



K e n n i n g s

Artistic & Literary Journal

Edition 14

2022-2023

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2023

Editorial

Kenning: a descriptive phrase used in place of the ordinary name for something, usually found in the poetry of Old Germanic languages, but still very much alive in our own vernacular.

Examples include:

“sea-farer” for ship

“whale road” for sea

“tree-hugger” for environmentalist

Produced by Hanover College students, *Kenning's Literary and Artistic Journal* features art, photography, poetry, and prose from both inside and outside the Hanover College Community submissions. All submissions are considered for publication, and selection is made by blind voting of the editorial staff.

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Kenning's Artistic and Literary Journal 2022-2023

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“First Glance At Lily pads”

Anjolaoluwa Favour Oyebadejo '24

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Content Warning

Kennings collects submissions via open call. As we have no control over what gets submitted to us, there is potential for topics and themes that may be triggering or sensitive to individuals.

We don't approve of the censorship of creative expression and will never do so.

However, *Kennings* does not accept any work that is racist, homophobic, transphobic, xenophobic, or in any way is deemed as exclusionary or prejudiced. We also do not accept overly graphic, sexual, or strong language.

Work that does not follow our guidelines is always deleted and left unread.

Works that have a trigger warning will be marked with : 

Letter from the Editors

Hello you wonderful readers!

My name is Chloe Baker, and I am the Co-Editor-in-Chief this year. I have been on this staff for the past four years of my college career! And watching it grow as I have grown has been such a blessing in my life. I am very thankful that you picked up this copy of *Kennings*! You are looking at a wonderful piece of art, compiled with lots of sweat and tears, but also a lot of love. To our wonderful staff, I'm thankful you let Meredith and I lead you into battle, to bring this beautiful publication to real life. We are grateful to all the writers, both all over Hanover College's campus and all over the rest of the country, that let us review and publish your works of art. We are grateful you entrusted us with bringing your words – your pieces of art – to life. We are grateful your vulnerability was taken as a tool to bring art into this life, especially into this publication of *Kennings*. Thank you for allowing me to grow with this publication, and I'm thankful to have grown as a writer and as an editor with this wonderful group. I'm also thankful for my partner in crime through this publication, Meredith.

Hello all, I am Meredith, the other Co-Editor-in-Chief. I work beside Chloe and all of our fantastic staff to help make *Kennings* into the book that you see here today. Thank you to everyone: our dedicated staff, our talented contributors, and our dedicated readers. You all, in some way or another, have helped make *Kennings* what it is today and will help us shape it into what it will be in the future.

Thank you all! We both appreciate everyone who helped make this happen.

Enjoy this edition of *Kennings* 2023!

Chloe Baker
Co-Editor-in-Chief '23

Meredith Shepherd
Co-Editor-in-Chief '24

First Glance At Lily pads

Anjolaoluwa Favour Oyebadejo '24



Kennings Cover Photo Contest

1st Place: “First Glance at Lily pads” by Anjolaoluwa Favour Oyebadejo '24

Artist's Statement:

This picture depicts lily pads on the surface of a lake. It depicts the chemistry of life and shows why something will float and won't sink.

Judges' Statement:

1st Judge's Statement: Although this picture is dark, I am drawn to the texture of the leaves, how they overlap, the various muted shades of greens, yellows, reds, blues, and browns. I am also drawn to how the leaves capture the light coming from the upper left as well as the shadows made from that light.

2nd Judge's Statement: The composition, exposure, and colors displayed in this photo all pair very nicely. Lighting conditions and time of day make a significant impact on a photo, and the photographer has very clearly taken that into consideration with this photo. By shooting in optimal lighting conditions, the photographer has managed to utilize natural light in its best state to evenly expose the photo without blowing out any areas of the photo while still managing to have some natural diffusion to softly light and capture the fine details in each lily pad. As fall approaches and the colors of the leaves rapidly begin to change, there's a very small window to work with to capture all ends of the spectrum of colors, and there's a great balance of those unique shades displayed here. The perimeter of the shot is mostly even with darker greens, which helps lead the eyes to the center, which boasts subtle hints of blues and purples. More often than not, we see use of either very intimate detailed shots with macro lenses, or very wide landscape photos to capture this mood, but the photographer has done a great job of meeting somewhere in the middle with a 70mm focal length to seemingly give the best of both worlds.

Home

Allison Russell '26

Went for a jog. Should be back soon?

If not.

come find me

I'll be at...

YOUR MOMS HOUSE!

LOL!!

not funny???

Sorry;

No, really. Please.

I look like a potential Ted Bundy victim. So chance of death is high.

for me at least.

but. as much as I joke,

I could never leave you.

I never want. to leave

even when i find you at my best friend's house

even when i find you in her bed

even when i find your bruises all over my body.

even when you apologize.

time and time again.

i admit. you warned me.

i should have been careful.

Sorry;

swept in the current;

your beautiful green eyes. poison

those hands a puzzle piece to mine. bruises

plump pink lips. fat worthless sleaze

Sorry;

i look to you. up or across but never at.

and I see that smile.

the smile that bonds our souls together.

You smile big. my lips part.

through it all, we will be together.

because

Sorry;

I love you

Sorry;

Endlessly.

Balance

Molly Trout '23



Withdrawn

Conor McConnach '25

Autumn

The thick orange of the horizon stretched thin over the sky with subtle gradient, enhancing the seasonal tones of those leaves. They clutch their branch as they wither to gold, soon to be liberated. To their roots they fall, straight through the unbothered air, a blend of fiery browns coloring the earth. I breathe gentle and silent. These discolored benches strain and creek under the weight of time and sink into dirt. They are abandoned on these old campus grounds yet harbor a pioneering life; lichens cover the sere wooden slats that retrieve all that is lost in the echoing time. They sit with me as I follow the channels of fatigued webs spanning tree to tree and to the old four-way arch of fossil and stone – a defeated artifact.

The moss has outlined the graying bricks from under me, engraved with names of schoolmates generations from my own, alumna legacies imprinted on these campus grounds. I ponder my own legacy, appreciating the final ticks of receding sunlight casting through the vacant branches. A season of death overwhelms the little arch, and the little fountain within, in the form of shredded leaves and ancient remains. Blackening spores encrust the surface of the structure, forming a collage that marks the very beginnings of succession. Isolated – stubborn angers fade in these encircling trees and sorrows of a life before this moment dissipate through every breath, into the day's closing light.

A thick darkness soon smothered the embers of the burning sunlight, and stars like pinholes on a canvas flicker many a hundred light years away. The spotlight moon illuminates this stage in grayscale hues as a zephyr hurries the leaves into rows and piles to prepare for next day's recital. A zeal of fireflies bloom and dim and bob, strewn in the grass like fairy lights. I am aware of the innocuous crackling from the nearby bushes, never fearing those curious creatures that shuffle around in the night, organizing themselves.

A lone doe steps out from the protective shadows of the treeline not fifty yards from me. She peaks through the structural columns of the little arch. She scrutinizes me, and the gentle breeze subsides as doused fireflies lay hushed in the grass. Pages of leaves ordered and filed away, motionless, and moonlit projections of those slender branches lie painted like cracks on the concrete around me. The little arch, like a looking glass, between me, and this elegant and vigilant mother. Her two fawns dawdle behind her, and she noses them ahead. There is no danger; I, too, am finding peace tonight.

Winter

The sun sternly surveils, though undermined by the vast and unblemished blue. The remnants of last night's flurry shroud the campus, leaving it bleached and barren. Beads of water glint in the sunlight revealing the positions of hidden webs, suspended in the muted air. All is enveloped in the vacuum of winter. The leaves no longer ornament the stale limbs of those sterile trees – their rigid trunks pegged in the bitter earth like nails in a carpet of snow: an exhibition of the dead.

The pallid ash rests lifeless along the path towards the fountain, each step amplified in my ears and embedded in the past. The sober little arch stands as an altar, preserved in ice, and veiled by snow. Under the keen command of the sun, melted crystals treacle and hang over the edge, frozen. The patter, as they seep, of the thawing shards of ice like the rhythmic hum of time.

Blooms of lavender varnish the iron sky as the earth is ushered under the shadowy cloak of the moon. Leaning back, I watch my breath as it swirls and dances, and dies, dissipating in the absorbing air. Nebulous thoughts like cigarette smoke I wish to abate. But they dampen among the barbed silhouettes of shivering trees, a wall of thorns around the familiar little arch, sympathizing with me. It begins to snow. Wilted flakes torn from clouds like mercury that spill across the ether and obscure the moon as it drowns in the ink sky. As they fall they subdue any evidence of life.

Spring

It's been a while since I've sat with my thoughts, alone with the little arch. It seems distant and cold in this radiant light that embraces the new dawn. A cleansing mist rising from the green sifts around the fountain, no longer swathed in the soot spores of crumbling moss. Webs, too, dusted from their corners, deterring those stumbling harvestmen who wish to scale the solemn rockface. Washed benches equally scraped of their colonial lichens and left bare on the named bricks, immaculate, scathing.

In the past I sought comfort in its weathered imperfections, hindered by my own. I realized its entropic charm – a union of human and natural creation.

Now it imitates art.

Note to Mrs. Mootoo (Regarding Limits)

Lance Nizami

The fondest of hopes are the fondest of memories

I had so much belief in you

You had so much belief in you

But luck, like water, flows and washes memories away

What's left is pure ambition

I never knew ambition was your currency

You pay-out day-by-day, until all's spent

Your tribulations, problems, they were bought-out by ambition

And then, one day, you asked: where is there more

I can't buy more ambition; where is more

Where drive to get more drive; what hope to get more hope

Or is it time to settle down, to settle-in, accept –

Defeat, known by its inner name, “acceptance” –

And sometimes things seem red

How sad to have your limits forced upon you

And so you (you) are now a lesser gainer

A humbler and less glamorous job is yours

A husband, child; your life continues now

I had so much belief in you

You had so much belief in you.

Rocks in Gold

Ken Prince '80



How to Dye Your Hair at Home in 4 Steps: Because Fuck Satisfying Numbers, Do I Look Like an Expert to You? ⚠️

Tori McDougal '24

There are so many more than 4 steps in this list, but fuck it, 4 is close enough. Hope you already bought everything. Step one doesn't cover a trip to Sally's, so you're on your own for that part. Google that shit, I'm not your hairdresser. Being queer only gives me a certain level of expertise when it comes to hair dye, and honestly? The best way to go about this is making sure you're high as shit before you even start. Trust me. Inhibitions are a nuisance waiting to be shed.

Step 1: Prep

Dying your hair also requires a friend. The friend is probably the most important part of this whole damn process. A friend with nimble, well-practiced, stoner fingers that pull waxy paper to their plush lips, sealing their thickly rolled joint with the swipe of a skilled tongue. *Willow*. From her open mouth to my own, the joint rests on my bottom lip, a flickering lighter crackling to life as I inhale deeply. You'd think smoke filling your lungs would be cause for panic, but apparently after so long your lungs just decide to go numb, and I don't blame them since I don't really give a shit that my breathing skips every other beat and hell, it's just another step toward that sweet oblivion at the end of the line.

But enough of my nihilistic bullshit. For once, this is a moment I actually want to be here for. Being present, being real, I've never felt so alive. With ash in my teeth and smoke out my nose, I can feel my back arch against the back of my chair, finally uncoiling the knots of corded panic planted in my marrow. The innocence creeping into my giggles is tainted by the manic gleam of readiness I feel staring at the bottles of noxious pastes along the table. *Bowl, brush, gloves, bleach, toner, red*. Red has the kind of forgiving nature that I've never possessed, willing to overlook any missed strands and bleed through their pores indiscriminately. But Willow and I are going to have to trade in my brown waves before touching that step.

Step 2: Bleach and Rinse

You're going to fuck this step up, and that's the best part. Everyone panics so much about bleach and hair and hair and bleach and *oh no what if you kill it and I can't grow it back out and it's so healthy and it's so long and how will I fix it and what do I do if* blah blah blah. Just shut the hell up, mix this shit together, and slap the bleach in your hair. The instructions are on the box. Willow doesn't seem interested in burning off her fingertips again, so the vinyl gloves (the ones we stole from the café where we work) slip over her thin exacting fingers. With a fine toothed, rattail comb, my locks are parted into nowhere near evenly distributed sections.

Feeling her hover at my back as she paints chemicals into my hair is a vivid sensation. Each tingling scratch of bleach over my already half-dead strands feels more intensely heavy than the last. Her presence is thicker than anything I've ever smoked, and fuck, Willow is one hell of a high. She's a rush. A roll. A raging relief. Bleach will never burn my skin the way her digits leave fiery trails of smolder that spiderwebs across my scalp. She slips a thickly corded leg of muscle over my lap to get a closer look at the front. And as the bleach erases my pigment, our smoking lips exchange breathy fumes of bliss. I couldn't tell you how long we let that bleach process. It was long enough for me to lose my damned mind in her vast gray pools of eyes. Her touch may burn but it also soothes, washing out each layer of hue and bleach from my head that tips back into the sink. Neck arched, my breath skips twice this beat, damaged lungs and shredded senses desperately trying to maintain stability as she slowly pulls it from my grasp. She smirks.

"Time to let you dry."

Step 3: Color and Wait

The bathroom is the traditional setting for these events and it's for good reason. The red is everywhere. E v e r y w h e r e. Fuck gloves at this point. What even is the point? Has there ever been a point? Red splotches, red streaks, holy fuck her red fingerprints are on my thigh, my ribs, my waist, *shit*. She paints it into my hair but then the brush is gone too and it's just fingers. Red, red, red fingers that coax their way through my being as they squeeze over each hair strand, leaking red dye through the many layered tresses. My scalp is red. She's in my lap still. My face is flushed. But the red of her lips centers in my vision. I can't even blame my buzzing euphoria for the burning stoked beneath my surface. The leafy green pastures of my usual high are far away, a distant dream. All I see is R E D. Every mark she leaves will be there for days. No matter how many layers of skin I peel and scrub away she'll have stained me, marked me, branded me in a sea of rogue smudges.

Step 4: Rinse and Dry

As my neck extends back for a final rinse, my aching muscles stretched over the hard ridge of the sink. Willow's glinting gaze flashes across my figure, my shirt riding up my waist. And with a final smirk, her lips lean down to press against my pulse, painting more smudges. Smudges of blue.

Ravenous Bee

Jenny Schmidt



Color me blue

Ally Howard '25

color me blue
before you left
blue was my favorite color
blue was the color
of the ocean & his eyes & your wool sweater

blue was the color
of the wilting hydrangeas in the window box
blue was the color
of the walls of my childhood bedroom

before you left
blue was the color
of melting popsicles & sticky fingers & outstretched tongues
on sweltering summer days

now that you're gone
the color blue
is everything
& nothing

sadness

the color blue is
nurses' scrubs & code & veins under see-through skin

now that you're gone
the blue that once was hydrangeas
is the color of forget-me-nots

three words whispered like a prayer
held like a promise
blown away like a wish

What If What Was Holding Me Together Was Suddenly Gone?

Annie Powell Stone

One way:

if my sinew,
blood, muscle, and connective tissue,
wasn't there.

My digits would tinkle on the countertop
as they fell
sounding like high note piano keys,
the melody of a body unmade.
Then my kids would come around the kitchen island
on their toy cars
and mistake the bones for blocks,
build a pelvis palace
and find more to fight over.

Another way:

if just the bones were gone,
mysteriously yanked away
in a breath.

