

# *liminal*

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**normal noise**  
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Normal Noise is student run. Views expressed in the magazine do not reflect those of the administration. You can reach the editorial board at [normalnoisemag@gmail.com](mailto:normalnoisemag@gmail.com).

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***Dear Reader,***

Imagine yourself in a derelict mall.

It's seemingly apocalyptic except for the awkwardly-posed mannequins in the window displays. You're looking for someone. Only . . . the further into the mall you travel, the more alive—the more menacing—the mannequins seem.

Picture yourself standing in a morgue, organs in your hands as you beg the dead for secrets held within their clenched jaws.

Maybe you are faced with the impossible choice between vanilla ice cream and a new, eccentric flavor that may leave an unsavory aftertaste.

Perhaps you are caught in the fabric of a painting, haunted by the watchful eyes of a woman trapped in the walls.

Or, worst of all, what if you are bewitched by the beauty and contagious laughter of someone who was never yours to love?

These unnatural spaces may lead you to believe that you have crossed into another dimension. In our Fall 2025 issue—Liminal—you will. Walk with us down this (slightly ominous and horribly lit) hallway. The stories behind each door range from the eerily extraordinary to the marvelously mundane, but we promise you'll come out the other side stronger, braver, and perhaps even a little weirder.

We would like to cordially thank Barrett, The Honors College for helping us provide the student body with a creative outlet to express their insights and perspectives. Our sincere appreciation goes to Dean Tara Williams, Vice Dean Kristen Hermann, and our faculty advisor, Dr. Elizabeth Meloy, whose unwavering support made this publication possible. Additionally, we thank our talented contributors and hardworking editorial board, whose countless hours of devotion have brought Liminal to life.

Lastly, reader, we thank you for walking with us down this unfamiliar hallway and embracing the liminality that waits behind each closed door.

***Sincerely,***  
***Sara Bojczuk and Anaís Mahal***  
Co-Editors-in-Chief

The block contains two handwritten signatures in black ink. The first signature on the left is for Sara Bojczuk, and the second signature on the right is for Anaís Mahal. Both are written in a cursive, flowing style.

# THE CORR

I am here again. or, for the first time. I do not remember stepping through anything, just that the hallway starts where the room ended. white light buzzing thin air in my mouth. I take one step then another and it echoes like someone else is following me but there is no one

the first door has a sound inside—rolling glass or maybe a marble—& I put my hand on the knob & wait & I almost open it but the sound stops so I move on

the second door smells like rain so strongly my tongue remembers the taste of puddles. the night the storm flooded the street & we floated paper boats until the neighbors yelled for us to come inside. I think:

if I open this one I will see the water lapping at my ankles. the sky bruised purple I want it & I don't so I keep walking the hall curves soft. I think it must be circling something I cannot see

I touch the third door & it burns my palm hot like a stove I pull away & smell my own skin

I pass more doors. one sighs one rattles. one is so quiet it makes me afraid & then one with the sound of a girl crying & I stop & my legs lock. the sobbing is small

like she is trying not to be heard & my throat fills with tears. I stay until it stops. I want to knock but my hands are empty

the walls press closer now or I am bigger than before. it is harder to breathe. I turn to look behind me, but the hallway is dark & the doors are gone

**Ariana Rahman** is a sophomore studying biomedical sciences. In her free time, she enjoys climbing mountains to ponder.

# RIDOR

poem by **Ariana Rahman**



ahead:

one door smells of smoke sharp and clean like a just-lit match & suddenly I am six again. watching my father light the first candle of winter. the smell catches in my chest. my hand closes on the knob but I cannot turn it. not yet

I keep moving even though my legs are heavy. the floor feels soft like wet sand & far away there is more light a bright patch calling me forward

I reach it & there is only one last door & I know without knowing it is the one: the end or the beginning

I stand with my hand almost touching it. my heart loud my ears ringing. I think about every door I passed. the girl. the rain. my father. & I want to see but I am afraid that once I open it the hallway will vanish and I will never come back

I sit down on the floor. I let the light buzz above me, the wall warm against my back. my shadow curled beside me breathing slow

I stay there until I do not need to open it. until the wanting loosens & what is left is you.



# You Were Not Meant To Be Here

art by Kat Nilssen



When I think of liminal spaces, I picture transitional places that feel eerie or forlorn; sites meant for life and movement but rendered unsettling when empty. My painting explores this unease in a horror context, placing the viewer before a seemingly ordinary house that suddenly feels wrong. The work asks why the viewers are watching, what lingers in the window, and why something that should offer comfort has slipped into dread.

**Kat Nilssen** is a junior majoring in painting and drawing. Her work explores horror and the eerie through illustration and painting. She enjoys writing and creating comics, playing D&D, and fueling her creativity with iced coffee.



# A Glimpse of What Remains

Non-fiction by **Sara Bojczuk**

## *What is death, exactly?*

It's a question that I used to often ask myself.

I used to think that death itself was a poetic metaphor. Once you take your last breath, your soul leaves behind the vessel that it once occupied. There are many speculations as to where your soul goes, but the process of death itself is fairly straightforward. Once your heart takes its final beat, decomposition sets in almost immediately. The process isn't glamorous (believe me, I've seen it), but it's efficient. I'll spare you the grisly details, but suffice it to say that you die, and your body breaks down. That's it—the circle of life. Simple, right?

That's what I used to think, too, until I stepped into the unpredictable world of forensics. I quickly learned that death is not quite as simple as I once thought, especially under unexpected or suspicious circumstances.

To me, the morgue is a strange, liminal space that exists between the known and unknown. Only two types of people go in: the dead and those of us trying to figure out what happened in their final moments of life.

Whenever someone learns that I've observed autopsies, they respond with a mix of horror and fascination.

*Does it smell? What does the inside of a human being look like? What do organs feel like? How do you stomach something so morbid and macabre?*

Human curiosity often gets the better of us, and as much as I'd love to answer all of these questions, death, dying, and decay aren't for everyone.

The story that follows is a glimpse into that world—a place where the dead still have stories to tell. And I am one of the few who will listen.

"One, two, three," I whispered under my breath.

I reached my hand out toward the door handle, hesitating as my hand tightened around its cool, silver finish. I closed my eyes and took a deep breath as I pushed the door open, bracing for whatever waited inside.

No blood. No putrid odor. No grotesque, medieval-looking tools dangling from the wall. Instead, I walked into a room that reminded me of a small, gray walk-in refrigerator, quite mundane compared to the nightmare I had prepared myself for. The cool air slapped me across the face while the sharp sting of disinfectants burned the back of my throat. Fluorescent lights flickered to life, painting the room with the familiar harsh glow of a doctor's office. The room was covered by stainless steel, causing the fluorescence to ricochet off the table, sink, and countertops in a glare that felt more cynical than clinical.

As I tried to settle into the autopsy suite, my eyes couldn't help but wander toward the large butcher's knife resting on the workstation. Apart from the color of the handle, the knife could have been pulled straight from my own kitchen. My fascination with the seemingly ordinary tools was cut short when I noticed something large and unwavering in my peripheral vision. I glanced up and saw it: the white body bag in the center of the room.

"Ready?" I heard a voice call from behind me.

I pivoted on my heel and faced the medical examiner, who was clutching a pile of PPE.

"Ready as I'll ever be," I responded, a smile beaming across my face.

Perhaps it was morbid that I felt a rush of excitement standing in the morgue, but this was the moment I had been working toward. As someone obsessed with forensics, I usually find myself feeling out of place. Few people enjoy my conversations about murder documentaries or the content inside of *Stiff: The Curious Life of Human Cadavers*. Most of the time, I'm interrupted or met with uneasy glances from people

who are desperate to escape my distasteful chatter. Heaven forbid I bring up the word "decomposition." But here, things were different. Here, we all shared a passion for forensic science, and for once, someone had more to say about it than I.

As we prepared to begin the examination, we first had to cover every inch of our bodies in PPE. Together, the medical examiner and I donned ourselves in what could only be described as the latest morgue fashion statement: knee-high boot covers, a grossly oversized gown, a hair cap fit for a cafeteria shift, latex gloves, a face shield, and the star of the show, a chic N95.

I have seen death before. We all have. But this is not the quiet kind that you would find at a funeral, surrounded by flowers, hugs, and hushed sobs. Instead, it was the kind zipped inside of a shroud, kept from the inquisitive eyes of the living. The sound of the autopsy technician unzipping the body bag cut through the silence, bouncing off the walls of the small room. Inside lay the decedent. She looked disturbingly peaceful, as if she would wake up from her deep slumber at any moment.

The external exam was not particularly exciting or anything as gruesome as you would imagine. We searched the body for contusions and lacerations, any type of disruption that would hint at foul play. Instead, livor mortis had its own story to tell. The purplish-red discoloration on her back indicated that she had taken her final breath lying down.

We moved on to the decedent's eyes, one of the most mesmerizing parts of an autopsy. The medical examiner wedged tweezers under her eyelids and pried them open. I stared. Death's gaze is different. Her eyes resembled a cloudy, glassy void that filled me with a sense of unease and curiosity. I could almost see myself reflected in her pupil when suddenly the medical examiner drove a syringe straight through her eye.

I must have flinched because the medical examiner gently explained that she was collecting vitreous fluid. Unlike the rest of the body, the vitreous fluid is quite resistant to postmortem changes, making it ideal

for analyzing the body's chemical composition in a person's final hours.

Similar to livor mortis, rigor mortis also sets in once you die. Personally, I am not a fan of rigor mortis. It makes the body incredibly difficult to manipulate, which I quickly realized when the medical examiner asked me to lift the decedent's arm over her head. The stiffness makes every movement feel unnatural and inhumane, as if you might hurt the person despite knowing that they can't feel a thing. I hesitated as I grabbed her cold, rigid arm. As I pushed and pulled, her body resisted every movement. Left with no other choice, I leaned back with all of my weight, my muscles straining against death's unyielding grip.

After my embarrassing defeat in death's arm wrestling match, it was time for the internal autopsy. Carefully, the autopsy technician created a Y-incision along the torso, peeling the skin back to reveal a crimson interior. Before I had a chance to fully process the jarring sight, the oscillating saw roared to life. The autopsy technician meticulously sawed her way through the rib cage, producing an awful sound with each cut. Bone dust flew into the air, forming a menacing cloud under the luminance of the fluorescent lights. I winced, but I couldn't force myself to look away. Tilting my head, I peered into the abdominal cavity, my gaze lingering over each organ that, until now, had only existed in diagrams and ink.

I have done dissections before, but this autopsy was much different. The formaldehyde-soaked organs that I once remembered were now disturbingly fresh, soft to the touch, and unsettlingly lifelike. My admiration was cut short by one simple question from the medical examiner.

"Do you want to weigh the organs?"

Shocked, I eagerly agreed and grabbed the right lung from the autopsy technician. As it squished under my delicate fingers, I studied its beautiful,

pale pink color. Carefully, I weighed it and transferred it to the workstation for the medical examiner to dissect. As I repeated this process again and again, I was filled with a strange mixture of awe and skepticism.

*Is this what we really look like on the inside?* I thought to myself.

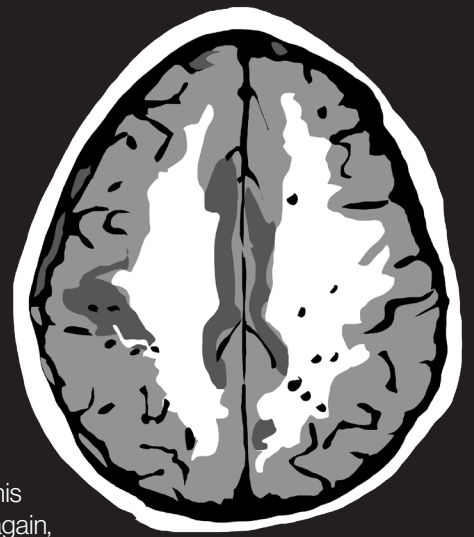
However, my thoughts were cut short once I was handed the heart. The medical examiner instructed me to squeeze the heart to ensure that excess blood would not contribute to the weight. As I squeezed the muscular organ, a thick, ruby fluid oozed between my fingers and turned my blue gloves a vivid red. After the blood was properly drained, I placed the heart aside and turned my attention toward the liver.

You would be amazed by how large the liver actually is. I always had the impression that it was a small organ, but my assumptions couldn't be further from the truth. The liver was heavy, sleek, and nearly slipped from my tender grasp.

As I caught it, the medical examiner laughed and said, "Don't worry. If you drop it, we just scoop it right back up!"

We both chuckled as I gently set the liver on the hanging scale, the melody of Lady Gaga's song *Disease* softly playing in the background. As grim as it may seem, the autopsy suite is a surprisingly humorous place. Medicolegal professionals laugh and share casual chatter, similar to what you would hear at a coffee shop. The soundtrack wasn't much different either. I've heard everything ranging from Shakira to classic rock hits, such as *Bohemian Rhapsody*.

As the autopsy technician peeled the decedent's face back to access the skull, the medical examiner sliced through organs with the infamous butcher's



knife. She searched for abnormal pathologies and took small samples of each organ, plopping them into a small preservative-filled container.

The oscillating saw whirled back to life, cutting through the cranium like butter under a hot knife. As she handed me the brain, I was taken aback by its gelatinous consistency. I hate to use food comparisons, but instead of the firm organ that I expected, it felt like a childhood dessert that I once indulged in: Jell-O. Gently, I weighed the brain and placed it on the workstation.

To conclude the autopsy, the organs were placed into a red biohazard bag and stuffed back into the abdominal cavity. The autopsy technician stitched shut the cranium and abdomen, sealing away the very organs that confirmed my unwavering love for forensic science. In just an hour, the autopsy was complete.

As we removed our layers of PPE, the decedent was zipped back into her shroud. Her milky gaze, fixed in an unseeing stare, was the last glimpse I caught before she was wheeled away.

Waving goodbye, I stepped out the doors of the medical examiner's office. Caught off guard by the natural sunlight, thoughts immediately began racing through my head.

*How many bodies pass through these doors each year? What's the most unforgettable case this office has ever handled? And seriously – how does anyone eat meat after performing an autopsy?*

I unlocked my Toyota Camry and sank into the driver's seat, my eyes lingering on the door that I had just exited.

To most people, the medical examiner's office is just another eyesore that they drive past on their way to work. While they may not give it a second thought, there is so much more that the medical examiner's office has to offer. Forensic medicine isn't confined to tragic deaths; it's a diverse field full of interesting lives and stories. While most cases result in natural and accidental deaths, some never get closure. I haven't encountered an undetermined case yet, but I know

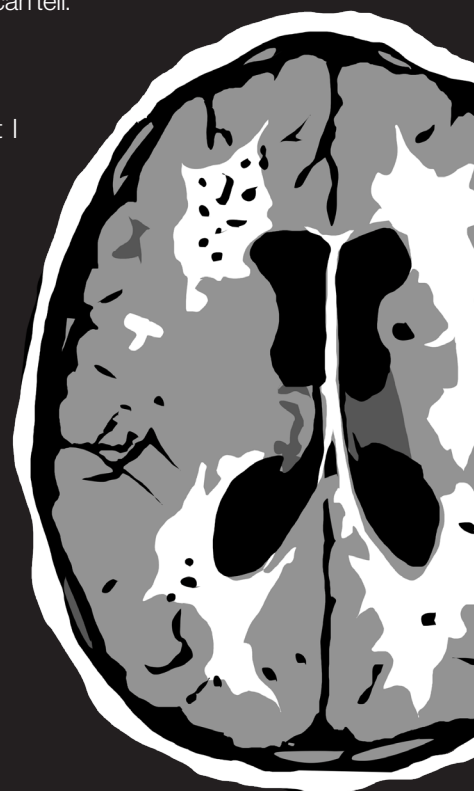
it's only a matter of time.

