

Cycles




Volume XLIX
2023



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2023

Changing
Perspectives:
An Art & Literary Magazine



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Mission Statement

The goal of *Changing Perspectives* is to provide a student-run, student-supplied annual magazine that encourages creativity in the school community and recognizes high-quality literary and artistic work.

Policies

Changing Perspectives: Cycles is the forty-ninth art and literary magazine published by Delaware Valley Regional High School. From the first club meeting in September, a staff of students from 9th to 12th grade read, ranked, and selected collections of pieces submitted by the student body for regular online publication on our website and for the print edition at the end of the year. Selections were solicited through a school-wide contest sponsored by the Literary Magazine Club: we offered cash prizes for the best submissions in each of the following categories: Nonfiction, Fiction, Poetry, Photography, and Other Artistic Media. Pieces were judged blindly and evaluated individually based on content and quality of the work. As no print edition was published last year, winners for both this year's and last year's contests are acknowledged as they appear throughout this issue.

The authors approved any editing of work beyond minor spelling and grammatical errors. The magazine was then conceptualized and laid out by the staff, reviewed by the Delaware Valley Regional High School Administration for content, and sent to the printers.

Printing

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From the Editor

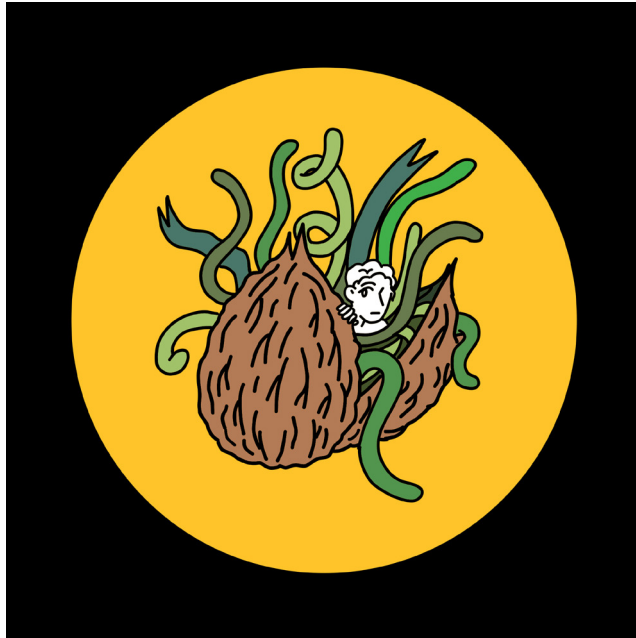


When it first came time to choose a theme for this year's magazine, we found ourselves struggling. The teenage angst and woe contained in the work we often receive as a high school literary magazine seemed especially prominent in this year's batch of submissions, leaving the staff looking at our selections through a pessimistic lens. Still, the generally dark tone we were seeing was distinctly different from the usual trip into the void. Looking beneath the surface of each piece revealed some light and nuance. We saw a progression that started with the constant motion of the world, moving into the quiet that comes when it eventually goes dormant, and finally, the fragile moments when the world first begins to thaw again. Organizing these pieces, we realized they fell into a cycle of life not unlike the one we went through at *Changing Perspectives* in order to get the magazine published. Hence, we arrived at *Cycles* as our theme.

The cycle begins with *Life*, which holds the overjoyed, the overwhelming, and everything in between. This section of the magazine includes the pieces that had some sort of movement to them, whether that be the playful steps of adventure or a marching apprehension. The work our staff put in to get this magazine published was a similar blur of motion, meetings increasing in frequency and intensity as we've neared the finish line. We had so much writing and art to comb through, which was certainly stressful work at times, but the stress was far outweighed by the joy of doing the work. Getting the chance to see so much brilliance is one of the unique benefits of being part of *Changing Perspectives*, and I'm so proud that we were able to share so much of it in our magazine and that we managed to do it all justice.

After *Life* comes *Death*, defined not as the irreversible, unstoppable enemy, but an occasional snuffing out of hopes or a temporary period of stagnation. In this section, readers will find endings, obstacles set on stifling optimism, and the quiet resignation that comes with these things. Our magazine is coming back from a similar period of stagnation, and, in this post-lockdown world, we are all very familiar with what it feels like for our hopes to be struck down as soon as they get off the ground. This issue will be our first to be printed since 2019, something that we tried to accomplish last year without success.

