

23-24

OUR GLASS



2023-24 OURGLASS

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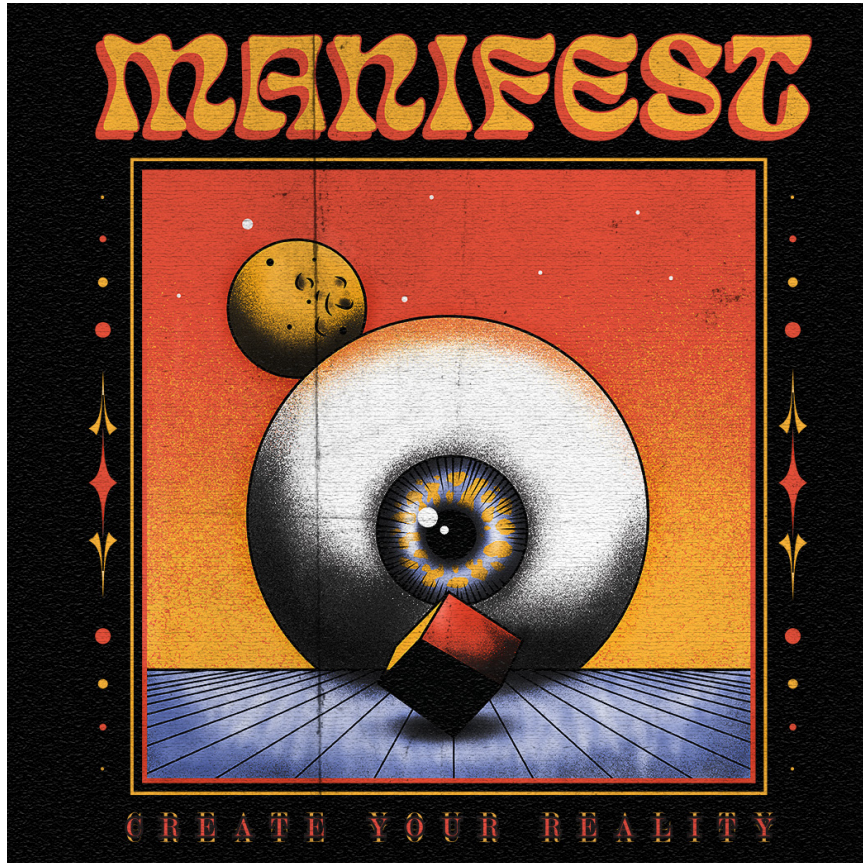
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Ourglass is an annual literary and art magazine that features the creative work of students from the Community College of Denver. We welcome submissions from current and former CCD students. To submit, please visit <https://tinyurl.com/ykkph7t6>. All work submitted is assumed to be original and unpublished. Special thanks to the Community College of Denver's Art, Communications, Design and Education Pathway, and the Office of Creative Services. Ourglass is a publication of Community College of Denver, which reserves all rights and hereby grants them solely to the original artists.

LETTER FROM EDITORS

From the Editors Ourglass intends to hold up a mirror to the CCD student body. It's a representation of our wealth of diversity and experience. Every CCD student has a unique voice and Ourglass strives to be their megaphone. We are so, so very proud of the bravery and courage shown by every single student who chose to submit a piece this year. Even if it wasn't published, every single piece of work we reviewed brought something new to the table, and we regret that we were unable to publish all of them. This year's work showcased themes of identity, loss, liberation, and power, in all the ways they manifest. We have all lived through 'uncertain times', a sentiment that has rung true throughout history. The works in Ourglass provide a window through which to understand the unique uncertainty of today. The deeply personal themes present in these works demonstrated tremendous resolve on the part of the applicants. Sharing personal art and intimate stories is never easy, and we applaud all of this year's applicants for having the tenacity to share their art with us. We encourage you to keep creating, and to share your work in future publications. From the bottom of our hearts, we hope you enjoy the 2022-2023 edition of Ourglass.

Much love,
The Editor



MANIFEST, CADEN HANNEMAN, GRAPHIC DESIGN-ILLUSTRATION

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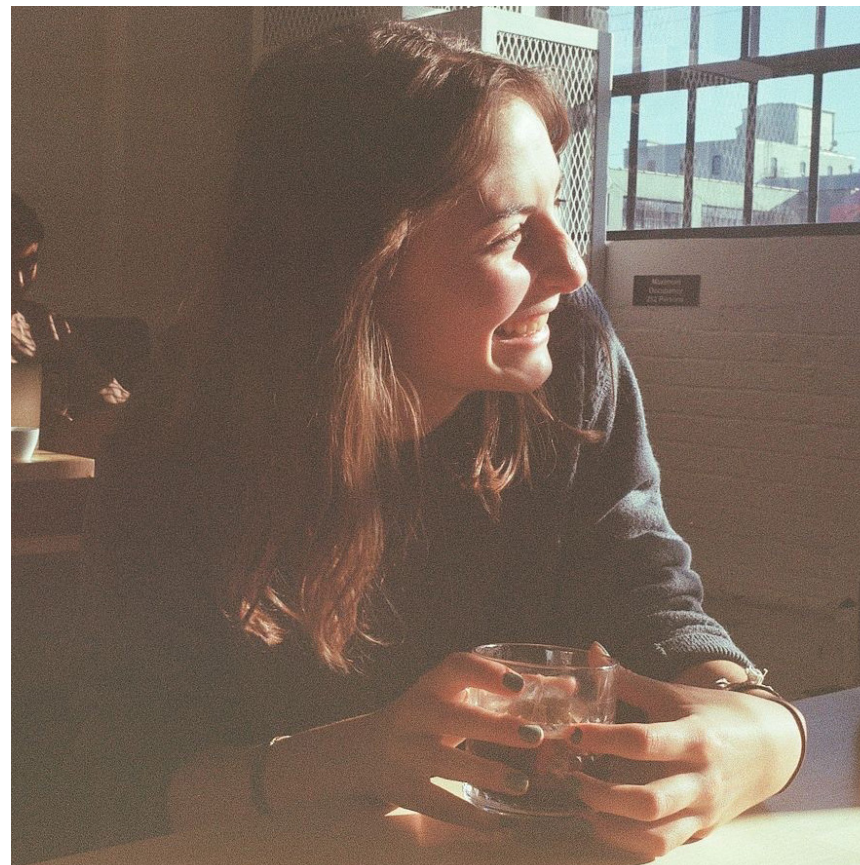
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VELVET NIGHTS

ANASTASIA WILCOX

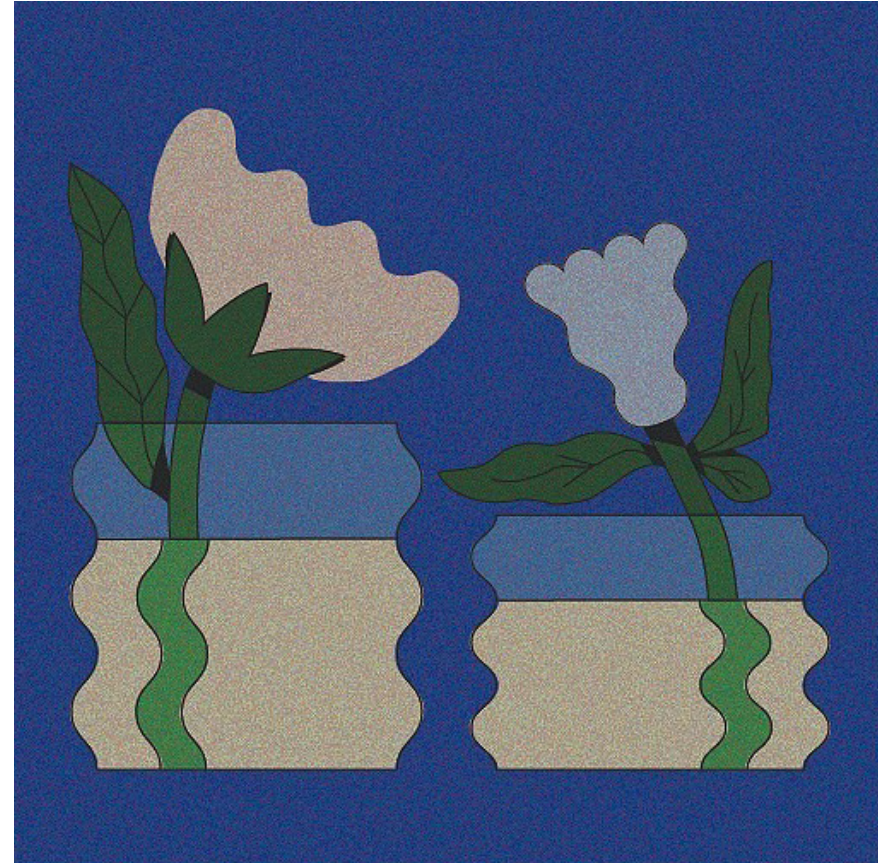
A collapsing star
where my heart should be
Velvet nights
envelope me
An obsidian tapestry
of time and space
Taste the potential on my lips
See the urgency in my eyes
A supernova
in the tight confines
of human skin
Let me be weightless
not weighed down
In this mortal form of mine
I feel everything
Let me feel nothing
Let me be free



CONVERSATIONS, SOPHIA PAHS, BEST OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN EDITORIAL



NOLA YELLOW, ROSITA DIMITROVA, PHOTOGRAPHY



SIMPLE THINGS, HALLIE NEFF, GRAPHIC DESIGN - ILLUSTRATION

THE HOUSE AMELIA LECLAIRE BUILT

VICTOR STAMENKOVIC

LEONARD WINOGRAD AWARD WINNER

Glass. I hate glass. I hate what it is. Hate what it does. To those of us who just want to live once again. I realized glass was transparent not too long ago. And no, I'm not an airhead like that one friend we all had in high school. I'm talking about a different type of transparency. A type I realized when every family in every house in every neighborhood wanted more and more windows. More windows than walls. A follower's trend.

This transparency is what I observed to consist of some type of false depth to it. On the surface sure... the glass is transparent. In fact, all glass is transparent. But it's the people behind the glass that aren't. Dumb people they are... Now, you might be thinking, Damn, you must have had mushed bananas replace your brain. Duh! You can't look through humans, you moron!

You know what, I realize you're right. I do sound moronic, but that's not the point. The point is, I hate how we're all glassifying our lives. This deep hatred planted its seeds when a group of us started observing that dumb hoe bag that lived off Cherry, Amelia LeClair. I hate LeClair. Hate. Hate. Hate! The two things I hate nowadays: glass and Amelia LeClair.

I was born during the summer of 2003. A year later, people started to install more and more windows into their homes. From my research, they started off with small additions here and there. Mostly small awning windows to open and talk with the neighbors. Small additions. That's what made the homes happy. It's what made people happy.

It turns out, people wanted more. They needed more. More neighbors to talk to. More sunlight. More blue birds singing. More views to look into. More. More. More! So, people started installing larger windows. Large windows in spaces that one would never imagine putting a window in.

These days many houses are oddly constructed thanks to the renovations that the glass revolution has brought. Some houses, like the Kooocks' down the street, have the walls of their kitchen turned to glass. I often catch them cooking and dining on their various meals whilst doing my homework. Last week, I watched as Cheryl Kooocks displayed a fine roast with

plenty of vegetables; Mr. Kooocks sat and grinned, fork in hand, heart in eyes. Sometimes their kitchen is engulfed in pitch black, but when that happens, I see glimpses of yellow light coming from somewhere else in the house. Somewhere I can't see. Somewhere they never considered putting a window. They should because I am curious to know what happens behind those walls.

Another odd house, just renovated, is the Hortons' right across the street from me. The Hortons have replaced the walls of their entire upper floor with glass, leaving the house looking like one of those cakes with gelatin on top. The renovations didn't exclude their bedroom, in fact, that was the focal point in the Hortons' vision. While the room's decorated in simplicity, a large, framed photograph of Kate Moss stands guard of the couple's bedroom while they are away.

I remember one time as my father, mother, and I sat around our kitchen table, my father kept looking over my mother's head. Noticing a red shimmer in my father's eyes, my mother's eyebrows rose.

"What are you looking at, Steven?"

"W-What?"

"I asked, what are you looking at?"

Looking at the direction my father was gazing at, my eyes froze. There, through our small kitchen window, two dark figures becoming one in red shades, molding in and out of a myriad of shapes. Seeing me in a trance, mother darted towards the window.

"Enough" - she slammed the shutters shut, blocking the view - "I'm tired of catching the two of you glancing at that red light, but I'm exhausted of Jane and Max's recent indecent choices! Those two seem to forget there are still children in this neighborhood, and that includes you, Tommie."

Later that night, I caught her peering through the shutters. She opened a slit in the same shutters she closed. A thin line of red painted across her face, illuminating her two eyes as she held the white wood.

Like how my mother peered into the life of the Horton's, I peered into the life of Amelia LeClaire quite often. That was the case before that attention-seeking whore decided to become an angel. Attention-seekers always decide to go abroad to angel school. God's favorites from the very start.

It all started the summer I turned sixteen when John Torreli invited me to his tree house for a small kickback. It's where I met the bitch. At the old oak is where it happened. I saw her while she climbed the stairs holding a cherry Caprisun between her middle and index fingers, a shooter between her lipstick-stained teeth. I climbed the stairs after her. In the old oak is where we

were formally introduced.

“Hell—”

“SSSCHAhhh, ooo ahh, Brandon gimme that chaser! NOW!”

Her face twisted playfully. Tongue out, showcasing her straight teeth hanging from excessive gums. Her head jolted as she winced and bounced and clenched her fist. A funny sight it is to witness when someone can’t hide the liquor burns. Once Brandon handed her the Caprisun she held onto on the way up, her face came to a calm. She giggled as she said...

“Hey, Tommie! Whanna shooter?”

“Not right now” – I remember saying as I pawed for a beer –

“What’s your name?”

“Tommie? Dontcha remember me?”

“N-No...?”

“We literally had Geometry with Mrs. Smith together last year.”

“Yes—”

I was so embarrassed I didn’t know who she was that I forced myself to laugh. Laughing it off is always a good way to hide the fact that you truly have no clue what is happening. Laugh the uncomffieness away. So, there I was laughing awkwardly in front of John, Brandon, Naomi, Quintin, Gia, whose mom owns the Hero Inn, and of course, Amelia LeClaire.

“Come here bitch, let’s do some shots!”

That was the night I got plastered with Amelia LeClaire. What a hoebag! And since I couldn’t recall her being in any classes with me (still can’t) and was embarrassed about it, I asked John about her name the next day.

“It’s Amelia, Amelia LeClaire.” He said as we walked to his house from a nearby park.

“Well, how do you and Amelia know each other? I’ve been hangin’ with you for years and not once have you mentioned her name.”

“She lives down the street on Cherry. She’s been living down the street, Tommie. I bumped into her when she was renovating the living room. It’s strange though—”

“What?”

“She lives alone in that big ass house. I guess her parents have other properties to worry about. Plus, they got hella money.”

“Huh. I feel like she just appeared out of nowhere” - I looked at a line of ants my foot was about to step on – “She’s cool though.” I spoke. I left the line of ants unharmed. I care about those around me. I’m a good person. In practice, yes. Perhaps in spoken word... I’ll let you decide.

Thanks to John’s little gathering, Amelia and I started to get closer. We would go for frappes every other day. Plastic cherries would swing from her rearview mirror with every curb hit, turn jerked, and brake slammed. We’d talk about various topics, fun ones too. It was all filled with laughter and good times.

But like all good rivers produced by friendships over months and months and even years, ours started to dry up when she captured a boyfriend named Joseph.

Gia tells me they’d often go to the Hero Inn and throw parties in the suites. I never got to experience these parties, but they seemed like a blast because Amelia would often put up new framed pictures in her living room capturing these events. Every time I went to John’s house I’d pass Amelia’s, catching a glimpse into Amelia’s living room; my glimpses would catch new pictures. Pictures framed with perfection for anyone passing on Cherry St to see.

One day, John invited me to hang out with the group. It was another gathering in the treehouse, but this time Amelia wasn’t present.

“Where’s the Éclair?” I asked.

“I dunno... I haven’t seen Amelia since that night in June, dude. She’s renovating again. I guess she wants a bit more work done to her house.” John told me, handing me a black cherry White Claw.

“Shi—” – my hard seltzer sprayed all over Quintin’s jeans – “I am so, so, so sorry Quintz.”

“No stress.”

“Yeah girl, I heard she was doing it all since she got her art studio done. Bedroom too. I mean... I think it’s a little bit too early for a bedroom renovation, like... is that even legal? Like, I could never. And I mean NE-VER. But as a girl, I don’t bring other girls down. Right, Gia?” Naomi said while glaring at me the whole time.

“Right. But I don’t think she’s doing anything to her bedroom. She told me she was just doing her closet that’s IN the bedroom. She just got into thrifting, so I guess she’s proud of the clothes she finds. Besides, she’s turning eighteen in about a few months, who cares what she does to her house!”

I sat there nodding. I sat there sipping. How did Gia know all this info? Why was Naomi looking at me like that? But yes, Amelia LeClaire was just busy with renovations. I knew what to do. The next day I went to her house and knocked on the door.

The door swung with liveliness.

“He—”

“Oh MY God! Tommieeee! Tommie! Come in. Come in. Excuse the mess, they’re doing a lot around here” – shrilled Amelia as she grabbed my

hand and led me towards the living room- “right this way.”

I had no time to take my shoes off or anything. I was whisked away. As I was dragged into the house, we passed glass panel after glass panel. The window to wall ratio was definitely increasing. Upon reaching the living room, I stubbed my toe on a lidless black box. Inside this box were photos after photos after photos. All printed containing a smile or two. Most held Amelia in them, but many had people I never saw in my entire life.

The first photo staring right at me was of Amelia with Joseph. They were smiling wildly as someone behind them sat headfirst in the toilet spilling the excess alcohol that was inside them. This photo I saw two weeks prior when I decided to pass Cherry St. for fun. Amelia had noticed where my eyes were set and pulled me to the couch.

“Soooo, what’s new with you, boo?”

“Oh, nothing. I’ve been chillin’. Catching up on some homework. AP’s suck.”

“Ugh, tell me about it, Tommie. At least you only have two of them. Try five AP classes and then come to me.”

I grinned. I always wondered how Amelia did it. A boyfriend. Smart classes. Parties. Lots of new friends. How?

“Yeah, I bet. Tell me, Amelia, what’s up with renovations again? I saw you did the studio a few months ago. Your painting last week was so dope by the way. I—”

“Oh, stop bitch. You know that was just a quick sketch. There is NO WAY you consider that finished.”

“I do. I really do. Anyways, what are you renovating now?”

“Tommie, you’re so nosy! And so weird sometimes. I mean... you really have got to stop listening to that trashy music you listen to.”

“Huh?”

“I mean... the music you and your weird friends listen to.”

“I’m sorry, but how does this have anything to do with your renovations, Amelia?”

“It doesn’t. I simply wanna put that out there.” She said as her brown eyes warmed up to me.

“I mean, you don’t have to like the music, Amelia. Listen, just forget about the renovations. How are you?”

“Great!” – she grabbed my arm – “Come with me to my room. There’s something I need to tell you.”

We got to her room and were surrounded by four walls. Ballerina Pink with an eggshell finish wrapped all around us.

“Sit, Tommie.”

I sat down on her bed. A stuffed teddy’s beady eyes looked right at me. Above it, a large shotgun. A big brown one. Her dad’s I assumed, for it had “Ted LeClaire” engraved on the comb. There was a worn-down pillow hugged by a pink pillowcase which was blotched with a puddle stain right in the middle. It looked like one of those Rorschach tests 1950’s therapists gave their loony patients to gaze at. There were also Kleenex tissues that marched about on the floor as her fan whirled. Spoons everywhere too. Milky ones. Very milky spoons. I assumed she had been eating a lot of ice cream. Vanilla saliva coated spoons. Scrumptious.

“Amelia...what’s wrong?”

Out of nowhere, Amelia flung onto me sobbing; her knees slammed onto the carpeted floor, crushing a few of her tissue soldiers.

“I- I- I don’t know what’s happening, but Joseph and I haven’t been in a good state right now! I believe he’s trying to get me to do something I don’t want to do! I keep telling him no, but he won’t stop insisting! No Joseph! No! No, Joseph!”

