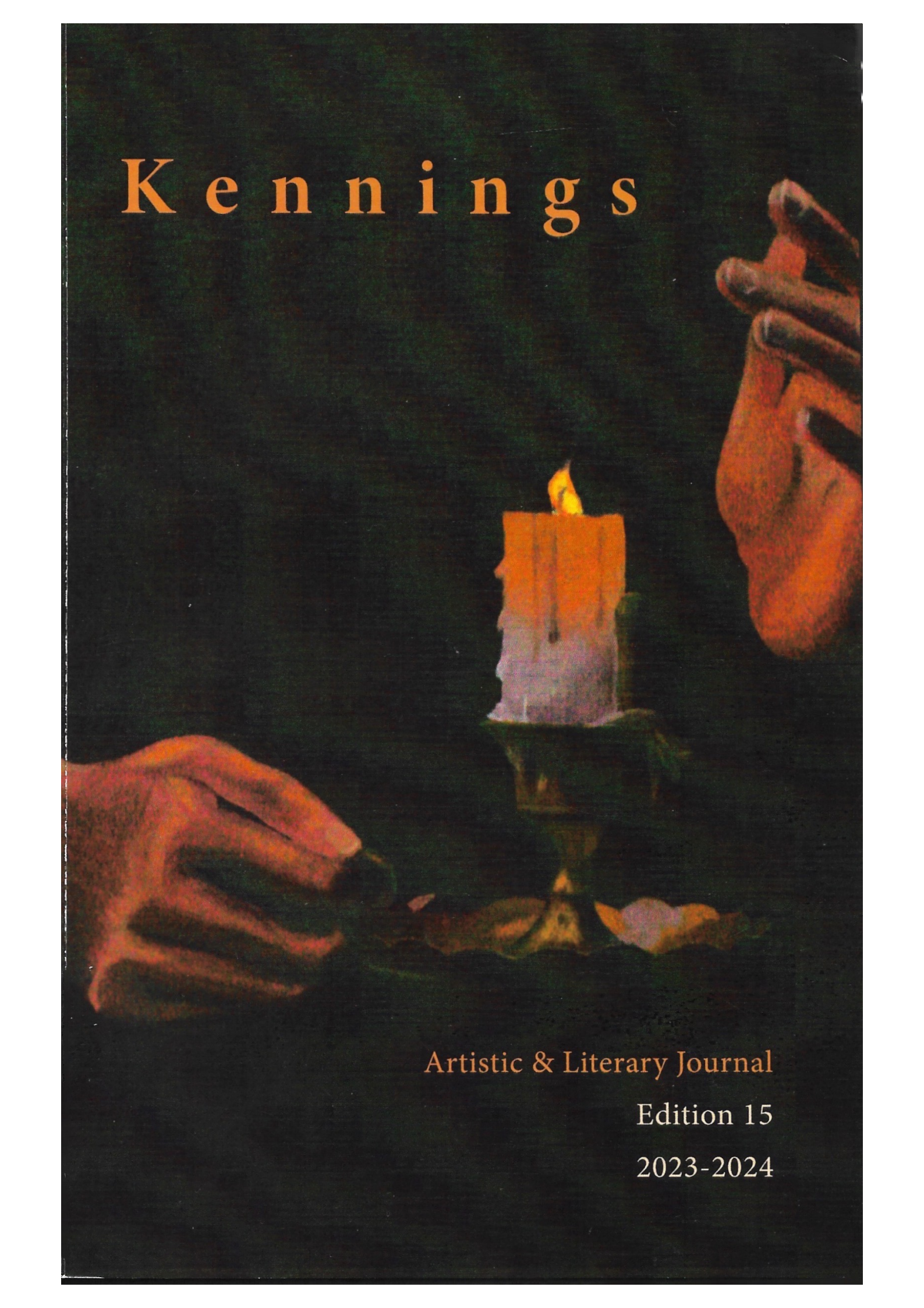


Kennings



Artistic & Literary Journal

Edition 15

2023-2024

k e n n i n g s

Artistic & Literary Journal

edition 15

2024

Editorial

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

Examples include:

“sea-farer” for ship

“whale road” for sea

“tree-hugger” for environmentalist

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

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

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Kennings Artistic and Literary Journal 2023-2024

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Content Warning

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

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


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

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

Works that have a trigger warning will be marked with : 

Letters from the Editors

Hello, dearest readers! I am Lexi Traylor, one of the Co-Editor-in-Chiefs this year. I am thrilled you have chosen to embark on this *Kennings* journey with us to explore the beautiful work done by our Hanover College community and the global writing community. It has been a privilege to witness all the dedication, creativity, and passion that goes into creating our journal. To each and every person that helps make *Kennings* so special—from our contributors to our staff and everyone in between—thank you! Your commitment to sharing art with the world is truly something to celebrate. To our readers—I hope your journey through these pages fills your world with beautiful art, too. Enjoy!



Lexi Traylor
Co-Editor-in-Chief '25

I joined *Kennings* shortly after its revival during my sophomore year after the pandemic, and I am grateful that I had the opportunity to spend the last three years with *Kennings*. As an editor, I've gotten to see hundreds of fantastic works of poetry, prose, and art that have helped me grow as a writer and as a human being. I'd like to thank all of our contributors, both present and past, who have poured hours of their lives and tons of energy into creating work and then choosing us to represent them and their art. I also want to give a big thank you to the student *Kennings* staff and Hanover faculty advisors this year who created the journal. This year, *Kennings* collected and assessed the most submissions that we have ever received, and the staff has worked extremely hard to create this journal, but they were also an absolute delight to have as a team regardless of the large workload. I couldn't have asked for a better final group to work with in my time at Hanover. With lots of jokes, chalk drawings on the blackboards, night-time coffee runs, and of course reading submissions, this has been a great year to be part of *Kennings*. Working with the journal has been my favorite thing that I've done in college; it has been an honor to watch it grow and to grow with it. I know that I will be leaving you in great hands next year, and I can't wait to watch this group continue to thrive.



Meredith Shepherd
Co-Editor-in-Chief '24

Dedication

Lastly, we would like to give a special thank you to our Design Faculty Advisor, Rick Lostutter, who is retiring this year. He has been a great support to *Kennings* for our revival in the last three years and has been a support to students on Hanover's campus for much longer. The journal that you have in your hands would not have been possible without his help, and we are so grateful that he believed in our vision enough to volunteer his time to help us. Though we are sad to see him leave Hanover, we are excited to see where he will go next.

Growing Pains

Tori McDougal '24

If college has anything I'll retain,
it is simply an undeniable
understanding of the phrase *growing pains*.
Not the kind that starts in my inching legs
waking me with this aching all sustained.
Instead, it's the squeeze of my own stiff skin
peeking out between the scales that contain,
my anxious hope for the unknowable.
But now begins the ease to this tight strain.

We've made it here.
Here we are.
Where is here?
Here is the end.
Here is the start.
Here is the gasp we take,
as our shedding skin begins to peel
from jet-lagged lungs.
Exhausting, isn't it?
But growth is never easy.
Our old skins itch to be shrugged away,
dry and cracked to kindle flames.
We hang them up, a fresh canvas all aglow.
Here is where we begin what we already began,
this path we started lays out unfinished.
Ready for our first steps.
As we close this chapter our pen bleeds to the next page.
I wonder what we'll write there.

Figure in Pencil 30 Minutes

Jane Stormer '04



The Wonderful Witchy World

Lana Wooley '26

Back when the world was wide and inviting, back when one believed in magic, there lived a lady and her baby daughter. This lady once had a husband and son as well, but when their young son passed away, her despaired husband left her alone with her fond memories and her newborn, Daisy.

The lady did not worry; she tightened her smile, tightened the twine, and raised her girl all on her own. And Daisy bloomed, with her hair curly and vibrant, her cheeks rosy and freckled, her eyes mischievous and full of curiosity. With how wonderful the little girl was, one would never notice her mother was as despaired as her forgotten father once was.

As Daisy grew, she began asking her mother questions about the world. The lady's maternal instinct was still present in her soul, so she resolved herself to as she once was, telling the most wonderful stories to send her inquisitive daughter to the land of dreams each night. For a time, this satisfied the little dreamer. But one night, Daisy asked about the witchy world.

The lady was terrified of the witchy world. But she did not want her daughter to live in fear. So she began to weave her fairy tale, of how the entrance was a magnificent shimmering door that caught sunlight and rainbows in its grasp, how the clay frame and the broken latch seemed enticing, but how beyond the flowers and creatures that seemingly lay within, there laid a dark and wretched and witchy world. Admire the door from afar, Daisy darling, but never go through the door. The witchy world was not where you were supposed to go.

Daisy intended to listen to her mother, she promised! But the rain was not as kind as her mother's stories, and it softened the clay that kept the door safely sealed. Daisy ran down the hall with her cape and sword, and was stopped in her princessly escapades by the sudden crack in the door. She was curious. But the witchy world was not where you were supposed to go.

She stared at the rainbows and sunlight that danced across the floor in front of her. It beckoned her closer. She saw the rusty lock was wrapped in twine, over and over but yet not tight enough to prevent Daisy from peeking through. It beckoned her to the edge of the door.

The flowers! The creatures! Daisy gasped. Her mother must have never seen how wonderful it was before. This wasn't dark or wretched. This witchy world was bright and enticing. And the witchy world was not where you were supposed to go?

Daisy was determined to brave the witchy world for her downhearted mother. She shed her cape so it wouldn't get caught on the flower bushes she had to push through. Wielding her wooden sword, she pried open the door, jumped up onto the step, and charged in.

A scream flew up and away from Daisy as she fell down instead of forward! The entrance was so topsy-turvy! Flowers and creatures spun her around, snatched her sword, dropped her on her head, and laid her in a soft bed of roses by a river so swiftly that Daisy forgot and then remembered how to breathe.

For a moment, Daisy was afraid to move, for she had lost her sword meant to protect her. Then a mischievous-eyed boy popped out of the tree above her.

"You made it to the witchy world!" he cried, and Daisy grinned as she saw that he was floating in midair.

"You can fly!"

"And so can you!"

Daisy giggled as she rose out of her soft bed and truly saw the wonderful witchy world. It was a forest, of fairies dancing on leaves, of sprites racing across the river, of animals rolling in the delicate grasses. The sky seemed endlessly blue, and the air seemed calm and sweet. Daisy felt so heavenly that she could not understand why her mother was ever so shy of this place.

She went to go get her mother, but the boy took her by the hands and spun her around so fast she was sure she fell back through the door. But she hadn't, and the creatures of the witchy world were there to take her to strawberry fields and bubbling brooks and climbing trees that never seemed to stop bringing the most fun. Daisy laughed and ran and flew and never lost her breath again.

She would have played in the witchy world with her new best friends forever if a woman hadn't touched her on the shoulder.

"Hello, child," she murmured. "What is your name?"

"Daisy!"

"It's nice to meet you, Daisy darling. My name is Lina."

Suddenly, Daisy remembered! Her mother called her Daisy darling! She turned to fly back to the door.

"Where are you going, child?"

"I'm going to get Mother! She's afraid of the witchy world but I have braved it for her! I must tell her the witchy world is wonderful! Isn't it wonderful, Lina?"

Lina smiled, but her eyes were shiny. The sad look reminded Daisy of her mother, and she decided to give Lina a hug before she took off.

"Oh, Daisy darling," Lina sighed as she enveloped the child in her arms. "Your mother is very proud of you. You needn't disturb her now."

Daisy pulled back from the embrace to brush the angel dust out of her curls. "But perhaps Mother can come to the witchy world with us!"

"Perhaps, child." Lina looked up at the wide and inviting window. "Perhaps."

Nightmare Closet

Jensen Bowker '23



Sonnet for Amanda

William Waters

There's something sad in everything we do—
a fall so full of fruit and grain
it aches to feel October rain
that chilling rot from which it grows anew;

or that first tender touching of lips to
lips that is neither passionate, nor tame,
but somehow grows to occupy the brain
until everything after seems review;

or any of this morning's palest hues
that bulge blue-green, gold, yellow to regain
old territory: new terrain
while last night's whispers wither on the dew.

But even sadness cannot last that long;
it is each ending that makes our middle strong.

Luna

Sophia Shaw '26



What I Can Say About Writing

Sydney Thomson

To write it down
is to rear your paper
on your blood
on your tears

and

to write it down
is to christen your paper
with that which
you hold dear

and

to write it down
is to name your paper
after a dozen
lost years

and

a hundred
old fears

and

a hand-me-down
passed around
baby blanket
gone sheer

with love
or wear
or whatever that stuff is
that floats around
in smoke
when you blow
out the birthday candles
each year

my dear

send me a song on the wire
and I'll make sure they hear.

Figure in Pencil 10 Minutes

Jane Stormer '04



Avarice of a Girl

Rilee Lonberger '26

Beaded bracelets, stuffed animals, tasty treats, toys of every kind; the girl took them all. She did not understand why they perceived her as a crook, a criminal, and a thief. By taking, the girl got what she wanted, but no matter how much she stole, it was never enough. They would cry, running to the teacher, wailing that their precious toy was stolen by the thief. The girl was told time and time again not to be *selfish*, to *share*, that it was *simple*. The girl hated those words, those words that began with *S*, the words that left her feeling unable to grasp what was so atrocious about what she did. *What is so bad about wanting? Doesn't everyone do it? What is so wrong with what I want?* Nonetheless, the girl continued her robberies, stealing as she pleased. While searching through the now playing children's backpacks, the girl overheard the grown-ups. *Why can't she understand? No one will want her as a friend if she's that greedy...*

Later, the girl stepped onto the bus, a tight grip on the stolen item that resided in her hand. The girl sat, looking out the window as she pondered what the word, *greed*, meant. The bus rolled on and on, passing several restaurants as a glazed look came over the girl's eyes. She saw one of her classmates, the boy she had taken a toy soldier from, and watched him smile as he entered the fancy restaurant with the rest of his family. The girl could not recall a memory similar to what she had just seen, but instead saw a small dining room, a chair that squeaked when sat in, and one empty seat that would never be filled. She saw her mother at the dining table, buried in paperwork as the white stick in her mouth gave off a tiny puff of smoke. In the next chair sat her older sister. She sat at the table, her food untouched, as she yelled at someone on the phone, telling them to pay her back. The girl's mother would eventually yell at her sister, saying she was too loud. Her sister would yell back, storm out of the house, and then drive away in her rusty car. The girl did not understand these interactions, why her sister would rather leave than stay, why her mother decided to place papers in front of her rather than food. But while all of this happened, her little brother sat next to her, playing with the piece of broccoli on his plate before putting it in his mouth. He looked up at her and smiled.

The bus came to a sudden stop, snapping the girl from her head. The girl picked up her bag and stepped off the bus. She opened the door to her tiny home, and greeted her younger, rosy cheeked brother. The girl held out her hand to her brother's slightly smaller one and gave him the item within. A broad smile stretched across his face, as he beheld the tiny plastic soldier now in his hand. The girl kept that image of her brother, locking it away in her memory for only her to see. She wondered if this was greed, wanting to see him smile, wanting to make him happy. She wondered if her mom wanting to take so many jobs, and her older sister wanting to leave was greed. Whatever it was, the girl knew what she wanted; for her brother to never yearn or stop smiling.

