



KENNINGS



KENNINGS ARTISTIC & LITERARY JOURNAL

EDITION 17 2026

k e n n i n g s

Artistic & Literary Journal

edition 17

2026

## 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:

“book-worm” for an avid reader,

“bone-house” for the human body

“fender bender” for a minor car accident

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

Disclaimer: The views expressed herein are not necessarily the views of the Kennings Editorial Board nor of Hanover College.

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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 some individuals.

We do not approve of the censorship of creative expression and will never do so, as such, some of these triggering or sensitive works will make it to publication.

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: 

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Dr. Saul Lemerond

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Sydney Seigle '26

#### Cover Designer

Vinny Shilling '27

#### Design Team

Sydney Seigle '26

Vinny Shilling '27

Mallory Mahin '28

Jack Shaeffer '29

Payton Lock '28

#### Design Faculty Advisor

Chris Jackson

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## Letters from the Editors

For the final time, hello dear readers of the Kennings Artistic and Literary Journal! I have had the privilege to be on this journal staff for my entire Hanover College career, and at the end of it, I can say with certainty that it has helped me become the person I am today. I can also say with certainty that every journal, page, and wonderful piece within it are made with so much love and care, including this 17th edition. I hope as you flip through its pages, you can feel all of the fun we had making it as well. Our journal has continued to grow exponentially over the years, with every new staff member, editor, photograph, or poem aiding in this process, making it what it is today. With this, I want to thank all of the people I have gotten to work with over the years, and all of the amazing memories they gave me; If I could somehow submit all of these memories to the journal, I would. I give all of my love and well wishes to the next Kennings Artistic and Literary Journal staff, who I know will pour all of their creativity and dedication into the next edition with both style and an appropriate amount of em dashes. I look forward to every new journal.

Rilee Lonberger '26

Co-Editor-in-Chief

Hello, dearest readers! My name is Vivian Jacobs, and I am the Co-Editor-in-Chief of Kennings this year. I have been on staff for two years now, and being closely involved with the curation of this journal is an experience like no other. I have made unforgettable memories with my fellow staff members, and I have had the joy of viewing poignant creative works from our campus community and beyond. There is truly no feeling like publishing a journal that we have worked so diligently on, and I am so pleased to share this edition of Kennings with the world! I want to thank my fellow staff members for their hard work and dedication, and I'd like to give a special thank you to one of my best friends and beloved Co-Editor-in-Chief, Rilee Lonberger. I cannot imagine what my journey with Kennings would look like without Rilee's friendship and encouragement. I would also like to thank our faculty advisor, Dr. Saul Lemerond, for his consistent advising and encouragement throughout my college career, and especially in our work with Kennings; Saul, your commitment to fostering your students' creativity and knowledge does not go unnoticed. In an era when original creative works are jeopardized, it brings me solace to know that our journal spotlights authentic works from incredibly talented creatives. We are leaving behind a legacy to be proud of, and I'm so excited to see what future staff members make of this institution we have contributed to.

Vivian Jacobs '26

Co-Editor-in-Chief

Hello, dear Readers! I am Brayden Johnson, Assistant Editor-in-Chief for this the 17th Edition of the Kennings Artistic and Literary Journal. This is my third year on staff and every year is a completely different experience, thanks to our vast network of contributors. I have watched as our reach has totally exploded, which is so much fun. Working with my fellow staff members has been one of the highlights of the year for each of these years. Getting to work alongside Rilee and Vivian this year has given me a deeper appreciation of everything that goes on behind the scenes, I look forward to bringing in another year's worth of memories and fun times next year as well. I want to thank our faculty advisor, Saul Lemerond, for getting me into the world of editing and publication, without him, my years would have been far bleaker. I want to thank the last few years' worth of Editors-in-Chief. Meredith Shepherd, for bringing me into the fold and helping me learn about the joy of editing. Lexi Traylor, for helping me fall in love with the creative process. And Rilee Lonberger, for helping me learn to fight the long battle against the red tape of bureaucracy. I hope to add another strong link in that chain as I take the lessons learned over these three years and bring them to another fresh Kennings staff next year.

Brayden Johnson '27

Assistant Editor-in-Chief

## Professor Dee Goertz Awards 2024

*Kennings Artistic and Literary Journal* happily announced the inauguration of the Professor Dee Goertz Awards in Student Art & Literature at Hanover College alongside our fifteenth edition in 2024.

The Professor Dee Goertz Awards honor Hanover Professor Dr. Dee Goertz for the career she has devoted to the students of the Hanover community and her lifelong commitment to the creation, understanding, and celebration of the arts. The Professor Dee Goertz Awards especially recognize the achievements in creative writing Professor Goertz has inspired through her teaching of literature and the appreciation for literature she has instilled in her students.

Kennings has partnered with a group of private donors, Friends of Goertz, to sponsor the Professor Dee Goertz Awards to recognize four exemplary Hanover student contributors, two in visual arts and two in literature, from our annual publications. Student pieces were judged by outside reviewers and announced at the annual Kennings Launch Party to celebrate the distribution of the journal and its contributors. See our Edition 16 2025 Goertz Awards Recipients below. You can find their works in our previous publication. Tune in next year for the winners from this Edition 17!

Visual Arts – “Raku Fired Beetle Vase” by Katelyn Enginger

Visual Arts – “Migration” by Raj Sharma ‘25

Literature – “Rain on Tin Roof” by Molly Billiard

Literature – “The Fate of The Interloper” by Brayden Johnson

## Kennings Mission Statement

Kennings was founded at Hanover College in 1941 as Hill Thoughts. Today, our mission is to seek out intriguing, unique, and engaging work. Our staff serves the literary and artistic community of Hanover and the wider world. Kennings publishes a print edition annually, displays online honorable mentions and contest winners on our website, and creates podcasts, videos, and more.

The Kennings staff looks for emotive works of fiction that leave readers on the edge of their seats, poetry packed with passion, and artwork that inspires creativity. We gladly advocate for pieces that amplify the voices of historically underrepresented individuals. The staff also wishes to promote the many talents of Hanover College students. We will not accept any work that reinforces harmful ideologies such as racism, sexism, and homophobia. Kennings uses a blind submission process to evaluate pieces. We look forward to reviewing your captivating, memorable, and imaginative works!

## Buried Alive in a Designer Coffin

Michael Roque

### **A designer coffin made death comforting.**

Linens that lined it  
were soft on my sides.  
Pillows placed inside  
were cozy clouds in cold soil.  
Lost in a year-long illusion,  
being buried alive wasn't half bad—

Then I recalled life.  
Then came panic.

Kicking, scratching the coffin lid  
to live again,  
brown dirt sprinkled white linens,  
exposing coffin comforts  
as contorted lies.  
Busting through them would mean  
six feet of dirt weighing down on me—

It means six feet of an infested fleshpile  
I'd have to rip through  
to reclaim who and what I was.  
It means sacrificing the coffin they gave me,  
the clothing they made me.  
It means crawling through all the slime  
they convinced me to sleep in.

## Boots

Vinny Shilling '27



# Virgo

Kevin Corbett

She saw Men climbing down from trees  
And growing out of caves like moss.  
She marveled at their obsequies,  
Their wailing words that spoke of loss,  
Of hunger food could not appease  
And rivers they were cursed to cross.

She walked with them, unsanctified,  
And watched their metamorphosis:  
The Hours wore them, like the tide  
Wears down a cliffside's jaggedness.  
They lived, they struggled, then they died.  
She would not let it end like this.

To make them grow in more than spurts,  
She stuffed their silos full of grain,  
She taught them tales of just deserts  
And wringing virtue out of pain.

"Love one another till it hurts,"

She testified. But all in vain:

The grave was not to be outgrown.  
From caves he wandered, and to caves  
He must return, bereft of bone,

However gently Man behaves.  
And so, Astraea walked alone  
Among the endless rows of graves.

There never was an age of gold  
To fall from, yet she chose to stay  
And watched each brazen age unfold  
In much the same depressing way:  
Men fought and foundered and got old  
No matter what she had to say.

She saw Men growing toward the sea  
Like marching ducklings, small and proud.  
They built their peril, tree by tree,  
Beneath a tower made of cloud.  
They left the earth, and so did she,  
For spheres where Men are not allowed

Forgive us, maiden of the stars.  
You deigned to walk beside us then  
And though the better part was ours,  
We sailed off and will sail again,  
As if bullion and battle scars  
Could rectify the hearts of Men.

## Disorienting

Payton Lock '27



## Scared Silent ⚠️

Alli Russell '26

I used to believe that warmth this profound could only come from the sun. Yet, as I lay curled on a narrow couch beside a boy I hardly knew, I realized that warmth could come from people too.

“Stranger” feels like a strange word to use for him, Chase, but I can’t label him anything else. We aren’t friends, not really, and “acquaintances” seems far too formal for whatever we are. Two teenagers, circling the edge of connection, both unsure of what we want or how far to fall.

Before coming to his house, I’d debated a dozen times whether I should go. My parents were out for the night, as usual, and the walls of our house felt too empty to endure. Earlier that day, Chase and I had worked the same shift at a charity fundraiser. I was trading cupcakes for crumpled bills, while he scrolled aimlessly through his phone with his friend working at the counter. We slipped comments across the tables like notes we weren’t brave enough to sign. I knew his reputation, the whispers on the bathroom walls, the warnings scrawled in gossip and marker. But part of me wanted to believe he was more than what people said.

At first glance, Chase was golden. Not flawless, his hair needed cutting; his skin freckled with the ghosts of breakouts, but there was something magnetic about him. His humor came easy; his confidence varnished everything he said. When he laughed, people turned toward him. When he looked at me, I didn’t know where to put my hands.

That’s how he got me to say yes.

He picked me up that night in a cloud of music and dirty exhaust. The stereo assaulted the quiet street as I hovered by the car door, palms sweating against the handle. When it opened, a puff of sweet smoke escaped like a secret.

“Hey, gorgeous,” he said, and the word “gorgeous” landed on me like static.

The ride was loud and too fast. Streetlights blurred through the tinted glass, stretching like ribbons. He offered me the cigarette once, insisting it wasn’t a big deal, that it was “just smoke.” I refused, quietly, twice. My pulse thudded in my ears until he finally shrugged. I thought that was it. But then he blew a thin cloud

into my face, chuckling as I coughed. I wanted to be angry but laughed instead. That's what his presence did; it rearranged my thoughts until they didn't feel like mine.