Clutching the steering wheel, I let questions swirl through my mind. I may never find the answers to all of them (though I wouldn't recommend a McDonald's cheeseburger after an autopsy), but I want to try. Despite the uncertainty around death, I want to keep exploring this strange and fascinating world. Most people recoil from it. After all, we have a natural aversion to mortality. Yet for reasons I can't fully explain, I'm drawn to it. Maybe it's curiosity. Maybe it's my respect for humanity. Or maybe it's the need to uncover stories that only the dead can tell.

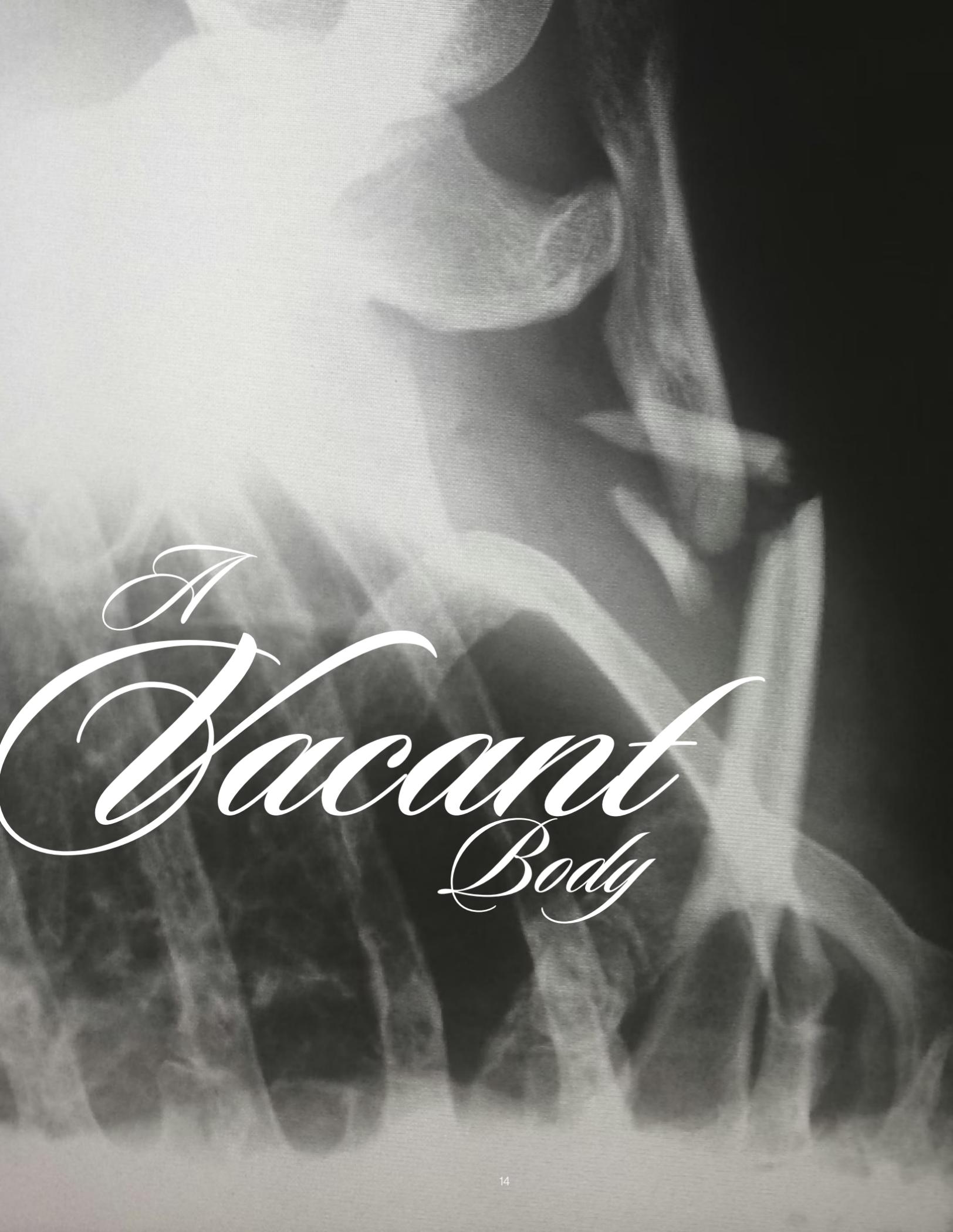
### **So, what is death, exactly?**

It's not the clean circle of life that I once imagined it to be. Death is a complicated story etched into flesh and bone; it's heavy, messy, and oddly reassuring. Every cut, every bruise, every stage of decay offers another piece of the puzzle.

I can't tell you where the Grim Reaper takes you, but I can tell you what happens when you take your final breath. The dead still have stories to tell, and if you dare to lean close enough, you'll hear them, too.



**Sara Bojczuk** is a senior majoring in neuroscience and minoring in forensic science on a pre-med track. In her free time, she enjoys crocheting, thrifting, watching true crime documentaries, hanging out with her friends, and collecting anything dinosaur or duck-related.



*A  
Vacant  
Body*

Poem by **Roya Ghahreman**

A formation of absence, a festering harshness  
between where the leg attaches to the hip and the skin  
of the lip barely grazes the teeth,

within each area of the person that can fold or bruise  
or murmur, there is a cutting nothingness, an internal  
shout that never encounters a reply.

I cannot speak, I was not handed, no, a voice was not  
sewn into the thin cords of my throat, though if you  
pressed your nails to them their verberation might sing,

though not a soul,

not a quiet, creeping presence will ever lay a finger  
to me, you will never step over my threshold, my one  
accursed place of residence, of itching tendons and  
seized joints of which I wish to return to the key.

I could find, somewhere, a voice, but its cadence would  
be wrong, its tone maladapted to the shape of my face,  
and I sharply recoil at the thought of impure sound  
kissing my tongue.

A brisk wind filling a hollow space of emptiness, a  
resting of noise and a collapsing of matter, a folding of  
air, similar to an inhale, but it is stiffly held and nothing  
follows.

Nothing will ever follow you into this room, into this skin  
that I lay in, tuck into at night, uncomfortable and bony,  
flimsy and hardened, frail and stony, cracks might be  
heard,

and they are the creaking of these joints, meant to  
be communicating among one another but ever-  
presently, exhaustedly, failing,

yet they carry my room, this empty room, supported  
on marrow and the knowledge that I should be  
somewhere else, yet I remain here.

I remain this. There is a contradiction in such vacancy  
yet such crushing attendance of despair.

I should be becoming something, and this thought will,  
would, skitter up to the fleshy, wrinkled meat of my brain  
and begin to chew,

a rodent infestation borne from a potentially incorrect  
form, a cacophony of clipping jaws, devouring the frail  
fibers of contentedness.

There are phrases spoken inwardly, words of the mind  
that escape through the gaps of its gnarled surface but  
they are put to death, with no existence of life

to soothe them into the soil of realization to watch them  
rise into beaming mental confrontation,

they pass away in the barren room of my body, in the  
dysfunctional space that stretches seemingly without  
end, occasionally hisses, and

lurches towards this need to be created better, to  
adapt an absolute perfection of surface, but with no  
knowledge of what creation I might begin to be,

and even too without the faintest clue of what I ever  
was.

**Roya Ghahreman** is a sophomore English major studying to  
be a librarian. Roller derby and endless hours of reading, writing,  
and reflecting on life and love with friends clutter their schedule.  
They love attending queer or activism-related events and going to  
movies with people who will rant with them about the film's various  
cinematic decisions over a bowl of (strawberry) ice cream.



## The Ineffable

Art by **Dylan Seeman**

Dylan's body of work centers on liminal moments, existing in no one specific place. He says, "This artistic pursuit investigates when eerie becomes beautiful, familiar turns foreign, cracked and flowing, cutting edge yet antiquated." This idea of liminality speaks to the very nature of human existence: a state of flux between new experiences and the immense history that each individual carries.

**Dylan Seeman** is a senior majoring in painting and drawing. Considered a top emerging artist in Western America, his work has been showcased in Phoenix and published in nationally recognized magazines. In his spare time, he enjoys reading romance novels.

# wondering the nothing

fiction by **Mason Dodds**

# wondering the nothing

"Mom?"

"Mommy?!"

A young Child called out, shivering as rain soaked their thin jacket. Not a single sound came from the drops, but they were just as heavy as a monsoon.

The alley they walked through didn't splash or puddle. Instead, the cracks in the pavement widened with each drop.

"Mommy? Where are you? I'm sorry, I didn't mean, I didn't mean I don't love—"

The Child froze.

The cracks were now holes.

And from their depths, the Nothing stared back.

Whispers echoed, voices merged and fractured, speaking in riddles the Child couldn't understand.

The hole stretched wider. The Child's breath caught. They looked down, and there was no solid ground beneath their feet, only jagged fragments floating like islands in a void.

The Child leapt forward onto the nearest shard of pavement, legs wobbling with the threat of collapse. The whispers grew louder and pressed against their skull, threatening to push through to their mind.

Another jump.

The next platform bobbed like a ship at sea, and the

Child's heart pounded with the knowledge that a single misstep meant falling into the Nothing.

Behind them, the hole gaped hungrily, eager to consume them. Ahead, a faint glow shimmered, an otherworldly light beckoning beyond the alley's exit.

Step by precarious step, the Child traversed across the fractured alleyway, and each leap felt like it would be their last. The air grew warmer, staler, and the whispers faded into a distant hum.

Finally, their feet touched solid ground. They spun around once, the cracked abyss yawning behind, before they turned toward the glowing silhouette that emerged from the dead treeline.

There it stood: the broken, decrepit mall, its shattered window walls flickering with light. The windows were filled with mannequins bent into inhuman poses.

The Child, in a trance, walked towards the mall, which played distorted music through cracked speakers. The sounds were on repeat like a broken record, playing the same four notes endlessly. The Child entered and blinked.

The mall was no bigger than a corner store, with only a few storefronts lining the walls.

"Wait . . . what am I doing? Right, I need to find my mom."

The Child turned around.

But the doors were gone. Just a brick wall, wet with condensation.

The Child turned back around; urgency clawed at them, though they couldn't remember if there had ever been an exit at all. The smell of dust bunnies and sweat filled the place . . .

The sides of the mall were lined with shops whose gates had dropped halfway down, and the mannequins beneath them seemed to have been caught mid-escape, arms stretched, fingers clawing, left to rot in a moment that had already passed long ago.

The Child walked through the mall, avoiding the debris and broken mannequins all over the floor. They turned the corner; the mall repeated itself, only larger now. Everything was an improvement from before. The shops seemed to breathe clearly, their gates lifted, their displays brighter, as if pretending to be alive. Mannequins stood upright in strained poses, trying on clothes with the stiffness of puppets that had only just remembered how to move.

From a cracked speaker, a lullaby played, faint but familiar, the same song the Child remembered their mother humming, as if the mall itself had stolen her voice.

Each time they turned a corner, the mall had rewritten itself, larger, more alive, more wrong. The mannequins here seemed unsettlingly vivid, their skin too smooth, their eyes too aware, more alive, perhaps, than the Child felt in that moment.

They passed a mannequin holding a wallet with money partially pulled out. The mannequin's features were faded, her smile stretched painfully wide. She stood at a kiosk in the middle of the walkway.

The kiosk was unmanned, yet lined with rows of warped mugs. Their handles bent in impossible angles, their rims collapsed inward, their glossy surfaces all stamped with the same broken phrase: "WORLD'S BEST MOM." Letters smudged, misplaced, stuttering as though the world itself could not remember the word. The Child's own mind seemed to trip over the word "Mom," as though even they weren't allowed to say it right.

The Child looked at the ID of the mannequin.

"Taylor Dakota," the Child read, the name tasting wrong in their mouth. The mannequin's resin eyes filled with tears that shimmered like glass. With a nauseating crack, its head twisted to face the Child. They staggered back as the figure began to hum, a vibration, as though the air inside it buzzed to life. The Child spun to flee, but when they ran back where they came, the walkway had already filled.

Mannequins sprawled in impossible heaps, stacked like corpses yet straining upward, arms outstretched. They reached for the Child, not moving, only waiting.

The Child looked back at the mannequin named Taylor, closer now, its hand lifted toward them. Her glassy eyes clung to the Child's gaze, refusing to blink. Quickly, they turned toward the wave of mannequins; they too had crept forward, arms stretched wider, yet all stood in rigid silence as though Nothing had changed.

The Child looked back. Above them, the first mannequin towered, its fingers trembling inches from their face, close enough for its shadow to swallow them whole. Small clinks of perfectly shaped teardrops piled on the floor.

They recoiled, and the wave of mannequins had crept nearer in the instant their eyes shifted. The Child pressed their spine to the cold wall and scraped sideways, keeping their gaze fixed on the mannequins, who seemed to lean imperceptibly closer with each heartbeat.

The Child slipped behind a kiosk, breaking their line of sight with the mannequins. At once, the mall erupted, thundering footsteps, joints splitting with sharp cracks, and the long, aching squeak of shifting floors reverberated from the other side. Then, just as suddenly, the sounds cut off, as though the mall itself had swallowed its own noise with the Child's gaze.

The Child slid further along the wall. The wave of mannequins had shifted, now joined by the first mannequin. Some clung unnaturally to the walls, their fingers curled like hooks. The Child swallowed hard. They had not seen them move, yet somehow the mannequins were closer than they should have been.

The Child edged along the wall until they neared the corner. Sounds of chatter in the wrong beats and plates being moved filled the area now. When they glanced left, the food court shimmered wrong. It glitched in place, its outlines stuttering, bending as though the air itself were folding over it, before snapping back into its original shape with a soundless jolt.

The mannequins seated there were caught mid-bite, frozen in a grotesque parody of life. Forks had fused into their fingers, trays sagged and melted into their torsos. Their stillness was punctuated by faint laughter, empty, like a memory replayed through a broken record.

At the far end of the food court stood a door. It was unmarked, unadorned, yet strangely untouched by the distortion that plagued everything else. It waited, whole and intact.

# the nothing

The Child looked back. The mannequins had closed the distance, only a few feet now. Their broken hands and twisted limbs clawed through the air, each frozen in mutilated reach. One pale, cracked hand hovered so close it nearly grazed the Child's nose.

The Child continued to slide along the wall. Storefronts along the way had sealed themselves shut, their displays warped into smooth, faceless walls. Yet through the glassless gaps, arms still pushed through, straining, as if the mannequins were bled from the mall itself.

After some shuffling, the Child's foot struck a mannequin's severed hand on the floor. They looked down just as it tipped over and crumbled into sand. When they glanced back, the wave of mannequins had drawn closer again, too close.

The Child pressed forward, inching toward the food court, not breaking eye contact. The air thickened with a rancid haze of spoiled food.

The moment their foot crossed into the food court, the ceiling speakers cut to silence. The canned music died mid-note. Instantly, every mannequin's head snapped upward in perfect unison. The silence pressed so hard against the Child's ears that they, too, felt compelled to look up.