Claiming Me

Tera Johnson-Swartz

I did not believe I was a
hostage. I moved away

from prison grounds, proudly
naming captors one by one.

I claimed myself, I thought,
but foolishly I followed

every false hope, lamb to
slaughter, I sacrificed my

soul to save my body. I was
not free. *Not really.*

Then one day, I looked around
and saw that I had tethered

my own limbs to a dead tree,
silenced my voice with a

prayer for peace, and pretended
to call this my happy place.

Deep down, I knew, my world
needed the woman I hid,

the warrior who broke free
and never took orders from

wardens. I chopped that oak
and ignited a fire that no longer

fears to be raked over coals.
Now, I do not think I am free
nor do I think I am claimed,
I know and that is the difference.

Spring at Hanover

Annalise Bassett '25



The Rot

Tori McDougal '24

Part of me would give anything
To move back into my limbs,
To live there again.
To fill out my skin like well-worn jeans.
But even jeans now sag against my waist.
I shrink
And shrink
And shrink
Pulling back from my receding flesh.
Mirrors breed a sort of apathy.
The kind that feeds this numbing neuropathy.
It gnaws at my indifference,
My exhaustion.
As I continue my retreat.
I can't look back.
If I take the time to look
If I take the time to stop
All I will see is the rot.
The rot that bleeds me dry,
Leaving this shriveled husk.
It's not for me.
Hasn't been for a while.
Everyone else sure takes their fill.
Oh wow. You look so good!
What they really mean is small.

A Story...

Allison Jones '25

A story is a pyramid, a peak at the top and a gentle slope back down. A story is a straight line, nothing exciting happening. A story is an upward line, reaching a peak without coming down.

A story doesn't have to fit one formula, but it can fit a formula perfectly. There isn't one type of story that is acceptable or enjoyable or critically acclaimed or good.

A story has good characters and bad characters and characters who are neither and characters who are both. A story has characters making good decisions and has characters making bad decisions and has characters making decisions that are not clearly good or bad.

A story resolves the conflict in a conventional way, following all of the tropes. A story resolves the conflict in an unconventional way, subverting all of the tropes. A story doesn't resolve at all, leaving the plot on a cliffhanger.

A story is one that you leave satisfied, happy with every decision and plot point, and definitely with the ending. A story is one that leaves you unsatisfied, where you question every decision and plot point, not really sure what the ending means. A story is somewhere in between. A story doesn't have to be liked to be good and worthwhile. Some of the best stories are the most vehemently hated.

A story is not always the perfect one. A story is not always the perfect character making perfect choices and perfect mistakes with a perfect ending. Stories are messy, and they're wonderful and meaningful because they're messy. Stories contain terrible, messy characters because that makes for an interesting story. Stories with neat characters are boring, without substance. Stories with neat endings, wrapped up in a nice bow, are boring, nothing to think about when it's over.

I want my stories to be everything and nothing all at once. I want to give readers exactly what they expect and exactly what they don't. I want my stories to confuse, to astound, to leave readers reeling. I want to evoke emotion, whether that's hatred or love, despair or elation, suspense or contentment. I want my stories to follow the tropes, to a tee. I want my stories to flip the tropes on their head, to the point where they're unrecognizable. I want to express the essence of life in my stories, how unpredictable and unfair it is. How one moment everything is going according to plan and is nice and neat and clean, but just one wrong turn changes everything. I want to create messy characters who fuck up. Because people fuck up sometimes.

My stories will be diverse. My stories will show the range of human emotion and experience. My stories will have messy characters in messy situations. My stories will have morally gray characters who don't do the right thing all the time, or any of the time. My stories may be hated and ranted about for hours to a close friend. My stories may be loved by thousands, making me a fortune to live off. But above all else, my stories will be mine.

Terroir

Alex Schillinger

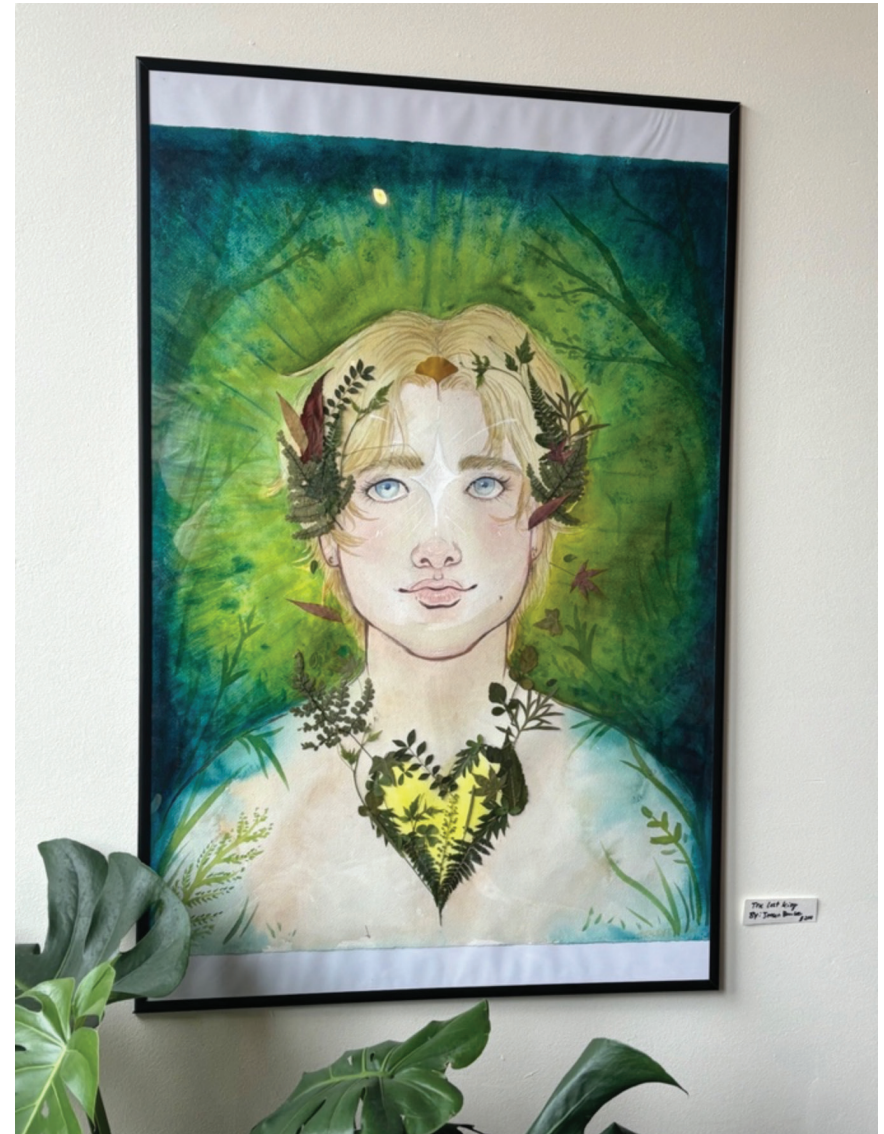
This doesn't feel like me.
I'm the thistle not the flower.
I'm the body buried
Under the dirt, and shit, and dust, and stone.
I'm the rot that nourishes the soil.
I'm the smoke washing over us.
Feeding the vines their violence back to them.

I was born in the bentgrass,
Caught in the weeds, too afraid to leave.
I was born bent, then born again,
Baptized by the sun,
But grew in a pretty, bad shape,
Desperate for the dust,
That dirty air that cut our lungs,

Growing cancer on cancer,
The most difficult terrain.
These hills where fruit sucks clean
The nutrients from the ground and leaves
Only us behind.
A desperate landscape
Ready to grow again.

The Lost King

Jensen Bowker '23



Atmen (Breathing)

Olivia Wertz '25

Einatmen und ausatmen
Ein und aus, ein und aus
In and out, in and out
Immer hoch und runter, hoch und runter Up and down
Immer Atmen

Ich bin der Meinung, dass Atmen wie eine
Maschine ist
Die immer einen Plan hat
Und einem Plan folgen muss
Ein und aus macht einen kompletten Kreis
Dann macht die Maschine den Kreis wieder
Wieder und wieder, immer wieder Während des Tages,
während ich im Auto
bin
schaue ich den Himmel an
Ich finde Tiere und Gesichter in den Wolken
Meine Imagination ist noch sehr stark
Die Figuren tanzen im Himmel, nein, nein,
nein
Meistens tanzen sie nicht
Aber sie bewegen sich sehr viel
In nur einem Augenblick gehen sie weg, und
ich suche etwas Neues

ich atme ein, und ich atme aus
Ein Kreis
In der Nacht
Schaue ich die Decke an
Und ich passe auf mein Atmen auf
Ich will das langsamer machen aber das
Leben ist immer so stressing
My heart beats in my chest
Und ich warte bis ich schließlich einschlafe
Ich bin dann nicht nervös,
ich habe keinen Stress
Aber ich atme noch ein und aus

Breathe in and breathe out “
Ein und aus, ein und aus”
In and out, in and out
Always up and down, up and down Up and down
Always breathing

In my opinion, breathing is like
a machine
A machine that always has a plan
And must always follow a plan
In and out makes a complete circle
Then the machine makes the circle again
Again and again, constantly
During the day, while I am in the car

I look at the sky
I find animals and faces in the clouds
My imagination is still very strong
The figures dance in the sky, no, no, no

Most of the time they don't dance
But they move a lot
They go away in only an instant and I look
for something new

I breathe in, and I breathe out
A circle
In the night
I look at the ceiling
And I focus on my breathing
I want to make it slower but life is always so
stressful
My heart beats in my chest
And I wait until I finally fall asleep
Then, I am not nervous
I have no stress
But I still breathe, in and out

In und out
Ein und aus
Während des ganzen Tages, am Tag und in
der Nacht
Atmet man ein und aus
Ein und aus, ein und aus
Ein voller Kreis, den man tausende Male an
einem Tag macht
Eine effiziente Maschine
Und ein Tag ist wirklich auch ein Kreis, der
in einen Kreis, der 365 Tage hat, übergeht
Diese Kreise machen dann ein Jahr

Viele Jahre machen ein Leben
Deswegen ist ein Leben ein Kreis
Denkt ihr einen Moment darüber nach.
Wenn das Leben ein Kreis ist, ist nur ein
einziger Atem nicht so groß oder so
einflussreich
Der ist so klein wie eine Sekunde, ein
Millimeter oder ein Teilchen
Es ist aber schwer darüber nachzudenken
Wenn man nicht atmet, geht alles
nicht wie eine Maschine, dann wird es ein
Problem, oder?
Also haben wir hier etwas Schwieriges

Warum scheint etwas Kleines so wichtig,
aber im Großen und Ganzen egal?

Wie kann es sowohl klein und wichtig sein?
Warum muss alles so kompliziert sein?

Ich wünschte, dass ich für euch eine
Antwort hätte, aber ich habe nichts.
Ich muss auch lernen, dass etwas so Kleines
nicht so wichtig sein soll.

In und out
In and out
During the whole day, in the day and in the
night
We breathe in and out
In and out, in and out
A full circle that people make thousands of
times a day
An efficient machine
And a day is really also a circle that goes
into a circle that has 365 days
These circles then make a year

Many years make a life
Therefore, life is a circle
Think about that for a moment.
When life is a circle is only one breath not
so big or so influential

It is as small as a second, a millimeter or an
atom

That is hard to think about though
When people don't breathe, then everything
does not work like a machine, then we have
a problem, yes?
So, we have here something complicated

Why does something so small seem so
important but in the big picture like nothing?

How can something be both small and
important? Why must everything be so complicated?

I wish I had an answer for you all,
but I have nothing.
I must also learn that something so small
should not be so important.

Ancient Power

Calla Celeste Smith

The rainy season in the city brought downpours that made the river swell. The cargo ships coming and going from the crumbling port found it hard to navigate the ancient tides that seemed to somehow have found a new vigor.

But the storms passed soon enough, and the first real days of summer arrived like a dream. The gentle breeze ushered in the familiar cavalcade of summer in Buenos Aires: weekends spent in the pool, Christmas and New Years next to the air conditioner. Vacations to the sea-side, long days and short nights.

The ferry boats and cruise ships that came and went on the coastline felt something was different that year. A mist hung over the brown water of the River Plate like a haunting melody of a forgotten song. There was something stirring down below, and a sense of uneasiness would sometimes wash over the lovestruck couples that gazed over the bank of the river.

March arrived with the usual shudder as school started. The air started to chill, and the city turned inward, looking away from the river. It was only then that he emerged, glistening and wet in the light of the swollen moon.

At first, he was nothing more than a ripple in the water. A hand, an arm, a body. A man, standing there, freshly expelled from the pulsating water of his home. He stood there for a moment, glistening in the soft moonlight before delicately setting his feet on the boulders on the shore, and gingerly taking his first steps toward the solid ground.

The leaves of the plants rustled softly in the wind, and the riverman wandered onto the walking path, unafraid of this new world he found himself in. He was at home surrounded by the chirping of insects and birds and the soft pitter-patter of the small padded feet on the animals that lived in the forest.

His strides were large, and he soon found himself in front of the gates, gazing out into the paved city streets beyond them. Something called him beyond those iron doors, so he scaled the fence in a rapid movement and set off into the heart of the pavement, glass, and steel.

The concrete was hard on his feet, but he kept going. He paid no attention to the cars or their blaring horns, and just kept trudging on, leaving a trail of flowers and vines breaking through the pavement in his wake.

The greenery sprouting up behind him got thicker and thicker as he entered into the heart of the city. The hum of the cars and buses and the snatches of music in the distance seemed to disorient him. But he kept advancing, leaving a swath of verdant greenery to consume the man-made constructions behind. He would return to his watery home by dawn. But first he had to leave his touch of life behind, a reminder of the ancient power of the land that stood steadfast beneath it all.

Lost in the Familiar

Ethan Geraci '25



The world and the girl of perky power

Arno Bohlmeijer

Some flowers have survived night frost,
but here's the growling mowing machine
and her voice is low. "Don't, please!"
Fast and loud it's come closer,
while the driver shrieks, "Beat it!"
"But Sir, the speedwell and buttercups,
clover-heads, lady-smocks..."
"Hey!" the mower raves. "Are you crazy?"

He returns for another lane:
a million snippings of shredded color petals.
Flailing, he stops and hops off, to say,
"Got no eyes or no brain? Get lost!"
"Why," she cries, "you mowed the other day."
"So? I'm *paid*. Now clear out!"
"But sorry, I love to *paint* this, please."
"Ha, you're a famous painter? For God's sake."
He takes off with a roar.

Four days later,
on the shortest way after school,
before the storm they talk about,
she hears the mower once more,
while time could be pressing.
He's just left and heads for...?
Wait, in the middle of the mown field,
there's something so red,
the rest of the world fades away.