Rather than giving up after last year's setbacks, we let them usher us into the next phase of our cycle, *Rebirth*. In the final segment of this year's magazine, we pay tribute to new beginnings, fragile and bruised endeavors, and the potential beneath the bruises. Introducing a phase of Rebirth challenges the view of life and death as two forces at odds, instead allowing us to see how dependent they are on each other. This is the phase of life that our magazine is in right now. We may have faced setbacks, but we needed to in order to have new directions to go. No one on our staff has been a member long enough to actually see a magazine printed before, and we were all feeling daunted after last year. Stubbornly, we decided that we would reach our goal, even if we didn't know how. Now, our stubbornness has paid off, and we've created something that we can be proud of (though it isn't perfect). We're so



"Walnut Follies" Digital Art, Emilia Tippet, '22

much steadier on our feet, and I'm delighted to see how far we've come.

Now, I'd like to acknowledge some of the people who made this all possible. First, I would like to thank our advisor, Mrs. Esposito, for trusting me with the responsibility of editor, for encouraging and guiding our very amateur staff through this process, and for all the time she's taken out of an already busy schedule to work with us. Next, I would like to thank the magazine staff for so kindly enduring the process of selecting and editing pieces for publication. Everyone (especially those who I just recruited at the beginning of the year) was floating in uncharted waters, and did a phenomenal job learning how to navigate them. Finally, I of course need to thank those who have submitted work to our magazine. Regardless of whether it was submitted to this year's contest or last year's, and regardless of whether or not we were able to publish it, each piece we received played a part in helping us get this magazine together. Last year, so many talented writers and artists submitted work, and though it truly hurts to not be able to publish as much as we would like to, I'm very pleased that we were able to include some selections from last year's group to print with this year's.

As a senior, this is my last year with *Changing Perspectives*. I'm so grateful that I am able to see this magazine thriving again before I leave and for the part that I was able to play in its success. I have no doubt that the magazine will keep growing next year, and I can't wait to see what its next cycle of life brings.

Grace Benthin

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In Remembrance
Liam R. Newman
January 14, 2004 - January 1, 2022

"Summer" Natalie DeTample, '24

My Angel in the Sky

Rachel McIntyre, '22

you're still here

here as the snow falls as soft as your smile was
hearing the melody of a song as upbeat as your laugh
you're with me as i embark on life now without you
guiding my hand instead of holding it

and i see you in the sky
you paint the most beautiful paintings
pale pinks
yellows
oranges
and of course your favorite,
purple

you and your brush paint for dusk or dawn
leaving a reminder for us all
to just keep looking up
because we will see you

if it isn't too much to ask,
could you just never stop painting?