"Sing with me," he asserted when a song came on that I didn't know.

"I don't even know it."

"Everybody knows this one." He turned down the highway, and when I didn't sing, he slowed down the car until I panicked and mumbled along with the chorus just to make him move again.

He laughed, and I forced myself to laugh too.

After a while, we parked in front of a small white house, he pulled out the key and said casually, "This is my place."

Inside, the house was warm and messy, the kind that felt lived in but not loved. Shoes by the door, dim lights, a small dog greeting him like an old friend. "Anyone home?" I asked.

"Nope," he said, smiling.

My chest tightened, but I followed him anyway. I sat on one couch while he sprawled on the other, arms flung behind his head with arrogance. "What do you want to do?" he questioned.

"Anything's fine."

"We could watch a movie," he suggested. "Or... just chill."

"A movie sounds great."

We ended up sitting closer than I meant to. He joked about wanting someone to cuddle him, and the words hovered between us until I broke. I told myself it didn't mean anything, just warmth, just comfort. The couch was small, and his shoulder pressed against mine. That was all.

Chase made me feel something I hadn't felt in a long time, wanted. My parents were ghosts in their own lives, too busy arguing or leaving to notice the quiet in mine. For months, I'd been trying to find any place where I could breathe and belong. Curled there beside him, I let myself believe I'd found one.

We watched something forgettable, a bad horror movie, I think. The light from the screen painted blue across his face. I kept my eyes forward, afraid he'd catch me staring again. Every time he laughed softly at the terribly written dialogue, I felt it vibrate in my chest.

"You have nice glasses," he said suddenly. Without asking, he slid them off my face and tried them on.

"You look ridiculous," I told him, and he grinned.

We both laughed, the kind of laughter that hides how nervous you are. He gave them back, and the moment should have ended there. But his hand lingered.

"You're cute when you blush," he murmured. My stomach tightened.

The air inside the living room grew heavier and slower. He leaned closer, and the smell of his cologne, citrus and something darker filled the air. I could have moved. I should have. But I froze instead, trying to figure out if I still felt safe. His breath touched my cheek.

"I'm going to kiss you," he instructed softly, like a question without room for no.

My pulse tripped. The rational part of my brain screamed to speak, to set a boundary, a line in the sand, but my voice disappeared under the weight of the moment. When his lips met mine, my mind went blank. It wasn't like the stories. It wasn't light or dreamy. It was confusing, the mix of fear and wanting, curiosity and instinct colliding until I couldn't tell them apart.

When he pulled back, I didn't know what to say. My throat ached. "You okay?" he asked. I nodded because the truth was too complicated.

He kissed me again, more confident this time, more certain, and my thoughts fractured into noise. I told myself it was harmless, that it didn't mean anything, that I could stop whenever I wanted. But when his hand slid along my arm toward the edge of my sleeve, something in me began to panic.

"Chase," I whispered, but he didn't stop. "Wait."

He smiled like I'd said something funny, assuring me it was fine, that he'd never hurt me. His kindness sounded like comfort, but felt like pressure. My heart slammed against my ribs while my body stayed still. I didn't want to upset him. I didn't want to be dramatic. I didn't want to make it worse.

And then everything went quiet inside me.

The next few minutes blurred. I remember flashes, the sound of the movie still playing, the dog barking somewhere far away, the weight of a world I hadn't asked for pressing down until I couldn't breathe. I said his name once more, but it broke halfway through.

When it was over, the silence rang louder than any scream I couldn't make.

Chase got up first, muttering something I couldn't process. A door creaked. Water ran. I stared at the window across the room, watching my reflection tremble in the glass. My mascara was streaked down my cheeks, a stranger's eyes staring back at me.

I don't know how long I stayed frozen before standing. My legs shook as I searched for my clothes, for dignity, for anything that might make me feel human again. I found my shoes by the door and slipped them on.

"I'll take you home," he said when he saw me. His voice was lighter now, almost casual. As if nothing had happened.

The ride back was suffocating. Neither of us spoke. The same highways that seemed endless before now felt like they were closing in. My hands stayed folded in my lap, nails digging into my palms to keep from crying.

When he pulled into my driveway, he gave a small smirk and said, "Text me when you get inside."

I nodded, stepped out, and didn't look back.

Inside, the lights were still off. The house was quiet, empty like before. I locked my door and slid down against it, the sound of my heartbeat swallowing the world. My reflection caught again in the hallway mirror, eyes hollow and skin gray beneath the light. I wanted to scrub everything away, the smell of smoke, the taste of citrus, the echo of his voice whispering "trust me."

But I didn't. I just sat there, scared silent.

The warmth was gone. Only ashes remained.

## Captivating You

Wren Abney '26



## True Love is Extinct

Rachel Treadway '27

I think true love has gone extinct.  
It died out with the great romantics.  
We find its fossils in poetry, stories, and  
letters  
Its footprints are in the green of my eyes  
But it's not really here anymore.

I'm sure Guinevere didn't feel as if she had  
never looked love in the face.  
I'm sure Eurydice kept true love as a pet,  
maybe it slept on her knees.

It's the familiarity with the idea that makes  
us feel the loss.  
Every story we read our children features  
true love at the heart.  
Maybe that's why so many of us feel so  
alone.

There is always an ulterior motive for  
marriage now.  
No one defies their family for love anymore  
No threats of disownment or dangerous  
duels  
No fights for love, no  
It's good friendship at best,  
and good sex at worst

Indeed, true love has gone extinct.

## Nature Morte

Roger Camp



# The Life and Death of Millie

Brayden Johnson '27

Millie stood at the edge of the roof. She knew that it had been her own choices that brought her here. Her inability to understand. Her inability to make the right choices because of her mental inadequacies. She has personally alienated the one person who she could have called a friend today. She stepped forward.

*"Millie, what's wrong with you?" Mother, screaming at her because she had tried to crawl into the oven. Her earliest memory. It hadn't been on. Mother had left it open. Millie had thought it looked like a train engine. Mother had never let her wander again.*

*"Millie, drop it! Use your head, get over here now!" Mother, screaming again because Millie had been playing with a dead rat. The cat could play with them, Millie had joined the cat, batting the rat around with her hands while crawling around with the cat.*

*"Millie, what is this? Are you kidding me?" Mother, pure disappointment dripping in her words, no longer screaming, she didn't scream anymore. This was the day of Millie's first report card. She'd gotten a Below Average in English. The Excellent in Math meant nothing to Mother.*

*"You'll never make friends like that." Mother, barely even giving the energy to be disappointed anymore. This has been the day Millie has come home, excited that the school was creating a math club. Sports were apparently the only way a fifth grader could be happy.*

*"Can't you just make normal friends?" Mother, now full of spite. Her friend Jacob had just left. He'd left Millie with a comic book and book of math problems. Mother took the math book. Millie was supposed to learn to play sports in middle school.*

*"Why can't you just go out sometimes?" Mother, pure annoyance. Millie had gotten home immediately after school and sat on the couch doing math homework. Mother's comment was unfair because a few weeks ago, Millie had gone to Jacob's house instead of them meeting at hers.*

*"I don't want him here anymore." Mother, full of hate. Jacob had just left. Millie and Jacob had spent the day creating math problems to try to stump each other. Millie had cleaned up the strewn about papers from the living room without*

*even being asked.*

*"You'll never be useful at this rate." Mother, a tall empty bottle next to her. Millie had signed up for only math classes senior year. Jacob had shown her a flyer for a college that focused entirely on math. Jacob had already applied there.*

*"You finally do something right and still manage to mess that up." Mother, driving and looking pale. They were leaving Millie's graduation. In her haste to get off stage, she'd almost forgotten to shake the principal's hand. Jacob had told her no one would remember in a week.*

*"It's not like you will amount to anything either way." Mother, this morning. Millie had been nervous about college starting next week. Jacob had already packed. He said he was looking forward to college. Millie had been talking to Mother about how she and Jacob would take some classes together but was still nervous and couldn't decide on a specific major.*

*An hour ago, Millie had gone downtown to go shopping for some dorm room decorations.*

*52 minutes ago, Millie had overheard the other girls talking about her.*

*29 minutes ago, she had missed a call from Jacob because she had been crying.*

*25 minutes ago, Jacob hadn't picked up when she called.*

*23 minutes ago, Jacob hadn't picked up when she called.*

*22 minutes ago, Jacob hadn't picked up when she called.*

*22 minutes ago, Jacob hadn't picked up when she called.*

*12 minutes ago, Millie started walking upstairs to escape.*

*8 minutes ago, Millie stepped onto the roof*

*3 minutes ago, Millie realized that her mother was right.*

*1 minute ago, Millie remembered why she'd come up here.*

*30 seconds ago, Millie dreamed of escape, permanent escape.*

*She stepped forward with her other foot, her toes hanging over the edge.*

*She teetered forward, then heard a door open.*

*"Millie!" It was Jacob. Screaming. But... not angry screams? "Millie, please!" He was close.*

*Millie did not move.*

*Jacob was right behind her. "Step back, Millie, I'm here for you."*

Millie closed her eyes and tried to move, leaning back a little.

Jacob reached for her hand.

Millie took his hand.

With a jerk, he pulled her away from the edge and fell backwards into the roof, holding her.

“Why not just let me go?” Millie did not understand. “I am useless, only holding you back, you could do better, Mother always says so.” She looked Jacob in the eye. “Why not just let me go? I’m broken.”

“I love you, Millie.”

**2 minutes from now**, Millie will realize that Jacob has always been there for her

**2 hours from now**, Millie packs up and moves in with Jacob’s family until school starts.

**3 months from now**, Millie starts seeing the therapist at college.

**3 years from now**, Millie stops having nightmares about her mother.

**4 years from now**, Millie graduates with a degree in Statistical Analysis.

**5 years from now**, Millie and Jacob get married.

**8 years from now**, Millie becomes a mother and promises to be better than her mother.

**14 years from now**, Millie gets a call that her mother has died.

**18 years from now**, Millie’s ten year old joins the volleyball team.

**26 years from now**, Millie and Jacob start the rest of their lives as empty nesters.

**52 years from now**, Millie and Jacob retire and live out the rest of their years in happiness, entertaining visits from their daughter and eventually grandchildren.