Above, the ceiling was nonexistent. Instead, a sprawling web stretched across the rafters like a second, suffocating sky. Strands thick as ropes in some places, thin as hair in others. Entangled within the silken lattice were mannequins and scraps of merchandise, shirts wrapped tight as cocoons, plastic limbs suspended in stillborn poses. The webs pulsed faintly, as though something vast still moved within their depths. A shadow of something larger caused the Child to look away.

Then the loudspeakers crackled back to life.

"Flash Sale! First customer to return the lost Child to Security wins ten mall credits, redeemable at select locations. Act fast, your desires depend on it."

In the same instant, every mannequin's head snapped downward in unison, blank faces turning to fixate on the Child, including the mannequins frozen mid-bite in the food court.

The Child wasted no time. They sprinted toward the doors at the far end of the food court, their small shoes pounded against the tile. Behind them, mannequins cracked and shifted, limbs snapped back into place with the sound of splintered wood and bone. The running and scuffling grew louder; it echoed across the court as if the entire mall had joined the hunt.

The Child slammed against the doors, and they burst open with a hollow clang. Only a narrow corridor stretched forward, the air stale and damp, the silence broken only by the Child's own glitched breathing.

The Child did not stop running. The corridor was lit only by the faint glow of an exit sign at the end. The Child refused to look behind them, and the sounds grew closer with each trampled mannequin.

The corridor shrank with every step, walls pressing in, ceiling brushing their hair, until there was no room for arms. Still, they ran. Still, the mannequins followed. The mannequins got closer. The Child practically felt the weight of the wave imposing on them.

The Child kept their eyes forward, closing in at the end. They burst through the door and stumbled, tumbling face-first into sand.

When the Child lifted their head, they froze. The sand was strewn with broken mannequin pieces, arms, legs, and faces.

Finally, the Child turned back. The door jutted out of the sand like a sore on the coast. The forest swayed in the wrong direction behind it. Mannequins clawed at the exit, their limbs pushed through. But the moment a hand passed entirely into this place, it crumbled away, falling into the sand.


The mannequins stayed there, from their faceless heads came muffled screams, choked cries that bled through the doorway and forced themselves into the Child's ears.

The Child shut the door.  
Silence.

They turned, and an open sea stretched before them. On the other side of the ocean,

A city sagging under the weight of its own impossible skyline, skyscrapers bowing like trees burdened by rot. A door that drifted on its back washed up onto the shore. The door bobbed gently, cracked open like a mouth waiting to speak again. "MOM?"

**Mason Dodds** is a creative writing major who enjoys writing horror and fantasy pieces. They have been developing a horror anthology, called *The Nothing*, that includes this piece as part of the whole!

A black and white photograph of a brutalist building. The building features a long, repetitive concrete structure with a series of rectangular openings and overhangs. A paved walkway runs alongside the building, leading towards a distant point where some trees and a few people are visible. The overall mood is one of isolation and repetition.

photography by **Nate Baker**

**This photo, shot on 35mm film, attempts to capture the liminal feel of being alone whenever I am surrounded by large, repetitive, brutalist buildings. Although the concept of liminal space has only recently become a widespread term, the feelings and emotions that such spaces evoke have had a profound impact on me and my art. Much of my photographic work focuses on the feelings of loneliness and solitude that exist around large, empty structures.**

**Nate Baker** is a senior in Barrett pursuing a degree in art studies at the Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts. He is a lifelong artist who enjoys working in a variety of mediums, including photography, metalworking, music, and printmaking. With a love for cats and kittens, he frequently fosters them from his local shelter, called Lost Our Home.

---

Beneath a sky of ideological fallout,  
where ash obscures dawn's start,  
I wander through the twilight of maybe,  
a land uncharted by common hearts.

No sun burns so fierce to cast a shadow,  
no moon illuminates a stark divide.  
Here, rivers weave through all terrain,  
their currents unfettered by arbitrary lines.

Far beyond, the beach stands constant,  
white sand bleached by a ruthless sun.  
Black rocks hoard the night's cold silence,  
each stake its reign when twilight's done.

Each side shouts hymns of righteous thunder,  
both factions ignite a sacred claim.  
Their dogmas sound in clashing clamor,  
as lighting curses the scene aflame.

The white cries out, "Truth is ours, unyielding!"  
The black retorts, "No, ours alone!"  
Obstinate fires choke the air with embers,  
while ash petrifies all hearts to stone.

But in the grey, the world is softer —  
tree canopies diffuse harsh light to a blend.  
The oak, half-rotted, still bears blossoms;  
The wolf and deer share riverbeds.

We crave the sun and stars' clear shining,  
but dawn's soft hues elude our claim.  
In twilight's grey, where shades are twining,  
true beauty blends in mottled shade.  
To paint the other as a demon,  
to name them evil, void of grace,  
deprives recognition of mirrored fragments —  
the flaws and hopes in every face.

We seek to claim the sole true vision,  
branding foes with harsh nomenclature.  
Yet absolutes breed cold derision,

# *In the Grey*

Poetry by **Kali Killingsworth**

and blind us to our shared human  
nature.

For black and white are but illusions,  
a trick of light that splits the whole.  
To worship one is to unravel  
the tangled roots that bind the soul.

The grey is not a coward's refuge,  
nor indecision's tepid cage.  
It's where the brave embrace the frac-  
ture,  
and find the truth in every shade.

We rush to shun the shades of blending,  
to draw the line and take a side.  
But truth, in greyness, keeps ascend-  
ing,  
where open hearts can bridge the tide.

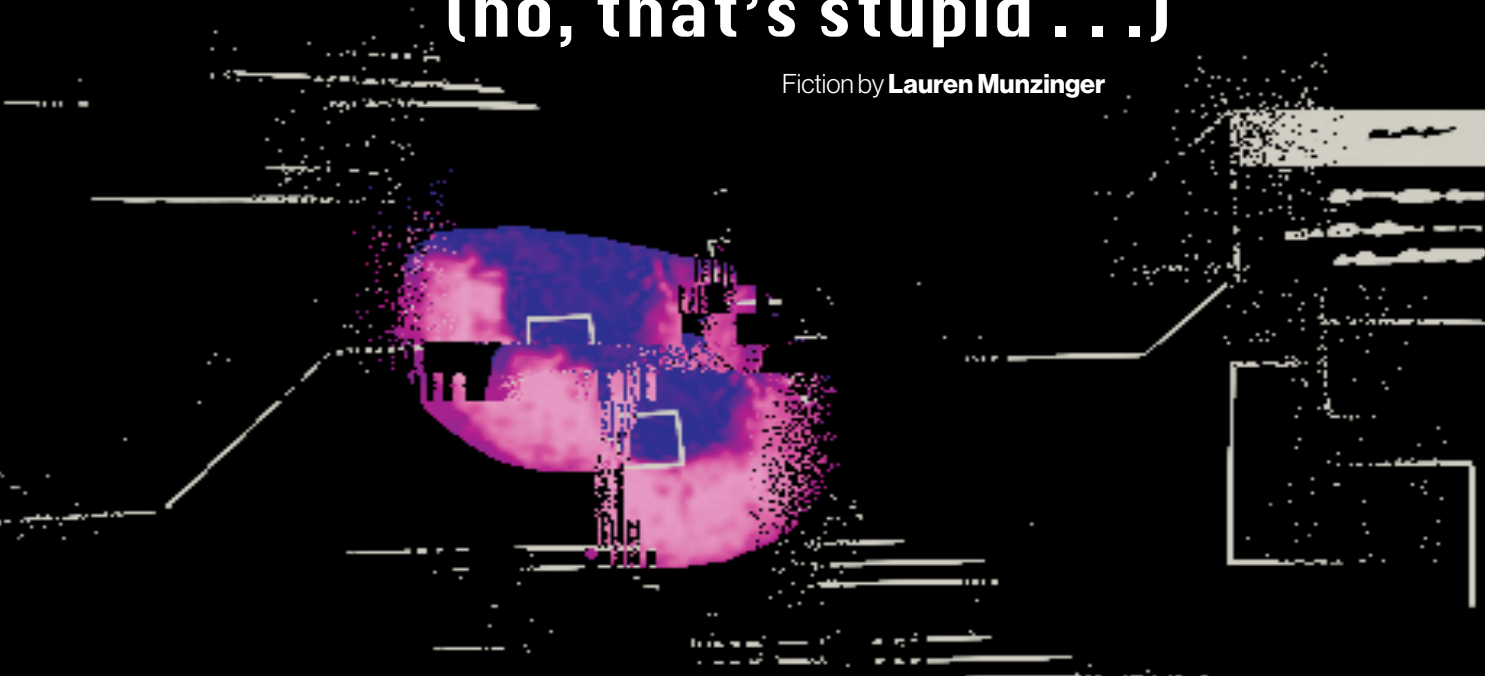
So let the zealots clash and sunder,  
their absolutes will crack and fade.  
I'll walk the grey, where life's a riddle,  
and peace is wrought in marbled grey.

**Kali Killingsworth** is a senior at ASU's Barrett Honors College, majoring in philosophy and minoring in psychology, through which she researches the metaphysics of time and consciousness. In her free time, she coaches junior-high cheerleading, works on the American Alchemy podcast, and creates art.

# QUANTUS

(no, that's stupid...)

Fiction by **Lauren Munzinger**



That empty face on the billboard was what first drew me in; a set of dark teeth cut out of what used to be a gaping smile and two eyes sprayed over by violent purple blotches. Which is strange, really, because that eyeless thing can't see me, but I'm only here because I want to be seen.

That's strange, right? I'm never sure how other people define 'strange.' But looking at it now, that raceless, sightless, featureless face on the billboard is definitely strange. My subconscious must've painted it over like this. All the other dozens of times I've seen this billboard, it looked like...

Huh. I can't remember. I only see those violet eyes, taunting me, purple dripping down the cheeks and onto the slogan that stretches below the chin. It looks like someone murdered a boysenberry; the words are all muddled, and I can't remember what it used to say. Something... **TAKE CONTROL? FIND A NEW LIFE? KNOW WHAT IN THE WORLD YOU'RE DOING ON THIS STUPID EARTH?** Because that's really what I'm here for.

This billboard is part of the first step of a program that's going to give me just that. I'm going to upload my consciousness digitally to this computerized plane of reality, and then I'll never have to worry about a messy human life again.

The digital world around me is desolate—but that won't matter once it's mine. This version is just the teaser trailer. The primordial soup. It's shaped like an empty urban street at midnight, but really, we're in my head right now, in an induced dreamspace that just so happens to look like the city I grew up in. And it won't have to look that way once it's mine. I'll make it into Atlantis or Rivendell. I'll even populate it with people—ooh! or maybe not people, maybe mermaids or elves, something fun and novel. And then it won't remind me of all the failures of my hometown.

My actual life is tedious, and scary too. This won't be scary. This isn't scary. I'll pay the tiny insignificant fee of a couple hundred thousand dollars, choose to live here for the rest of my life, and never be scared again.

**CONFIRM.** says something. It comes from the lacuna mouth of the billboard, sounding less like words than like scraping, like a rat in a locked dumpster or a fly against glass. I try to flinch away from it, but it buzzes at the base of my skull like a budding headache.

**CONFIRM. CONFIRM.**

Hold on. "Hold on! Confirm what?!"

**UPLOAD CONSCIOUSNESS**, it suggests, pulling the reminder out of my brain like wet taffy.

**TAKE CONTROL. FIND LIFE. KNOW BELONGING.**

A key loads up in front of me. It's a hologram; I can tell because it dances in my vision like a mirage. It has the skinny, brutalist structure of a handcuff key, and it looks something like a pen, the kind you'd pick up at a cheap swag booth.

**CONFIRM.**

The world zeroes in on that key as a trick of the hologram shoves it forward into my vision. Jeez, it didn't even give me a chance to finish my exposition! It thinks it has me hooked here. It wants to go in for the kill.

It's as if the whole street, down to the pupil-black asphalt, is watching me to that effect. And the billboard, too. Of course the billboard is watching. Despite the purple where its pupils should be, it reminds me of that billboard from *The Great Gatsby*: ever-watching, ever-waiting for me to crash off course.

I hate that book, and I hate these billboards, because what's the point of throwing your life away in pursuit of something you're never even going to have?

(Throwing your life away for something like control, or life, or belonging.)

**CONFIRM.**

There's no point, that's what. This world is made up of 0s and 1s. I won't find what I want here, and running away from my real life isn't going to heal me. Even the urban facade that my subconscious built for me is telling; that in imagining leaving I end up right back in the world I'm trying to run from; that everything I know has its foundations in the ever-changing quantus of human knowledge, and this futility only —

No, no, shut up. I'm being too purple; sorry. What am I even saying?

I don't know what this means. If I did, though, I'd think it means something really sad.

**CONFIRM.  
CONFIRM.**

The voice keeps scraping at my bones, horribly, and my hand starts reaching forward like that black hole of a mouth is pulling it in.

It did hook me, I guess.

Even though I know I'm just one person, alone. And one person alone could never make a world.

**Lauren Munzinger** is thrilled about this opportunity to explore her passion for creative writing. Especially as a freshman, "liminal" is a chance topic, and one close to her heart. She wanted to write something oceans-related to honor her ocean futures major, but she's just a sucker for sci-fi.

This piece explores liminality as the intersection of peace and loneliness. The monochromatic blue lets the viewer wonder where the figure is, what they are looking at, and why they are there alone. The color blue is often associated with sadness and tranquility, and the piece is meant to convey this.



Art by **Aileen Sanchez**



There is also a connection between the panels themselves and the figure, which can create feelings of emptiness throughout the entire piece. The limited yet significant information given to the viewer allows them to create their own story.

**Aileen Sanchez** is a Mexican-American artist from Rio Rico, Arizona. She is a senior pursuing a Bachelor of Fine Arts painting and drawing. In addition to art, she enjoys dance, and is part of the Devilettes dance team at ASU.

## BLUE PANELS

# DETACH

Fiction by **Violet Lenz**

The first thing I see of the new world is coffee cups. They're stacked high on a desk, forming a wall around what looks like an old-fashioned computer. An empty chair sits in front of it, washed in blue light.

"I know you must be feeling a lot right now."

The voice comes from behind me. I jump, spinning on my heel and grabbing an empty mug to defend myself.

The room looks old—like it's plucked from a retro movie about the 2000s. Decorated like it might have looked before the Collapse.

"After all, you must be realizing now that your world doesn't really exist." She's standing in the middle of the room, blonde hair tied in a messy bun above her head. Her brown eyes are swallowed by dark circles. She seems perfectly relaxed, wrapped in a large red hoodie. "That you don't."

It shouldn't be possible.

"What?" My arm holding the coffee cup

shakes, but I know that she's lying. She must be lying. The Detach has to be broken or something—

"Life is a lie," she says, waving her hands in faux excitement. "Whoop-de-doo."

"Who are you?"

She sighs, "Look, I didn't think you'd get through it this fast. You're getting smarter, I guess. But it always happens this way. I'm sorry. I know this must be hard." She straightens, pulls something from her pockets. A small metal disc with a single red button. "If it helps at all, nothing you feel is real."

She presses the button and the world whites out.

...