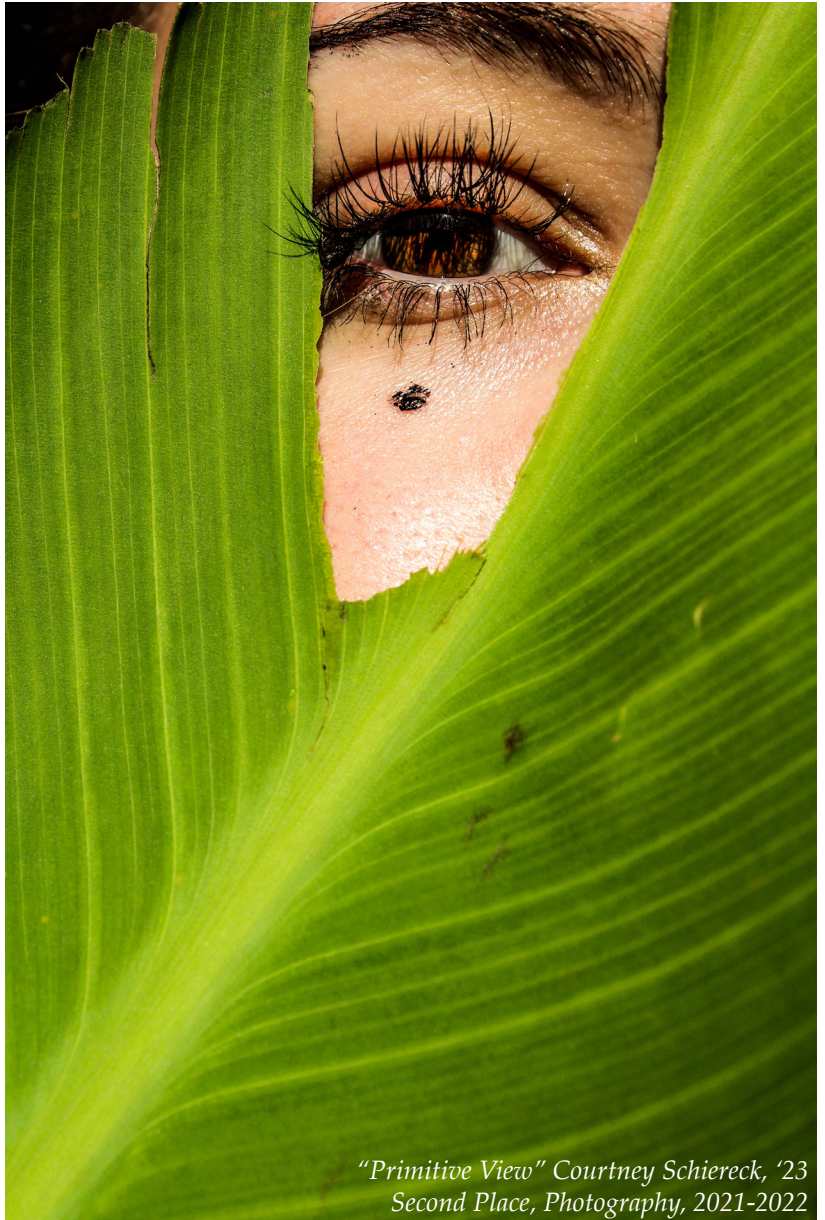


Sarah Ruppert



Life

"Earth's Unnoticed Beauty" Julia Meyko, '22



Abditive

Courtney Schiereck, '23

*"Primitive View" Courtney Schiereck, '23
Second Place, Photography, 2021-2022*

Hidden and unpretentious
Loathing to be found
Like a secret pond
In a secluded forest

What would the moon be without Galileo
Just another floating rock
That shines in the night sky
So easily unforgettable

You can be so bright and vibrant
But you stay eclipsed
hidden in plain sight

Like a child playing hide n' seek
That can never be found
Unsurpassed in his art
Although there's no one seeking

You hide from a world
That isn't even searching
That doesn't even know you exist
Do you even care to be found?

The Book of Sneketh

Part One

Aidan O'Connell, '24

Chapter One: First Place, Fiction, 2021-2022

Chapter Two: Second Place, Fiction, 2022-2023

Chapter One

The house was greeted by the morning with an offensive of red and yellow, as if the world itself knew of a great evil and was on guard to defend from it. It shone on the rough stone and the soft blue tapestries of the domain, seemingly turning the stone-gray into a magnificent pink and the royal blue into a purple-black. The scarlet rays pierced through the panes of glass and metal, creating a kaleidoscope-like display of the morning sun on the inside walls and ceilings of most of the residents of Castle Daethon. One resident, however, the eldest son of the king and queen, instead had the beautiful but intense rays pinpoint his closed eyes, thrusting and burning into him, and pushing his consciousness into the real world.

Sir Nathar woke with a start. He was sore and tired from the long journey the day before, and his rest came to no avail. The covers were too soft, the bed too fluffy for him to get a good night's sleep. Instead he lay awake into the long hours of the night, drifting in and out of reality until weariness finally overtook him. But he found no respite in his subconscious, and was only greeted by terror and fear, which he finally escaped from as he awoke from the battle in darkness. Nathar sat up on his bed, as the mattress gave way to his form, trying to recall the dream before his waking. He could only remember one image, an image of fire, as burning and piercing as the sun itself. A feeling of dread crept into his mind, as he strained himself, searching for more clues or snapshots of his nightmare, than just the inferno that roared in the back of his head. He rocked back and forth, seeing if his body stirring could reignite his memory. Rocking backward more, the bright array of the morning once again

caught his eye.

A knock came at the door, and Nathar quickly wrote off his vision as the rising sun shining in his half-closed eyes. The feeling of dread left him, faster than it had come, and was promptly replaced by panic. He hastily tried to collect himself, shoving his garments under his bed, adjusting his sheets, anything to not appear as messy and destructive as he once was. The knocking continued, becoming more and more insistent. After a few frantic moments, the futility of his actions set in. His room looked like a monster of old's tail had whipped through. The knocks turned into pounding as Nathar, frustrated with his appearance on his first full day of knighthood, stomped toward the door. He had almost reached the sturdy oak entrance when it burst open. Two bodies collapsed on him as the door was flung into the bookshelf. The rattling shelf vomited books to the ground, ricocheting off the heads of his attackers.

Their laughs turned to pained cries as they rolled off Nathar. For the first time in a long time, he started to chuckle. His brother, Sionn, and his best friend Basck had come to greet him. He hadn't seen them in what had seemed like ages. The sun had risen and set many times from his bare straw bed in Dara Talam since he had seen his best friends. Sionn had been his brother for eternity, for lives after lives of hot summer days in the woods after worship. He had seemed a curse to Nathar many times throughout the years, with Sionn's wily tricks and stubbornness getting in the way of his great, magnificent plans. The splendors of an older brother were often ruined when any joke or prod of the younger sibling was returned with a swift and bitter justice. From derailing his clubhouse in the woods, to

exposing the entire castle to Nathar and his friends' attempt to skip the morning sermon, Sionn had made sure to pay back Nathar for every snub or taunt, until he earned his older brother's respect. That respect did not last long, however, because by the time Sionn had grown to become an equal in Nathar's eyes, Nathar was whisked off as a squire for Dara Talam, an industrial city-state on the borders of Daethon's land. It was a dark time for Sionn, as he delved further into the woods of autumn to escape the void that had formed in Castle Daethon.