**74 years from now**, Jacob smiles as Millie’s coffin is lowered. His grandson asks why.

“I got more than seventy years after a moment that almost erased all of it. My best friend lived her whole life.”

His grandson will remember this until he stands next to the coffin of his own wife when he tells his own grandson the same thing.

## Wisdom and Death

Brooke Carper '29



# The Wasp & The Butterfly

Samuel Sea '28

*In loving memory of the kindest soul who I was fortunate enough to call my best friend through some of the best and worst times, Jacob E. Searcy (2006-2024).*

*It was an honor to share a target with you during our archery years.*

The archers only saw my defense when I was scared

So they all vilified me;

I only survived their attacks because you cared,

Never hesitant to love everybody.

They tried to take my soul;

In defense, I tried to take my own

And they claimed to never even know.

They all called me a monster:

“A wasp’s sting can’t be recovered.”

You didn’t believe in losing lives

So you stood up for me every time.

After the fact, you said you wanted to see me fly too;

You reminded me that I had something to lose—

*Where I am now, I’ve done it all for you.*

You bring light into every room,

Effortlessly beautiful and endearing.

I was lost until I found you

And I hid behind those butterfly wings:

Bright colors covering my fears

Even in times when the end was near.

You waited patiently on a deadly arrow,

Aimed at the end of a heavenly rainbow,

Refusing to turn dark even when you were angry:

Too kind to fight and too determined to flee,

So I told your mom years later:

“He was always such a good friend to me,

Even when we were worlds apart.”

We may not have another chance to speak,

*But I immortalize you in all my art.*

## This Australian Ibis wants yo fries

Marieke Young '27



## Nightmare

Alyssa Hartman '27

There are many nightmares that we all may know too well,  
Nightmares where your teeth fall out, or where you flew and fell,  
Nightmares where you find a monster every place you look,  
But my least favorite nightmares are the ones where they ban books.  
I find myself in middle school, in those hallways I once walked,  
But now all of those educators wanted education stopped.  
History classes were supervised, they controlled what teachers said,  
And students were restricted on what could be learned and read.  
The library was all taped off, the shelves were almost bare,  
And as I walked through all the halls, I sensed fear in the air.  
They removed all books on World War Two, afraid to cause a stir.  
Afraid of the comparisons that students could infer.  
I found myself a tutor for a student wanting to speak,  
But any poster on the wall meant detention for a week.  
But waking up was not much comfort. I don't know how to feel.  
The thing about these nightmares is that they could be very real.  
In middle school we were afraid of what we could become,  
Then along came high school, and we thought the threat was gone.  
Now it's back and worse than it has ever been before.  
People can't say anything, or walk out their front door.  
And naturally, it's going after education.

Public school has its problems, on that we can agree,  
But we absolutely need a way for kids to learn for free.  
And, as always, in the face of uncertainty and fear,  
We need to keep a large supply of books from through the years.  
I don't remember much of fractions, or all of what was said,  
But one thing that has stuck with me is all the books we read.  
We read tales of those from everywhere, places near and far.  
Books that take you down the street or far beyond the stars.  
Books about police states that show what we could become,

## Camp Cove on a Cloudy Day

Marieke Young '27

Books of child refugees that had to go on the run,  
Books we read and analyzed beginning to the end,  
Books written about the Holocaust to stop it from happening again.  
Books trying to teach tolerance through mockingbirds and mice,  
Because if we learn the first time, it doesn't need to happen twice.  
A girl trapped hiding in an attic, eventually caught.  
When asked if we would hide her, none said that we would not.  
Books that wouldn't mirror what we're seeing on the news,  
If we had only learned to walk two moons in someone's shoes.  
In a time where we are testing just how far science can go,  
Why don't we ask Mary Shelley to tell us what she knows?  
And of course, the Bard himself sure had a lot to say,  
Many words are surprisingly relevant, even in modern day.  
There are many things that we were taught by the books we read each night,  
And one big thing that I did learn was "when in trouble, write!"  
In a world where things are scary and we're all fighting to be heard,  
The best tool we have to fight our fight is the power of our words.  
It's our job to make sure children have all the things they need,  
For the sake of all our futures, please... let the children read!



# The King is Merciful

Mario Sensale

## I

Selah sat across from the counselor, playing with the ends of her linen smock.

“Selah.” He looked up from his ledger. “My condolences again for your father.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“I’ve reviewed your petition.” He set down his pen. “The law is clear. First born male child inherits the land. In the absence of such heir, the property belongs to the King.”

“But sir, I’m an only child. I’ve worked that land my whole life.”

“I understand. But the law is the law. The King is merciful. Until the King makes his determination, you may reside on the property but not exploit it commercially. No planting, no sales, no trade. Do you understand?”

“Yes, sir,” she replied.

“The King will consider your case. These matters take time. Come back in two weeks.”

She stood slowly, waiting for more. Her legs shook.

## II

Mr. Brennan had bought eggs from her family for twenty years. Selah found him in his shop, counting inventory.

“Mr. Brennan. I brought eggs.”

He didn’t look up. “Can’t buy them.”

“But you always—”

“Your father had authorization. You don’t.” He made a mark in his ledger.

“I’m not selling them. Just trading. For flour, maybe. Or—”

He finally looked at her.

“I’m sorry, Selah. I can’t help you.”

She walked home, the basket of eggs heavy on her arm.

## III

Two weeks later, Selah sat across from the counselor once more.

“Sir, has a daughter ever been in this conundrum before?”

The counselor stayed quiet for a moment. “There have been cases of daughters in your situation, yes.”

“And?”

He shuffled some papers. “The property sits. Empty.”

“And what about the daughters? Where do they go?”

“No one knows.” His expression was carefully blank. “Two more weeks, Selah. Be patient. The King is merciful.”

## IV

Before dawn, Selah set out everything she had at the edge of her property. A jug of milk. A dozen eggs. A sign she’d lettered carefully:

“Take what you need. Donations accepted.”

By midday, someone had thrown the jug against a tree. Milk soaked into the dirt. The eggs were smashed, yolks running yellow across the stone. The sign had been torn in half. Selah looked at the mess. Then she cleaned it up and went back inside.

## V

At her next visit, the counselor was arranging papers when she entered.

“Selah. Please, sit.”

“Sir, I was wondering. Has anyone actually seen the King? In your time as counselor?”

“That’s an unusual question.”

“I’m just wondering. You submit petitions to the King. Have you ever seen him?”

The counselor’s face turned grave. “The King conducts his affairs as he sees fit.”

“How do you know he’s alive?”

A long silence. Outside, children were playing. Their shouts echoed down the street.

“Go home, Selah. Don’t ask questions like that again.”

“Why not?”

“Because questioning the King’s existence is heresy,” he said, his anger barely restrained.

Selah went back home. That night, she killed the cow. It took her three hours with her father’s tools, and she puked twice. She butchered it badly. Then, she dug a shallow pit in the dirt floor of the barn and layered what she could save with the last of her father’s salt. That night, the smell drew wolves to the farm. With the dawn, the chickens were gone.

## VI

“Sir, I’m running out of food. Is there anything I can do?”

Four weeks had passed since her last visit. She’d stopped coming every two weeks when she realized it made no difference.

“Have you thought about killing the chickens? The cow?”

“The cow’s dead, sir. I ate the last of it yesterday.” She didn’t mention the maggots. “The chickens were killed by wolves. Any word from the King?”

“Selah, I look for your letter in every dispatch that arrives. When the King responds, I’ll send word immediately.”

“Will he ever respond?”

“I submit petitions. Sometimes they’re approved. Sometimes they’re not. Sometimes there’s no response at all.”

She stood. “Thank you for your time, sir.”

At the door, she paused. “You’ll send word? When he responds?”

“You have my word.”

That night, she scraped the salt off a piece of soil with remains of meat and worms.

## VII

She went to the forest looking for mushrooms. She’d seen her father gather them but couldn’t quite remember which were safe. The forest floor was damp, thick with moss and rotting leaves. She found an old woman near a stream, crouched beside a cluster of pale fungi. Dirty gray hair, clothes so patched they were more patch than fabric. She looked up when Selah approached.

“You’re Selah. The one with the counselor problem.”

Selah stopped. “Good evening, mistress. How do you know my name?”

“People talk.” The woman stood with difficulty, joints cracking. “You’re starving.”

Selah’s hand went to her stomach. “I’m managing.”

“It wasn’t a question.” The woman studied her face. “The counselor won’t help you. They never do.”

Selah felt tears threatening. She pushed them back.

“The counselor. He’s the problem, yes?” The woman said.

“He’s just following the law.”

“The law that’s killing you.” The woman bent and picked some mushrooms, put them in a cloth bag. “I could help. If you want me to.”

“How?”

The woman reached into her bag and pulled out a small bundle, wrapped in bark. “Brew this at home. Just pour hot water over it and drink it before sleep.”

“What is it?”

“It’s magic.” She pressed it into Selah’s hand. “Drink it and sleep. By morning, you won’t have to worry about the counselor or your land anymore.”

Selah hesitated, looking at the bundle in her palm.

“Don’t worry, child. It’s not poison. What do you have to lose?”

## VIII

Selah boiled water that evening over some sticks she gathered from the woods. She unwrapped the bark bundle. Inside were dried mushrooms, dark and twisted. They smelled farinaceous. She poured the hot water over them and watched it steep, the water turning brown. It tasted bitter. Within minutes, the room began to tilt. Colors brightened. Shadows moved.

## IX

Selah woke to shouting. She pulled on her dress and walked toward the sound on unsteady legs. Her head pounded. Her mouth tasted like copper. The crowd had gathered near the counselor’s house. She pushed through until she could see. Blood on the threshold. Blood on the ground leading away. The door

was open.

"The counselor was murdered," someone said. "Stabbed multiple times."

"Who would do such a thing?"

"Bandits. Has to be bandits."

"It was her!" The voice cut sharp through the murmuring. The old woman from the forest, pushing through the crowd, pointing at Selah. "I saw her last night, creeping around!"