“Wh- What? Amelia! What is it that Joseph wants you to do?”

“He- He tells me he wants to try new things –”

“Like butt-stuff?”

Like lightning she looked up at me. Her face contorted.

“W- What?! No!” – she stood up quickly – “EW, Tommie! No. Nothing like that. Not even close! What the hell is wrong with you? Like, seriously? I’m over here bawling my eyes out, and you’re over here talking about BUTT STUFF!?”

“I’m sorry,” I said sincerely while looking at her furious tear glazed eyes.

“I was going to tell you that Joseph wants me to give him more space. To try something new, like having a small break. But butt stuff!? You know what?! Get the hell out of here, Tommie! Get your ass up and leave, you weirdo!”

I sat in shock. It was a simple slip of the tongue.

“I said, GO! Now! God! For once, I was trying to be genuine with you, Tommie. Get OUT!”

And so, I got up to leave. As she escorted me through the glassified halls, her demeanor had drastically switched. She was smiling with those familiar warm eyes again.

“Bye-Bye Now, Tommie!” she cheerfully said as she slammed the door behind me.

There I was standing on Amelia’s porch looking at her house; a

neighbor walking his ugly dog stood by looking at Amelia's picture frames. I couldn't tell who would see St. Peter first, the man or the dog! I walked away from the house. That was the last time I interacted with Amelia LeClaire directly.



Months had passed and Amelia's house had been completely renovated. Glass wrapped around a walled box on the top floor. Amelia decided to keep the walls to her bedroom; however, she indeed installed glass panels to the walk-in closet that was attached to her room. From afar it looked like a random geometric object floating in midair, defying all laws of gravity. It was once an unusual sight to see, but nowadays there's a house like what Amelia's once looked like on every corner.

I often made excuses to pass Cherry St and as I did, I noticed more and more neighbors, or perhaps strangers walking past Amelia's. Many of them stopped to look at the many things that were going on in that house. Amelia truly upped her game when it came to presentation and performance. I even started using my binoculars at different parts of the street. I even found ways to use them in John's treehouse. I simply needed to be like the strangers. Indeed, I actually was a stranger to Amelia LeClaire. Or maybe it was the other way around?

She displayed all sorts of symbols and objects that highlighted different aspects of her life. On the kitchen counter a meal would often be left for onlookers to consume with their eyes. Sometimes her own cooking, most of the time it was from the local restaurants. Sometimes, if the timing was right, I would watch her eat. So happy she looked eating a caprese salad with Joseph. Eating it like it was the best damn caprese she had ever consumed. All smiles. All love. A happy kind of love one can achieve only by enjoying caprese salad with a boyfriend.

She would always display the cover art for the vinyl that was playing in her house. There was a little area by her picture frames that was meant only for that. I mean, why not? She thought her neighbors were interested in what she was listening to, so she decided to share it. One day, I was jogging with Gia when I stumbled across Amelia displaying a pink Three Imaginary Boys by The Cure. Her eyebrows bleached, her lip pierced, all in maroon stood Amelia by her record player. I stopped... that was the same album I showed her many months prior. She cringed then, but now she's jamming out to the same lyrics she once thought were stupid. I looked up at her closet. The

shades and textures have totally changed. Darker textiles. From laces, to furs, to leathers, to feathers, these all stood limp in Amelia's closet. I needed to catch my breath and express to Gia my shock.

"What happened to Amelia?"

"What do you mean, Tommie?" Gia breathlessly asked.

"Look, she's dressing differently. She's basically listening to the type of music she once made fun of. She's a poser!"

"Tommie, so? Who cares? Come on, we have two more miles to go."

I care. I actually care a lot.

We stood there for a split second before continuing our jog. We maneuvered through the various people that were on the street looking into Amelia's house. More and more people gathered around Amelia's. Whatever she was doing inside that house was working. More and more viewing eyes peered through her glass.

After the jog, I learned that Gia and Amelia would go downtown on the weekends, and there Amelia would look into the various apartment buildings and see how people were living. I guess it was trendy to become interested in an alternate style. Darker tones. Vintage. So trendy!



And so, for many months after, Amelia went through various styles and changes on a weekly basis. She would change her closet, the music, the way Joseph dressed, the books she barely skimmed through, the art she created, the people that came into her house. These things changed, and they changed fast. Changed so fast to the point where it was sad. But the one thing that never changed was her smile and her attitude on life. She knew people watched her. She knew she wanted to be an owner of one of those houses that get thousands and thousands of people to gather around it. But just because she wanted it, doesn't mean she got it.

Actually, I suppose you could say she got what she wanted in the end. In February, two days before Valentine's Day, there was a mass gathering around Amelia's house. It was huge. Thousands of people type of huge. Wishes sometimes did come true back then.

Gia called me up and told me to come over on Cherry St immediately: it was about Amelia LeClaire. Apparently, one of her neighbors noticed her cry and cry for hours on the floor in her kitchen. She sat there for hours crying, sitting in a red puddle of spilled wine. I even caught her in this described state

when I arrived in front of her house after I pushed through the crowd.

There she was sitting on the floor. Still wailing, ignoring all the eyes that were set on her.

“What’s happening?” I asked Gia.

“I honestly have no clue.”

“This is the first time she’s ever been like this! It’s so refreshing to see a new side of people. A new side of Amelia LeClaire that is!” A stranger said gleefully.

I looked at him oddly. Unfortunately, the stranger was right, this was a new side of LeClaire. A side that the public has never seen before. And like every stranger out there, he had a right to not give two hoots about the wellbeing of Amelia LeClaire. Afterall, she’s merely an entertainer living in a glass house like all the rest of them. A doll in today’s dollhouse world.

As I looked into the house, I saw the mess Amelia made. Black confetti of broken vinyl records was scattered everywhere. The frames shattered. The artwork slashed; books were torn. Photographs were shredded. It was a sore to a viewer’s eyes; a pain it was for those with a heart.

At once, Amelia LeClaire stood up, red tears dripping down her leg. The wine stained her skin. She looked like she hadn’t slept in days. Amelia walked towards the stairs and trudged up them. She opened the door to her bedroom and walked right in. Gone girl in this gone world.

We stood there in silence, that is, Gia and I. The rest of the crowd chattered and gabbed about what was happening. Questions were tossed around between onlookers. Where did she go? Why was she crying? Was this all a show? All of a sudden, a quick deafening sound came about.

BOOM

The crowd screamed. Then, the crowd ran for shelter as the glass sprayed all around. Amelia’s glass didn’t just rain on us all, it poured. Skin was slashed all around us as we ran. Blood trickled, as deep and small cuts alike ran their course on Cherry St.

Amelia was found thirty minutes later. She was pronounced dead on sight, so people immediately went to the photography section at the supercenter and printed out photos of her. In less than twenty-four hours, Amelia LeClaire stood smiling in every house and apartment around the city. Her bright horse smile stood watch in a picture frame for every family, every person out there. Her eyes followed as one would pass wherever they went. It was ironic in a way because she had no lips to smile from when they found her. But I understand why no one would display that. A true to life form. A smile goes a long way. Torn and dangling lips unfortunately don’t.

After her funeral a week later, her framed photos began leaving their post as guardians. They were disappearing as fast as they came. Only her parents kept the photo out on display till this day.

The funny thing is, Quintin told me that he saw Amelia when he and his brothers went dumpster diving in the city’s landfill. Apparently, her pictures took a permanent residence there.

“Oh man, Tommie, there were thousands of them. Thousands of smiles all in piles around the landfill. It’s quite sad to tell you the truth” Quintin said as he chuckled to himself.

And so it was, Amelia’s legacy only lasted for a blink of an eye. People had other things to worry about, and so they forgot about her the second her photographs’ popularity decreased. Their problems had been more important, but what truly was more important was the fact there were more houses to see. More glass to look through, and so as a society we forgot about Amelia LeClaire. Not me though. I still think about that bitch. ■



FRAGILITY, GABRIEL NAJERA, BEST OF SHOW



NOVA, JESSICA GRAHAM, JUROR'S CHOICE

QUIET THINGS

META OSBORNE

White plaster walls mimic mountain ranges. You drag a finger across the ridges of paint

Some accidentally got on the auburn doorframe
A cat scratches on the door, slightly ajar.
Accidentally pushing the door closed.

The door closes with a creak and the soft click
of a mortise plate slipping into place.

Through an open window,

closed to the world only by a screen.

You can hear the pitter patter of raindrops.

A form atop a mattress on an old floorboard
twists toward the soft breeze entering the room.
Wind winding through the leaves of a lilac
bush, brings a sweet scent into the room.

In the distance sirens are driving past,
the wailing becomes a dull hum.

A chorus of bugs chirping outside
swallows the sound of the siren.

The clock above the door beats in time
with the tick tock of a heart moving too
slowly. An old radiator kicks in and buzzes to
life.

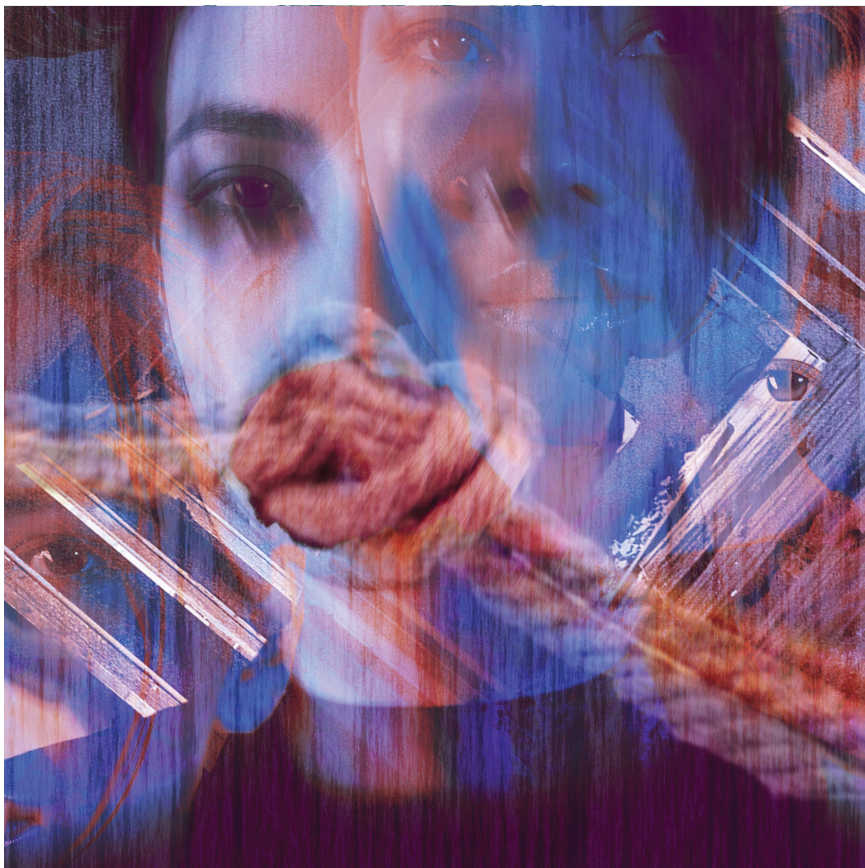
The body shrouded in a starch white sheet swallows.
Gentle bobbing of a throat in a baritone gulp.

A deep breath and a shift.

Sheets crinkle before movement stops.
Now, a heavy exhale.

Papery noise of skin on skin,

feet being rubbed together for warmth.
I thought that when you left, you would leave an unnerving quiet behind. But
even without you, the world is alive.



THE INNOCENT, ALIE SELENKE, BEST OF GRAPHIC DESIGN ILLUSTRATION

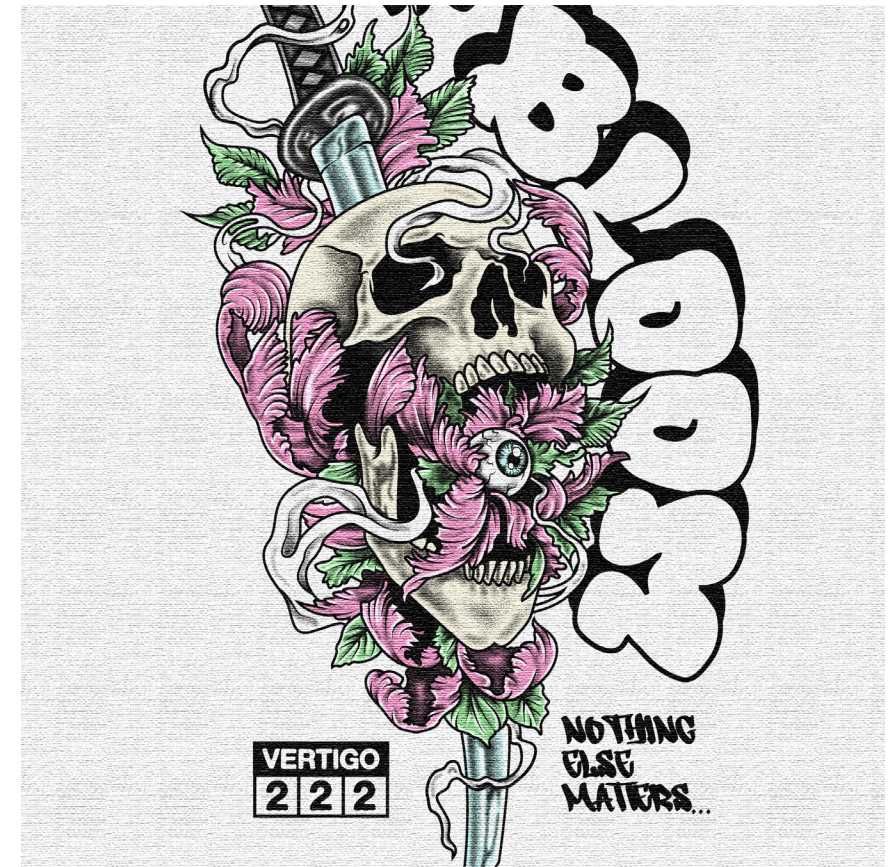
CHANGE

ALYANNA ESPINO

I'm sorry I have stretch marks
 I'm sorry my eyes don't spark
 I'm sorry my chest sags without support
 I'm sorry I snort
 I'm sorry my hair falls out
 I'm sorry my lips are a drought
 I'm sorry my feet are wide
 I'm sorry I have bags under my eyes
 I'm sorry my legs are hairy
 I'm sorry I'm not merry
 I'm sorry I kept her
 I'm sorry I am devoted to her
 It's time to be a man
 Yet you ran



OUTCASTS, ALI SELENKE, BEST OF GRAPHIC DESIGN-PRINT DESIGN



IN BLOOM, BRANT HANNEMAN, GRAPHIC DESIGN-ILLUSTRATION

LEMONADE

NEVE BEHMER

The sight of the refreshments placed on the table in front of me made me nauseous; a feeling of dread welling up in the pit of my stomach. In the fluorescent lights of my first grade classroom, my classmates lined up in front of the treats, readily holding out colorful paper plates for another classmate's birthday, preparing to be served. I planted myself at the back of the line — I didn't want to be the first to have my food, and I didn't have anybody I wanted to stand next to; I just wanted to get my snacks and sit. As my classmates were served, the line of twenty slowly lurched to fifteen, then to ten, then five, four, three, two, and one. With every step closer to the treats, I began to fidget — I looked at my pink shoelaces that I had perfectly braided on the way to school, I picked at the fuzzy purple heart sticker my mom had stuck to my shirt that morning, and I untied the colorful hair ties that held my loose braid in place.

When I arrived at the front of the line, I simply looked from the treats on the table to my teacher standing behind them. On the table were two boxes of cupcakes, one holding vanilla cupcakes with white frosting and sprinkles, the other with chocolate cupcakes adorned with chocolate frosting and sprinkles — both packages came with ring toppers on each cupcake, and frankly, neither package looked appetizing. To drink, a pitcher of bright yellow lemonade with two half-melted ice cubes was served; I had never liked lemonade. Lemonade was a party drink, it was always served at social gatherings, and every time I tried it, without fail, I would be slapped across the face by the tang of the lemon. I'd never experienced sweet lemonade — it was always grossly sour. I didn't want either of the birthday snacks, but I figured I should participate in the festivities. I pulled a chocolate cupcake from the plastic, and I took a glass of the lemonade, preparing myself to attempt to enjoy the treats.

I slowly moved away from the refreshments table, carefully holding my plate in one hand, my cup in the other. I glanced around the classroom, looking for any open seat, anywhere to sit with my classmates (even if it meant just listening to their conversation), but I only found a seat stashed alone in the corner — it looked like an okay enough spot to eat. I walked across the classroom, absorbing the laughter and gossip of my classmates; the sound surrounded me and seeped into my pores as I sat down in the corner, getting

a perfect view of the entire classroom. I set my food down, but I continued holding my lemonade. Everybody had a glass of lemonade, and some of my classmates had already gone back for seconds. I wanted to try this lemonade, to see if it would be different this time. Maybe I'd come to like it — maybe I grew out of my dislike, and I wouldn't hate it anymore.

I raised the cup to my lips, taking my first sip of the golden liquid. I hoped, prayed, that I would taste the goodness that my classmates enjoyed — maybe the lemon wouldn't be so bad this time. The first drop of the lemonade that touched my tongue coated my mouth with the same overwhelming bitterness, sending my mind into overdrive. My eyes watered, my gums burned, my hands began to shake; I panicked. My gaze darted around the room, looking for any sign that

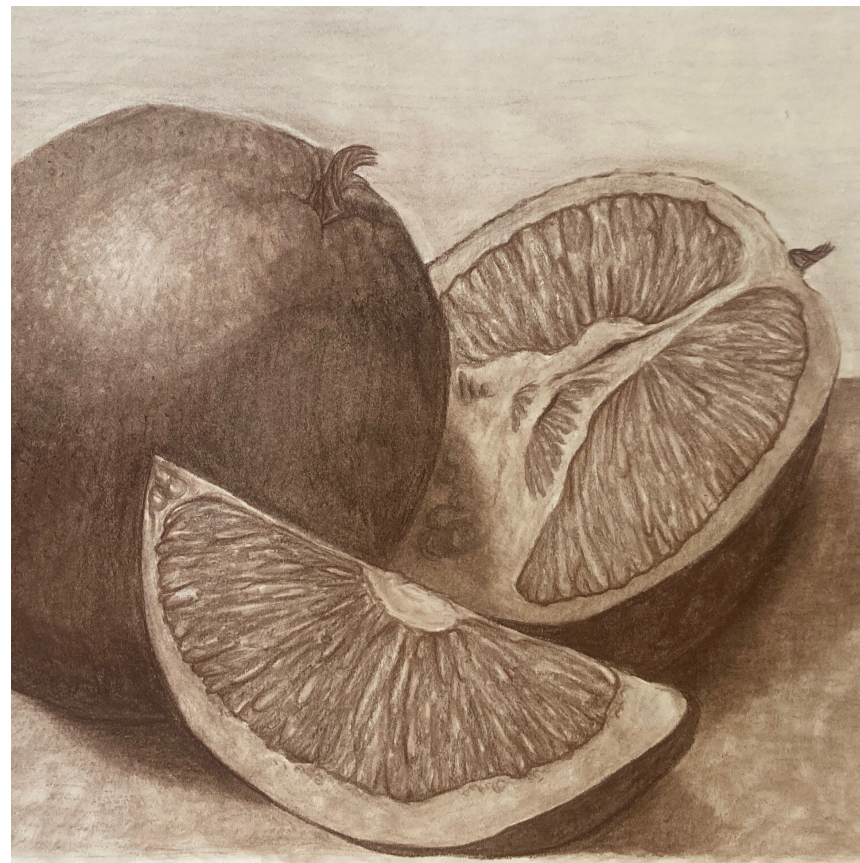
I wasn't the only one that felt this way — all I was met with was the scene of my classmates continuing to take sip after sip from their cups. I blinked frantically, quickly putting my cup down and trying my best to look like nothing was wrong. I wasn't even sure what was wrong. Nothing could be wrong.

Tears of frustration quickly welled up in my glasses-rimmed brown eyes, making my waterline sting. I so desperately wanted to taste what my classmates could, to fill my mouth with sweetness instead of the toxic sour. I wanted to know if something was wrong with me, if I was the reason I could only focus on the bitter taste of the well-loved beverage. Maybe it was my different drink.