So it seemed only divine providence when Nathar was sent home in summer due to a bad

scal infection, a sickness localized in Dara Talam that was thought to come about due to the mass mining and burning of scal, a near unbreakable ore found deep in the mountains of old, only to greet the newest squire from a little-known king under Castle Daethon, whose name was Basck. It didn't take long for Nathar to befriend him, as he was restless to get out of bed even with the heavy weight of smoke in his lungs. Sionn took longer to take up with Basck, as he had become gloomy and morose in the time of Nathar's absence. Eventually, in light of Nathar's return, he became his old self and joined them. As for Basck, his past was



"The Red Door" Watercolor, Pen & Ink, Jenny Tindall, '22

cloaked in mystery, and he would refuse to talk about it to anyone but Nathar and Sionn. He was both scheming and proud like Nathar, and headstrong and sly like Sionn. Together they roamed further and planned bigger than ever before, and looked to the future with ambition as bright as the stars of a clear, deep night.

But as the summer reached its twilight, Nathar's exploits grew darker as he continually attempted to escape his fate as a squire in Dara Talam. After attempting to even break his own leg, Sionn and Basck had enough, and shunned him until he accepted

his continued squireship. Nathar turned to the land's god, a deity known as Sneketh, and soon became a zealot of the religion he had once mocked and avoided in his youth. Once the king and queen deemed him healthy enough to return to his squire duties in their neighboring country, Nathar went silently, clutching to his faith, and nothing else. With Nathar gone, Sionn and Basck continued relatively more innocent pursuits, but without Nathar, they remained in the lands of their older, grander adventures. Meanwhile, Nathar labored under the smoke and stone of Dara Talam, with the rough conditions and grueling training only saturating his piety. Many moons passed before his training was complete, and with it, he forged his master sword, known as Athrucin, the sword of change and fate. He was knighted by the Rigeas, the supreme leader of Dara Talam, and was allowed one visit to his friends and family before embarking on faraway quests in service to Dara Talam.

Nathar stood up, relatively unharmed, and began to brush himself off and pick up the books that had assailed his friends. Sionn and Basck, rubbing their heads in discomfort and confusion, followed suit, but also imprinted a hard stare on each of the offending texts. Breaking the ice, Sionn spoke first, saying, "Well, I didn't expect your room to be filled with traps on your first day back. Seriously? Falling books? Pretty uncreative, Nathar. Dara Talam's scal fumes must've muddled your brain more than Mother and Father thought."

Nathar replied, "Well, my injured mind is still doing better than yours, Sionn, as I had plenty of time to set my trap with all that time you were knocking. You could have just waited a little longer, and you would have caught me in an ambush as I opened the door, unaware of your presence. But that would be too ingenious for you Sionn, wouldn't it?"

"Don't look at me, it was Basck's idea to surprise you," Sionn countered. Basck, caught off guard by the betrayal of his accomplice, started to protest, but was cut off by the ringing bells of the castle, signaling breakfast.

Breakfast was quite the affair in the house of Daethon, as the agrarian state had often enjoyed bountiful harvests, and this year was no exception. It was made even grander to celebrate the visit of Nathar, the tables filled with stacks of hot bread and pastries, bowls of

fresh fruit, and plates of meat and eggs. The entire dining hall was alive, with servants, squires, kings, and ladies alike merging into a sea of people, all very hungry and awake. Nathar's parents, the king and queen of Daethon, were seated in tall chairs at the end of the profoundly long dining table. Nathar, Sionn, and Basck greedily stole seats near to them, but even nearer to the steaming piles of food on the table. While Sionn and Basck eyed the fare voraciously, Nathar glanced at the massive carved emblem that sat above the king and queen in the cavernous hall. It was of a massive snake encircling a tower, fangs bared and hood spread in defense of the structure. A word crept into his brain, a single name, Sneketh. The dark vacuum he had felt when he awoke returned as his eyes settled on the tower the snake encircled, a mysterious place of worship on the cliff-sides of their land. It had become a place of peace for Nathar before he was taken back to Dara Talam, far away from the bustle of towns and castles, where he could work in silence, serving Sneketh. The tower's design also fascinated Nathar, as Daethon had never possessed enough metal of enough strength to ever build such a structure. Some people in Daethon believed that it should have been harvested for its resources, but its connection to Sneketh was unquestioned, as it was found with emblems of snakes and ancient writings of Sneketh's great war with its archnemesis, a being of death only known as Fox. Therefore, it was preserved as a religious monument, a source of great pride for the country. However, the lords and ladies of the land had improved it over the years, making it a habitable edifice rather than just a metal skeleton of one, and the current rulers of Daethon, his parents, had left him in charge of the monument. Nathar felt a sudden fear for the place he had grown so attached to, as well as a longing to see it after being in Dara Talam for so long. These feelings were again interrupted with the clinking of a glass, as the breakfast was initiated with a prayer to Sneketh.

