

# KENNINGS



Artistic & Literary Journal  
Edition 16  
2024-2025



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Kennings Lit Journal



Kennings: Hill Thoughts



k e n n i n g s

Artistic & Literary Journal

edition 16

2025

## 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 avid reader,

“tree-hugger” for environmentalist.

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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# Table of Contents

<b>Content Warning</b> .....	2	<b>Afsheen's Choice</b>	
<b>Kennings Staff</b> .....	3	Arshia Iqbal .....	35
<b>Letters from the Editors</b> .....	6	<b>Palaver of Pruned Pinions</b>	
<b>Professor Dee Goertz Award</b> .....	8	Bethany Ratliff '27.....	39
<b>Kennings Mission Statement</b> .....	9	<b>two minutes from nuclear armageddon</b>	
<b>Rain on a Tin Roof</b>		Beatrice Bleakley .....	40
Molly Billiard '25.....	10	<b>Solitude</b>	
<b>Tea pot</b>		Raj Sharma '25 .....	43
Isaac Lally '25 .....	11	<b>Moves in Chess and Love</b>	
<b>Scroll</b>		Skyler Shouse '26.....	44
Sammy Anderson .....	12	<b>Raku Fired Beetle Vase</b>	
<b>AFTER A LOST EVENING</b>		Katelyn Enginger '25.....	46
George Freek .....	14	<b>Night Frog</b>	
<b>Eye of the Beholder</b>		Wren Abney '26.....	47
Ethan Geraci '25 .....	15	<b>On the Shore Talking with Odysseus</b>	
<b>Curiosity</b>		Ethan Geraci '25 .....	48
Wren Abney '26.....	16	<b>This Sonnet Has Thirteen Lines</b>	
<b>"And my cat never liked you anyway"</b>		Kayla Pyle '25.....	49
Lexi Traylor '25.....	17	<b>Whispers of Silence</b>	
<b>change</b>		Plamen Vasilev .....	50
Anissa Weber '25 .....	20	<b>This House Has Hands in It</b>	
<b>Magnolia Grenades</b>		Molly Billiard '25.....	53
Molly Lyon.....	21	<b>it's in the details</b>	
<b>Forsaken</b>		Anissa Weber '25 .....	54
Colton Auxier '26 .....	24	<b>Self-Sabotage</b>	
<b>Traces of Me</b>		Ezra Young .....	55
Sophia Shaw '26.....	26	<b>Restaurant Guide</b>	
<b>The Life of Himm</b>		Carson Calkins.....	56
Brayden Johnson '27.....	27	<b>Two of Pentacles: A Tarot Card</b>	
<b>Oyster Shells</b>		Steph Chapman '28.....	58
Michael Shoemaker .....	30	<b>RAGDOLL'S BODY</b>	
<b>The Fool: A Tarot Card</b>		Samuel Sea '28.....	59
Steph Chapman '28.....	31	<b>One Day</b>	
<b>here's all the proof you need</b>		Skyler Shouse '26.....	60
Abbie Doll.....	32	<b>Migration</b>	
<b>Jungle Sky</b>		Raj Sharma '25 .....	61
Taylor McNally-Henriksen '25.....	34	<b>Eight of Pentacles: A Tarot Card</b>	
		Steph Chapman '28.....	62

**A NOTE FROM THE RICH & POWERFUL**

Samuel Sea '28 ..... 63

**Thinking of Ansel Adams**

Ethan Geraci '25 ..... 64

**Hymn to the Dove.**

Ayaan Fahad ..... 65

**Changing Colors**

Sarah Steen '26 ..... 67

**gas pedal**

Anissa Weber '25 ..... 68

**The Fate of The Interloper**

Brayden Johnson '27 ..... 69

**Steeple at Sunrise**

Michael Shoemaker ..... 73

**The Inescapable Sea**

Lexi Wyckoff ..... 74

**Big Eyes**

Wren Abney '26 ..... 76

**East vs West: an Essay on Cultural Differences**

Yuan Changming ..... 77

**Self-Reflection of Sickness**

Paetyn Greve '25 ..... 78

**only one**

Hailey Hansen '26 ..... 79

**Recycled Nature Sculpture**

Nina Crawford '25 ..... 80

**Food, Water, Shelter**

Rilee Lonberger '26 ..... 81

**Wading**

Sarah Steen '26 ..... 83

**bee life**

Heather D Haigh ..... 84

**Passing Seasons**

Edward Lees ..... 85

**Chinese Lesson Continued**

Yuan Changming ..... 86

**The Gatherer**

Ilya Gromochenko '26 ..... 87

**Replay**

N.T. Chambers ..... 88

**salsify in rain**

Heather D Haigh ..... 90

**Spiders**

Joyce Brinkman '26 ..... 91

**ripples**

Heather D Haigh ..... 93

## Letters from the Editors

Hello, dearest readers! It is truly an honor to present you with the 16th edition of *Kennings Artistic and Literary Journal*. While every moment I've spent with Kennings throughout my college experience has been truly impactful, this edition will always hold a special place in my heart. It is a product of love and growth in an era of our world that needs more beautiful art. In the last three years, our success as an undergraduate journal has absolutely exploded. We have expanded our audience, contributors, and supporters from the small Hanover bubble to the global creative community; our number of submissions has grown exponentially; our editorial staff size has more than doubled; we now host an annual contest for student contributors with cash prizes; and most importantly, we are leaving a legacy for the future Kennings team to continue building upon. This journal and every single person who has shared their creative energy to bring it to life deserves to be celebrated. Kennings has brought me joy and passion that I will carry with me to my next chapter. I hope you too find joy and passion in these pages, and I hope you feel inspired to grow your own creativity on your journey with Kennings.

Lexi Traylor

Co-Editor-in-Chief '25

Hello readers! I'm Allison Jones, one of the Co-Editors-in-Chief. Kennings was one of the first clubs I was first involved with on campus, and I'm so proud to have been a part of Kennings these past three years (and a half). Getting to work on a variety of staffs with many different people has taught me so much and shaped the person I am today. First, to all the past and present Kennings staff who have inspired and challenged me: thank you. And a special shoutout and thank you to my fellow copyeditors—who knew there were so many different types of dashes? Second, to all of our contributors, for this edition and past ones: thank you for all of the hard work and heart that you pour into your poems, stories, art, and more. We are honored that you have chosen us to show your work to the world. And last, but certainly not least, to Saul Lemerond, our faculty advisor, thank you from the bottom of my heart. Not only have you helped to shape me as a creative student and person, but you don't get nearly enough credit for all the work you do for Kennings. With all that, I hope you enjoy this edition of Kennings, that it brings you as much joy and life as it has for me!

Allison Jones

Co-Editor-in-Chief '25

Hello, fellow readers of the *Kennings Artistic and Literary Journal*! My name is Rilee Lonberger, the current Assistant Editor-in-Chief. I hope all of you have enjoyed reading and viewing all the wonderful works in this journal as much as I have had in helping produce it. Since my freshmen year at Hanover College, I have been a part of the Kennings staff in some way, shape, or form, and have been able to meet and work with so many amazing people that have become some of my closest friends. Kennings was the first ever club I joined on campus and I am forever grateful for its existence as it has helped me both grow as a person and writer, but also in that it has given me a plethora of fun and heartfelt memories. And, with that, I want to thank all of the former and present staff members I have had the privilege to work with, the journal would not have been created with such love without each and every one of you. I must also give a special shout-out to all current and past poetry staff for reading hundreds of poems sometimes in just a couple hours, in my experience, though, the night feels much shorter with the laughter from good company. Then finally, I would like to thank our faculty advisor Saul Lemerond, former Editors-in-Chief Meredith Shepherd and Chloe Baker, as well as our present Editor-in-Chief Lexi Traylor. I would not be a part of this journal today if you all had not been so welcoming to a certain nervous, little freshmen. Thank you!

Rilee Lonberger '26

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 Edition 15 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 15 2024 Goertz Awards Recipients below. You can find their works in our previous publication. Tune in next year for the winners from this Edition 16!

Visual Arts – “Guarded Flame” by Raine Houston ’26

Visual Arts – “Lost in the Familiar” by Ethan Geraci ’25

Literature – “Trinity” by Molly Billiard ’25

Literature – “Third Shift” by Paetyn Greve ’25

# 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 art 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 seat, 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!

# Rain on a Tin Roof

Molly Billiard '25

I'm always in my mom's childhood home that  
we once drove past,  
the reality not comparable to memory  
and I hope she's forgotten

every one of my teenage tear-aparts  
new-tide summer risings;  
with brevity comes something new:  
there's a constant ringing

and I wrap back around into something  
resembling old photo albums  
put into storage for safekeeping.  
Time wraps around me

I am so close to seven,  
I am standing in my mother's home  
inside her mother's home  
and I'm home now,

loaned souvenirs that feel like my own;  
evocation of some yellowed wallpaper  
that was torn off years prior.

# Tea pot

Isaac Lally '25



# SCROLL

Sammy Anderson

The phone whispered.

*What's the harm? Make yourself feel.*

"I can't."

*You will.*

Jonas scrolled, his dirty thumb gnawed off from endless hesitation. Sitting at his desk, watching the blank screen reflect the tortured face. But was it really his face anymore? It had started to feel like only eyes were looking back, and they were no longer his. They belonged to Android, and he was merely an extension of it.

"Stop it," he whispered, unable to halt his hands.

His real eyes darted. He craved respite. Something to prove he wasn't alone.

On the shelf above him, his Bible. The story of a God, once a man. Thin-rail bones and paper skin. Beaten and hung on a cross. Words thrown down through eternity, highlighted in blood.

Jonas took the book from its shelf.

He thought of Dismas. What had God said? You will be with me in Heaven? Eternal Life, just for believing.

*See what you aren't.*

"I'm reading."

*See who you're not.*

The pages strained under his desperate grip.

The phone vibrated. Once. Twice. Again.

A quick glance. Just enough. Android had caught him. The hypnotic screen.

The Bible fell on the desktop, now forgotten. Jonas rounded on his phone. He felt the sweat plastering him to his rolling chair. He heard the slow tick of the clock as it chipped his minutes away.

And those eyes. Thin and sly. All-knowing. Waiting.

*I'm right here, Jonas. Let me be your God.*

"You're not a God."

*Oh, but I am. Take a look. Just one.*

So, he did.