Selah stuttered. "No, I was—"

"Look!" The woman grabbed Selah's calf and twisted it fiercely. "She still has his blood on her!"

Selah looked down. A dark smear, dried and flaking.

"I was home," Selah said, her voice trembling. "I was asleep."

"Liar!" The old woman's face was twisted with righteous anger. "I saw you with my own eyes! Stumbling around in the dark near his door!"

The crowd pressed closer, their faces cold.

"She was asking all those questions," someone said. "About the King. My cousin works in the counselor's office. Said she was getting desperate—"

"For the land," another voice screamed.

"I didn't—" Selah looked at her leg again. The blood. How did—

"Murderer!" The old woman spat at her feet. "She killed him for the land!"

"Get out," Mr. Brennan said, his voice cold. "Get out of this village."

"This is my home—"

"Your home?" His face was red. "You murdered a man for a land that's not even yours."

"I didn't— I don't—"

"GET OUT!"

The crowd surged forward. Selah made it to the farm, grabbed what she could carry. A blanket. Her father's knife. A clay jug. Then she fled into the forest before they could follow. She found a camp that evening. Just a lean-to made of branches, a fire pit, some crude tools. Inside the fire pit, a dirty knife with hardened mud, bark and blood. In her father's bed, the old woman slept warm. She had also been told the King is merciful, long ago.

## 100 Million vs. 5

Brooke Carper '29



Throwing the rest  
back doesn't make  
it better.

## Liquid Violet

Gabe Hetrick '27



## When the Sun Goes Down

Isabella Young

The sun yawned, getting ready for the night.  
You and I sat in the back of your Toyota  
with the truck popped open. I could feel the grooves  
on the bottom of the trunk press into my butt and thighs,  
but that didn't matter

I wish I would've brought a blanket,  
but my mind was preoccupied.  
Our DQ Blizzards were trying to balance  
on the grooves, just as my thoughts  
were attempting to balance in my mind.

Brown doe eyes looking at me, but I was  
afraid to look over. Afraid to fall in love  
and do a relationship all over again

Thoughts flooded my mind of the time  
I watched you from across the frat house and  
noticed the way you smiled at your friends,  
but pretended you didn't care.

Remembering the moments where I would try  
to hide my blushing as we talked and  
the feeling that I kept harbored inside.  
I couldn't, though and you knew it too.

Like the sun tries to hide; yet, its light  
still shines through the night.  
Too often, I tried to hide my smile,  
but it appeared nonetheless

## First Stair Feline

Alex Warren '26

You grabbed my hand and my thoughts all  
went away. As my head turned slowly  
to the right, I knew it was over.

"I think I'm falling in love with you."

The sweet soft words slipped slowly from your lips.  
The lights surrounding the parking lot turned on  
and we were reminded of the public eye

Our lips touched and we returned  
to the front seat to drive off.  
The lot had been closed  
and we were there far too late.



# The Madonna Inn

Craig Constantine

"I paste on a moustache  
You rat out your hair.  
Let's cosplay! Let's Vogue!  
I'm Sonny! You're Cher!  
Pile into the pink Caddie,  
Show a little thighplasty skin,  
We're all going to the Madonna Inn.

You merchants of clickbait  
You crypto-fluencers,  
You armchair zillionaires  
Who have all the answers.  
You Christo-Kardashians  
Clutching pearls at my sin,  
You're all going to the Madonna Inn.

The first time it's tragic,  
The second? A farce.  
First the posh wedding  
And then the divorce.  
You start out in rom-com  
And end up in porn,  
We're all going to the Madonna Inn.

Turn on the oceanic highway  
Like an open-air Louvre,  
With the whales all watching  
From their respectful remove.  
Bound for surreal Big Sur,  
Baroque Hearst Castle,  
The Rubenesque sands

Where elephant seals jostle.  
Wait!—there's that candy-colored knockoff  
Blushing the mountain,  
And now you're checking into the Madonna Inn.

They've got your room  
If you've got the fetish,  
The Daisy Mae Room  
If you're feeling coquettish.  
The Harvard Square Room  
For your inner bluestocking,  
The Cave Man Room  
For paleo tiktokking.  
Every kind of boudoir,  
Plus King Tut's own pissoir!  
Even your pee gets a spin,  
On the pink whirligig of the Madonna Inn.

You're Marie Antoinette,  
I'm a ruined baronet.  
You're Rosie the Riveter,  
I'm the Grand Inquisitor.  
You're Gaga, I'm Jagger,  
We're Bogie and Bacall,  
Or just two more knuckledragger  
Insta-tube Neanderthals.

What's so big about Sur?  
Why the buzz about Hearst?  
What's the great rock of Morro  
Have on the pink feast

Of kitsch!  
Thanks to absentee God  
Life's all a façade,  
Just ask old Potemkin,  
Who haunts the twee lounge of the Madonna Inn.

## Toward Freedom, Still

Sydney Seigle '26



# The Muse's Muse

Brayden Johnson '27

Calliope sat in the choir hall on Mount Olympus, her elbows on her knees, chin on her hands. She was completely stumped. People thought that she could just magically create. She was a Muse after all, one of the nine spirits of creativity itself. Except that wasn't how it worked! Calliope couldn't just come up with something without inspiration any more than Heracles could conjure a firestorm! So when Athena had asked her to write a poem of insults for Poseidon, she had agreed. Insults were really Thalia's area of expertise. Thalia could insult someone for a full quarter hour and have them leave feeling better for the exchange. Even Melpomene could work up a good insult, though not one that would leave anyone feeling lighthearted, she tended to know where to hurt people when she wanted to. Calliope was great with flowing words and beautiful literary compositions, an insult poem was a GROSS misuse of her abilities. She rolled her eyes. She could have just said no, told Athena to talk to one of the other Muses about it. Thalia would have likely jumped at the opportunity to write an ode to Poseidon's barnacle breath or something. Something that would satisfy Athena while not irritating Poseidon, maybe even making them both laugh.

"Hells, this is so much easier when they just tell me to write a thrilling tale about one of their kids!" Calliope tossed down her papyrus and reed and walked over to the wine rack and pulled a bottle. At that moment, Erato entered the room.

"A little bit early to be drinking,  
What on earth is Calliope thinking?  
Help you think the wine will certainly not,  
It only ties your mind all up in knots!"

Calliope groaned, "You would be drinking too if you had to write an insult poem for Athena. You KNOW how intense she gets about good poetry and stuff. It's not fair, she's a strategy goddess, what does good poetry have to do with strategy?"

"You are a spirit of inspiration,  
Not really a voice of complination.  
Athena has a personality,  
It needn't always be just strategy."

"Are you serious? Complination? That isn't a real word, and you might be slipping because personality and strategy do NOT rhyme."

Terpsichore twirled past the door, humming and flourishing, followed by Clio, who entered the room. Terpsichore continued to dance away, apparently not noticing Clio's disappearance.

"It is no use to complain, Calliope," Clio stated in a neutral tone. "Erato has discovered the works of a mortal poet, a healer by the name of Seuss, who conveniently creates words that do not exist to create rhyme where once there was not."

"Healer Seuss has verily inspired  
My poetry to be raised higher,  
I, the Muse, the one who brings to mortals  
Lyric, bring their lessons to immortals."

"Regardless of fake rhymes, mortal healers, and other such nonsense, I am trying to do my job!" The others left, only to be replaced by Urania. She bumped into the doorway, not watching where she was going, thanks to a picture she was holding in her hands. "OW! Stars and Moons, did Janus move the door again?"

Calliope groaned in frustration. Why was a Muse necessary for things of space? Urania was Calliope's least favourite sibling for this reason. "What do you want?"

"Want? Oh nothing, I was just looking at this." She held up a picture of a star. It was an extremely close up picture.

"Did Apollo take that for you?"

"No, that's why I was so impressed. Calliope, the mortals have telescopes that can take pictures like this! They've come so far since placing the Strong Armed

One on the moon. Did you know that the mortals have explored more of outer space than the watery depths of their own planet?"

"I—" Calliope had been about to disparage Urania for that comment. Did she know that? "Are you sure?"

"Well not by percentage, but by volume! They have satellites throughout their whole solar system! But they have mapped barely a quarter of their own planet's waters!"

Polyhymnia and Euterpe drifted into the room. They both looked exhausted and immediately poured themselves each a glass of wine and began to drink. They had been performing for the Pantheon. It was the Summer Solstice next week, the biggest holiday on Olympus. Urania did not seem to have noticed the new entrants, who had already begun to leave.

"It is almost as though the mortals fear the sea more than the endless vacuum of space! How silly of them."

Inspiration struck. Calliope stood bolt upright.

"Calliope? Are you well?" Urania sounded genuinely concerned.

"Urania, I have been terribly unfair to you."

"What do you mean?"

"I thought of you as the weakest of us, but clearly it is I who am the weakest, for in my desire to serve Athena, no inspiration was to be found, I could not be my own Muse and the others each came and went to no avail. But you have just given me exactly what I needed!"

"We are all the weakest sometimes, Calliope, there is no constellation for a single lone star, we are Nine, are we not? We all have a role to play, though not all at once."

Calliope nodded, the poem already halfway forming in her mind, Poseidon, the fear of mortals, they dread his presence, his face is detestable to them, yes, this would work nicely, satisfying Athena in that she is insulting Poseidon, satisfying Poseidon by reminding him how fearfully the mortals perceive his power.

"Thank you, Urania."

"Every Muse needs a Muse from time to time," Urania mused as she wandered off, still staring at the closeup of her star.