The prayers were bare and simple, as the ancient scriptures passed from ruler to ruler had decreed. All partakers would simply shut their eyes and face towards the tower in the south, wishing or praying in whatever way they wished to the snake god, or in Sionn and Basck's case, snickering and poking each other

back and forth. The behavior irritated Nathar, and he suddenly had the urge to get up and reprimand them for making light of such an important tradition. He started to push his chair away and stand up, but caught himself mid-action. *What am I doing?* he thought to himself. *Have I really changed this much?*

He closed his eyes and memories flashed by of him hiding in halls and corners while the castle attended sermons, his mother frantically looking for him to avoid the embarrassment of a unfaithful and indifferent child. He had always known that those acts were wrong, but to feel the urge to scold his friend and his brother because they chuckled at a private joke during the ceremony felt... sickening. He needed something to take his mind off himself. As the last words of the rite sounded through the hall, Nathar prepared to field a question to his monarchs... or his parents. As the sounds of noisy eating and plates clanging took up his hearing to the right, he turned towards his glowing, majestic mother and his august, baronial father. Their judicious and knowledgeable eyes set on him, and suddenly he started to stutter. Years of kneeling to strange, callous overseers, trainers, and nobles in Dara Talam came back to him, the cruelty and scorn he faced unforgotten, but he quickly shoved away the old memories and confidently proposed his plan to the king and queen.

He cleared his throat, declaring, "My king and queen, I wish to embark on a quest." Their eyebrows arched at the bold announcement. "Or, er, a routine maintenance checkup on the tower, for um, upkeep reasons."

The hall was silent. After a moment, he began to try again when his mother held up her hand to him. "Yes, yes, as long as you take Sionn and Basck. We can't have them in the castle for much more time or else they'll destroy it." Nathar turned towards Sionn and Basck, who were busy trying to see how many bread loaves they could shove in each other's mouths. They soon realized they were being watched, and snapped towards Nathar and his mother, with Basck spitting out a loaf in the process. Basck smiled, Sionn, looking annoyed, glanced at his brother for bringing him into this, and the queen simply rolled her eyes.

After breakfast, the trio were sent to the Armory in order to suit up. The tower wasn't terribly far away from the castle, but

unfortunately the terrain surrounding the tower, which sat on the cliffs that acted as a border with Dara Talam, were deemed much too steep for the castle's horses. That meant Nathar, Sionn, and Basck had to walk, in full gear, for hours to get to the tower. This greatly irritated Sionn, as not only did he have to go on his brother's useless quest, but now he had to walk there, in the freezing cold. So Sionn carelessly threw his armor on, as if it was the last thing in the world he wanted to do, and then, when selecting and trying a sword, almost cut off his foot. He remained silent and cautious for a few minutes afterward, looking awkward and embarrassed. Basck, an onlooker to the event, put on his gear more carefully after that and made sure to stay out of the way of Sionn's sword.

Nathar was nothing but serious in putting on his gear. Sionn's near-amputation was quickly disregarded, as Nathar set his mind on solving the mystery that haunted his dreams. He felt an inkling of some heavy meaning to the moment, a dramatic, religious tone, as he slid on his chainmail shirt and gloves. Grasping his sword, Athrucin, and fastening his bright-blue cape, he felt more ready for the journey than he had felt in many years. He called over Sionn and Basck, as they prepared to exit the castle to the land outside.

Sionn still looked moody, and he complained, saying, "Hey! How do you get a cape?"

Nathar tauntingly responded, claiming, "Only knights get capes. You should know that by now, my squire brother. Very unknighly of you." Sionn scoffed and, much like his mother, rolled his eyes, while Basck held back a laugh.

They turned to face the great door, the main entrance to the grand building, and it began to open. The oak gate creaked to life as the chains and pulleys rang discordantly. Light flashed through the growing opening, as the harsh wind roared into the castle.

Sionn grumbled, "We're going to regret this."

Chapter Two

Crunch, crunch, crunch crunch. The sound of crunching leaves was erratic, and it echoed in the woods. It revealed the presence of multiple people walking, their paces all different. The first stoic and rough, crushing

every leaf with equal, determined power; the second was much more silent, telling of an experienced dweller of the woods. The third was abnormal, even as its own sound, as the one making the footsteps was making every effort to crush each leaf in a new, louder way. Nathar, Sionn, and Basck had made their way deep into the forest. The journey was silent up until this time, with only occasional grumblings from Sionn. But even those lessened as they entered the bare trees and the dead bushes of the woods.