I wake up to the sound of plates breaking. That's the third time this week. Slowly, I sit up in my bed—not fully, because the metal roof of my sister's bunk hangs too low over me—and contemplate the merits of pretending to be asleep instead of walking into the living room.

Before I can decide, the door opens, revealing my rumpled sister. Her hair is a mess, tangled like a bird's nest that might once have been a style with half-singed bits sticking out of the cyclone. Her clawed hands hang on the stained fabric donning her arms with chipped, broken nails.

"He's plugged in again," she huffs, stepping over the debris littering the floor—her clothes, her drawings, her letters from her friends torn to shreds and littered across our room—and plopping onto the bed. "He's been in all morning."

I straighten in bed. She's not done talking yet. I know from experience that she still has more to add, so I wait.

"He's not the one who pays for it; I don't see why he should get a monopoly."

She doesn't pay for it either, but it's not the time to bring it up. It's never really the time, actually, with Gaia.

"He's grieving."

"He's not the only one." Her gaze flicks to mine, sharp as knives. "You don't even use it, what do you care?"

There is, once again, no right answer to this question. So, I shrug and push out of my bed, careful to avoid stepping on her clothes as I walk past the curtain. She starts picking things up, moving the piles around on the floor.

I go to the sink first. Dishes are easy compared to everything. It's better to scrub grime off plates when I know where it comes from (my family) than it is to spend my days searching through garbage of unknown origin for recyclable materials (the government's last ditch efforts toward sustainability).

After the dishes, I go to check on my father, find the shattered plates on the living room floor, and set about picking them up.

He remains unaware, lying on what could once have been considered a couch but is now too stained and shredded. His face is hidden by the Detach, blocked by the box-like mask over his eyes that's emitting soft, muffled sounds every second. Wires stick out of the sides, climbing up to the apparatus in the ceiling that connects the entire neighborhood to one large server. For a moment, I just watch him, tracing the old lines of his face, deepened over the last few weeks like chasms. The hard edges of his cheeks poke through his skin, sallow and gaunt.

"Is he still on?"

I nod, gathering the small pile of broken plate pieces in my hands and rising to carry it into the kitchen.

Gaia scoffs as I walk past.

"It's my turn. It's long past my turn." She kicks the bottom of the couch. "Wake up, old man."

"Gaia..."

"What?" She spins on her heel, crossing her arms and turning her judgemental eyes to mine, "It isn't fair. It isn't right. You may not care about using it, but I do! And why does he deserve it? What does he do all day? Nothing. He just wastes the energy."

Instead of responding, I start making breakfast. I don't think that either of them have eaten in a while, and these daily laments are always worse without food. All we have is three

pieces of toast and some peanut butter, which will have to do. I'm working tonight, and I should get paid this weekend, so I can go to the store.

While I'm thinking, I don't notice Gaia striding up to my father until she's reaching for the headset.

"Gaia!"

You're not supposed to take the thing off mid-Detachment. It has to be powered off first, or it can damage the whole server and hurt the person wearing it. Gaia knows this. Everyone knows this. Yet, she still grabs a chunk of the wires and yanks.

The Detach sparks. My father rockets off the couch in a startling whirl of motion, crying out as he tears the apparatus off his face. He sways on his feet, Detach sparking in his hands, "What the hell?"

"Dad," I say, but neither of them notice that I've even spoken at all.

"It's my turn!"

"Look what you did!" He throws what's left of the Detach onto the floor, cracking the remnants of the screen. It blinks once, twice, and goes dark.

"You broke it!" she screeches. "Look what you did! You destroyed it."

"Stop." My voice isn't loud enough to rise over her shrieking, which would be more alarming if I hadn't heard her shrill voice rise a thousand times by now. If I hadn't heard this entire argument play out before with only slight differences every time. Never a broken Detach, though. That's new.

"What, I did? You did this! Now no one can use it!" he yells back. "Are you happy?"

She flinches as if struck. "It's not fair for you to have it all the time!" Her voice sounds smaller than it has in a long while, like she's seven and not seventeen. "I want a turn. It's not fair!"

"Fair?" His voice grows low. Cold. His next words are interrupted by the sound of shattering glass. I look at the Detach

first, expecting it to have exploded or something, but it hasn't changed. I notice both their eyes settling on me as I stare confused, looking for the source.

Something warm runs down my palm. I turn to look at it, feeling like I'm pushing through molasses just to move my hand. There's a broken plate in my hands. A shard has cut my palm in a shallow slice. Red pools in the center of my palm, dripping through my fingers.

"Great," Gaia huffs darkly, kicking the broken Detach. She folds her arms. "Now we're all going crazy."

Her eyes find mine, looking like she wants to say something else, but she just stalks out of the room, leaving me alone with my father.

"Dad."

A sheen of sweat glistens against his pale face. He sways on his feet, but doesn't say a word.

"You should really eat something," I say.

Finally, he moves. He walks toward me, and I think he will take my offering of stale bread. I turn the plate so that the slice with the most peanut butter is closest to him.

But he walks past me, stepping into his room without a word. Peanut butter stares up at me, abandoned on its plate. The Detach whirs quietly. I move toward it. I should probably shut it off so it doesn't light the house on fire. The screen lights up, spilling blue light across the carpeted floor. I stop in my tracks, standing a few feet away from it as a voice spills through the audio system, crackling and young.

"On for Saturday?"

I look around, but neither Gaia nor my father come in at the noise. Maybe it's picking up audio from someone else's system, or maybe it's running the program that my father was using before it broke.

"Okay, I'll see you. Love you."

Another voice spills through—one that I haven't heard in years.

"Love you, Cassie."

I pick up the headset, not thinking about the broken screen or the dangers of a damaged apparatus as I secure it to my face. I've never used it before, but I've seen my father and sister wear it enough times that it's almost muscle memory.

Darkness greets me first. The blue light is gone, replaced by a rainbow of colors blinking between the cracks in the visor.

"Hello, Cassandra," a robotic voice says. The cracks in the visor stitch themselves together in front of my eyes, disappearing entirely within seconds.

A door sits alone in the darkness, close enough that I can touch it.

I feel as though I should not open it. My only experience with mysterious doors is from the old horror movies I used to watch with my mother. She always liked old things like the books stacked onto her retro shelves, the music she listened to on her old, half-broken headphones, and most of all the horror movies stacked into a pile in the corner of our living room. She was never a fan of the Detach even as it became more popular with her friends. Before she got sick, when I couldn't fall asleep, I would wander into her room and tug at her blankets. She would roll awake, cup her soft hand against my cheek, and carry me into the living room. After setting me on the couch, she would select one of the films from the stack and slide it into our old-fashioned TV. Dad found it at a dump one day and brought it home to repair. Sometimes, he would even join our late-night movie sessions. He would stumble out of his room sleepily with a dopey smile on his face and sit beside us before falling back asleep almost instantly. Sometimes, Gaia would join, too, but she was scared by the things on the screen, so more often than not it was just me and Mom.

Instead of the monsters, I watched her dwindling smile through the light of the screen. I

would watch her eyes.

"It's not scary," she would whisper. "Those people—you know they aren't real, baby. What real person would ever make such a stupid choice?"

I feel like a distant observer as my hand floats up to the handle and meets solid metal, cold to the touch.

As a kid, those movies—even with their awful, unrealistic special effects that were nothing compared to what people could see inside the Detach—still scared me.

But now, I think I understand.

I open the door.

"Simulation failed."

The world whites out.

...

The first thing I see behind the door is coffee cups. They're stacked high on a desk, forming a wall around what looks like an old-fashioned computer. An empty chair sits in front of it, washed in blue light.

The room looks old, like one of those replicas of a house before the Collapse, and there's a girl sitting in the desk chair.

She turns, blinking at me slowly. Her face is hidden by the darkness, "Huh. That was the fastest one yet."

"What..." I look around. There are posters lining the walls, difficult to see in the darkness, but I think I recognize some from Mom's old movies. "Where am I?"

"You were the last one—the last chance for the program to show that people could—" she cuts herself off with a dark chuckle, shaking her head. "...Change things. You had all the tools. You were almost there."

"What's going on?"

"Every single time, you're almost there. You were supposed to be better. I needed you to be better." Her eyes shine in the dim lights.

"You were... supposed to be different."

There's a picture on the table, half

**Violet Lenz** is a film major and a part of the NGSC program. They are a sophomore this year. Outside of writing, they like to watch cartoons.

hidden in shadow, but I can see enough of it to recognize my mother's face. Her hair is tied back with a yellow bandana, blonde curls dancing around it. She's wearing an old pair of black overalls, paint messily decorating the faded denim that I remember her wearing a few times when I was a kid. The strangest part, though, is that she's smiling. Her eyes are bright, blooming with joy.


Behind me, her voice is sardonic, "I guess we're all just doomed, huh?"

Her arm is wrapped around someone else, extended over a shrouded figure that I can't see in the light. I want to move closer to try and make out the details, but I don't know how I would get past the girl in front of me.

"So many chances, and it all goes down the same way. We all fall into the chasm eventually. It doesn't matter if it's nuclear war, climate collapse, virtual reality—what did you call it? The Detach?"

"Who—" My head is spinning and my thoughts buzz around my head like flies, too fast to catch. "Why do you have a picture of my mom?"

"Look, I know you must be feeling a lot right now, but it's only temporary. And none of your emotions are



tick-click-click, the sound breaks me open,  
a steady tapping, sharp teeth scraping  
at the back of my skull. i try to measure it —  
time, slipping past like water i can't hold,  
spilling through the cracks in my palms.

each second sticks in my throat,  
lodged deep like something unswallowed,  
a pin pressing its way into my ribs.  
i can feel the hands twitch-twist around me,  
their jagged motions tearing the air apart.

the face of the clock—watch it grin.  
its lines stretch, thin and trembling,  
a smirk that speaks louder than anything  
i am allowed to say. it knows me.  
it reads my fears off my skin  
as though i agreed to this, as though  
this gnawing forward has a destination.

tick-click-click, the gears grind harder, sharper.  
inside me, something beats to the rhythm —  
not a heart, not warmth, just  
a cold insistence that won't stop.  
time swings wide, jaws unhinged,  
devouring itself in uneven gulps,  
until the hour is left raw, splintered,  
a metallic taste i can't spit out.

i count the seconds to steady myself.  
but they keep moving—fractured rhythms,  
falling too close together, then too far apart.  
hands claw toward the next moment,  
a forward motion i can't catch,  
a spinning too fast to track.

what time is it?

my voice cracks the air like a splinter.  
there's no answer—only the thudding  
in my chest, a rhythm that doesn't belong to me.  
counting forward. counting backward.  
never landing anywhere at all.

tick-click-click. the sound is inside me now,  
buried too deep to pull free.  
the hours pile up like loose pieces,  
too scattered to put back together.

i try to hold myself steady,  
but the minutes keep shifting, slipping  
into a place i can't see,  
and i don't know if i ever knew  
how to stop them.

tick-click-click,  
the sound twists itself into my thoughts,  
filling the gaps i didn't know were there—  
until i'm not sure what's mine,  
what's left, or what i was supposed to feel.

what time is it again?  
the hands swing forward, backward,  
closer, farther —  
and i am still here,  
waiting for the hour  
to tell me who i am.

# an hour too far

poetry by **Emerson Amaya**

**Emerson Amaya** is a first-generation Latina writer currently studying creative writing with a focus in poetry. They are in their fourth and final year and will graduate in Spring 2026. One thing Em likes to do is collect trinkets and use them as decoration when they need to feel closer to home.



# the intersection

**Halle Pickett** is a sophomore originally from Salt Lake City. She's majoring in biological sciences and minoring in studio arts for "the giggles" of it. Appearing in this magazine makes her mom very happy. Halle wants to say, "Hi Mom!"

The emptiness and quiet of the street, despite the evidence of city infrastructure, evokes feelings of an uncanny stillness. The scene is vague; it could

be any city you've passed through in your life. The intersection itself suggests themes of crossing and intersectional zones. Some traffic lights are

Art by **Halle Pickett**

green, the others red; it conflicts itself. The viewer is left uncertain if they should continue or if they're meant to wait.

# Lady of the Theatre

Lady of the Theatre

lyric essay by **Gladys Anette Sanchez Padilla**

*This is a love story.*

*Act I*

During dress rehearsals, I could see the lady with her dark hair wet with blood, tutu tattered at her abdomen where a barre speared her, splitting her in half.

She was a silly story we, the corps de ballet, made up to giggle at while we waited at the legs before our entrance, or in the dressing rooms as we zipped each other's corsets, brushed each other's hair, under the yellow glow of the light framed mirrors, surrounded by women and girls; there was no danger that could touch me. She was not such a silly story once the other girls were picked up by their parents and I was left alone, seeing her in the mirrors of the classroom as I waited for the academy's principal, my mom, to finish working. Most

nights I had to face the speared lady in the mirror along with the other ghosts within me which led me to conclude that the loss of a life makes for a sad story, but the death of a beautiful young girl is a tragedy. The speared lady and I are a tragedy. I am Lucifer desterrado, not dead, but might as well be, because I am a creature that was brought to life wrong. The speared lady had her life cut short, I had mine taken from me altogether by catechesis which taught me to fear the half lady in the mirror. I am in purgatory, between crossroads, I am something between heavenly and hellish, half human and half vampire, a sinner of the worst category, the kind that has sinned against herself, and yet also I have been the best little Catholic school girl I could be. A waste of a woman, petite and delicate, but I desire only another woman's hands on my waist.



## Act II

My papa used to be visited  
by la damita, a little girl with long, long, black hair and  
black eyes  
who would warn him of dangers to come -  
colleagues that sought to hurt him -  
and advise him on how to act against this.  
I would watch him at the foot of his and my mama's  
bed, jealous,  
but I am not sure any more if I was jealous of her  
and the wisdom she would give him  
or of my papa and his ability to see the  
beautiful girl.  
My great grandma, Socorro Astol, would  
also see beyond this veil  
for her art. She could see visions of the evil woman  
she embodied on the stage,  
of the Queen, Mother in law, and maid:  
"Y eso fue vida para mi,"  
she said shortly before dying.  
A shipwreck was what brought Doña Socorrito to  
Sinaloa,  
stranding her and her husband in Altata, from there  
they traveled the state with a carp,  
the Teatro Rodante Colonial Socorro Astol, bringing  
the art of theater from Mexico City.  
Having instilled this interest, a physical theater was  
named after her:  
Teatro Socorro Astol, home of the speared lady.

## Act III

My mama was not the first to found a ballet school in  
Culiacan,  
but hers was the only ballet school in Sinaloa to win  
silver on a national level.  
My mama was her school, she was the very walls of  
the building,  
the rosin on our pointe shoes, the uniform we wore  
and she was the stories we danced on the stage.  
The plot for a ballet usually goes something along the  
lines of  
a beautiful young woman, who is loved by all, falls in  
love  
with a charming prince whose love she cannot have  
leading to her tragic end. The ballet school has long  
since shut down—

despite how much a person pours  
herself into her love,  
she cannot force others  
to appreciate  
what they  
see

as  
useless.  
Socorro Astol  
brought love  
for the theater  
to Sinaloa once,  
but ignorance  
and hatred  
are a roach  
that cannot  
killed. Love and  
beauty are useless.  
Fear is the only currency that matters —  
keep a people afraid and you will rule them.  
As tensions rise in El Chapo's state  
so does violence and fear: once upon a time, there  
was a beautiful lady  
and her husband who were naive enough to still be  
out at night.  
Just as the couple were about to get home,  
maliantes stopped them  
with guns, took the car,  
a car which cradled costumes for ballet.  
Newspapers talked of stolen cars that were used to  
burn victims of los narcos,  
it was not hard for my child imagination to conjure the  
image  
of flames consuming the sequence and silks  
along with the human flesh.  
Those of us who live oppressed by fear  
of los narcos must develop in order to survive,  
to see enemies at every step,  
sink into our fear and pain  
and live in that emotion because if you get too  
comfortable, too slow,  
too stupid,  
it could be you burning in that car.