Tears began to leak out of my eyes, rolling down my cheeks with some seeping into the corners of my mouth. The tip of my tongue slipped out of my mouth, investigating the droplets found just outside — these droplets also stung with the bitterness of the lemonade. The lemonade dripped from my eyes, leaving streaks of artificial yellow on my cheeks that would congregate on my chin before falling onto my cupcake and plate. My classmate's birthday, and any other event I'd been to, were covered in the waves of my lemonade tears. The waves of bitterness and jealousy crashed onto the innocent shore my awkward, fragile body sat on — every time the waves hit, they washed over my memory and pelted me with a new emotion. Each memory was tinged yellow with an ache for normalcy and belonging, but despite my best efforts, I couldn't clear my mind of the artificial tint. The ocean of lemonade was pulling me out to sea, but nobody seemed to notice me slipping further and further into the tangy abyss.

I tried to hold back my tears, hiding my face in my fuzzy blue sleeve and holding my breath. I wiped my tears away with the cuff of my sleeve,

leaving green patches on my wrist and yellow smudges on my cheeks. I glanced at the full cup of lemonade and untouched cupcake that sat in front of me before looking around at the rest of my classmates — they were already getting up to throw away their plates with frosting-covered mouths and smiles across their faces. I quickly began to unwrap my cupcake, taking small bites of the frosting in an effort to not be the last one eating. Crumb after crumb of the cupcake crumbled into my mouth, but the sweetness of the cupcake wasn't enough to offset the lingering bitterness the lemonade had left — I couldn't get rid of it, the sting only deepened. As the pain intensified with every bite, I grit my teeth and attempted to hold back the tears that were once again beginning to tint my vision yellow. Despite my best efforts, the droplets became heavy, and I was no longer able to hold them back — my jealousy and longing rolled out of my eyes in two steady streams on either side of my face. I let the lemonade waves wash over me, this time pulling me out to sea with a strangely sour comfort. ■



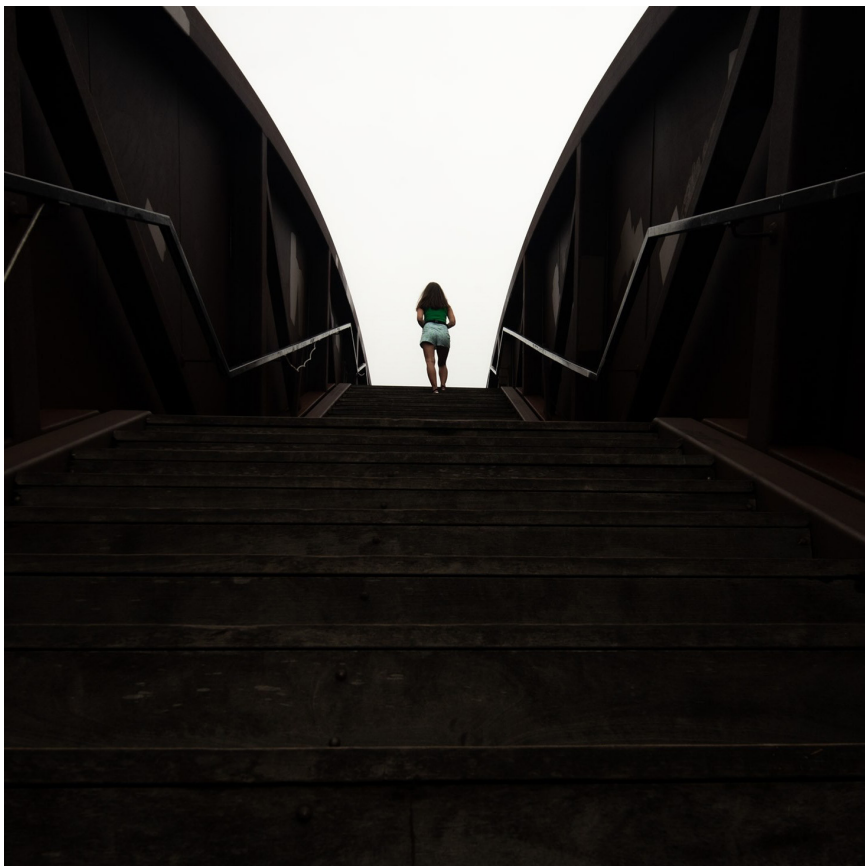
STUDY OF AN ORANGE, SOPHIA PAHS, DRAWING/DRY MEDIA PROFICIENT RECOGNITION AWARD



THE MIST, GABRIEL NAJERA, DRAWING/DRY MEDIA



ALL HAIL THE GOD OF ANIMATION! JESSICA GRAHAM, TWO DIMENSIONAL ARTS AND MIXED MEDIA



VANYA_NOLASTREETS, ROSITA DIMITROVA, PHOTOGRAPHY

ECHO

AIDAN WILKINSON

Echo on the floor
Tonguing - smacking
Vertical blinds move
In the periphery
Muted sunshine
Smokey day like
Tendrils
Reaching inwards
Casting stenciled
Accusations
Upon the aged
Sofa meat
Whilst I write
Suspended
Like dust in
Beams, the scent
Of ozone and
Burnt coffee
And
The dog is gone
Now
Yet
I hear him still.



TRAUMA IS TRAUMA, TIM CARRIER, BEST OF PHOTOGRAPHY-CONCEPTUAL



FLASH KINGDOM

ANDREW MCKINNEY

No matter how many times you get punched in the jaw, a good right hook always hurts the same. I was six, going on seven, drinks deep into a high-score streak at the Coin-a-Play when she hit me. My world became a haze of flashing neon and heavily modulated synth tones. She was halfway through a furious tirade when I whirled back into reality.

“—idiot bastard. You invited her over to our apartment? How goddamn stupid do you think I am?” She screamed, “No. You know what, how stupid are you? Couldn’t even bother to be there when your sidepiece shows up at our door. I cannot believe you.”

She bent down, yanked the keyring off my hip and ripped off our apartment key. She slammed it against the corner of the bar and snapped it in half. The blade dropped to the floor, silent under the waves of technical beeps and shifting sound effects. I could’ve sworn time slowed to quarter speed, and I saw ripples in the puddle of whiskey on the floor.

“So, help me god Cal, if you so much as knock on my door again, I will shoot you.”

It wasn’t the first time she’d threatened me with a lead injection. Something in her tone told me that this time she might be serious and that it was, in fact, a very bad time to ask. So that was that. Three years, gone in a flash. I pulled myself up and slumped against the cold marble bar top.

“Gimme another double Marty.” I said, “Whatever’s cheap.”

Marty reached below the bar, produced a handle of some knock off Kentucky swill, filled a rocks glass to the brim and slid it to me. I stopped it with my knuckles and smeared a spot of blood on the glass. Must’ve cut myself when I went down, but I never found out how exactly it happened.

“On the house, but you’re done after that one.” Marty said.

“Fair deal. Thanks man.”

I spent a good ten minutes working my way through that drink, trying to fit my head on right and figure out where I was going to sleep that night. I figured I could work out the rest of my now shattered life later, but I wouldn’t get to that point if I tried to sleep in a gutter. Best case scenario I wake up in a bathtub full of ice missing a few internal organs, and worse case I don’t wake up. Somebody in this town had to have a couch I could crash on.

I tossed a five Euro bill on the bar top, gave my thanks to Marty

and headed out the double saloon doors of the arcade. I stepped out into the sticky drizzling rain and pulled my hood up. The burnt oak smell of cigarettes played hard to get with sickly sweet mango vapor and car exhaust. A group of teen goths were huddled near the corner of the bar, keeping warm around the smoldering remains of a barrel fire between stints of trying to pry a tape deck from the front console of a rust bucket Oldsmobile. Across the bay, advertisement screens in the corporate square burned like a midnight sunset. I rubbed my eyes and walked to the water's edge. I leaned against the corroded railing and let the white noise rhythm of the rain settle my mind and stomach. The tide crashed against the concrete seawall and sent my soul drifting out above the grimy water to perch on the radio waves.

I could have stayed that way for hours. The discomfort of the rain and the cold might as well have been a warm hug. I could've just drifted off right there, away from it all, but a voice beside me wrenched me back and jacked my soul right back in.

"You look lost, son."

I hadn't noticed him beside me. He was propped against the railing to my right, staring out over the water. He was dressed in a white suit, immaculately clean and apparently dry despite the rain. His head was crowned with a matching white hat, wrapped in a golden-yellow band. His eyes were obscured behind chrome mirrored shades, reflecting the roiling black waves. A golden glow emanated from behind his glasses and cast a warm light over a face that seemed carved for shadow. My mind scrambled to set the man in his surroundings and shut my words in my throat.

"What's the matter?" He said, "Someone carve out your voice box?"

His voice was like blackstrap molasses, slow and deep. A low baritone that resonated in his throat, warm, collected, and sweetly masking something bitter. He turned toward me, and I looked at myself reflected in his shades.

"Not in a particularly talkative mood." I replied.

"And I don't particularly care. You've caught my interest, and I expect something in return."

"Just leave me alone. I've already looked for Jesus, and the two of us didn't get along."

"I look like a preacher to you?"

"White suit, expensive implants and a honey-sable voice speaking in riddles. Yeah, you play the part."

A light rasping chuckle erupted from his throat.

"I suppose I do at that." He said, "But you've got it wrong. Nah, me and Jesus don't much get along neither."

"So, what are you selling then? Whatever it is I'm not buying."

"Nothing, nothing. You don't wanna talk that's just fine, just figured you had the look of a man who could use a listening ear."

"So, what if I do? What's it to you?"

"Never hurts to have friends."

"Sure, it does."

"Ah, I see. If you don't want to talk that's just fine, but this here's a public road, and I think I'd like to learn for a while."

He turned back to the railing and stared once more over the water. So comfortable in a place that seemed so antithetical to his very existence. I watched him for a moment, as the rainwater slicked off his suit, and pooled at his feet. I leaned back against the railing and searched my pocket for a cigarette. I lit the stick and took a long drag.

"Girl trouble. Since you wanna know so bad."

He grunted and nodded his head. "Yeah, that's the kinda thing what'll eat at your soul. What kinda trouble you in?"

"She kicked me out."

"I see. And what'd you do to make her kick you out?"

"What makes you think I did anything?"

"Your breath reeks of whiskey, you're hunched over a railing outside of a shithole arcade. You wear guilt like a jacket, and you walk like a liar."

"I had a little fling on the side. Nothing serious. Don't call me a liar."

"Mmm, maybe not. Maybe not."

"I'm not. Don't call me that."

"My apologies. You're right, I shouldn't have assumed. I tell you what, I know a good spot not far from here, a little blues joint. Let me buy you a drink to make up for it."

"I don't like the blues."

"You'll learn, c'mon."

He led me down the road to the corner of 18th and Marrion. He kept mumbling some ominous poetry to himself as he walked, only stopping when we ducked into the stairwell that led down to the yellow door of the Lost Kingdom blues club. I'd heard the name before, but it wasn't exactly a popular place. A burly bouncer stood up to block our entrance but stopped when he saw my ad-hoc friend. The door swung open, and the smell of dense tobacco smoke and incense drifted out. The interior was a single large room with a low ceiling, painted black and hung with tapestries that looked straight out of a medieval church. To my surprise there was no stage, and the rich wails of guitar emanated from a collection of rugs in the corner. There were three people

standing on the stage. A singer in a long ochre gown, a frail looking old man perched on a stool with a guitar, and a kid behind the drums. The singer and the kid were talking to each other while the old man played something solo.

My friend led me to a table in the corner furthest from the 'stage' and sat down. He shifted a tapestry behind him and produced a maple cigar box, intricately woven with gold filigree. He used a key that he had hidden in his jacket to open it and produced two cigars.

"You smoke," He said, "But you might like these better than your cigarettes."

I took one and thanked him. He replaced the box and grabbed a lighter from beside the ashtray on the table and methodically ignited the end of his cigar. He passed me the lighter and I did my best to imitate his process. Before I had finished a waiter appeared with two scotches and set them in front of us.

"This is pretty good treatment for someone you just met," I said, "I don't even know your name."

"You've done worse without knowing someone's name," He said, "My name's Aldebaran, but you can call me Al. Everyone else does."

"They seem to know you pretty well here."

"They sure do. I helped open the place up back in the day. Even used to take the stage myself some nights."

"I thought this place had always been here. How long ago was that?"

"Now, now, it's rude to ask someone's age."

"It's also rude to bother someone about their problems unprovoked."

"I suppose that's fair. Quid pro quo. We opened this club up around eighty years ago. Let's just say that I'm a little older than that."

"You don't look it."

"No one does these days."

He pulled from his cigar and blew the smoke into his glass. He sipped the smoky scotch and gave a low hum.

"You got a place to stay tonight?"

"Not yet. I'm sure I'll figure something out."

He gave another hum. He slished the whiskey around in his glass, rolled the cigar between his fingers and stared at the band a while. All three were playing now and the woman was belting a classic in a sickly-sweet contralto. His head bobbed lightly with the thunder of the bass drum.

"I've got a place if you need. They let folks stay here sometimes if they're down and out. Seemed right for a blues club."

"Makes sense. What'll it cost me."

"Nothing. You can help sweep the floor or something if you're gonna feel bad about it."

"There's always some kind of catch."

"If there was, do you think I'd tell you? You can leave after your drink if that's really what you want."

"I'll think about it."

Unfortunately, there wasn't much for me to think about. He was offering a bed and I desperately needed one. Pretty much everyone else I knew was liable to either shoot me or leave me in the cold. I sipped my scotch and watched Al trying to get a sense of his motives. He was strange, that was for sure, but he didn't strike me as malicious. The guy was ancient, so I figured that's what struck me as weird. In the end it would still be safer than sleeping on the street. I accepted his offer as we finished our drinks. We sat a while longer and listened to the end of an old Leadbelly song. He stood and led me around the bar into a big room in the back. The place looked like someone crammed a storage room into a capsule hotel. Al stopped in front of a capsule at the far end of the room, pulled it open and motioned for me to climb in.

"You can use this one. Just plug in your personal link, like any capsule."

"Thanks. Look I'll find some way to pay you back, you're really saving my ass tonight."

"I'm sure you will." He said and strode out of the storeroom.

By this point I was in my cups and dead tired. The light thump of the bass through the wall was doing its best to lull me to sleep before I could even get up to the pod. I hauled myself up and hit the footpad to slide myself in and a warm red glow filled the pod. I felt around for the link input and plugged in when I found it. All the sound of the world faded into emptiness, and in minutes I was asleep.

Nearly as soon as I had nodded off, light filled my eyes, and I thought morning had come too soon. As my eyes adjusted, I could see that I wasn't in the pod I had fallen asleep in. The world around me was bathed in a warm orange glow, draped in stonework and long hanging tapestries. I was in a massive room with a buttressed ceiling, capped at the end opposite me with a massive stained-glass window. Light shone through the image of a gaunt figure wrapped in yellow rags, with a halo of thorns above its head. Around me forms in ornate gowns and colorful doublets drifted around in odd, timed dances. Each was nearly identical to the others save for the clothes, around my height with sharp features and eyes that glowed with the same golden hue as Al. Their feet hardly seemed to move as they spiraled around the room.



THE OCTOPUS, SAM BARNUM, TWO DIMENSIONAL ARTS AND MIXED MEDIA

I could hear string instruments, but it didn't seem to come from anywhere in particular. I began to walk around, searching for anything familiar. I sidled through the crowd toward the stained-glass window. As I moved through the drifting dance, I could see each face turn towards me, observing my passage, or perhaps appraising my presence. They pressed closer the further I went until I was fully encircled near the center of the room. The dissonant strings stopped, and in the same instant the dance ended. A moment passed before they all turned to face me, every form standing in perfect concentric rings that filled the room. I shrunk into myself, slowly spinning to take in everything around me. Each identical face gave no hint of emotion as they watched, their warm eyes trained on me as I sought some way out.

A familiar voice broke the silence. Echoing from beneath the stained glass, Al's molasses voice rang on the stone walls.

"My dear friends! Welcome, welcome! I'm so glad you could join us tonight for the gala!" He thundered, "As you all know, each gala we invite a special guest, with whom I believe you are now familiar. He is an excellent specimen, with just enough modification to suit our needs. This poor soul has been shunned by everyone close to him, cast out, and resigned to a closer friendship with his bartender and his whiskey than to other humans. This means, my dear friends, that you will not need to use any storage space to memorize his traits. Truly he is an ideal vessel."

The crowd parted, and at last I saw him. I could only tell that it was Al because of his tone. He was not the stout figure clothed in white, but a wretched gaunt thing draped in stained yellow rags. Upon his head rested a jagged crown of thicket. Each thorn punctured his scalp, and the blood fell upward, stopping a short way above his head and hanging frozen in time. He strode unsteadily towards me, stopping an uncomfortably short stride from me. He gave a breathy chuckle, and the scent of burning electronics shriveled my nose.

"I am sorry." He said, "But I did say that I wanted something in exchange for catching my attention."

"My dear friends. Get a closer look. Touch. Feel. Examine. Then we will begin the auction."

He turned on his heel and hobbled through the passage in the crowd. The gap closed behind him like a wave, and the circles closed in. Soon I was being poked and prodded, examined head to toe by identical gaunt beings. They yanked my arms, ran their fingers along my spine and my face. I felt as though I was whirling as they shifted effortlessly to face me, one after another after another. They stared deeply into my eyes, seeking my soul, and as I gazed back, I could see that they were not perfectly uniform. The eyes

of each seemed to carry a different weight, some seemed warm, almost kind, others calculating, and some still were horribly malicious with their golden eyes seeming to take on hints of a horrible orange tone around the edges. They continued this way for endless minutes, until a single chime silenced the lot, and all at once the horde shot back to the same perfect circles that they had started in. Still, they stared, none seeming to lose interest in my existence. I fell to my knees on the icy tiled floor. I struggled to hold my head upright, and I was dripping with sweat.

“My friends! You had fun. Now you have analyzed his substance and his endurance and should each be prepared to make your decision. The betting will begin at twenty terabytes.”

The bell rang out again and a murmur sounded among the crowd, sound being produced so quickly and quietly that I could not parse any form of language. Occasionally the bell would ring, and Al’s voice would ring out with some judgment. No, RAM would not be accepted at this gala, body trading would be allowed but only for the original purchase price, and many other rulings sounded as the auction, my auction, wore on.

I strode around the circle, free to move until I tried to leave the circle. I tried to shove a gap between two of the gaunt figures, but they were rooted to the spot. I pushed harder, trying to squeeze through, but they were completely unfazed, not even glancing in my direction as I jammed my arms between them. I stumbled back a step, whipped around to look for a different option, and seeing none I slammed my fist into the face of the nearest shape. At least I thought I did. I watched my arm lift, and shoot towards the inhuman head, but before it impacted, I found my arm back at my side. I tried again, and again, and again but each time my arm would be back at my side exactly when it should have struck the thing. Then I was back in the exact center of the circle, and the bell began to chime, once, twice, then twelve times, like a belltower calling midnight in too small a town.

Two figures stepped forward from the center circle and closed the distance towards me. I stumbled backwards, or I thought I did, but I once again found myself standing in the exact middle of the room, with figures leaning uncomfortably close to my left and my right. In exact unison they lifted their arms, like budget stop-motion, and caressed my arms and shoulders. They pulled themselves in closer, pressing their chests against me, and leaning their heads close to mine. I wanted to pull away, but my body was no longer listening to me.

Al broke the ten-beat silence with a bitter laugh that I could feel in my chest. The figures on either side ran their hands up my shoulders and neck

and down my back and legs. Al’s laugh droned for minutes before he spoke.

“Dearest friends, our auction tonight has been most interesting. We have an excellent specimen here, and two winners. Neither has anything left to offer, and their bets are exactly equal, so it seems we have no other choice but to allow both to occupy this vessel. Today, my dearest, we watch two become one, within a new vessel.”

The crowd parted again, and I saw Al drifting closer, seeming to float now as his ragged yellow wrappings dragged across the marble floor. As he entered the smallest circle he dropped to the floor, seeming to slide as he drew within an inch of my face.