As Nathar walked through the cold, dead forest, he could not help but feel anger at the place he was in. The sun-dappled paths betrayed the freezing, silent death that covered the hills. No birds sung, not even crickets chirped. There was only the sound of themselves, of their voices, and of their feet crushing the old fall leaves. Breaking the silence, Nathar bitterly remarked, "This forest... it's so cold, so cruel... and ugly. I wish it was Spring, or Summer, or Fall, or anything else. Winter is the work of Fox."

Sionn stirred from a dreamy state, and with surprising earnestness, corrected, "Well, actually Winter really seems to benefit the place. Sure, some things die in the cold, and it's not the most fun for us out here, but time off is good. I feel like this forest needs it."

Nathar responded harshly, "You think this is good? The Winter stops us from growing crops, keeps us indoors, and drives me insane. I can tolerate regular Winters, but this one is much stranger... much colder... and you're wrong if you think it's anything but terrible." Basck winced at the sound of them fighting. He hated when the brothers fought, for real at least. It reminded him too much of his past.

Sionn tauntingly returned, "But I remember you playing outside in the snow, not so many years ago, and getting excited anytime you'd see a snowflake."

Nathar wheeled around, taking the jab at his age to heart, barking at Sionn, "Remember your place, squire, and stay silent!" Sionn went to attack back, but then he saw a potent, stressed anger in Nathar, one he hadn't seen in him before. Something was going on, and he was going to find out what.

Sionn didn't have time to find anything out, however, as a piercing shriek rang through the woods at that very moment. Both Nathar and Sionn recoiled at the ear-splitting sound,

but for some reason, Basck stood still. Nathar yelled at Sionn, "Banshee!" However Sionn couldn't hear a word over the piercing sounds, and Basck didn't seem to acknowledge anything. Then, entranced by the shrieks, Basck marched forward, mesmerized by the angry screams as if they were a beautiful, echoing melody. He turned off the downward-winding path and started to mindlessly scale a much older and densely covered path up a hill.

Nathar and Sionn turned and yelled for Basck through the world-numbing noise, but Basck did not hear it either. Both got up, and weakly followed, all the while covering their ears. As they reached the top, they looked out on a bare plain where Basck was already mindlessly stumbling. He was headed toward a sudden end to the bare plain. Sionn shouted, "It's a cliff! Basck's going to walk over a cliff!"

But Nathar could not hear him. All he saw was Sionn yelling at him, and then taking off out of the blue. Nathar yelled "Wait!", but like everything said after the banshee's wail began, it was lost to the impenetrable wave of screeches.

Frustrated but determined to stop Basck, wherever he was going, Nathar started off towards him. But just as he neared his friend, Basck slowed. The flat plain that Nathar had seen further back ended suddenly with an abrupt and shocking drop. Comprehension dawned on Nathar, and he let go of his ears. The ringing shot through Nathar's head like an arrow, but he ran anyway. He ran harder, faster, pushed more than he ever had in his entire life. His armor clanged against his body, making every step feel like minutes of running. His throat became sticky, his breathing irregular, his sweat, from pain and exercise, poured down his face and stung his eyes, but he continued to run. But it was too late. He saw Basck's right foot step over the edge, and he knew there was nothing he could do to stop it. No training, no luck, no divine right would stop his best friend from plummeting to his death. He slowed, stumbled, and fell. At the last moment, he saw a figure jump out from his right corner and tackle Basck away from the cliff.

Nathar pushed himself up from the ground, spitting out dirt as dust blew past him. He looked to his left, to see Basck and Sionn in a heap, Basck's trance gone as he sat up, looking towards the cliff in fear. Nathar turned and

looked past the drop only to see a ghostly green apparition floating over the edge of the cliff. It was of a skeleton draped in cloth, with long flowing gray hair of an old woman. It shrieked in anger as it set its two pale white spheres, in place of pupils, on Nathar. Nathar got up in another burst of determination, unsheathed his sword, and ran at the banshee. The banshee screeched in anger and flew towards Nathar and the cliff, its boney hands unfurled and nails pointed like knives. But he stood straight, sword clasped right over left, and swung down diagonally, cutting into the banshee's left hand and shoulder. The places where the blade touched seared it, causing part of the apparition to disappear into air. The scal-coating on the sword turned bright red, illuminating the cracked, skin-like coating. The banshee screamed in hatred and fear, and flew back off the edge, gaping at the clear cuts in its ghostly green form. It howled one more time before vaporizing into the air.

Nathar stood in shock, looking past the cliff at the place the banshee once was. He had heard the stories and legends, but never truly believed them, much less believed they could be in Daethon. He then stared down at his blade, which was crackling bright red, as if it had just been forged. Something was truly wrong in the forest for such a foul creature to be here, and somehow his blade had repulsed it.