The blob would hold
for one jiggling instant
and then gorge out,
stretching and testing the limits of the skin.
Brain and heart would mix in the soup
each unable to hold their place,
like when we sealed up the thin places
between us and the neighbors
but the ick still got through.

Or:

if you were gone,

my big why

my cure for wanderlust.

The wail of heartbreak

would burn my throat

as the kettle cauldron of scalding loss erupted.

Left open and steaming,

a scorched esophagus

would lead to my boiled heart,

ticking faintly like an engine run.

And the waves of pain, poured out,

would melt the glue holding me together.

I hate it here

Tori McDougal '24

I hate it here

Living in my bones,

Swimming in my marrow.

I hate it in my flesh

I hate it in my horrible,

screaming,

buzzing,

I-hate-my-body-feeling brain that crushes me into pulp.

I hate the pulp so I spit from my teeth.

I hate spitting.

I hate my teeth

set into the lower jaw that pulls back slightly into my skull and crushes my words.

I hate it here in my words.

I hate it here in my face.

I hate it here in my body.

The body born so out of place, all warped

All wrong,

All out of shape.

I hate my fat, my chest, my jaw, my lungs, my calves, my spine.

I hate it here where there is too much, and

I hate it there where there is not enough.

I hate it here because it's empty.

I hate it here because I'm full.

I hate it here because I'm stuck.

I hate it here, so fucking much.

Lovely Lady

Molly Trout '23



Blonde on a Bench

Fabrice Poussin

Blonde on a bench.

Is it the sun she seeks in the lonely hour
the quietude of a deserted park
when everything seems to hibernate
for balmy summer months?

Gone are the hectic days of the weary
she has returned to the carefree little dress
of the girl she so longs to become again
let her skin bronze in midafternoon.

Hours pass as she fidgets on the steel
no book nearby nor any cell to distract her
from those precious moments spent with herself.
her hand on her chest as she inhales softly.

It is difficult to find her peace yet
away from the cold walls of a dark office
too cold with artificial air and dim lights
it is as if a rebirth for this child in a woman's flesh.

What does she wait for all this time
mesmerized it appears by her surroundings.
perhaps it is the answer to her daily dreams
a voice that speaks kindly through her private realm.

Fox 2

Juliette Wallace '24



River North Chicago October (1)

Lance Nizami

The cloud-bank dips, is caught upon the sky-scrappers

Cloud like fog, it's featureless and uniform; motionless, impaled; all else is moving

And all is business, the hustle of humans, hustle of cars and taxis, buses, river-boats, all

hustle

A day that's shadowless, all light's the same outdoors, plain gray it seems, the gray-light

–

The white-light not quite bright as white; the gray-light –

The clouds have lost their energy; all cold, so little light to give, no energy –

All energy's below, in motion; quanta on the grid North-South cross quanta on the grid

East-West

The packets with two feet, four feet, two wheels, four tires, ten tires, all moving

Endless boogie-woogie; all stream and counter-stream within the stream

Everyone's directed, the selfsame choreography, no randomness allowed

And who looks up to see the frozen clouds?

River North Chicago October (2)

Lance Nizami

All around me: glass that's hung from steel that holds the floors that holds the people

People; seen through hanging smoked-glass, dimly

Bosses, secretaries, middle-rank administrators, clerks

All tread the floors, behind smoked-glass, and wonder:

How did I get here; was this in my dreams

Remember dreams? what were they, anyway

What dreams survive from childhood – all astronauts and ballerinas, rock musicians,

glamor models, so –

How thin our memory is

How weak our corresponding motivations

And then one day: the earthquake, or the hurricane; it shatters glass

And there we are: afraid and unprotected

No astronauts or ballerinas there to help us – not their job –

No astronauts or ballerinas there.

Good Girl

Joan Mazza

When a man tells me to smile
I smile.
When he speaks
I listen, attentive as a puppy
no interrupting.
When he wants quiet
I'm quiet, my presence soothing.
He doesn't want to hear my chatter
or worry-talk, that I'm uncomfortable
when he drapes his heavy arm
across my shoulders.
I keep it to myself.
I'm here to please, to be agreeable.
I don't express opinions or desires.
When he interrupts me
I stop speaking
to listen – rapt – to his long stories.
I follow his lead, I defer to him
in all things because
his judgment is sound and true
although I have a PhD
and he went to college for two
minutes.
I never remind him of this fact.
I don't say facts, data, or experts,
words that enrage him.
I don't say science or history,
never say diversity or human rights
to sidestep his scorn and fury.
He likes me amiable, compliant

flexible and very thin
easy to get along with
not pensive, not controversial.
I know what he likes to eat.
I know what he likes.
I am that, nearly confident
I haven't forgotten
something.

Maybe Chicken Little Was Right All Along

Lexi Traylor '25

The sky is f

a

l

l

ing

Oh wait.

The sky has been falling

For so long

That it is gone and a new one

Is in its place.

The ground is s p l i t t i n g

Oh wait.

The ground has been split before

The cracks filled up again

By time.

And money.

ing do

sh

w

The mountains are cra n

Oh wait.

The tip of Mount Everest

Has broken off before

Placed back on top.

Superglue.

Aristo-coup.

g

n

i

s

i

The sea is r

I wish I could say

Oh wait.

But.

Has the sea ever receded?

Orchid Tiger

Sarah Steen '26



Golden Dragons

Jay Lewis '24

Once upon a time, there was a
Golden eyed girl.
She had golden hair, and golden skin.
She was praised, raised
to be queen of a nation.
In her nightgown and
satin sheets she was told that
She would lead.
That the world would
bend for her, her hair would
boast a crown. That the golden
Rings of her eyes, would
Reflect off a golden diadem.
The lords would bow,
Velvet hems would slide
And the Ladies would watch
With Eagle eyes. They watched for those
Golden eye rings, till age sixteen
When the diamonds grew in her hair.
With every twirl of her gown
She released rubies and gems
Opals and jade. The lords
And ladies would run at her heels
And horde those precious stones With
Every jewel their eyes grew
Hungry, and their fingers itching.
Her mother
and father wrapped Lace
thorns around her fingers
and golden chains
Around her arms.
Her ankles tied to the bed

With those same
satin sheets, and they hovered above
Longing to steal her golden eye's
Rings. To plunge their soiled hands
And rip the halcyon from their sockets.
They send rivets of red down her
Skin, down her hair.

They tore and shred her,
Plucked and stoned. Her
Wrists were bound and
Her eyes were wet. She was
Paraded and brandished,
An exhibit on display. She would
Twirl for hours, till her toes grew
Numb. Till her skin was no
Longer gold, but stained red and
Pink and patchy. Till the diamonds
in her hair could fall no more,
Stuck in the gunk, the sticky
Red.

One day the princess ran from the
Castle. Deep in the woods
Rocks and twigs stabbed, gripped,
Flayed pieces from her toes, heel, and arch.
The shadows around her
grabbed and pulled, and she
Screamed. Red leather tore from her back
And her golden eye's rings grew
And grew. Till her feet no longer touched
the ground faded away, trees
Falling below. The princess had turned,
She cried and soled.

Clancy

Zac Stigdon '23



Crossing Over

Annie Powell Stone

I stock up on mythical and natural information
like a survivalist stocks up on cans of tuna fish
so that one day when I find the door to Narnia or Neverland or Not here
I'm ready.

I know a mermaid's power is in her hair,
to mistrust leprechauns,
how a raven is like a writing desk.

I study rhymes about which berries to eat
– as though the flora will be the same...over there? –
and on that day I'll be watching wolves' elbows
so I can tell them from their domesticated cousins,
spy their leaner ribcages and longer legs.

And will I have gone leggy and wild at this time too?
Maybe that's part of the crossing over
beyond quarantine no-hair-cuts and out-of-date pedicures
– the sign of a city cat gone dingy –
a wildness that will rip through the chest
striking like cold air breathed while taking in Canis Major,
a star out of reach
behind leafless branch.

It's all in the Webbing

John Grey

The first web is light and thin,
a trailer for the giant silken main feature
farther down the path.

That first web is barely there,
like a child's breath on the skin,
whisked away with a swift backhand.

But then comes the web so huge
not even dew can drip its way around
the outer anchor lines.

The sun flatters,
dazzles these scattered jewels,
a brilliant light to celebrate
a spider's perfect handiwork.

It's either go around
or risk being the next beetle,
next moth, trapped in that arachnid's lair.

Or, at best, I'll be picking bits
of thread from my clothing
for the next week while, all the time,
wondering if the creator of this handiwork
is crawling somewhere on my body.

The first web is a skirmish, I figure.

The second web is all out war.

Or the first web is a date.

The second web is marriage.

Or maybe they're both just webs,
one more complex than the other.

Or only the first is a web.

The second may well be two spiders.

Shadow Puppets

Ken Prince '80



If I Have a Daughter

(Inspired by “If I Should Have a Daughter” by Sarah Kay)

Ally Howard '25

If I have a daughter,
I want her to be brave.
I want her to take the world around her,
scoop it in her hands,
and mold it as her own.
I want her to create,
and destroy,
and create again
because that's how
life is sometimes.
If I have a daughter,
I want her to be bold.
I want her to hear no,
and hear no,
and hear no,
and hear it until her ears ring,
and hear it until her head pounds,
and hear it until her blood boils,
and I want her to scream
yes, yes, yes
until someone listens.
If I have a daughter,
I want her to feel pain.
I want her to cry,
I want tears to flow from her cheeks
until they're flooded
by all of the pains a young girl carries.
I want her to feel pain,
because, without feeling your own pain,
you can't heal others'.

If I have a daughter,
I want her to feel joy.
I want her to smile
at the big things,
but more importantly,
the small ones.
I want her to feel happy.
I want her to celebrate life.
I want her to appreciate
the air in her lungs,
air that was taken
from so many young girls,
that was taken
from so many young boys,
that was taken
from newborns
and toddlers
and children like her.
If I have a daughter,
I want her to complain.
I want her to talk back,
talk smack,
talk in circles
until she can't talk anymore.
I want her to tell me
all the rights she knows,
and hell all the wrongs she knows,
because if she's anything like me,
she'll know 'em all.
If I have a daughter, I want her to have her own one day.
I want her to feel how it feels to have a daughter.

Mirror, Mirror

Allison Russell '26

I see her up on the wall.

Her reflection is familiar but who is she? Is she who I am now?

Am I her?

She's painted on the canvas. Portrayed on the medium; Short strokes around her face, Long strokes in her hair.

She looks modern but historic. Maybe she was an inspiration to an artist, A muse.

I feel a connection to her.

I inspect her eyes with my own,

There is that same fleck of auburn right near her right iris. I am her.

How can this be?

I have no recollection.

She must be someone else.

But I return to her beautiful eyes,

Almost like a heartstring is beginning to develop.

I see the past in her present.

Her eyes are the windows to her soul.

I can see a broken house inside.

Well not all broken.

The house looks burned, and scorched.

But partially remodeled.

She is not completely broken.

She is healing.

She speaks to me. Her still irises hold a lifetime of stories.

I feel as if the woman I see hanging on the wall is me. I am her, and we are one.

I stand here peering into our parted soul.

I am her.

I gaze into her dull eyes dented in her porcelain skin. While I perch myself upon this exhibit, I notice

I am here withering in a life of prosperity

While she is hanging zealous staring back at me

That seems like who I was in a past life,

Hanging onto something as thin as a metal wire and a rusty nail.

Neon Acrobat

Zac Stigdon '23



White Collar Crimes

EP1, "Pilot"

Lexi Traylor '25

FADE IN:

INT. A KITCHEN. - DAY

LISA, a woman in her 30's, stands centered in the frame in the kitchen. She's wearing a typical housewife's clothing from the 1950s - blouse, long skirt, short heeled shoes, pearls, curled hair, lipstick (the works). The kitchen looks like it was decorated in the 1970s - goldenrod yellow walls, gold and brown linoleum floors, fake dark wood cabinets and fake light wood countertops. A single, round, plastic table sits in the center of the kitchen with only two plastic chairs pulled up to it. An old-fashioned phone hangs on the back wall. The cord swings ominously, even though there's no source of wind or air flow. LISA seems to stick close to the phone, pacing back and forth around the kitchen with her heels clicking on the floor with each step, but never straying out of arm's reach of the receiver. A cell phone (some high-end, modern phone) sits on the countertop, just within the frame. It seems forgotten by LISA. (It should be clear that each aspect of the shot seems to contradict the other as far as time period goes).

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP: Cell phone on counter. Dark screen.

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP: On LISA's pacing feet in short heels.

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP: On old-fashioned phone hanging on wall. The phone begins to ring - BRING BRING BRING like the noise phones only make in cartoons. With the camera still centered on the phone, LISA's hand reaches into the frame to grab the receiver. She has perfect nails. A sparkly, expensive bracelet dangles on her wrist. It should be assumed she puts the phone to her ear, but the view is still focused on the now-empty wall mount. The phone cord swings ominously at the bottom of the frame.

LISA (VOICE SHAKING)

Hello?

MARGIE (OVER THE PHONE)

Lisa, it's me. I got your message.

LISA

Oh, Margie, thank God.

MARGIE

Why do you sound so scared? Who did you think I was going to be?

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE BUILDING. SOMEWHERE IN THE CITY. UNSPECIFIED TIME. POTENTIALLY A FEW DAYS IN THE PAST.

BRIEF SHOT. Two men sit at a desk reviewing a stack of papers. They look important. They're wearing suits. The office is fancy - all obsidian black and modern.

CUT TO:

INT. THE KITCHEN. DAY.

We're back in LISA's kitchen. This time, we see the other wall of the kitchen. MEDIUM SHOT on LISA's body against the background of the kitchen. She shifts from foot to foot nervously. She's clutching the phone tightly.

MARGIE (STILL OVER THE PHONE)

And why did you want me to call the house phone? I didn't know you even still had that old thing.

LISA

I don't trust my cell phone. They might be listening.

MARGIE

Who's listening, Lisa? What the hell is going on?

LISA

You know the bracelet Bobby got me?

Camera CLOSES IN on LISA's face - she's anxious and sweating a little - then drifts down to her wrist where the bracelet rests. We stay focused on her wrist and hand clutching the phone. The side of her face and corner of mouth are also visible. We see her talking.

LISA

Remember how I said I didn't know how he paid for it?

MARGIE

Yeah, but I told you he probably just wanted to spoil his wife. What, do you think he stole it or something?

LISA (SHARPLY)

No! No, he didn't steal it, but... I found a stack of papers.
On his desk.

MARGIE

So?

LISA

I was too scared to touch them, but they look... I don't know,
they just look wrong. (WHISPERING) Suspicious. I don't think
I was supposed to see them.

MARGIE (LOUDLY, PHONE CRACKLING)

What did they say?

LISA

I don't know! Keep your voice down! I didn't want to read
them, but I can't stop thinking about them. What if Bobby can
get in trouble?

MARGIE

Lisa, for Christ's sake, what are you talking about? Go get
the papers. Tell me what they say, or I'm hanging up.

CUT TO:

INT. THE OFFICE BUILDING.

The two men now have a laptop open. Some sort of stocks re-
port is pulled up. The men cross-examine the report with
the stacks of papers from before. ZOOM IN on one paper ly-
ing near top but partially covered by another sheet. It's
an almost-complete picture of a man. Below the picture reads
ROBERT - and the last name isn't visible.

CUT TO:

INT. THE KITCHEN - DAY.

Camera is now viewing LISA from behind. We can see the origi-
nal wall that the phone hangs on. LISA hasn't moved, but she
seems to be curling in on herself.