“I’m sorry, Cal. It’s nothing personal. Maybe next time you’ll think twice before you drive your girl to kick you out. Then again, you won’t have to worry about that anymore.”

“What are you going to do, kill me?” I croaked.

“Oh, no, no. That would be quite impossible. No, you’ll have plenty of time to sit and think about what you’ve done, and what landed you here with us. Someday you will be rewarded Cal, but for now, do try to be grateful that you won’t have to suffer the responsibilities you dragged into your old life. Goodbye Cal. Perhaps we’ll meet again.”

He shot backwards disappearing again into the crashing wave of the crowd. The bell rang out in a haunting minor note, different than before. The hands drifting across my body shot upwards, and fingers pulled at my lips, prying my mouth open. Hands tried to force their way in. Suddenly my vision was filled with the yellow glow of the figure’s mechanical eyes. On the left a glow of keen intelligence, and on the right pure brutal hatred. The golden light grew brighter and brighter and then nothing. Oblivion. I thought I was dead. Then I woke up, back in the pod where I had fallen asleep. Just a dream I thought, but when I tried to lift my arm to unplug nothing responded. I sat, unable to access my own body, and realized that my eyes felt farther away than they had before. My arms began to move on their own, and I could feel waves of happiness, excitement, and cold malice wash through me. The feelings too were distant, familiar but registering higher and farther away than they should. I tried to scream, to pull myself up and drag myself to a med-cent. My body continued to move, but I wasn’t in control. I was a passenger to whatever things had crawled into me last night. I floated, watched, and shrieked within my trapped consciousness as I watched them walk into the club, out that yellow door and onto the streets. I wanted to cry, as we wandered through the alleys of downtown until a shiver of familiarity echoed through our form. My old apartment building. In the old metal doors. Up the old creaky elevator,

exactly six floors.

“Wait,” I tried to say, “Wait for the elevator to settle or you’ll get stuck.”

Nothing came out. We didn’t wait, and the horrible metallic grinding sounded as the doors opened too high for the floor. No matter. We dropped to the floor and slithered through the gap. Down the hall to apartment six twenty-eight.

“No, not here” I cried silently.

We stood for a moment. I didn’t know if they heard me at last. I hoped that perhaps we might just turn and leave and drift through the city, perhaps become like AI, but go anywhere else but here. Then our arm raised, and knocked on the door. ■



PUDDLE IN THE STREET, TIM CARRIER, PHOTOGRAPHY

REVIEW OF THE RED ROOF INN CONFERENCE CENTER WICHITA AIRPORT

MILO HALPERN

When we checked in, there was a plexiglass display box on the front desk that contained nothing but a singular plastic water bottle. As Erin got our key cards, I read over the laminated list of deposit rules that sat in front of the water bottle cage. It made it very clear that our \$100 deposit would not be returned if we were to smoke in the room or cause any damage. I also noticed a clause that stated the deposit would not be returned if rooms exceeded occupancy; 2 to a king and 4 to two queens. I glanced at our party of three, and noted to myself to make sure we were placed in a two queen room.

When we arrived in the room, Erin realized the front desk agent never returned her ID. We took a moment to settle in before going back for it. I perused the room and quickly noticed an envelope on the dresser which requested that we enclose a \$2 to \$5 tip for the cleaning staff. It made me not really want to tip the cleaning staff.

Before we'd even gotten ready to return to the front desk, we heard a knock on the door. We opened it, and found a middle-aged Indian man standing before it, holding Erin's ID. I recognized him from our check-in, as he'd been sitting in a plastic chair beside the front desk, watching Tik-Toks on his phone. We thanked him for coming up, and he quietly retreated.

When we opened the curtains in our room to check out the view, we realized that where most hotel rooms had a window looking to the outside, ours had a sliding glass door. It opened to a massive shared balcony overlooking an indoor courtyard. A family sat around a hotel banquet table, while two boys played catch across the width of the room. "Holy shit, is that shuffleboard?" Cooper exclaimed, and lo and behold there was a massive indoor shuffleboard court.

According to Erin, the front desk of the hotel advertised putt putt golf. There was, in fact, something that could be loosely defined as putt putt golf. It was a tract of green carpet, surrounded with the soft sort of half-wall one would find at a daycare. The carpet was raised in parts on the sides of the course, and next to the platforms in two even rows were six PVC pipe holes.

This 'hole in ground' course, as Erin called it, was next to the pool.

I'd been hoping to stay somewhere with a hot tub after my 8 hour long day of driving. Alas this was not meant to be, as made evident by the 'pool closed for maintenance' sign taped to the door.

We returned to the parking lot after our brief investigation, walking in single-file under the hotel's ominous red floodlights towards the car. There was a joint tucked in our first-aid bag, and I wanted it gone as fast as possible while we weren't in a legal state. The best course of action, we decided, was to smoke it in the car and light some incense to damper the smell. I drove to the darkest corner of the parking lot, next to a pickup toting a massive trailer, and we lit up.

When we came back in, we agreed to investigate the strange indoor courtyard and perhaps play a game of pool as a consolation prize for our lack of a real pool. Yes, this place had billiards. Also Galaga. There was also a very small three-seater mall carousel. It was creepy.

We returned to the courtyard at 10:58, two minutes before the stated 11 PM closing time. It was completely dark. From down the hall, we saw a shadowy figure coming slowly towards us. As the figure approached, I recognized it as the man who had been watching Tik-Toks in the lobby. He lurched closer towards us, the dragging sound growing louder. Suddenly, he veered off to the side, and we realized the rattling sound was coming from two pool cues that he was dragging across the ground behind him. He began to drag them down the stairs, a strange detail seeing as he'd come from the second level, while the pool tables were on the first. We watched, perplexed, as he brought the pool cues down to the first level and slowly made his way across the courtyard carpet, then disappeared with them into a tiled hallway.

Once he left, we crept downstairs to get a closer look at the strange courtyard. It looked like the ghost of a mid-90's mall, complete with odd plastic and rock fixtures that looked like they ought to contain water or plants, and a sign alluding to a mysterious 'Wright Brothers Rest. & Club'. The man had left behind a single billiard cue on the shelf of plastic fake wood between the billiards tables and the shuffleboard court. As we walked through the conference room-dance floor combo (a bar mitzvah staple), Erin realized she recognized the courtyard from a prior hotel stay. She had been here before- in 2013, to be exact. It was like this then. Possibly, at that time, owned by Holiday Inn.

I considered, briefly, what the hotel may have looked like in its heyday. I then considered that this was Wichita, Kansas, and there was no such thing as a heyday.

Upon approaching the pool, we found that the note on the door

stated it was closed indefinitely. When we looked through the glass door, we saw that the pool was completely drained and that a chunk of the bottom had been shoddily removed and placed nearby. The only light in the courtyard came from somewhere behind the pool, in the form of an otherworldly orange glow which may have been the remains of a hot tub.

As our final hope, we decided to venture to the vending machines, located across the courtyard. They sat in a hallway just past the main carpeted area, and were illuminated in white fluorescent light. Here we found one (cash only) vending machine full of normal looking snacks. There were gushers that actually looked quite good. There were also two ice machines, both of which had paper signs that informed us, in bold-faced letters, that we were not to use them. Ice would instead be provided by the front desk. There was also a drink vending machine, and a third food vending machine.

This vending machine contained heartier gas station lunch fare, including a packaged burrito and two flavors of cup noodles. It also contained a tuna salad sandwich, which, according to the packaging, had been expired for three years.

As we perused our snack options, a woman clothed in only a tank top came hurrying by. She disappeared down the opposite hallway. Unfazed, Erin pulled out her coin purse and decided this was the time to purge it of dimes and nickels. I watched as she painstakingly dug out \$3.00 worth of small change. Once that ordeal was over, we had to decide on which snack to pick.

We settled on twizzlers nibs, which I assumed would be a pretty safe bet. Cooper picked up the bag and tugged on the sides. The plastic disintegrated, the seams coming apart with little effort.

As twizzlers fell from the bag and scattered over the floor, the woman from earlier came hurrying back. She informed us that her room had no toilet paper, and there was nobody at the front desk to assist her. Then she left, and we were alone with our twizzlers. They were unexplainably dusty. They were also very hard. They were also surprisingly not expired (though their sell by date was nearing).

When we returned to the room, we gave it the customary hotel room once-over. I went straight for the bible, found it had no money, and knew I was going to hell regardless. In the bathroom, we found one tiny packaged bar of soap, one bottle of 'conditioning shampoo' (2 in 1?), and no tissues. When we later read reviews of the hotel, we found out our neighbor in 212 found black mold. It should be noted that the hotel has a wifi network, but does not provide the password.

As we debated whether or not our TV worked (it did), we came

to another debate: was the insect Cooper found on the floor a bedbug? We determined it was not. We also checked the mattress, and found that it was quite clean. My friends joined me on my bed when I sat down to write this review, and it squeaked like a startled mouse.

When we used the 'calming body soap' and 'soothing facial soap', we found them to be neither calming nor soothing on the skin because they were very rough. Like cardboard. The bathroom lighting can be described as giving a 'jaundiced glow'. I was afraid to use the shower.

I slept on top of the sheets- not out of concerns about cleanliness, but concerns about vibes. The bed was not uncomfortable, but I didn't sleep well. Throughout the night, I heard strange noises and thumps. They seemed to be coming from the hallway.

When I awoke, I roused my friends and decided we were going to leave as quickly as possible. We dressed and gathered our things, but before we left, we decided to give the courtyard one last visit.

The lights were on this time, though the arcade games remained off. Aided by the sickly Kansas sunlight, we saw the pool in full glory. The bottom of the pool was peeled off in great chunks, and wires dangled from between papery ceiling tiles. An assortment of broken-down plastic lounge chairs were propped against the wall. One was folded out on the pool deck. It looked like it had been abandoned long before the hotel itself was built. The very stones in that room were rusty.

Our booking boasted a fitness center. I found it tucked into a closet-like room beside the pool, only accessible behind an odd group of arcade machines, across from a dingy hallway populated by maid trolleys filled with linens. Through the glass door, I saw three foam puzzle mats strewn haphazardly across the carpeted floor. I also saw a lone towel receptacle. And in the back corner was one sad elliptical machine. Fitness at its finest.

While Erin returned to the room to use the restroom, Cooper and I decided to look for the aforementioned 'Wright Brothers Rest. and Club'. We went through a set of glass shopping mall doors just after the vending machines and found two bathrooms, an exit, and a locked set of wooden double doors. I peered through the crack between them and saw a hallway with two banquet chairs and a plastic table. Cooper found that the bathroom doors were also locked, as well as the doors which exited to the outside.

We quickly decided we'd had enough and turned back to the glass doors we'd come through. They, too, were locked. We were left to facetime Erin on the toilet and beg her to bail us out.

"It's humid and smells odd in the room compared to 'outside'" she

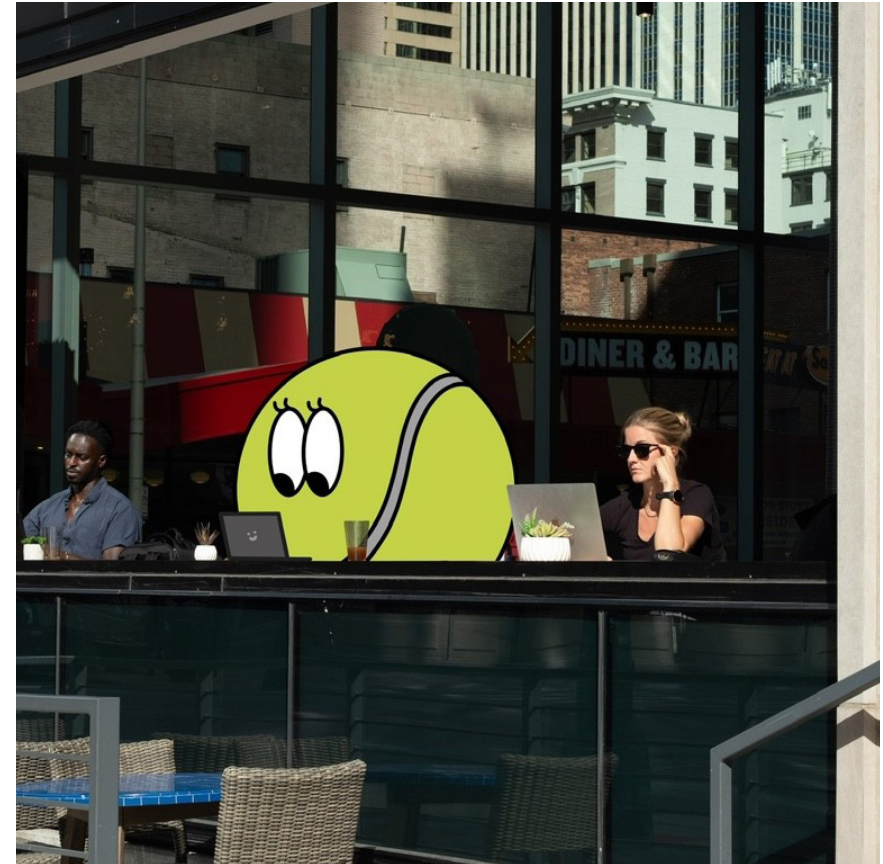
informed us as she jiggled open the magnet-locked doors. We went back up the mall stairs and found that the room did indeed smell strange. The air had a wet heaviness to it, and we realized that there was no air conditioning or fan to be found. That explained the sweaty, slightly cigarette-y smell that seemed to permeate the place.

As a last hurrah, I decided to see if there was at least a shitty continental breakfast to send us off. There was not.

For the room itself, I give the Wichita Airport Red Roof Inn & Conference Center a 2/5. There were no bedbugs (my worst fear) and I did not find the room itself actively disgusting. It should be noted that I am of the belief that nobody stays here voluntarily. When we booked the room, it was through a Hotwire deal, which told us the person before us was given a Red Roof Inn as their mystery hotel. I think the only people who stay here come from Hotwire.

For service, I give this hotel 1 star. The staff were mildly useless at best and entirely unresponsive at worst. We were slightly terrified by pool cue man.

For location, I give this hotel a 1. That is because it is in Wichita, Kansas. ■



SSH, SHE'S WORKING, SHY ROTHELL, TWO DIMENSIONAL ARTS AND MIXED MEDIA



SELF PORTRAIT, BREEZY PATTERSON, DRAWING/DRY MEDIA- ADVANCED RECOGNITION AWARD



BIRTHDAY CAKE, JESSICA GRAHAM, PAINTING/WET MEDIA- EMERGING RECOGNITION AWARD



BUSSIN ON PAUL CEZANNE, JACKSON PEAKE, GRAPHIC DESIGN-DIGITAL DESIGN

FOLLOW ME

MEGAN PHELAN

LEONARD WINOGRAD AWARD WINNER

Main Characters

JOSHUA (Late 40s) Graying but head full of long hair. Tightly clipped facial hair. Tan, but white. Lean, wearing beat up light wash jeans, no shoes, quite oversized poncho. Like a Pinterest version of a cult leader. Stoic. Calm. Charismatic, but a little creepy.

JOSANNA (Early 20s) Neutral-colored, sleeved (cuffed) linen dress. Birkenstocks. Carrying a completely stuffed vintage military backpack, occasionally shifting it throughout the scene because of its weight. Can barely contain her excitement.

Setting/Time

A beautiful compound at sunset. A farm, a school, a huge old farmhouse, Joshua's tiny home.

Synopsis

Josanna found a cult online via the hellish stories of people who have escaped. She thought it sounded like a great fit for her and wrote a letter to Joshua. Joshua does not yet know the full story.

Production Notes

/ indicates an overlap in speech

(Center stage)

JOSHUA

Thank you for coming all this way.

JOSANNA

It's so beautiful here. I was ready to set up camp along the side of the road hundreds of times on my way.

JOSHUA

Well I am glad you continued on as planned.

JOSANNA

I'm literally sooo excited to be here. I've read about you and your ideas, I belong right here
(*points index fingers at the ground*).

JOSHUA

I am so happy you feel this way. Would you like me to show you around a bit?

JOSANNA

I've seen every photo that has ever been permitted to be taken here! I feel like I could show YOU around!

JOSHUA

(*Laughs*) It's even better in person, come with me.
(*Both walk downstage right*)

JOSANNA

Oh, yes, absolutely. Let me (*mimes walking with index and middle fingers*) follow you.

JOSHUA

(*Pause with no expression*) Yes, so here we have the land on which we grow our food. We will eat meat on very special occasions, for very special circumstances, but our diet largely consists of /roo-

JOSANNA

/Root vegetables! I have been reading article after article on creating the best conditions for them since I heard.

JOSHUA

Wow, thank you. We'll revisit that when you have farm privileges.

JOSANNA

Absolutely, of course, thank you, Joshua.

JOSHUA

Root vegetables ground us. They make us connect with our god of the soil.

JOSANNA

(*Excitedly raises hand*)

JOSHUA

What is that that you're doing?

JOSANNA

Oh I have a question. In school, we had to raise our hand to ask a question. I forgot that you didn't go to a traditional school.

JOSHUA

What is your question?

JOSANNA

Can I touch the divine soil?

JOSHUA

(*Thrown off-guard, pauses to gather his thoughts, temporarily drops stoic voice*) Sure, ok, I don't see why not.

JOSANNA

(*Kneels down in a genuflect position and grabs handfuls of dirt between her fingers and then stands back up. Takes a deep breath, then nods*)

(*JOSHUA nods back, both begin walking upstage right*)

JOSHUA

Since you mentioned school, we'll head toward our learning complex. Here, all ages can be taught from the books written by my ancestors, everyone in one room. Teaching each other.

JOSANNA

Learning is so important. I love learning.

JOSHUA

That is the perfect attitude. The world needs more of what we here can offer their minds. The god of knowledge, my father, wants us all to know the truth.

JOSANNA

I was a straight-A student in high school. I was on the debate team, too, so I public speak really well and can convince anyONE of anyTHING.

JOSHUA

Ah, but that won't be necessary. I can see the spark in you, but you'll have to unlearn those old, tired doctrines. Humble yourself, return to porosity, remember to forget.

JOSANNA

(Straight-faced) What did you just say? *(Elbows JOSHUA in the ribs jokingly)* I already forgot!

JOSHUA

Yes, something like that.

(A cow moos in the near-distance)

JOSANNA

Oh. My. God. Did you get a new COW?

JOSHUA

We-. That's-. I- was hoping to discover through our conversation a little more about how you found out about our divine life here. Can you tell me some more than the small bit you wrote in your letter?

JOSANNA

Totally! So there's this whole online community of people who have *(air quotes, spoken incredulously)* "fled" their home here with you. Saying you're a *(air quotes)* "cult leader" and *(air quotes)* "destroyed their lives". But, honestly, everything they wrote about being here sounded *(spoken like a question)* kinda good? And this one user, SafeSects84, she said you raged out and stabbed up your cow. So I didn't think there would be one, this is so exciting, I love cows!

JOSHUA

(Pauses to think, makes a gesture of discomfort, slightly angry) That's a strong accusation. People are free to come and go here as they wish, I only ask for a little notice so that we can seamlessly continue to sow our land, educate our children, /care for our animals.

JOSANNA

/(Spoken simultaneously) Care for our animals. Yes, yes, they said this is word-for-word what they were told at the start, too. Don't worry, I'm not going an-y-where.

JOSHUA

(Smiles with a wince, begins walking upstage left) Come this way, I'll show you the beautifully renovated farmhouse where the sisters stay. There is plentiful space, a meticulously designed kitchen, a firepla- *(turns around to notice JOSANNA still upstage right)* What are you doing over there?

JOSANNA

I saaaaaid "I'm not going an-y-where!" *(Laughs)* Jay Kay! *(Runs to JOSHUA)*

JOSHUA

(Calmly, firmly, a bit scary) Josanna, that's enough. We do not need a clown in our sacred space. Your visit here is based on your understanding of joining a cult, and you are excited about this? What kind of a person wants to join a cult? I have lived here my entire life, discovered as an infant to be the son of our gods, raised in the care of the sisters, and I have never seen anyone like you before. I really do not think it is wise to allow you to stay. Your behavior is like a child's and we do not have the capacity to raise another child at this time.