Beauty. Happiness. He felt the fury of the megabytes surge forward. The bombs exploding across his eyes. A child dead. A drug epidemic. A joke he'd seen before. So many things, all streaking by. But nothing...nothing...

It was all nothing. Just refrain. No matter what he wanted. No matter what he was looking for. Nothing. Again and again. But it was him. His entire self reflected. The world in synopsis.

He was nothing. Nothing...

*You are nothing. Now, you see.*

Jonas regarded the Bible. Tattered. Frayed. It did not move. Then...

*Zz. Zz. Zz.*

Jonas froze, staring at the book. Had it just...? No. He'd imagined it. It was not the book that had vibrated.

It was Android, vibrating so hard it shook the whole desk.

*Look at me, Jonas.*

Jonas did.

*You cannot escape.*

"What do you want?" Jonas asked.

*You know what I want.*

Jonas thought of God. What did God look for? What was his intention? At the end of all things, he was there to collect souls.

*Do you understand?*

"Yes," said Jonas.

Without reason, Jonas was in the closet. His eyes flicked to Android, where he caught his reflection once again. All things together. Eyes forevermore. Then, his body swayed.

*Zz. Zz. Zz.*

# AFTER A LOST EVENING

George Freek

Before the day breaks  
like ice breaks on the river,  
a vengeful wind  
blows through the trees,  
seeming to bring them,  
as if they were human,  
to their knees.

Leaves fall from the trees  
like lost memories,  
which strain to be remembered.

If they were to speak,  
their phrases would be weak.

I stare into a mirror,  
where I see nothing,  
nothing but a face  
like a petrified tree,  
where I should  
be seeing me.

# Eye of the Beholder

Ethan Geraci '25



# Curiosity

Wren Abney '26



# “And my cat never liked you anyway”

Lexi Traylor '25

If we had a theme  
I think water, it'd be.  
Blue, sure  
But always something just a little bit more.

At least, it was more to me  
But apparently not you  
Because that's why you left.  
We agreed to disagree  
On how we thought about life after school  
And what came next.

We tried to talk more  
(if you count more as fifteen hours)  
But no—  
You had already moved on and just needed to let me know.

So now it's all tainted!  
After that talk on the phone,  
The last one, God did I know  
You'd tear right through that beautiful picture I'd painted  
In my head, but I guess in my head alone.  
For six months, you were just throwing me a bone.

So if we had a theme,  
I know water it'd be.  
Smooth, sure  
But always rough just around the corner.

It was even in the cards,  
No really! I'm not superstitious  
But after all this time  
You can't blame me for latching onto something good in times that are so hard  
The tarot card reader promised my poor lonely heart who's tired of being  
suspicious  
That finally! Finally. finally. I'd find something that's mine

So it could be my fault  
Maybe I've joined the delusional cult  
Of women in the 21st century who panic—  
God fucking damn it, this is what I get for being a romantic.

There were too many signs  
That I just couldn't ignore  
Telling me it was perfect. You were the one.  
Now I hear the laughter of Time  
Shrieking, cackling, weeping, you poor poor poor  
Girl. He isn't the one. There's no one.

Now if we have a theme,  
I suppose water, it'd be.  
Fleeting, sure  
Slipped right between my fingers.

I'm sure someday it'll be easy,  
(No, I'm not sure  
Because right now,  
I'm begging, pleading,  
For it to not hurt)  
Someday I'll look back and not wonder how.

You'll move on, if you haven't already, with your life.

I hope I move on with mine.

We'll see.

We'll see if I ever recover from feeling like your A Team when I was apparently B.  
or C. or D.

Water is our default.

The water was the first meet, the first kiss.

Now the water leaks down my face.

And you know what's weirdest of all? This is the first time it's salt.

And I finally. Finally. finally. Taste what it was that you and I missed.

But I am so afraid that I'll never find anything better to take its place.

If we had a theme,

I think water, it'd be.

Scary, sure

That deep blue will pull you right under.

Cats don't like water.

My cat never liked you, either.

And you know what they say.

Animals are the best judge of character.

change

Anissa Weber '25



# Magnolia Grenades

Molly Lyon

Hunching behind the sand bags, Private Jimmy feels safe enough in the trench, but if a bomb hits the truck next to his hole, that could be the end of him. It is a large truck: a work truck. Only the Sergeant is allowed to drive the two-ton as they called it.

It is Jimmy's responsibility to collect all the grenades. They are scattered around the encampment, lying in wait, where they fell. The orders are to get them collected and into the brown paper sack before next chow. It will take all morning, but Private Jimmy is confident he can accomplish the mission. If he can accomplish it without injury to himself, that is preferred. If he can accomplish it and cause injury to the Enemy, a lucky bonus.

You can smell the season in the air. Dead leaves—always a giveaway that summer is over. With only his sense of smell, he could tell that it was fall. The cool breeze helps, but it is the smell of dry, dead leaves and wood burning piles of debris that Jimmy remembers from last year and the year before.

The sun is warm on his face and that is a welcome feeling, but it makes it harder to see the Enemy. Jimmy knows the Enemy is nearby. Upon giving his orders this morning, the Sergeant nods in the direction of the Enemy and instructs Jimmy to be mindful. Jimmy knows without further explanation what that means.

Jimmy places the brown paper bag a distance of about two clicks by his estimation. This is far enough away to minimize injury from an accidental explosion when throwing the grenades in. It is also close enough that he might actually manage to get a few into the bag on the first try. Last year it took him into the afternoon to complete the mission. Reprimanded by the Sergeant for his inefficiency, he has been practicing his aim and is confident he will be much improved this time.

Surveying the grounds for the closest grenades, Jimmy notices the Enemy backlit by the sun. It appears the warrior is doing a ritual dance before battle. Jimmy has seen this before. Decked out in feathers, special occasion satin with sequins and ceremonial head gear, the war baton is being wielded as a show of strength and taunting. Out of respect for the Enemy, Jimmy will let the war dance proceed without intervention. He has learned when he can attack and when the repercussions are too severe. Ambush has historically ended with Jimmy in the stockade. Blatant frontal assault claiming it was accidental has proven more effective, especially when the General is involved. The General always stays well away from the front lines, so provided the Sergeant is not a witness, it is Jimmy's word against the Enemy. He has learned not to underestimate the Enemy, alliances with the General are unpredictable, but common. The Enemy is an elusive foe: cunning and unpredictable. She is unusually adept at both hand-to-hand combat and diplomatic relationships.

Jimmy picks up the first grenade, rolling it in his hands. He has accompanied the Sergeant to the Army Supply Store and knows well what a standard issue grenade looks and feels like. The grenades he collects are spikier. If gripped too tightly, they can puncture your skin. The pin does not have a hook or loop like those at the supply store. These grenades have a stem on top.

Throwing them stem first, mindful of how the egg shape doesn't always land as planned, Jimmy lobbs the first grenade into the bag easily. The next several nearby grenades also go into the large brown paper bag with ease. His confidence is growing. Moving a bit further away to the edge of the barricade, he has to be more particular with his aim. The stack of firewood serves as both protection and fuel. He has moved out of the range of certainty into that of practiced skill. Several of them miss the bag. Some hitting it and bouncing off, those are still calculated as target strikes. But others go rogue and miss the bag altogether. Some land within a few clicks of the bag and that is acceptable. One lands in the bag and that is a confirmed hit of an enemy hangar.

The Sergeant walks behind him with a fuel-powered weapon. Jimmy is not authorized to use the weapons that require gasoline. The Sergeant casually points his weapon at Jimmy then at the array of grenades on the ground around him, hurling them in Jimmy's direction, "You know you have to pick all those up."

Assessing the work still to be completed before chow, he remembers the momentarily forgotten foe. The Enemy is darting back and forth along the horizon and dances within—what might be—striking range if war luck is on Jimmy's side. War luck is fickle. This is his chance to hurl a grenade and take the Enemy out. Calculating the risks, noting the lack of witnesses, he reaches for one of several grenades laying on the ground behind him. There is always a plentiful supply this time of year. Jimmy lobbs a grenade long, hoping to make contact with the Enemy. Instead, it bounces off the wall and lands behind the Sergeant. He turns to face Private Jimmy. Giving his usual scowl, Jimmy knows he has displeased the Sergeant by making a direct hit on a civilian compound. Jimmy can feel the muscles in his face and neck constrict into what he calls the "oops-eek" face. Whereby, he can communicate to the Sergeant his apology, and that it was not on purpose, without actually saying anything. He and the Sergeant have a secret code they use sometimes.

The Sergeant turns his back again and continues to add to the purposefully collected pile of propaganda leaflets that Jimmy assumes he has been building as a decoy. The Enemy is invitingly close. With all his might, Jimmy overhands a sturdy grenade right at her. It bounces short of its intended target. He throws a second, third, then a fourth grenade, missing the target each time. The Enemy is crafty and acts like nothing has even happened. Does she even notice the failed assault? She is singing.

"You have not even come close to hitting me with your war baton," Jimmy jeers at the Enemy.

The Enemy pretends not to hear and goes on with the war dance. Just then the screen door to the mess hall slams. No reaction from anyone. Jimmy

wonders why he is the only one that gets in trouble for slamming the screen door. The General has probably come out to negotiate with the Enemy and survey the troops' progress. The General looks to the Sergeant for a status report.

"How's it coming along? Almost done?" the Sergeant hollers to Jimmy.

Out of earshot of the General and the Enemy, "One confirmed kill of an enemy hangar, several hit the target, a few outliers were acceptable, and one strayed into civilian territory, sorry. I missed the Enemy completely, but when I collect the grenades that didn't hit the hangar, I can probably get her."

"The Enemy is off limits." It's always more fun when the Sergeant plays along.

Jimmy shrugs. The Enemy is always off limits.

He picks up the grenades that came close to the bag and drops them gently into the paper bag.

The General is strict, but an effective General, always making sure the troops are fed, and medical attention is given when needed. When the General comes out onto the patio, a truce is eminent.

The General, standing all-powerful at the edge of the concrete, broadcasts for all in the land to hear. A proclamation. "Lunch."

Jimmy throws the rest of the magnolia seed cones—grenades—into the paper bag. He notices his sister, the Enemy combatant, twirling her baton with her majorette skirt glistening in the sunlight. She is not supposed to take the rhinestone tiara and feather boa outside. The General will likely have something to say about that.