#### *Act IV*

It is its own circle of hell to be so far from your family when you know they are in danger.  
Culiacan, the popular, even humorous way to call the battles of Culiacan,  
bloody shootings in which los narcos take control of our city,  
trapping us like rats, looting us, burning our city, and stripping us  
of every freedom, confining us to our homes for days  
without being able to work or shop for food.  
When I began this poem, there had been three of these violent battles, but  
since September 10, 2024, there has been yet another ongoing battle.  
With every 'us' and 'we' I have written I feel like a liar,  
a joke, I am not there, I am here while my family is there.  
And it is still going.

#### *Act V*

Lucifer came to me for the first time when I was nine,  
his long tongue nearly touched the tip of my nose  
from where he hung from the ceiling lamp.  
It was the age I first found out women could be gay.  
Again he visited when I was twelve then his visits became frequent,  
even when I was awake I feared the influence of Satanas  
I felt him hovering over me when I looked at another girl for too long.



**Gladys Anette Sanchez Padilla** is an English and anthropology student at Arizona State University. She has written and acted in two short films for school projects. She was in the corps de ballet for Proyecto Danza Academia de Ballet and performed at Teatro Socorro Astol and Teatro Pablo de Villavicencio. She is currently a ballet teacher. Gladys loves to write gothic horror, fairy tales, and young adult, but she hopes to be part of the art world in every way possible.



I am a foreigner and a queer, a deeply  
vampiric intersection of identities.  
A villainess - my one true identity, my  
Sinaloa does not claim me,  
nor this country, nor my family once they  
find out,  
but how can I blame them, when even I  
denied myself for the longest time.  
I have betrayed myself more times than  
I can count  
by giving into pressure from male friends  
and relatives  
who wished to hug and touch me in  
ways that have since made me wish  
I could rip my skin off my bones. Worst of  
all I have  
desecrated my body, I have shredded  
parts of me in far too literal a sense.  
But  
this is a love story—  
I have not forgotten the speared lady, the  
half lady in the mirror.  
With all the harm I have brought to my  
being, she demands  
that I heal myself and so I take the lady in  
the mirror by the hand  
and mend what I discarded.  
Skin can be revived. With the right touch.  
Now I refuse to see the clashing  
of my lesbian culture and my Mexican  
culture and my foreign culture

as a villainous thing. They are just shards of who I am, but  
they are not all I am.

Outside of the great violence, there is no telling  
who I can be, but for now I know  
I am not a tragedy.





# ***Living Figments***

art by **Grace Fitzgerald**

This piece is an abstract interpretation of a short story called "The Yellow Wallpaper." Parts of the narrative illustrate hallucinations of eyes and figures embedded within the walls, confined by swirling intricate patterns, the walls possessing a life of their own. The use of oil paint and paper on the canvas shape a textured surface, creating visual complexity.

**Grace Fitzgerald** is a senior in the Herberger School of Art pursuing a BFA in drawing and painting. Her work focuses on life, death, decay, nature, natural elements, and the beauty found in it all.



# VAMPIRES AND QUEER PEOPLE: LIMINAL BEINGS

non-fiction by **Mary Crawford**

Since ancient times, societies have constructed strict systems of identity to maintain order and control. These systems, rooted in colonialism, religious dogmas, and capitalist production, often enforce binary oppositions—such as man and woman, good and evil, normal and deviant—to limit ambiguity and maintain power structures.

Whether it is the gender binary structure, the “nuclear family” archetype, or workplace norms, society is conditioned from infancy to conform to rigid structures. For instance, even entertainment media reinforces these norms by repeatedly centering stories around white, cisgender, heterosexual protagonists, shaping what the audience perceives as standard. Tests like the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT) determine the “right” way to be intelligent. The heteronormative, monogamous relationship is “right,” and anything else is unnatural or strange. Society clings to black and white, right and wrong, and these structures show that the reinforcement of the “one-or-the-other” mindset is both cultural and institutional.

## **But what happens when something—or someone—falls outside of these rigid structures?**

Liminal beings exist in a threshold—neither fully one thing nor another. Vampires fall into this threshold by blurring life and death, human and monster, lover and predator. They resist reproduction, challenge traditional timelines, and disrupt social order, making vampires a reflection of queerness.<sup>1</sup> Similar to vampires, queer identities challenge “neat” categorizations. Nonbinary individuals, for example, defy the gender binary in the same way vampires defy the mortal/immortal distinction.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper, queerness will be used as someone who does not identify as heterosexual and/or cisgender.

And yet, society demonizes the unconforming. Whether metaphorically with vampires or literally with unconventional lifestyles, society assigns monstrous traits to villainize those deemed abnormal in an attempt to assimilate them into the “correct” way of living. By examining the historical demonization of queerness through vampiric metaphors, we can better understand how rigid structures of identity function and shift.

When hiding under the guise of a vampire or queer person, the idea of passing, or inaccurately being assumed to be part of the majority, comes into play. Like queer people, forced to “pass” in hostile environments, vampires often “glamour” humans, hiding their truth to navigate society safely. Consequently, identifying as a vampire or queer person forces the subverting and embracing of social order that lies at the heart of liminality.

The vampire's enduring prominence in popular culture reflects our evolving fascination with transgression, intimacy, and identity. Their timelessness—both literal and symbolic—allows them to adapt to cultural anxieties, whether about intimacy, disease, class, or belonging. In contrast to the “classic” and usually malicious vampires, modern vampire media feature seductive—and even benevolent—beings. Vampires currently represent a genre of romance and are seen as desirable.

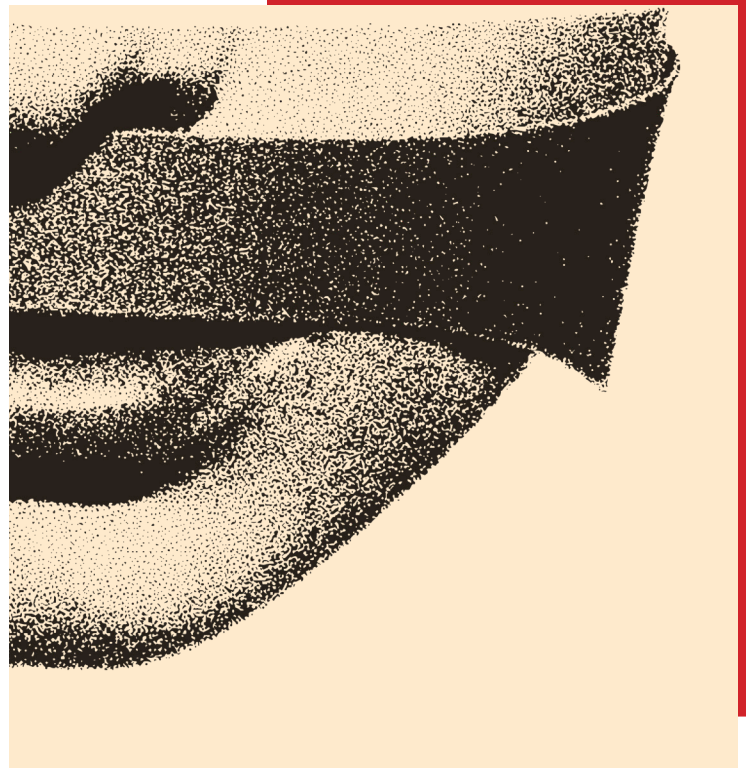
But does this attitude change only apply to vampires? Or perhaps to all liminal beings?

Over the past hundred years, a clear shift can be observed in the attitude towards queer people. Though it is still a struggle, the idea of a person defying social structures has become significantly less villainized in certain parts of the world. We can hope that, over the next decade, queer people follow in the footsteps of the vampire and become an accepted part of society rather than an ostracized concept. Queer people, too, deserve to be seen beyond stereotypes—as complex, joyful, loving

individuals. By embracing the in-between, society may finally move beyond rigid social constructs and into a more inclusive future.

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**Mary Crawford** is a second-year industrial design major. Her interests include vampire research and baking. She is also a referee for the ASU roller derby team.



## IN THE MIDDLE OF *Everywhere*

Art by  
**Sedona Sturgeon**

This oil pastel drawing displays the feeling of walking through life's transitional stages with another person. "In the Middle of Everywhere" captures two people from different worlds finding comfort within one another. As the details of place and identity fade away, the feeling of only their presence is left behind.

**Sedona Sturgeon** is a senior majoring in animation; she has a minor in architecture and a certificate in computer gaming. She was born and raised in Sedona, Arizona, and she enjoys painting, drawing, and reading in her free time.

# RED ROOTS

Poetry by  
**Isa Gonzalez-Cruz**

**You visit your roots  
From behind glass,  
Like relics dusted off  
For an afternoon**

**Gazing up the steps  
Of the pyramid,  
You're a tourist here  
Gawking as anyone else**

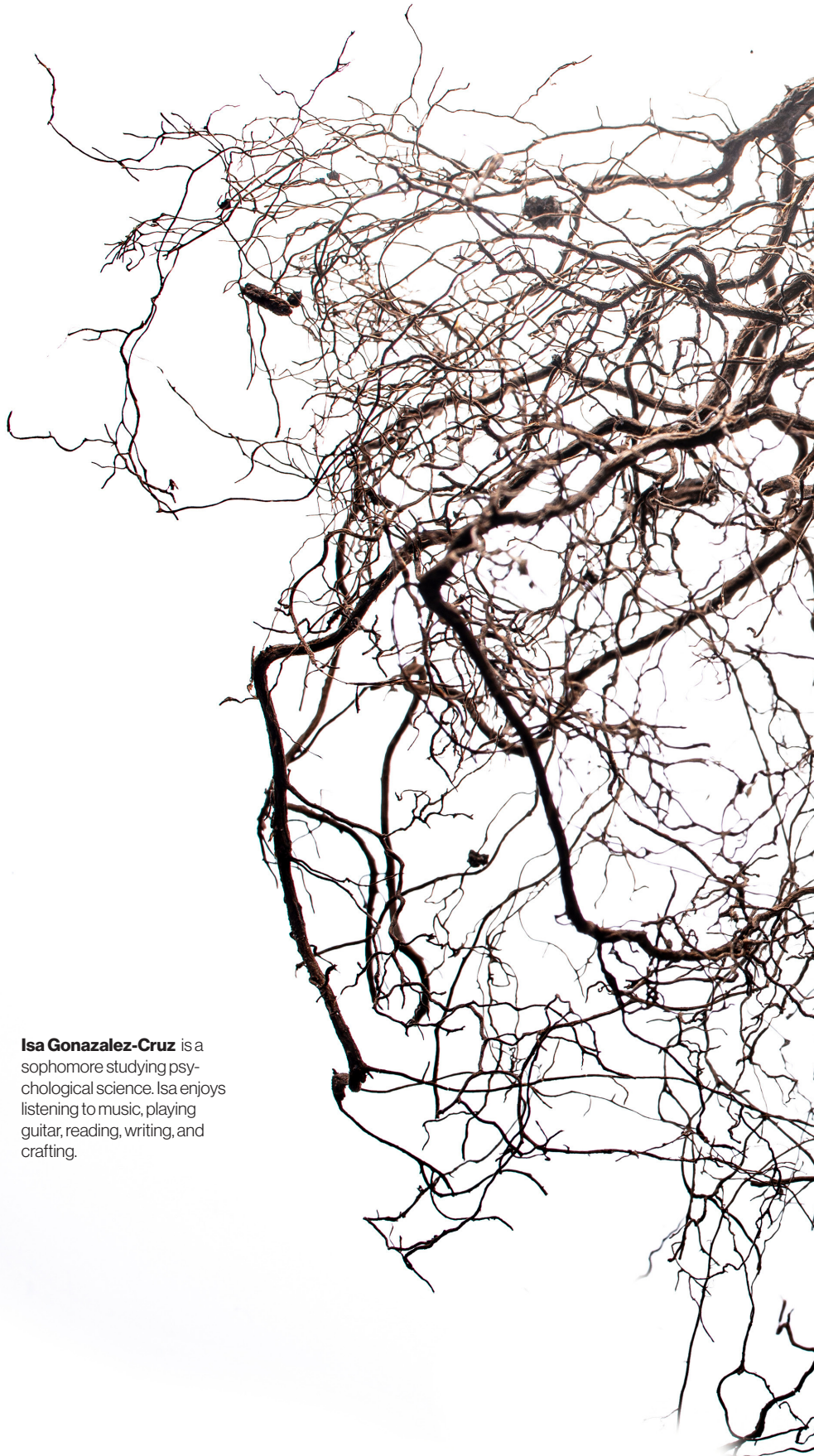
**You have el nopal  
En la frente, pero  
You see your name  
In history books  
Matched with those  
Who burned the cacti**

**Speaking every language  
Except your own  
Stumbling over words  
Your split tongue fails to find  
Words it was never meant to speak**

**You were born from  
Your unwilling mothers  
And your overzealous fathers**

**And how do you live  
Knowing the blood they spilled  
Nourished your tree's red roots?**

**Isa Gonzalez-Cruz** is a sophomore studying psychological science. Isa enjoys listening to music, playing guitar, reading, writing, and crafting.



# *Unhoused Citizenship*

non-fiction by **Mia Bazbaz**

In the past century, a great dilemma has arisen in American culture. The American dream has expanded, deflated, and inspired new imaginations. Since the 1960s, we've been quoting Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream; since 2000, the DREAM Act. Everybody wants to know: what does having American citizenship mean, and why doesn't it mean the same thing for me?

In the conversation of dreams, people have the freedom to ask the following: what is American citizenship? What are its explicit and implicit terms?

Why and how are certain people and groups excluded?

As a second-generation Mexican-American from a multiracial family, I have always been drawn in by overlapping conversations about reframing and reclaiming American citizenship. But when I moved to Tempe, Arizona for college, new challenges to citizenship became evident to me. In an urban landscape, the stark visibility of homelessness activated my sense of justice. I joined a local volunteer group, and over the years, I have leveraged my leadership positions in student organizations to direct more funds and support toward nonprofit initiatives supporting unhoused folks.

The more time I spent getting to know my unhoused neighbors, the more I noticed that the city seemed designed to exclude them from everyday, public life. When shelters are full and people are forced onto the streets, they enter a cycle of continuous displacement.

Staying in one place for too long is considered trespassing. Even public parks and bus stops have hours when they "close" for the night. This is not an accusation against the City of Tempe, but an unfortunate reality of American cities: a concept known as hostile infrastructure. I can't help but wonder—aren't unhoused folks residents too? Where is the sense of responsibility for our neighbors? These questions became the heart of my honors thesis on what I dub *unhoused citizenship*, an insight into how exclusion from public spaces changes the citizenship experience of unhoused folks.