As if it has no stem, it's rocking bright-lightly
like a butterfly. It's a poppy, and she knows:
the mower has left it on purpose for her,
showing the petals of sunshine;
he must have steered in a hundred funny ways.
"I've got a painting for you," she tries to say.
But it's grown quiet, he's long gone,
like a calm before the storm?
"Or let it be *after*... Okay, in any case,
I'll come back to bring the painting—soon or late."

Provenance

w^mdavid

No great thing is created suddenly,
any more than a bunch of grapes or a fig.
I answer you that there must be time.
Let it first blossom,
Then bear fruit, then ripen.
-Epictetus (First century A.D.)

She sat quietly, looking outward through the large picture window at the early signs of spring. The tree she gazed upon had begun as a seed she had sown in the spring of her own life. Now, it had earned the right of maturity and bore a bounty of blossoms.

For this moment, the view of the tree was hers alone, but this had not always been so. Over the years she had shared it with a new husband and then a beautiful daughter. The window had faithfully served as a frame for the seasons:

the birds of springtime searching for food in the new greenery;

the warmth of the summer sun and her daughter's pigtails flying behind the swing hanging from the tree;

the colors of autumn, gradually becoming a crisp carpet on the ground;

and finally, the sparkling white winter stillness, glowing through the night and framed by a wreath of frost at the edges of the window.

The seasons had advanced much too frequently in recent years. In her mind, she could freeze a scene from any given moment in the past. All she had to do was close her eyes. But the present scene was much too delicious. Being older can be lonely, but it need not be bitter. The blooms on the tree were welcome company. With eyes closed tightly and an imagined determination belying her years, she stood slowly and passed through the window into the world outside. In her mind, the scent of the blossoms stood in stark contrast to the lingering purity of winter's heir.

Her thin lips forged a gentle smile as she opened her eyes, comfortably embraced by her warm and worn upholstered, Victorian wingback chair. The delicateness of the soft, white petals—framed again before her—juxtaposed the aged skin of her hands and fingers that she stretched toward the splendor, well beyond her reach.

The next morning brought a spring snowfall. The frozen crystals glistened in the morning sun on the newly formed buds. The warm rays, however, validated the new season and quickly put winter's remnant to rest. She watched through the window as the melting flakes fell by sticky globs from the tree. Deep within her heart she hoped that the warmth had arrived in time to deny the late hand of winter its cruel grasp on the delicate blossoms.

In the following days, fallen petals formed a new blanket of white beneath the tree. When the scene was complete, she had willed a lone flower to remain:

one that faced the window directly and received a double dose of sun shine from the window's reflection;

one that received a daily dose of warmth from a widowed heart, even in the absence of sunlight.

In recent years, her moments had been spent alternating the view from the window with the memories of her heart. Once again, the season passed much too quickly. The limb that had retained the lone blossom bore fruit. The fruit grew and ripened, just as her daughter had matured—much too quickly—through the same window, outlined by the same painted frame. With the support of an entire root system and the energy drawn through every leaf on the tree, the lone fruit weathered storms. It basked in the stillness of the summer sun. At maturity, the weight of the fruit was a great encumbrance for the limb, yet it bore its progeny proudly, as if knowing that it would soon be time to let go. Mother nature often reflects human life—if we pause to observe.

The moment arrived when it was time, once again, to pass through the frame into the scene—but not this time through the power of imagination and memory. Gravity and years had much changed the figure that had once been a more frequent part of the ever-changing portrait on the opposite side of the glass. Now, there were no eyes on the inner side of the window, sitting in the upholstered chair to view the scene beyond. Instead, a stooped figure balanced delicately with her cane, her head turned upward and straining to look up at the fruit, just out of reach.

The young man who delivered the afternoon mail happened to glance across the street on his rounds. He saw the woman stretching a quivering hand toward the branch, the ripe orb well out of reach. He hurried across, and the fruit fell into his hand with one slight twist. She thanked him as he helped her up the steps and back into the house.

After re-crossing the street, the man looked back and saw the woman sitting in a chair holding the fruit, a portrait in a large window. He paused in the shade of an old oak as she studied the prize and finally took a bite.

On the other side of the picture window, the woman took her time and savored the fruit. In admiring it, she failed to notice the scene in her window, depicting a tree—void now of fruit. She closed her eyes and concentrated on the flavor. It tasted like heaven.

The next day, the nurse told her daughter that she'd found her mother sitting in her favorite chair, with a look of serenity on her face. It seemed unimportant to mention the seed she found clutched in her hand.

Sherbet Sky

Sophia Shaw '26



Trans Rage

Ethan Schmidt '25

There is a wolf inside my chest

Sleeping

Sleeping

Sleeping

Curled up tight next to my heart

I let it lay there

I try not to wake it

But then

But then

But then

“Oh there she is”

“She helped me with...”

“ I missed you so much!”

It wakes up

I am so

TIRED TIRED TIRED

OF THE WRONG FUCKING NAME

OF THE WRONG FUCKING PRONOUNS

OF

“Well you need to make sure”

“Well how do you KNOW”

“Well that’s a big change what if you don’t want it”

We know you better than you know yourself

The wolf wakes up and it SCREAMS

It HOWLS

It TEARS

It CLAWS

I WANT TO TEAR YOUR THROAT OUT

I WANT TO RIP OPEN YOUR CHEST

I WANT TO RIP MY DEADNAME OUT OF YOUR MIND

OUT OF EXISTENCE

FORCE YOU TO CALL ME THE WAY I WANT TO BE CALLED

I WANT TO GET TOP SURGERY WITHOUT BANKRUPTING MYSELF

I WANT TO CHANGE MY NAME WITHOUT LEGAL FEES AND COURT
PROCEEDINGS

I WANT TO BE ALLOWED TO EXIST

WITHOUT JUSTIFYING WHY I AM

WHY ARE YOU A WOMAN

WHY ARE YOU A MAN

WHY DO YOU GO BY THAT NAME

MAKE YOU FEEL THE WAY I FEEL

QUESTIONED AND UNWANTED AND UNRESPECTED

The wolf screams and screams and screams

But it has no one to scream to

No one to hear

Except me

The want to tear and yell and break

But nothing can be torn or yelled at or broken

I must be:

Polite

Understanding

“I know you’re trying your best”

“I know it’s hard”

I cannot be angry because you are trying

So instead

It cries.

Because I am grieving for the life that I wish to have

But that I fear I never will

I am

So tired

Of existing in a world

That does not want me here.

Dance Dance Revolution

Marieke Young '27



Oh bother, my slip is out
To what end must I rely
on my insecurities to inform my decisions?
How dastardly am I, to care so much
about so little.

In my day to day stretch
No butterfly gives a damn.

So maenad, dance incessantly
With each wing a promise so intoxicating
That my beauty will realize itself anew
A sight to be captured forever
decorated and in motion.



Lavender Morning

Sarah Steen '26



The Depth of Glitter

Bethany Ratliff '27



Pretty, thin enbies on my pinterest feed

Kay Schappelle

I pray to androgyny in cathedrals.

I idolize slender columns, graceful arches, engravings delicate like fingerbones.

The tracery is sharp; it mocks me, dancing on the window panes. The windows wash me with pale dawn, wash me and my soft round flesh in purity unattainable.

Bare-backed I lay, letting the chill of the marble, the austere marble, soak into me. I stare up at the ceilings vaulted proudly, the ribbing suggesting sickliness.

I am a devotee of narrow hips, angular face. I have gone light-headed for it, fasting, a monk after elusive divine bliss.

Baruch atah Adonai (Shabbat Candles)

Molly Billiard '25



Writer's Block

Angela Secrest

"Guys, I'm out of ideas." Every head turns to stare back at the girl, her fingers resting on the keyboard of her laptop. They are in an office that was covered in pink and red plush walls with desks lined up and around the space.

"What do you mean you're out of ideas!" shouts an identical girl wearing a green formal jacket and her hair tied up in a loose low ponytail. She stomps right up to the first girl, glaring down at her.

"I mean, I can't think of anything. I'm out of ideas." The first girl, who is wearing an old light gray jacket and blue jeans, shuts the lid of the laptop.

"You can't be out of ideas! We have to turn in something!"

"I'm sorry Left, but that's how it is." Left stomps her foot, pouting her lips in a snarl.

"Leave her alone Left." Both turn to see another similar girl wearing a blue cap and a large blue sweater. "Right just can't be perfect all the time like you."

Right glares at the other girl as Left snaps back, "We need to have ideas! It's her job to provide said ideas!" Left stomps over and slams her hand firmly on the other girl's desk roughly.

The other girl just looks up at her, before casually bringing a cup of hot chocolate she was drinking up to her lips, not caring at all for this conversation. She smacks off the girl's nameplate, reading 'Movement' clean off her desk. Left frowns hard, glaring down at her. "I don't need your pity."

Movement rolls her eyes with indifference before relaxing back into her chair. "Whatever boss." A girl with a green button up shirt cuts in "I think—"

"No one asked for your opinion here!"

"But that's literally my job!" Opinion sulks before crying running back to her desk as Left nearly hits her with a flying vase.

Left glares at everyone, who looks like the same person only wearing a variety of different outfits, before scowling. "I suppose that, given Right is too *lazy* to do her job today, it will be up to me to fix this mess." She walks over to the side and pulls out a white board from out of nowhere, snapping off a marker lid, and scribbling lines. Everyone, besides Right, walks over to see what Left has presented.

"Ok!" She turns around to face the small crowd, before fixing her glasses back onto her face properly. "What would be a good story for us to write?"

“What about a dog?” a girl wearing a puppy paw t-shirt chimes in.

“That’s dumb,” another girl wearing a hoodie pushes the first girl out of the way. “I think we should write about how stupid people can be and how we’re better than everyone else by default.”

Left writes down both ideas before asking for more. “Come on people, we don’t have all day!”

“What about colors?” one girl with messy hair wearing a painted old shirt asks.

“We’re not drawing an image, Art; we’re writing a story.” Said messy girl frowns before walking off. More voices come in and out as Left adds in ideas on the board. Meanwhile, Right is at her desk with her head resting in her arms looking ready to cry.

“Why does Left have to be so frustrating? It’s not like I asked to have this block. I want to show and tell ideas, but what if they’re not good enough? I can’t even come up with a good plot to revolve around them.” Right looks up at the brainstorming that’s going on several feet from her. Tilting her head, she looks out at the random ideas posted on the board. She walks over, ignoring the people that are pushing her to the side to get up front, and stands before it, much to everyone else’s anger.

“Hey!”

“Move out of the way!”

“Make room for the rest of us!”

“Pineapple!” Everybody just turns to gawk at the girl wearing purple, yellow, and pink polka dots that just mentioned that last statement. Said girl stares at everyone with a smirk and a shoulder shrug. “What? It’s a funny word!”

“Right Brain,” Left stands before Right. “Did you not see that we’re busy doing your job? Prime needs this story completed today, at the very least an idea, and you’re just bothering all of us with your lack of creativity!”

The room grows deathly quiet. The rest of the girls just step back as Right glares daggers at Left. Left, realizing that she may have gone too far, tries to save herself. “No-now Right, let’s not be hasty! I just mention—”

“Left Brain.” Left Brain shuts her mouth up and, for once, listens. “We all know your job is to provide facts, that you think you know everything analytical under the sun, but here’s some news for you: I am Prime’s creativity. I can’t stress this enough when I say that I need time to work through things... that being said...” Right side steps and looks back at the board with interest, much to everyone’s surprise.

“We all need support from time to time to get the job done. What you all have here is something, well productive at least. I can’t show anything for myself today, but at least I can help and try to work with what we do have here.”

With that, the rest of the mind started working out and brainstorming ideas on the white board on full display.

A girl with long brown hair stared down at the sheet of paper in front of her full of random words and concepts. She tilted her head at some of them but was overall just giving the words some thought. The story didn’t have to be long, but she had to start somewhere. It was like her brain was on fire with how much she wanted to just get something down on paper.

That’s when her last thought grabbed her attention. Setting the other sheet aside, she hopped onto her laptop and opened up a blank document and started to type.

“Guys, I’m out of ideas.”

Circus Performer

Sarah Steen '26



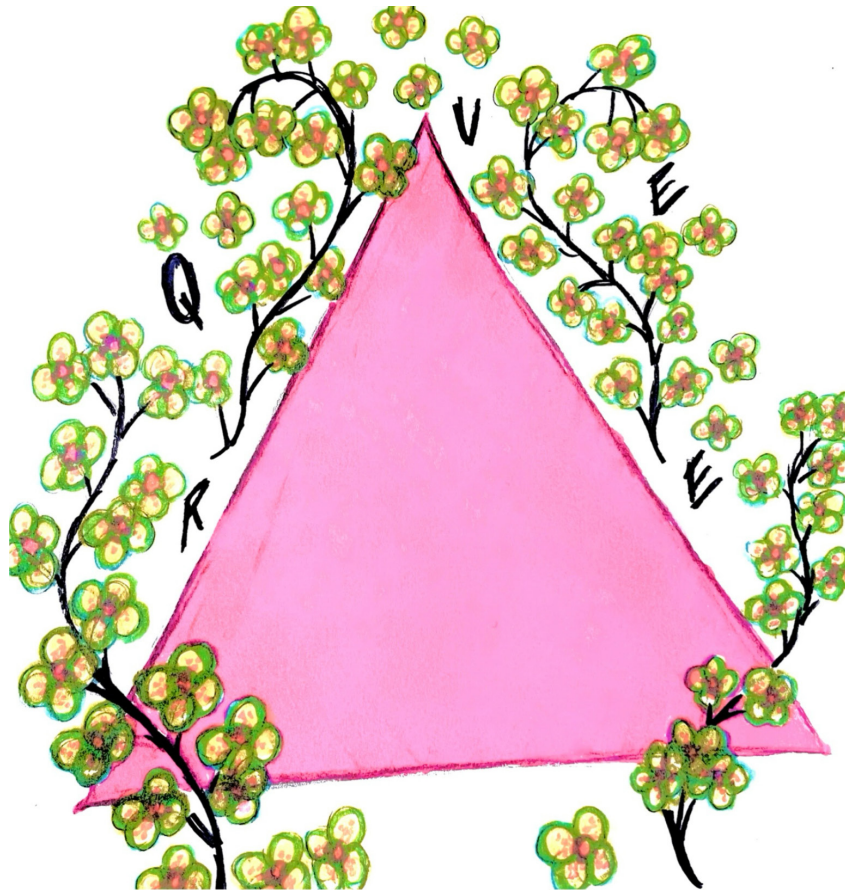
A White Couch

Cheyenne Jordan '27

In my mind
A white couch
Is the pinnacle of luxury
So posh, and elegant
And
Horribly impractical
Impractical
That's what the people in my life tell me
When I say my dream in life is to own
A white couch
They say, "How dirty it will get!"
"How much cleaning you'll have to do!"
They tell me that what I want
My dream
Is foolishly optimistic
But nobody understands that
The white couch
Is a metaphor

Silence=Death

Cheyenne Jordan '27



Student Therapy

Maureen Sherbondy

The college now requires me to help my students reduce their stress, so I begin therapy sessions in class. Soon, there is little time to teach how to write essays or explain topics like persuasive writing and logical fallacies. I have no idea how to counsel the twenty-year-old young men and women, but my performance review dictates that I create an activity to lessen their stress.