He was roused by Sionn, who called, "Nathar! Get back from the cliff, Basck's alright!" Nathar noted his words, realizing his feet were hanging off the edge, causing small chunks of dirt and rock to crumble and fall beneath him. He sheathed his sword, which felt strangely warm, backed up cautiously from the cliff, and then turned and ran to his friends. He hastily kneeled down to Basck, who was propped up against a nearby rock, and Sionn, who was already stooping to Basck's level, and immediately started firing off questions.

"Are you ok? What happened? Why did you follow..." Basck recoiled as if he was being stuck with arrows, still panting in exhaustion and fear.

Sionn cut in, reprimanding, "Can't you see he's in no condition to answer any of your questions? He almost fell of a cliff a few moments ago!"

Nathar grew silent, and both turned back to Basck as they heard him finally start to catch

his breath. He started to whisper, "I... I'm fine. I don't know what happened, but all I remember is I heard a... beautiful song. I had to follow it. And when I came to the edge, I... I didn't see that monster, Nathar, I saw Elva."

Nathar sputtered, "Elva? What? No... no... She's not here, she's in Dara Talam. You couldn't have seen her! You couldn't have!" Basck shrunk, and Nathar, realizing he was shouting, silenced himself. Deep in thought, Nathar stood up, hearing Sionn's angry admonishments as only faint, muffled cries.

A rush of memories flitted through his head. In his first days as a squire in Dara Talam, he only saw faint glimpses of her, crossing from on top of the towering walls. She was confined to the Citadel, the luxurious dwelling of the rulers of Dara Talam, and ultimate defense point for the state, as of course, a princess could not come into contact with the street rabble. It was even prohibited for her to explore the lower levels of the massive fortress, lest she run into one of the brash, foreign, lower-class, dirty squires. But only two weeks after arriving, Nathar, while lugging the soiled armor of his knight through the gray, grimy streets of Dara Talam, caught a flash of green in the corner of his eye. He turned around, looking for the owner of the enigmatic garment that wasn't dulled and smog-colored, like the rest of the clothing in Dara Talam. Then, from behind him a mysterious but sincere voice asserted, "You aren't like the rest of the people on these streets. You don't smell of scal."

Nathar whirled around, already suspecting a foreigner, and callously affirmed his newfound knowledge of Dara Talam, saying, "You aren't going to make any friends around here if you talk like tha..." He stopped dumbfounded, as his eyes focused on what exactly he was looking at.

Light brown hair ran around her seemingly immaculate, unblemished face, down her neck, and merged with her gold-leaved green dress. She was beautiful, astoundingly beautiful, and her figure had a glow, a glow that was only magnified in the streets of Dara Talam. A rush of feelings came over Nathar, and he wondered if he was in a dream, instead of hauling his master's foul shell of metal. After what was like a lifetime to Nathar, thought leaked into his unloaded brain, and he realized exactly who he was gawking at. A new rush



"100%" Pen & Ink, Heidi Haver, '23

of feelings, embarrassment, came over him, and he began to apologize, stuttering in amazement, dropping the armor.

All the mysterious girl did was laugh. She spoke again, mimicking his first words, "You aren't going to make any friends if you stare at everyone you meet, squire. But, of course, everyone stares at the princess." Nathar let go of the chestplate, which landed in the mud. His expression changed from a blushing embarrassment to bitterness. He was done for. Insulting the princess, gaping at her in public, he'd be lucky if he ended up as a scal miner for the rest of his squireship. The princess seemed to have read his mind, as she said, "Don't worry. I'm not going to turn you in to my father. He resents me going down here alone anyway, so knowing I've been down here, he'd never let me out of the house again. Besides, I like you, you're not as timid as the Dara Talam folk around me."

Relieved, Nathar gained back some of his bravado, jabbing, "You call that a house?" pointing to the distant Citadel, still looming in the faraway background behind the princess. She laughed, brighter and happier than the first time. Nathar liked the sound of the laughter, and decided to keep going. He continued, asking, "And the people of Dara Talam? Timid? Have you actually been out here before?" He was interrupted by a passing slur, proving his point, which he merely gestured

at. She laughed for a third time, clear and happy as a summer day. No hacking cough or strained lungs betrayed her life in Dara Talam. Her name was Elva, and she was one in a million, a needle in a haystack.