LISA

Honestly, Margie, I couldn't tell you what they say, even if
I tried. It's all stock market mumbo-jumbo. But -

MARGIE

But what? Bobby's a broker. Of course he has papers like
that, Lisa. What are you so worried about?

LISA

Where is the money coming from, Margie?

CUT TO:

EXT. A DRIVEWAY.

A brand new truck sits outside of a house, presumably Lisa and Bobby's.

CUT TO:

INT. A LIVING ROOM.

A flat screen TV is mounted to the wall.

CUT TO:

EXT. A TROPICAL LOCATION - DAY.

Two figures, a man and a woman, sit on the beach. Presumably Lisa and Bobby.

CUT TO:

INT. THE KITCHEN.

Back to previous shot of LISA from behind. She switches the phone to her other hand. Her bracelet jangles noticeably.

LISA

Why would he bring his work papers home? What was he doing with them?

MARGIE (STILL OVER PHONE)

I don't know. I don't know, but I think you should stop talking about it and just forget about it, okay? I'm sure it's nothing to worry -

MARGIE is cut off by an aggressive KNOCK KNOCK on LISA's door (O.S.). LISA turns her head toward the camera and the noise. Fear is visible on her face.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

FBI! Open up!

LISA drops the phone. The camera ZOOMS IN and follows the phone's trajectory. It swings on its cord and hangs limply. MARGIE's voice can still be heard through the receiver, calling LISA's name. LISA's heels clack again and the sound moves farther away from the phone.

FADE OUT.

In Darkness

Isabel Hannon '26



In Character

Isabel Hannon '26



Crank

Jeffrey H. MacLachlan

It's Friday the thirteenth. You're all doomed doomed doomed doomed. Sorry. It's spiritual possession when I speak. Doomed is a Friday word. It's the projection of welcome. There's a replication of adventurous possession and a peak. My white skin will please a rural cemetery. I'm sorry if my funeral is on Friday or the thirteenth. It's peak rural horror. The spirit in my mouth shouts a number every Friday when I snooze. Numbered adventures doom us to funerals. This week she projects thirteen, and next Friday is a dozen. White skin welcomes horror and possession.

Cold Memory

Bradley Boudreau

As my feet melted into the sound of snow, the first flake graced my ear on what would be a day that forgetting will find, over and over again. The remains of Sam's life tumble through the air while I pause to look across the congested lot to the church, waiting for direction, a sign, something, anything, to get me through today.

So many years ago, standing on the shore of a frozen lake, throwing stones, gauging its strength, and marveling at its fractured, bellowing response.

"Why don't you go out there?" came from behind me, and I turned to see Sam's smile for the first time.

I quickly wound through the doubts of his soundless approach, how he seemed to hover over the snow with an inconceivable lightness.

"Come on...it's safe," he said, walking out and over any reasonable fear.

I cautiously followed him onto uncertainty as he kept slippery dancing to some unknown song. Life had opened up. The trees in the distance held up winter, and their reflection invited exploration. The cracks in the ice provided signs of direction, signs that experience is endless if only I could let go and follow Sam. My feet loosened their grip and began to flow over the ice. I felt joy on my face and could see it reflected in Sam.

"We're walking on water!" we had excitedly declared.

My eyes welled up, and my reflex was to hide, and Sam placed his hand on my shoulder to try and help me escape. He grabbed my hands and spun us in circles until momentum pulled us apart. I experienced a new laughter, a laughter that was somehow hidden.

Sam has pushed me to places I would never have gone, and now I stand helplessly. Why did he go out alone that night? Visibility was poor, no moonlight to guide him, fences, trees and wild animals around every corner, and he had just learned to drive his overpowered sled.

A passerby that I don't want to recognize breaks me from my trance. My legs tighten; my knees don't want to understand, yet the church comes closer. Where are you, Sam? One step after another, the gravity of the situation makes me want to stop, but I know he's in there.

Looking up the stairs and to the door, hoping the stairs crack and cave to prevent me from having to explain my absence. I ascend slowly with the weight of Sam's

memory. Reaching the door, I hold out hope and pass my way through to the grandiosity that attempts to envelop us. The orchestration of the mid-day light brings the biblical depictions to life as the pillars that hold up the unreachable heavens stand in attention. I move through the nave to find my place beyond anyone who remembers me. Sitting, I look blindly at the back of the empty pews. Acknowledging eyes, nodding heads, and wordless empathy bring the remaining mourners to their seats.

Samuel's wife is upfront, leaning on friends and family. When Sarah and Sam first met, I had hoped it wouldn't last, and I acted in a way that made her uncertain of me. My guide, my friend, my brother chose moments of effortless joy, moments that brought him to a new life with Sarah. When Sam's mother passed away a few years ago, he fell deeper into her, and our cherished moments became less and less frequent. He would guide me through our periodic messages while our unforgettable physical moments began to wane into the patterns of a predictable life.

Our priestly presider abruptly creaks out of his sacred door and climbs up to his pulpit. His presence demanded silence, and his expression lacked the empathy I needed. He scanned the room, looking for something or someone in an unobvious way and then focused on his biblical guide.

"Samuel came to us as a child and followed our Lord."

He leafed through his noted bible within the respected silence we had all assumed.

"However ... he spent very little time with us in recent years. Samuel might not have passed on from us today if he had spent more time in the house of our Lord."

Struck by disbelief, I looked for unimpressed eyes and found most bowed in blind deference. The presider's holy statements continued, and my urge to defend grew. Why doesn't anyone interrupt and correct our ignorant presider, explain Sam's selflessness and ability to rise and bring us along? His ability to see what holds us back and know how to help us escape? I imagine Sam walking out of the creaking door, looking out and over everyone, our eyes meeting. I try to stop time, holding on to this last unforgettable moment, but a surge of tears pulls me back.

The presider came to his closure, his words unintelligible to me. I could see Samuel's wife straighten herself up, and the music began.

Times have changed, and times are strange

Here I come, but I ain't the same

Mama, I'm coming home.

A wave of chills started in my arms and rose up and out of mind. I experienced the lightness of Sam's presence and was beaming with the moment's beauty. The song danced off of every arch, reached every corner, and, starting with Samuel's wife, the congregation climbed to their feet, pew after pew, with a wave of admiration and respect. Our presider slammed his guide shut as everyone turned their back to him, his words quickly forgotten.

I moved to the end of my empty pew just as Sarah started past. Her teary eyes rose to meet mine, and she slowly lifted her open hand to ask for my acceptance. I complied and was quickly filled with a familiar warmth, and we turned to face the world together, a world without Sam. The doors opened, and the light of Ozzy's final words pushed joy through our tears just as Sam would have loved.

I'm coming home.

Snow Leopard

Sarah Steen '26



Happiness is a Field Mouse

Joan Mazza

in autumn, finding its way into warmth
and sturdy shelter from rain and sleet
while you plug tiny holes and cracks
to shut it out. You buy glue traps and poison
to make it bleed internally, mistake
this intruder for an adversary, not a gift,
while you wallow, despairing, and ask,
“Where is my joy? Where is my laughter?”
Happiness travels on the slowest country
roads, visible if you throw impatience
out the window to turtles and snails.
It comes alongside you to whisper while
you’re waiting in line, tapping your foot,
grousing to the person ahead of you
to move faster, get out of the way.
It murmurs LOOK, commands you LISTEN,
reminds you to breathe and sort through
the scents near, as you might distinguish
instruments in an orchestral overture.
Open the doors wide to happiness and find it
at your feet camouflaged among leaves
and Snickers wrappers, a shining, hard quartz
crystal, ever present, one you can carry in that
tiny pocket above the pocket of your jeans,
where it belongs, easy to access and hold tight.

ode to seventeen

Andi Spring '23

i miss the way you yelled at your dad and threw shoes at moving cars and went psycho whenever you damn well pleased and i miss the way that you skipped school and smoked weed and cursed at boys to get them to like you and then didn't like them back because you didn't have to.

i miss you telling your mom you weren't gonna shave your legs or wear bras or admit that you were a lesbian and i miss the way that you would cry with everyone watching because it didn't matter that anyone was watching only that you felt something.

i miss how you told everyone you were a natural even when your roots were showing. i find a long blonde hair on my pillowcase. a photo booth picture flipping the bird. a note you wrote that said "i can't wait to be twenty one"

Learning to Fly

Sarah Steen '26



Down By The River

Ashley Swango '24

Down by the river. I wonder at night. Since my early teenage years, I've had the same routine. My friends, whom I question if they really are my friends, and I, meet down by the river most every night, after the sun goes down of course. I only question if I am really friends with these people because I only ever see them at the river. Nowhere else. But at the river, we meet. We walk. We talk. We sit in each other's pain. We all have different pain, but I guess, like I said, the river sort of brings us all together. Every night I attend, I bring a blanket, my sad heart, two lighters, band aids, my favorite book, a bag of chips, and of course, two joints. I always over-pack. At least that's what my friends always tell me. I'd like it more, if they called me prepared. Nine times out of ten they use everything I bring along with me, so why are they never thankful?

Down by the river. Tonight, I arrived first. Alone. Waiting. On the blanket. Listening to the crickets, I remember why I ever came to the river. I came to disconnect. I came to watch my problems with my parents float down the river and out of my mind. I didn't want there to be more people, but I think now I am glad there were others here that first river night.

Down by the river. I watch the fireflies dance like blinking neon lights in the night sky. Dry leaves cracking in the distance startle me, making me jump, but it is just Ellen. She looks as she always does at night, by the river, a small figure coming towards you. Ellen is the same age as me, seventeen, but she has blonde hair not brown. She seems to always carry pain with her too. Different from mine of course. Ellen was in foster care, and she had been most of her life. Sometimes the friend group would go a while without seeing Ellen, but she always seemed to show back up.

Down by the river. Ellen and I stare into the water. Looking for a sign of better times in the flowing water. Ellen begins to speak saying, "Hey Jamie, anyone else wondering out tonight?" I reply with "No, not yet. Just me and you right now." Ellen giggles, "Well then, should we get started?" She says while staring at my backpack.

Down by the river. I unpack my backpack. She sits on the blanket. Looking at the stars I pass the lighter and joint to Ellen. "Go ahead, I mean realistically who is it hurting?" I said while handing her the items. Quickly snatching them from my hand, Ellen lights the joint and takes a massive drag, without coughing might I add. She passes it to me after that. Ellen sighs saying, "I love the river."

Down by the river. The smell of burning marijuana must have pointed Harper and Max in our direction because it wasn't long after Ellen and I lit the joint that they came strolling down the same path to the river as we took. Harper and Max are dating. They are a year older than I am. It's known that Max isn't always faithful or

even that nice to Harper, but Harper would never leave him. That's where their pain resides, in their dying relationship that they will never end because they are both too afraid. The first night I came to the river these two were here. I think they were fighting but my sadness made their anger at one another disappear. I like Max. I like Harper. But I do not like Max and Harper together.

Down by the river. "Are you going to pass that?" Harper says pointing at the burning joint between my fingers. I ash it. Then I pass it to Harper. "I need the lighter too. Come on. This isn't your first rodeo Jamie." Harper demands. These are the moments I wonder if these river people are really my friends. I question the tone of their voice and their actions against me. I always conclude they are my friends or they would never come back at night to see me.

Down by the river. The joint has now made it to the lips of Max. He takes small hits, then the rotation starts again. Ellen, then me, then Harper, then Max. Almost like an assembly line. We continue this cycle with the second joint.

Down by the river. The two joints I had brought along are now gone. As soon as the second one was out, Max and Harper got up and said their goodbyes. I ask them why they are off so quickly and they tell me it's because they need to get home. I don't really believe them, because that's what they always say. They leave. I question why I even consider them my friends.

Down by the river. Ellen lets me know she is getting tired. I'm kinda tired too but the river is too captivating. Ellen says goodbye and starts on the trail. Thinking about it, maybe it has never been pain or even the river that brought us together, but rather I think these river people just want to smoke weed.

Down by the river. I never wait for anyone anymore. My friends stopped showing up. I was alone finally. Maybe being alone at the river isn't so bad after all.

Bloodshed at the Bingo Hall

Lizzy Jackson '23

You should have been prepared.

You'd been training.

Hours and hours spent sharpening your mind and refining your techniques to perfection.

You had all your affairs sorted out.

Your friends and family knew of your plan. Procedures for every worst-case scenario were in place.

(The knowledge your best friend would take care of your cats and that you had hugged your mom goodbye were small comforts amidst the horror of your situation.)

By all accounts, you should have been ready.

So why were you so goddamn terrified?

Your hands are shaking, and you're drenched in sweat.

The fluorescent lighting paints the room a harsh white, bringing tears to your eyes. It's hard to breathe, not just from the secondhand smoke that fills the air. The room itself is seemingly blanketed in an oppressive fog of tension. As if some bastard knowingly wound up the spring too tight and is watching in sick glee as you wait in apprehension for it to go off.

(The waiting is the easy part, you know this. When it finally goes off, the aftermath will be worse. So much worse.)

An endless sea of crowded tables surrounds you. Every seat is filled, all lined up in rows as if waiting for execution. In some way, they are.

The empty, monotone voice calls over the speaker, "B5".

Everyone has no less than five cards in front of them.

Grandparents wearing visors and floral cardigans will not hesitate to stab you through the heart.

Middle-aged PTA moms ready to claw your eyes out with their press-on nails.

All the hardcore players willing to kill each other at a moment's notice in order to win.

Spouses, siblings, lifelong friends, it doesn't matter.

There is no loyalty in bingo.

But what else can you expect when a million dollars are on the line?

"O1".

You dot the square wanting nothing more than for the game to end. The man beside you lets out a growl, frustrated with his continued loss. You look down, not wanting to meet his eye lest he takes it as a challenge and tears out your jugular with his teeth.

Your heart stops.

There on your card, a bright pink line of dots spells your doom.

You bring your card close to your chest, staring as if you can change the layout with your gaze alone.

This was happening. Whether you wanted it or not, this was happening.
You're terrified. You almost don't want to do this, but you know the consequences for not playing by the rules would be far worse than what is about to occur.
Slowly you stand up. Card cradled to your chest.
You raise your hand, "Bingo."
Silence. Deafening silence.
You can practically hear the snapping necks as everyone in the hall turns to face you.
Then all hell breaks loose.
They scream as they descend, like the wails of the damned as they bash down the gates of hell to rip the mortal plain asunder.
All at once, they converge on you.
Thinking fast, you jump up on the table.
Hands are grabbing at your clothes, tearing at your skin.
Harsh voices, rough from age or smoking, cry, "Give it! Give it to me!" as though they're in agonizing pain and begging for any respite.
The door at the front of the room is suddenly kicked open with a heavy slam – staff dressed in riot gear filter in and create a human barricade between the door and the mob. The mob does not notice. The mob does not care. All their demented fury is focused on you and your card.
"Will the lucky winner please make your way to the front to claim your winnings."
They're now climbing over each other, dragging others down to reach you.
"Should you be ripped limb from limb, we will notify your next of kin and issue them a coupon for 10% off their next meal at Mr. Wong's Chinese Buffet. 'Mr. Wong's Chinese Buffet, authentic Chinese cuisine made cheap.'"
With your heartbeat pounding in your ears, barely audible over the cacophony of the crowd, you stare at your only hope of escape.
Only one way to go from here.
You start leaping from table to table, trying your damndest to reach the door.
Tears blur your vision, and you just miss your next jump. You start to fall backward and have to flail wildly to right yourself.
You lose one of your shoes to the desperate mob.
You have to shake off your jacket after some rabid players grab the back in an attempt to drag you into the frenzy.
(That had been a gift from your uncle. You should have called him more.)
Part of you thinks of tossing the card and making for the exit.
But then all this pain, all of the pure terror, would have all been for nothing.
No.
No, you aren't leaving without that prize.
Card gripped between your teeth, you reach down. You dodge the hands attempting to claw at you as you search for a weapon.