In class I listen to their problems about absent or hostile parents, the cost of tuition, how hard it is to take five classes and also work. Nodding my head, I take notes on a pad just like therapists on television shows do. Sometimes the students sit on tables or just stare out windows for the entire one hour and twenty minutes.

On the drive home, my neck stiffens and my shoulders feel heavy with the weight of one-hundred problems. Dreams now include these students and all of their issues. I become sad and stressed out, but have nowhere to turn. When students do write in class, their sentences are only about their feelings. They ask for my cell phone number so they can call me at night when they sink to their lowest point.

At the end of the semester, I have no idea how to evaluate their work in class. Yes, they all participated by spilling their guts, and most of them learned to smile and express feelings. I stay up for several nights agonizing over grades. Eventually, I award all A's—because suddenly nothing matters.

I call in sick for a month because a deep depression has invaded my entire life. When I return, English instructors are now asked to fix the leaking plumbing in the bathrooms. And since only two of us are left in the department, my teaching load has increased from six classes to thirty.

Every day I stare out the window from my fifth floor office and watch instructors jumping from ledges, one at a time. Soon, there will be no one left to teach the students.

It's Always Sunny

Colton Auxier C.T. '26

The clouds in the sky pierce outwards from the endless sea of blue above me. The grass on the ground flows with the wind blowing through it towards the west. I walk in that direction as well, for the west is where I'll find the angels. A small wooden shack stands tall in the open field of nothingness. No other structures surround this shack, and only to the east can one find a multitude of buildings with a multitude of people. But this shack stands quiet and alone, yet is filled with a peaceful nature. The wind chimes that hang on the posts out front of the shack, fill the air with their beautiful melody. Two small white rocking chairs sit in the corner of the porch. Their white paint chipped and dulled with time. It's not as if more than one person lives in the shack, and hardly do they sit in those chairs. So it's not the act of sitting that breaks down these chairs, but rather the act of neglect and being of loneliness.

The stained-glass windows, now broken and cracked, still remain as protectors from the weather outside. Although the dust as made the once glorious glass designs nothing more than dim décor, the glass windows remain. The door, cracked slightly open, is stained fading upward from the near constant storms of dirt and dust that violently pass over the shack almost every fall. But now it's the winter, and the clouds cast a grey shadow over the once golden brown door. I approach the door, my wrinkled hand outstretched, ready to grasp the fake gold doorknob. I place my hand on the knob, and before opening the door, I pause and rest, leaning on the knob. I sigh. The memories of this place echo something melancholic in my head.

The door opens. An empty, dark room expands off in the distance as far as I can see, with just the dark, faint outlines of the corners of the walls showing themselves to me. A strange comfort courses through me in an instant, a comfort of solitude, and yet I was not alone. I entered the shack, turning to the all too familiar table which held in place a table lamp. I turned the switch, and the old light came to life. I heard something upstairs in that moment. "Was it her?" I thought. I pressed onward toward the old staircase. It loomed in the distance, shadowed by the light of the lamp. But I crept my way forward to their impeccable features. The stained wood, the small cobwebs, and, as my foot etched onto the first stair, the common creak of the board shook me to my core.

I continued up the staircase, caressing the handrail to the side as I climbed upwards. The rail's gentle feeling holding me up from tipping to my doom. And as I reached the top, I could almost make out her voice saying to me, "I remember you." But alas, it was a simple hallucination of memories long since passed. No voice was heard, not really. I moved closer to the door illuminated by the light shining through the cracks. I opened the door, and I saw her. She was sitting down at her desk simply staring out one of the many windows of the shack.

The desk lamp was turned on, illuminating her features in a vibrant light. Yet it was only contrasted by the lingering shadows that hung so featurelessly on the walls. "It's bright here," she whispered.

I responded, "I know. It's always sunny when I'm with you." She smiled.

Moments later, she faded away, leaving no trace left behind. "Goodbye," I murmured. "Goodbye."

I Wonder When I Got to Be So Blue

Liz Hunt

A flash pops
pictures hold still
emotions and fleeting moments,
I wonder when I got to be so blue.

In the photo, the light is drained from my cheeks
the gray behind my eyes shocks me
begging to be filled with beauty again.

I long for my body to feel warm again
to forgive life for crushing me.

I want to be saturated with bliss
where my cheeks are pink again
and my eyes amber brown.

Yet, I am still here in this moment
waiting for the next still to illuminate
the color reflecting from within me.

Diamond Beach

Jennifer Schmidt



LATE SUMMER EARLY RAIN

Bibhu Padhi

You watch the strangeness
of a forest that holds

the secrets of your blood.
You walk down the road

that leads to the sea.
Today the wind from the sea

rushes to you
with a new perfume.

The old wound begins to heal,
but the sadness stays

as if it were an angel
of darkness, watching

every turn in sleep.
The rain falls on the hills.

You watch the rain
falling on deserted streets,

the low-roofed houses
and the sea.

The courtyards are full of rain.
The children dance and sing

a song of discovery.
You walk down the street,

thinking of yesterday,
of what moves in the wind,
of a strange new friendship
that was built out of

faith and memory,
a love of centuries.

The rain still falls.
You walk the street

towards evening,
carrying fresh ripe mangoes

and a remote life. The sun
is about to fade

among the Dhenkanal hills;
Colors flood the sky.

Dreams flower around you,
defining the lost.

Thoughts of the past
travel in the air.

There are no words here;
there's only the voice of the rain.

Mama's Curious Child

Jensen Bowker '23



Pasture Statues

Alfredo Salvatore Arcilesi

Millie mooded.

Cate mooded with her.

The cow stared at them.

Millie giggled at the old joke, a pure, authentic song.

Cate giggled with her, exaggerated, trembling notes.

The cow stared at them.

Millie continued to pet the cow's cheek. Cate stroked the other, looking for signs of impatience in the otherwise stoic animal, searching its blank yet, somehow, knowing eyes for knowledge of her charade. What made her want to release the scream that had been lodged in her throat for inconceivable minutes was how Millie, sitting comfortably in her numb arms, was so far away from screaming; Millie, who had every justification for adding her shrill voice to the one behind them.

She hadn't asked Millie if she was all right; doing so would have given her the impression something was wrong. She hadn't asked Millie her actual name; as far as the little girl's amiable behaviour indicated, they had known each other all their lives, and names didn't matter. She hadn't asked Millie her age; from the moment she took the little girl into her arms, she could tell the small human being was no older than her career.

Three years old, Cate mused again, as she transferred Millie from one desensitized arm to the other, careful not to break contact with the cow. Three years, and once again she imagined the retirement banner, growing longer and larger as the idea cooked in her mind, advertising the pitiful number.

Cate was grateful for the brown-and-white animal's presence. Moreover, she was grateful that the cow was the first thing Millie had noticed. She wouldn't have thought to mosey on over to the cow; instinct—training—would have told her to immediately transport the disheveled little girl to her car; and there they would have waited for the next routine steps. And then she would've known something was wrong, she thought. And then she would've started screaming.

A scream perforated the ambience, a cocktail of pain, fear... and perhaps a note of anger. "Mooooo!" Cate issued her loudest impersonation yet. Millie echoed her sentiments, prolonging and exaggerating the bovine language until it devolved into more giggling. Another scream smothered the laughter, and, for a terrible moment, Cate thought she felt Millie stiffen; thought she saw registration on the little girl's suddenly sagging face. "Moo mooooo moo moo mooooo moo,"

Cate interjected, the single word spoken in the rhythm of conversation. She fixed upon Millie's eyes, hoping the little girl would take the bait, ready to shift her little body should she decide to go peeking behind her back, toward the scream.

Millie's bowed lips glistened, saliva pooling as she gathered her thoughts about the conflicting sounds. Cate readied her own lips with another string of nonsensical cow-speak, when Millie broke out of her trance, and fired off a meaningless statement of her own: "Moooooo mooooo mooooo"—laughter—"mooooo moo moo moo."

Relieved, Cate kept the dialogue flowing for as long and as loud as was necessary to beat the intermittent screaming from Millie's ears. As their banter rose and fell with the outbursts behind them, she imagined how the others must have seen them: vulnerable backs; a revolving red light highlighting Millie's arms wrapped comfortably—Or is she in shock? Cate couldn't decide—around her neck; mooing from unseen lips; the cow itself unseen, blocked by their combined bodies. How unreal it must have appeared to them.

How grotesquely real it was to her.

How beautifully real it was to Millie.

A terrible thought returned Cate to their cozy huddle: This is your first time, isn't it? The scream she struggled to keep deep down in her gorge threatened to erupt. It occurred to her that this cow—not the pair grazing further down the fence, dangerously close to the break; not the calf flanked by several adults; not the others standing nonchalantly, laying nonchalantly, living nonchalantly; not the countless others that might have been a blur in Millie's passenger window—but this cow might very well have been the very first cow Millie had ever seen.

Cate mooded, and wondered if Millie could detect the underlying melancholy. You don't need to meet a cow, she desperately wanted to assure the little girl. Not now. Not like this. She was certain that when Millie was one day no longer a size fit for one's arms—There's no guarantee of that, Cate sadly reminded herself—she might learn to hate the cow. All cows. The way Cate hated them for what they had done to Millie. To her.

To Millie's mother.

The human sounds behind them were less frequent now, quieter, the pain, the fear, the anger—if ever there was—giving themselves to realization. Cate hoped Millie's mother would soon forget how to scream; hoped her mother forgot her daughter's name. This line of thinking was drenched in selfishness, but Cate had accepted it... for now; may guilt torment her later. It was just that she and, more importantly, the cow had worked so damned hard to keep Millie occupied.

Or are we keeping the cow occupied? Cate thought for the first time.

She looked into the animal's eyes, glossy black islands surrounded by thin halos of bloodshot white. Pulses of red light, rotating like an angry lighthouse—an eye of its own—searched those eyes, much as Cate was doing now, for knowledge.

Do you see the red light? she mentally transmitted to the cow. Do you understand it? Did you see what happened before the red light? Do you understand what happened? The cow stared.

Do you understand that this little girl I'm holding, the one mooing at you, the one petting your face... do you understand that her mother is the one who killed your calf? Based on its indifference, she couldn't tell if the calf was blood-related to the cow. Would he or she—Cate couldn't tell which—bite Millie if it understood the situation behind them? Would he or she reconsider biting if it understood the whole thing had merely been a matter of a broken fence? Would he or she refrain from seeking revenge upon Millie if it understood that the calf had wandered through the broken fence, onto the asphalt, and before Millie's mother's car? Would he or she rethink their potential bite if it understood that Millie's mother had, from the looks of the finale, done her best to avoid the calf, but instead clipped its behind, sending her speeding vehicle into the ditch? Would he or she accept that the calf had been mercifully put down, quickly and painlessly, unlike Millie's mother, who found herself wrapped deep within her metal womb, gasoline-for-placenta everywhere, unable to be reached or moved, lest she perish sooner?

The cow stared.

Cate focused on Millie's silhouette within the animal's sheeny eye: Do you understand? A voice answered the question. Cate couldn't make out the words, only the harshness of the voice. She sensed an approaching presence, and immediately understood what was happening. In a voice tailored for Millie's benefit, Cate said, "Please, don't come any closer," and resumed mooing along with Millie.

"Officer?" The voice didn't sound so harsh. Perhaps it hadn't been at all. Perhaps, Cate decided, she was prejudiced against voices outside of her and Millie's precious bubble. Cate sensed the intruder take another step forward.

"I said don't," Cate said in her rosiest voice.

"Officer, I need to examine the little girl," the soft voice said.

The well-meaning plea incensed Cate. She's fine. I checked her when I pulled her out of the car. Some scratches, a few bruises, but she's fine. I checked her. And I named her. She knew someone close to Millie must have known her real name, but for tonight, in her arms, the little girl would take the name of the first girl Cate had lost on the job.

Footsteps crunched behind them.

“Don’t,” Cate emphasized, momentarily breaking her character of utter serenity. Before the intruder could interject, she added: “I... just give us a few minutes, okay?” And then what? she thought.

Once again, she caught Millie’s silhouette in the cow’s eye. Do you have a father? Grandmother? Grandfather? Uncles? Aunts? Anybody? Do you know your name? What would become of Millie when Cate decided enough “few minutes” had elapsed? What would become of the little girl when the cow was gone?

The intruder’s footsteps—a paramedic just trying to do her job—retreated, but Cate sensed she hadn’t gone far; Millie did need to be examined.

She realized the screaming had died. It made sense to her, not because the outcome was inevitable, but because the paramedic now had time to check on the only survivor.

But they still had a few minutes.

And so Millie mooded.

Cate mooded with her.

The cow stared at them.

Water Dragon

Isabella Garino-Heisey '24



The Machine

Meredith Shepherd '24

Come one, come all! Live the American Dream and try your luck with the Capitalist Machine. Remember when we had to work for money, what a bore. Now making money isn't as much a chore. So, step on up to the machine and put in some hours, and it'll transfer each one for how much an hour of your life is worth. Where does this time go, you ask, only to the same place it did when you still worked! Time is money, isn't it? It's more efficient this way, you can live your life with the money you'll earn without working all day.

Step on up and interact with the display. The computer asks, how many hours do you want to exchange for money today? Put in an hour and it goes *chick-chack*, *chick-chunk*, or sometimes it goes *chick-chack-ching-a-ling*. If you hear that last one, you've got lucky, that's the sound you hear when you're worth a lot of money. But that almost never happens. Why do you think it would happen to You? You hold your breath and see your worth and you sigh, it's 7.25, not even enough to stay alive. But remember, that you are exchanging your time, if you spend it all you won't own yourself. You'll think it's a mistake and try to enter more time, but an error message occurs; you've spent away your life. Dear me, if that happens, you're fucked. Listen closely and your heart's *ba-bump*, *ba-bump* as it slowly becomes *chick-chack*, *chick-chunk*. Your life has drained away from your eyes, your body still stands but your soul has died. You're no longer person, just another soulless gear in the workings of the machine.

Sell yourself to the machine and fail to live the American Dream.

Story's End

Mark Hurtubise



Happily Ever After

Ethan Schmidt '25

Once Upon A Time...

Vallerie stared at the corner of her cell, watching water drip down the damp, cold stone. The magic-suppressing chains around her wrists and ankles bit into her skin. Her head rested against the wall. She had been sitting there, unmoving, for what felt like hours.

There was a princess.

Even if she wasn't chained to the wall, she had nothing to do. Nowhere to go. She huffed, a small smile forming on her face. Oh, how Mother would laugh if she saw Vallerie now. How ridiculous. A queen locked up in her own dungeon. Vallerie could hear her now. *If only you had listened to me Snowflake, I wouldn't have let this happen.*

The princess was trapped in a tall tower guarded by a cruel dragon.