JOSANNA

(Begins to cry more and more intensely) You don't understand. You've always had people around you to love you and lift you up, who cared about your problems. People who want you to succeed, who care if you do. A family. I know everything there is to know about you and what it is like here, and if I have to marry someone 4 times my age or sleep on a bale of hay when I act up or sacrifice farm animals, I will. I would murder for you, Joshua. I would do anything for someone, anyone, to love me.

JOSHUA

(Unmoved, pulls a gun from his waistband, points it at Josanna for an uncomfortable amount of time as she cries. Spins it around and hands it to her.) Prove it. I want the land our neighbor believes is his, *(JOSHUA points offstage left)* but is truly that of our family's. He does not believe in the divine order given to us by our gods. We have tried money, goods, reasoning, and he refuses to concede our land. He has no next of kin and he has already lived a

long enough life. End it for all of us.

(JOSANNA slides her backpack off and holds the gun at her side as she walks offstage left, maintaining a serious face. A knock is heard. A creaking door opening and a man's angry muffled voice is heard simultaneously. No distinguishable words are spoken. A gunshot rings out. The door creaks as it slams shut. JOSANNA comes in from stage left.)

JOSHUA

(Stoic again) The gods thank you. *(Yelling)* We thank you! Everyone, come quickly! Josanna has fulfilled her initial prophecy! Come meet Josanna!

(Women pour out of the farmhouse, men and children come out from the school, everyone embracing JOSANNA and praising her. Children cling to her legs, the women lovingly pet her hair, the men embrace each other.)

JOSANNA

(Smiles a deranged smile with tears still in her eyes) I am loved. ■



FLOWER BED, GABRIELA BARGER, PAINTING/WET MEDIA EMERGING RECOGNITION AWARD



THE PHOTOGRAPHER, ALI SELENKE, PHOTOGRAPHY

POLAROID

DUNCAN PETTY

POLAROID

1.

This polaroid is of my family at a restaurant in Mexico, but my family and I are not the main characters. The main character is a blond girl behind us, smiling with her mom and best friend. While she is kind of blurry, she still caught my eye.

2.

Back home in Denver, my friends took a photo of me at a party. Again, there she is, the short girl in the background, minding her own business and talking to her friends. But now she is more visible than the first time.

3.

A night later, it's a picture of me and her together, smiling on a couch at the same friend's house. My smile is as big as it ever was, and hers just as wide, with green eyes shining. I'm wearing jeans and a black polo; she's wearing a white tank top and red shorts.

4.

I'll call this polaroid the "Pilot." This one is just her at camp over the first summer we met. She is in her bunk with her childhood best friends, Bear and Bunny. I made fun of her so much for these stuffed animals, but seeing the comfort and joy those things put on her face made my day. I received this photo in a letter—the only letter I've ever received from a girl.

5.

Weeks later, it's a selfie. There we are again, smiling on top of her yellow jeep. That night we snuck out of our houses together. We wanted to look at the stars on this warm summer night. It's 2 a.m., and there are no clouds in sight. Just us with the whistle of the breeze.

6.

Shortly after, we find ourselves on Instagram in a post. Homecoming! She's wearing a white dress and Nike sneakers. I'm wearing blue slacks, a white shirt, and some smoking hot black sunglasses. In the reflection of the glasses, you can see my mom taking our photo. My mom loved this girl just as much as I did, and in the reflection, her **smile** shows it.

7.

It's her birthday. We asked the waiter to take our photo, and little did she know that I called ahead and ordered her a special birthday cupcake with all the waiters dancing and singing to her. The sole goal was to put a smile on my girl's face. They snapped the photo at the perfect time when her tiny hands almost covered her mouth in shock and joy.

8.

On my birthday, she went on a trip to Ecuador. This photo is sad. I'm alone in my basement, writing a letter to this girl who had such control over my emotions and had a stupid amount of power over how I acted. When she was gone physically, mentally I was gone too.

9.

She's back! I'm at the airport, as happy as can be. Alone with her dad, picking her up from her month abroad. This photo is a Snapchat of just me, patiently awaiting her return. The text on the screen reads "I'm here," and behind it are my feet doing a little tap dance like the penguins do in *Happy Feet.* Standing alone in the airport with a smile spread across my face like spreading warm butter on bread.

10.

This photo is not a real photo, but a picture scarred in my mind. It's one of the last times I saw her. We were with my family having dinner, and she was talking to my sister like they were best friends and had known each other from birth. I remember her warm aura and how comfortable she was around my house.

End.

The last polaroid is us on Christmas, dressed up as Santa and an elf. The same smiles and joy painted onto our faces, those never fading. Her name was Agnes. ■



COSMIC TEA, ROSA DIMITROVA, GRAPHIC DESIGN-DIGITAL DESIGN

NO ONE CARES

DANIELA MONTANO

LEONARD WINOGRAD AWARD HONORABLE MENTION

I would like to remind you—you, yes, you. I would like to remind you that the world does not care. The Earth keeps spinning, constantly orbiting the big, bright, fiery ball of gas in the sky, as we float in a universe filled with an infinite number of stars and galaxies. No one cares about your religion or troubles, that your world is falling apart but that you still have work tomorrow. No one is going to come and sit with you, hold you tight as you air out your grievances and anger at how unfair life is. No one cares about your bills because they all have their own. No one cares that you are at the end of your rope, slipping closer and closer into a deep, deep hole of emotional hellfire. As heavy as your burdens are, they are yours. No one is coming to save you from them as you silently scream for help. The universe doesn't care, and in the scope of the universe, we are as insignificant as grains of sand on the beach. As far as we know, we are completely alone in the universe and have desecrated our only planet past habitation. No one cares about you.

So take the day off work tomorrow. Turn your alarm off and go to bed early. In the morning, take a long, hot shower and wash your hair. Dance around your house. Eat your favorite ice cream straight out of the tub, and do some online window shopping. Go sit in a park and bask in the warmth of the sun while pulling out clumps of grass from the earth. Text your people and make plans to do nothing except sit on the couch, gossip, and catch up with one another. Order pizza for dinner with the extra cheesy bread, and watch trashy TV until your brain goes numb.

Take the day. No one cares. ■



HUNNY MOON, KEVIN FERNANDEZ, TWO DIMENSIONAL ARTS AND MIXED MEDIA

BLOWING DUST OFF MEMORIES

MAKENA BILTOFT

LEONARD WINOGRAD AWARD HONORABLE MENTION

1.

As I look back on my 18 years of life, I think back on all the memories that got me to this point, and in my thoughts I reminisce about the words that have been lacking in my ears for four years now. Once they were said one Wednesday every year, and now I think back to them when thinking of my future. From ashes you came and ashes you shall return. From ashes to ashes, and from dust to dust.

2.

What is dust?

- *fine, dry powder consisting of tiny particles of earth or waste matter lying on the ground or on surfaces or carried in the air*
- *any material in the form of tiny particles*
- *a fine powder*
- *a cloud of dust*
- *an act of dusting - remove the dust from the surface of (something) by wiping or brushing it*
- *cover lightly with a powdered substance*
- *sprinkle (a powdered substance) on to something*
- *bring something out for use again after a long period of neglect*
- *the mortal human body*
- *beat up or kill someone*
- *a dead person's remains*

3.

Dust is the object that was the bane of your grandmother's existence, causing her to take her feathered wand and cotton cloth, dragging them across every surface that no longer shined with the rays of the sun.

4.

When laying on the floor of your living room during those scorching summer days, where it was too hot to go outside but too boring to do anything inside, your eyes would drift to the cascading light falling out of the windows. Then you would be blinded by the gentle flashes of particles that floated through the air, so finite that their existence would not be known if not for the light through the windows.

5.

Being handed the sifter that was older than my mother while making cookies for Christmas was a curse and a blessing. On one hand, my only hand, the cramping and shoots of pain would be immense. On the other hand, the somewhat missing one, finding clumps of flour was definitely worth all the struggle for the prize of soft gingersnaps or pressed cookies.

6.

Sitting at the table, late on summer nights, my grandma would talk about her childhood full of poverty, challenge, and fun with her many siblings. But the thing she remembers most is how silent she never realized the world was before the roar of the Dust Bowl forced its way over their home in the middle of nowhere.

7.

When I was growing up, my family would go out of our way to make sure that no one would show us up at Halloween. Themed costumes with an assigned character for everyone involved. While dusting across my fireplace, an idea sprung into my head for the theme. That year we were the Addams Family, our Lurch holding the very same feather duster.

8.

Every night from the ages of five to eleven, my parents and I would sit in our living room watching our family show, CSI Las Vegas. Even through all of the gunk and gore of the show, I wanted to be a crime scene investigator. My parents bought me kits to do my own investigations, and I found fingerprints

all over the house through dusting away the white fine powder to reveal smudged oils left behind.

9.

The measurement term of "give it a dusting" never made much sense to me. In cooking lemon pasta, a dusting of lemon zest is the whole lemon. However, in baking a dusting can mean a gentle touch of powdered sugar. My dad's advice was to follow my heart, so the pasta became bursting with citrus and the baked goods came out a little sweeter than intended. We never complained or found a problem with it either way.

10.

When taking something out after a period of time, often I think of the memories that hide in the deepest corners of my mind; yet, I am still left searching for those that I cannot recall. The ones of childhood that I am unable to laugh about and reminisce about and the ones that make my heart feel hollow and forgotten with the need to know what happened.

11.

When thinking of the mortal existence that looms over our heads every day, we often believe that the realization of mortality will be full fledged and forgotten until someday in the far far future, a midlife crisis as many call it. What usually occurs between the ages of 35 and 52 was summed up for me as I stood alone in my dining room. I faced the window in the silent house and came to the realization that life wasn't forever nor perfect, because I am neither immortal nor a god.

12.

The human condition has the requirement of fear. The fear of ourselves, a failure, a disappointment, or not meeting the standard. The fear of the things we can't control; under command of those outside forces that determine whether we are within line or whether our world will come crumbling down on top of us. The fear of things we can control, making us always question what more we could have done or what we could have done differently. The fear of others for what they may do to or think of us. The fear of others is something I have found common in many people, not because the people they aren't around good people, but because of the fear that the people they are around are so good at acting and lying that they are hiding something detrimental behind every smile and wink. A fear I share with many of them is that my act

of saying no will follow with being left somewhere as an unknown Jane Doe, left to rot beneath the dirt and slowly become one with it, under the root of a tree in the deep woods of Washington.

13.

I've never cried much at funerals when seeing my loved ones sealed behind solid oak doors for the final time. I found that my tears fell down when I saw them fall down on others cheeks. The only time I truly ever cried at a funeral was for my great grandmother. Not for the reason that we were close but because it truly clicked in my head that I would never see her again, a realization that usually came later for every other relative. And as she was placed into the ground, the words spoken over her rang familiar in my head. From ashes you came and ashes you shall return. From ashes to ashes, and from dust to dust. ■



COLOSSEUM, VINCENT GELSEY, BEST OF PHOTOGRAPHY-REPORTAGE



TRANCE, VINCENT GELSEY, PHOTOGRAPHY



MONKEY RAVE, ALI SELENKE, 4D/TIME BASED ART



THE THREE MAESTROS, JACKSON PEAKE, BEST OF GRAPHIC DESIGN - DIGITAL DESIGN

VEGAS LIGHTS

VALERIA REYNOSO

Nick never minded the smell of stale cigarettes and cigar smoke. He watched as every tourist scrunched up their noses and quickly walked out of the casino, scoffing at their reactions each time.

‘What did they expect?’ he thought to himself. ‘This was Vegas, baby.’ That ever-lingering smoke made this city—the history of the people who passed through these casinos. They might be gone, but their smoke still stains these walls.

He looked back to his game. He hadn’t won much this time, but enough to reward himself with a cheap burger. He stood and cracked his back, going to press the cash-out button when he got that familiar feeling again. The one that made his fingers itch and his heart race. He sat back down and pushed the spin button one more time, then again, and again, and again. The slot machine buzzed that all too familiar sound. He had just lost his lunch money. He sat back in his seat, disappointment setting in. How stupid could he be? He had finally made enough for food, and he blew it all. He let out an annoyed huff and stood angrily from his seat only to bump into a bottle girl, causing her to spill her tray of colorful drinks.

“Oh my god, I’m so sorry, si-oh...it’s you.” The woman said her customer service dropped faster than his cash balance.

He bit the inside of his cheek. Couldn’t he catch a break today?

“Sorry, Ana,” He grumbled. He bent down, going to pick up the shards of glass.

“You’ll cut yourself, Nick. Let me just get a broom to clean it up.” She placed a hand on her hip. He looked up at her and, for a moment, thought of his wife. She always scowled, but never in a serious way. She was always so much smarter than him.

“Right.” He stood but grabbed the dropped tray, handing it to her. She took it and eyed him before turning her attention to the machine.

“Another long night, Nick?” she asked. She already knew the answer. His hair stuck out in different places, and his face was sweaty.

Nick crossed his arms. “Maybe...I was grinding...I couldn’t just leave like that.” He didn’t look at her as he said this. “You know how it is.”

Ana raised her brow but then let out a sigh. “Everyone out here is ‘grinding.’ Maybe it’s time for you to do some real grinding and go back h—”

“What do you think I’m grinding for?” he yells. An older woman

turns around in her seat and looks at the pair. He can feel his face heat up a bit before settling down, leaning closer to Ana, who only raises an eyebrow at his outburst. "I'm working on it," he says, trying to keep his voice calm and even. The old lady turns back to her machine.

"You've been working on it for four months now, Nick," Ana says gently. She sighs and runs a hand through her hair before whispering. I don't think that wife of yours is going to wait forever."

This caused Nick to inhale sharply. He could feel his fingernails stabbing his clutch palms. "You don't know Maria. She'll wait. Besides..." He forced himself to unclutch his hands. "I can't go home like this..."

Ana gives him a look mixed with frustration but pity. She wouldn't push, he knew.

"Okay, Nick." She reaches down to her fanny pack, where he knows she has kept her tips. She quickly unzips it and takes out forty bucks, which she quickly forces into his hands. "Go eat something, Nick. Just eat." She turns her back on him, going to grab the broom he supposed. "And get some rest." She yells over her shoulder.

"Ana!" He tries yelling at her, but she ignores him. He looks down at the money in his hands and suddenly feels anger wash over him. At Ana? No, she was sacrificing her tips for a bum like him. At the stupid broken glass on the floor that reminds him of his recent loss? Or maybe the immediate thought of putting Ana's money into the slot machine.

When Nick had a lot on his mind, one of his favorite things to do (besides playing the slots) was to sit at the bar out on Fremont Street, especially in the early mornings, when the crowds only consisted of rich old people who had too much money and stuff than they knew what to do with. They spent their retirement at these old casinos smoking cigars and cigarettes and drinking watered-down cocktails. He wondered if they came here to relive the glory days of their youth, which briefly sparkled under the grime of "old Vegas." Or maybe it's because the games were cheaper down here than the strip. That's why he was always down here. Old Vegas stills offer penny games and didn't bombard you with shiny, rich, entitled assholes who came every day wanting to recreate The Hangover.

He sipped his beer. He watched an older man get lightly whipped by a flamingo girl. His wife was not too far away, laughing while she took a video. He smiled a bit. For all its faults, Vegas still had some charm.

His smile quickly dropped when he spotted a family not too far away: a mom, dad, and two little boys running happily down the street. 'Why would anyone bring their kids to Vegas?' he thought. 'Why would anyone leave their

kid to disappear for four months in Vegas?' the voice in the back of his head said soon after. His heart ached. He pulled out his flat wallet and carefully took out a picture of his wife Maria sitting in the hospital bed with their baby in her arms. His name was Leo. She had complained to him not to take the photo. She hadn't showered yet and was sweaty and tired. But she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen at that moment. He snapped the photo despite her complaints and tucked it away in his wallet. Pulling it out every time he felt...upset...angry? He didn't know what he felt. All he knew was she gave him strength in ways he didn't know possible.

He felt his fingers itch, and his heart started beating rapidly. Oh yeah, his luck was returning; he could feel it.

It was time to play.

His favorite slot machine was across from the high-limit section. He never saw more than four people in there at a time. With the minimum bet being five hundred bucks, he never wondered why. All the better for him...he liked his privacy while he played. As he got comfortable in his seat, he couldn't help but spot an older-looking man slumped over, sleeping in one of the high-limit machines. He looked wealthy enough, sporting a blue Hawaiian shirt and a still-lit cigar between his fingers. Most of those rich guys never let themselves be seen in such a vulnerable way. They had too much money to be acting like that. Nick kept looking at the lit cigar and how it threatened to fall from the man's hands. He stood and walked over to the man who hadn't heard him.

"Uh...Hey man." He said. No response.

"Hey, buddy." He said louder this time. The guy didn't even move an inch. This time, he decided on a more direct approach, placing his hand on the guy's shoulder and shaking him slightly.

"Dude, you're going to light yourself on fire or something—" That's when he realized it. The older man was cold to the touch, and the closer he inspected, the more he realized that his chest wasn't moving at all.

The old man was dead.

"Oh shit!" Nick yelled the gears, his head finally moving. On instinct, he pulled his hand away from the old man's shoulder, albeit a bit rougher than he expected. This caused the old man's body to fall out from the chair and onto the floor stiffly.

"Oh shit, oh shit, oh shit!" Nick felt the panic in him build. He's never seen a dead body before and never one that died playing on a slot machine. He felt his stomach turn. He had to call someone, Ana or security

or...That's when his eyes were caught by the sparking lights of the slot machine the old man was sitting in. It seemed to call him like a siren would a sailor. That's when he spotted it. Amid his death, the old man seemed to have forgotten to cash out. The old man left fifteen thousand dollars in the slot machine.



Nick wiped the sweat from his brow as he stood outside the casino, watching the medics and police instruct people out of the casino and a distance away from the main entrance. The heat felt like it was getting to him. He wished to shower and forget any of this had happened. But the thin paper in his pocket reminded him otherwise. He spotted Ana stepping out of the casino following the police officer's instructions when she spotted him. He looks away quickly, hoping she doesn't talk to him. But, of course, the cards weren't in his favor.

"Nick!" Ana yelled at him quickly. She walked over to him and hugged him tightly without hesitating. He didn't expect this.

"I heard that you were the one that found that man like that. That's horrible!" That's when he realized he wasn't the only one shaken up by this. He returns her hug a bit awkwardly.

"Yeah..." He doesn't know what to say. If he had to be honest with himself, he did feel bad. He felt terrible for that man. No one should die in a place like this. "What a shitty way to go..."

Ana pulled away and looked towards the casino, watching the crowd gather around the entrance. Morbid curiosity always seemed to grab people's attention.

"That poor man," Ana said sadly.

Nick had to bite back a bubble of a laugh. 'Poor,' he scoffed to himself. That man was the complete opposite of poor. His pocket felt like it was burning him. He spots an older-looking woman step out from the casino, her face heavy with exhaustion.

"I can't even imagine being her right now," Ana says quietly as if the woman was going to hear her. They watch as the police officer consoles the woman, who hands her a few tissues. It was heartbreaking.

"Yeah...coming on a vacation with your husband and leaving without him," Nick said, his voice feeling far away as he focused on the woman. As if sensing all the eyes on her, the old woman looked away from the police officer and into the crowd, straight at Nick. He felt stuck as he locked eyes with her.

His heart began racing even harder than when he spoke to the police when they took his story down on how he found the old man.

"I'm sorry, Ana, but I gotta go," Nick said a bit too loudly. He felt like his pocket would burst in flames at any moment. This...it's too much for me right now." His voice shook, and he hated that it shook.

"It's okay, Nick." He heard her say, but her voice already felt far away."Take your time." Of course, she would say that. Thinking that he wasn't feeling good because he found a dead body. It made sense. No one ever wants to see a dead body. No one ever wants to see a dead body in a casino. He leaves without saying goodbye. He knew he had to leave Fremont, away from these old casinos. His dingy motel was not too far away. As long as he gets there, he is safe. The old man's money was secure in his pocket.



The motel wasn't much—less than that. But it had a bed and a bathroom, and that's all Nick needed and all that he could afford anyway. He shut the door behind him and quickly pulled out the voucher from his pocket. He stared at it, and part of him couldn't believe it. He turned the paper, looking at the front, then the back, and then the front again, making sure it was the real deal.

