

Aesthetic Statement for *Bread & Circuses*

For full transparency, this story was a big inside joke. Julian is a real person, and I have plans to visit him sometime after graduation after considering your advice to live outside the country for a while. My peer reviews saying “Ian seems like a younger Julian” (while a great realization to fit in the revised piece) also gave me good reason to reflect on who I am. A lot of my stories are taken at least partly from real events, and this was an experiment to take that to the extreme. A lot of the problems with this strategy that I’ve observed in my own and others’ pieces from similar influence is that truth is indeed stranger than fiction. Things that can exist as consistent in real life may not—and usually *do* not—translate well to a narrative. This was the source of the inconsistent characterization that most of the reviews commented on. Lots of details make sense in real life where there’s ample backstory and context, but when distilling that into a short piece there’s a lot that has to be sutured during translation. I guess the “goal” I was trying to achieve with this is capturing the ridiculous essence of Julian’s character and share it with others, but something I neglected during the first draft is that the most potent characterization is a response to events. I focused too hard on recreating our interactions true-to-form instead of true-to-story. Funny thing is I was actively trying to avoid making this mistake, but it’s a difficult balance to strike. Killing your darlings is much more difficult when your darlings are facts. As for the ending, I think I miscommunicated in the dialog that the whole love-doll thing was a new, experimental thought of Julian’s and not something he had believed previously, to represent some subtle turn of character. It wasn’t the best way to end things, and I executed it poorly, but no longer trying to honor the “real” people these characters represent gives you much more freedom. I keep getting hung up on trying to make the dialog and interactions fun but neglecting the weight of the story. Even now after I’ve (I think) made the “action” more involved and the turn in the characters a bit less subtle (though I think it’s still too subtle) I still can’t shake that this is still mostly a situation than a story. I think I’m too attached to preserving the original vision that I need to let this story sit for a while so I become less attached to what I want it to be and can meld it into what it *can* and *should* be. What exactly that *is* is a mystery to me as of the time of writing this. Hopefully we’ll see.