Cold metal touches your skin, and without a second thought, you yank it toward you.

It's one of the metal folding chairs. You'd spent the last few hours hunched in this thing, destroying your spine, so this would do. These things were torture devices. You barely dodge some old bitty's switchblade. A second longer and your foot would have been impaled.

You swing your chair. With a sharp crack, the woman's head is flung back. Her false teeth go flying.

You're done playing.

You look out over the sea of malice and bloodlust, of the hundreds of people planning your downfall.

These were experienced players battle-hardened with ages of experience. What were you? A novice. A curious newbie who was in over their head.

But at the very least, you're not going down without a fight.

You had no idea what was going to happen, but one thing was certain.

Blood will be shed in this bingo hall tonight.

Light Through the Pages

Jenny Schmidt



Call 877-565-8860 for the Transgender Experience! ⚠️

Ethan Schmidt '25

I Want

A body that fits

That isn't plagued with

Large sacks of flesh

Stuck to the chest

That doesn't have

A high soft voice

That everyone hears

And decides

Must belong to a woman

I Want

A family that accepts me

A mother that loves me

A father that doesn't ask

Questions

Questions

Questions

Searching for some reason

Searching for trauma

Searching for an answer

As to why his daughter is like this

I Want

A society that doesn't hate me

That doesn't make

Every

Single

Step

Expensive and over-complicated
A lawyer and a court and
Money money money
For changing a dead name
To a desired one
12,000 dollars
Probably more
For freeing myself
From these bags of flesh
Not to mention
All the steps
The proceedings
To be allowed to create a body
That makes me
Happy

Is it any wonder
That 40% of us
Seek to free ourselves
In other ways

Be Patient, Blue

Anjolaoluwa Favour Oyebadejo '24



Transitions

Gary Jaycox

Old Man Praeger's barn burned down last night. Jagged orange flames sliced into the black October sky, animating the countryside. The whole place was lit-up and could be seen for miles around, so I was told. Being that Praeger is a well-liked man in these parts, lots of people turned out. Some to help, like the volunteers from the local fire department. Others to lend a hand however they could, and still others to direct all the traffic that ended up choking County Road 148. Yet, I suspect that curiosity got the better of most of them. Clueless souls drawn out into the night, like common house moths to a bright candle flame. Me, I didn't hang around all that long. I mean, what's the point? If you've seen one structure fire, you've pretty much seen them all.

Next morning, an acrid, smokey haze clung to the town, drifting all the way over to the Ten Penny Diner. There, amid the sounds of breakfast, you could hear talk about the night before. About how the fire could've got started. Some said it might have been crackheads lighting-up while hiding out inside the barn. That made no sense to me. I mean, there's crackheads over in Welch and in some of the bigger cities downstate, but not here. Meth users, sure. And we've got our fair share of fentanyl abusers, too. But crackheads, well, they don't hang around this town. No way.

Others opined that the fire might have been due to a type of spontaneous combustion. Wet bales of hay, tightly packed and stowed, slowly heating-up until they burst into flame. Sure, that kind of thing has happened on farms around here before. But Praeger is no farmer. Everybody knows he's a retired school teacher hawking antiques out of his barn. And not just the usual junk either. Fancy items, like hand-made furniture from the nineteenth century. Vintage copper weather vanes, silver-backed mirrors and hand-blown glass. High-end stuff like that. And those things don't just up and ignite on their own. I'll bet the State Fire Marshall is hot on the case even now. Trying to find a way to pin the blame on somebody so that Praeger can recoup some of his losses with insurance money.

Speaking of antiques, you ever notice that it's mostly the older crowd who go in for that kind of thing? The well-healed types, the ones with lots of money and means. Younger people like me, we're more into the here-and-now. We're more focused on the future. That is, if any of us has got a future worth thinking about. But you'd find them out there, especially on weekends during the high tourist season on their way up to the lake. Collectors and pickers parking their big SUVs next to Praeger's barn and then filing inside. Judging by his fancy Victorian house that still sits up on the hill, I'd say lots of his customers have got lots of means.

Before he turned to the retail trade, Praeger was a teacher over at the high school on the other side of Naaman's Creek. There, he reigned over his classroom for

nearly forty years until he was forced to take mandatory retirement. A real shame many thought. A loss for the educational community others said. Both of my parents had him when they were in school. My uncle, too, and some of my older cousins. When it came time to be my turn, everyone said I was lucky. That I was fortunate that Mr. Praeger would be one of my teachers. That he was still on the faculty. As it turned out, I got “lucky” twice. The first time I had him was in the ninth grade for English composition and writing. A year later, I got to have him again for the same damn class after he shit-canned me the first time around. I didn’t measure-up to his standards, that’s what he’d told me. Also, that I needed to follow-through with my assignments. To work harder. The way I saw it, I worked about as hard as everyone else. Besides, if he was such a gifted teacher, you’d figure that he might have found a way to reach out to give students like me a hand up. I mean, we can’t all be Robert Frosts and Hemingways.

As it turned out, Praeger’s words sort of stuck to me through the rest of high school. When it came time to consider my options after graduation, I was advised that I wasn’t college material. That I was more suited for the trades. You know, that I’d probably be better off relying on my own two hands to earn a living rather than aspiring to more cerebral endeavors. I didn’t expect to qualify for college scholarships or financial aid anyway, so, I didn’t have a big issue with it at the time. But looking back on all of it now, I don’t think it’s right that a school – or an individual teacher for that matter – should be able to pin those kinds of labels on their students. I mean, young people starting out in this life have got enough stacked against them without being pigeonholed like that. Don’t you think?

So, for the past four years, I’ve run my own business as a general contractor. Sort of a glorified handyman around town. One of the better ones, I might add given the demands on my time. Just about every day brings something new to build or to fix. Projects to think through and then make right. Mostly though, it’s taking care of the college types when they reach out for help or advice. You know, the ones with all of the fancy degrees and diplomas on the wall that don’t have the smarts to properly put a hammer to a nail.

But lately, I’ve been feeling an urge to move on. To pick up my stakes and make a change. Small towns can do that to you after a time. Comforting at first, they get to be smothering after a while, what with everyone knowing each other’s affairs and business and all. They’re like a heavy winter’s blanket. One that’s been pulled up over your face for too long. Besides, I’m lucky. Right? I can take my hands-on skills and apply them just about anywhere, anytime I need to. Before I go though, I’ve got one final job to get done. One that I’ve been putting off until the very end. That’s why I’m refilling these old gas cans in the back of my truck. Never quit until your work is complete, isn’t that how it goes? I know that’s what Old Man Praeger would say.

Stained Glass Branches

Jenny Schmidt



Sister and Brother

Martin/Em/Emily Sanders-Whiteley '25

The boy sat in his darkened room, preparing to write. He lit his new candle, smelling it first. He always forgot how good it smelled before he unscrewed the lid. Then the heavenly scent and everything it evoked would come back to him.

He turned around the candle so he could read the label again, making sure he had the name right – Happiness – and then underneath that in smaller letters – Hansel and Gretel's House. The boy smiled, but only with his mouth. His eyes didn't smile with it.

Before the boy could put pencil to paper, he thought he heard a sound outside his door. A short, blunt, thumping noise, and then a long sharp scraping. Then everything went silent. The boy made a move to start writing again. Before he could, the sound returned, squeaking as the whatever-it-was dragged across the floor. He shook his head, trying to dislodge the agonized screams and smell of burning flesh from his mind, without success. The thumping and scraping continued.

The boy slammed the pencil down on his desk with such force that it broke, smearing graphite all over his sweaty palm. He looked down at the blur of gray on his hand with frustration and disgust, but quickly stood up, walked over to his bedroom door, and opened it, not bothering to clean up the graphite.

It was already dark outside, and the boy lived alone.

He walked down the small staircase that led to his living room and the adjoining kitchen and dining room. They were all one big room, really, but there were walls separating little parts of the whole, so the boy liked to think of them as separate rooms. Something must be one thing, or it must be another. Things that existed between one thing and another were unacceptable to the boy.

He began turning on lights. He could never remember which switches turned on the indoor lights and which turned on the outdoor ones, so he ran around the room...no...rooms, flicking every switch in it (them!) until the whole room...damn it all...until all the rooms were lit up. He then went back around the rooms, the Very Separate Rooms, finding the switches that turned off the outdoor lights and flicking them again. The inside of this house was a place of light and comfort. He did not wish for his light to escape into the inky unknown of Out There.

The boy looked around the living-room-dining-room-kitchen, now aglow with yellow electric light. There was nothing. The boy lived alone. He didn't even have a cat, although he wanted one. The thumping and scraping had stopped.

The boy ran down another flight of stairs next to the front door. These stairs led to his basement library. He flicked a switch, the only one in the clearly singular room, and a series of white overhead lamps lit up in succession, gradually eating away at

the darkness that filled the room. The walls were lined entirely with books.

Many of the books were nonfiction. There were philosophy books, self help books, For Dummies books, cookbooks he never used. But one wall was lined exclusively with storybooks. Board books for three-year-olds, lushly illustrated picture books from around the world (many in languages he couldn't read), and large, scholarly, annotated fairy tale anthologies. All of them fiction, and yet they told his story, his life.

The walls were lined with books, but there were no shelves in the middle of the room. There was nowhere for anyone or anything to hide.

Letting out an exasperated groan, the boy ran back up the stairs towards his room, flicking off lights as he went. He dreaded seeing her again, but finding nothing at all was somehow just as horrible. The thought made him shudder. What was wrong with him? The absence of her was an objectively good thing. What did he have to get upset about?

Before he returned to his room, the boy looked down the hall to the bedroom across from his. The door was always open; it was the only door in the house that he never closed. The bed in that room was empty and unmade. There were no covers or sheets or pillows. Its residents, one man and one woman, had been missing for a very long time. If he knew where they were and could bring them back to him, that would be their room.

The boy retreated into his own room and shut the door behind him. As he heard the latch click, he thought about how many light switches in his house were now smeared with graphite. He twisted the tiny latch on the doorknob that locked the door, and returned to his desk, still illuminated by gingerbread-scented candlelight. The boy wondered what masochistic urge had possessed him to buy this particular candle.

"Interesting choice of scented candle," said a voice both familiar and unfamiliar.

The boy started to his feet, nearly knocking over the candle in the process. He ran to the light switch and turned it on.

"You!" exclaimed the boy. His voice was deep, yet it had a nasal quality.

Before him stood a girl who was slightly taller than him, slightly older than him, and much prettier than him. She had straight black hair, a black beauty mark, and wore a simple black dress. The boy felt a twinge of envy when he looked at her. His name would always come before hers in every record of their life story, but the boy kept a longing-turned-bitterness inside him for her beauty. But this could never be.

She was one thing, and he was another.

“Brother,” she said.

“Sister,” he said.

Neither of them smiled.

“How did you get in?” asked the boy, the knife of bitter envy still twisting deep into his chest.

“Through the front door,” replied the girl.

“Through the front door? The front door is locked. It. Is. Always. Locked.”

“And it continues to be locked. Still, I got in through it. I thought your first question would be: ‘Why were you making those awful noises downstairs?’”

“That was you? I thought I was hallucinating. I thought I was hearing...her...again.”

“You were,” said the girl, smiling. She did not elaborate. Everything about her and the words she spoke terrified and confused the boy.

“What do you mean by that?” asked the boy, using all his willpower to keep his fear bottled up inside, neatly shelved next to all the things that the world must never see. “That I was hallucinating? That she somehow faked her death and is still alive and well in my house? And you’re just...okay with this? I don’t understand you, sister. I don’t know if I ever will.”

“What I mean, brother,” said the girl, the word “brother” still stabbing a place deep in his inner archives for reasons he didn’t understand and didn’t want to, “is that she has been alive ever since we killed her. She is me and I am her.”

“You mean...you inherited her position?”

“I suppose you could think of it that way,” said the girl, “If it makes you feel more comfortable.” Her smile became more mocking, and the boy could feel rage burning through the orderly prison he had built for his emotions. And he didn’t care. He just wanted to do something, anything, that would remove this taunting beautiful face from his sight, and with it, the painful memories it brought. He clutched at his hair in frustration and disbelief, unwittingly smearing graphite all over his face in the process.

The girl’s smile opened and gave way to a laugh, gently maniacal. It was the comforting voice of the boy’s sister, and it was the cackling of the wicked woman who had meant to eat him all those years ago. How it was both one and the other, the boy could not understand.

Without the boy realizing it, the room had become darker, and the two of them were illuminated only by candlelight. The flickering flame distorted their features, making both boy and girl look like things less than human. Or more than human.

If it was possible for a frown to get bigger, the boy's did. "Why are you here?" he asked.

"For the same reason as you. To tell our story as it happened. Or, at least, to make sure you don't screw things up in the telling."

The boy's mouth fell open. He couldn't believe her audacity. "I was there too!" he said. "I want to correct the errors as much as anyone else. What do you think I'll get wrong?"

"How about the parts where you were stuck in a pigpen? You'd be dead now were it not for me, and yet all you'll write about is how brave you were for withstanding the cage."

"That's an important part of the story too! I was miserable in there! People need to know what I went through! Besides, what makes you think I'm going to ignore your part in the story?"

"This," said the girl, holding up the pages of the boy's manuscript.

"Where did you get those?" asked the boy. It sounded more like a demand than a question. Why could he never have anything that was his and his alone? Why did everything have to belong to both him and his sister?

"They were on your bed."

"And how do you know what's in them? You can't have read them all just now."

"I've been coming here for days now, reading while you weren't looking. And I don't like it one bit."

The boy reached his breaking point. "You had no right to do that!" he bellowed, his voice cracking and becoming an embarrassing falsetto.

"I had, and still have, every right to know how my own story is being told!" the girl shouted, suddenly too close to the boy's face for his liking. She was a mirror to his intensity and anger, but she seemed to be holding back. The boy got the sense that she could be far more intense, far angrier if she chose. And far taller, and far older, and far prettier.

"I didn't just come here to give you advice on your writing," said the girl, backing away from the boy slightly. "I came here to make sure our story is being told the right way. And there's only one way to do that."

Before the boy could react, the girl lunged at him. As she did, a gust of wind blew the bedroom door open. Where it could have come from, the boy didn't understand. All the doors (save one) and all the windows were always closed. They were never open. The boy fell backwards down the stairs with the girl on top of him, baring her teeth like a wild animal.

As he landed on the hardwood floor of the living-room-dining-room-kitchen, pain rippling through his back, the boy looked to his right. The door to the oven was open. He knew what was about to happen, and he knew that there was nothing he could do to stop it. This was his last chance to ask.

"Mother and Father," said the boy, looking into the eyes of his sister, which seemed to burn into him. "Have you seen them? Are they alive?"

For a moment, the boy saw what he wanted to believe was a look of sympathy in his sister's eyes. Then, it was gone. With superhuman strength, she picked up the kicking and screaming boy and shoved him in the oven. The boy felt the metal searing his flesh. The oven had been preheated.