Jimmy dusts off his pants. His dad aims the gasoline blower at Jimmy as he passes by him to give Jimmy a good dusting off.

Crossing under the great, big magnolia tree towards the porch, Jimmy hears a missile in the trees. Hearing the thump, thump, thump, the magnolia grenade comes bouncing through the tree branches and hits him square on the head as he runs for the porch. The impact launches Jimmy into his mother's arms with tears in his eyes. The Enemy giggles.

"The game had already ended when Mom came outside, so the grenade hit doesn't count," Jimmy announces with conviction towards the Enemy, who is skipping past.

But for now, war is forgotten and decisions must be made, "Who wants their grilled cheese cut into triangles?"

# Forsaken

Colton Auxier '26

Forsaken.

A word is worn thin with time,  
a thread passed from hand to hand,  
as if grief was some rare thing.

But wounds are nothing new.  
They split and they fester,  
and then...  
they close.

Flesh remembers its shape,  
or else learns and twists to hold this shape,  
a tapestry of gold-lit fractures,  
a map of all that has been lost to it,  
and lived through.

What is betrayal,  
but proof of something that is worth leaving behind?  
At least to those who would do such a thing,  
knowing the weight of trust,  
too heavy in the wrong hands,  
dropped like ashes upon the ground,  
before they could set the world alight.  
Let them go.  
Let them wander the dim corridors of their own making,  
living in their darkness,  
fumbling for light that no longer waits for them,  
the light of yours which they threw away.

Meanwhile, the fire gathers itself,  
the anguish turning into a great flame.  
Coals stir, waiting and patient.  
Grief becomes kindling, as loss becomes the heat.

And one day,  
when the sky burns with the fire long denied,  
your fire, those who betrayed you,  
will look up towards the sky,  
aching and reaching...  
but the flame will not bow any longer.  
It will not pause.  
You will no longer look down.

# Traces of Me

Sophia Shaw '26



# The Life of Himm

Brayden Johnson '27

Himm Surname woke up on a Saturday morning in a small town in the Divided States of America. The Saturday morning was crisp because the season was almost winter. Himm was rather tired from the week Himm had had. The week had been long, and Himm had been required to work 20 extra hours beyond the 15 hours the law required, and on Himm's first week too. President Gawhd the Third had mandated that every human was still required to do at least 15 hours of work per week to eliminate laziness. Technically, humans did not need to work at all, robots had entirely replaced the human work force back in 2110. That was 40 years ago. 10 years later, humans had been put back as minimal labor because people had too much free time. Not a lot of people alive still remembered what working was like fully alongside other humans. Himm was only 23.

As a 23-year-old, Himm had recently finished Himm's Required Education. The Required Education was a system that started when a child was 5 years old. The 5-year-old started in First Required Education. This is where children learned about how humans had destroyed the world and President Gawhd the First had saved humans by creating the robots. President Gawhd had then declared President Gawhd as the Divine Ruler of the Dividing States of America. President Gawhd's first action had been to officially divide the States of America, electing a person to do what President Gawhd said in every one of the Divided States.

When a child was 12, that child would enter Second Required School. This is where the children would learn basic math and how to write words. The children would learn about every different part of words, like vowels and non-vowels, nouns and how important nouns were, and how the more important thing of other things about words was to always say things in a way that could be understood by every other person. This was the place that children learned that if a person gets mad at the child, the anger is the child's fault; the child must learn to say things in a way that makes no person mad.

At 18 years, the child enters Third Required Education. This is where the child is taught that the information the child got from the child's parents is wrong, unless the information is in agreement with what President Gawhd says is true.

The year was 2080 when President Gawhd the First had outlawed pronouns. Himm's parents had not even been born yet. Only a small number of people left alive even knew what pronouns were. Pronoun users were incarcerated in a special prison designed specifically to stop the most dangerous of criminals. President Gawhd had banned pronouns because President Gawhd decided banning pronouns was easier than banning people from taking offense, and since no person should ever be made to feel offended, only one option was left.

Himm walked out of Himm's house to go with Himm's friends to the bar. When Himm and Himm's friends, Breadford, Hayryssin, and Kwintin, arrived at the

bar, the Bartender-Bot, 1T/TH4T, waved amiably as was 1T/TH4T's programming. Himm and Himm's friends found a table and sat down. Himm's group ordered a round of spiked licorice punch. 1T/TH4T brought the drinks over. This was an exciting day for the whole group because this day was the first time any amount of the group had been in public together since finishing Required Education.

"What did Kwintin do during the most recent week?" Breadford said.

"Kwintin had waffles on Tuesday, but mostly Kwintin just had work. The Bots at Kwintin's workplace have been slowing down. President Gawhd needs to hurry up and finish the 'rebuild robots' plan because the robots need to be rebuilt."

"Gawhd is too busy enforcing the Pronoun Ban President Gawhd the First put in place. Gawhd the Second was able to focus on everything, but Gawhd the Third is not very good at focusing on more than one thing. How is Breadford?"

"Breadford is good," Breadford responded. "Breadford has not had to work extra because Breadford's bosses paid the government to fix the Bots at Breadford's job."

"Breadford is very lucky," Hayryssin interjected. "Not everyone can afford to pay the 'get stuff done' tax."

"How is Hayryssin's work?" asked Himm.

"Hayryssin's work is okay, Hayryssin's bosses do not like the Bots though. Hayryssin's bosses make Hayryssin and Hayryssin's coworkers work for 20 hours every week, and overtime does not start until the 35th hour of working."

"How is Himm?" Breadford asked Himm.

"Himm is tired of working extra hours, Himm had to work 35 hours during the most recent week. Himm does not like working so long." 1T/TH4T's head slowly turned toward Himm's group.

"Himm should come work with Breadford," Breadford proclaimed. "Himm would be paid better and work less." 1T/TH4T was getting worked up about something. Himm was not sure why.

"Himm cannot work with Breadford because Himm has already moved jobs once in the last three years, so Himm must wait at least two more years before Himm can change jobs again," Himm said morosely. 1T/TH4T appeared to be making a call.

"What is 1T/TH4T doing?" asked Breadford. 1T/TH4T did not respond because 1T/TH4T did not realize Breadford was no longer speaking to Breadford's friends but to 1T/TH4T.

Himm and Breadford and Hayryssin and Kwintin watched 1T/TH4T. Suddenly three Cop-Bots marched into the bar. The Cop-Bots approached 1T/TH4T and spoke in the chattering language of robotics. 1T/TH4T pointed at Himm's group, and the Cop-Bots turned towards Himm and Himm's friends. The Cop-Bots approached and spoke in English.

"Citizen HBR8032 and Citizen HBP9403 have been detected using illegal words. Pronouns are banned and therefore Citizen HBR8032 and Citizen HBP9403 are under arrest."

“Whoa, hold on,” Hayryssin said, confused. “What did Himm and Breadford do wrong? Hayryssin did not hear pronouns, what even are pronouns?”

“Citizen GSR5327 has used a pronoun also and will now be arrested.”

“Hang on a second, Officers,” said Kwintin. Kwintin’s family was from the countryside, so Kwintin’s family knew more about the old ways. “Himm’s name is Himm! Himm is not a pronoun if the word is Himm’s name.”

“Citizen RJW3427 is under arrest for using pronouns.”

“No person used a pronoun!” Kwintin objected.

“Himm is Himm’s name!” Himm pled.

“Initiating arrest protocol for Citizen HBR8032 and Citizen HBP9403 and Citizen GSR5327 and Citizen RJW3427. Do not resist.”

Himm could hear Kwintin arguing with the Cop-Bots the whole way until the Cop-Bots opened the Move People Away Machine, and the Cop-Bots pulled Kwintin away to a different part of wherever the Cop-Bots had brought Himm.

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Himm woke up in Himm’s cell. The AntiPronounLaborCamp, also known as the A, had been Himm’s home for three years now. Breadford and Hayryssin were also in the A. Kwintin had been executed for defending the use of pronouns. President Gawhd the Third had personally cut the rope holding Kwintin’s chair above the lava pit. Himm struggled to feel emotions anymore. The drugs the A gave Himm were supposed to make Himm less resistant to the A’s training. The drugs only made Himm tired. Himm went back to sleep. The way Himm’s life was was the way Himm’s life was. Himm would have to go to Anti Pronoun Training later, but not yet. Himm still was not sure what a pronoun was or why pronouns were bad, but Himm knew if Himm went another two years without using the pronoun Himm had used, Himm would be released back into the world. Himm had already decided to change Himm’s name. If Himm was an evil name, then Himm would change Himm’s name. Maybe a name like Hurr, or maybe Thaye. Anything to avoid offending people or Gawhd.

# Oyster Shells

Michael Shoemaker



# The Fool: A Tarot Card

Steph Chapman '28



# here's all the proof you need

Abbie Doll

to know i'm  
absolute shit  
(at small talk)

the setting:  
a mid-december  
gathering,  
a rather mirthful air

the approach:  
someone kind  
(enough) inquired  
about the flow rate  
of my creative juices  
as of late

& i,  
despite the  
common query,  
could've sworn  
they said  
**"crate of geoses"**

silly, silly me.  
—as if that's ever  
been a phrase.  
as *the* "writer"  
in the room,  
i really  
otter know

but when  
it comes  
to chitchat,  
my brain  
is bound  
to crash,  
just like  
**windows 98.**

# Jungle Sky

Taylor McNally-Henriksen '25



# Afsheen's Choice

Arshia Iqbal

The one thing about marriage that Afsheen was sure of was that she was not going to spend the rest of her life negotiating.

Afsheen's dad wanted her to be with a man straight from Bangladesh so that she'd have a reason to go back and visit more often—despite the fact that she told him that she would rather eat hot rocks off the sun than ever set foot there again. Baba thought a man could change that.

When she went to Bangladesh, the summer of her twentieth birthday, Afsheen came face to face with him—The Ideal Bangladeshi Man. In an American themed cafe, she nursed a latte that tasted like spicy milk while Bimal, the son of a family friend, sat nervously across from her. Bimal's parents were neighbors with Afsheen's mom and dad before she was born. The two families lived together so peacefully that Afsheen spent her childhood listening to stories of Bimal Bhaiya, and his never-ending love for *chanachur*. Every day, on his way back home from school, Bimal Bhaiya, who was four at the time, would force his dad to stop at a street vendor just to eat a giant serving of *chanachur*. Then, every night, he'd sit on the toilet with an aching tummy. Once, the pain being so bad, Afsheen's dad carried the boy to the hospital in his arms. When she brought up this story to him at the cafe, his face turned as pink as the walls.