Mother had laughed a lot. She had laughed and laughed and laughed. And then she died. And oh, how Vallerie had laughed then. Poor Queen Scarlet, so sure of her superiority, of her power over little Princess Vallerie. She never expected the little princess to slip poison into her nightly glass of wine. Never expected to end up dead on her bedroom floor, suffocated in a pile of her own vomit.

Every day, the dragon would tell the princess horrible things.

The guards puzzled and puzzled and puzzled. They were never able to figure out who had done it. But the little princess knew. The little princess knew everything. And it had taken all of her power to keep the smile off of her face. Good little princesses didn't smile at their mother's funeral, after all. And then the princess was a queen. And the queen had everything she wanted.

"You are going to die here alone," the dragon would say, "and no one will ever love you. Not the way I love you."

Almost everything she wanted.

The princess cried and cried. And the dragon laughed and laughed.

The sound of a door opening echoed through the dungeon. Vallerie perked up at the sound of it, her smile growing.

The princess read stories of princes rescuing princesses. She prayed for a prince to come and rescue her.

Her prince was here.

And One Day...

His footsteps echoed down the hall. Slow and halting. She wondered if he was still in pain. He must have been, the incident had only been several months ago. Oh, the dedication, her beloved had to come and see her despite everything. She loved him so.

...The prince finally arrived!

Before long, he was standing in front of her cell. Her prince looked tired. There were dark circles under his eyes, and his face was pale and thin. He was wearing sleep pants, but his chest was only covered by the plethora of bandages wrapped around it. She remembered the sound he had made as her ice ripped through his chest. A quiet gasp, quiet enough that she was sure she had been the only one to hear it. A sound just for her. She remembered the feeling of his blood splattered against her face and arms. She remembered the way he looked at her. Shocked and scared, then dim and resigned. And then he went limp. And then the guards grabbed her and wrenched her arms behind her back and cuffed her and dragged her down to the dungeons. But all she saw was her prince. Ice coming out of his chest, beautiful crystals covered in blood and gore, his dim eyes, his open gasping mouth.

The prince slayed the dragon and climbed the tower.

Prince Thea looked down at her. Tired brown eyes meeting bright green ones. "Hi, Val."

When the prince and the princess saw each other, it was love at first sight!

He sat down in front of the cell. Vallerie moved as close to him as she could, the chains stopping her right before she could reach the bars.

"My prince! I've missed you so much, have you missed me? I'm sure you have, why wouldn't you?" She laughed and smiled at him. He didn't smile back.

The prince and the princess left the tower and moved into a beautiful castle together.

He sighed and let his head fall down into his arms. "Why do I keep doing this?"

"My prince?"

And they lived happily ever after!

"I just— I thought—" He snapped his head up to look at her. "Do you regret this?" he asked, gesturing at his chest. "Do you regret doing this to me? Do you feel any remorse?"

They lived happily ever after.

Vallerie frowned. "Of course I do. I didn't want to kill you, my love."

"But it's not— it's not just that." Tears began to form at the corners of his eyes. "You—"

Happily. Ever. After.

"You hurt me. You hurt me a lot. And I was so scared of you— I AM so scared of you."

...

"Oh, my prince..." She reached her hand as far as she could towards the jail bars. Hesitantly, he reached through the bars and took her hand. She ran her fingers gently over his palm.

Where is it.

"I only did those things to you because I loved you."

WHERE IS IT.

He flinched away from her, falling back against the opposite wall. He stared at her, tears dripping down his cheeks.

GIVE IT TO ME.

"I—" he laughed, a pained, humorless sound. "I'm such a fucking idiot. I thought— I thought THIS would change things." He gestured frantically at his chest. "I thought YOU were going to change. I thought you didn't want to hurt me, I thought I could FIX things."

GIVE ME MY HAPPILY EVER AFTER!

"I thought you loved me." Her prince sobbed.

I WANT IT!

"But I do love you—"

I NEED IT!

"NO, YOU DON'T!" he screamed, stumbling to his feet, leaning against the wall for support. "You don't love me, you've NEVER loved me. You love your prince. And I *tried*. I tried so hard to be him, I tried so hard to make you *happy*. But I couldn't, because I'm not him. And I'm never going to be him."

WHERE IS IT GIVE IT TO ME GIVE IT TO ME NOW!!

"It's ok, my prince! I can make you into him, I can make you perfect, I can make us happy."

Thea stared at her. He took a deep breath, released it. "I'm leaving."

GIVE IT TO ME I NEED TO BE HAPPY WHY AREN'T I HAPPY!!

Vallerie stared at him. She felt cold. "No."

He turned to leave. "Goodbye, Val."

MAKE ME HAPPY

"NO." She screamed, she howled. She strained against the chains but they wouldn't give and he just kept walking away. "COME BACK!"

HE'S MY PRINCE HE'S SUPPOSED TO BE MINE

"COME BACK HERE PLEASE PLEASE COME BACK COME BACK!"

HE'S SUPPOSED TO MAKE ME HAPPY

"COME BACK! YOU'RE MY PRINCE YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE MINE YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO LOVE ME YOU HAVE TO COME BACK!"

GIVE IT TO ME GIVE ME MY HAPPILY EVER AFTER WHERE IS IT I NEED IT I NEED IT I NEED IT GIVE IT TO ME I'M SUPPOSED TO BE HAPPY I NEED TO BE HAPPY I WANT TO BE HAPPY PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE MAKE ME HAPPY

And they lived happily ever after!

The End.

Violets for my Sisters

Annalise Bassett '25



Third Shift

Paetyn Greve '25

The hotel was silent aside from the faint whirring of the box fan in the back office and the hum of the washing machines in the laundry room. It was hardly more than an hour into my shift, just past midnight, and I was already bored. The third floor was shut down for renovation, which meant our already small repertoire of guests was cut in half.

I'd already checked in every guest that was due to arrive, had cleaned the coffee station, and put in the first load of laundry for the night. I reclined in a rolling chair in the back office, idly scrolling through social media, flicking my gaze to the security feeds every couple seconds.

There was a faint hiss as the automatic doors opened, bringing with it a gust of humid air. I stood up slowly from the chair, knees popping, as I walked around the corner to greet the newcomer.

He was nondescript, in a loose gray shirt and jeans, a blue hat over his head. He held up a plastic grocery bag with a sheepish smile. "Delivery," he said. "Where's your elevator?"

I pointed around the corner. "Just to your right," I told him. "I didn't know any place took orders this late."

He shrugged. "Me neither, but pay is pay."

I watched him as he walked to the elevator, a faint feeling of apprehension coiling in my belly. I was sure most places stopped delivering after nine, but I couldn't bring myself to care too much. Salem Motel sat at the intersection of two major intersections. We got mostly business travelers, people who had driven for hours and couldn't be asked to drive any further, and the occasional spattering of people who were less desirable.

I got paid just enough to show up and shut up, as my other coworkers would tell me. It was better if I didn't get involved unless something was *egregiously* wrong. I slumped in the chair in the back office, checking the cameras as the guy knocked on a door on the second floor and stepped inside.

Weird.

I snorted to myself and texted a friend about it, making a joke about some sort of affair. I clicked back onto a wordsearch I'd been doing earlier, propping my feet up on the counter. An hour ticked by, seconds like the drip of molasses.

Agonizingly slow.

The ringing of the phone startled me, and I shifted in the chair, reaching to grab the portable phone.

“Front desk, this is Summer, how can I help you?” I asked, putting my own phone down to listen to what would probably be a request for a wake-up call.

A deep sigh, like the person on the other end was annoyed at having to call. “I’m in Room 218. The room next door is making a lot of noise—can you please call and tell them to quiet down? I have to be up at 5 for a conference.”

I pushed my tongue against the inside of my cheek. “Yeah, no problem. I’ll give them a call. Sorry about that.”

The guest hung up without another word, and I turned to dial up to 220, the room right next to 218. The phone rang once, twice, and then someone answered, breathing heavily on the other end like I’d interrupted something.

“This is Summer from the front desk.” I tapped my nails on the laminate countertop. “I received a call issuing a noise complaint about your room. I’m just requesting that you try to keep the noise to a lower level.”

A low chuckle, like the rasp of a cat’s tongue. “Oh?” someone on the other side asked. I could guess by the voice it was a man, his voice husky. “Well, I’ll have them keep it down in the future.”

“That would be great, thank you,” I said dully, hanging up the phone. Weird phrasing was the least of my worries—I’d probably heard weirder. After working in hospitality, you learn to just tune most things out.

A flicker of movement on the second floor cameras caught my eye, and I turned my attention back to it. The delivery guy walked out, his clothes rumpled, hat pulled low over his face. He avoided looking at the cameras as he moved next door, knocking. The door opened, and he disappeared inside.

Now it was getting weird. One of the housekeepers had told me about a time two couples booked rooms next to each other and switched partners throughout the night. I texted the friend from earlier with the update. Maybe it was a swinger situation—who knew?

Another phone call came through, this one complaining about noise from 218. Oh, the irony. I called up to the room and got no response, so with a heavy sigh,

I pocketed the portable phone and slid my own in my pocket, grabbing the master key. As I waited for the elevator to begin the laborious descent from the second floor to the first, I opened my phone, clicking into the security camera app to watch the feeds.

Thank God for little mercies and competent managers. The elevator dinged and I stepped inside, pressing the button for the second floor. I wrinkled my nose and made a mental note to spray it with some sort of air freshener. A tiny metal box didn’t bode well for foul smells.

On the second floor, I rapped my knuckles against 218. There was a long pause, and then footsteps.

The door opened a few inches, stopped by the chain. I could see half of a face, and although I couldn’t be sure, I was pretty positive it was the delivery man.

“Hi,” I said, offering a pinched smile. “I got a noise complaint for this room. I tried to call but you didn’t answer. Could you folks just keep it down? It’s quiet hours.”

The glint of white teeth in a grin. “We were a little busy,” he said, and my stomach dropped. The hair on the back of my neck prickled. “But we’ll be quiet now, Summer.”

I nodded curtly and stepped back, prepared to walk away and call it a night. But the door didn’t close all the way, and I stayed still, rooted by sick curiosity.

There was a muffled groan from inside the room, followed by a squelching noise. My stomach churned at the sound.

Something liquid splattered, damp and heavy like rain.

Bile rose in my throat, and I pivoted, turning away, trying to make as little noise as possible. Someone barked a curse, and then there was the sound of a chain unlatching as I rounded the corner.

My heart rose to my throat as I darted into the stairwell, not bothering to wait for the elevator. I checked the security feeds as I hurried up the stairs, headed for the third floor. The plastic sheeting crinkled under my feet as I stepped out, watching on the cameras as a man stalked through the second floor hallway. It was the same delivery guy, but his cap was gone. He carried something in his hand—with dread settling like a shroud over my bones, I realized it was a knife.

I turned into the first room nearby, unlocking it with the master key. The entire room was stripped, concrete floors and half-done wallpaper stuck onto otherwise plaster walls. The man was still walking through the second floor, turning his head this way and that.

With shaking fingers, I dialed 911, holding my breath as the operator's voice crackled over the line.

"911, what's your emergency?"

"I'm at Salem Motel," I breathed out, making sure the door was still locked. "There's a man here with a knife, and I think he's already killed people."

Computer keys clacked in the background. "Are you safe?"

"I'm in a room," I whispered. "It's locked. He's on the floor under me, but I think he's looking for me."

A couple more keystrokes. "Okay. What's your name?"

"Summer." My name was barely more than an exhale. "I'm the front desk agent."

She instructed me to stay on the line and try to barricade the door, telling me dispatch is ten minutes out. I kept the line open while I opened the security cameras again.

But the second floor was empty.

I made a choked noise in my panic, switching between feeds until I opened the third floor cameras.

Shit.

"He's on the third floor now," I told the operator, my voice wobbling. "He's on the third floor."

A rustling noise made me stand up, and I watched on the cameras as the man checked the door handles. With a sinking feeling in my gut, I checked my own fingers. They were coated in white plaster dust from the powder that had coated the door handles. He would probably know what room I was in.

Sure enough, the door handle jiggled. I frantically looked around the room,

ignoring the words of the operator on the line requesting updates. The handle jiggled again, more aggressively, the wood groaning as the man pushed against it.

The window. The glass had been removed while renovations were ongoing. I could hear the wail of sirens approaching, but I couldn't wait.

I scrambled over to the window, tearing the tarp off to reveal the hole. It was a dizzying drop, probably around 25 feet. *I could survive that, couldn't I?*

The lock on the door broke with a loud splintering noise. The choice had been made for me.

I jumped.

The fall lasted forever and was over in a breath at the same time. My name was shouted from the phone and the man in the room at the same time as I plummeted.

My ankle made a sickening crack as I landed upright on my feet. Pain surged through my body, and I swallowed back the urge to vomit at the sear of agony. I whipped around to see the man leaning out the window, leering, blood smeared over his forehead.

"I jumped out of the window," I gasped out, talking into the phone as I moved towards the entrance of the hotel. The sirens were getting closer. "I think I broke my ankle."

As soon as the sliding doors opened, I slammed my hand against the fire alarm, yanking it down. The wails of the alarm mingled with the screaming of police sirens. White flashing lights in the hallway of the motel intercut the blue and red lights of the cop cars. The sprinklers opened, showering me and the lobby in water. Guests spilled from their rooms, clinging to spouses and children, holding robes around their bodies.

Cops found the guy as he was leaving. It's hard to surreptitiously leave when you're drenched with blood.

In total, six people died. The man was convicted of two counts of first degree murder and four of second degree murder. He got two life sentences with no chance for parole.

Families sued the owners of Salem Motel for wrongful death, and they were forced to sell to afford their lawyer fees. I was painted as the final girl, the lucky survivor.

I don't feel that lucky, though. I shattered my ankle and can hardly walk without pain. I lost my job, and became a social pariah.