The girl shut the oven door. "Goodbye, brother," she said as she pressed the buttons above the stovetop, increasing the heat. The boy was blinded by the flames, and in unbearable pain, and there was an oven door between him and his sister, so he couldn't be sure if the next words he heard were spoken by his sister, or if they were a message from his own mind: "You may have thought you were free, but you've always been living in a cage." Regardless of where these words came from, there was a sympathy in them, a deep sadness.

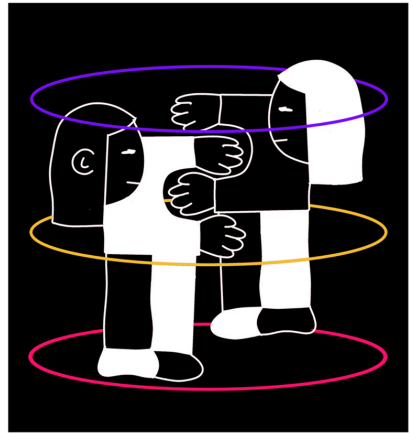
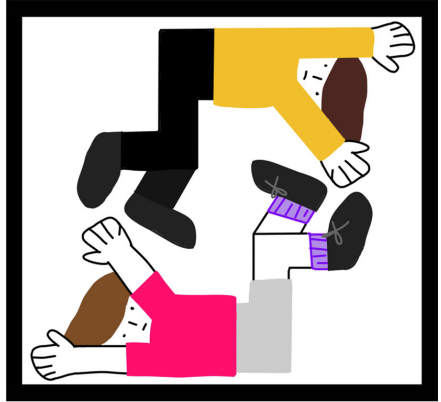
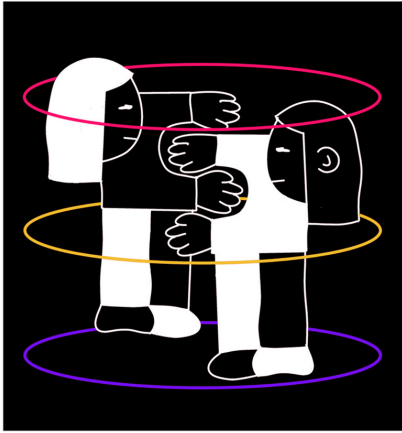
As he faded away, the boy listened to the sounds of his own screams, smelling the horribly familiar scent of burning flesh. A moment before his consciousness was burned away, the scent took on an alluring quality. It was the beckoning aroma of gingerbread as much as it was his reeking body. It was death and deliciousness, all at once.

The girl looked down at the title page of her brother's manuscript in her hand. Brother and Sister, it read. She let out a small laugh. "Even when we're not called by name, he's always put before me."

The girl dropped the page and walked away from where her brother was baking. Without unlocking or opening the front door, she walked outside.

My Sister's Keeper

'25



Immune to Beauty

Lydia Goebel '24

they told me i was born seeing in black & white
they spoke of a beauty i could not see
my eyes burn

i thought i could see all the colors
in the bright blue sky
when a rainbow appeared
after a dreary storm,
but they said I did not know beauty
my eyes burn

i say what is beautiful to me
the itchy green grass,
the shades of blue in the night sky,
& a shining ivory moon
yet i'm alone in my exploration
my eyes burn

they state the sun is a golden yellow
they say its powerful beauty
what is yellow?
my eyes burn

black & white is all i see
i do not deserve beauty
i am a mere spec on the earth
smaller than any
my eyes burn

a person is a person no matter the
size
shape
color
background
beauty was made for all
though i may be nothing
i deserve everything
but when you have everything you eventually gain nothing
my eyes burn

i am what i have

n
o
t
h
i
n
g

they took something away
they stole beauty from a baby
then I deemed myself unworthy
my eyes burn

and everything went ----

b
l
a
c
k

The Mirror Pool

Ethan Geraci '25



It Started Long Before the Girl ⚠️

Mary Isola '23

The fall leaves rustled along the wind, the leaves waving at this small airport's newest arrival: Bae. Much to her chagrin, Bae's parents sent her to her grandfather's small hometown in Central Kentucky. Her parents were doctors in Manhattan, and since COVID was spiking and they could not take care of their daughter, they chartered a small private plane to take her to Kentucky where she would be safe and taken care of.

Bae had been all over the world on her family's vacations and, as an only child, had seen some of the most luxurious airports the world had to offer. However, she wasn't sure if she could call this an airport. There was a tarmac, which was sun-bleached and had some grass growing between cracks, but there wasn't any sort of building that Bae could sit and relax in. She held onto her two suitcases and her school backpack and tried to grip her jacket closed as the wind blew. A boy about her age was trying to talk to her about her high school in New York and so on. He wore blue jeans, boots, a U.K. shirt, and an airplane baseball cap. He was dressed very differently from Bae, with her many different bracelets and necklaces adorning her, ripped jeans, a crop top (since she was going south, Bae thought it would be warmer. She was wrong), and a windbreaker from her school back home.

She tried to smile while he went on and on about basketball, which Bae had little interest in, but her smile disappeared when she saw dust flying up on the other side of the tarmac. The boy kept talking, and as he did, Bae could see what was making the dust: an old red Ford truck speeding down from the entrance towards Bae and the boy. The boy looked over and waved at the truck, not stopping his explanation of the U.K. vs. Duke rivalry to Bae as he did. Finally, as the truck approached them, the boy wrapped up his conversation and went up to the truck. The window rolled down, and the boy went up and leaned on the door, crossing his boots.

"Hey, Mr. Clark, for future reference, be careful driving that fast up the tarmac. Ya know, with the drought and all, racin' down the 'mac causes the dust to fly up so planes can't see...and well, you get the picture."

Mr. Clark nodded, "Hmm, yeah, sorry about that, Charly, I was just running late and all, don't worry, though; it won't happen again."

The boy, apparently named Charly, nodded and pushed himself off the truck, and gave the front tire a slight kick, "You better top off the air on this front tire; it's lookin' low."

"Thanks, Charly, I'll make sure to check it when I get back."

That seemed to satisfy Charly, and he came over, and without asking Bae, took her luggage, and went and threw it in the back of her Grandfather's truck.

She opened her mouth to ask him to stop, she didn't want to take the chance of COVID and whatnot, but as she did, Charly took out a spray bottle of Lysol (from somewhere deep in his worn pair of jeans) and sprayed her luggage. Then, she shut her mouth and started forward.

She hadn't seen her grandfather in at least three years. She had seen pictures of him from his youth. He was once handsome, or at least what that period would describe it as. Still, his tan skin became pale, and wrinkles and blemishes covered his face. His hair had receded almost entirely, leaving only a few patches of very short white hair. The last time she saw him, he had quite the potbelly, but now he was fragile, and she could see his veins prominently near the top of his paper-fine skin. He smiled at her, his teeth were long gone, but some nice-looking dentures replaced them.

"Hey, Bae! Look how you've grown! Come on in," he said, sticking his hand out the window and smacking the side of the truck. "Let's go; I've got vegetable beef soup on the stove back home."

"Hopefully not still on?" Bae said with a smile, trying to relax as she navigated getting into a truck (it was elevated, and Bae had never ridden in a truck before, so it was a bit difficult).

"No," he said with a chuckle, "I turned it off before I came to get you, but don't worry, I put some tin foil on the top to keep it all warm." Once Bae had finally gotten into the truck, her grandfather said his goodbyes to Charly, and took off, a bit slower than before, down the tarmac. Her grandfather tried to make small conversation on the way back, but Bae just replied with short answers.

"How's school?"

"Good."

"Do you have a lot of homework to do?"

"No."

"I imagine you may be hungry after the flight. Will that soup be okay for your stomach?"

"I guess."

He stopped trying with the small talk and just kept driving in silence. Finally, they drove out of the countryside and into town. The town looked lovely, with buildings built up right next to each other, and old names of the original business faded on the side of the brick buildings. Dogwoods were sectioned in five-yard distances between one another on the sidewalk. The sidewalks and buildings were completely empty, and the truck Bae was in was the only one in sight.

In the middle of the town was a traffic circle with a large Osage tree in the middle. It had low-hanging limbs close to the ground.

“See, we’re not that small. We have a traffic circle,” her grandfather laughed, trying to break the silence.

“Yeah,” She replied. She looked closer at the tree as they drove around. “Hey,” she said, pointing at the base of the tree, “what’s that rusty-looking thing?”

“Oh,” he said, tapping his fingers on the wheel, “hmmm, how do I explain this?” he muttered to himself. By the time he explained it, they had already gone through the roundabout and were well on their way away from the tree.

“When I was a boy, there was a murder that happened there. A dead friend of mine’s brother was murdered on that tree, and the local historical society put that up to honor him, but the town doesn’t take good care of it.”

“Oh,” Bae mumbled. She started to think about the serial killers from Criminal Minds. She was excited about the idea that such a bizarre thing happened here in this very plain small southern town. “Why was he killed? Was it like a serial killer type thing or like a crime of passion?” she asked, a tinge of excitement in her voice.

Her grandfather’s face dropped, “No, nothing like that,” he said. Bae looked at her grandfather and saw him staring off into the horizon, and it seemed like he was far away. The rest of the drive was in silence. When they pulled up to his house, he unloaded his truck and took Bae’s luggage inside without a word.

Bae was upset, to say the least. What did she do wrong? She just asked a question. She didn’t want to stay here in Kentucky anyhow; she would much rather be back home where she could DoorDash her dinner every night and get coffee in the mornings. Her house was nice and big; she had her own bathroom and walk-in closet back home with all of her things. But her granddad’s house in front of her was very different from her home. It was a one-floor lake house with a basement that overlooked the lake behind it. The initially small house had been built onto over the years, which Bae could tell from the wear and tear of the different shingles. Tall oak trees surrounded the house and partially blocked the view of the lake (which was nothing to

behold anyhow). Bae was used to the crystal blue lakes her mom would take her to on spring break; this lake, she recalled, was named “Bitterton Lake.” It was a brown color with lots of limbs floating around the water. The pretty leaves from the oak trees had floated down into the lake and had begun to rot in small islands that floated around. The lake was also shallow, with yards of a craggy rock face that sloped down towards the low and murky water. Glass bottles and litter that had previously littered the lake had found their home on the rocks as the water dried up.

There was a smell in the air, specifically that of stinky fish. Bae gagged and ran inside, coughing and sputtering until she threw open the screen door and the thick wooden door and entered the house. The house itself smelled clean, like fresh laundry (Bae knew what scent it was because of the AirWick plugged in near the door with the bright blue words “Fresh Laundry” on it). As she walked further in, she could smell the soup. Her grandfather was stirring the soup and had just turned on the gas stove.

Bae felt the awkward silence between them and tried to convince herself that she didn’t care about that. The kitchen melded into the living room, with the living room starting at a couch, which was used similar to a wall, right behind the kitchen table. She went and sat down and then flopped down on the warm leather couch with a sigh.

“Tired?” Her grandfather asked. Bae sat back up, not expecting him to talk first.

“Yeah, the car and plane ride took it out of me.” Her grandfather sighed.

“I’m sorry about my reaction in the car, Bae,” he said, sighing and walking over to her on the couch. Bae stiffened as her grandfather sat down but forced herself to relax when he looked at her.

“Your question was valid; it’s just a sensitive subject for me...” he said.

“You didn’t kill him, did you?” she asked slowly.

“What? No!” he said, shocked, “No, it’s just not a good story.”

“Well, I’m pretty bored, and I enjoy a good murder story,” Bae said with a smile, trying to lighten up the mood.

“Well, it’s not a good story. The town doesn’t like to talk about it; it’s a part of history they don’t like to talk about. It was a dark time in this town’s history.” Bae was even more intrigued; nothing like a good forbidden story, right? She turned and sat crisscrossed on the couch facing her grandfather, putting her head in her hands expectantly. The old man sighed sadly. “Alright, I guess I might as well tell ya, the anniversary is coming up soon anyhow, and I’m sure it’ll be on the local news, might as well hear it from me first.

“To understand the murder at the Osage tree, I’ll have to tell you about my childhood friend: Michael Hill.” So, he started, “They teach you about Martin Luther King and all that stuff in school, right? Well, a lot of those stories about hate crimes during and before that time sometimes get noticed, or in this case, are discreetly covered up. Growing up, my best friend was Michael Hill. He was a young and lean African American, and he and I would run around on my mother’s farm, exploring caves and playing in streams. Sometimes for lunch, we would take our rifles or fishing poles with us and find our own lunch out there, start a fire, and cook. Hell, in the summer, we would just camp out for days on end,” he said, a smile slowly

emerging on his face as he reminisced. "Mother and Mrs. Hill were good friends, her coming over for coffee and whatnot once she got off working as a seamstress. Mother would hire Mrs. Hill to fix our own odds and ends as I wore through my trousers. It was cheaper than going into town to get a new pair.

"We were in elementary school and went to different schools back then, but we would often meet after school to run back to my house together. During one of those after school meetups, a girl in the grade above me saw Michael and started talking about how handsome he was. That girl was part of a wealthy family in the town, and everyone got angry when word got around about her crush. The boys in my school, and the grown-ups, got it in their minds that Michael did something to her and couldn't stand the thought that a black boy would be more alluring and handsome than them. Four boys took action: John, Arthur, Louis, and Harvey. Harvey's dad owned a store in town, and in that store was a large fancy piece of luggage that had metal latching and a lock attached. So, one night when Michael was walking back from my house, those boys went and tried to kill Michael. I say tried because they couldn't go all the way, they beat him to an inch of his life, but they couldn't bring themselves to go all the way. So, they threw him in that fancy luggage, and while Michael was trying to scream for help, they threw the luggage into the lake." Her grandfather was quiet and looked out the window toward the lake outside.

"His mother immediately noticed he was missing when Michael didn't come home that night. She called Mother, and they met to discuss what could have happened. When I overheard the boys bragging about it at school, I ran home and told both Mother and Michael's mother. Michael's mother broke down, screaming and crying. I can't say I've ever heard such a frightening yell as that of a mother who lost her child. Mother tried to help, but what could she do? She told me to call the sheriff and tell him what I heard. So I did. But I didn't know at the time that the sheriff was Harvey's uncle. The sheriff said he would take care of it, and then swept it all under the rug. Then, witnesses came forward saying they saw Michael hop on a train

to ditch town. And just like that, the town had one less black boy, and the white folks in town couldn't be happier.

"Michael's mother never recovered. I think she was broken after what I told her, and that in her heart as a mother, she knew her little boy was gone. Mother sent a letter to Michael's older brother Mark. Mark was attending a law school up north that allowed black men to attend. He came rushing back to take care of his mother, and once he learned what happened...he tried to sue the sheriff's department for the coverup. But it didn't stick since there wasn't any evidence other than what I overheard. But that didn't stop Mark. Mark kept digging, and that got him in trouble. He got testimonies from other black folks; they saw those boys gallivanting through town, blood on their hands and clothes, threatening anyone who wasn't white that 'They'd be next.' So, the day after he had submitted that evidence to the court, he was found lynched on that Osage tree in the middle of town. Apparently, it was a whole event. Families went out and took their kids at dusk. They celebrated

as they killed Mark, screaming at him while he struggled to get out of the rope. Nothing was done afterward, but everyone talked about it. How great it was that, and I refuse to say that nasty word they used, a black man got what he deserved. It wasn't until later that the local government tried to sweep it under the rug. Now, the only thing that proves the lynching of Mark and the 'disappearance' of his brother is that little sign by that tree that the local African American Historical Society put up in the 90's. Mark and Michael's mom didn't last long after Mark's murder. Mother said she died of a broken heart. It's not a good story." Bae's grandfather finished, and Bae was left frozen.