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First, I want to explain what I mean when I reference citizenship rights. In many justice issues, especially housing justice, the groups seeking to claim their rights are legal citizens. But citizenship is more than a legal status. Sociologists trace the concept of citizenship back to the work of T.H. Marshall (1950), for whom citizenship "encompasses national and constitutional rights such as civil and political

rights, as well as embracing social rights, each of which is closely associated with social and political institutions” (Kennett & Marsh, 1999, p. 37).

The framework of civil and social rights suggests that citizenship is more than legal recognition; it is also about access to the social and political institutions that make those rights meaningful. Overall, what I broadly refer to as citizenship rights include:

- **Civil rights:** Protections affirmed by political institutions, such as protection from discrimination.
- **Political rights:** Constitutional rights and legal rights, such as the 1st Amendment right to vote and 4th Amendment protection against unlawful search or seizure.
- **Social rights:** Rights affirmed by local institutions, such as libraries, or global institutions, such as the United Nations. Social rights include food, housing, education, health, cultural life, and public spaces.

These examples target ways in which unhoused people are systematically denied their rights. In my honors project, I discussed a ProPublica investigation titled *Swept Away*, which documented the belongings people lose in “sweeps.” Sweeps occur when law enforcement clears homeless encampments. While many people view encampments as a public health and safety concern, sweeps can have serious ramifications for unhoused people. Often with little to no notice, they lose essential personal items, including Social Security cards and birth certificates. Without their documents, people cannot access social services or apply for employment. Did you know that a person can only receive three replacement Social Security cards in one year or ten cards across a lifetime? So what happens when someone loses the documents that prove their citizenship? At that moment, a person’s legal rights— even their legal status—become tenuous.

These questions parallel discourse about undocumented individuals on U.S. soil, who face similar struggles in accessing social services. Yet mainstream conversations rarely address the rights of unhoused

people. My goal is for more people to recognize the cycle of hardship that unhoused individuals endure. The examples I have listed barely scratch the surface of the exclusion unhoused people are subjected to. When confronting how unhoused people live outside institutional protections, all dimensions of citizenship—legal, civil, and social—come into question.

Confronting the conditions that unhoused individuals live in exposes a paradox in how we understand citizenship. In my thesis, I suggest that citizenship exists along a spectrum, from social citizenship to legal citizenship. Social citizenship has moral and civic dimensions; individuals who participate in institutions that promote social goods may be considered “good citizens” even without legal status. Yet without formal legal recognition, someone can simultaneously be a “good citizen” and a “non-citizen.” At the other end of the spectrum, the figure of the “bad citizen” emerges: people who have been incarcerated, ostracized, or otherwise marginalized are often blamed for their circumstances, revealing a moralistic dimension to citizenship. These “bad citizens” may lack legal protections and, at the same time, face exclusion from public life and civic participation. This paradox shows that citizenship is not just a legal status, but a social and moral construct in which recognition, participation, and rights do not always align.

Many unhoused people fall on the “legal citizen” end of the spectrum, yet they face the paradox of limited citizenship rights. For instance, sweeps threaten the Fourth Amendment’s protection of “persons, houses, papers, and effects” against unreasonable search and seizure. But what happens to people with no houses to protect? I argue that the figure of the “social citizen” (a citizen who enjoys moral and civic recognition) carries an unspoken qualification: this citizen is housed. Housing itself becomes a condition for accessing constitutional rights and public belonging. The privilege of residency grants housed citizens access to parks, libraries, and other public institutions. For example, the housed citizen can enjoy the benefits of residency *without legal residency*,

such as myself, an out-of-state college student who enjoys unlimited access to Tempe's public life. Paradoxically, the housed citizen enjoys public citizenship, while the "street person" is excluded.

This paradox isn't abstract. It's visible on the streets in Tempe. The city creates and enforces ordinances that determine who gets to occupy public space and who is pushed out of it. For instance, the city enforces vendor ordinances against nonprofits that host free events in public parks. They require special event permits with costly and time-consuming application processes. Consider the burden these places have on small organizations. Their limited resources, funded almost entirely by volunteers and sympathetic community members, should go directly toward helping unhoused people access basic needs. Almost daily, advocates take to social media to crowdfund the cost of one night's stay in a motel for individuals and families who come to these events to ask for help. Furthermore, these free events represent a rare public safe space for our unhoused neighbors. They connect people to their communities.

Advocates' posts on social media reveal how law enforcement places unequal burdens on unhoused people in Tempe. They are disproportionately cited or arrested for trespassing in public parks, often under dubious pretenses. Park rangers also have broad discretion to move or confiscate belongings. A notice posted at Moeur Park and shared by @azhugs on Instagram reads: "Items left at this location have been relocated by the City of Tempe for safekeeping ... All persons picking up property must have a photo identification. All property that is soiled, unsanitary, verminous, perishable, or a safety hazard will be discarded." When public safety measures result in trauma, loss, and incarceration for unhoused folks, it raises a crucial question: safety for whom?

Advocates are also caught in the crossfire. ASU Barrett alumnus Austin Davis has been jailed three times for his activism, most recently for filming the arrest of two unhoused individuals in Moeur Park (L'Heureaux, 2025). Together, these policies reveal how political institutions construct a conditional sense of citizenship granted to "good citizens" with homes, while citizens without the means to pay for shelter or storage


face political exclusion as public safety and health work against them instead of for them.

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A conditional model of citizenship inevitably produces "non-citizens" deprived of their political and social rights. But I invite you to imagine a different framework—one where citizenship is not something to be granted or taken away, but something claimed, built, and practiced. What if, instead of viewing unhoused individuals as living "without," as the term homeless implies, we recognized the political life within their daily endurance and survival? This is what I call *unhoused citizenship*: the everyday practices through which people stake their right to exist.

In my thesis, I argue that unhoused citizens reclaim their political rights by transforming ordinary items into political tools for survival. Take, for example, the shopping cart. Traditionally, a cart belongs to a business, not to people. It is intended to carry items from the store to a personal vehicle, and is often marked with signs warning that it locks at the parking lot perimeter. The shopping cart symbolizes economic participation—the idea that goods, like food, belong to businesses and can only be obtained through transactions. In this sense, fundamental rights, such as the right to food, are undermined by anti-poverty and anti-homeless messaging. The warning signs themselves acknowledge that people might seek to carry essential items beyond the store's perimeter. By repurposing the cart for survival, unhoused citizens transform its message and meaning. The shopping cart becomes a tool of personal belonging, security, and storage. In doing so, they reclaim their right to security and enact a subtle, everyday form of resistance. Through this ordinary object, unhoused citizens exert political tension over an anti-poverty landscape, reshaping both the physical and social environment. As small as it may seem, this act represents a meaningful form of social change.

We can support *unhoused citizenship* with actions

The background of the page is a light blue color with abstract red line art. The lines are thick and fluid, creating a sense of movement and complexity. Some lines form loops and swirls, while others are more straight and intersecting. The overall effect is a modern, artistic backdrop for the text.

as small as changing our language and learning about the conditions unhoused folks face locally. Ideally, we can take more active steps to show up for unhoused folks socially and politically. Attending protests and volunteering at community events are impactful ways to help unhoused citizens reinforce their membership in civic life. When financially able, donating to organizations that provide transparent and direct material support helps sustain our unhoused neighbors' survival.

Careful language is another form of political support and social inclusion. I use the term *unhoused* to emphasize that these are people with power and agency who have been displaced by systemic issues such as poverty. I also use the word *neighbors* to push back against political and social exclusion. They are residents of this city, just as much as I am. On top of economic support, social and political inclusion remain equally important for supporting unhoused citizenship.

At a time when restrictive federal policies and regressive public discourse erodes the citizenship rights of many groups, it is important to imagine new ways of reclaiming and practicing citizenship. Although all of us are touched by oppression in some way, many of us benefit from privileges that can be leveraged to support marginalized and disenfranchised communities. Survival is political, and promoting the survival, safety, and full citizenship of others is a vital way to build collective political strength. Ultimately, imagining unhoused citizenship asks us to see our neighbors who have been rendered invisible by political exclusions. I hope that we can affirm their rights, agency, and belonging, while advocating for communities where everyone can participate fully and equally.

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**Mia Bazbaz** is a master's student in justice studies studying the impact of local ordinances on the unhoused community in Tempe, Arizona. She is particularly concerned with the impact of these ordinances around ASU's Tempe campus and Downtown Tempe. Outside of her research and academics, Bazbaz enjoys reading speculative fiction and playing Pokemon.

# MARION



## *Selection from 'Marion'*

Art by **Kara Keene**

This image is from my series "Marion," an ode to my childhood home in Massachusetts, shot with my first digital camera. The sundial reads "Grow Old Along With Me," weathered and surrounded by plants, a reminder that my childhood home lives on even without me there. This is a place that has held me for as long as I can remember, and yet with every passing day it slips further and further away.

**Kara Keene** is a senior in Barrett studying media arts and sciences (design) with a minor in theatre. Her passion for and experience with creative work extends through many forms, including acting, modeling, dance, photography, videography, poetry, painting, and creative direction.

# Unworthy

Poetry by **Jacob Mathew**

**Free thy heart from thy fingers,  
And wretch it from her hands,  
As though love and blood lingers,  
Thy heart is not prepared for the band.**

**Colors so bright fill thy head like vibrant floods,  
And sounds so loud, they thrum from heart to head.  
But thy heart is not prepared for the two bloods—  
Only for thyself has the heart bled.**

**How canst thou proclaim a readied heart,  
When thou seeks to cut thy flesh?  
So now, thou must swiftly depart,  
And make haste, and flee, in a horse-like thresh.**

**Thou promised her wealth, yet no gold lines thy  
pockets. Thou promised her peace, yet no hope lines thy  
heart. Thou sees with blindness, with eyeless sockets—  
Peer open thine eyes, and realize: thou art destined to be  
Lonesomely apart.**

**Thou praised her mind fortified, yet no thoughts line thy head.  
Thou promised her a body for the gods, yet no muscles line thy bones.  
Open thine eyes, and look at the barren road ahead,  
For nothing awaits—thou or I—in this endless angst of  
Broken stones.  
Thou may search in heaven and hell for arms to hold,  
But worry not when love and hope are all but lost.  
For no arms were meant for thou to hold;  
Forever will company remain done and crossed.**

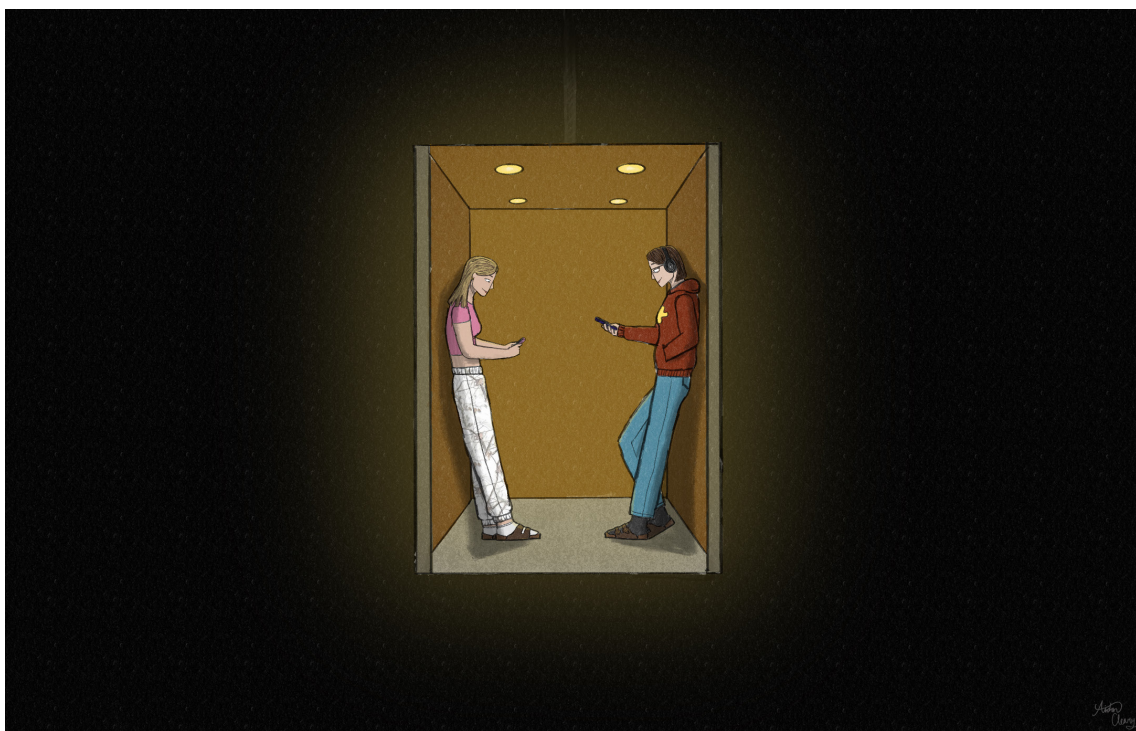
**The white and the gold are naught for this life,  
And her company is not meant to grace thou and I.  
The life of thou and I is of fiery strife,  
One which we will bear, till our eyes bleed and die.**

**My friend,  
My beloved—  
We die alone and apart,  
Forever stricken with scarlet  
And unworthy**

**Hearts.**

**Jacob Mathew** is a freshman majoring in English literature. He is an aspiring writer and professor. He loves Dungeons and Dragons, Warhammer 40k, and all manners of classic literature. His secret dream is to have a piece immortalized in the black and white of a Penguin Classic.

# UNWORTHY



## Lifts in the Night

by **Aidan Cleary**

This piece reflects a moment in my dorm elevator. I was crossing paths with a girl whom I'd never met, but she could've been my sister. We were an odd inverse, and we went our separate ways, but the strange feeling I had that night stayed with me. This piece represents the odd warmth of momentary connections with strangers; the transitory, impermanent state of elevators; and how, sometimes, we need only to look up to find people in the unknown faces around us.

**Aidan Cleary** is a freshman majoring in English literature.

With a strong passion for creativity, Aidan began her art journey in middle school, where her primary form of expression was drawing. More recently, she has begun exploring the world of digital art. In her free time, she loves horror films and overanalyzing her favorite shows.

# blink

by Adarshini Pattnaik

**Adarshini Pattnaik** is a senior in Barrett, graduating this semester with a major in biomedical sciences and a certificate in computational life sciences. In her free time, she enjoys the arts, such as reading, creative writing, and binge-watching movies and television. She also loves spending time with her friends and family.

Have you ever tried not blinking?

It's amazing the details the pupil can capture in a second,  
the small gust of wind fluttering through leaves,  
the little girl who tripped over the curb,  
the twitching mouth of a man trying desperately to  
hold in his laughter at his friend's joke.

Eyelids droop downwards, and I catch my eyes closing again.  
A brief darkness. A short end. A slate wiped clean.  
Light peers through the blinds of my eyelashes as they fly open,  
and the world returns.

Sometimes it feels like we blink through life—

blink

A parent patting your head as a toddler.

blink

Moonlight shining down the night before Christmas.

blink

The smiles of friends packed into a car for prom.

blink

Walking through the door to your first class of the semester. blink

blink

blink

blink—

Change after change,  
moment after moment,  
separated by the blinks of mundane tasks.  
Soon enough, so many blinks have passed  
that you realize perhaps the blinks are where we must live,  
in the dirt, in the mud, in the journey between  
each here and there.