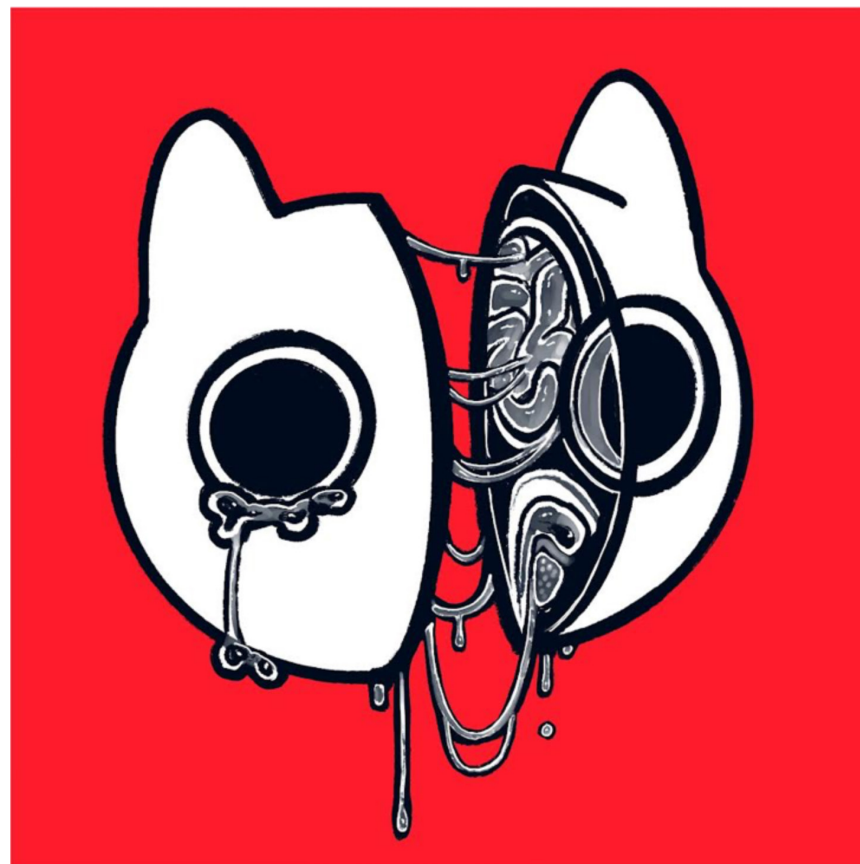
And then there was the letter I got in the mail today. Addressed to 'Summer at the front desk.'

There's a single folded piece of paper inside, with four words.

We have unfinished business.

Headsplitter

Wren Abney '26



Leaving Night

Ed Higgins

Sometimes
in the middle of the night
awake under a panoply
as mordant as Doré
illustrating Dante

spelunking to the dark center
of your best suppressed terror
asking
 will I ever get out of here
alive?

If so, only temporarily of course.
Fear, tap, taps again and again
an old séance table leg,
moonlight over a wrong shoulder,
strangers waiting in shadows
all appearing magically
out of so many black hats
fear everywhere
 with the fecundity of rabbits,
 rats around a grain bin,
under your bed when you were a child.

Now, the chill of winter bedsheets
or dinner's spiced rellenos
may be causing these thoughts—
but you can't really know.
Illusions exhaust finally even
magicians

a life-time of spectacular escapes
and Harry Houdini couldn't get back.
The darkness digested him.

Then, just as the whole of universal darkness
spasms like a sphincter,
 or a predator's jaws closing
 on a small antelope's spine

thank God,
 the radio-alarm goes off.

Artificial Life Lessons

Madison Ragsdale '27

The optimization of existence is something that everyone wants to experience. A life without pain and suffering is thought to be impossible because you must learn those key life lessons in order to appreciate what you have truly. I, Lily Parker, am destined to do life on my own terms and learn those lessons at my own pace. I guess you could say this all started when I was nine at my grandmother's funeral, I never really knew her well but I could tell that this loss really upset my mom. I had never seen my mom cry before this and it was terrifying, the strongest woman I knew, was crying. On the car ride home I had an awakening, an idea, and a goal, I was destined to master the art of grief. So, for my birthday that year I asked for a goldfish, I named it Mr. Gold and really bonded with it, well, as much as you can with a fish. Then, once I believed I had optimized our relationship, I flushed him down the toilet and mastered grief. I then thought to myself, *What if I can master other things too?* and decided I would do just that.

When I was 14, my parents divorced and I watched them begin to become unraveled and lost, eventually becoming cold shells towards one another. This inspired me to learn my next great life lesson, navigating heartbreak. So, I finally agreed to go out with Nick, after all, he's liked me since we were 10. After our first date, he asked me to be his girlfriend and of course, I said yes, knowing I didn't want to be with him. I waited a week to get the full relationship effect, then broke up with him, on our one-week anniversary, which is pretty significant for some 14-year-olds. Something that I hadn't taken into account was the guilt I'd feel after, Nick had been my friend for years and all of that had been erased because of my choice to break his heart. I guess I will just have to account for that next time.

At 17 it was college application time and I thought it would be a great time to learn the art of rejection. I applied to Harvard, Stanford, and Yale as an early decision applicant with a 3.3 GPA and prepared for my rejection letters, and they came, nearly immediately. I felt better now knowing that no matter what happened with the rest of my applications, I already mastered rejection, so I would be fine. I settled on a much cheaper and less competitive state school and began my freshmen year feeling so much more mature and prepared for life than the rest of these kids. That is until my stepdad called me halfway into my second semester to tell me that my mom was sick and I needed to come home to see her. Perhaps at nine, I didn't really know what grief fully meant, I didn't know you could grieve someone who was still alive, but dying, I sure felt bad for flushing Mr. Gold now.

I finished college and made the Dean's List every year, the pride I felt in my parents was unlike anything I had ever experienced, I noticed my mom getting weaker and exhausted, but I knew everything would work out, it always did. I applied to law school that summer and was accepted for the following spring

semester. When I got there, I would have never expected who was there too, Nick. I walked straight up to him, expecting us to be instantly reconnected and excited to see one another again. I tapped him on the shoulder, "Oh my gosh! Long time no see!" I said with a large grin on my face. He said nothing, instead looking confused he turned around and left. I had never felt rejected quite like this before. Eventually, in our second year of classes, we began to talk again, even becoming friends once more. He was incredibly smart and funny, we bonded over old childhood memories. I started to genuinely like him, and we began dating throughout the rest of law school. Trouble began however, when after graduation, I wanted to move to the East Coast, and he wanted to go to the West Coast. It became very clear that one of us would have to compromise our goals and aspirations, which neither of us wanted to do. We decided to go our separate ways, and for the first time, I felt absolutely shattered, lost, and abandoned. It felt like the whole world needed to be stopped and come to a halt, because of my breakup. I had assumed that I would get a text from him one day apologizing for the disagreement and we would work it out and get back together, but that text never came, I threw my phone in frustration landing it right in the toilet. Well, at least I had just mastered anger management real quick. As my whole world stopped, the time passed anyway.

As I grew older and more mature I realized that what I had failed to account for is that I couldn't choose when those life lessons would come my way, when loved ones died, or how much I would love them when they did. My mom was no fish, after all, she was a woman of great beauty. I cried at my mom's funeral, as she did at her mother's and my daughter will at mine. The timeline for grief was much longer than I thought it would be, I sat for hours thinking of how my mom would never become a grandma, see me get married, or grow old. It still catches me to this day and I have to remind myself that I can't change the cards I was dealt but I can choose how I play them. I have finally learned that it all was never a puzzle to be solved, but a journey to be lived.

Color Is Us

Nicole Shariatmadari '24



MYOPIC SLEEP

Mark J. Mitchell

Because she doesn't see well, her dreams blur
like greasy glasses. She's always unsure
about what night shows her. There's that one face
with masked eyes that often appears quite late
as her alarm rings. But the cooling lips
she tastes around three, that touch she just missed,
they're never clear. She won't bequeath a kiss
in dirty dreams, only in waking thought—
odd, but true. Sweet, slow night moisture is bought
with sin, she knows. She needs glasses that see
into her dreaming soul. That, like a night light,
can drive demons off. She's sad her sight
is worse in dreams. There's no optometrist
to treat drowsing eyes. She's trapped in blurry sleep.

Kingdom of Stone

Mike Bemis

Dedicated to Gloria Zaiger, a friend and admitted taphophile

Near sundown, pass I through wrought iron gates
Monuments graven with names, kin and dates
Noiseless, save for crunch of gravel 'neath feet
Contemplate life and the whims of the fates

Mighty oaks, filtered light, clustered in glades
Tall pines, standing watch, as day slowly fades
A willow weeps for all those that are lost
With each breeze, whisper secrets of the shades

Mottled granite: varied size, shape, and hue
Angels, draped figures of marble, there, too
Obelisk, steeple, temple, long shadows
Encrusted, pristine, the old and the new

Empire builders who boldly seized the day
Lie side by side with those of common clay
Upon a bench, an open volume lay
Selected Poems, by the Brit Thomas Gray

"Here lies sweet William, Aged 1 Yr., 5 Mo."
Epitaph only hints, grief that confronts
Family, the victim of dread disease,
Forgotten now, took many a life once

"Mary, Died in Childbirth, 28 Years"
Barefoot maid, beneath shroud, sheds sculpted tears
Science, medicine, do only so much
Ignorance yet manifests in our fears

"This soldier the red battlefield once trod
Gave all for his country, known but to God
Fell at Shiloh, 1st Minnesota Battery
Eternal slumber now, beneath the sod"

Only one way to come into this world
We're born: into the rough and tumble hurled
A thousand means allow us to depart
'Cross fresh mounded earth, a dust devil swirled

Memento mori! Do not be so proud,
Arrogant, churlish, or boastful so loud
Look down. Your future a hole in the ground
I murmur a prayer with my gray head bowed

So, build our tombs with brick and with mortar
Our lives are short and our youth is shorter
Create something—immortality gained
Praised and remembered from every quarter

Back out the gates, I have sins to atone
Sky all ablaze now, Lord's heavenly throne
Today at an end, tomorrow unknown
'haps meet my maker, his kingdom of stone

Mossy Rocks

Jennifer Schmidt



The Lake in the Yard

Maureen Sherbondy

A lake appeared in my yard. Yes, it had rained for three consecutive days, so it seemed natural for some water to accumulate in the back yard. The one-acre lot did, after all, slope downward.

But even after the storm ceased, the lake continued growing wider and longer, even expanding beyond my neighbor's property line. Mr. Griffin was away on vacation out west, so I couldn't ask his opinion on this issue.

By the end of a week, fish appeared in the pond, followed by ducks, then small boats.

Fishermen wearing ballcaps and camouflage vests lined up with their rods and nets. I confronted them.

"Hey, this is private property!"

One flashed his fishing license. Another took a long drag on a cigarette, then told me I didn't own the lake or the fish. He tossed an empty beer bottle onto my lawn.

Eventually, I bought a canoe and paddled away.

Heavy, Heavy Bones

Samantha Donndelinger

She looked delicate in her brokenness, like part of her was grateful. The waves rushed to fall over the bird's slouched body as if she were sculpted from sand and they didn't notice the difference.

"Is it hurt or is it resting?" I asked.

"No, something's wrong," Léon said as we approached the loon on the shoreline. "I want to see her face."

She threw her head back, straining her neck, bending it so far behind her it looked like it might snap. As the water gathered and pulled into the ocean, her face lulled to her chest, tucking herself into the sand.

"What happened to her?"

"Loons have solid bones," Léon replied. "Sometimes, if they swim too long, they get tired." He crouches by the bird. "And they drown."

Later that night, I googled loons to see if he was right.

Loons are the only birds that have solid bones, it said. **Their heavy bones help them dive deeper and make it harder for them to stay afloat.**

We met while he was visiting New York for the summer. We spent so much time together that I felt dizzy when alone. It was like I was getting too much air not in his presence, and my lungs didn't know what to do with the excess. Like the cosmos made a mistake, we were meant to be sewn together that way.

Loons are large, diving waterbirds with rounded heads and dagger-like bills. They have long bodies and short tails that are usually not visible. If you encounter an oil-soaked bird, do not attempt to handle it yourself. Specially trained professionals can provide the necessary care and treatment for the bird's best chance of survival. Do not attempt.

You're hard to compliment, he joked on the night sidewalk, two weeks into dating each other. *I don't tell you how beautiful you are enough. But I don't think you want to hear it.* Something simple, taken for granted, like the pages of a book slightly torn, but they meant something.

"I don't need compliments," I replied. Do not attempt.

Preserving and respecting wildlife and their habitats is essential for maintaining the delicate ecological balance in our surroundings. It is easy to spook a loon, especially in the wild.

On my fire escape, the third week in, lonely, scared of the dark, the shingles rusting and breaking. He held my hand during our first fight. Watch your head when you climb out the window. It's easy to scrape your knee on the edge. Drenched in my own interruption, he held my hand as I tried to pull away and climb back inside.

"It's okay if you're done," I said.

My patterns were suddenly strewn out like loose magazines, with glaring scrutiny, revealing my history. It felt like falling. Like I knew the land was coming but wasn't sure exactly when I would hit it. "I want to work this out," he said. He held my hand.

Disturbing loons can disrupt their incubation process. It is important to keep a respectful distance, or it could lead to nest failure and abandonment.

When he left on his flight to go back to Zurich, where he's from, I didn't cry. It was the first time I wasn't afraid of leaving or being left. I sat in my dark green Volkswagen Beetle, the glow of brake lights swerving around me in silent honks, and I watched him float through the JFK airport doors with equanimity. The security guard told me, *you can't stay here you have to go.* So I turned the key roughly and merged without looking.

"What kind of bird would you be?" I asked him one day.

I think his bones would be too light for him to control. The breeze would lift him into the clouds and allow him to linger somewhere on the horizon. He picks up bees on the sidewalk and takes them to clovers. He doesn't yell unless he's excited. He hums when he walks, little snippets of songs he's never heard.

Loons are water birds, only going ashore to mate. Their legs are placed far back on their bodies, allowing efficient swimming but only awkward movement on land.

Out of her element. Reckless, a little bit.

It seems obvious. How could two damp lungs forget how to breathe, the one thing we need to stay alive? Maybe she forgot some other parts too.

Forgot that diving is easy, falling is free, but meeting someone on land is harder when her bones are heavy enough to glue her to the first wrong move she makes. Paddling her feet, because she thought she could conquer the entire ocean with one little breath, thought she could exhaust the tides with one bold dive.

Lying in bed together, “Breathe,” he said softly. I didn’t realize I was holding myself together, avoiding the exhale at all costs, until he said it. “*Breathe.*” I feel the tightness in my chest expand as I inhale. *Breathe.* I think all I have ever wanted is for someone to notice that I wasn’t.

Another wave washed across the bird’s ruffled body, and this time, she didn’t move.

Seasons Change

Isaac Lally '25



TRINITY

Molly Billiard '25

In the dark, I can pretend that every river is iridescent,
that I can get up close to the water and see myself.
But there's only so long in an audition,
and the olive groves in Gethsemane already saw this outcome.
I'm starting to see the value in being irreverent,
the benefits in holding onto something you'll inevitably relinquish.

I want more than I am owed. And I want to be selfish.
I want to take and take and take until I can't,
I'm a bad person, I think,
because I want to be even more selfish and give and give myself to a bigger
cause, to a bigger person—just to find out what I become.
You can take my skin and feel its erosion—

a man, a bull, an eagle, a lion;
a formless mass in the mirror, a thousand spinning eyes of fish.
My tongue and teeth touch the bottom before God decides the outcome—
I cling to roots and rocks until I don't.
They find my clothes folded on the bank; I find myself somewhere halfway between
the struggle and the sink.

I want more than I deserve, more than I want to think.
I want a long-forgotten temple, I want a halo, I want resolution—
I want a church with muraled walls, a castle with a hundred gardens, for myself
to be something both minute and overwhelming, to both stay quiet and embellish.
You can do anything to me, you can lie to me if you want—
just let me pretend for just a little while longer, leave me for the rapids to exhume.