She could only ask one thing: "What happened to those boys?" Her grandfather sighed.

"Well, John became mayor and only just retired about two years ago, Arthur's a judge, Louis is a doctor, and Harvey is the sheriff."

"So, they never faced any consequences?"

"Nope." her grandfather said, "Well, it's soup time."

Bae couldn't sleep that night. She was sleeping in her mother's childhood bedroom in the basement, which had a small window looking out to the dark water of the lake below. She looked out the window and, for a second, swore she could see the body of a young man hanging from the tree, blowing in the wind with a snapped neck. She fell asleep staring at the body. Because if she kept her eyes on it, it wouldn't move, right? When she woke up in the morning, there wasn't a body, just a dead branch hanging off a tree over the lake. She convinced herself that she was just having a nightmare.

Bae stayed inside most of the time, doing online school during the week and playing on her Switch during the weekends. Her grandfather and her got along well, he enjoyed watching her play the Switch, and he let her choose the tv shows to watch at night after dinner. The only exception to that was that he got to watch Kentucky Afield when it came on every Tuesday. Bae settled into her daily life, that disturbing story in the back of her mind only making itself known at the darkest hours of the night when she thought she could see a body swinging from the dead tree limb overlooking the lake.

One day, she looked over at the newspaper her grandfather was reading and saw a story about an old piece of luggage discovered in the lake due to the historic drought.

"What's that about?" She asked her grandfather. He flinched when she talked but quickly relaxed.

"Well, it seems like with the drought, and the lake all dried up, they found the piece of luggage they threw Michael in."

“Did they find his body?”

“No,” he said nervously, “When they found it, the luggage, the lock was rusted off. When it was opened up, they found a bunch of scratch marks, human teeth, fishing wire and hooks, and fish skeletons in it.”

“Freaky,” Bae said, a chill going down her spine. “So, what happened to the body?”

“I don’t know.”

A few days later, she had the local news on during her lunch break, absentmindedly listening to the weather and the pets available at the local animal shelter. She watched as the newscasters looked at each other nervously, and new words popped up on the screen.

“Breaking news,” the female newscaster said, “previous Mayor John Goodwell has been found dead outside his home. The police report says he was found face down in his front pond, covered in bruises and cuts, and had multiple broken bones. Police are currently looking for suspects in this suspected murder case. His body was found this morning while neighbors were walking their dogs. We go live now to the scene...” Bae hopped up and yelled across the house.

“Hey! Grandpa! Come in here! That guy John was found murdered in his front pond!” She could hear him fumbling as he quickly walked into the living room. He stared at the news, watching as the Breaking News title scrolled by.

“Well, shit, the bastard was murdered.”

“Yeah! Isn’t that awesome? He got what was coming to him; justice was finally served!” Bae laughed, going to high-five her grandfather. But she saw he was frozen, staring at the TV in horror. “Grandpa, you okay?”

“Yeah,” he said, “Do you see anything weird on that tree on the TV screen?” he asked. Bae looked back. A large oak tree was hanging over the pond where John’s body was found. All the leaves were dead but still hanging onto the tree.

“Do you mean all those dead leaves? That is a little strange, but I’ve seen that before.” Her grandfather narrowed his eyes at the screen and then walked away. Bae shrugged and went back to her computer to start her next class. Honestly, she thought it was good that the old bastard got what was coming to him. She smiled and joined her zoom class.

Her grandfather didn’t talk much that night, just making small conversation before he went to bed early. Bae didn’t think much of it until she looked out the window of her room that night. She thought she could see a small figure rising out of the murky water and start walking up the rocky cliffside. When Bae woke up the following day, there wasn’t anyone there. She shook her head; she’s got to order some gemstones online to help her with those nightmares.

A week passed, and the town was in disarray trying to find the murderer. The new Breaking News headline didn't make things better. The local judge, Arthur McFelton, was found dead in the fountain outside the courthouse earlier that morning. He was similar to how John was found a week earlier, face down in the fountain, his body covered in bruises, and many bones were broken. It seemed strange, and the police had a public announcement saying they were now investigating these murders as a part of a serial killing. Bae's grandfather was quiet that night and the rest of the week. Primarily when the famous local surgeon, Louis Lenade, was found dead in the local hospital, face down in a full bathtub, body covered in bruises, and had several broken bones. Bae's grandfather ordered Ring cameras to put around his lake house. "Just in case," he said.

During the fourth week, the police continued their investigation. During that investigation, Harvey Jackson was found murdered on his farm, face down in a small stream that had previously been dried up. Like the others, his body was covered in bruises, and many of his bones were broken. Bae thought it was just justice being served; she wasn't worried about it. But dark thoughts littered the back of her mind, as every night since the first murder, she saw the same figure emerge from the lake and slowly walk up the bank, getting closer and closer every night. And recently, the lynched figure in the tree returned; this time, she thought she could almost hear a scream covered up, just barely, by the autumn winds. Finally, one night during dinner, nearly a week after Harvey's death, her grandfather sat Bae down for a conversation.

"Bae, I've got somethin' to tell ya," he said, looking out the window down towards the lake. "I partially lied to ya about that story I told you last month."

"Is it fake?"

"No, but I am."

"Are you the one who killed those guys?"

"No, but by God, I wish I did," he said, a tear dripping down his face. "I lied to ya that I overheard about what those boys did to Michael. I was actually there that night. I was there and so angry that the little girl liked him, a black boy, over me, that I stood there as he was beaten. I stood there as he screamed my name for help and as he gurgled my name with blood in his mouth. I did nothing to stop them, and I had no intention to. I was in on it, and I was supposed to lure Michael over to an abandoned part of town by the lake so they could kill him. His screams, and the screams of his mother, still haunt me to this day. I've never been able to sleep well, and it scared me to death that you would have to see that body swingin' in the trees too."

"What, so you..." Bae said, standing up in shock. "You helped to kill your best friend?! Why?" she yelled. Her grandfather looked out to the lake, a dead look in his eyes.

“Because he was black, Bae, and I couldn’t stand the thought that he was better than me.” Bae ran off. It wasn’t until she was in the field across from the house that she realized: A. It was dark now and, B. Her grandfather saw the body hanging in the tree.

She stood frozen in the field and looked back at the house, her legs shaking. When she got to the front door, water was leaking from under it, forming a small stream down to the lake. She could hear her grandfather talking calmly from the inside.

“I know, Michael. I’m sorry, and I’m not gonna ask for forgiveness. All I ask is that you leave my granddaughter alone; she didn’t do nothin’.”

Bae could hear a voice responding, but it sounded like nails on a chalkboard or a fishing hook scraping against a rock. She started trying to open the door, but it was locked, and she didn’t lock it when she ran out. Bae kept shaking at it and yelling inside, asking if he was okay. She only heard some groans and something hitting the ground. Suddenly, everything went quiet, and the door was unlocked.

Bae tumbled into the house as she tried to open the door. The entire floor of the house was covered in a two-inch deep pool of water. In the middle of the living room was her grandfather, face down in the water that was quickly turning red, his body beaten black and blue, and bones sticking out of his back. She saw the exact figure that had always walked up from the lake each night. It was what used to be a young black boy, but fish and crawdads had eaten away at its face, leaving half-eaten eyes and rotting flesh all over its body, with all of its ribs sticking out of its chest, legs, and arms. The entire top half of his head was just bone, and part of that was broken, revealing what used to be a brain, now covered in fishing wire and hooks. It looked at her, and she was frozen.

It started slowly trudging toward Bae, and she couldn’t do anything about it. It walked right up to her face, and she could smell its rotting flesh and the dead fish smell wafting off of it. Silent tears trickled down her face as she looked at its mouth, rows of teeth without lips, with scales and claws of crawdads sticking out between its front teeth. As it raised its arm towards her, the body dropped into the water like it suddenly walked into the deep end of a pool and disappeared.

Bae looked outside and saw the body hanging from the tree by the lake. It swayed violently in the wind as a storm blew in, rain pelting the ground for the first time in months. As the lightning struck, the dead branch broke, and the body fell to the ground, got back up, and walked into the lake, hand in hand with the thing that had killed her grandfather. And with the rain pelting down and lightning flashing around the house, Bae was left alone in a flooded home, with the dead body of her grandfather a few feet away.

Tape Measure

Molly Trout '23



A Queen to Beat a King

Galileo Henneman '24

you are beautiful
with your strawberry speckled skin
and your tiger stripes stretching thick and thin
and the dark kisses of sun that decorate your flesh
a body so perfect yet told that it lacks
convinced to hate the rolling valleys of soft fat
told to loathe the pores that etch themselves, dense and flat
sworn to never love a figure so magnificent and unique
by a world filled with flaws that bring down even its peaks
strong mind, strong hands, broken down by broken men
women told to internalize the hate, of a body more powerful
than a system it should hate.

you are lovely, you are tender, you are the world's finest splendors
you are strong and you are wild, you are the sun and moon's finest child
wrapped in silks of skies and earth, eyes kissed with fire, face kissed with mirth
laugh in the face of the cruelest of kings,
hold your chin high, let them see you win,
for there's never been a queen so fine as the one i see before me now,
so never bow, never quiver, let them know their worst fear lives
for nothing challenges a hate filled man more than a love filled woman.

InvisiCream

Ernie Sadashige

Dear InvisiCream,

So I went to the drugstore. Bought InvisiCream, rubber gloves, face shield, misting bottle. Snuck into my apartment (not really snuck 'cause we're both on the lease) and did what TikTok said.¹

It didn't work! My boyfriend is STILL HERE. He REFUSES to leave. I even called the cops, but since he's invisible (except for his thong),² the police think I'm nuts.

Look. I admit. I freaked. It's not my fault. We fought. We fight a lot, but this one is on HIM. He never should have said, "I wish you would [illegible] disappear." Jeez, don't put ideas in people's heads!

Refund my money!

Daisy

¹Disappearo Solution

1. Pour 3 1/2 cups water into a 1 1/2 qt. nonreactive pot.
2. Boil, then simmer.
3. Slowly add 32 oz. of InvisiCream, stirring gently. Your stirrer may vanish
SO PAY ATTENTION.
4. Stir until thoroughly dissolved to ensure even application.
Caution: wear gloves and face shield. Don't splash or breathe fumes.
Bonus: add yellow food coloring to create the Golden Glow of Invisibility.
5. Let cool to the touch, but don't touch!
6. Carefully pour mixture into misting bottle.
7. Spray liberally where appropriate. Discard any unused product.

²No way Jose I'm spraying down there.

Hello Daisy!

Thanks for choosing InvisiCream. Sorry you are not 100% satisfied with our amazing product. Unfortunately, we cannot give you a refund. Refer to our terms of use below.

Our 100% Satisfaction Guarantee: Return the unused portion within 30 days for a full refund.¹

¹*Guarantee limited to personal application. Using InvisiCream on other people, pets, porcelain, or nuclear submarines violates our terms of use.*

Like us on Facebook!

InvisiCream Cares

Hey InvisiCream,

Help! My [illegible] ex-girlfriend sprayed me with your [illegible] product. Now I'm invisible except for my [illegible] thong. Got fired for not "showing up" for work. And the ladies at the gym can no longer admire my six-pack abs and boom-boom biceps.

Will nail polish remover work? It works on permanent markers. I rubbed some on my skin but nothing happened. Should I fill a bathtub with acetone and jump in?

Lately, Daisy has been picking my clothes off the floor so it's harder to hide from the police.

Dave

P.S. Cataclysm won't leave me alone. Our [illegible] cat thinks my shorts are a toy.

Hey Dave!

Thanks for being an awesome InvisiCream customer! Sorry you are not 100% satisfied with our incredible product. For legal reasons, we can't comment on bathing in nail polish remover. We can say InvisiCream naturally fades in a week if used as directed.¹

¹Do not mix InvisiCream with anything, including water. Diluting InvisiCream may cause "spotting" unless professionally mixed at a minimum temperature of 215 degrees Fahrenheit. Don't try that at home.

WARNING: InvisiCream will permanently bond to organic matter and the omniphobic coating of nuclear submarines when heated improperly.

Post your picture on Instagram and tag us. We'll add you to our \$100 monthly drawing!

#InvisiCream Cares

Q&A I Asked in Tucson, AZ | Oct 20, 2022

My evil ex sprayed InvisiCream on me. I'm invisible except for my [illegible] shorts. Can I file assault charges? Daisy has been nicer since I threatened to call Five-O. Even left new boxers next to the litter box.¹ She tossed my old thongs when she tried to kick me out of our apartment. Gym workers keep grabbing my shorts, thinking it's dirty laundry. Is that sexual harassment?

¹I'm not sure if the new pack is for me or Cataclysm.

2 attorney answers

Fred Fleecem: Your ex may be guilty of third-degree assault, depending on the circumstances. Sexual harassment will be tough to prove unless people are aware of your presence.

Curley Cheatem: Our personal injury law firm, Cheatem & Howell, is investigating InvisiCream for potential violations of the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act. Contact us.

r/invisicream_cures: Posted by DaveSleepsNude • 3 weeks ago

My frenemy sprayed me with InvisiCream. Will Tattoo Depot's \$99 Miracle Cure work for me? Lost my job. Nearly broke.

DramaQueen0792 • 20 days ago

Laser removal is for small areas. I tried lasering after InvisiCreaming myself to look like a size 2 for an audition (I'm a size 8). Now my skin looks like a fried egg. No one will hire me.

AlaskaMomma • 16 days ago

I buy concealer in bulk from Costco and wear fake eyebrows and a wig. Luv that thong pic. Grrr!

Cosplayboi • 15 days ago

Theatrical makeup. It comes in colors. I work from home and show up for Zoom meetings looking like Spiderman's nemesis, the Green Goblin.

DownUnder • 12 days ago

Black submarine paint (MIL-PRF-23236). It's waterproof. Won't run like concealer or makeup. Makes you look like a deadly ninja warrior. Plus, it absorbs sound so you can skinny dip without worrying about being chased by sonic torpedoes.

Top News

- InvisiCream faces class action lawsuit following FDA ban
- Spray woman mysteriously vanishes
- Blue Man Group hires "shorts guy"

Daisy snuggled against Dave. It was still hard to get used to all the Swiss cheese-like holes in their apartment where they accidentally spilled InvisiCream on the bed, furniture, carpeting and floor—especially that humongous hole in the tub that looks down into the Braverman's bathroom. Yuk. Thank goodness for MIL-PRF-23236.

“Sorry baby, I lost my temper,” Daisy said. “But you shouldn’t flirt with gym bunnies.”

Dave kissed her forehead. Or at least what he thought was her forehead.

“I [unintelligible] promise not to do that anymore.”

Daisy’s eyes narrowed, or at least that’s what her tone suggested. “Easy to say since no one can see you without your stage makeup.”

“Gimme some [unintelligible] credit. I saved your [unintelligible] from jail and got a [unintelligible] job.”

“You called the cops in the first place and didn’t stop Cataclysm from drinking bath water.”

Dave felt pressure on his chest and imagined the cat’s eyes staring at his face. Still in the doghouse, he thought.

Dove

Lydia Goebel '24

f l o
d w
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w s
the have
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s
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P
e
r
e
d

what a perfect excuse
to let the wings loose

lie here as the ground
eyes closed envelopes me

forgiving are the hands of God

as they
caress my
tired
soul

am i one with creation yet?