## Nature's Elegance

Lillian Gatterdam '28



## The Female Gaze

Alli Russell '26

I can see it now.  
The fade of green and the fade of gray.  
In your eyes a solid blue sky.  
The pale soft brown hairs guarding your soul,  
A key that I would die to hold.  
Oh I love it and I hate it at the same time.  
Quiet caramel skin painted across a rigid canvas.  
Beauty in blemishes, a crooked smile.  
Plump pretty pink lips.  
My eyes peel open and expose themselves.  
They lay bare at that sight of your beauty.  
No standards, no expectations  
Encompassing my presence, yours is radiant.  
I am so little compared to the beauty of a God.  
The subtle softness of the canvas, so orgasmic to the touch.  
Are you what they say?  
Pads of fingertips press into the fleshy canvas.  
It's red now, the art.  
The art is red now.  
The art is red and still.  
Pieces are missing.  
The sky, the green, the gray. Closed. Gone. Missing.  
The pretty pink lips are reformed.  
They live, the salacious, selfish, silky lips. They're a cold blue now.  
A blue hue deserving of its time due.  
It's beautiful, isn't it?  
An acquired taste. A charming cunning taste.  
A taste for revenge

## Air

Sophia Shaw '26



# Those That Speak

Silas Haendiges '29

Neil used “who” instead of “whom.” This offense is punishable by death. Harvey was walking on the opposite side of the road. He passed by just as the officers were shoving Neil against the brick wall. *Mixing up subjects and objects. Rookie mistake.*

Neil would be fine. Probably. More likely than not, he would get a warning and a slap on the wrist and be on his way. Assuming he did not already have two warnings.

That would be a sorry way to go, a minor mistake on the last day of the month. Harvey was well-acquainted with Neil; he was quiet. Still careful. New residents always are for the first year or so.

Harvey had two warnings this month. It was a rare occurrence for him. Thankfully, he only had to last for the rest of the day.

As he walked down the street, he noticed a familiar face. His neighbor, Rita, from a few doors down. This was an inconvenience. Her presence tended to make him feel awkward. He found that whenever he talked to her, or about her, or even thought of her whilst talking, his grammar got inexplicably worse.

This would be a bad day to lose control of his speech. He thought about ignoring her. Or turning around. But there would be no way to do either of those naturally. He could try to stall for the next ... nine hours ... Too much time thinking. The distance had closed between them. He looked back in her direction and met her eyes. *Do not mess up. Do not mess up.*

“Hello,” said Rita.

“Hello, Rita,” he quickened his pace as he walked past her.

“How are you?”

Harvey paused. He turned around slowly. She was looking at him intently, a curious smile on her face. It always made him feel special when she looked at him like that. *Focus on your words. Focus on your words.*

“I’m well,” said Harvey, “I’m relieved it’s the last day of the month.”

“Me too,” Rita said, “I’m aware that you have two warnings. I won’t keep you, but I wanted to tell you that I am relieved you’re almost safe.”

She started to walk away, still smiling. Harvey—unfortunately—felt as

though he may faint.

On pure impulse—the kind of impulse that gets one in trouble—Harvey shouted, “Rita! Tomorrow me and you should do something to celebrate the new month!”

He froze.

*Me and you.*

*Tomorrow WE should do something to celebrate.*

*WE should do something.*

*WE. WE. WE.*

*Shit.*

Rita gasped. Panicking, Harvey looked over his shoulder to where the police were arresting Neil. Their heads all snapped up in unison. For a split second, their eyes glowed red. Then they dropped the unconscious Neil to the ground. And started marching toward Harvey.

They all spoke at the same time.

“VIOLATION DETECTED.”

Harvey ran in the opposite direction. Sweat rolled down his back.

“VIOLATION DETECTED.”

His vision was blurry. He couldn’t see anything.

“VIOLATION DETECTED.”

Harvey turned around long enough to see the eyes of the police shift back to their original color. One of them called out to him, “Turn yourself in and ask for leniency or suffer the consequences.”

Harvey shuddered. “Leniency” was only granted to a spare few. And it was about as “lenient” as an iron fist. “Leniency” meant Harvey would undergo months of torture that would turn him into a member of the police. Just like the officers chasing him. Nobody knew what went into the process, and nobody wanted to. Some said the officers were cybernetic, some said they were mutants, some said they were undead—a lot of people said a lot of things—but nobody knew. The officers drew their swords. The words *cave quid dicis, quando, et cui* inscribed on the golden blade. *Be careful what you say, when, and to whom.*

Harvey ducked around the corner of the street. He was probably one hundred yards ahead of his pursuers. He scanned for any onlookers. Harboring a

fugitive—or knowingly withholding information from the police—was punishable by death or exile. The punishment depended upon the person and their permanent record. Most people didn't bother with the police—unless they absolutely had to—but there are some that would be more than willing to turn someone in.

Capturing a fugitive bought you a clean permanent record and “respect” from the city elite.

He decided to turn into an alley and hide behind one of the dumpsters. Bright orange and overflowing with trash, just like all the other dumpsters in all the other alleys. Hopefully, the officers wouldn't think to check them.

“Harvey!” came a hushed voice, “It's me!”

Rita was walking down the sidewalk, looking for him. She looked worried. It was a risk to reveal himself to anyone—he was effectively a fugitive now—but he needed help. He had never actually considered the possibility that he would be in this position.

Rita continued, “They'll be here soon. You have to get out of here!”

Harvey peeked out from behind the dumpster. He waved to her. She glanced over her shoulder, then walked over to the entrance of the alley.

“How close are they?” he said.

“About thirty seconds away—tops,” she replied.

“Do you know a way out of the city?”

“Yes. Wait here. I'll help you.”

“Thank you. I'm sorry, for all the trouble I've gotten you into.”

“It's worth it,” Rita smiled at him, “Hide now. They're coming.”

Harvey ducked; he could hear the officers turning the corner.

“Which way did he go?” one of the officers said—presumably to Rita.

“Who?” she asked.

“The fugitive,” the officer said, “You are aware that it is a crime to harbor a fugitive.

Now, where is he?”

“Calm down,” said Rita, “I've caught him for you. He's right there behind that dumpster.”

She must be pointing to the wrong dumpster.

*Must be. Must be.*

But then. He heard the footsteps. Getting closer. Closer.

She had sold him out.

Harvey craned his neck upward, desperate to find anything that would help. The closest thing to a weapon was an old, moldy pillow. He grabbed it, took off the pillowcase, and began refilling it with the heaviest pieces of plastic and metal he could find. It was too late. They were upon him.

He swung the pillowcase aimlessly. All it did was spread the vile smell of decay. They knocked it out of his hand. And threw him to the ground. One of the officers stepped on his hand, breaking it. They started to kick him, he didn't know how long it lasted but by the time it was over, he wasn't really feeling them. In fact, he wasn't feeling much of anything anymore. Then, they started to drag him slowly along the burning ground. The officers stopped for a brief moment—giving Harvey a chance to cough up the blood in his mouth.

The leading officer looked at Rita, a proud smile on his face, “Thank you for your service, ma'am. The city thanks you,” the officer tipped his hat and continued dragging Harvey across the pavement.

## Jackalope

Sarah Steen '26



## Televised Tragedy

Samuel Sea '28

Smiles and laughs fill the room  
And, today, I direct this to you:  
Pretend you thrive in this system  
And you'll invent a sense of it.  
You'll gain control over your mind  
And this is where you'll find  
The scripts I wrote for those who plead  
For a chance to sit back and breathe—  
For you, I'll put up an endless fight;  
I'll use my voice until the day I die.  
*Welcome to the Televised Tragedy.*  
We fight for the Right to Be.

If you relate to this, I sincerely apologize;  
This reality is a game of playing pretend:  
You'll lose yourself and question this life  
All in front of an intrigued audience—  
Stubborn kids grow up to be civil leaders:  
When we need something, we fight for it,  
Even if it means facing failure in the process.  
We do what it takes to live just a little longer;  
This isn't entertainment for the rich—it's a protest,  
We the People demand to be free of the convict.  
*Welcome to the Televised Tragedy.*  
We fight for the Right to Be

Spill Your Guts

Sophia Shaw '26



Superior Rocks

Jennifer Schmidt



## Archive Two

Ana Victoria Guevara

We only call it “real” once it’s gone,  
once it’s safe enough to caption.

Memory is that museum gift shop where you buy your own life again in  
a cheaper material.

The past isn’t history, it’s PR:  
a few true details in a trench coat  
pretending to be the whole scene.  
Literature helps—of course it does—  
it puts a spotlight on the bruise and  
asks for applause  
for not flinching.

I keep thinking: maybe I’m addicted  
to the raw version  
the way people are addicted to  
behind-the-scenes footage,  
the way a timeline loves a disaster  
as long as it’s formatted.

I tried to look at myself in the mirror  
and see only my eyes  
not my backstory, not my pose,  
just the looking—  
and it was almost funny  
how quickly my face started narrating  
Even my pupils have opinions.

Writing could be serenity,  
or the first step toward it.  
But I’m not raven enough,

I don’t know how to carry messages  
without chewing them up.

For years I lived like a dead woman  
with excellent manners.  
My eyes were so empty  
they could be rented out.  
People filled them according to the contract:  
friend, lover, daughter, good citizen,  
someone who “seems fine.”

I accept any kind of solitude.  
I’ve dispersed myself like tabs in a browser  
so I don’t have to meet the one  
with the title: Me, Open Here.

They say solitude is power, art, etc.  
Sure.  
But for women it can also be  
the void with a clean font,  
the madness that arrives politely,  
or suicide pretending to be clarity.

Our era is too mediocre to  
survive an actual intensity.  
Everything comes half-done—  
even grief.  
Lately common sense  
is the only philosophy  
that doesn’t make me feel  
like I’m performing depth.

Somewhere between Circe and Ulysses  
(a woman who knows what she's doing and  
a man who thinks he's the plot),  
I'm listening to a Ralphie Choo track  
while Rosalía turns pain into choreography,  
and Aphex Twin makes the future  
sound like a nervous system learning to blink,  
and a Japanese band I can't pronounce  
keeps insisting the chorus is brighter  
than anything I remember.

There's coalescence, yes—  
not meaning, not a thesis—  
more like: a collective weather  
moving through individual bodies,  
everyone pretending it's personal  
because that's how we cope.

I want to submerge in something else.  
Not enlightenment.  
An element.  
The smell of a dog trapped in a room  
with cigarettes, anise,  
and the soft violence of stored objects—  
things kept so long  
they start to think they own you.

And maybe that's the trick:  
we don't lose reality,  
we just archive it  
until it can speak without us.

Then we call it "the past"  
and act surprised  
it knows our names.

## Atlas' Cloak

Tristan Johnson



## Idée Fixe

Wortley Clutterbuck

I once was sure reality  
would be as I would have it be  
and, though the world was not inclined,  
I thought the world obeyed my mind.