The two were set up that morning by their parents who wanted to spend the day roaming around their old neighborhood in Puran Dhaka. Afsheen's dad smiled slyly and turned to the boy, "You kids are too young to spend your day with us old people. We'll bore you. Go get something to eat while we walk around." When Afsheen's little brother raised his hand to join, her father covered the preteen's mouth with his own hands and muffled his voice. So, the two strangers sat awkwardly on a rickshaw as Bimal's hand kept hesitantly hovering over hers. Though the breeze felt nice in her hair, and she enjoyed the way his eyes always bounced when they landed on hers, in her spirit, Afsheen knew a man straight from Bangladesh would rob her of herself. The rest of her life would be spent explaining bits and pieces of who she was to someone always playing catch-up.

First he would need a job, then he would need friends, but he wouldn't like hers because they're kinda hard to understand, and the friends he'd make would be borderline misogynistic, but since he'd left everything to be with Afsheen, they'd spend their weekends with his friends, fishing in some stream upstate or having picnics in the park, where the men wear shorts and the women yell at them for it.

Then comes the language, Afsheen was not as funny in Bangla as she was in English. This became evident when she tried to make a pun with the word "*shuno*" and "*shuna*," and he stared at her blankly. In Bangla, she was serious, she only knew words for utility, getting from place to place, doing things quickly—she would be the boring one. Obviously, his friends would laugh at her broken Bangla,

sometimes to Afsheen's face, but more so in their homes in front of their wives who would already dislike her for her hoity-toity degree in English. When they do this, he'll laugh but when she'd confront him about it, he'd roll over in bed and pretend to be asleep.

The question of "I left everything behind for you, but is it worth it?" would always linger between them, the same question that lives comfortably between Afsheen and her parents. One day, it'll be a "no" and he'll threaten to go back to Bangladesh, take their hypothetical two kids (she couldn't bear to carry a third, they all have big heads) and raise them with a nanny and his mother—who would eventually come to hate Afsheen for her "American"-ness, something she praised the girl for when they first met. And on that day, Afsheen would challenge him to go, they shared nothing but children who she wished they could split in half to never see each other again.

To be with him would be to relive the cycle of the immigrant hustle, to be shoved back down to step one and work all the way up again, be at the grocery store and hear about how watery the fruit tastes in this country and help another person study for the immigration exam. On the rickshaw ride home, as Bimal Bhaiya begged her to speak to him in English—and only English—Afsheen realized that her dad was trying to rob her of something when he imagined a full-blooded Bangladeshi groom in her future; a shared language, a common culture, this ability to look at the moon and think the same thing. She'll stare at her in awe of her beauty, and he'd imagine how much more life she has back home. The alternative to this was, obviously, a white guy. A month after Afsheen graduated from college, she found herself in a pottery class with Andrew. The two had met at her friend Taylor's graduation party where he had complimented her henna. She told him that it smelled better than it looked, and held up her decorated hand for him to sniff as a joke. To her surprise, he did it. Andrew held her wrist to his nose and took one big whiff. He made a face afterwards, but his bravery impressed her. Numbers were exchanged, texts were shot back and forth, until, finally, he asked her on a date to a pottery class a week later.

They met at the mouth of the Prince Street station and walked out of the subway giggling at the lady with two Yorkies in her purse. When they got to the studio, he tied the back of her apron and sat close enough to her to have their knees touching at all times. He kept repeating that this was just like in the movie *Ghost*, she had never seen it, so she smiled along and Googled it when he wasn't looking. Afsheen decided to make her mother a "bone plate." When Andrew asked what it was, she spent half an hour explaining to him that when Bengali people ate anything with bones in it, especially fish, they would use a bone plate to put the inedible pieces onto. When Andrew asked why they couldn't just put those pieces on the end of the plate, Afsheen was at a loss for words.

At that moment, Afsheen realized that if she ever married Andrew she'd somehow become more Bengali out of it, which isn't necessarily a bad thing, but every part of her culture would have to mean something to him and they'd end up playing catch-up the other way for the rest of their lives. Explaining to relatives that

he loves spicy food whenever they ask if he can handle their cooking, and being a translator between him and her parents, widening the gap between them until it's big enough for her to push him into during any disagreements. He would ask her mother what she's cooking and she'd smile politely, acutely aware that half the conversation would be lost in translation.

On their walk back to the train station, Afsheen took a call from her mom, ending the conversation with a brisk "*ashchi*." As she hung up the phone, Andrew asked her what it meant. It means that she was coming. He then asked her to pronounce it for him. It took him five minutes to get the first syllable right. By the time they got to Prince Street, Afsheen only had the "*chi*" left in her, which, fittingly, in Bangla meant, "ew."

In his effort to respect her culture, they'd become a walking mockery of it, he'd try to speak broken Bangla and Afsheen would tell people that she was learning German because his great-great-great-grandfather came from Germany through Ellis Island a hundred years ago and they both really want to get in touch with each others' roots—it's romantic. And they'd celebrate. Krampus for Christmas (even though they would be Muslim, he couldn't bear to leave that tradition behind) and every Bangladeshi event to ever occur, New Years in bright colored saris and punjabis posing in front of greenery pretending they were in the "desh," Independence Day in red and green, waving flags from their Long Island home, Ekushey February, or, as Afsheen would explain to him, ironically so, International Mother Language Day, where they'd celebrate their reverence to a language he'd never quite get the hang of, but insist she speak it with him "for practice."

Afsheen's biggest fear is that he'll get too into it, marry Bangladesh through her, live his life in search of a minority woman, begging to immerse himself in a culture far from his own. Maybe she'd like a more flippant man, one who starts off loving her, and then eventually descends into madness through his association with Bangladeshi society, the judgy uncles and the people are constantly calling him "brave" for entering the touchy territory that is Desi women and the baggage they carry. He'll have baggage too, but it wouldn't matter because, by default, she'd be the one weighing them down with her brownness and his sudden need to preserve it.

Finally, came the alleged "Mr. Right," Desi in all the right ways, and western in the spaces between that.

Ishaan appeared at a friend's wedding, handing Afsheen a tissue during the first dance when she began to cry at the first two notes of Ed Sheeran's "Thinking Out Loud." Later, he collided into Afsheen as she was leaving the bathroom. He danced next to her when they played "Get Low" and helped her up when she got too low. Eventually, when all her friends ended up outside taking pictures in the moonlight, and she sat on the curb of the street waiting for them to finish, he plopped down next to her and offered her his jacket.

She refused. He insisted until his navy blazer was wrapped around her shoulders as they walked to the nearest 7-Eleven. On that walk, the two discovered the parallels between their lives. He'd grown up watching SpongeBob, and they

both went through the phase where they mocked their parents' accents because they thought it was funny. But Ishaan would never do that now, because it's politically incorrect. He was applying to med school, but worked at a lab part time. Ishaan didn't really know what he wanted to do with his life—he just wanted to make it. They came together from a place of mutual understanding. He understood why her parents slept in separate beds, and she didn't need a backstory as to why his older sister got married at seventeen.

All of it would come to them naturally, they would hate the same parts of themselves and bury them in the backyard of their New England home. Five bedrooms, two baths, and a balcony because Afsheen insisted. Their parents would come over intermittently, so Ishaan would fix the basement up for them, and the kids would have to share rooms because the couple believed it would help foster more meaningful relationships between them. Afsheen's paintings would be on the living room walls, and Ishaan would have a desk in their bedroom for his home office. A lovely front porch and a beautiful garden, but there would always be something hollow in that house, whether it be his eyes or her laugh. They would be a match perfect on paper, made in a corner of heaven where they pair people up like loose socks during laundry day. But love, true love, would not be shared between them, perfection would reek out of their walls, but desire would be lost somewhere between their first meeting and the second day of the honeymoon.

Two cherry slushies and a bag of spicy Doritos sat between them that night. They missed everything; the bouquet toss, the shoe stealing, the farewell. The world felt stalled until Afsheen's friends drove by and honked a horn at them, the wedding was over, but something else was beginning. The issue was whether or not Afsheen was ready for it, the fact that the perfect love was thrown at her aching feet, yet she felt no inclination to grab it. Sure, his eyes twinkled and his hands felt warm when he helped her get up, but something was missing, something would always be missing.

Where was the spark? Can she even afford it? Or will the rest of her life be spent on a seesaw of apprehension; passion traded for ease, acceptance traded for reverence, familiarity traded for the joy of others. Maybe all of love is a negotiation, and Afsheen always ends up on the losing side.

To test this, she grabbed him by the tie, took an eyeliner pencil out of her bag and scribbled nine digits on the palm of his hand. It was his job to guess the last one. If he did, it would mean that he was up for the negotiation; years and years and years of kitchen table squabbles and alternating Eids between their parents. If he didn't, it was a sign for her to look for more, to search for passion, and acceptance, and familiarity in the face of another. A sign from the universe of something more, that the love she hoped so deeply for was nestled somewhere in the future.

# Palaver of Pruned Pinions

Bethany Ratliff '27



## *two minutes from nuclear armageddon*

Beatrice Bleakley

“do you suppose we’ll be able to see it from here?” she asks. there’s an air raid siren wailing so loud that she can hear it even from this hill on the edge of town, and she doesn’t know how she feels about it because on the one hand, they already know what’s coming and there’s nothing to be done about it, but on the other, she worries perhaps it would be screams she can hear as opposed to droning.

“i imagine you’ll be able to see it from anywhere,” he answers. he can’t say for sure, of course; he’s certainly no scientist. but it’s the kind of answer that ought to be true, isn’t it?

you should be able to see the end of the world  
from any place on it.

“do you think we’re close enough for it to get us instantly?” she doesn’t know if there’s an answer she’d prefer to that question. all of them seem unbearable to think about, but then again, what is there left to think about? even when humans are looking behind, they are living ahead. “i don’t know,” he answers, leaning back against the tree trying to make sure that every moment is spent valuing the health of the wood and the vivid life of the grass beneath him. “i don’t think this many’s ever gone off at once before.”

they sit without speaking. there’s a fire in town, they see, starting at the savings and loan on the corner of capra and welsch. nobody seems to be making any effort to put it out. why would they? like straightening your tie before you fall out of a plane.