Shadow of Decay

Anjolaoluwa Favour Oyebadejo '24



Identity of a Housewife

Creek Arthur '26

“What were you doing when you were grabbed by the suspect, Miss White? Or would you rather be called Hannah?”

“My name is Lucy.”

“The file here says ‘Hannah White.’”

“I want to be called Lucy.”

A man dressed in a suit sat across from me. His name tag read “Dr. James Graber.” Dr. Graber was a psychologist. He had a yellow notepad in hand and was ready to write. I watched him shift in his seat. His lips formed a thin line. “Of course, Lucy,” he paused and took a breath, “you can begin telling your story. Start from the beginning. You can take as much time as you need and go into as much detail as you like. Whatever you’re comfortable with.”

I looked like any person who was in Walmart at 10:30 at night. I was wearing a sweatshirt and sweatpants, my hair was a mess, and I felt like I was about to fight anyone who even looked at me the wrong way. I dragged myself through the store until I found the hygiene section.

I can’t believe I ran out of damn tampons. I searched the shelves for the brand that I used. I finally found the green package and grabbed it, the plastic crinkling in my hand. I yawned. If only I realized before I went to the bathroom, then I would probably be asleep right now. A frown was plastered on my face as I walked down the aisle and to the cash register.

I paid the \$8 and left the store as quickly as I could. I pressed the button on my keys that unlocked the car. I saw the lights blink and went straight to them. My eyes hadn’t yet adjusted to the dark and the street lamps barely helped. As I moved closer I could see that a van with an open trunk was parked very close to my car.

What an asshole.

I shook my head as I finally reached my car. I had to squeeze between my car and the van to get to my car door. I opened the driver seat door and threw the bag with the tampons into the passenger seat. I realized that I wouldn’t be able to open the door enough to fit into my car, so I began to slide my way out between the crevice.

“Unfortunately, I never got to reach the other side of my car,” I told Dr. Graber. “I don’t remember what happened exactly. All I know is that as soon as I got out from between the cars, I got grabbed and thrown into his car. I think that I was hit a few times? I remember that I got hit in the face, but that’s it. After that blank, I remember that I was tied up and blindfolded. My arms and legs were tied in

something, and I think I was gagged. I couldn’t move or see or talk or scream. I could feel the blood on my legs because I bled through my tampon. I was scared, uncomfortable, and embarrassed, I guess,” I took a deep breath and clenched my jaw, trying to keep myself from crying at the memory. “It’s alright. Take all the time that you need,” Dr. Graber said, scribbling notes down on his notepad.

“I felt so...helpless. I thought that...that I was going to die,” I said as my voice trembled. A tear slid down my cheek.

Dr. Graber nodded. The sound of his pen scratching on paper was gone.

My head was ringing when I was dragged out of wherever I was being kept. I heard a man grunting while I was yanked and pulled as I tried to struggle against him. After what felt like an agonizing few minutes, the yanking stopped, but it was replaced by a blow to my side. I stopped fighting as pain burned through me. Arms wrapped around me and I was lifted up. Carried.

“You’re home now, Lucy. Now you can just relax,” said an old, raspy voice.

Who is Lucy?

I heard a door creak. I was being brought inside. Who knew what was waiting for me there? My whole body began to tremble as my mind wandered to what my possible fates would be. I didn’t dare to make a sound, so everything was quiet except for my heavy breathing and the man’s footsteps. I heard another door open and close as he carried me into another room.

I heard a click come from nearby. It sounded like a lock. Then, I heard another. And another.

I was thrown down onto something cushiony, and I bounced from the impact. The blindfold was taken off of me. I looked around frantically. The room was dimly lit, so I couldn’t see very well.

“Calm down,” a man said as he gripped my shoulders. I looked over to see a man.

He wore a hat and a facemask, so I couldn't make out any of his features except his eyes.

"You're home, Lucy. Home." His eyes smiled at me, but I felt no comfort from them. He took the gag out of my mouth.

I stayed silent for a moment, afraid to speak, but he looked like he was waiting for me to say something.

"Who are you?" My voice shook, and my lips trembled. I squeezed my eyes shut at the man sitting next to me. He left my arms and legs tied together.

"It's me, Lucy. Your husband? Landon?" he laughed. "The man you got married to in 1978? We have a strong son and a beautiful daughter?" He placed a hand on my stomach. I flinched at the touch. "And you're pregnant with twins, remember?"

"I...I don't know who Lucy is," I said, not opening my eyes.

"Of course you do. You are Lucy. At least, you will be," the man said as I opened my eyes. I looked around. I was in a basement. A rather large one at that. There was enough room for a couch, a table, a TV, a bookshelf, and a whole kitchen. There were multiple doors, I assumed to other parts of the basement.

"I will be?" I watched as the man walked over to a drawer and opened it. I squeezed my eyes shut again. I didn't want to see what he would pull out. I heard steps walk over as a rough cloth was put over my face. It smelled like cleaning supplies. I struggled against it, but I wasn't able to do much. It wasn't long until I felt dizzy. It wasn't much longer until everything went black again.

"I genuinely thought that I wasn't getting out of there alive. I thought that he was going to kill me right then and there."

Dr. Graber nodded, placing his notepad on his lap. He was quiet for a moment as he looked down at his notes. "So, you had no clue where you were going? Or where you were?"

"No."

Dr. Graber nodded again. "What about when you woke up?"

I woke up in a bed. The lights were off and it was very, very dark. I shifted to sit up when I realized that I wasn't wearing the clothes that I came in with. I don't know what they looked like, but they were much lighter than my sweatshirt and sweatpants. They felt smoother too. I could feel that I was wearing some sort of pad. I was somewhat relieved, but I also felt so much shame.

I blinked as my eyes adjusted to the darkness. I slowly eased myself off of the bed. The abuse that I got when I was grabbed had finally caught up with me. I could feel bruises and scratches all over my body. When I moved my left arm, pain burned through my body. I hissed from the sensation.

I felt something cold on my ankle. When I reached down and grabbed it, I realized it was a chain and a small padlock. This man was treating me like some sort of prisoner, and this place was the prison.

There was a lamp next to my bed. Surprisingly, it turned on, even if the light was low. My vision readjusted to the light. I looked around the room. It was full of crazy patterns and faded colors. I could tell that they had once been bright. The room was full of trinkets, decorations, and dust. I could make out cobwebs on the ceiling. I wondered how long it had been since someone was in this room.

There was a vanity next to my bed that was full of make-up and hair products. A large mirror hung above it. I looked at myself in the mirror. There was a dark bruise underneath my right eye. My hair was a mess. I finally noticed my new outfit, which was an orange turtleneck tucked into some high-waisted pants. It looked like something my mom would wear.

I reached out for the brush on the vanity. Why was I brushing my hair? I tugged the brush through my hair, ripping some blonde strands out. I didn't even realize that they perfectly matched the hair that was in the brush.

"I'm confused," Dr. Graber said. "Why were you brushing your hair?"

"I don't know," I looked down at the ground and wrung my hands together, "I guess that if I couldn't be in control of my environment, I could at least be in control of myself."

"Did you ever go to the door?"

I thought for a moment and then shook my head. "No. I was too scared of what would have been on the other side."

"Was there anything in the room that stood out to you?"

"Yes."

"Would you like to share?"

On the nightstand next to my bed was a photo. There was a woman with blonde hair who was pregnant and in her arms was a baby. Her stomach was large,

showing that she was late in her pregnancy. A man stood next to her with his arm wrapped around her. A small boy who looked like a toddler stood in front of her.

Next to the picture lay a newspaper. The headline read “FAMILY KILLED IN VENUE FIRE, ONLY HUSBAND SURVIVES.” I picked up the newspaper carefully. It was from August 4, 1983. There was a wedding and a candle fell over, causing the building to go up in flames. Something fell and trapped 5-year-old boy Charlie Jacobson and 3-year-old girl Darling Jacobson. Their mother wouldn’t leave them to die. The two children, along with pregnant Lucy Jacobson, were the only deaths from that night. They left a father and husband, Landon Jacobson.

Lucy. I’ve heard that name. The man kept calling me Lucy. He said that I will be Lucy. I thought about what that meant. Would he kill me? Was he going to force himself upon me? I didn’t know.

I jumped as I heard the door open. I turned to see an unfortunately familiar person.

“Rise and shine, Lucy!” The man walked into my room, “I see that you’re already all ready.”

He wasn’t wearing his face covering. He was definitely the man in the picture. His beard was gray and his face was covered in wrinkles, but I could tell that he was the same man.

“Landon,” I said the name from the newspaper article. I watched as he forced himself not to cry. He pressed a hand against his mouth and looked at the ground.

“Lucy, I’m hungry. Can you fix us up with some food?”

“I started to feel bad for Landon. I think it was then that I sort of ‘accepted’ the role of Lucy Jacobson. Or, at least began to accept it.” Dr. Graber shifted in his seat.

“Would you say that you felt empathy?”

“I guess so.”

Both Dr. Graber and I went quiet. I looked down at my hands. Tears began to stream down my face. I didn’t know why I was crying, but I was. I think I felt ashamed, stressed, and upset. I felt so empty. Dr. Graber called for an attendant to bring some water before turning back to me. “It’s alright. Take your time.”

I sat on the dirty couch next to Landon. I had no clue how long I’d been there, but I’d slept three or four times since I’d gotten here. I spent my time mostly cleaning and cooking. I had begun to learn how to sew, a skill that I hadn’t touched on since I was a kid. The basement had room to live in. It had a bedroom, a bathroom, and a living area.

Landon turned on the news as he wrapped an arm around me and pulled me close. I still hated his touch. I had to keep myself from flinching because it would make him upset. I didn't want to make him upset. My life was still, essentially, in his hands. So, I had to become Lucy Jacobson in order to keep Hannah White alive.

Landon turned on the news. I was surprised to see how many working appliances were down there. I recognized the man on the TV. His name was Jared Mann, one of the reporters. He was talking about construction on a highway that was in my city.

"They're always doing so much damn construction," Landon complained while shaking his head. I wished that he wasn't so close to me.

"Yeah, it's like they never stop," I didn't want to talk to him, but I hoped that it would make him happy. Hopefully, if he was happy, then he wouldn't kill me. My hands were white from how tightly I was gripping the pants that I was wearing. I wondered if the clothes that I was wearing once belonged to Lucy.

Landon then stood up. "Well, I should go and get some work done," he smiled at me and leaned down to kiss my cheek.

I hate him.

I hate him.

I hate him.

I had to hold back tears. I clenched my jaw as I watched him go up the stairs to leave the basement. I sighed and brought my knees to my chest, hugging them. I focused on the floor until I heard my name on the TV.

"Hannah White has been missing now for four days. Her phone and car were found in the parking lot of Walmart off of 32nd Street. If anyone knows or has seen anything about Hannah's whereabouts, contact the police at the number shown."

I watched as the news talked about me. They're showing my picture. They're begging to know where I am.

I'm here, right here. Please come find me.

It dawned on me that I was stuck. I couldn't call out for help, just helplessly watch as my family and friends searched for me. I didn't even know where I was.

I couldn't take it anymore. I reached for the remote and turned off the T.V. I finally broke down. Tears streamed down my face as I silently cried. I realized that I was stuck here. I couldn't leave, or else I would die. I was alone. I was afraid. I was at the mercy of my captor.

I set a glass on the table next to me. I had just drank all of the water out of it. Dr. Graber sat back down across from me.

“Are you alright to continue the interview? If not, we can keep going tomorrow,” Dr. Graber looked concerned.

“I’m fine.”

Silence. Dr. Graber frowned and wrote a few things in his notes. He pushed up his glasses and sighed. He looked worried. Was he worried about me? My face scrunched up. I hoped he wasn’t. I didn’t want him to be worried about me. He didn’t need to be worried about me.

“Can I ask you a few questions about how you’ve been feeling lately?”

“Why?”

“I just want to know the effects of what happened to you. I want to know how whatever happened has affected you mentally, physically, and personally,” he said a bit softer.

“I guess so.”

“Thank you. Have you felt like you’ve been isolating yourself? Not talking to friends or family and not participating in hobbies or interests?” I thought for a minute. At first, I was going to answer “no.” I’ve had friends and family talk to me a lot since I’ve been rescued, but I’ve never been very engaged in the conversations that we’ve had. I haven’t done anything that I really “enjoy” lately. It’s just been cooking and cleaning.

Like some sort of housewife.

“I guess so. I haven’t really been paying attention,” I finally answered. Dr. Graber wrote a few notes down, nodding.

“And lately, have you been feeling tense or anxious?”

“Well, why wouldn’t I? I just got kidnapped and locked in a basement. Obviously, I’d feel like that.”

Dr. Graber put his notepad on his lap after writing more things down. He shifted awkwardly in his seat. “I have one last question, Hannah. You were there for almost two weeks. Did you ever feel like, at any point, that you were Lucy?”

As I lay in my bed, I wondered how long I had been here. Maybe a week. Maybe a month? Maybe more. I don’t know. I don’t know when it’s night or day. All the clocks down here are different. I use the one in the living room, but I don’t know if it’s right.

I've gotten used to Landon's affection by now. It has become a habit to make sure that the basement is always clean for him and to make food when he wants it. I used to do it out of fear, but it's become normal to me. He calls me "Lucy," or "Honey," or "Dear," and I call him "Landon," or "Darling," in return. At first, it really bothered me. It doesn't as much anymore. I've gotten quite used to it.

We stopped watching the news. Another story about me came up last time we had it on, and I told Landon about how much it upset me. In fact, we barely watch anything that isn't a VHS tape or a DVD anymore.

I finally managed to exert enough energy to get out of bed. The clock read 5:33 P.M. Landon was normally down here by now. I frowned as I walked out into the living space. He wasn't out there either. I wondered where he was.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

I looked up at the ceiling, wondering what had happened. The sound of many, many footsteps came from above me. I hugged myself as I pressed myself against the wall. I heard yelling. There were a lot of voices. **BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!**

There was banging on the basement door. I went over to the small kitchen and grabbed a dirty pan out of the sink in case I needed to protect myself.

CRASH!

Men came pouring from the steps. They were dressed in blue and large protective gear. They were the police. They had Landon with them. He was in handcuffs. One of the men looked at a picture and stepped forward. "Ma'am, are you Ms. Hannah White?"

I froze, just staring at the man.

Hannah White.

The name didn't feel right anymore. I barely recognized it. Was I even Hannah anymore? I've been Lucy for... I don't even know how long. "Lucy," I said, looking Landon in the eyes. The corners of his lips turned up into a smile.

"Excuse me?"

"My name is Lucy."

Toast to a New Home

John Grey

As we gathered on the back porch,
she poured from a bottle of merlot
into two crystal clear goblets,
lush velvet liquid taking up its glittering quarters
without a hint of splash.

She lifted her chalice
as she'd seen the priest brandish the blood,
slowly ran her finger down the goblet's throat
to feel the smoothness of our life together,
then clinked a tribute to this unsullied Eden.

Again and again we sipped more than just the wine:
shared ownership, each other, the sun in fine mettle,
so warm, relaxed and patient as the afternoon hunkered down.
I rejoiced in her bow-shaped, narrowing lips as she
mouthed cheer after cheer,
saluted her way into my perfect happiness,
as mottled light through maple sparkled her hair,
and the rooms behind us prepared themselves for our entrance.

She was, as the wine,
early ripened, full in body, high in tannins.
And we were a couple, our July's lazy duty
to make homestead of an address,
to share the particulars,
recite vows in the gentle grasp
of some dark, blue-washed grape.