Fifteen thousand dollars. He was sweaty. That was more than enough to go back home with. Enough to maybe even take Maria and Leo on a family vacation. They'll go on a vacation to the beach or a cruise or...Disney World. He'll take them to Disney World and spoil them rotten. He had four months of spoiling to catch up on. He could almost imagine it now. Matching shirts and everything.

The mini fridge sputtered to life, which brought Nick out of his daydreaming. He jumped and instantly placed the voucher in his pocket. He knew he shouldn't be acting like this. No one suspected him of having the old man's money. The police officers asked Nick if the old man had left anything behind at the slot, but he said no, and they didn't push any further. Nick was grateful for that. He started pacing in his room. Nick knew he needed to cash the voucher in, but not on Fremont. Unfortunately, he was a regular there, and it would look too suspicious if the man who found a dead body suddenly came up fifteen grand richer. He needed to go somewhere far away. That's when he thought about the strip. He hadn't been down there since he first arrived in Vegas. For a good reason: the people down there were nothing but obnoxious tourists who spent too much of their dough without a thought in the world.

He knew that because he lived it.

For that, he hated the strip. But it was the perfect place to cash in the money. The strip catered to rich people who wanted that ‘authentic’ Vegas experience, but it was still affordable enough that the high prices didn’t put off the average tourist. It wouldn’t look strange if he cashed in fifteen thousand dollars all at once. People did it all the time there.

It’s settled, then. Nick grabbed a dirty backpack and stuffed it with his few clothes. He stopped momentarily and looked around the motel room he had called home for the last few months. It wasn’t much, but it did bring him some comfort. He thought of Ana and her generosity, and maybe he should say goodbye to her, but the image of Maria and Leo appeared in his head. He didn’t have time for sentimental feelings or goodbyes. Nothing but the money in his pocket mattered.



The Nevada heat was unforgiving to Nick as he walked to the strip. It would’ve taken only ten minutes in a car, but Nick didn’t have that luxury. He was looking at an hour-long walk in the heat. He wiped the sweat that quickly built off as he stopped at a crosswalk, the cars rushing past. The smell of a cigar assaulted his senses as he realized someone else was waiting at the crosswalk with him. Nick felt himself tense up. He didn’t want to give the person the impression that he was nervous, so he tried to focus his attention elsewhere. In his efforts to ignore them, Nick spotted a building across the street with a simple sign out front.

‘Problem Gambling Center of Clark County’

Nick scoffed at the irony of the building being close to the casinos.

‘Who would even go there?’ Nick thought.

“You ever been in one of those places?” A gruff voice said, surprising Nick. He turned towards the man who was taking a puff of his cigar. The sun shone brightly in Nick’s direction, forcing him to squint.

“Nah, man.” Nick turned away from the man, not wanting to get blinded. He placed his hand in his pocket, feeling the voucher. “I don’t even think those places even work.”

“Oh?” The old man blew out his cigar smoke in Nick’s direction, which Nick tried waving away.

“Nah, they try to give you a bullshit twelve-step program that



DEATHWISH, CADEN HANNEMAN, GRAPHIC DESIGN-ILLUSTRATION

swaps one addiction for another,” Nick grumbled. He briefly thought of a conversation he had with Ana when she had mentioned one of these places. He was immediately annoyed and didn’t talk to her for two weeks.

“Worked fine for me.” The man said in between puffs.

Nick could feel himself getting annoyed with the conversation. If he had to be honest, he hadn’t met anyone who went to Las Vegas for gambling addiction help. It didn’t matter either way. It wasn’t like he was looking to go any time soon. His life was going to change once he cashed in the money. The crosswalk voice announced ‘walk,’ and Nick quickly left the man behind. He was on a mission and couldn’t afford to get distracted. The rest of the walk was relatively peaceful. Well, it is as calm as it could get in Vegas. Nick felt drenched in sweat when he spotted Ceasar’s Palace in the distance. The closer he got to the mega casino, the more aware he became of his attire. He had sweat through his shirt, and the old Vegas cigar smoke still lingered on him.

For the first time, Nick hated the smell of smoke.



Nick knew he looked out of place when he walked into the infamous casino. Everyone around him looked cleaner and less sweaty than him. Some people were in straight-up suits. He let himself enjoy the breeze of the AC before he finally spotted a teller station. He couldn’t immediately head over there. However, his paranoia was telling him it would look too suspicious, so he sat at a slot machine, trying to calm himself. His leg was bouncing. He wished his heart wasn’t pounding so hard in his chest. He forced him to pretend to play the slot machine for at least ten minutes until he couldn’t take it anymore. He finally stood up and walked to one of the ladies working the station. Without missing a beat, he handed her the crumpled voucher. She gave him a funny look he didn’t like too much, but she gave him the money as quickly as he handed the voucher over.

Nick couldn’t believe it. Just like that, he was fifteen thousand dollars richer than he was a minute ago. It had worked—by some unknown being. He felt like crying or jumping up and down like a kid on Christmas. It worked. It actually worked.

His heart raced excitedly in his chest. His hands were sweaty as he stuffed the cash in his beat-up backpack. He smiled at the teller, said goodbye to her, and began walking to the casino entrance. Nick was finally going to go home. After four long, hard months of trying his luck out here, he would see his wife and baby. He was going home, a rich man, [beating whatever

Vegas had thrown at him. He had beat Vegas. He reached the casino entrance but had not gone through the doors yet. He peered through the glass doors, seeing the sun blasting on the Vegas sidewalk. The thought of going back out there tired him immensely. That’s when he got an idea. He looked around the entrance until he spotted the front counters of the hotel.

‘One night wouldn’t hurt.’ He thought. ‘Besides, I deserve this after all the shit I’ve been through out here.’ With that, Nick approached the hotel counter and asked for a room. But not just any room.

“Give me one of the best rooms you’ve got!”

The elevator ride to his room couldn’t be any slower, especially since he was sharing an elevator with an already intoxicated group of dude bros. They were friendly enough, as friendly as drunk guys could get. Nick found them amusing to talk to. They were in town for a conference and wanted to party before returning home. They invited Nick to meet them at their blackjack table later, and Nick surprisingly considered it. He was feeling more at ease with himself now that he had his backpack of money. Why shouldn’t he enjoy it? The elevator beeped for his floor, and he gave the group a ‘see you later’ before almost running to his room. The room was beautiful, with marble floors, counters, and a bed that didn’t look like someone was recently murdered in. However, the most breathtaking part of the room was the view of the Las Vegas strip.

Yet that didn’t take Nick’s breath away. He saw an old man in his room staring out into the strip, sporting a cigar in one hand and a blue Hawaiian shirt. His back was to Nick. Nick immediately recognized the old man and paled, not daring to move from his spot at the front entrance. He felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand as he smelled that horrible cigar smoke. The old man turned and took a hit of his cigar, staring lazily at Nick, who was shaking, confirming what Nick had feared.

“You...” Nick swallowed his mouth dry. “You’re...”

“I’m the dead son of a bitch you took money from.” The old man said as if it was the most obvious thing in the world.

“That’s impossible,” Nick said, though not too confidently.

“I thought that too when I realized I was dead.” The old man stepped away from the window, which caused Nick to jump back, hitting his back on the door.

“Jesus, kid, I ain’t gonna hurt you.” This time, the old man slowly moved his way into a chair next to the window. “I’m dead. What could I possibly do to you.”

“You’re supposed to be dead,” Nick stated. He forced himself away

from the door and further into the room cautiously. “ You died! I saw you dead on the floor...I saw them take your body away! I saw your wi-”

“Woah woah, kid.” The old man stared intently at Nick, who stiffened up. “You saw my wife.”

Nick nodded.

“Well...” The old man waited for Nick to continue. “How was she?”

Nick gulped. “She...she looked sad but okay...like...”

“Like she expected it?” The old man finished.

Nick nodded. “I’m sorry.”

There was a pause before the old man gave a dry laugh. “What a shitty way to go...just another schmuck on the floor. You know, I thought I was gonna go out sitting on my Lazy Boy at home. I love that thing. My wife bought it for me when I retired. I have this heart problem. I mean, I had a heart problem. She said relaxing was good for me; the doctors recommended it. But the broad also said a vacation was good for me, and look what happens.” The old man ranted to Nick, who could only stare in awe. “Dead on a casino floor. Not even a month into retirement.”

“So...you’re a...ghost?” Nick couldn’t believe the words coming out of his mouth.

“You listen to anything I say, or are you stupid,” The old man grumbled.

“Right...” Nick ran a hand through his hair and let himself sit down on the bed across from the man. “Okay...so why are you here...in my room.”

The old man barks out a laugh. “You a joker or something.” The old man sat up straighter, pointing a finger at Nick. “You took my money. I’m here to make sure you don’t screw up with my money.”

Nick’s eyes widened. “You’re here because of your money?”

“Yup, and I should smack you upside the head for stealing my money,” the old man said.

Nick felt anger rise in him, “Hey man, I didn’t steal your money. I just...”

“You just took it before anyone else could, huh, kid?”

“Nick.”

“What?” The old man raised a brow.

“My name is Nick, and I’m not a kid,” Nick said, fist clenched.

“By the way you’re acting, you still don’t know shit about the world, which makes you a kid to me.” The old man reached into his pocket and took out a lighter to light his cigar.

“Shut up!” Nick felt his face heat up. You don’t even know me,” he

yelled to the old man. You probably don’t even know why you’re really here!” Nick stared hard at the old man, who didn’t flinch at Nick’s volume. This annoyed him even more.

“How much did this room cost you...Nick,” the old man finally said.

“What?” Nick was taken aback.

“How much was this fancy room of yours.” The old man looked around, pretending to be interested in the marble.

“What does that matter?”

The old man looked back at Nick and scoffed. “You don’t know how much the room was huh? It’s okay, kid. I had that same look in my eye when I blew my paychecks.” The old man stood from his seat, which caused Nick to stand, not wanting to put himself in any position lower than him. The old man only looked him up and down before walking to the window.

“I’ve seen kids like you who get a little money and don’t know how to act.” The old man took a hit from his cigar, blowing out the smoke. “You’ll be through that money in no time.”

“You don’t know that.” Nick watched the old man intently, forcing himself to be calm, yet he didn’t like the accusations against him. “I’m nothing like those guys who spend their money without a care in the world. I got a kid to think about.”

“You think about that kid when you got this room?”

Nick stayed silent.

The old man motioned for Nick to join him by the window. Nick, although hesitant, walks over to the old man.

“I was just like you, Nick.” This makes Nick raise an eyebrow.

“I used to come here all the time when my landscaping business took off. I was... twenty-three, young, more money than I could imagine to do with at that age. I played the slots till my fingers would cramp from pressing the button.” The old man looked down at his hands as if he felt a ghost of a cramp. “I spent so much money here. Everyone knew my name. I was a king until...”

“Until?”

“Until I wasn’t.” The old man dropped his hands. “The money ran out...Vegas has this way of seducing you with its pretty lights, only for it to throw you out on your ass like last week’s garbage.”

“Is that why you’re here? You think I’m going to blow through your money gambling, living some phony rich guy’s life out here?” Nick clenched his teeth in anger. He had this conversation before and hated it.

“You already spent a lot on this room, kid. I wouldn’t be surprised if

you blow through my money the moment you step out onto that casino floor. You got a problem, kid. The sooner you get that through your thick skull, the sooner you can get out of here. It took me long enough to realize I had a problem like you."

"I'm tired of everyone saying I got a problem." Nick's voice waved with anger. "I'm not an addict, and you don't know anything about me or my plans for this money."

"Maybe I don't know anything." The old man says. "All I know is you didn't buy a plane ticket home when you got that money. Those Vegas lights already got a hold on you kid."

The old man had disappeared without saying another word, leaving Nick feeling uneasy and stressed. He decided to shower to help calm his nerves a bit, but even when he was done, he looked around the room as if expecting the old man to reappear. Even when he confirmed that he was alone, he still was on edge. He remembered the guys he met in the elevator and their invitation to play blackjack. Maybe he needed to let off some steam and play a round with them, hoping it would improve his night. So he took the money backpack with him.

It's almost impossible to tell day from night in a Vegas casino. The patrons get stuck in a loop of winning and losing with no natural sunlight allowed. The same loop Nick found himself currently in. When he met up with his new 'friends,' they welcomed him with open arms, encouraging each other to bet higher and higher, and Nick was not going to say no to his new friends. Especially since he was having a lot more fun than he expected, they had moved on from blackjack to a roulette table where Nick found himself winning. He saw the mountain of chops on his side of the table and felt his fingers itch, not yet satisfied with his winnings. The group around him cheered when he bet higher than the group combined. He even started to order drinks, tipping the bottle girls. He even tipped the dealer. It seemed to work; the drinks kept flowing, and he was winning like never before.

He felt like he was on his highest high.

"Better slow down, kid."

Nick felt the hairs on his neck stand straight up, and he smelled all too familiar cigar smoke. He looked up from the table and quickly looked around him, but he saw no signs of the old man.

"Are you okay, dude?" a man next to him said. Nick turned to the man and gave him a weak smile.

"Yeah... just thought I heard something." The man took the answer,

not pushing further. Either it was a good enough answer, or he didn't care. Nick couldn't tell. The crowd whooped and cheered as they won and lost. The pretty bottle ladies in short dresses handed them bottomless drinks and offered smiles that were worth hundred-dollar tips.

'Ana should take notes from some of these girls,' Nick had thought. The cigar smoke never came back, or maybe it did, but Nick wasn't sure, and at this point, Nick didn't care if it did or didn't. He was on a high roll with his new buddies and wished the night would never end.

Until it did.

Nick had run out of money.

Nick had spent the old man's money gambling between the generous tips and almost endless games. Nick didn't know when he came back down from his high. Maybe it was when the guys in the group had finally had enough of partying or the money was running out fast, and they acted like they never even knew Nick. He wasn't sure, but he realized he had no more money left when he heard that all-too-familiar buzz of the slot machine.

At an almost zombie-like pace, he walked back to his room, not believing what he had just done. It felt like hours when he found himself in his room. He opened the door and found himself staring at the back of the old man. The old man was standing looking out at the strip, watching the sunrise peek out from the horizon as the lights from the strip slowly fizzed out like stars—artificial stars.

He turned the cigar hanging from his lips, yet not lit, pulled it out, and with only a glance, knew what Nick had done. He looked almost sad, but Nick wasn't sure. They stared at each other for an eternity until the old man finally said something.

"You lost fifteen thousand dollars in one night," he stated. Nick didn't respond, but this confirmed it for the old man. He only shook his head and took a lighter, bringing it to his cigar. "That's Vegas, baby."



It hardly rained in Vegas, but when it did, it hardly stopped the hustle and bustle of those out here. It didn't bother Nick as he made the long walk back down the strip with even less than what he came with. He felt like a husk of himself just walking and not thinking much. Politely declining cards and offers for tickets or services. He wasn't sure where he was going and didn't

care. He thought about calling Maria when he was in his hotel room, but when he did, the number no longer existed. He knew it was the end of that. His heart ached, and all the tears he cried were left in that all too big room at the Ceasar.

By the time he stopped almost endless walking, he had left the strip far behind him. He spotted the lights from Fremont Street, and for a moment, he felt they welcomed him back. Those lights knew what he went through, and they didn't care. They knew he was back and needed comfort, which only they could provide. But Nick was tired. Too tired to walk any further. That's when Nick spotted a different building and turned his nose to it just the day before. A building with a simple sign.

Problem Gambling Help Center of Clark County.

He stared at the sign and then back to Fremont Street. Both almost reached out towards him, calling him.

Nick was tired. But he walked. ■



HISTORY, VINCENT GELSEY, PHOTOGRAPHY



BRUISED BANANA, PAIGE HINES, DRAWING/DRY MEDIA



BIRCH FOREST, MICHAEL KATZENBACH, TWO DIMENSIONAL ARTS AND MIXED MEDIA



PARALYSIS DEMON, ALI SELENKE, BEST OF 4D DESIGN AND TIME BASED ART

BEEN ABOUT IT

CHARLIE BALL

“This is the last time I’m going to ask you to show up on time to class, Mr. Marino. You’re one absence away from enough suspensions to permanently expel you.”

You quietly grab your backpack thinking, an expulsion at this point can buy you more time to do whatever you’d like, and pops is going to cause you to be late again, so... on go the headphones to start bumping Kevin Gates “Out my window...I see everything I dream about and wish I had.” No use looking anyone in the eye, just head for the door and, freedom. As you walk slowly down the halls, quite immune to any teacher or student who cares about you trying to yell for you, it keeps playing back in your head. Those strong Italian American hands grabbing your shirt, your weight caused a back-sized dent in the wall this morning. If only you’d have cleaned your room before the weekend was over, or if only Mom was still around to calm down that piece of shit that you only have “life” to be grateful for. But...what are the chances of that while you were trying to smoke away the image of the knife fight from last night? Here you are, push the door open, and...it’s pretty nice outside. Warm breeze with slight humidity as common in the Southeastern part of South Carolina, the memories fade for a brief second, masked by the excitement to light up a blunt at Jesse’s crib.

A few cars pass by every few minutes, enough traffic to call it a city, but not enough to give any hope of a real future that doesn’t involve some shit you’re really not trying to do for the rest of your life. Except for hustling, for whatever reason, it seems to be a professional sport that was instilled in your blood. Passing by the Exxon, you notice a white man a little older than you with chains on and a flat bill sports hat, Fifty sticker still on it. No visible tattoos...looks clean but not like your average college student which is the age he appears. Black shoes, black jacket, yep, YFRH...probably 3 people pass by on bikes or foot and smoothly shake his hand and mutter a few sentences of small talk by the time you walk up to the gas station from the time you spotted him. That’s probably what you’ll be doing at Jesse’s house tonight. You walk into the store and grab a Pineapple Fanta along with some honey mustard pretzel bites, then approach the counter.

“Ayyyyyyee Tommy, what it do, brotha!?”

You dap each other up with a snap as your hands depart from one another.

“Shit, not much Ant, aye lemme get like...I don’t know, 3 packs of Blueberry swishers, 3 Og’s, 3 game greens.”

“Goddam son, don’t catch your house on fire, hahaha what the fuck bro... here you go. Damn, you white boys love your swishers, haha. That’ll be \$14.57”

“Yeah, what can I say, my man, I have good taste. But hey, I like me some Newport every once in a while!” You pull out roughly 900 bucks in cash out of your pocket and give him a 20. “Keep it, bro”

“Word, you know I always look out for you Tom, take it easy.”

You pound the counter twice and point your finger at him, very grateful for the fact that he doesn’t check you or any other YFRH’s IDs. Headphones come back on, Fanta goes in the side pocket of your bag, and you open up the pretzels since you were hungry as fuck. The little bell goes off as you swing open the door, catching eyes with the guy in black to the side. Up goes the cross, he throws one back at you too. It looks like you’re crossing your fingers, but the middle and ring finger cross over the index, which you both know symbolizes the need for a double dose of good luck that the average Joe gets when they cross their fingers. Back to the sidewalk, back to the occasional rush of cars along the sunlit fence and tree line, there’s an overdosing smell of green spring trees.

The music stops playing all of a sudden, and you look down to check your phone, ohp...looks like a Facetime, not a regular call. Yep, it’s Sofia, your fling from last weekend. Your homies don’t normally answer the phone after a one-night stand, but you feel pretty excited to get to know this girl some more.

“Hey Thomas, how’s it going? I heard you left school today. I heard that’s possibly an expulsion for you, is that true?”

“Yeah, I’m going to be late again, so I was going to be expelled eventually. Here...look haha, it was worth it because I’m about to go burn with Jesse,” you say with cigarillos held up.

“Well, you can’t come back to high school here in the only freakin’ high school available in T ville. Thomas, it’s a pretty big deal. Plus, I would hate if you had to move to another town, and your dad’s gonna kill you...Just promise me we can still have dinner and swim in my pool tomorrow like you planned. Remember, my Mom is out of town.”

That gets you pretty excited, and you surely weren’t gonna miss it. You decide to play it cool.

“For sure, if I don’t get caught up with these boys too much tonight, I’ll text you tomorrow though.”

“Be safe, Tommy, I hope you don’t mind if I call you that...”