Illusions that I exercised  
I found myself not so surprised  
to have imposed on life's chaos  
despite life being a coin toss.

It didn't matter what I thought,  
some outcomes were not what I sought  
and while I knew it was in vain,  
I disbelieved what caused me pain.

I'm pretty sure that Kant meant well  
and noumenon's a parallel  
experience I'll never know,  
although I tried to have it so.

I thought that if I wanted it  
enough, the whole world would submit  
but I suspect that something's wrong  
because the world won't play along.

## Moody Sheep

Jennifer Schmidt



## A Madwoman in the Basement

Sriharini Seshachalam

there's a madwoman in the basement, a woman  
we remember only in our dreams, asleep.  
she's chained in the dark for crying  
before she's chained to the dark  
for screaming. we're related to her,  
distant in blood, closer in time  
than you'd think.

doctor, can you prescribe me a trip to the seaside?  
I need sleep.  
I don't lie in bed during the day, not even at night.  
I take all of my pills. I eat more, I eat skin and nails.  
I haven't gone outside in days, but I will.  
I will wash my hair, scrub my scalp red. I don't  
drink, I don't smoke. I don't tell you, I'm hurting.

I'll be alright by the sea. I need to see waves  
against dawn again // to hear morning birds //  
to be outside without leaving—to know:

will there be mail waiting for me there?  
what music do women my age listen to?

can you tell me in words  
my child won't understand  
why I will never be clean?

a woman's white hair swept from the linoleum floor,  
I save it like a ribbon wasted on a printed price tag,  
tuck it safe in the kitchen drawer.

## Sun and Soul

Mary Hennessey '27

after my friend told her mother I liked girls—I have to pray  
before I can come in to eat or play // sit still and listen.

I think of my life had I been  
a nurse, a nun, a teacher,  
how deep abuse runs rivers in these fields.

I run far from that door,  
my bottom lip bloody.  
dry, it split open.

the soles of my feet burn beneath summer's sand—  
urged by the tide's call to keep moving—a promise to meet the brisk shore.  
water is a mother // evolution's god.

a song we can dance happily to  
without having to translate the tears.  
steps careless in harmony.



## Whispers of Mountains

Rilee Lonberger '26



## Lost Days

Thom Schilling

As I sat down at work, I saw Amy Tyler looking at her computer followed by a loud sigh. Standing, I looked over the top of my cubical to see her staring at the pictures of her two children on the screen. Attempting to feel closer, she touched the screen and began to caress the flat images. Tears flowed.

Looking at the calendar on the wall, I realized it had been exactly one year since her children died. I was there when it happened, and the vision of the accident is permanently etched in my brain. We worked late that January night, and Amy's husband dropped her two young children off at the office on his way to senior volleyball practice.

As we left work, it was snowing and I felt chivalrous, so I scraped the ice from her car windows as she buckled her children into their car seats. Turning to scrape my own windows, Amy honked, waved, and drove away. Moments later, I cleared the icy snow from my windows and took River Road home. The only tracks in the snow were Amy's. From time-to-time her tire tracks fishtailed but I didn't give it much thought; it was the first ice storm of the winter and drivers are always the worst during the first snow of the season. I wasn't even a little concerned until I saw her tracks shoot off the road toward the river. She must have hit a bump, lost traction, and cannonballed into the waterway.

Immediately, I turned on my flashers, gingerly pulled off River Road, and called 911.

I'm sure I sounded like a madman. "Hello! Hello! I'm on River Road and there has been a terrible accident. Please send the sheriff and an ambulance! I'm about a quarter mile east of Highway 7. There's a car with passengers in the river." I'm sure the operator tried to get more information, but I shouted, "I need to get Amy and her kids out. Send the sheriff, NOW!"

Sliding down the embankment, I saw the nose of Amy's car was underwater; only the trunk was still visible. I hopped into the black, frigid river and tried to swim to the driver's side door, however, my winter wear—boots, a wool sweater, and parka—proved to be too restrictive—I couldn't keep my head above water. Struggling to shed clothing, I stripped to only my socks and underwear

before dogpaddling to the driver's side door. The doorhandle would not budge regardless of how hard I tried. I pounded on the door to get Amy's attention to no avail. "Roll down the window." She was stunned with panic. Pointing and shouting, I repeated, "WINDOW! ROLL DOWN YOUR DAMNED WINDOW!"

I pounded as hard as I could on the window until she rolled it down. Water flowed inside until I tugged hard enough to spring the door. Reaching across her body, I battled to get her seatbelt released, and fought even harder to pull her from behind the steering wheel. She waged war to get back inside the car to rescue her children. I nearly drowned as I towed her to shore. Dragging her up the embankment, I yelled, "Stay here and I'll get the kids."

Now fully submerged, the car doors opened much easier. I grabbed the girl first, unbuckled her from the child car seat, and started to feel my arms and legs ache from the icy water. I struggled to swim the twenty feet from the car to the shore, but managed to hand off the girl to her mother.

My head told me I needed to rescue the boy, but my body was slow to respond. I gathered every bit of strength to make one last trip to the car.

I wish I could say I saved the boy. However, I removed his lifeless body and struggled to get him riverside. The ambulance arrived while I was underwater and one of the medics took the boy from my frozen hands and instantly rushed him to the back of an ambulance for mouth-to-mouth and a respirator. Another medic wrapped me in a blanket and assisted me into another medmobile.

I asked in vain, "Did the little girl make it?"

"They are working on her," responded the female medic.

"How about the little boy?"

"It's too soon to say."

"What about Amy? Is the mom gonna make it?"

"You got to her in time," said the male EMT.

Intuitively, I remember thinking, So I must have failed on the other two.

My insides were devoured by incomplete splendor, unrestrained rage, and perfect self-hatred; all of the feelings so completely pure of heart and soul when you fail . . . especially when it involves the death of children. Although I did everything I possibly could to save Amy's children, nothing prepared me for the purely unmitigated and inescapable guilt I felt.

In the past year I've searched my soul for answers. I asked myself more than 1,000 times what I could have done better. What could I have done to react quicker? How much shorter could I have made the 911 call? Could I have opened the driver's door any sooner? If I didn't take Amy to shore, could she have rescued the girl, leaving me to get to the boy minutes earlier?

A month after the tragedy I wallowed in self-pity and looked for others to blame. It was rather harsh but I started with Amy. Why was she so careless to not have control of her car? Why couldn't she open the damned door? Why didn't she give mouth-to-mouth to the girl?

More guilt, regardless of her contribution to my personal hell, was unnecessary. She will pay for it the rest of her life as she asks, "Was I driving too fast? Why did I let him take me to shore? Why was I allowed to live?"

Her husband blamed her for the deaths of the children, and he left her and the town a few months after the devastation. She has never recovered from the incident or remarried.

Still looking for a scapegoat, I blamed Amy's husband. If he had waited for Amy to get home, the children would still be alive. I was sure he left town to hide his guilt.

Going down the list of finger pointing, I accused the medics for reacting too slowly until I realized they responded in record time. Then I faulted them for not being skilled enough in their jobs. After all, everyone has heard stories about children drowning in icy waters and then being revived an hour or two later. Why didn't we have one of those medics in our town?

Without finding anyone more blameworthy, I went through pathological feelings of guilt, which got progressively worse after my wife left me. Alone, facing the oppressive onus that sucked the very life from my soul. I yearned to control the spirit that smothered my will, my intensity, and my very spirit. I waded through a river of sorrow, sieving for the many feelings, like a fisherman removing fish from a river of despair. I began my drinking phase and poured bottle after bottle of whiskey down my throat. On one such binge, I wrote:

Every act of kindness,

And every civil deed,

creates emotional blindness,

and satisfies some sick need.  
Sometimes when I fail and slip  
I arrange the deck chairs on a sinking ship.  
Doing anything less is tragic,  
necessitates something more dynamic.

That stupid little ditty rang a bell in my brain. It made me realize the subtle difference between life and death can be something as fragile as a leaf blowing in the wind; swirling from gust to gust, like taking a simple breath in a hurricane's fury.

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It wasn't until a week ago that I stopped pointing fingers and accepted my fate. I'd lost too many days defeated by guilt. I did what I could.

Moving to Amy's work station, I stood silently behind her. Without looking up from her screen, she murmured, "It wasn't your fault."

With a consoling hug, I whispered my capitulation, "Nor yours."

## There, Still Standing

Sydney Seigle '26



## Womanhood in two parts

Rachel Treadway '27

I became a woman today.

I received an invitation to a baby shower. It is addressed to me, not my mother, not my grandmother, *me*.

It was from a couple kids I knew years ago. Though I haven't thought about them in a good while, this bit of cardstock occupies so much of my mind.

They're having a baby, *a whole kid*.

We are all just babies ourselves.

It's cliché, trite, *true*.

What do I buy them?

I have no money, I mean we are all still in college.

What do I wear?

It has been so long since I've been to one of these.

Are they really grown enough to raise a baby?

*Am I?*

Will they be happy?

Happier than me?

It's a bit of paper, blue and green and watercolors,  
but it sits like a brick on my chest  
like a hole in my womb  
like a weightlessness on my ring finger  
It's tears in my eyes and an ache in my heart  
It's the fear in my very core that I will never catch up to them  
That they have won some competition  
That they are *happier* than me.

My mother told me that I have to stop acting like the greatest sin a woman can commit is getting pregnant before she is married.

She doesn't understand.

It isn't about a baby

It isn't about marriage, a ring, a husband

The greatest sin she can commit is not living her life to her fullest

*HER FULLEST*

To let your dreams be trampled by the pitter-patter of little feet.

To let your future be flushed away in a flood of alcohol.

To let your plans be pushed back on the shelf to make way for your spouse's.

Maybe she'll be happy here,  
but happier than with the medical degree she'd been dreaming about since she was ten?

God forgive me for doubting it.

## Sensoji Serenity

Gaz Millwood '29



## Slipping Away

Neil Weiner

“When are the grandchildren coming to visit?”

Her voice is soft and gentle, almost childlike.

I answer the question for the eighth time today.

“They’ll be here at the end of December.”

There was a time—early on—when the repetition scraped my nerves raw.

My anger rose as I protested a future I wasn’t ready to face. That anger has long since softened into something heavier, an ongoing burden, but the flames have died down.