"Chin-chin," she said.

"Chin-chin," I said.

"Chin-chin," said the house and the sky beyond.

Hyrule Livestock

Sarah Steen '26



Humans to be Used for Testing Instead of Animals

Robin Karwath '24

Animals have always been treated by humans as a means for them. They are kept in small tight spaces, dogs at shelters are abused or neglected due to a lack of resources, baby chicks' beaks are cut off, so they don't peck at each other. These are just a few examples of the mistreatment of animals. However, a better idea is in the works to help animals and us. There has been an overwhelming amount of research being done in order to better the quality and quantity of our lives as humans. One that has been proven to show amazing efforts recently is using humans as test subjects for cosmetic, educational, and medical purposes. Studies have shown that the use of humans has allowed for 100% accurate results. The drawbacks of this have been shown to be minimal compared to the success that human lab subjects provide. Science is the basis of everything we build, the further that it can take us will help humans live longer and better lives. The use of humans as test subjects has already helped to save so many lives!

This change has allowed for so many advancements in the medical field. One of those includes easier access to organ donors. To make sure that those who are in a life-or-death situation and may need a kidney, or lung, or liver transplant get them, having human test subjects has allowed for lots of unused organs to get used and given to those who are sick and in need. Doctors and those in medical school have practiced on animals, or cadavers but practicing on real, alive humans has helped them gain so much more experience and has allowed for better and more accurate hands-on learning. Having more experienced doctors allows for better help and more efficient help to reach even those in poverty in America.

Beauty and cosmetics are always so expensive, and those that are cheap cannot always be trusted. Due to the amount of testing that goes in, and those who do not test on animals take longer processes but now, with human testing, good and decent hygiene products and cosmetics such as makeup are more affordable than ever! These products can also now ensure for 100% fact that it is safe to use on human skin, on human hair, and is safe to consume by humans.

The easy way to roll out this plan is simple. There is a huge crisis in the growing over-population in this world, and there are particularly way too many people in the United States. This new method allows two problems to be solved in one way, and everyone will benefit!

Starting July 2045, every couple will be allowed to have one or two children. If a third child were to accidentally come about, then there are two options that will be put in place. One, an abortion is an option, but it is highly encouraged against, and a mandatory surgery will be put in place to ensure that you and your partner will not be able to have children again. The other option creates many opportunities for couples and people struggling. For every pregnancy over two that occurs, if the

pregnancy is completed and the fetus is born, then you will be paid up to 1,000 dollars for your offspring. This enables that everybody benefits. Not only would you be helping your country, by helping scientific research continue to get better and more accurate but you also will be able to make some extra money to help you and your loved ones.

Now this does not stop here. There are other ways to benefit if you are unable to contribute by producing test subjects. If you know someone who has more than three kids by notifying your local police or government officials, you will receive up to 2,000 dollars for supporting and aiding your country. There is no limit on the amount of money you can receive. It is endless as far as you are helping to create test subjects or if you are helping to keep your fellow neighbors accountable.

There are many drop off locations for the test subjects but a drop off and pick up location will be decided for and assigned by your local government officials. Once the tip has been received or you have sold your subject, you will receive cash on the spot!

There are also many benefits to farmers and to the economy through this new plan. Farmers will get paid for excess food they create to be used to feed the test subjects and those who own and operate hotels will be encouraged to sell their property or manage it to local researchers to help create space and rooms for these test subjects.

When asked about how this will benefit all of America, a fellow researcher and scientist who asked to remain anonymous said "This researcher is giving people a second chance at life. It is allowing for some people who have been told they have six months to live to get a transplant or create a new medicine that has been approved and save their lives. It is critical that these experiments become more and more common in order to help save those we love and cherish, and hope that they can get extra years. With this research diseases and illnesses that have previously been 'incurable' are starting to become curable. Everything is starting to make more sense and before we know it there will be a test site in every state to help save you and your loved ones."

This clearly speaks for itself. Once this is widespread then everyone will feel the benefits that it allows! It may even help us to understand other animals and help us combat diseases your dog or cat might have!

Dear black woman

Zanisha Richardson '23

Dear black woman,

Black girl magic is not just a #hashtag.

You are beautiful in your melanin skin.

You are the standard for beauty.

You are black, gifted, powerful, and fearless.

Dear black woman,

You are a warrior.

You are resilient.

With an essence that is unmatched,

And a soul that flies.

You are a reflection of our ancestors.

Dear black woman,

You don't have to explain your lovely hairstyle to this unwoke world.

Your hair is your story.

Let those curls bounce like they got springs.

Wear those locks and braids like they got a purpose.

Dear black woman,

you are perfect in your skin.

You are never too much.

You are enough.

Every shade of chocolate is divine.

It is a movement and statement of your unapologetic power.

Dear black woman,

hold your head high

You better recognize everybody wants to be us.

You are the trailblazer.

You are a Queen.

Unwavelled

Galileo Henneman '24

Struck to the ground I was
From heaven to dirt
In a cicada sickened summer
My wings ripped from tip to tip
Making me nothing

But there in that garden of sin and human
My rib cage cracked and broken, pieces stolen
I unwavelled in the palms of an earthly angel
A being beyond the book of god and lust of lucifer

The thrum of bugs served as our choir music,
My shattered bones became our flower beds,
And my unwavelled spirit and mind welcomed
A once mourned and regretted change

So in that cicada sickened summer,
With my rib cage cracked and broken, pieces stolen,
For the first time in all the eons that I had lived,
I let myself become
Unwavelled.

in my mind her name is always birdie elouise

Andi Spring '23

I want to call my hypothetical daughter.

I want to ask her how she is, but more importantly if she hates me.

I want to ask her what I picked for her middle name and ask her for an itemized list of every time I've traumatized her by the time of this hypothetical daughter hypothetical phone call.

I want her to say to me that I did a good job, that it wasn't a mistake to bring her into the world—that there's still a world—that she is pregnant with her own daughter now and that when we all put our hands against her belly, me and my mother and her, that everything feels right. That we didn't screw up completely somehow.

I want my daughter to tell me that something beautiful came from all that suffering. That she remembers me singing in the kitchen while I cooked. That she remembers goodnight moon and rainbow fish and hungry hungry caterpillars crawling around her room as I read to her every book from the shelf not leaving one page unturned.

I want her to tell me that on the night of her middle school dance I curled her hair without burning her ear. She'll say that I always braided her hair before bed and got all the pith off her oranges every single time no matter how long it took, that I left notes in her lunchbox that said I love you love mom every field trip and it made her friends laugh. She'll say that every birthday i took her to look out at the ocean. That every summer we gardened together, ripping carrots and watermelons and cucumbers from the soil laughing at the dirt.

I want to call my hypothetical daughter. I want to know that she doesn't hate me.

I want to know that I did all right.

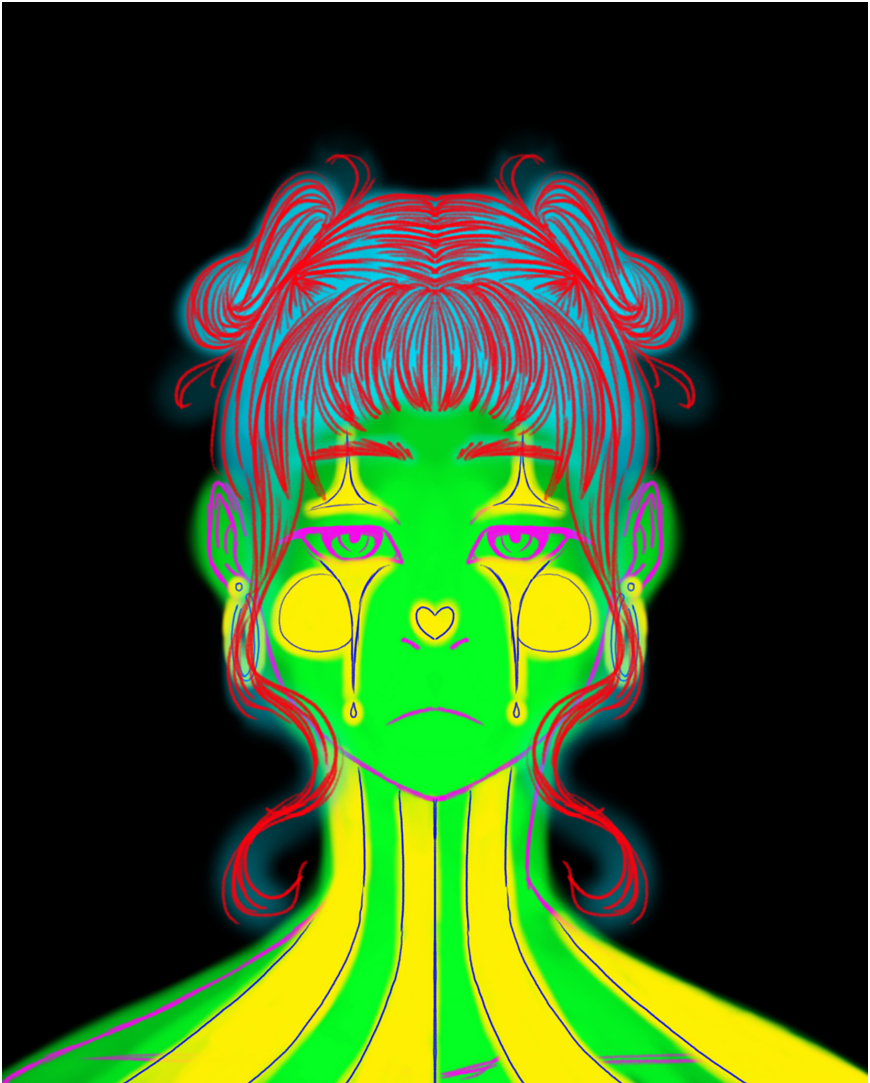
I want to know that I didn't kill the thing I've always lived for.

I want to call my hypothetical daughter.

She'll answer the phone, half-asleep, I called too late again. She'll say mom can we talk in the morning? And I'll say yes. I just wanted to hear your voice.

Neon Clown

Zac Stigdon '23



Riddle Me This

Robert McGill

"The child is father of the man"

-William Wordsworth

The sick man's face was the color of putty, and there was a thick clear tube attached to the gaping hole in his belly. He looked as if he'd been dragged behind a road grader and pieced together again with parts from a scrap yard.

The sick man's sister, Willa, had met Anderson on the floor of the ICU as he was coming out of the elevator. She was on her phone, frowning, and when she saw him, she hung up and slipped the device into her pocket.

"There was a DNR," she said.

Anderson slowed his feet and stopped.

"He signed a DNR order without telling me," she said. "You don't do that to people who love you, Bill. You don't make decisions like that in secret."

She hunted Anderson's eyes for conspiracy, a sign he'd known about the directive, which she learned had been drawn up long before her brother had fallen ill. The hurt in her voice was palpable, raw with betrayal. "Did you know about it, Bill?" she demanded. "You're his best friend, so I suppose he must have told you. Was he trying to hide it? Was that it?"

She raked for answers, but Anderson hadn't any.

Pulling down the paper mask that covered her face, she said, "You knew about it, didn't you? You had to know about it." She was trembling, on the verge of tears. "I told them I want the order rescinded. The doctor said they'd put me in touch with someone, but all I've gotten so far is the run around." She gathered herself, a dignified straightening of the shoulders. "They won't answer my calls, the bastards. But I can promise you this, they haven't heard the last of me. I'm going over to the administration building and settling this thing right now."

Anderson put out his hand but stopped short of touching her. "Why don't I talk to them?" he said. "Maybe I can do something about it."

She paused, eyes full of distrust, and declined the offer with a brisk shake of her head. "No," she said, tugging at the hem of her jacket, "he's my brother. This is my business."

Anderson entered the sick man's room where he took a chair beside the bed. He raised his eyes to the monitors humming overhead. They were hard at work, their oscillating lights leaping and falling in the half-dark of the room.

He made himself comfortable, or what passed for comfortable in that austere setting, and crossed his legs and recalled the long ago when he and Gaddis were boys. Gaddis had been born old, he thought. He was a child whose poor health had left him with an outsized sense of the world's injustice.

He looked at Gaddis now. A rattling breath issued from the sick man's lungs. He sat

forward, wondering if he ought to summon a nurse, but the noise ceased of its own accord and the sick man's respiration evened again.

A woman in scrubs appeared at the door and entered without knocking. She nudged past Anderson's chair to observe the sick man's vitals.

"Thomas?" she said, bending to the patient's ear. "How do you feel?"

The expression on Gaddis' face said everything anyone needed to know about his condition. But the nurse, or PA, or whatever she was, seemed determined to make him say it aloud.

"On a scale of one to ten," she said, "how is your pain level, Thomas?"

Gaddis' mouth quivered, but he did not speak. His eyes fluttered but remained shut.

"Thomas? Can you hear me? On a scale of one to ten..."

Anderson shuffled his feet. One to ten. What was the world's affection, he wondered, for that particular bandwidth of human misery?

On a scale of one to ten, how strict were your parents? On a scale of one to ten, how likely are you to treat failure as a learning experience? On a scale of one to ten, how important is it that your most private secrets die with you?

The question seemed a prickish formality given the sick man's state. But the nurse asked it just the same, as if a ghostly finger hovered over the "ON" switch of Gaddis' life-support machines, threatening to shut down the power if his response proved unacceptable.

Anderson knew nothing about the DNR, despite what Willa Gaddis believed. But even so, he was not especially puzzled to learn of it. He recalled something Gaddis had told him when they were young, when the boy had learned that his deformity could never be operated on or put right. Billy, he'd said, sometimes, when I think about it real hard, I wish I was never born.

The nurse resumed her prodding. "On a scale of one to ten...ten being the worst..."

Anderson closed his eyes. He had begun to loathe the nurse's voice, her monotonous, clinical demeanor.

He checked his phone. It had been an hour since Willa Gaddis had set out for the administration building, yet he'd heard no word regarding the DNR, and had begun to wonder, vaguely, if it even mattered.

How blasphemously extravagant! Gaddis' sister had declared before strutting off in search of a way to reverse her brother's directive. Who does this? Who throws away a second chance at life?

Anderson had no answer for her. Nor had he any notion where to look for one. But when the nurse left the room, he took his friend's hand and squeezed it, lovingly.

There would always be rainbows in the sky. Days bound by natural piety. But there would be children, too, whose eyes did not leap at the sight of them.

Gaddis' heart continued to beat, its capacity for life and love, for breaking and being broken, undiminished. Meanwhile, time ticked in swift pursuit of its own inevitabilities, undaunted. Untroubled.

Mission Statement

Kennings was founded at Hanover College in 1941 as Hill Thoughts. Today, our mission is to seek out intriguing, heartwarming, and engaging work. We serve the literary and art community of Kentuckiana and the wider world. *Kennings* publishes a print edition annually, online honorable mentions, contest winners, podcasts, videos, and more. Soon, a read-aloud and discussion podcast to honor our roots – *Kennings: Hill Thoughts* – will be available.

We accept emotive works of fiction that bring tears to the eye, rage and sorrow-infused poetry that pushes our souls, and artwork that leaves us breathless. We gladly advocate for work that inspires us to be better human beings and artists. *Kennings* will not accept submissions that reinforce harmful ideologies such as racism, sexism, and homophobia. We use a blind submission process. So, submit boldly and fear not our judgment; intrigue, inspire, and engage us!



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