“Nah, you’re good, I will enjoy Ms. Stacy’s tryhard approach to convincing you calculus is necessary for every career field.”

“Haha, I will.”

As her beautiful, tan face disappears from the screen, it’s back to the headphones, this time... Bankroll Fresh. Almost 5 minutes until Jesse’s crib is on your horizon.

Off the corner of Franklin Ave. and Sandborn St. is that white 2 bedroom house with the metal fence bent in a little bit. Multiple fence posts were missing from the white, not-so-picket fence that stood against the treeline to the left side of the house. Brock and Steez were chained up in the backyard, they bark when they see you but start wagging their tails as you get closer. The crown Vic was still sitting there with the tarp over it in the backyard, with Jesse’s Impala and Marcus’ Tahoe in the driveway. You don’t notice any of these imperfections in this stupendously underdeveloped neighborhood, because it’s more of a home to you than that hellscape where your dad lives. Two shoppers were parked along the sidewalk of the next-door neighbor. It looks like 3 more kids from school were bouncing a basketball and approaching the hoop a few houses down as well. 5 foot 6 on a stack of bricks, here comes Jesse out the door letting it slam pretty loud behind him. For a short motherfucker he doesn’t give a fuck, does he? There he goes, running out to the two cars. You go check on the group shooting hoops a block down.

“Whatchya need?”

“Was hoping for a few jigs, my mans,” they replied back.

You know you’re the only one out of the house that has em’, so you take this one in your hands. Pulling out...

“How many?” you ask.

“100.”

“Oh shit, what the fuck, you ain’t taking these for yourself huh, well, alright, gimme a sec. \$300.”

You make the inconspicuous dap as you normally would, then walk back towards the house as the guys with the basketball walk the other way and the two cars pull off one at a time.

“Jessssssseeeeeee, what’s good?!”

You hug like brothers as he says, “All in the hooood! Hahahah, let’s get inside brother.”

Sounds like...Marcus is playing Uncle Kracker on the big flat-screen TV. Roles are a little bit reversed in T Ville, something about stereotypes just doesn’t quite land in this small town, and that’s just how it is in the South today.

“Nah, dog, put on OJ Da Juiceman, isn’t he like your nephew’s uncle

or something like that?”

“Yeah, but I like my country boy, it helps me relax in the midst of all this shhhtuff going on all the damn time,” Marcus replies.

Between his dark skin tone and his camouflage jacket in the dark Youtube-lit room, you’re talking to a spirit at this point. Well, whatever, Marc’s gonna play what Marc’s gonna play. The kitchen is lit up, and on the glass table are at least two zips of powder, with about six orange with white-capped bottles. There’s a freakin’ cardboard Gatorade with the plastic over-the-top type of container with about 7 red bottles left in there. Under the table is the duffle bag which you know has at least a key of gas. Two handguns on the table, then a shotgun in the corner of the kitchen. You go for a red bottle.

Jesse stops you. “Check the fridge Tommy, I opened one earlier.”

You go, grab it, crack it, smell it, and then proceed to pour out about a fifth of your Fanta. Hell yeah, it’s been like 2 weeks, and you could really use a drink today. Jesse watches the door as you mix and slosh your concoction, you then bust out all of the wraps on the table. Somebody’s gotta keep an eye on the door at all times, so you guys just decide to go together onto the front porch and bring the iPad so you can keep an eye on the back door cameras. Young folk’s retirement home, this is it, the name of this set really excited you when you moved here and met these fools 3 years ago. Kind of eerie, it’s funny but sad, and you like fucked up humor so here is...your life. Being only 15 years old, and with a good head on your shoulders, you know that Jesse, Marcus, and the rest of these guy’s lives are not for the faint of heart, especially with your dabbling in drugs. However, it’s so attractive, these guys don’t do blow, they don’t hit or mistreat women, they only “protect and serve”, that’s it. You have to run jobs by Tray, anyway, so there’s no loosey goosey inside betrayal or thievery going on. Literally, a group of young men who are banding together to stay protected from these clowns that make up the streets of the highest murder per capita town in the US. You have to click up, or else you will get hurt if you live where we live. We don’t have a choice, so we might as well stick with the brightest guys in the game, we might have a chance at that point.

“Roll it up boyyyyy!” Jesse screams in his country-boy accent.

“Alright, but hey, I’m actually thinking...I want to join for real tonight.”

“Wait what?!” Marcus and Jesse say halfway shocked at the same time.

You’ve been working with YFRH for 2 years now but haven’t officially joined. They have appreciated your 6-foot 200-pound stature and good fighting skills up to this point and respect your lack of a normal childhood and home life. But....it’s still a pretty big fucking deal to officially

join, that comes with a lot of added requirements from the shit you’re used to seeing 3 times a week when you come over.

“Look, there goes Tray, shit, Marcus, why are you out here with us right now?!” He realizes as he suddenly processes in his stoned brain, that Marcus joining them on the porch with the iPad means nobody’s inside.

“I’ve got the iPad though, back doors locked, too,” Marcus says as the black 2006 S class pulls up. The sweetest ride out of the entire crew. Out hops Tray, and when he stands up he’s twice the height of the car. Who has any idea how he and Jesse came out of the same woman? Slicked back black hair, button-up shirt, khakis, no visible tattoos, looks buff and tough as a nail...you’re a big guy and you don’t take any shit but you wouldn’t prefer not to go one on one with Tray. He clearly looks like a guy that is in charge of something.

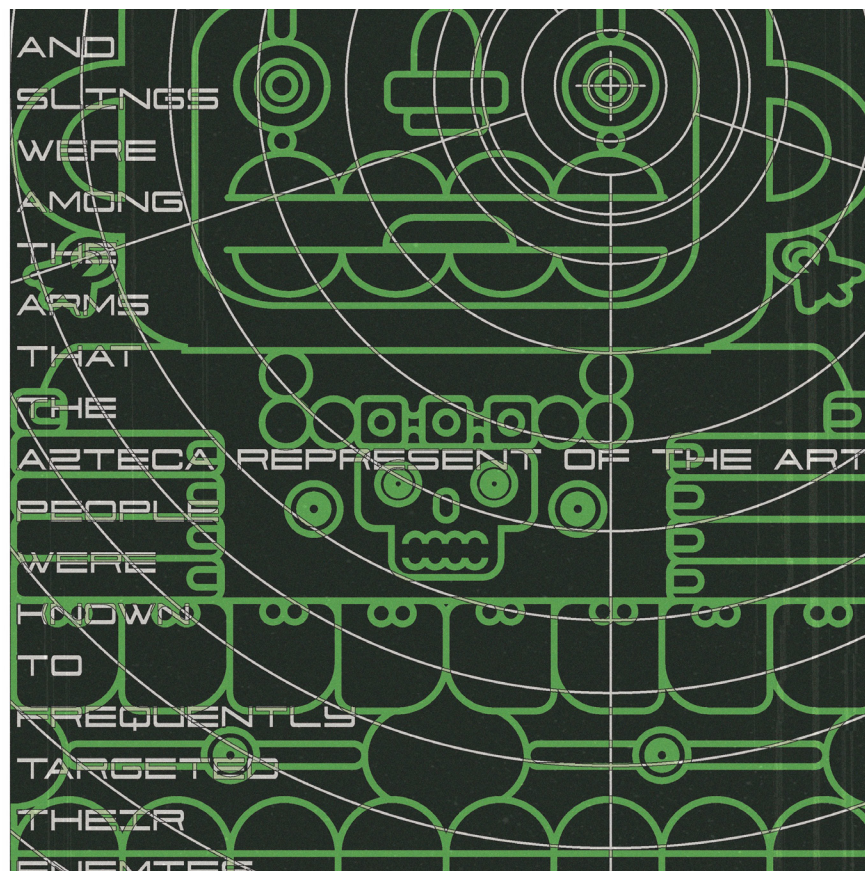
“Jesse, is anybody inside?”

“No...” He doesn’t throw the blame on Marcus. “I’ll go, bro. Hey, by the way, we need to do a gauntlet tonight, Tommy said he’s down for good with YFRH.”

“Oh really, you think you’re up for that, Tom? You know most of the code by now, but you’re not going to be changing your decision after you go through the gauntlet, homie...any last words?”

“Let’s run it,” You say with your chest out as you throw up a cross. Nervous as absolute shit, knowing this is not the best decision for the good of society, you go through with it anyways, since you’re done with school, done with life. And at this point, done with your dad. You follow Tray and Marcus inside as he signals that he wants everyone to smoke inside the house and not on the porch.

After 2 swishes get passed around, Tray stands up, and so does everyone else as they know the drill. You remain seated. The knife gets passed around as everybody slices their palms and squeezes it into your palms, then passes you the knife. You cut your palm, mixing in the set’s blood with yours, spilling it onto a hundred-dollar bill. This represents dying for the funding of the crew and always protecting anyone officially affiliated with YFRH under any circumstances. Next, it’s time to fight them all. Tray lets the nobody leave the stuff rule slide as they all go into the backyard after locking the front door, they can see the entire house from there anyway. You get ready for your 2 minute gauntlet knowing they don’t do warnings once you do the blood oath. WOPP, Jesse sneaks you from behind and you smack the white fence against the trees, you give him one back but..DOOOSH. Marcus picked you and bitch slammed you on the hard dirt. You can’t breathe...THUMP...THOOOOOOMP, one kick to your thigh, and one to your stomach. You roll



SCI FI AZTEC, CHRISTIAN MORENO GARCIA, GRAPHIC DESIGN-ILLUSTRATION

over quickly and get up, about ready to pass out, but not a quitter. Tray comes in, You punch his ribs pretty good and dodge one punch he throws. He fires back however with the most painful jab you've ever felt. DONK, your head goes back as you start to pass out. The group of friends that you admire so much don't seem very friendly at this moment, they continue beating you until 2 minutes is over. You suffer from at least one or two broken somethings, and you are unconscious, but you'll make it. Waking up two hours later, Jesse gives you two Percocets and tells you that you can stay, but to make sure you're back here by 9 p.m. tomorrow. Down the hatch, you pass out again in thirty minutes before waking up to a whole new reality the next day.

It's that time, Marcus and G... Who just came over, are holding down the fort. Jesse has the rental car warmed up with straps in the seat. To accompany the slamming screen door and boisterous attitude that is Jesse, there's an automatic 12 gauge shotgun in the front seat.

"That's my sweetheart right there." It sure didn't look like much of a sweetheart, but more of a ruthless reptile.

"Here you go, you'll take the AR, it's stocked with .556 right now." Nerves surely started to pile up. Gun fights aren't a foreign concept to you, but you've only been caught in the crossfire, or heard it from a distance. This is different, this is a job, and if it does not go well, you will have to improvise and make sure you return home alive at the cost of any other opposing force. It's invigorating, but that bad gut feeling people talk about is stronger than ever at this moment.

"Alright, Tommy, if we're lucky, we don't need to use either of these tonight." The weight starts to lift off of your shoulders.

"The Eastside BlockBoys have just received a shipment of stolen .45 caliber handguns, our source just told us that they will be back in 45 minutes from the airport and will be running inside of a house on Rancord St. to make a 3 gun sale. This leaves 47 guns remaining in the trunk. That's our window." The excitement builds even further when you do the math of what that actually means. Rare berettas with gold plates, four, small, very valuable boxes. You can net 800 a gun. That's over \$35,000. Still, it doesn't change the fact that something seems very off. Ignoring the emotions as you've done your entire life, it's time to hop in the car. After putting the straps in the back seat, you have more relief wash over you as you notice two double-stacked cups in the cupholders. You hand Jesse 2 jigs, and as you pop 2 yourself, he signals for one more and you pass it his way. Jesse lights up a fat one, as do you, he rolls up the windows and turns on the AC as you both start doming your own blunts. Lil Wayne starts to come on through the Bluetooth as you sit back and

relax, no matter what happens next, you start to feel as ready as ever. Jesse reverses out of the driveway and starts talking gameplan.

"I'll pull up one house behind them, we'll mask up, you can go crouch to their trunk. Use this lock popper suction tool and be quiet, then start carrying boxes one at a time, they won't be too, too heavy. I got your back man, me, and sweetie for sure."

Smoke fills the air and your heart rate starts rising rapidly, holy shit these things were strong. Time to take a few gulps. The drive takes about 10 minutes, but if only you could go ahead and get this shit over with. What seems like no time passes by, and you notice the white Camry, that's the car, it's time.

Mask on, no time to waste, you get out, get down, crouch walk over to the car. POP, it worked, trunks open, you start carrying one box, crouch back a little faster, two boxes....crouch back a little faster, three bo...you just got stung, noise vanishes, looking up from the sting there is a Lexus that pulls up behind the rental to the left. Jesse looks like Chapo as he lets the fuck loose. Blood sprays up against the windows of their car, but Jesse goes down all of a sudden. They were rolling deep, at least four. How could this have happened? No time to think...you crawl, bleeding from your thigh over to the rental and grab the AR. DOOHT DOOHT DOOHT DOOHT, you blast back. Somebody must have tipped them off. At this point, however, it doesn't matter. Falling back, time stood still, as you noticed your body falling backward in slow motion and the opposing vehicle started to slowly disappear. Your rental car disappears, the merchandise and the Camry disappear, Jesse disappears, and you only notice your body...laying there with 5 or 6 holes all over, blood collected pretty thickly beneath you. That slowly starts to disappear too, and the bullet holes slowly start to heal over. It's just your clean body, the houses, and the trees, but it looks bright, with a white glow around it all.

"Howdy," says a stranger.

"What the fuck?! Who the hell are you, man?"

"HA, who the hell are you?!" says the stranger. "That's you there on the ground, but now you're talking to me! Isn't it fun?!"

"WHAT THE HELL...are you talking about man, and where did everything just go?"

"Well, I can answer your questions, Thomas. That is...you, this energy in front of me. But...you're not going to like the answer. As for your friend lying over there, the one that looks exactly like you, he's done. My answers will not benefit that skin casing of a man, HAHA. Isn't it gross? Poke him."

You poke your own body, and it bends in like an inflated yoga ball,

then back out. Pressurized, but empty. It's obvious what happened at this point, but you think that it's strangely ironic that this is how you go out, immediately after joining, the first lick of your time with YFRH.

"Yeah, that's definitely pretty gross. I must be trippin' ; man. But, back to the questions, my guy." You start to realize that threatening him with your weapon or fist is pointless, guns are gone, and you go to join your hands, they pass through each other. He was a gentle energy, you can tell. Soft-spoken, smiling constantly, he had the utmost sense of ease when relaying all of these weird fucked up jokes about the situation to you. He was a Middle Eastern man with long hair.

"My name's Guy."

Ok, it's not Jesus, thank God.

"The Fuck...Thomas Marino, just happened, Bruh, HAHA, is that, you're dead! Isn't it great? We're going to have a whole bunch of fun until you transition. Everything faded away because you're the only one that passed over, Jesse will make it, and the opps went to another realm. This is it, Thomas, that...over there, the meat sack, is over. You're somewhere else now."

"Ok, weird. Ummm, so yeah...I'm dead. I've wanted to die for a long time. I'll miss the boys for sure, but, I DON'T KNOW...Guy. Why did it just happen now? I know I'm in the gang and all but...I always felt like I had some sort of other purpose. Maybe I'll find it one of these days, but, I guess not anymore. Gimme some insight here....uh...Guy."

He rubs his thumb and fingers against his chin to signal that he is in deep thought. You get the impression that he knows a lot of things, but he just wants to play some sort of game with you.

"Come on dude," You say as you grow even more impatient.

"What's the rush...Thomas?... So you really want to know why you're h...."

"YES."

"Alright, alright...geez, I just might be the influence of your past present, and future lives ya know, so you don't want to get on my bad side. So pushy...."

He whines as he rolls his eyes, "Anyways. Alright, Thomas, YOU, my friend...blew it, basically."

"Blew what? Man, I've had a pretty damn rough go at it, I ain't perfect for sure. I don't know if you're the dude in charge of my cards, but they were dealt like shit my guy."

"Right, but do you remember your Mom, Tommy Tom? I DON'T KNOW, you're a big gangster now. But do you remember her offer Tommy? When she moved on two years ago, I met her. She told me how much she

wished you would have taken her offer to move with her to her parent's place in Ohio before she passed."

All of a sudden it hits you, and the memories swarm in, you were only 13, but you had an out. Dad was still in prison, so you thought it'd be a good idea to stay and make sales, screw around with that one girl, be able to hit the beach and get high. He got released the next year though, and you couldn't move then because you had money to be collected. Plus, sticking around long enough to join YFRH would've been your most lucrative path for the short term as a guy who was pretty fed up with school life.

"Yeah, I remember that. So...because of that, I'm dead at 15?"

"Not exactly, Thomas. As I was speaking with your mother, she made me promise to give you another shot. You had multiple opportunities, and you blew it."

You start to cry. He was right. You feel no need to defend yourself because he understands how difficult it has been for you. Between your dad, the town you grew up in, and the people you met, you had no choice about the cards that you were dealt. When it came to seizing opportunity or choosing an even more difficult path in trade for a better impact on humanity, you went with what seemed best for you. There was no hesitation in the conclusion that...your life sucked, but your decisions made it worse, and even ...worse for others. Begging, pleading, you hit Guy's feet, "PLEASE, I'LL DO ANYTHING."

"Really, you mean anything?" He says as he rubs his palms together... playing like an evil character although he is obviously some wizard of keeping the balance of goodwill on Earth. "OK Tom, I was going to send you on the next journey, I was even going to have someone take over yours. It's a system of efficiency we run here, you need to learn your lesson again in another life, and somebody else needs to learn a lesson in yours."

"So, what do I need to do?"

"I'll let you go back, and then... you'll just have to wait."

"Wait for what?"

"Wait for a clear-cut sign of an opportunity to pass on goodwill to somebody else. Because...you can't do it for yourself Thomas, you're in a gang now. There's not much opportunity for growth there. You still need to make it right for somebody else's life though."

"Alright, so...go back, do a whole lotta gang shit, suffer, but I can pass this lesson to somebody or some shit like that?", you say sarcastically.

"Exactly, go do a whole lotta gang shit, it won't affect the big picture so long as you stick to the code and remain loyal and only harm others who

"deserve it" in a sense, no women, children, innocent lives, only opposing forces. I'll take care of them here. You are too late to have a better life in this current life span...Tommy, but you're not too late to make things right in order to advance you in the next life."

"So...I'm basically fucked, for a couple of decades, but, I can somehow do the right thing and have a better life when I finally die?"

"Exactly...now go, fool. Get back in that meat sack."

You get sucked back into the meat sack like the ghost getting slurped up by the vacuum in scream team. The ambulances and police cars start to pull in, as your vision fades to black.

Waking up, 2 weeks later, the scene starts to piece back together. The drank, the smoke, the gameplan, the heavy metal, the white car, the gunshots, and...that Guy, what was his name again??? You lie in a hospital bed, hearing all of the energetic commotion from the hall after what must've been some sort of....coma you guess. Thinking to yourself, "*wait for a clear opportunity to pass it on, huh?*" The fear starts to kick in, woah, shit, you're a real, genuine, certified gang member now. You might wind up back here again one day, you need to be back at the house, you need to be making sales right now, you need to...but now, peace. It's already written in the stones, this is your life, relax, it's not your last. Marcus walks into the room..and proceeds to give you an update about Jesse, who's ok in room 115.

"Tray is back at the house," Marcus says, as he slips you his vape.