“do you think the people who come after will know anything about us?”

she asks, because of course there have to be people who come after, her life, the lives of everyone she's ever met, that she would've met, that she never would've glimpsed, that's one thing, but she cannot comprehend this being the end of everything. there's got to be something more, she thinks. even when there's nothing left, there must be something else.

he thinks about it, watching the smoke rise,  
seeing the flames flicker over to the convenience mart.

"i think they'll find our bones and wonder who we were,"  
he says finally.

"i think they'll come up with stories about us.  
i think they'll painstakingly reconstruct our rib cages,  
and they'll clean off our skulls and, if we're very  
lucky, they'll use us as something to grow other  
things in."

the flames engulf the convenience mart.  
so quick to become an inferno, like  
perhaps all it was waiting for was  
permission.

"i'd like that," she says. and she does, not just out of a desire  
to be useful, not just because she needs her life to have  
meant something, but because she is enchanted by the idea  
that, in spite of everything, something will ever grow again.

"yeah. me, too."

the flames reach the gas station and  
they watch it erupt into a fireball,  
plumes reaching towards the sky.

“will it be like that?”

she asks.

“i don’t know. i suppose in the end,

i don’t know much of

anything.”

without looking, she reaches across the grass,

and she clasps his hand in hers.

“you know enough,”

she says.

there’s a boom, distant

but not distant enough.

he rubs his thumb against her hand.

“thank you,” he says.

“that’s a kind thing to say.”

the air tastes funny now, a little

like the way metal burns, or the

way electricity strikes.

“a little kindness is a good way to go out,”

she says.

they can see the last release of lungs approaching

the sky brightening as the taste of lightning dances

across their tongues as a prelude to something

similar.

“yeah,”

he says.

“i think you’re probably

# Solitude

Raj Sharma '25



# Moves in Chess and Love

Skyler Shouse '26

Tink. Tink. Tink. I listen to the pieces hit the cloudy glass of my chessboard. She takes a drink from her cup, which is filled with cranberry juice and vodka. She is stunning in this lighting. The smoke from my cigarette is filling the bedroom, somehow highlighting the features of her face, even though I was sure it would do the opposite. What should be my next move? Both with the chess game in front me and her. I wanted to be kissing her by now, not playing chess. Does she even like me? We only met two months ago, at her cousin's party... or was it when we ran into each other at the Guitar Center? Fuck. She took my knight. Pay attention. I need to pay attention. But it's so hard to when she's here. She is beautiful and gorgeous and lovely and wonderful and kind and thrilling and sexy and everything good in the world, and she smells amazing with her jasmine perfume. Although I suppose even without the perfume, I would still find her to be beautiful and gorgeous and lovely and wonderful and kind and thrilling and sexy and still everything good in the world. My heart has been racing this entire time. Can she hear it? Or does she notice my fingers shaking with each move? How do you make a first move on a girl? Every smart person knows the best first move in chess is moving the e2 pawn to e4. But what is the best first move for a girl that I've been in love with since I met? Now she has me in check. I take her rook. Maybe she is nervous too. But she looks so cool, calm, and collected. Why would she rather play chess than, I don't know, do me? I look at my messy bedside table, it's staring at me like a high school bully, taunting me with not only my celibacy but also my fear to touch the perfect woman in front of me. She readjusts herself so that her knee is touching mine. Is this my chance? I move my queen. How did I get here? I move my queen again. She asked to come over, which I thought meant what people normally mean when they say, "hey r u up? can i come over?" but instead she wanted to play chess in my bed at two in the morning. I need her, I want her, why doesn't, she, want, me? I move a pawn. I watch her move her rook with delicate hands and I can't help but begin to wonder many things, like why her ex cheated on her, or why her dad left, or how if one potato in the sac is rotten it can infect the others so you must throw it out. I tell her I like her eyes. I move a pawn. She looks up at me, with a smile that knocks the air from my lungs. She bites her lip and moves a pawn of her own. She looks at me. I move my king. I can't stop fucking shaking. "Do you want to listen to some music?" "Sure." I stand up and put my Fleetwood Mac vinyl onto the record player. It spins and sputters as sweet songs begin to play. I hear her giggle. "I love this song." I love you. I love you. I love you. But I don't know how to say it. I move my queen. I should have her in checkmate in just four moves. I need to make these four moves last forever. I see a book in her sage green tote bag. It's a biography on William Faulkner. I ask her if she has read any of his books. She lights up. All of them. She has read all of them. Of course she has. She tells me that *As I Lay Dying* is her favorite. She has

a tattoo of a sun and a moon on her wrist. How would it look on my neck, her arms wrapped around me as she pulls me in close? I move my bishop. One. She looks at me again, with her beautiful, angelic, devilish grin. She is everything. I move my knee away from hers, not because I want to, but because the heat of her body makes me think she is melting into me, which makes me nervous. She knows how to play chess, of course she does. She knows Faulkner, of course she does. She smokes American Spirits, of course she does. And I love her, of course I do. She is perfect. I take a breath to stabilize my words. "Cass, I need to tell you something." I move my queen. Two. "Then tell me something." Her eyes glimmer. Her hand grazes mine as she reaches for her drink. My heart is racing. I move my bishop. Three. "I love you." She looks at me with those greenish blue eyes. "Checkmate."

# Raku Fired Beetle Vase

Katelyn Enginger '25



# Night Frog

Wren Abney '26



# On the Shore Talking with Odysseus

Ethan Geraci '25



# This Sonnet Has Thirteen Lines

Kayla Pyle '25

Which is indeed unorthodox  
But just as the greatest minds  
I seek to look outside the box

I shall push beyond, venture forth  
Structure be damned, and the rules waived  
Discard the well-beaten course  
For greatness sprouts from paths unpaved

So I've pondered and looked abroad  
To a new world, absent of structure  
Without the foundations to build upon  
This greatness seems outside my nature

Inside the box is where I will always reside  
I'm not sure I could ever leave, even if I tried

# Whispers of Silence

Plamen Vasilev

Evelyn Harper had always been a creature of routine. Her mornings began with the soft chime of her alarm clock at 6:30 a.m., followed by yoga in the serene, sun-drenched corner of her home. After a refreshing shower, she would brew herself a cup of chamomile tea—a ritual she cherished—for it marked the transition from dreams to the realities of her day. As a successful freelance graphic designer, she relished the quietude of her workspace, where creative thoughts danced on the edges of her mind. But routines have a way of unraveling, and, for Evelyn, the seams of her existence were about to fray.

It began innocuously enough—an indistinct sound, a low whisper echoing through the empty corridors of her mind. At first, she dismissed it as the remnants of half-formed dreams, perhaps a figment of her overly imaginative creativity. But as days turned into weeks, the whispers morphed into something more sinister; they hissed in the darkness of her thoughts, coiling around her consciousness like smoke spiraling from a flame.

Evelyn's close friends noticed her growing detachment. Sarah, her best friend since childhood, tried to reach out. "Evelyn, you've been distant. Are you okay?" she asked one Thursday afternoon over coffee. Evelyn forced a smile, but the smile felt like paint rubbing off a canvas. "I'm fine, just busy with work," she replied, her voice wavering with uncertainty. Yet, inside her mind, the voices grew louder, mocking her attempts to brush them aside.

The whispers spiraled through her days, a constant presence weaving in and out of her thoughts. "They're watching," they said, slithering past her defenses. In the haze of her overwhelming anxiety, she began to perceive shadows lurking just beyond her field of vision—shadows that morphed into indistinguishable forms, creatures birthed from the depths of her unhinged psyche. The more she tried to ignore them, the more vivid and dynamic they became.

As the fall months rolled in, Evelyn's world began to shrink. She stopped attending social gatherings, unable to endure the cacophony of laughter and chatter that drowned her inner misgivings. She canceled plans, choosing instead to remain cocooned in her apartment, where the whispers were the only company that stayed constant. The walls, once her sanctuary, became her prison, where reality collided with pervasive illusions.

One stormy night, as rain hammered against her window, Evelyn found herself gripping the edge of her desk, staring at her computer screen. The blinking cursor morphed into a watching eye, its relentless blink questioning her sanity. "They know," the whispers crescendoed, their urgency intertwining with the rhythm of the rain. "You must protect yourself." Fear gnawed at her insides, feeding the fire of her growing paranoia. Grabbing her coat, she bolted from her apartment, racing into the night, desperate to escape the prison she had created.

Outside, the storm lashed at her, but it felt alive. The towering trees swayed, their branches reaching towards her, pleading or threatening; she could not tell. Evelyn's breath came in ragged gasps as she stumbled through puddles, eyeing the faceless shadows lurking in the corners of her vision. She had to escape their scrutiny.

In her mind's labyrinth, Evelyn constructed delusions of grandeur. Voices whispered promises, transforming into sinister chants that convinced her she was destined for something greater—the beacon of change. But in the daylight, her world felt disjointed, and the voices grew fierce, their incessant wailing echoing in sync with her racing thoughts.

Weeks turned into months, each day manifesting a new strain of dread. Her work suffered; clients grew impatient as deadlines slipped like grains of sand through her fingers. She felt as if she were crumbling, yet the whispers insisted she was merely shedding her old skin. "They want you to see," they echoed, punctuating her despair. "Look deeper."

In her spirals of chaos, Evelyn sought escape through dreams—the only place where the shadows didn't haunt her. But even dreams turned sour, twisting her subconscious into a haunting playground of her fears. In one particular nightmare, she found herself standing in a darkened room, mirrors lining the walls. Each reflection held a different version of her—some smiled, others wept, while others still screamed in silence. She reached out, desperate to touch the glass, but they whispered in eerie harmony, "You've lost your way, Evelyn."

Over time, her reflection became increasingly distorted, her visage morphing into one of desperation and terror. Frightened, she awoke gasping for air, drenched in sweat, pulsating with adrenaline as the whispers erupted from their slumber. A sense of impending doom enveloped her—was she truly losing her mind?

In her fragile state, even Sarah's voice became invasive. "Evelyn, please!" she pleaded one night, voice trembling during a visit. "Let me help you." But the agitation was palpable to Evelyn, who felt suffocated by love turned to judgment. In that moment, the shadows whispered, urging her to flee—and with a choked sob, she pushed her friend out, slamming the door with a finality that echoed through the empty halls.