## THE LIFE OF A DAYDREAMER

When I hear the word "liminal," I think of the feeling of familiarity that comes from being in strange, dream-like places. This piece is an attempt to capture that feeling of being between a dream and reality.

**Mary Crawford** is a second-year industrial design major. Her interests include vampire research and baking. She is also a referee for the ASU roller derby team.

art by **Mary Crawford**

# THE WORLD IS YOUR OYSTER ICE CREAM



by **Millicent Yurong**

"What flavor are you going to get?" Lulu asked.

Georgia shrugged, studying the vast array of ice creams before her. More than two dozen flavors, each vibrantly colored and differently textured, were displayed in tins along the expansive counter of Ice Cream Sundays. Most flavors seemed appealing — mango, cake batter, green tea — while others — bacon, beer, oyster — showcased the shop's more unique flair.

"Ooh, can I try the strawberry cheesecake one?" Lulu asked, a huge grin spreading across her face as the bored twenty-something employee handed her a sample spoon with a tiny scoop of white and pink ice cream.

"That's your second sample today, so unfortunately I can't offer you any more," the worker said emotionlessly, glancing down at their watch.

Lulu tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. "Aw, I know. I just want to

taste all the temporary flavors here while I have the chance!"

Georgia smiled. Lulu adored sweet treats, and Ice Cream Sundays was her favorite ice cream parlor. Lulu used to go for ice cream every week or two with her older sister, but now that Olive was a freshman at the distant University of Virginia, Georgia was doing her best to fill in as Lulu's ice cream accomplice — at least until Lulu followed her sister to their shared dream school. In their seven months as high school seniors, Georgia and Lulu had visited the parlor ten times. Everything was twenty percent off on Sunday afternoons.

Having exhausted her free samples, Lulu ordered a large cup with two scoops, and Georgia found herself in front of the register without her friend to shield her.

"What can I get you?" the employee asked.

Georgia scanned the lineup before her, but a fog filled her mind. Should she get vanilla or chocolate? Cookie dough or cotton candy? Yam or prickly pear? Maybe she could order two scoops? But she wasn't very hungry and didn't want to waste money on food she wouldn't eat.

"Do you need another minute to decide?" The employee had an eyebrow raised and a hand on their hip. Their boredom was quickly tipping toward irritation.



Georgia shook her head. "No, no, I'm good. I'll take a small. One scoop of..." She surveyed the expanse of flavors one more time, but in the end, she resigned herself to the one option she knew she could trust: "One scoop of vanilla, please."

By the time Georgia had paid, Lulu had already gathered a short stack of napkins and reserved a small table in the corner of the parlor.

"Thanks for grabbing napkins," Georgia said, sliding into the seat across from her friend.

Lulu nodded, leaning forward to examine Georgia's selection. "What flavor did you get?"

Georgia sighed. "Guess."

Lulu cocked her head to the side. "It's ok to have a favorite."

Georgia shrugged. "Yeah, but I wish that I had been more adventurous and tried one of those other flavors."

"That's what the free samples are for!" Lulu said, grinning. "Mostly I get them so I don't miss out on temporary flavors, but I also do it to stall for time before settling on my final order."

"And what was your order this time?"

Lulu pushed her cup toward Georgia. "This one's strawberry cheesecake," she said, using her plastic spoon to indicate the half-eaten white-and-

pink scoop. "And the one here is oyster."

Georgia felt her nose wrinkle. The oyster ice cream scoop looked similar to vanilla, plus a slight tan-colored tint. "What does it taste like?"

Lulu swallowed another bite. "It's more of a savory flavor. To be honest, I can't tell if I like it. I don't think I'd order it again, especially not with the strawberry cheesecake, because the flavors are weird together. But it's nice that I can now say I've tried it!"

"I admire that about you," Georgia said softly.

Lulu's eyebrows furrowed. "That I have interesting culinary opinions?"

Georgia shook her head. "That you're just willing to try things, even if they might not turn out perfect in the end." She impaled her vanilla ice cream with her spoon and took her first bite. It was the same as usual: good but boring.

"What's this all about, Georgia?" A note of concern crept into Lulu's voice.

Georgia placed her head in her hands. "Ugh. Sorry, I didn't mean to get like this again."

"It's all right." Lulu reached a cold hand across the table to touch Georgia's arm. "You can talk about it if you think it would help."

Georgia turned her head to gaze out the window, where a pigeon foraged for food among snack wrappers that had collected around the storm drain.

"It's just been really stressful with college decisions coming out soon and senior year being more than halfway over. I've been on like seven college tours in the past year, I applied to eighteen schools, and I've heard back from eight of them. But nothing I do brings me any closer to a decision." Georgia let her hands fall into her lap. "Rejection letters will do some of the deciding for me, obviously, but I only have a few short months to decide where I'm going to spend the next four years of my life."

She wasn't like Lulu. She wasn't the girl who had toured the University of Virginia with her older sister and had returned with a gaudy UVA scarf and the glow of someone who knew exactly what her future held.

As a freshman, Georgia had been thrilled at the prospect of having so many options for her future. She had been confident that by senior year, she'd know exactly what she wanted to do with her

life. Now Georgia was staring the infinite possibilities in the face, and she'd never been less sure of herself. At this point, it felt like she was running out the clock, stuffing her brain with copious college information as she waited for high school to end.

"I know I'm fortunate that I can afford a good education, but there are just too many choices, and I have no idea what I want to do with my life!"

The shop seemed to grow quieter. A few people snuck curious glances at her, but they quickly turned back to their own groups. Georgia felt her cheeks warm.

"You know," started Lulu, swallowing another spoonful of strawberry cheesecake ice cream, "I've heard it said that people are happiest when they choose from a more limited set of options. There are fewer options that they didn't choose, and fewer possible opportunities to miss out on. The trade-off doesn't seem as high."

"The paradox of choice," Georgia whispered knowingly.

"Exactly," Lulu said. "People are less satisfied when they believe better choices are out there. Just look at dating apps and ice cream shops that offer too many flavors."

Georgia forced a laugh. "I guess so. But if I can't make one tiny choice like that, then how am I supposed to make such a huge decision about my future? I can't just ask for free samples on this one. The college tours were basically the samples."

Lulu shrugged. "My parents always told me that you have to try something multiple times before you know if you like it or not. Granted, that may just have been to get us to finish all of whatever new food was on our plates, but still." She took another bite and began waving her spoon absentmindedly. "I'm not necessarily saying the solution would be to seek out even more information on the colleges. Maybe go with an option you can live with for at least a year? You're not binding your soul to one college for all eternity! You can order a different flavor each time you come to the ice cream shop, and you can transfer to a different university if you hate the first one. You can always go somewhere else for grad school. We've got a lot of time ahead of us, you know?" She promptly

scooped the last of her oyster ice cream into her mouth.

Georgia managed a weak smile, thankful for the wisdom her friend kept tucked away for moments like these. "I guess you're right. Just take it one step at a time."

"Exactly!" Having devoured the entirety of her two scoops, Lulu wiped her mouth with a napkin. "How about this for a first step: We come back here next month, and we both pick out flavors for the other person to sample?"

"Deal. But I think you might be surprised at how good the vanilla is here."

Lulu shook her head. "Oh Georgia, I think we're going to be exploring worlds beyond the mundane vanilla! The world is our oyster! But you'd better hope they don't have that flavor in a few weeks because the aftertaste isn't great." She swallowed and wrinkled her nose. "Yeah, I left my water in the car, and I kind of want it now. Almost done eating?"

Georgia smiled and began shoveling the remainder of her ice cream into her mouth. It tasted like everyday life: waking up and driving to school, returning home and doing homework, showering, eating a quick dinner, going to bed, repeat, repeat, repeat. She took her final bite.

"All

done," she told Lulu. They dropped their empty ice cream cups into a trash can and headed toward Lulu's car. Infinity was out there, waiting for them.

**Millicent Yurong** is a senior majoring in Sustainability, English, and Biological Sciences. In her rare free time, she enjoys reading books and watching movies that were made for much younger people.



# walk DOWN MEMORY LANE

Art by **Emily Houlihan**

My piece, "Walk Down Memory Lane," represents my transitions through different memories and stages of life. Whether it be through art, music, or another creative medium, I find true inspiration by unlocking doors into my past that connect with my present.

**Emily Houlihan** is a senior in Barrett, The Honors College at Arizona State University. She is pursuing a bachelor's degree in art studies with a minor in art history. Emily is an Arizona-based visual artist who uses her skills in painting, drawing, and 3D mediums to express her feelings and ideas.



# IN THE SPACE BETWEEN

Non-fiction by **Ella Bonnie**

In the summer of 2022, just before starting my freshman year at ASU, I had the incredible opportunity to go on a forty-five-day backpacking trip—an ‘Alaskan’—through Gates of the Arctic National Park in Alaska. This trip was run through Camp Manito-wish YMCA, an outdoor tripping camp based in Boulder Junction, Wisconsin. I had been attending the camp since I was ten years old. Unlike a traditional overnight camp, Camp Manito-wish combines an outdoor adventure trip, known as “trail,” with classic summer camp activities.

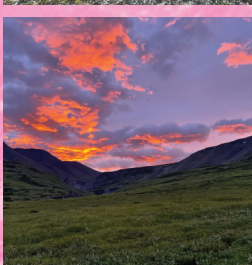
Growing up, I would go to Camp for two weeks, where I went on “trail” during that session. I started with a three-day canoe trip when I was ten, progressed into longer trips as I got older, and ended with a seven-day backpacking trip when I was fourteen. At Manito-wish, you age out of the summer camp portion in your mid-teens and then have the opportunity to enter the trail-oriented outpost program. When I was fifteen, I started in the outpost program, where I spent two weeks backpacking in Isle Royale National Park (IR), an island located in the middle of Lake Superior in Michigan. After skipping a year due to the pandemic, I went on a ‘Western’ in

2021, a twenty-five-day backpacking trip through the Wind River mountain range in Wyoming. To complete Manito-wish’s outpost program, I went on my ‘Alaskan’ in 2022, concluding my time as a participant in the program.

Both my IR trip and my ‘Western’ were solo-led, while my ‘Alaskan’ was co-led. The leaders vary in age depending on the length of the trip, but most of them are in their mid-twenties. All of the participants on these trips were girls around my age, and there were a total of five to seven people per trip, including the leaders. For the purpose of my ‘Alaskan,’ there were six of us: two leaders and four participants. Two of us were entering our freshman year of college, and the other two were going into their senior year of high school.

During an outpost trip, you are in the backcountry for a long time. When you are a kid, you don’t really think about how long you are gone on the shorter in-camp trips. However, as you enter the outpost program, you realize that being in the backcountry for that long is a big deal. On outpost trips, you do not have any connection to the outside

**Ella Bonnie** is a senior studying sports business. She is originally from Green Bay, Wisconsin. She works as a manager for Sun Devil Lacrosse and has had the opportunity to intern for Real Madrid and other sports agencies in Spain this past summer. Outside of school, she loves to travel, hike, and lead outdoor canoeing and backpacking trips for kids during the summer.



world apart from a Garmin In-Reach device and a satellite phone. A Garmin In-Reach device allows you to text through satellite messaging, look at topographic maps, and send coordinates; a satellite phone allows you to make calls.

For some context, Gates of the Arctic National Park is located above the Arctic Circle near Coldfoot, Alaska, west of the Dalton Highway. It is the least-visited national park in the U.S. and the hardest to access. There are only two ways to enter the park: by plane or on foot. There aren't any trails or roads in the park—just open land and wilderness.

To recap, my 'Alaskan' was a forty-five-day remote backpacking trip in Gates of the Arctic National Park with little to no contact with the outside world. My group and I got to hike through the beautiful mountains and rivers with seventy-five-pound backpacks, experiencing nothing but pure joy as we hiked through the Alaskan wilderness.

On backcountry trips, there are certain things you do that are unusual in the frontcountry. One, I didn't shower for forty-five days. Two, you go to the bathroom in the wilderness (yes, you poop in a hole). And three, you have a lot of time to think and reflect on your life. For me, this was one of the most important and beneficial parts of the trip. It was a time in my life when I was transitioning from high school to college, moving away from home, working on improving my mental health, and navigating my mom's traumatic brain injury.

Alaska and the backcountry taught me to be resilient and grateful. Most importantly, it taught me to appreciate the little things in life. In the frontcountry, life moves quickly, making it hard to find a moment to smile and appreciate the little things in life. Appreciating the little things in the backcountry has helped me enjoy my typical routine at a slower pace. Most importantly, it has helped me to stay positive when things get hard. The life skills I have learned in the backcountry have shaped me into the person I am today. I would not be the person I am without the backcountry and Alaska.

Once I realized that my 'Alaskan' was coming to an end, I knew that I would struggle with the transition back to the frontcountry. Yes, I was ecstatic to see my family and friends, but when was I ever going to be back in Alaska? Going into my trip, I knew that I would have a quick transition, but the transition itself was almost harder than the backpacking. My group and I were picked up from Gates of the Arctic on August 8th, and we flew back to Manito-wish on August 10th. From there, my mom and I left Camp and flew back to Arizona, where I moved into ASU less than twelve hours later. In the span of five days, I went from hiking in the Alaskan wilderness with three of my closest friends to navigating a campus with over fifty thousand strangers. Long story short, it was an extreme culture shock for me.

I had transitioned from the backcountry to the frontcountry before, but nothing was as difficult as the period after my 'Alaskan'. Why was I even here? I had to process what had just happened. Had I really just spent forty-five days backpacking in Alaska? No one at ASU had any comprehension of it. Yes, I was able to share stories with others, but it was difficult for people to understand what I went through because it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I felt trapped in my own mind, only able to find relief by looking through pictures and talking to my tripmates. We all went back to our own lives. Living in four different states with four different time zones made that quite difficult. I struggled to eat, to make friends, to find something to distract myself, and to find my purpose at ASU. The backcountry was where I belonged, and I was just a college freshman trapped in the confusing and fast-paced frontcountry that was Arizona State University.

Eventually, I did find my path here at ASU. It took me a little over a month to fully transition back into the frontcountry after my 'Alaskan.' I was able to rediscover things I loved,

make friends, actually talk to my roommate, and process my experiences. However, the thing that helped me the most was to share my experiences with others. I made a video about my 'Alaskan,' which helped people understand my joy and love for the backcountry.

A lot of people have asked me, "Would you ever do it again, even though the transition was so hard?" I would do it in a heartbeat. A part of me will always be connected to Alaska, and the girl I know today was built through that trip. The backcountry has my heart, and now I've had the opportunity to lead trips, giving back the opportunity that I once had to today's campers. Thank you, Alaska, Camp Manito-wish, and the backcountry for giving me the qualities, lessons, and experiences that make me who I am today.

Excerpt from my Alaskan journal on our Solo Day\*.

\*Solo day: My group and I stayed at the same campsite for two nights in a row, separating from each other during the day. During this time, we would reflect and enjoy a day to ourselves. On long backcountry trips, this is quite common among groups.

SOLO DAY-EXPO ALASKAN: Day 37, August 2nd

"Why do we do it? Why do we choose to spend our summers away, in the wilderness, exploring, adventuring, and discovering? Why do we willingly carry everything we need to survive on our backs? We are brave, we are strong. The land is unremarkably beautiful and ever-changing. Yes, there will be hard moments, when you're homesick, or cold, or hurt, but those are the moments that strengthen you. You can do it. And for every hard moment, there are one thousand good ones. Laughing in the tent. Summiting a hard pass. Letting the sun warm you up. So, why do we do it? Why are we here? Because this is where we choose to be. Where you are happy and joyful and free. Because this is where you are meant to be."