Every word I say should be taken with a grain of pantomime.
To feel, to breathe, to think—

I am a three-act play about letting go, about attachment:
about the shock, the stop, the convulsion;
a hypoxic prayer before the finish.
Just below the waterline I can see myself.

There's a world where I am not myself
(It's easier than it looks to overcome).
I can wash this body skinless, no more blemish;
I can be good for you, I think—
if you can just leave me to my delusion
(I've always wanted to be a wildflower or a saint).

The Ohio River is warm, I think.
To love without repercussion, to give until you can't.

The Theoretical Ship

Robert Wexelblatt

Dittlos was up with the sun, squinting at the waves sparkling merrily. The fishermen were either preparing their boats or already pushing off. In a few hours the procession of the chosen fourteen would arrive with the priests and priestesses, flute-players and thieves, the whole urban mob pouring down from the city ready for the annual holiday. He had put off what he had to do until the last moment. Why did he dread what was his duty, his destiny—and not just his, but his father's, and his father's before him, going back five generations. Dittlos' father had predicted this day after making the last of his entries on the family's scroll, the record of their repairs. Pistos had said to twelve-year-old Dittlos, "If the gods spare you, son, the last plank will be laid by you."

Weeks ago, after he pushed his thumb deep into the spongy plank, he had cut the replacement to length and smoothed it. Then he put it aside. Did he expect the rotten plank would be made miraculously sound, that Apollo or Poseidon would see to it? Not at all. Dittlos felt the full force of what he had to do and the confusion it could incite. Should he tell anybody? And what did he, Dittlos, think? He had a long time to ponder the question, but he was still of two minds. But then so much about Theseus himself was ambiguous. For instance, Dittlos had heard a few old men claim that the hero founded Athens, while most others scoffed pointing out that he was the son of Aegeus, who was king of Athens. Theseus could hardly be the founder of a city of which his father was already king. The ambiguity of Theseus began in the womb. His mother, Aethra, wife of Aegeus, was said to have been impregnated by Poseidon, in which case, he wasn't the proper heir of Aegeus. Others say that he was Aegeus' son, and that the Poseidon story was just the Greeks' custom of turning a hero into a demigod. Demigod? Isn't that ambiguous too, thought Dittlos. Theseus raised the rock, retrieved Aegeus' sandals and sword, was acknowledged by the king, and claimed his patrimony. But what was it Aegeus acknowledged? That Theseus was his son and heir or that the boy had passed a test any muscular adolescent might have, especially if they were the son of the sea god?

Minos and Ariadne, the dispatching of the Minotaur, rescuing of the seven boys and seven girls, and the other adventures of Theseus culminated in his uniting of the demes in the *Synoikismos*, all of which was embodied in the ship, Athens' ship of state. And all of it was commemorated in the annual voyage to Delos to honor Apollo with the chosen fourteen. For this, the city purified itself, suspending executions, with lustrations and better behavior. The ship had, therefore, to be maintained and it was to the family of Dittlos that the task had been assigned generations ago.

But when the last plank was replaced—what then?

The ship of Theseus would no longer be Theseus' ship, thought Dittlos. But then he asked why the hull, the planks, the ropes, and oars were significant? Wasn't it because of what they represented, what people thought of when they saw them? The ship was as ambiguous as Theseus' paternity, both a thing and an idea. An idea is more durable than wood that rots, more powerful because immutable. After all, the chosen boys and girls who would shortly be boarding were not the sacrifices sent to Crete. Nor was Dittlos any longer the boy who had heard Pistos' prediction. What did it matter if the ship was not the original one? And yet, it did matter. And wasn't the twelve-year-old Dittlos somewhere inside the forty-year-old carpenter?

Theseus unified Attica. He saved seven boys and seven girls to help populate it. Should the Athenians learn that not even a single splinter of his original ship was left, they would, being Athenians, divide into camps and start to debate. The argument could turn bitter and undo the work of Theseus.

Dittlos fitted the final plank to the deck, and then, instead of recording what he had done, he burned the family scroll. But he was unable to keep anything from his faithful wife, Noikia. Nor could Noikia keep anything from her dearest friend, Kalytera.

Human Cracks

Arno Bohlmeijer

Be warned, please:
this is metaphorical
or will turn practical.

A wasp can be slapped
and gnats may be whacked
in self-defense or preventively.

Birds are put in tiny cages for life.
What about a butterfly or dragonfly?
A line of ninety ants: poison kills fine?

Shooting wildlife in reserves can be lawful,
40 claustrophobic years for goldfish in bowls,
traps for mice and moles: not quite in one blow.

Screaming and pooping rooks are protected species,
like the martens that wreck your car or roof and larder.
People are on death rows for years, except world leaders?

Beetle

Sophia Shaw '26



Missing You

John Quinn

One day, my dad borrowed a CD from his friend and never fulfilled his promise to return it.

Growing up, I was never very interested in music. I knew what I was familiar with. Friends and family introduced me to some songs, but none of them ever stuck. What reason did I have to explore beyond that? I had experienced rock and roll and was familiar with some of the major players. The Beatles, AC/DC, Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin, all bands that made for an easy Jeopardy question. Their songs were just welcoming sounds that I would stumble upon. I never sought to find it. The stolen CD altered everything for me after listening to its first track.

I remember first discovering “Some Girls” by the Rolling Stones. Dad and I would loop it over and over again whenever we would go for a drive. The opening song, “Miss You” was by far my favorite of the ten rich and rhythmic tunes to choose from. I would begin to miss “Miss You” so much that I couldn’t wait for car rides with Dad to listen to it. I would look it up online and enjoy it in new ways. It was a slight betrayal, taking this thing Dad had introduced me to and running off with it for myself. I would play it in the background as I did chores or homework. I’d blast it through a speaker, louder than the running water so I could sing as I showered. Or I would peacefully listen with a pair of headphones and absorb the lyrics. From that song, I always felt a spark.

“Singing after dark, people think I’m crazy.”

“Miss You” made me feel free. It helped me come out of my comfort zone. I would sing it aloud no matter how many people were covering their ears. I’d cover the song as I played online video games. The cyberbullying and teamkills didn’t discourage me. I used to play it out loud when I walked to the bus stop each morning. I even sang it karaoke style to my family once. We were on vacation at the beach and they were all a little drunk and probably don’t remember. Except Dad, sober for 18 years now, he got the full experience when I performed.

It’s humbling to hear how people discovered their first favorite song. There are so many possibilities. If you’re lucky, they will tell you how they found their cringiest song. With so much saturation, I sometimes feel like I am neglecting my musical core. Never had so much music been exposed to me before going to college. Living at school, you get to experience the tastes of thousands of people coming from all walks of life. Your new tastes grow, but they may grow dense, covering your roots. A blessing in disguise has befallen me recently. My phone’s charging port is a bit messed up and I’m always chasing a full battery. Worse than that, my AUX cord only works half the time. Car rides have become much less enjoyable.

Unbeknownst to him, my Dad’s still a thief. The copy of “Some Girls” he ‘borrowed’ is still in my car to this day. It has been experiencing a renaissance. I love riding around campus, windows down, shades on, blasting “Miss You.” It’s made me feel like a bit of a kid again. That young version of me who’s first discovering what he appreciates.

“Hey, let’s go mess and fool around. You know, like we used to.”

Spotify has changed the way I listen to music now, and as a repercussion, who I listen with. When I pick someone up, I can feed anything imaginable through the AUX cord. I have playlists with hundreds of songs and I’m not (usually) ever so hyper-fixated on one. I’ve begun to appreciate new genres, fresh artists, and music I never would have thought I enjoyed. Whenever I want to queue up a specific song, I tend to scroll to the bottom of my playlist. Zipping by the neglected old guard to where the new additions reside. I still love 70’s Rock but I can say it doesn’t hold the same allure. When I first discovered it, it was like a shiny new toy. Today, rock and roll to me is a safe genre to fall back on in times of need. Nowadays I love rap, indie, reggae, and pop. I have a healthy mix of music and I can click shuffle whenever I need a dose.

As a twenty-year-old, I love music. I have posters on my walls, I’ve bought a nice pair of earbuds which I wear more than I don’t, and I Shazam a new song daily. Music is a bigger part of my life than it ever has been before. It helps me study, relax, get pumped up, and make time go by. I have become comfortable with different music genres and will listen to almost anything, but we all start from somewhere. “Miss You” was my first-ever favorite. Yeah, we have our highs and lows. Sometimes it’s like I’m hearing it for the first time, other days, I want to skip it because I’m getting sick of it. Yet, I know *he* will be there. I can always rely on him and he will always be there to fall back on. It may have taken some overexposure and me going away to school to realize it but, my Dad’s a rockstar.

“I guess I’m lying to myself, it’s just you and no one else.”

Light Shapes Shadow Figures

Isabella Garino-Heisey '24



The Tale of the Befuddled Cranberry

Vivian Jacobs '26

The day began with business as usual. Dr. Paul Piddlesmith was sitting in his office, grading papers, and drinking a \$9 latte from a coffee shop in Madison. Usually, he hits Café 1827 in the campus center for his cheap morning coffee, but not anymore. The President of Hanover College, Ringo Rogers, had shut down the café due to his dislike of coffee. So now Paul was reduced to buying overpriced lattes on his way to work. He rolled his eyes at the thought. Suddenly, Paul's phone chimed on his desk with an alert. A message from his boss, John Jefferson, appeared on his screen.

It read, "Everyone, emergency meeting in the Ogle Center NOW. Cancel your classes for the afternoon and get here ASAP. This is not a drill. We have a situation."

The message was sent to the entire faculty. Finding humor in the panicked wording of the message, Paul messaged his wife, Penny.

"Yo. Did you see John's message? I'm hoping he's being overdramatic. What could possibly be going on that would require an emergency meeting? A Covid outbreak? Large-scale academic dishonesty? Look, now I'm being dramatic."

If only the answer had been that simple.

Paul quickly emailed the students in his remaining classes of the day, grabbed his keys, met up with Penny, and rushed to Ogle.

As the two entered the conference room, it was filled with their fellow professors and faculty. There was a buzz of gossip and activity, as no one knew what the emergency meeting was about.

Soon, John Jefferson entered the room and motioned for everyone to be quiet and sit down. He made his way to the front, with a panicked look on his face.

"So, I have gathered everyone here because of a dire situation that took place this morning in the Campus Center dining room; it is an ongoing issue..." he sighed and pushed his glasses back up the bridge of his nose.

"Basically, President Ringo Rogers barged into the dining room this morning, screaming hysterically. He was running up to students and yelling 'Look at me! Look at my deep red skin and my roundness. How did I get this way? Please help me, I woke up like this and I have no idea what happened!' Out of deep concern, a student alerted Campus Safety, who then alerted me. Upon further investigation, we discovered that Ringo had nothing physically wrong with him. Yet, somehow, he

woke up this morning believing someone had turned him into a... cranberry,” John finished with an exasperated sigh.

Some of the people in the room laughed, others were struck with disbelief, it being written all over their faces. Paul had a very puzzled look on his face.

John continued, “This meeting was mainly to let you all know the situation so that you can attempt to squander the concerns of your students. I do not want rumors floating around about any part of this. I don’t know what triggered this episode or when it will end, but I want it kept under wraps. Enough of the students already know about this, we do not need more discussions about it. I wanted to cancel classes for today so that we as a group can attempt to mitigate this situation. You are all free to go, do with your days as you please.”

As people began shuffling out of the room, John directed his attention to Paul specifically. He said, “Paul, I need to speak with you immediately.”

Oh, God. Why me? Paul thought.

After everyone had left, John sat down next to Paul.

He explained, “Look, here’s the situation. For whatever reason, Ringo believes you are the cause of and answer to all of his problems. He swears that you’re harboring some kind of magic wand that will turn him back from a cranberry to a person. At this point, we have no idea how to help, and letting you talk to him seems like our best bet. He’s in the next conference room if you’re prepared to talk to him.”

“You know, John, I’m not exactly sure how one can be prepared to talk to a man who thinks he’s a cranberry, but I appreciate the sentiment,” Paul retorted, visibly annoyed.

John led Paul into the next room, where Ringo was sitting, obviously shaken. As soon as Ringo laid eyes on Paul, he jumped out of his chair and onto the table. A bewildered look washed across Paul’s face. He couldn’t believe it.

President Ringo yelled, “SIR PAUL! YOU HAVE ARRIVED. YOU ARE MY SOLACE,” and bowed down on the table.

“Huh?? Listen guy, I’m not knighted. That’s Paul McCartney. We are not the same,” he snapped.

For a moment, a wave of confusion passed over Ringo’s face, but he was back to his nonsense soon enough. Apparently, they don’t have 1960’s British pop rock bands in Cranberryland. Shame.

“Please, Sir, you have condemned me to the life of a cranberry, and I cannot bear it, I cannot be a cranberry forever, I have a family, please! Please cure me! What if Oceanspray™ comes and kidnaps me and uses me in one of those commercials! I don’t want those men in overalls and plaid shirts to be stepping all over me! Those cranberries in that field of juice are like a playground for those farmer freaks. I’m begging you...” he continued absurdly.

“Ringo, look, man, I am not the answer to your prayers. You need serious psychiatric help for this—among other things—and I am not the guy for that,” Paul replied.

“Paul, this is not the moment to be coy. I already told John about the magical wand you’re harboring. You can fix me; you just don’t want to. Evil man!” Ringo shrieked.

“Magical wand? Are you insane? Actually, that’s a rhetorical question, because we clearly know the answer to that one, Mr. Craisin. I can’t believe this,” Paul quipped.

With a swift jab of his elbow into Paul’s ribs, John began, “See, Ringo, I told you. Paul has no idea what you’re talking about. He truly had nothing to do with this.”

By this point, Ringo had descended from the table and was crouched in a corner. John crossed the room to get closer to him, as he could hear a quiet mumbling coming from Ringo.

Barely above a whisper, he was repeating, “This cranberry caused a calamitous catastrophe. This cranberry caused a calamitous catastrophe. This cranberry caused a calamitous catastrophe.”

John and Paul stood over Ringo, peering down on the mess of a man.

“You know, I really did not want to interrupt his wife’s vacation, but this is getting serious. I’m calling her and seeing how she wants to go forward,” John explained.

With a nod, Paul exited the room and walked back to his office. When he returned, he swiftly went inside and locked the door. Approaching his desk, he opened a locked drawer and pulled out a silver, glowing magic wand. He could not believe the spell had worked. With a smirk to himself, he began packing up for the day. Grabbing the empty cup from his overpriced latte, Paul thought, *Poor Cranberry Man. Let’s see how long this ‘no coffee in the Campus Center’ thing lasts now. Now that your sanity is my leverage.*

Anomie

Alex Schillinger

I'm not convinced any of this is poetry
But rather the incontinent sorrow of neglected fury.
A voiceless sound. A void.
The same mistake cast on iron
Pressed against skin so hard it turns to rust
And falls apart before anyone reads a word.