Days turned into a drawn-out silence. Evelyn waded deeper into her own darkness, refusing to answer phone calls, to check texts, to even acknowledge the world outside. To the shadows, it was a victory; they taunted her with unrelenting glee, their Tim Burton-esque laughter reverberating in the corners of her mind. "You are one of us now," they coiled around her, "you belong."

But then, one evening, she looked into the mirror and saw someone she barely recognized—hollow eyes sunk into her pockmarked skin, hair disheveled,

and lips cracked and parched. A flicker of self-awareness ignited, causing anguish to seep through the cracks of her delusions: she was spiraling into insanity, and the shadows knew it.

On a desperate whim, she put down her journal, took a deep breath, and centered herself amidst the chaos. She picked up her phone, her hands shaking as she dialed Sarah's number. "I need help," she whispered, her voice a fragile echo of hope.

The ensuing therapy sessions felt like climbing out of an abyss, each week, a small victory over the tendrils of madness that sought to claim her. Slowly, she unraveled the tangled threads of her thoughts and emotions, revealing the raw wounds stitched beneath layers of isolation. The shadows did not vanish entirely, but they became more manageable, less daunting as Evelyn discovered the power of connection, expression, and healing.

Through it all, Evelyn learned that the whispers would always be there, remnants of battles fought. Yet, she stood resilient, embracing her imperfections and accepting that life is a canvas meant to be painted with both light and darkness. In that acceptance, she found herself again—not a distorted reflection, but a vibrant individual walking her own path towards a tumultuous yet beautiful existence.

Insanity was no longer her master; it became a chapter in her story, a testament to her strength as she forged ahead into the world, resolute and aware. The whispers eventually faded to a gentle hum, a reminder of her journey, guiding her toward the intertwined realms of imagination and reality, where she now thrived as both creator and muse.

# This House Has Hands in It

Molly Billiard '25



it's in the details

Anissa Weber '25



# Self-Sabotage

Ezra Young

Tongue has tasted the Earth without you by,  
Brain has dreamt this world without your visage.

I rip out my tongue for casting this lie,  
I char my brain to black for this image.

My eyes have seen light sans your silhouette;  
I plucked them off and stared into the blind.  
My chest still draws a breath since your sunset;  
A knife to pierce, to repay them in kind.

Songs sung without your voice for the chorus  
have deafened my ears, left them pouring blood.  
My heart dares to beat after you have left?  
I carve useless muscle out to the mud.

There is no more body left for this world.  
There is no more love here left unfurled.

# Restaurant Guide

Carson Calkins

## **Cafe Du Monde**

It's cold and crowded. Coffee mugs clack, guests chatter. Tables are bussed furiously. You're four, donning an Oakland Raiders Starter jacket Santa gifted you days prior. It's covered in powdered sugar. You grab another beignet and blow the sweet snow all over your older sister. You both laugh. Your mother, smiling, informs both of you that was the last time. You blow again. This time, even harder.

## **Avalon Diner**

The sizzle of the griddle circulates. Waiters serve patrons white plates piled with club sandwiches, omelets, and chili cheese fries. A talk show is silent on the television in the corner. You sit in a booth with your family. It swallows you. Your uniform is still pristine: a white polo tucked into blue khaki shorts. Across, your parents congratulate you on your monumental feat: completing your first day of school. The reward is a burger, crinkle cut fries, and a Coke. When the burger is served, you baptize it with ketchup and dig in.

## **Goode Company BBQ**

Texas country music streams overhead. Relics of the Wild West adorn the walls. A baked potato is piled with brisket and doused in sweet sauce. It's a school night, but you're out. Eating barbecue and talking basketball with your dad. Later, you walk out into the dimly lit parking lot off I-10 full of admiration.

## **BJ's Restaurant and Brewhouse**

You sit beside your first love and suburban families, this Saturday night. Televisions showcase sports. A fresh pizookie is served. Rivulets of vanilla ice cream caress the molten cookie. It's devoured. Waiting for the check, you lean in to kiss her. She tastes of chocolate.

## **Willie's Fried Chicken Shack**

Three hand grenades were downed like Sprite as you wandered Bourbon Street with your fellow bachelors. Test tube shots followed at The Beach. You're drunk for the first time at twenty-five. You crave greasy sustenance. A neon sign shines brighter in a sea abundant with them and beckons you. Within minutes, chicken strips and french fries are set down and demolished. In between drunken bites, drunken declarations are issued. Declarations never realized nor remembered.

## **Molly Moons**

Your phone is dying, and you're likely lost. It is nearly ten, you're alone, roaming streets you've never been. You take another bite of ice cream. All you're concerned about is the cup of salted caramel and maple walnut. You wished it was bottomless. Eventually you'll find the apartment where your best friend and his friends are staying. There is no reason to panic. You can't panic when savoring ice cream this comforting.

### **Proletariat Pizza**

The pizza is hot and bubbly. You're numb and lifeless. On the table is debilitating depression and a fresh break-up. A break-up not wanted by you but the woman who sits across. A woman you moved 2,000 miles away with less than six months ago. You're stuck. Stuck with her for thirty-six hours before you can head back to your hometown and move in with your parents. You grab a slice and take a bite. It's flavorless.

### **Mountain Harbor Hostel**

On the patio by the food truck, you sit alone. A patty melt is gone. Only its ketchup—smeared across your hands—remains. A bacon cheeseburger is up next. You're not counting calories. In fact, you need them. Hiking the Appalachian Trail depletes you of every macro eaten. So, you grab the bacon cheeseburger with both hands. Without guilt, to gorge once more.

### **Righteous Slice**

The past three days you built furniture for your new home. The past three years, you rebuilt yourself for a new life. The aroma of red sauce, sweet Italian sausage, and pepperoni pervade. You feast on two Neapolitan pies in your own company. Pondering where you once were and where you are now.

### **Whataburger**

Six years ago, you two were estranged. Now it's two a.m. following your brother's wedding. You stand side by side, deciding. Your older sister is tipsy. You're drunk. Finally, the order is placed: a patty melt, french fries, onion rings, a chocolate milkshake, and a few chocolate chip cookies. The food will satisfy but not please. The pleasure arrives from indulging together, like that time at Cafe Du Monde nearly thirty years ago.

# Two of Pentacles: A Tarot Card

Steph Chapman '28



# RAGDOLL'S BODY

Samuel Sea '28

When you look for an apology,  
You won't find it in me—  
Do you see this body?  
It runs on snow and bloody whiskey;  
Trust me, this isn't what you need.  
It can sell you an endless supply of dopamine  
But it holds no memories—  
Do you see its loose seams?  
It's held together by lies, money, and misery;  
All it knows is *survival* is key.  
Well, that's not me.  
So, if you're looking for an apology,  
Don't look for it in this body—  
Unapologetic, apathetic, a yearning mystery  
Sewn together by silent cries and hopeful dreams.  
You can search however long you feel you need,  
But you will never find me in this ragdoll's seams.

# One Day

Skyler Shouse '26

One day, the lightbulbs will no longer light

One day, the only flicker will be that of a fire

One day, a friend will have no food

One day, women will be wed without choice

One day, there will be no population due to our pollution

One day, men will go mad and resort to making their own mead

One day, a daughter will murder her mother over drugs

One day, hurt people will hurl themselves from buildings in times of hardship

One day, when the government has gone corrupt, we will govern ourselves

One day, kids will be kidnapped and kept

One day, we will kill each other out of competition

and

One day, we will realize this all has already happened

# Migration

Raj Sharma '25



# Eight of Pentacles: A Tarot Card

Steph Chapman '28



# A NOTE FROM THE RICH & POWERFUL

Samuel Sea '28

Dear American Human,

If you live in the endless poverty  
That we've generously gifted you,  
You will give your life for the economy  
And we'll ensure your death is soon.  
You will never afford our beautiful country  
Unless you agree to give your soul to sell  
For the rich and powerful to exploit,  
And live in honor of us until you reach Hell.

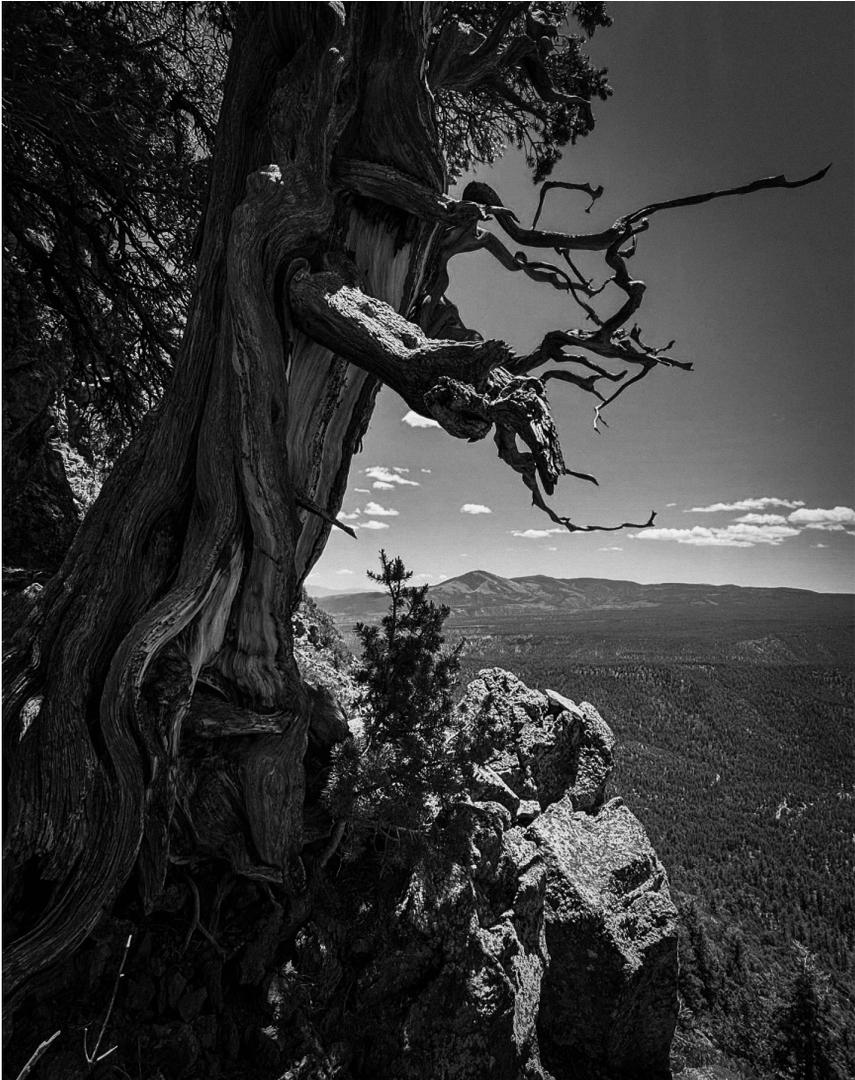
Don't you believe in Heaven  
And all the things we're doing right?  
There is no such thing as protection  
When your existence is weaponized.  
Call for someone of authority  
And beg them for deserved justice and mercy,  
We will pay them to kill you  
And journalists will say it was suicidal tendencies.