# Wings of Change



Photography by **Sara Bojczuk**

My photography piece captures the transitions between different stages of life. As a child, I remember catching butterflies and caterpillars, always taking a second to admire their beauty. How does something so simple develop into something so beautiful and complex? In this work, I hope to emphasize transformation and highlight the way organisms continuously adapt and change in the world around us.

**Sara Bojczuk** is a senior majoring in neuroscience and minoring in forensic science on a pre-med track. In her free time, she enjoys crocheting, thrifting, watching true crime documentaries, hanging out with her friends, and collecting anything dinosaur or duck-related.

# FIELD OF POPPIES AT SUNSET



Art by  
**Emily Houlihan**

**Emily Houlihan** is a senior in Barrett, The Honors College at Arizona State University. She is pursuing a bachelor's degree in art studies with a minor in art history. Emily is an Arizona-based visual artist who uses her skills in painting, drawing, and 3D mediums to express her feelings and ideas.

My painting, "Field of Poppies at Sunset," represents the hope that I feel whenever I imagine a field of poppies at my darkest times. As a flower of hope, poppies guide me to a comforting place at the threshold of the present and the future. In my haven between worlds, anything

is possible. When I don't know where to turn, the figments of my imagination come to life and keep me company. My painting reminds me that no matter how I am feeling, hope lives in a field of poppies, and the sun will set on today and rise on a brighter tomorrow.

# FOEVER A *Muse*

Poetry by **Jacob Mathew**

You're perfect.  
Perfect.  
Every feature,  
Every characteristic,  
Every detail.

The way the sun bends around you  
Would make any man weak.

The way your nose crinkles when you speak  
Would drive anyone to insanity.

The way you tilt your head when you think, turning your  
gaze towards the night sky, it's enthralling, stimulating

The way you snort when you laugh—it's bewitching.  
It makes me believe in the impossible,  
The unachievable.

You inspire me to labor, to craft  
Words that attempt to capture your beauty,  
Phrases to encase your splendor,  
Stanzas to immortalize your radiance.

But no word could capture your beauty.  
No phrase can encase your splendor. No stanza,  
expression, or snippet could secure your radiance.

Because even though I love the way you walk,  
Which ignites the fires in my heart,

Even though I love the way you smile,  
Burning brighter than a thousand suns,

Even though I love everything about you—I don't love you.

I don't long for you.  
I don't crave you.  
I don't covet you.

I long for the ache,  
That's what I crave,  
That's what I covet

The way your blood inspires my ink.  
The way you make my mind race.  
The way you liberate my visions.

Because, you were never mine to hold,  
But mine to capture,  
Forever confined to the pages of a tome.

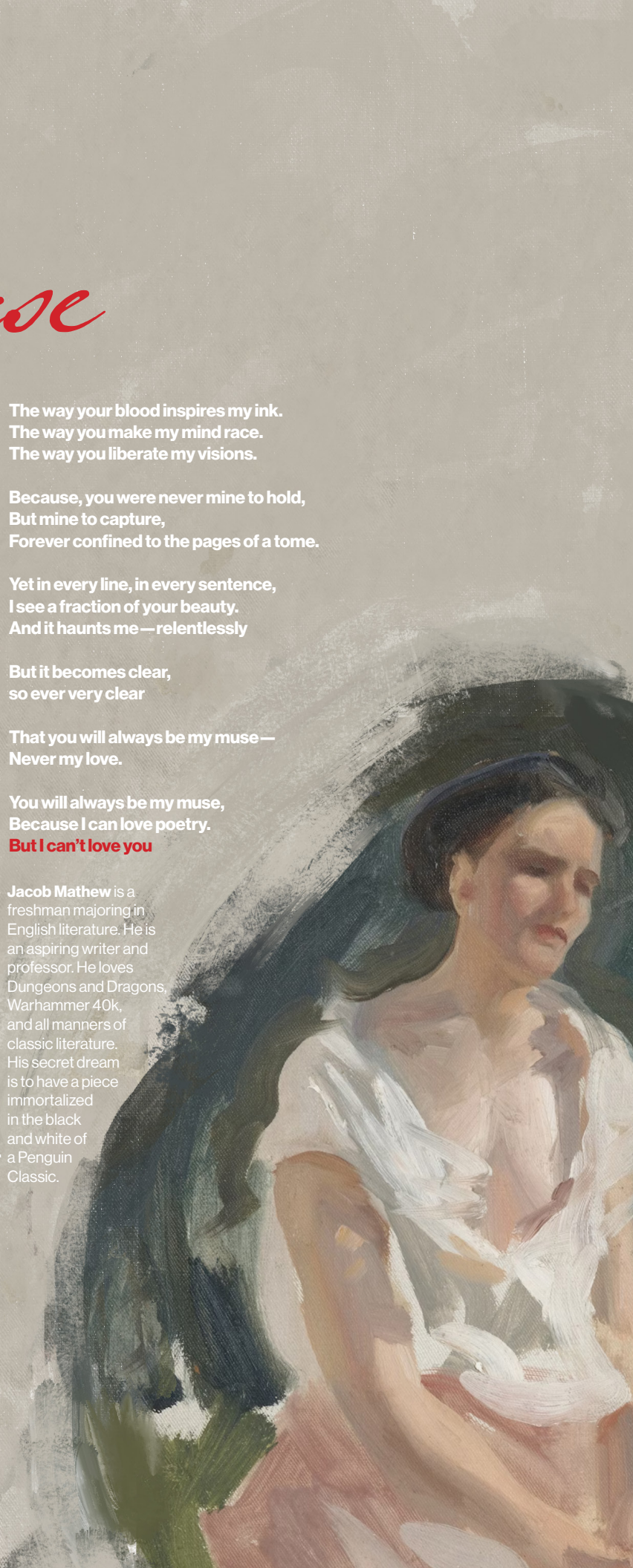
Yet in every line, in every sentence,  
I see a fraction of your beauty.  
And it haunts me—relentlessly

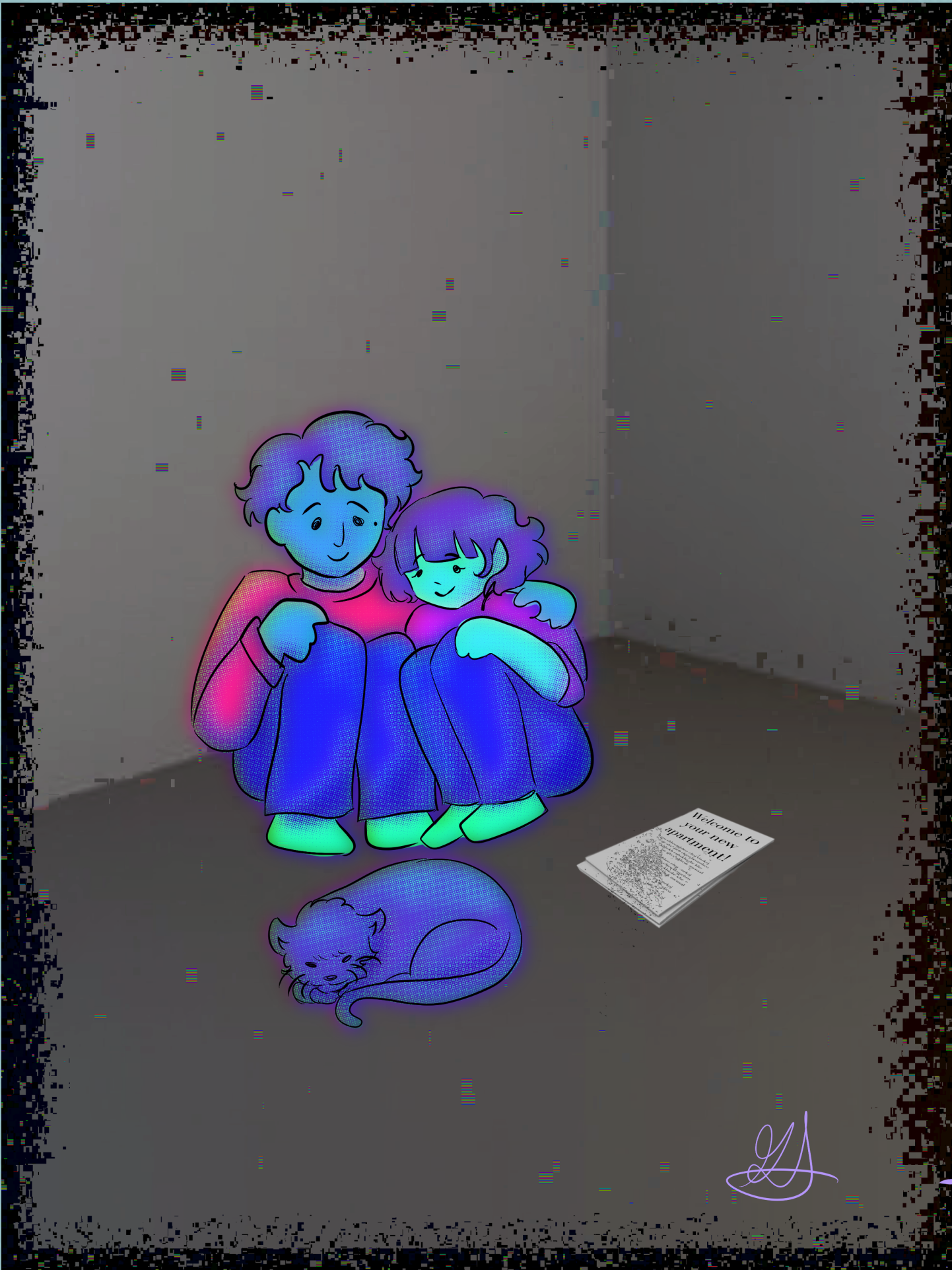
But it becomes clear,  
so ever very clear

That you will always be my muse—  
Never my love.

You will always be my muse,  
Because I can love poetry.  
**But I can't love you**

**Jacob Mathew** is a freshman majoring in English literature. He is an aspiring writer and professor. He loves Dungeons and Dragons, Warhammer 40k, and all manners of classic literature. His secret dream is to have a piece immortalized in the black and white of a Penguin Classic.





# HAPPY ALMOST *Home*

**Gwen Selfridge** is a sophomore at ASU majoring in media arts & sciences (graphic information technology). She loves to draw original characters, sing songs she's written, and rollerblade around her neighborhood. She's constantly trying to learn new ways to express herself like photography, sculpting, or collages. When she's not drawing or singing, she's probably collecting trinkets or playing with her cat.

Art by **Gwen Selfridge**

This piece is a portrayal of when my boyfriend and I first moved out of our old houses and into an apartment together. We couldn't move all of our stuff in right away, so there were a few days where we would just sit in our apartment with no furniture and just relish in the fact that we had our own place. I added in my cat, Clyde, because he is my muse, but he didn't move in until we had furniture. It was a strange in-between of knowing this was my new living space even though I wasn't able to sleep there yet. I drew this to portray the liminal space between having a new place and having a new home.

# Threshold of Becoming

poetry by Sofie Wycklendt

He came for everything good in me—  
my loving family,  
the job where I was seen and appreciated.  
He despised my friends, jealous of the support they gave,  
and every small and sacred thing that ever brought me joy  
was slipping from my hands before I knew it was gone.  
He bent my world into a suffocating life—one I could no longer recognize as my own.  
He believed that if he stripped these pieces from my life,  
they would vanish altogether.  
But when the taking was done,  
all that remained was his possessiveness and his control.  
Yes, I can trust again. Not him—  
but I can trust in daily life.  
I can trust any breath that is not ruled by fear.  
I can rebuild the bonds he tried to sabotage.

He can never take away the best parts of me—  
the parts I will no longer allow to be silenced.  
I carried the weight of his ownership too long and too deeply,  
yet even that burden revealed my strength—  
that I am both wounded and becoming whole,  
holding what was in one hand,  
and what will be in the other.

I will let him face the emptiness of his control.  
I will let him fade into the power he once worshiped.  
For the reins of my life are mine again,  
and no hand but my own will close around them.

I rise from this threshold between what was and what is,  
no longer eclipsed by his shadow.  
His presence fades with the past I have shed,  
and the weight of his control lifts,  
leaving me open to the light ahead.

I became someone I could hardly recognize —  
a version of myself I was not proud to carry.  
And though I still grieve the part of me that must heal from this,  
I am also more alive, more open,  
more profoundly human in reclaiming my power than ever before.  
This liminality is the threshold  
where my old life ends  
and the new one claws its way into the light.  
It is the space between silence and voice,  
between who I was and who I am still becoming.  
It is the pause where grief and hope share the same breath,  
where I am both undone and remade.

Here I can learn that I can love both fragilely and fiercely.  
I can trust this imperfect world,  
even when innocence is long gone.  
I can sharpen myself both inside and out  
for the dangers that do exist.  
But I will heal.  
I will live my life  
free from suffocation and beyond surveillance.  
In this liminal light,  
I will fall back in love  
with a life that no one can ever kill.

**Sofie Wycklendt** is currently a senior majoring in social and behavioral sciences. She is a student at Barrett, The Honors College, and choosing to attend ASU has been one of the most transformative experiences of her life. The journey that brought her here has shaped who she is today, and through her writing, Sofie hopes to offer support and connection to others navigating their own challenges.

**Sara Bojczuk | Co-Editor-in-Chief**

Sara is majoring in neuroscience and minoring in forensic science on a pre-medicine track. In her free time, she enjoys crocheting, thrifting, watching true crime documentaries, and hanging out with her friends.



**Adarshani Pattnaik | Copy Intern**

Adarshani is a biomedical sciences major, and she enjoys spending time with her friends and family, as well as reading or binge watching TV in her free time. One of her hobbies is writing, which is something that she finds very therapeutic and fun.



**Mary Crawford | Design Editor**

Mary enjoys volunteering with dogs and reading classics.

# MEET THE

**Aaron Walker | Copy Editor  
& Managing Editor**

Aaron is studying earth and environmental science. In his free time, he enjoys playing the oboe and watching films. You can find him listening to Conan Gray and Chappell Roan.



**Tiana Nguyen | Design Editor**

Tiana is studying computer science and hoping to get a minor in animation. You can find her either playing video games with her friends, drawing, or consuming media.

**Elise Barlow | Head of Design**

Elise is a first generation student majoring in business. She is Navajo and grew up in Arizona. She enjoys designing the magazine with the design team to make something absolutely beautiful!



**Anaís Fernandez | Co-Editor-in-Chief**

Anaís is majoring in English creative writing with a concentration in poetry, and minoring in Spanish. She enjoys reading, cooking, and hanging out with dogs.



# Team



**Gwendolyn Selfridge | Social Media Manager**

Gwen is currently majoring in media arts & sciences (graphic information technology). Gwen loves all things art including drawing, theatre, and music. She is currently in a duo band where she plays keys and sings.



**Vera Zuch | Literary Editor**

Vera is a neuroscience major who loves anything nature, food, and music related.



**Claire Bixby | Features Editor**

Claire is currently studying English (literature) with a minor in justice studies. In her free time, she enjoys reading, writing, doing yoga, and art.

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