I dwell in sadness for my wife of fifty-four years. She slips away inch by inch.

“Why don’t you check the whiteboard you asked me to put on the fridge?”

“It’s easier if you tell me.”

She is covering, trying to hide that she forgets to use it.

Last week she accused me of lying when I slipped and said we had discussed the same issue ten minutes earlier. I try not to remind her since it hurts her feelings and accomplishes nothing.

“I wasn’t paying attention. Repeat it.”

“At the end of December.”

She accepts that, at least for the moment, and turns back toward the TV. Her world is reduced to the bright colors and the comforting noise. This is the woman who once buzzed with ideas, built furniture in the garage, redesigned rooms on graph paper, earned two master’s degrees while raising kids and holding a job.

Now she spends most days in front of the television, not comprehending what she sees. If I initiate, she’ll go to the gym, for a walk, or to a movie, or a jazz club.

She’s lost her passion.

Lately, though, I notice I’m slipping, too. It’s creeping in on cat paws. Bit by bit.

I’m searching for words more often, opening my mouth, only a void where language used to be.

I forget to turn off the lights at bedtime. I miss appointments by forgetting to write them in my book as I'd done flawlessly for years. Such automatic behaviors are not automatic anymore.

For the last two years I've been holding on for both of us, gripping our memories like a man clinging to a rope in rising water.

I can feel my fingers loosening.

Slipping Away.

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One of my best friends was a psychologist, an author, a college instructor, and a conversational wizard. She has that unmistakable Jewish humor, irony sharpened by centuries of suffering and verbal cleverness.

She still has the humor, thank God, but now her conversations are laced with squirrels—little mental skids when her attention switches involuntarily to meaningless distractions. Her focus slips as thoughts dart away mid-sentence and leave her reaching for them again.

She suffers from a debilitating illness, Myalgic Encephalomyelitis. On her good days, she's functional, so long as she doesn't overtax her fragile system. Thinking too long, lifting a bag of groceries, or sitting through a dentist appointment can steal the rest of her day or week. On bad days she's barely herself at all. Instead, she presents a faint outline of the dynamic woman she was in her prime, four decades ago.

She became an expert on M.E. and published books, starting at a time when her illness was controversial, a manifestation of hysteria or stress. She lectured nationwide, held annual seminars, and served on CDC and other educational committees.

Now I write freely while she struggles to shape a hundred-word story. Her long-term project, a collection of short essays about living with M.E., moves slowly, painfully. She writes well when the words flow, but they seldom do these days. She realizes her meager collection of short stories may never form a publishable book. Still, she edits my stories on our Zoom calls. We slip between critique and banter, weaving in musings about politics, recent science discoveries, and ridiculous ideas we create for our own amusement. One day we spent thirty minutes discussing oxymorons. I turned that conversation into a published story, *Déjà Vu All Over*

*Again.*

In those moments, I see her. Not the illness. Not the losses.

Her.

It's both beautiful and unbearably sad.

Slipping Away.

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Two of my good friends have died in the last three years. I miss them— not with a clinging, sorrowful longing, the way one misses recounting a chapter of their life. I miss the shared memories, the intersections where our journeys braided together at just the right moments. It's not possible for others to appreciate these memories in the way my friends and I did, nor to speak in the same shorthand or find them hilarious.

I've always accepted death as inevitable. That's why Bob Dylan's line— *He not busy being born is busy dying*—has always struck me with such a clean, cutting truth.

Accepting the way people drift, disappear, or simply change beyond recognition?

That's harder and far more painful.

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Recently, out of some quiet ache in the chest, I reached out to Big Bob, a man I'd been friends with fifty years ago. I regarded him as bosom buddy, a brother in everything but blood. We had met as underpaid high school teachers in the 1960s in Newark, the armpit of New Jersey. We spent two halcyon years together. Big Bob introduced me to psychedelic trips. We went to concerts and civil rights marches. We led a walkout at our high school to protest the Vietnam War.

Big Bob and I shared heartbreaks, dreams, triumphs. Both of us moved to Berkeley at the height of the hippie era. My heart broke when he moved to Israel to work on a kibbutz. I continued to carry those two years of camaraderie like prized gems, warm, smooth, always in my pocket. I told countless stories about him. I drafted an essay about our bond and submitted it for publication.

After fifty years of searching off and on for Big Bob, ChatGPT was able to find him. In a rush of excitement, I sent him a long email and the essay. I told him how much those years meant to me. I asked if we could reconnect on Zoom to

capture some of that wild, golden friendship.

His response was polite. He didn't respond to the Zoom invitation. He didn't remember any of our exploits, our protests, our adventures.

He attached a photo of his wife and daughter, smiling in some sunlit moment far away from the past we once shared.

The memory I had kept alive with such warmth, such tenderness, met with indifference. I was deeply hurt because of the rejection and unimportance he communicated.

Pieces of myself I'd thought Big Bob still held were nowhere to be found, as if our years meant nothing to him.

Slipping Away.

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Another best friend lives deep inside the ceaseless whirlwind of Mormon womanhood. She moves through her days like a high-ranking general in a never-ending domestic campaign—mother, grandmother, Stake Councilor, therapist in independent practice. She layers responsibilities thick as sweaters in a bitter winter. Tasks and expectations multiply around her, and she meets each one with a determination that borders on obsession.

We were once colleagues in private practice, our offices side by side. I ran my psychology practice while she tended her master's level therapy clients, both of us trying to save the world one client at a time.

I felt the presence of her overcommitment. I tried every trick I knew. I bribed her with birthday massages, yoga classes, Christmas weekends at spas where no one was allowed to speak above a whisper. She would return luminous, rested, floating.

She'd plunge back into her schedule with the determination and insanity of a deep-sea Japanese pearl diver. No oxygen tank, no margin for error. Just a single breath and a willingness to disappear beneath the waves. Now she's burning out. She tells me she can't understand why the fatigue clings to her, why her brain fog rolls in like morning mist, and why she feels drained and is unraveling.

I want to grab her shoulders and yell Stop. Stop the busyness. Stop the martyrdom. Stop the self-imposed sainthood drive. Some dark part of me even

wants to strap her into four-point restraints like a danger-to-self inpatient. Not to imprison her, but to force rest into her bones.

But I can't do any of that. Her sense of duty is bigger than me, bigger than both of us. I'm left doing the only thing I can: listening, empathizing, and quietly hoping she finds the brakes before the cliff.

Slipping Away.

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I don't want you to take this as some gloomy fable about old age, as if I spend my days clutching my lower back or talking endlessly about my next meal. No. My life is a lot bigger and funnier than that.

My wife and I have a tight-knit family, carefully stitched together like an intricate quilt. Twice a year we vacation together: our son, our daughter, and her husband. Our two grandchildren operate at an energy level that should be illegal. They cannonball into pools, sprint through airports, and leave trails of cracker crumbs (so long you could use them as GPS coordinates).

I stay busy. Ridiculously busy for a man who sometimes forgets where he put the glasses that are already on his face. I work with ten coaching clients, I serve on the AARP fraud committee (which is a bit like joining the Avengers for seniors), and I'm on the board of a nonprofit that teaches English as a second language, which means I get to witness people learning the word "squirrel," the hardest word in the English language to pronounce.

We've got friends in China, in France, and across the U.S. These are people who manage to stay upright without complaining about their rotator cuffs.

I also don't want to peddle a fairy tale. Life at seventy-eight is a balancing act—a seesaw between belly laughs and doctor appointments, joy and the occasional existential "Ouch." I share the heartaches not because I'm auditioning for a tragedy, but because they're the truth. As Tennyson said, "In every life a little rain must fall." He forgot to mention that sometimes it falls the very day you washed the car.

Still, rain or shine, the gifts of this life with my family and friends outweighs the creaks and unexpected noises my body makes when I stand up. Most days, the joy wins. On the days it doesn't, well, there's always tomorrow, ibuprofen, and the grandchildren to remind me why it's all worth it.

## Sightseeing in Savannah

Vivian Jacobs '26



## The Empress

Kevin Corbett

“A crown a crown a crown a crown:  
You plot and pine to pull it down,  
But once you’ve got it on your head—  
Only the faster, dear, to drown,”

Or so her Empress-Mother said  
Speaking as quickly as she bled  
The hidden-dagger’s worth of blood,  
Till quiet lips pronounced her dead.

The Empress grew and understood.  
Gritting her heart, she faced the flood  
Trying to force her, crown and all,  
A foot beneath the river-mud,

But lacking Mother’s wherewithal,  
She spent a varied interval  
Of days in rooms so tightly shut,  
She could not hear the public squall.

The fun of playing autocrat?  
Mother had used up all of that.  
The world was in her fingers too,  
But just to pry a window slat

And frame the thoughtless geese that flew  
Above the pond, and never knew  
Their flesh had duties to the state  
Until state arrows ran them through.

They scattered; she would abdicate,

And kiss some cousin off to fate.  
Instead, said cousin's opaque hand  
Stretched darkly to assassinate

Her decoy in an over-manned  
And distant room, while, on the pond,  
The would-be mufflers of her screams  
Rang cries through all the meadowland.

Her blood was shaken. Mother's themes  
Of fear and force and counter schemes  
Rose up like ghosts who missed the sight  
Of limbs stretched out on wooden beams.

She blew them back to ash and night,  
Admitting Mother could be right:  
Mercy could be a form of vice.  
Goodness might lose, or more than might.

But, stabbed and shot and poisoned twice,  
She lived, her mercy cold as ice  
Filling the pond the geese had left,  
Still echoing their mourning-cries.

Serpent and dove, we are bereft  
Of something heavier than the theft  
Of crowns and scepters—she is gone  
Who kissed a killer's head and laughed.

Walker, know what you're walking on:

No Queen of Hearts, no Avalon,  
No footstool to a crushing throne,  
But strongest and most yielding bone.

## Sun Catcher

Gabe Hetrick '27



## A Child Of My Own

Angela Townsend

Gentle people on the internet want to help you be your own parent. It may feel contrived, but you will get the hang of it. You will wake yourself up on time. You will place blueberries in the individual compartments of your toaster waffle. You will hide neon index cards in your lunchbox to remember that someone is proud of you. You will never go to bed without one last, “I love you.”