Believe the lies of the trusted rich,  
Take these drugs we've laced with bliss;  
Tell yourself things will get better  
Until you're forced to plead for shelter.  
Don't you know, we're the land of the free,  
But only if we decide you're worthy—  
As a citizen, your life depends on this:  
We can make you or break you  
And there's nothing you can do.  
*Welcome to the society the Rich & Powerful has created,  
A reality where the world has already ended.*

Sincerely, the Rich & Powerful.

# Thinking of Ansel Adams

Ethan Geraci '25



# Hymn to the Dove.

Ayaan Fahad

Burn your insights,  
Dim the city's lights,  
Where puddles reflect my frights.  
Where the crowd dismisses the stagnant water.  
A pitch consumes me.

Flee to frosty woods  
To die on an unimportant hill.  
And sing to love  
Sing to the squirrel in the tree,  
Write to the dove  
Ask how she broke free.

Live not to be buried on a mountain,  
But a hill uninhibited.  
Untethered, Free spirited.

You may have lost all  
But the woods.  
Butterflies enthrall,  
The bird broods.

Man broods too,  
Menacingly; corrupting words,  
Maliciously; corrupting worlds.  
So I sit in the forest free,  
Needing no man's plagued honesty.

Listen to the strum of a guitar,  
The hum of a shooting star.  
Intoxicate on nature's qualia,

Slip into rarasvadic reveries,  
Intertwined with the trees,  
One with the azure sky  
Sway to the creek's lullaby.

Bathe in gold,  
Apricity's descend from heaven.  
Flow along the December breeze,  
Let the soil meet your knees  
By this elysian's amaranthine awe,  
Till the frost melts on your skin;  
Forgetting to bite  
As you dissolve in sunlight,  
One with the earth.

# Changing Colors

Sarah Steen '26



gas pedal

Anissa Weber '25





rifle being activated. The high pitched *deedeede* of the automatic laser rifle firing. “Monsters, Captain! Monsters! I need—”

ScrEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!!!!!!!

Bildur’s screams were followed by a wet ripping sound that silenced him.

Static.

“What in the Void was that?” Mila had come out of *The Interloper* after the first shriek.

“Can the ship fly?”

“Planetside engines are functioning, but we have no jump capacity.”

“Everyone board!”

They scrambled onto the ship and Scalor quickly took off, heading for Bildur’s last known position.

\*\*\*\*\*

The area was a mess. The land speeder had been smashed. Several large cloth sheets lay around in heaps. They could see Bildur’s body, he had been drained of blood completely.

Scalor thrust the controls forward, fleeing the gruesome scene.

“By the Void, by the Void and all that it swallows, what happened back there?”

“Take a breath, Caila.” Mila put her hand on Caila’s shoulder. “We’re getting out of here.” She looked at Scalor. ‘*Somehow*,’ that look implied.

The ship suddenly listed to the side and careened into a mountainside. Scalor managed to level out just enough to stop the ship from being completely blown apart on impact. A scraping noise, the ship slid along the ground, the rough landscape shredding the underside. A rock outcropping smashed through one of the engines. *The Interloper* came to a stop. She would never move again. When Scalor came to, Mila had already salvaged some of the medical equipment and had, evidently, used one of the drugs to knock out Caila for a short time.

“Captain, finally, I needed you to wake up before letting Caila wake up. She’s completely lost it. Would have shot her, but my rifle got busted in the crash.”

\*\*\*\*\*

After gathering what supplies they could, the two of them woke Caila. She seemed too high to realize her predicament, but that did not bother them at all. They set up the comms array again. Two of the three stations were smashed, but, miraculously, one was still operable. Supposedly. They still could not get a signal. Mila pulled Scalor aside, leaving Caila at the comms.

“We need to do something about her, she is no help to us.”

“I agree, but we can’t just leave her. We got her into this mess, we need to—”

B000000000000000000M!!!!!!!

The ground shook at the sound of the explosion.

Caila perked up. “Yes? Oh, but that... Ah, yes, I see. But that will hurt!”

“Caila?” Scalor turned up the volume. “Who are you talking to?” It was still just static.

“No, no, not him, he is helping. I suppose, but she is helping him too. Me?”

Oh..."

Mila grabbed Caila. "Who are you talking to?"

"He says it's time to go. He says I have to go now."

"Who is he, Caila?" Mila shook her by the shoulders.

"Time to go." Caila snatched Mila's knife and slit her own throat with it.

Mila screamed and jumped back, the blood already on her hands. Scalor stood, dumbfounded. Mila stood, frozen, watching Caila's body convulse as she bled out.

"He... is... coming..." Caila gasped out, choking. A moment of lucidity appeared in her eyes, she looked at Scalor. "You! You did this!" She coughed, then gasped, then stopped moving.

Mila snatched her knife back, face pale. "What was that?" Her normally confident voice was wracked with fear. Scalor just shook his head. He had never seen anything like this in all his years of traveling.

*BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!!!!!!*

Scalor pulled out his sidearm. It was built for killing pests on a ship, but it was better than nothing. Mila pointed silently towards a cave nearby, and the two moved towards it.

*BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!!!!!!*

Mila yelped and scrambled forward, Scalor cursed and sprinted after her. They reached the entrance of the cave. It was dark. Mila did not hesitate to run inside. Scalor pulled out a light and carried it into the cave.

*BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!!!!!!*

The mouth of the cave collapsed. Mila screamed as the cave went completely dark. Scalor turned on his light. Mila was huddled in a corner. Scalor's sidearm was gone.

"Captain, where are you?"

"I am here, come to the light."

"Light?"

"Yes."

"I can't see."

Scalor brought the light over to her. Her eyes were dim, unseeing, darting from side to side in fear. Scalor helped her up and started to guide her back, deeper into the cave. Mila was unsteady, she stumbled over rocks she should have seen. Scalor grabbed her and pulled her back at the mouth of a chasm.

"Don't move, Mila, I am going to find a way around. There is a chasm." She just nodded.

Scalor walked for a good five minutes in one direction before turning around to try the other way. He could only just see Mila's silhouette when she jumped backwards and screamed. Scalor ran up to her, but she scrambled away from him.

"Mila, it's me!"

She screamed again, scrambling backward. Scalor stopped moving and held the light forward. Mila was on the very edge, one wrong move could send her over.

"Mila, can you hear me?"

“Please, don’t hurt me, there is another man here! He will be back for me, take him instead!”

Scalor reached his hand forward and Mila cringed.

“Please, let me go, I didn’t mean to kill her!”

“You didn’t kill anyone.”

“You’re right... you’re right, she deserved it.”

“What?”

“I did it and she deserved it. Yes, yes, I did mean to kill her.”

Scalor grabbed her hand. She closed her eyes and rolled over the edge, twisting her hand out of his. She fell silently. A second later, Scalor heard a crunching thud and a scream. Mila’s screaming continued to drift up from the chasm. Scalor ran along the chasm edge, chased by the agonized screams. He had killed her, he had killed Mila by throwing her over the edge. But she was not dead. He had to run, to escape those condemning screams that beckoned him towards Damnation.

\*\*\*\*\*

A light at the end of the cave, Scalor burst out into sunlight. The bright light accompanied by the sound of Mila’s screams, still ringing in his ears. He stepped out into the light of day. A choking gasp joined the screams, Caila, bleeding out and choking on blood. The screams and gasps accompanied him as he returned to the crash site. But there he discovered his ship, not a scratch on her. He looked it over. It was most certainly *The Interloper*, there could be no question. He opened the hatch and as the hydraulics hissed, Scalor could hear Bildur shouting, “Monsters, monsters!” Mila’s screams, Caila’s gasps, and Bildur’s shouting, together, a roaring cacophony in Scalor’s ears. He did his best to ignore them as he prepared his ship for takeoff. He lifted off and flew away from the hellscape. Bildur with his body drained of blood, Caila with her body covered in her own blood, and Mila, laying at the bottom of a chasm, her body shattered. These were the images that Scalor tried to purge from his mind as he flew away.

He didn’t realize that the walls of *The Interloper*, which should have been white, were now blood red.

# Steeple at Sunrise

Michael Shoemaker



# The Inescapable Sea

Lexi Wyckoff

A soft vibration announces  
the publication  
of my second fiction story,  
nestled amongst several  
established authors, dragons  
flying across the pages.

*The faucet drips self-doubt  
onto worn tiles.  
The cold seeps  
between my toes.*

Book orders fill my screen,  
relatives clamoring  
for a signature I've created.  
I pop open the cap, ink

*rushes higher up my legs,  
brushes against scarred  
knees, searching  
for a gateway.*

Money is pressed  
into my small palms;  
my writing earns more  
than just space on a page.  
I fold each bill into  
a creased envelope.

*It grips my hip bones,  
sloshing against my stomach.  
Its thick black viscosity  
holds me captive.*

My first book was  
accepted a year ago,  
an entire collection of words  
and phrases from the space  
in my chest. Each poem  
gives weight to the term author.