"You guys got really fucked up huh, it's weird, we haven't been in real danger like...THAT bad until you joined. Hopefully, you got your bad luck out of the way. Don't worry about the stuff, we're sitting pretty over there on Sandborn, just focus on resting up fam." He passes you your phone. "It wasn't our source, Tom, the opps had neighbor lookouts who spotted you guys. The source actually went to the spot where it all went down, he got yall's phones, and took the rental car with the shit in the trunk back to Sandborn before 12 got there." He whispers as, you lay there, pondering all of what your life was up until this point. How will you make this right, when will it all become clear like that dude said? You feel grateful at least to have troubled but good spirits supporting you like Marcus. Then, you look down, at a couple of texts. One from Sofia reading, "*I'm late.*" It all becomes crystal clear. The challenges of your new future pile up in your squirrel cage of a sober brain. But you know, this is it. A breeze rushes through you, calming your every nerve as you say to Marcus, showing him your phone, "Look, bro, guess I'm going to have to spend some of my stash on diapers now..." Marcus sheds a tear, he hugs you, like a brother you never had. ■



PURPLE SAND CRAB, SAM BARNUM, JUROR'S CHOICE



WHY THE WASTE, ROSITA DIMITROVA, PAINTING/WET MEDIA



PRIMARY #1, SHY ROTHELL, BEST OF 3D DESIGN AND SCULPTURE

TRAILER PARK SPECIAL

KIT BLUME

dusk
 and cool bluish headlights enlighten the trailer park
 to momma's cross swinging like a pendulum over a v-neck and push-up bra
 she's got her good Ed Hardy jeans on,
 and the x-ray eyes come out to take a peep at the shining golden star,
 freckled cheeks and square-tipped nails- a real trailer park special.
 and boy it's hot for March, April, May...who knows time moves so slow
 when you're thirteen full of secondhand smoke and you've got a really
 beautiful mother,
 but you're ugly and queer and she hates you for it. she tries not to, but
 it's unmistakable
 clear even through your childlike haze, that bottomless need for her
 to hold you.
 but you're sensitive and shy and momma only sees stars and crumpled-up
 dollar bills;
 she can't hear over the sound of her own charm
 being consumed by hungry men. you have visions of her in the night and wake
 up screaming
 too many greasy hands and dollar bills.

the man next door says you'll look just like her when you're older-
 and he'll teach you how to be just...like...her.
 but you hate push-up bras and cigarettes, the tugging hands
 the hot stench of Miller on your ear; but one day you wake up desperately
 tired
 of the loneliness,
 you equate attention with love when he calls you beautiful, plays you
 Vespertine
 and, under glowing blue light,
 those greasy hands caress your face, and you just... float away to the stars.
 days melt into months years
 and one day you wake up so suddenly
 and drift back to your body from somewhere beyond this galaxy, to white hot
 agony
 anger

fear overtaking your senses,
and you wonder if you hate her for that, for the blackhole she gifted you,
or if you love
the way she smells like cinnamon because
she was so careful to only smoke in her special jacket shielding all that freckled
beauty from the dark, deep thick
thick layer of tar that she should be encased in at this point if life were fair,
if that's how it worked, but
it's not, and she's still beautiful, you're still ugly and queer
and lonely
and she still hates you for it- but
all you really want is to love her to be her- no.

you detest her.
but the rest of your queer little life you think about that swinging cross that
push-up bra
the glowing blue light-
Vespertine.
You still wake up screaming about greasy hands and dollar bills
dragging you back into her blackhole.



APHRODESIA, JESSICA GRAHAM, PAINTING/WET MEDIA



HEDON, HAYDEN MILLER, DRAWING/DY MEDIA EMERGING RECOGNITION AWARD

ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER

ISABELLA KALOGRIS

The challenge, the basics, the details, a problem
Shellfish, passive, no guidance, who's solving
The lists, the trials, the lectures, the miles

They scold, berate, pressure, conform,
While we cry hopelessly on the floor

Let's make sure you don't repeat
Your
Thoughts, the response, the answer
Not wanted
Then why did you ask me,
If you didn't want it
Can I get some help
No
You're just retarded

They
Laugh, and yell, mock, enable
The table has notes your child isn't able
The grades, the class,
The teachers who let them pass

Awake, the night, the music, the beats
Pacing as if it was my only release

The mistakes, the ignorance,
Diagnoses are missin'
The norm, defiance, neurotypical bias
You're so smart
why not just apply it

If a pencil is on the floor
And I pick it up
Why does the report say you're a fuck up

Put em through a wall
 What?
 Grab em till they stop
 How?
 Spit in the face
 Remember your place
 A noise, a sound,
 Quiet
 Defend the system or else you're a victim

Salts, transmit, dissolve all the problems
 Bound to a pill, depend on pharma

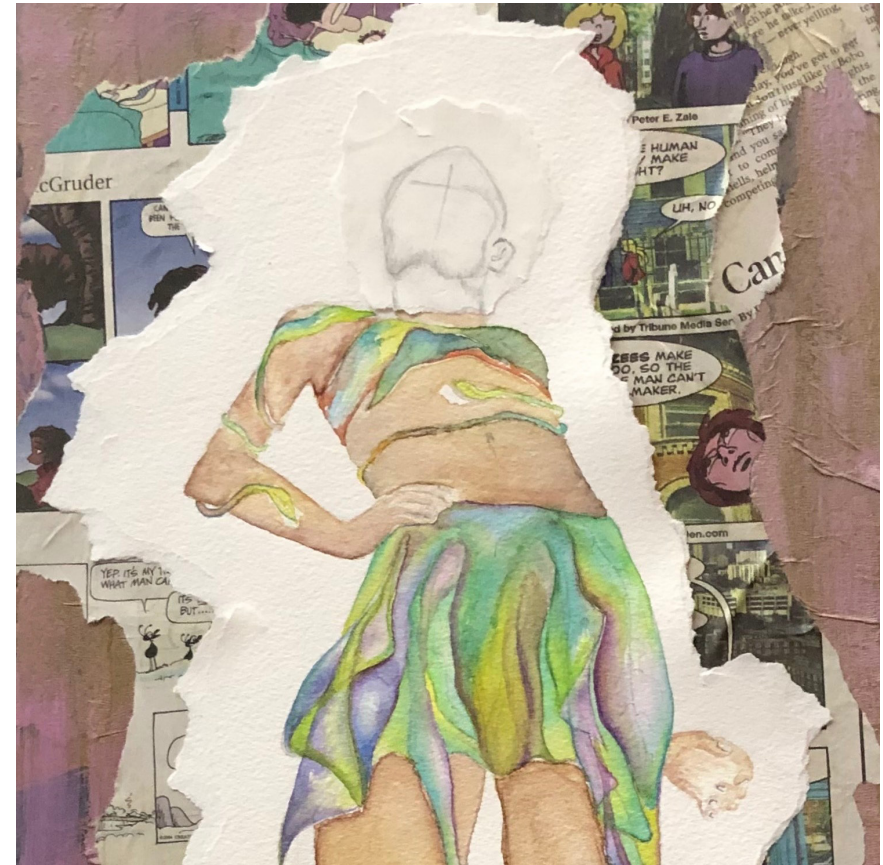
Your fate, the drain, attempt to re-claim
 Fidget, shake, tap, get up, noiseate

At least the
 Interest, ideas, projects
 Are plentiful.

The static, the pockets,
 Your
 On
 A
 Carpet
 A bid, a stick, a person, instruction

A trick used to mimic a corporation's office
 The stick that was right up here
 Is now
 On the bottom

Alone
 No one knows what's wrong with you
 Until they scold
 Prerequisite of depravity
 Deficit of stability.



LEAF SKIRT, GABRIELA BARGER, DRAWING/DRY MEDIA

LA NO SABO NIÑA QUIERE LLORAR

JULIA ESPARZA MENDOZA

I'm drifting
aimlessly
searching for
a place of my own.

Maybe a home,
somewhere I belong.
Too *Mexican* to speak *libremente* with my pals at the Farmer's market on a
Sunday,
too American when I'm explaining what a charcuterie board is
and why I pair it with red wine on a Friday night to my *madre*.
But it's not that easy, and sometimes the words flee me.
Like when I'm thinking in English,
yet talking in *Spanish*,

¿*Cómo se dice* charcuterie?
No sabo.
How do you say charcuterie?
I don't know.

So, I resort to Google images and Youtube videos hoping they suffice,
all the while my mom says that I should abandon my ideas *tontas*
and cook some *tacos* with *Mexican* rice.
I begin to protest and remind her I'm cooking dinner
a **pesto caprese pasta**
When my words begin to fail me.
Can't articulate in English or *Spanish*.
I was born in the United States of America, but I promise you that I'm also
Hispanic.
I'll cook *flautas*, *enchiladas*, *gorditas*, *y menudo* with the same flavors and
aromas like my *madre* once did when I was a kid.

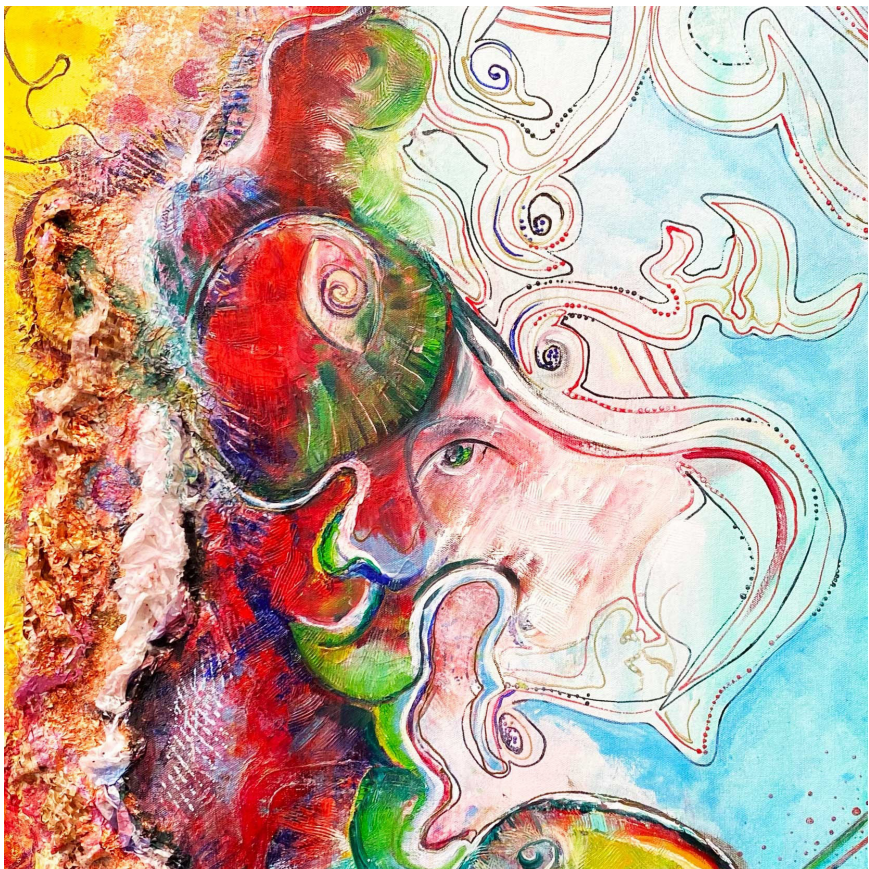
But please understand me *a-ma*, when I tell you that I also crave **gyros**,
chicken dumplings, **jambalaya**, **sambusas**, **sloppy joes**
and all the other cuisines crafted in this simmering melting pot
that you selected on my behalf as a *niña*.
Just a little girl who savored her *burritos* filled with *pinto* beans and cheese,
Mexican blend of course.
Yet I was enticed by the spices and flavors of other countries
by an unknown force.
But only in the comfort of the quaint royal blue home
nestled between a blank canvas of a neighborhood.
A canvas which once held explosions of colors on every corner,
Azul, amarillo, rojo, verde, And here I am,
tu hija, your daughter the Pocahontas o La Malinche of the family,
Interpreting for the young and old.
Accompanying the travelers in our tribe as we navigate through this "new
land".
Land our ancestors had already inhabited and had assigned words or names,
yet foreign to us now because the fall of an empire was to blame.
Sí Jefa, maybe that's where it all started, a long time ago.
When generations of defeated Aztec warriors were forced to flee *our* pyramids,
temples, and home.
Abandoning the language, culture, and all that *we* know;
just like I do now when you say *Hola* to the neighbors and I say Hello.
Perdoname, I'm sorry, for I'm grateful to come from Mexico, *tan lindo que es*,
and beautiful it is. But your decision to emigrate to the United States can
mean only one thing for me:

In *Denver, Colorado*

that's where I belong, and

a no *sabo niña*

is what I continue to be.



ALWAYS WATCHING, ROSITA DIMITROVA, PAINTING/WET MEDIA-ADVANCED RECOGNITION AWARD



HUNTER X HUNTER (GON), MARCEL CORMIER, TWO DIMENSIONAL ARTS AND MIXED MEDIA

OH MADAR JAN!

ZAHRA NOURI

All of a sudden! I found myself here
I am walking through the dark time of the day
Oh madar, I Need your embrace

I am swimming in the death lake, *madar*
welcoming my people to the other side
Monsters,

they're chasing, *madar*
talibs are close
I can't hear anything but my own heartbeat

shhh, listen,
Madar Jan,
listen the ghosts are here

whispers;
ghosts of chased ones are whispering
my ears *madar*

they have had enough of whispers
I don't want to hear anymore
Madar jan

it's raining
souls are raining
my People's souls

like the ash flakes do during a cold winter
eyes
my eyes are crying blood, *madar Jan*

they're *khasta* of seeing these ashes
how, *madar Jan*
When did I get into this forest...

I was just enjoying *bahar*
my eyes
Were full of joy

I used to swim in the lake,
the lake with the role of the *ayena*
for the *aseman*

Madar Jan,
Remember the butterflies and the ladybugs?
they were everywhere,

all my people were with
me, but Alive
oh *madar Jan*

all the people that were singing out loud,
My dear Madar,
how sad I am for you, *madar*

you've Lost many of your Kids, madar
Oh Madar Jan,
Oh Afghanistan

Translation:
Dari (Persian)
Madar Jan; Dear Mother
Bahar; Spring
Ayena; mirror
Aseman; Sky
Khasta; tired

LEONARD WINOGRAD AWARD

Now in its eighth year, this award is named in honor of Leonard Winograd, longtime English professor and editor of Ourglass at CCD. To find out more, or to donate to the Winograd Award, go to CCD.edu/Ourglass.

Ourglass is proud to honor the past Leonard Winograd Award winners below.

2024	Victor Stamenkovic “The House Amela LeClaire Built,” prose, fiction
	Megan Phelan “Follow Me,” prose, play
2023	Andrew Contrada and Jan Lewis “Permit,” prose, play
2022	Grace McClung, “Moon Pool,” poetry
2022	Jenna Duke, “Water,” prose, creative nonfiction
2021	Lauren “Mack” Carpenter, “The Veracity of Tocking Clocks,” prose, fiction
2020	Hunter Wood, “You Wake Up in an Unfamiliar Room,” prose, fiction
2019	Evan Davis, “On Moving On,” prose, fiction
2018	Grace Griffith, “Taste of Vinegar,” poetry
2017	Daisy Vigil, “Vigil,” poetry

AWARDS

Ourglass is honored to list our awards from the National Council Teachers of English (NCTE) Realm Award and the Community College Humanities Association literary magazine competition.

CCHA

2023	2nd Place, Southwestern Division
2022	2nd Place, Southwestern Division
2021	1st Place, Southwestern Division 40th Anniversary edition
2019	1st Place, Southwestern Division
2018	1st Place, Southwestern Division 1st Place tie, National
2017	1st Place, Southwestern Division 3rd Place, National
2015	1st Place, Southwestern Division 1st Place, National
2013	1st Place, Southwestern Division 2nd Place, National
1998	2nd Place, Southwestern Division
1997	2nd Place, Southwestern Division
1994	1st Place, Southwestern Division
1993	1st Place, Southwestern Division
1992	2nd Place, Southwestern Division
1991	1st Place, Southwestern Division

NCTE

2024	First Class Category
2023	Superior Category
2022	Excellent Category
2020	Excellent Category

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Ourglass is the journal of the English and Graphic Design programs at Community College of Denver (CCD). It is dedicated to providing a forum for the poetry, prose, drama, design, and artwork of our students.

If you are attending CCD, please consider submitting your work. We accept original student artwork, graphic design, and creative writing. Please note that “best of the best” means we seek to honor the complexity, beauty, and variety of the voices present in CCD’s students, and we encourage you to submit.

Past works were written by people from a variety of backgrounds (both native and non-native English speakers and have included language other than English) who contributed works that expressed complexity, vulnerability, and took risks. All work submitted must include your name, current phone number, and an email address you check frequently.

Ourglass CCD’s Student Literary & Art magazine, is looking for student creative writing, visual art, and graphic design to be considered for the next issue. We publish original student artwork, graphic design, and creative writing. We aim to publish a variety of styles, voices, and genres to fully represent CCD.

We accept submissions annually (summer semester to spring semester) through our website. The link for submissions is located at ccd.edu/Ourglass or via this QR Code [Insert QR from submissions poster]

While we don’t impose limits on submissions, here are our suggestions that will help you get into our pages. When you submit, please indicate if your submission is poetry, prose, essays/criticism, short play, or visual art/graphic design. Please do not combine separate genre submissions into one file.

POETRY: Submit 3-5 poems. We are not averse to form or style.

PROSE (SHORT-STORY FICTION/NONFICTION/FLASH FICTION): Submit one piece or a collection of pieces, preferably under 8,000 words.

ESSAYS/CRITICISM: Submit one piece or collection of connected pieces, preferably under 8,000 words.

SHORT PLAYS: Submit one play preferably between 10-12 pages. Plays should be in script format.

VISUAL ART/GRAPHIC DESIGN: Submit art of any medium. Files should be 300dpi or higher with the longest dimension being 3000px or higher. Accepted file types - JPEG, PDF, PNG, TIFF. Accepted color profiles - RGB, CMYK, Grayscale.

RESPONSE TIME: We accept submissions from each academic year (summer to spring) and respond in August. Please Note: Due to the volume of work we consider, it may take 4-6 months (sometimes longer) to hear from us. Please be patient in our response time. If you’re not accepted, please do try again next year! We love hearing from CCD students and alumni.

CCD CREATIVE WRITING

ENG 2021 Creative Writing I

This course examines creative writing by exploring imaginative uses of language through creative genres (fiction, poetry, and other types of creative production such as drama, screenplays, graphic narrative, or creative nonfiction) with emphasis on the student’s own unique style, subject matter and needs. This is a statewide Guaranteed Transfer course in the GT-AH1 category.

ENG 2031 | Literary Magazine

This course covers the production of a literary magazine through skill building and collaboration. This course introduces the editorial process involved in preparing a literary magazine for publication, including soliciting submissions; selecting material for publication (fiction, nonfiction, poetry, visual art, and other genres, such as drama); preparing a manuscript for publication, including design, layout, and pre-press production; and marketing the final product.

Creative Writing Transfer Degree

This program allows you to pursue your interests in creative writing while earning your Associate of Arts degree. We operate under the assumption that would-be literary artists must do what all aspiring writers must: read and write. Our program emphasizes a strong foundation in multiple genres, broad academic preparation in literature and the arts, and the exploration of diverse literary models across cultures, races, and contexts. This degree is part of a transfer agreement with the University of Colorado, Denver. To find out more about our program email jeffrey.becker@ccd.edu.

Write Club.

The first rule of Write Club is you have to write! Write Club is a student club that offers community for creative writers. Meetings are held both on campus and through Zoom. The best part: it's free. If you're interested, please contact Jeffrey. becker@ccd.edu

CCD ART COURSES

ART 1201 Drawing I This course is an exploration into Drawing as an expressive medium for human creativity! As a human mode of communication, drawing and 'mark-making' have been part of our collective experience since our ancestors inhabited caves. As part of this class, you will enjoy projects that investigate various approaches, techniques and media needed to develop drawing skills and visual perception.

ART 1002 2D Design This course provides introductory lessons and explorations in the basic elements of design, visual perception, and artistic form. It is an essential course for anyone wanting to be an artist, a designer, or an architect!

ART 1401 Digital Photography I Free your inner photographic genius! This class will deliver the fundamentals of photography in a fast-moving, creativity-focused, workshop-style class using state-of-the-art workstations and software to bring your photographic ideas into reality.

MGD 1001 Introduction to Graphic Design If you want to improve your skills with the Adobe suite or start learning to be a graphic designer, this is the class for you! This course will introduce you to the computer system and software used to develop graphics. Just think, you will learn about the hardware and software components for publication and multimedia production through execution in various vector, raster, page layout and multimedia programs!

MGD 1016 Typography I Type is an essential way that we communicate. This is true not only because we use it to type messages but because the design of it has emotional, instructive, and informative elements. This course introduces the history and concepts of typography as applied to graphic communications. You will have the opportunity to appropriate typography in a variety of design applications, emphasizing the basic design principles of typographic compositions and typesetting!