This is essential work for an adult mammal. But what about those of us who never sprung the pupa?

You may not recognize us by sight. I am biologically forty-three, with the mortgage and chickadee prints around my eyes to prove it. I have been deemed sufficiently responsible to operate a sedan, adopt four cats, and report to the Internal Revenue Service. I take my multivitamin, and vote in federal, state, and local elections.

It is an illusion. I am still my parents’ child. I do not need to be my own parent, because my mother sends me neon index cards, my stepfather calls me his daughter, and they both pray for me while stockpiling my favorite colas in the spare bedroom just in case there is a shortage.

I am a tycoon. If tomorrow I get kidnapped by Visigoths and force-fed horseradish, I will still be the gladdest girl on land or sea because of my parents.

I am so afraid of taking them for granted, I exasperate them instead. I text them hugs until the emoji’s arms give out. I describe them in terms usually reserved for Almighty God or Shaquille O’Neal.

My parents made me sign a cease-and-desist order regarding heart-warming figurines. The Postmaster General called an emergency session of his lieutenants to address disruptions caused by the volume of my “I love you” cards.

I do not need to be my own parent, but I am playing around with being my own child. I do not have one of those.

I am not sure where to start. The birthday parties of colleague-spawn suggest that the chief duty of children is despotism. They are proficient at wanting in all directions. Their key performance indicators are loudness, and the ability to shut down a supermarket checkout line over injustices involving Reese’s Pieces. They are ambulatory nuggets of need.

I am not sure I can do this. I like my reputation inside my head, where I am iridescent and modest. I illuminate the proceedings. I am a pleasure to have in class. In the rare event I have a request, it is meek and enchanting. My parents have never indicated that I am needy. But if I am going to be my own child, I am going to have to look that jam-smearred imp in the eyes.

This may involve pulling the comforter over my head on work mornings, yelling “noiny noiny noin,” and informing the alarm clock it is mean and unfair. I will have to practice throwing my body to the floor and writhing like a cat in heat when required to attend a boring meeting.

Most importantly, it is imperative that I announce what I want within six seconds of wanting. This is as essential in trifles as in matters of national security. It is up to parents to gauge scope; that is not my problem. My problem is to present my problems, whether they involve Easy Mac or the rate of return on my 401k.

I dare not complain. It is only hard to be my own child because it is easy to be my parents’ child. They never resent my needs, or at least they close the door before screaming. I am embarrassed to be a rumpled animal at this age. I never knew I was so needy. Perhaps keeping that secret is the better part of parenting.

## Kilnborn

Aaron Masri '26



# ADHD

Brayden Johnson '27

So they tell me I have a bit  
Of a condition in my head.  
Turns out  
That I can't focus  
On what people say,  
That I sometimes ramble and over explain, well it's hardly my fault,  
So what can I say?  
There are so many things  
That I can say  
But none of them matter  
Anyway  
Squirrels are a creature  
To which I relate deeply  
Because just like them I  
Scurry and  
Run in  
Circles and  
Circles,  
But my scurrying and my circular running is all in my head so they tell me  
I'm crazy.  
I'm not.  
Not crazy.  
Just different,  
But different tends to  
Make people scared,  
And when people are scared  
They avoid and evade  
Anything that makes them  
Confront the reality.  
Can I really blame them?  
I do the same thing,

With  
Homework and  
Taxes and  
Paying my bills.  
A mind that refuses to live in a box,  
A mind that is capable of so much more,  
A power I call it,  
Though some call it a curse.  
A mind that never stops running,  
Like squirrels,  
So see,  
I lied when I said I can't focus, I can.  
Turns out when I want to I don't over explain.  
Turns out four little letters and some prescription pills can't really describe me.  
I'm more than four letters,  
I'm more than your box,  
I'm more than the  
Squirrels that you see on your lawn.  
I'm no more than you,  
Though also no less.  
So I guess what I am trying to say  
Is that rather than making a big deal about what condition I have  
And what it may or may not stop me from doing,  
What is important is that  
I am human too.

## Exhale

Payton Lock '27



## When the World Went Quiet

Alli Russell '26

In the first semester, she learned  
how silence can hum louder than lecture halls,  
how grief can lace itself through coffee spoons  
and sleepless nights that never quite turn to morning.

She kept her window cracked in winter,  
said she liked the cold air,  
but really,  
she needed to feel something  
that didn't burn.

Her friends texted,  
her inbox filled with deadlines,  
and she told herself she was fine,  
that fine was good enough,  
until the mirror began to flinch first.

Midnights blurred into each other,  
one more drink, one less meal,  
one graceless apology whispered to nobody.  
The walls in her dorm began to listen  
too closely.

One morning, she looked at her reflection  
and realized the room wasn't shrinking,  
she was.

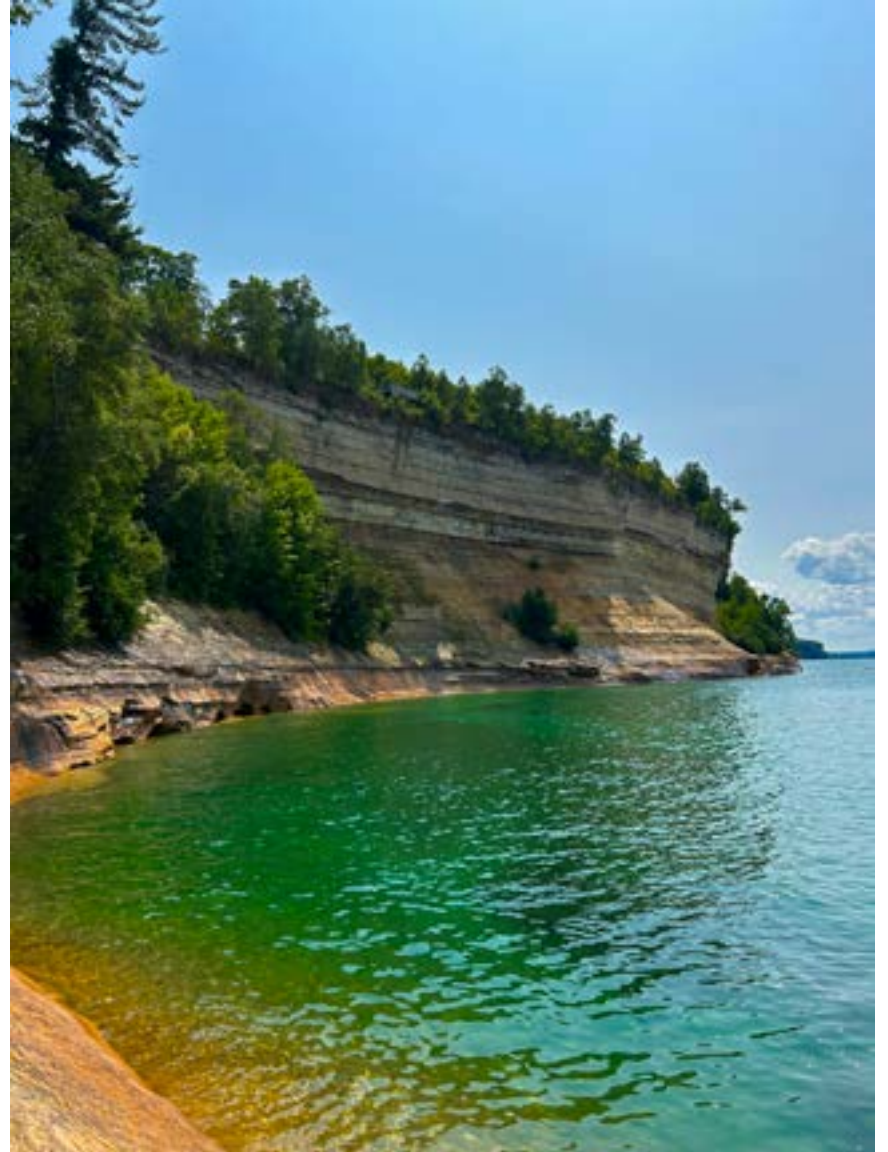
So, she breathed. Once. Twice.

## The Copper Coast

Gabe Hetrick '27

Typed out a message,  
hesitated,  
then pressed send.

And in the bloom of that small, trembling act,  
the silence finally loosened its grip,  
and the world began to hum again,  
not louder,  
but kinder.



# Sedum

Jennifer Schmidt



# The Bliss of a Wendy's Cheeseburger

Alli Russell '26

I cross the oncoming traffic in the parallel lane, entering Wendy's driveway. The beautiful red building glowed against the moonlight. The white sign beamed bright as I neared the ordering location. The scene was familiar, painted with several types of meal selections. I didn't need to bother glancing at the menu, I already knew what meal I planned on devouring. The radiant and juicy Dave's single. The hamburger sat between two crispy buttered buns, drenched in grease from the grill's surface. A thick slice of American cheese separated the piece of meat from the buns. Typically, it was dragged through the garden before being served in aluminum wrapping, but today I wasn't feeling the vegetables. I wanted to taste the sweet beef and soft cheese combo. I quickly placed my order and paid, now waiting at the second window. The transparent fortress sat separating the delectable meal and my hungry stomach.

Finally, a uniformed employee came to the window with a brown paper bag in her hand. My eyes watered and my stomach grumbled as I heard the window slam open. My hand moved swiftly and stole the bag out of the lady's hand. The brown bag entered my vehicle as the grin on my face grew deep. The lead in my foot pressed into the gas pedal, leading me to a parking spot. I sat, eager to devour the juicy delicacy but also hesitant to ruin something so beautiful. Maybe I should have gotten two.

The bag nearly ripped into shreds as my hand thrust into the dark space fishing for what I wanted most. I withdrew my hand, a ball of aluminum in my grasp. My fingernails tore away at the wrapping and finally the burger was vulnerable. I felt similar to a predator, ready to pounce on the vulnerable and precious existence. As the food reached my mouth, I chomped and chewed repeatedly until nothing was left. It felt of pure bliss and almost as a piece of heaven was sent down into the soft beef. It was perfect. There is truly nothing better than a Wendy's cheeseburger.

Starry-Eyed

Alex Warren '26



Smokey Mountain Laurel

Gabe Hetrick '26