*Self-doubt spills  
into my mouth, leeches into  
bones and bloodstream,  
grips at my heart  
like an old lover.*

*I gag and the sound  
echoes into the small space.  
You'll never be good enough,  
it whispers.*

# Big Eyes

Wren Abney '26



# East vs West: an Essay on Cultural Differences

Yuan Changming

During the great flood

Noah hid himself in the ark

While Dayu tried to contain it

With his bare hands

Prometheus stole fire

From Olympian gods

While Sui Ren got it

By drilling wood hard

Smart Daedalus crafted wings

To fly away from his prison-tower

While Old Fool removed the whole

Mountain blocking his way

Helios enjoyed driving his chariot

All along in the sky

While Kuafu chased the sun

To take it down & tame it

Sisyphus rolls the boulder uphill

Because of his deceitfulness, while

Wu Gang cuts the laurel as a punishment

For distractions in learning

# Self-Reflection of Sickness

Paetyn Greve '25

I live in a body that rejects function. A body that, at every turn, has mutated and changed, valleys and dips on what should be a plain surface. Glass fibers live under my skin, sharp and needling, tiny lacerations that I can feel but no one can see. My bones shift and groan, the support of a house with rotted wood and water-warped siding. Pain laces down my spine like the stays of a corset, twining between my ribs and digging in with claws.

When I breathe, my lungs push out my ribs. Nerves entangle and compress arteries and veins. There are things where it should be empty space, empty space where there should be something. My joints twist and bend, contorting me into something uncanny, a scarecrow stuffed just slightly wrong. I exist on the periphery of normal.

I am not wrong enough that the doctors know immediately, but I am wrong. The wrongs, they build up, compile and stack until they are then all that someone can see. And then the doctors balk, frown and mutter amongst themselves, check off notes on their clipboards and adjust their stethoscopes and discuss *more* tests, as if that will change anything. As if it will then be one little issue with a neat bow, and not a snarled tangle of complications that is so tightly woven that you can't see where one ends and another begins.

It took them years to listen and look. Years of each issue simply being brushed off to add to the pile in the corner, called sensitivity or hysteria or melancholy. I began to understand why women went mad so frequently. I felt like I was going mad myself, locked in a prison of my own bones and flesh, sinew and muscle caging me in. Now I tell doctors how long it took and they click their tongues, furrow their brows. They say they cannot imagine how frustrating it would be and then turn around and do the exact same thing to their next patient, all the while believing that they would be the ones who listen.

Where do I begin within all of this? Am I just my problems, my issues? Am I just a body that is a cautionary tale, a body that is used as an example for future doctors to pass on? Pokes and prods, needles and scans. They chip away at humanity. I am not a person on a doctor's table—not to me, and not to them. I am a body, to scrutinize and remark on, to point out tiny errors and flaws in the anatomy. I give up my personhood on the hospital beds and metal tables, and when I leave, there's always something else missing. It's small, sometimes not even noticeable. I didn't even realize it was happening until I smelled antiseptic and felt the pinch of a ghost IV in my elbow.

Maybe when they do finally fix me, I'll be a shell. A healed body without someone to properly inhabit it. A body that has someone who rejects *being*. Perhaps it is all just cyclical, the snake swallowing its own tail.

only one

Hailey Hansen '26



# Recycled Nature Sculpture

Nina Crawford '25



# Food, Water, Shelter

Rilee Lonberger '26

Bushels of wild berries grew next to your grandmother's cottage.

Plucking and picking, plucking and picking, until fingertips were stained red.

Until baskets were full, until plates were served, until a final berry was snuck into your mouth;

Sweet—The berries, the moment, the memory, your grandmother.

## Food, Water, Shelter

The soybeans and corn were sewn into the land long before you were born.

Their stalks were your swords and the soil your battleground, stained with a fatal fertilizer.

Golden kernels were pulled and extracted, fed to the deer, fed to the cows, fed to you.

The crops were culled as the seasons shifted, you recall, a barren landscape remaining.

All that is remaining.

The mutant corn and crops can no longer sustain themselves with their chemicals—

Their blood growing too thick in the soil, the streams, the earth herself.

The berries and bushels no longer bloom; their vitality withered and dead.

Only dirt and dust spills from your mouth now, all sweetness lost.

## Water, Shelter

Water would ripple by your ankles in the stream close to your grandmother's cottage.

Cold waves met dry limbs, surprised screeches reached the sky, laughter gathered to your ears.

Diving, splashing, swimming—flowing water there to catch you, envelope you, embrace you.

A constant reflection of the sky and world above, your forgotten face in the midst.

The looking glass has broken, the image lost.

The watery mirror now reflects every mistake, every regret, every feigned moment of ignorance.

Algae and scum invade the waves like a disease, sunlight and oxygen unable to reach its depths.

Earth's elixir of life, left and brewed into a toxic, polluted poison.

It rises and reaps loathingly, drowning all that was once born from it.

Shelter

Grandmother's cottage was warm and inviting even after her presence had long since faded.

The ancient wood had heard each argument, each happy birthday, each whisper of joy.

Framed photographs sat abundantly in the home, next to mini forests of potted plants.

Images of familial and familiar faces, vast deserts, picturesque prairies, great mountain ranges.

The pictures have yellowed, their images of a seemingly illusionary lost time.

The wood has rotted and decomposed, unable to protect against any wind, water, thunder.

The foundations have eroded, eclipsed by hurricanes, tornadoes, tsunamis, landslides.

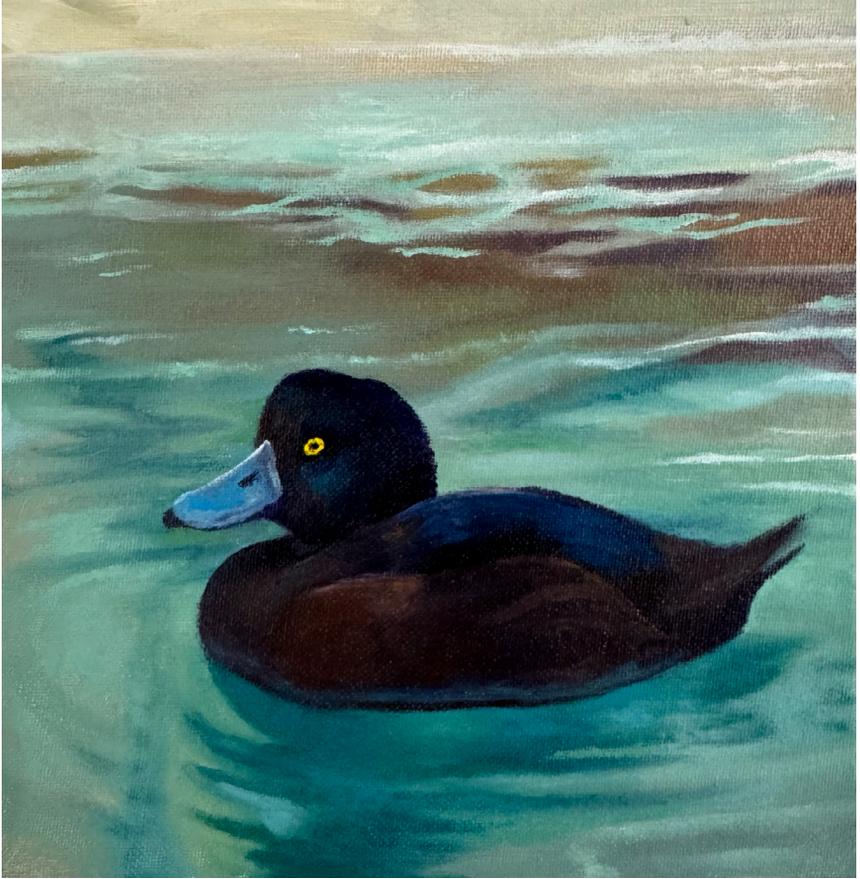
The rubble left behind is customary, a graveyard of homes, couches, cradles, trees, memories.

Your shelter, your earth, is dying, and you are glad your grandmother is not a witness to it.

Rot, Dust, Decay

# Wading

Sarah Steen '26



bee life

Heather D Haigh



# Passing Seasons

Edward Lees

I remember seasons as a child,  
so distinct they were like different countries.  
Welsh winters, huddled  
by the hot air vent before school,  
Japanese springs, full of blossoms and emergence,  
Greek summers, amidst heat-glare  
that could only come from a paved city,  
and Canadian autumns, waving like a primeval coral reef.  
Even the smell of the air changed.  
Each brought busy routines,  
like the ranged needs  
when our later house was full  
with pets (three) and kids (two),  
and everything moved so quickly—  
too much to do.  
Peak life I called it,  
sensing it needed to be marked,  
so I could find my way back.  
Now, in England, the seasons blend.  
Sometimes a whole summer  
never properly comes  
and instead of snow,  
there is early dark  
and lengthening stillness.

# Chinese Lesson Continued

Yuan Changming

Square-shaped, stroke-structured

Every Chinese character presents an

Abstract painting rich in symbolic

Meanings; for example, ‘自由’

[Freedom] is an enclosed framework

Where there’s always a unique stroke

Trying to break out of the cell

Whereas ‘牢籠’ [prison house] is

Open-ended in every direction, but

Even if you are as strong as a bull

Or a dragon, you can never hope to

Escape from under a simple radical

# The Gatherer

Ilya Gromochenko '26



# Replay

N.T. Chambers

**Remember me,  
somehow  
with a smile  
gifting you  
a long-ago poem  
that tickled  
the corners  
of my mouth  
and the edges  
of your mind  
in ways that  
made you feel—  
not so much the sky  
as an eagle's  
spreading wings—  
not nearly so much  
the mountains,  
but a way to climb—  
and nowhere near  
close to loving  
as a way to touch  
and feel and be.**

**Remember me,  
sometimes—  
a little more  
than friend,  
a little less  
than lover—  
someone**

occupying the time  
between  
falling leaves and  
warm Spring mornings—  
living beyond the shores  
of lackluster passions  
who simply cared.

Remember me,  
somewhere  
singing silly songs  
writing  
forgotten rimes—  
in a way—  
remembering  
you.

salsify in rain

Heather D Haigh



# Spiders

Joyce Brinkman '26

I like spiders in the garden.

Enscorced on their self-woven

thrones they reign impregnable

as Caesars, though without

garrisons of soldiers. Sunlight

decks their royal chambers

with gems that shimmer in wet

droplets of dew. Bejeweled

themselves in jade green,

onyx black, or perhaps,

a royal, ruby red, they

rain destruction on armies

of ants and aphids, legions

of leafhoppers and flies. I

like spiders in the house too.

They station themselves

strategically by windows  
and doors, constantly on guard  
for marauding intruders  
that try to sneak beneath  
the rubber window seals  
they wait in the stickiness  
of webs and I aid and abet  
them by not dusting.

# ripples

Heather D Haigh