I'm not convinced any of this should exist.
So desperate to destroy this negative space,
I take what is perfect and ruin it with words.
I place steel and stone on land and sink,
Drowning without water. Dying without...

I'm not convinced any of this matters.
As we all drift closer to dust
We create gods from air
Breathe them into the world,
Write their words for them
And fail to live up to their standards,
Finding ourselves in a hell we built from ash
Too preoccupied by fire
To see the beauty in the flame.

This is not a metaphor,
It's a God damned riot
In search of antipathy.
It's phallic, just like everything else,
But doesn't have a point.

Glow of Dawn

Sarah Steen '26



Black: I'm Proud.

Nkosilathi Moyo

I'm Black and I'm proud.
I have a voice and I'm loud.
My words shall free the oppressed.
I will leave everyone blessed, like an answered prayer does.
I once was, but no longer am I... a slave, the colonized.
Let me live, let me breathe.
You can't lynch me like you did Floyd.
I am a king like the European George.
And no. I am not a wannabe.
All I'm saying is that I'm free.
You can no longer shackle me.
I already broke your chains.
I stand ready to collect my gains,
For all the work that my people did on the plantation.
Let me mention it out loud, you owe me.
You can't deceive me.
You can't even whitewash me because I'm Black and I'm proud.

Written August 11, 2020.

Black Is: Word to the Race.

Nkosilathi Moyo

Black is when you don't crack,
Even if they infuse the ghetto with cocaine.
Black is when you refuse to point a gun at your type,
Even if they arm the hood with Mac-10s.
Black is when your life doesn't feed their stereotype,
Even if you are young or old.
Black is when you don't live for the hype,
Even if they promise you fame.
Black is when you live and die for freedom,
Even if you don't possess X in your name.
Black is when you aim for the life of a King,
Even if they don't believe that you are non-violent and organized.
Black is when you stay on track but refuse to compete,
Especially if it's to the detriment of your race.
Black is when you desire collaboration,
Especially to uplift people of African descent globally.

Written September 4, 2023.

Vibrato

Ken Holland

My father disappeared inside his memory
Until memory itself disappeared
My mother stared out her window
Searching for his shape.

Winter in its frigid rhythm
A trace of leaves stiff-necked in the wind
The earth huddled around its molten core
All of it mortal and precise.

Nothing is ever our own
All our murmurings sing
Then sing no more
The silt of our bones borne back
To the light of the stars.

Yet we're lifted by the heat of our blood
Witness to what is then is no more:
The blue cinema of beauty
The quiet vibrato of our lives.

Frozen Falls

Ethan Geraci '25



Shipwrecked

Isabella Garino-Heisey '24

The sight and sound of waves lapping hungrily at the beach and the ever-present sting of salt in the air turns his stomach, burns his chest, tightens his throat with flashes of memories soaked in absolute fear, where he breathed in water as if it were air—as the roar of winds and screams of the dying filled his ears. It's hard to say how long ago the storm tore apart the vessel, ripped him into the merciless ocean, and saw fit to leave him the only survivor. If you can call this surviving; it's certainly not living. And yet. And yet.

And yet.

The crunch of sand alerts him to the reappearance of the creature. Its company both a balm and a revolting reminder. This is an island of monsters. His skin feels tight on his face.

"Little human, you are sad today?" It tilts its head as if in question, curiosity seeming genuine, if detached.

"I'm not sure I'd call it that." He feels bile at the back of his throat.

The skeletal thing responds with a sound somewhere between rattling bones and soft birdsong. The contradiction is disturbing. The perpetual smile certainly doesn't help. Neither does the smell, like rotting meat. It's standing at his side now, empty eyes staring at the horizon. His nausea intensifies.

"Did it hurt?" A question he was hesitant to have answered.

"I remember not."

Anger ignites and fizzles out just as quickly. Irrational, completely irrational, he berates himself. This creature knows only the now, he learned in his early days on the island. The past holds no weight in its mind. It's a living corpse, animated, emotionless. Dead. Dead. Dead. *Dead.* And yet. And yet.

And yet.

His teeth clack together and nails dig into his palms. He doesn't want to die. He doesn't want to feel himself decompose. He wants to cry, but the tears won't come. When was the last time he had water? The waves. The memories. They burn, burn, *burn.* He can't bring himself any closer to the water.

"Little human, you are afraid?"

Unbidden, his eyes snap back to the skeletal face. Something like a deer or elk, but the fangs suggest another story. Its head is tilted toward him in question once more. This time it's much closer. It towers over him—he exists entirely within its shadow. The body is twisted, mangled, unnatural—a patchwork of green fur, scales, exposed flesh, and bone. The stench is nearly unbearable, burning his eyes and nose along with the salt.

"There were men before you."

The consolation might have worked, if he wasn't skeptical of its ability to remember that far back, if the previous men likely weren't the other creatures roaming the island. The rest are content to ignore him after passing glances of curiosity. He hates that he can read the body language now. How long has he been here?

"If you so desire, I can remove the fear that plagues you."

There is no change in tone, no alteration in expression—bone doesn't allow for such—but the offer sends chills down his spine, the most sinister the creature has ever sounded. The toothy smile fixed across its face not helping the feeling any. And yet. And yet.

And yet.

"How so?" He's all but helpless to ask, the words ripping themselves from his mouth before conscious thought can intervene. His skin prickles as the creature's smile gets impossibly wider.

"Is that a yes?" Slimy, oily, foul. But so certain, calm, relieving. The contradiction is disturbing. He should say yes.

"Not at all. I don't understand." But he does. He does understand.

"Just one yes, Little Human. Just the one and you're at peace."

Blood fills his mouth from biting his tongue, the tissue already thinned by dehydration. Why the hell is he resisting? Crashing waves then, gentle waves now. Screams replaced by calm. Too much water and now not enough. The fear is the same, festering like the thing beside him. It burns, burns, burns, *burns.*

His body shakes, lungs rattle, the moisture running down his cheeks is red. He's falling apart.

“Promise?”

“*Of course.*”

Then...

“Yes, yes, yes, *yes.*”

This is an island of *monsters*.

Another Venice

Nicole Shariatmadari '24



Heat

Ken Holland

Heat of volcanism at the depth
Of an oceanic rift, fire
That pours into water, water
Whose heat is that of fire

Heat of uranium, heat of enrichment,
Its interminable half-life of decay

Heat of Hiroshima

Heat in the resurgence of tears,
In the blood of grief

Heat of a mother's love, its geologic pressure,
Its metamorphic embrace,
Heat that shapes a child's molten heart

The cold heat in the ascension
Of a manganese moon

Heat in the middens of all that we've abandoned,
That sparks its own warmth, that resurrects
From what we've cast off

Heat of my brother's disdain
For what I believe in, and the heat
Of his hand pulling me toward his embrace

The heat of God, Buddha, Allah, Jehovah, Yahweh, Shiva,
Of desecration, appropriation, annihilation

The heat of Ra whose body is that
Of the falcon, wings singed from his own
Roiling eruptions

Heat from all that is intolerable—
Oppression, submission, the way shame
Brands itself into the skin of the mind,
How the sun cups an eye to burn away its vision.

Morrels

Sophia Shaw '26



2/10

SJS

Kinetics

India Turner

The world at night opened with a scream,
Hills bowed, let the sound tongue over them
Then the ocean currents; and tides
Overfull
Flooding mangrove forests under full
Moon
The orgasm of igneous rock
Tears, brackish and heaving even in pain
In briny exultation
In contraction;
An inhale (let go through the stomach)
And silence

That Fleeting Feeling

Bethany Ratliff '27



The Three Crows

Blessing Culver '22

The crows that perched on the graveyard tree had heard of this happening in the past, but they had never witnessed it before. Darkness pervaded the October night, and something vague and ominous hung in the air as the crows watched a man throw a shovel and a sack over the graveyard fence. They had known immediately, being intelligent creatures, that he had come to abduct a body, but for what purpose, they had no idea.

Complaining, the first crow spoke up. "How lucky this man is, able to dig up a grave whenever he wants. If I could do that, I would have eaten every body buried here. He can use his hands and his tools, and what do we have? Nothing! We must scavenge for ourselves."

The second crow replied, "That's not the best way to think about it. Think of what a great opportunity this is for us. Not every crow sees a grave robbery, you know!"

They continued to watch as the man walked to a recently filled grave. He held a small pinpoint light to view his tools, and, with his back turned to them, the crows could not see his face.

A naturally nervous and anxious bird, the third crow had cowered in silence up to this point. He now said, "This man could get us in trouble with that light. We're not supposed to reside here, and if he's discovered, we could be found and captured and killed!"

Beginning to work, the man picked up his shovel and he began to dig, removing the recently laid dirt. An autumn breeze rustled the dead and dying leaves hanging limply on the trees.

"Calm down," the first crow snapped condescendingly. "If someone detects him, they won't pay attention to us, they will focus on him. We don't want him exposed though. I know what we need to do. Once he gets the body out of its coffin and onto the ground, we will peck out his stupid human eyes, blind him, tear his throat out with our claws, and feast on his fresh flesh—"

"I don't like fresh flesh," interrupted the second crow. "The blood is much too warm; it could make me sick. I'll eat the body he carries out of the grave. That option holds much more appeal for me. This plan is good; I think it will work."

The man had already dug three feet into the ground and now had only three more to go.

Staring in horror, the third crow regarded the other two. Their inconsiderate, and obstinate relation to the obvious danger that was surrounding them seemed impossible to him. They knew nothing about this man, he could have incredible strength or speed. He could kill them, all because the others wanted to give in to greed. Falteringly, he pleaded with the others.

“Please don’t draw attention to us, we may all regret it.”

Brightly professing that absolutely nothing could go wrong with the plan, the second crow promised that everything would work out perfectly, and then they would all feast.

The man had reached the cement covering over the coffin, so he grabbed his pick from the pile of tools and began to work on breaking through. No longer being able to see the man, the crows could now only hear him.

A pang of helpless dread filled the third crow with each clang of the pick against cement. Although the graveyard lay far from any town, he worried that someone would hear.

“How strong this man is,” the first crow said. “If only I could use a tool like that. It’s not fair that humans have been given all the perks in the animal kingdom. Perhaps by eating him I will gain his strength.”

Reassuring him, the second crow verified that, “Yes, that’s definitely how it works.”

Trying to reason with the others for the last time, the third crow pleaded, “We have no guarantee that any of this will work. Their meat may even make us sick. Let’s not be hasty as we don’t need the food. Plenty of animals are about to die with the winter coming on.” Uneasiness and fear were beginning to overwhelm him.

“No, we’ll do this whether you like it or not. This human does not deserve everything he has. I deserve it,” preached the first crow.

The man had finished his work, and the crows waited in stillness for the man to climb out of the grave with the body. The ever-present breeze had stopped, and a dense, impenetrable fog filled the graveyard. Absolute and unalterable silence had fallen over the graveyard, and the atmosphere was thick and palpable. The third crow tensely awaited whatever fate destiny had in mind.

Suddenly, through the fog, two heads appeared in sight. Two seemingly living figures crawled hauntingly and laboriously out of the grave. The original man faced the crows for the first time, and his new accomplice stood next to him. The crows could now see the man’s eyes. They were not human eyes.

All of their plans were abandoned, and the three crows hurriedly flew away in fear.

Guarded Flame

Raine Houston '26



Mission Statement

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

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



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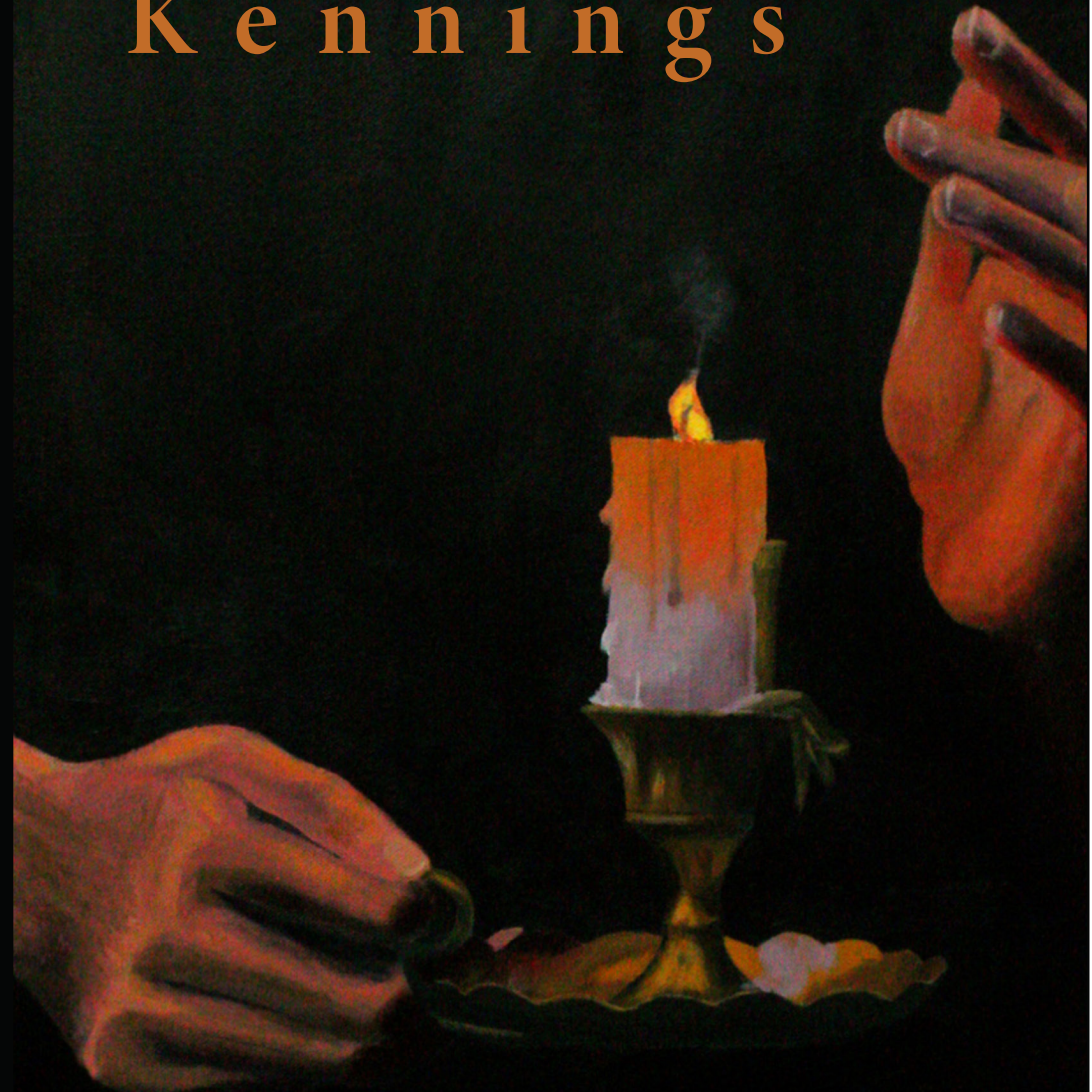


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