They saw each other again, this time far away from the agitated, unruly city. They sat on the roof of an old brick house near the immense, murky river, known as the Dela, once an elegant, swift river, long flooded and

poisoned by the sewage of Dara Talam. Nathar was able to pick out the great cliffs of Daethon, even through the city's smog, pointing them out to the princess. She responded with fascination and familiarity, saying, "I've seen them. I don't... get outside to see them often. But every so often I can steal a moment away from it all, and when I do, I look over to those cliffs, and I see the strangest thing. There's a flickering light near the edge, below an old... structure of some sort. Every time I would go out I'd see it, but recently it hasn't been there." She turned towards Nathar questioningly, but Nathar refused to add anything. Instead he just smiled, sat up, and leaped down to the scraggly path around the house.

She playfully followed, trying to get him to speak. He just kept walking, and playing with his wooden carving of a snake, and Elva became impatient. She finally exclaimed, "What? What have you got to say? You're just walking, laughing to yourself, playing with that stupid figure. What could be so interesting?"

Nathar broke his silence at last, responding, "Something you think is interesting, because you're trying very hard to get it." She whipped herself around, but stopped when he spoke again. "It's just... it's funny how things are so connected. One of my duties back in Daethon was to take care of a place called the Tower, an ancient monument to Snekeith, our god, and...

every night, when I was out there, I'd light a fire on the edge." Her mouth opened slightly, as she realized what he meant. "I'd sit there and just look out, towards Dara Talam. And I could've sworn I saw a little light of my own, like a lantern someone was holding, on the roof of the Citadel. It's almost like fate, isn't it?" He smiled at her cryptically, and Nathar knew, looking back on that moment, that was where Elva fell for him.

But good things never could last, Nathar thought, as just as quickly as Elva and Nathar had fallen in love, Elva was torn away from him. The word got out, one way or another, from another squire jealous of his link to the royal family. The Regent sent Elva away on a tedious diplomatic task to a well-known ally, where she would be safe, away from Dara Talam, with boredom as her punishment. Nathar was devastated, but with the arrangements of the squire Fahac, one of the shadier squires that he had been able to befriend, Elva and Nathar were able to stay in a limited, secret correspondence for the rest of his time in Dara Talam. Still, even though he had only spent a month at most with her, there was a hole in his life in Dara Talam. It became boring, just how it was in Dara Talam before they met.

Nathar found himself back in the woods, his subconscious guiding him on the path towards the Tower. His mind was still churning with questions. Who had sent the banshee? Why had Basck seen Elva, instead of that horrible old crone in the apparition? What did any of this have to do with her? His thoughts were interrupted by coughing, which he realized was his own. Something had stirred up his scal-cough. He sniffed the air. Smoke. Nathar stopped and looked around, off the path, which was rising onto the cliffsides. A trail of smoke was passing by him, and as he followed its path, his heart dropped into his stomach. The smoke was coming from the direction of the Tower!

He unsheathed his sword and sprinted off towards the Tower, pursuing the path. He did it without any feeling, any discernible pain. He wasn't running out of determination, out of the goal to save his friend. He was running out of fear, but surely running as fast as before. He stumbled over vines and roots, but kept

running. He crossed small, improvised bridges and cleared obstacles with great leaps. Then, after what was hours of running to Nathar, but minutes to the rest of the world, he was pushing up to the top of the cliffs. The Tower finally came into sight, but it was... not the Tower. The once makeshift, but comparably civilized place of worship to the rest of the wilderness took on different colors that day. It was a blazing inferno, and its skin, the wooden walls and roof, were melted away to reveal the fiery skeleton underneath. Piles of ash lay below it, on its foundation, which were once floors, or altars, or other furnishings inside the structure. Nathar slowed, his eyes locked on the burning, his skin pale, his body shaking. He dropped his sword, leaving Athrucin among the grass. He lurched closer to what was once his structure, still crackling and roaring, consuming his beloved Tower. His ears registered frantic footsteps behind him, and concerned calls, but he heard none of it. Everything was... silent.

Grief whirled through Nathar like a hurricane. His mind flashed from one time to another, all his labor, all his dedication, his cold hard work restoring the Tower. All penance, all validation to cure the crippling guilt for his wrongdoings; his defiance of Sneketh, his carelessness, his sins, all gone, all for nothing. Anger boiled his blood, but was kept down by the pure and utter loss he felt, facing the burning sign of failure he had held so dear. And so he dived deeper and deeper into hysteria, so far he thought he would never come up.

Just then, something caught his eye. On the edge of his vision, he saw a symbol, cruelly etched into the foundation of the Tower. Instantly he knew it, all of it, where it was from, to whom it belonged, what it meant. His anger surged, pure fury now, a feeling he had never felt before. All traces of sadness and suffering had been replaced by scorching hatred, so intense Nathar felt as if he was going to explode. The rage filled the cold vacuum that had haunted him with a flaming passion, a focused wrath on an evil he knew so well. His dreams, his nightmares, flashed before him, all harshly shining with a new purpose. Nathar understood what he had to do, as if he always had.

It was time to go to Dara Talam.

Quoz

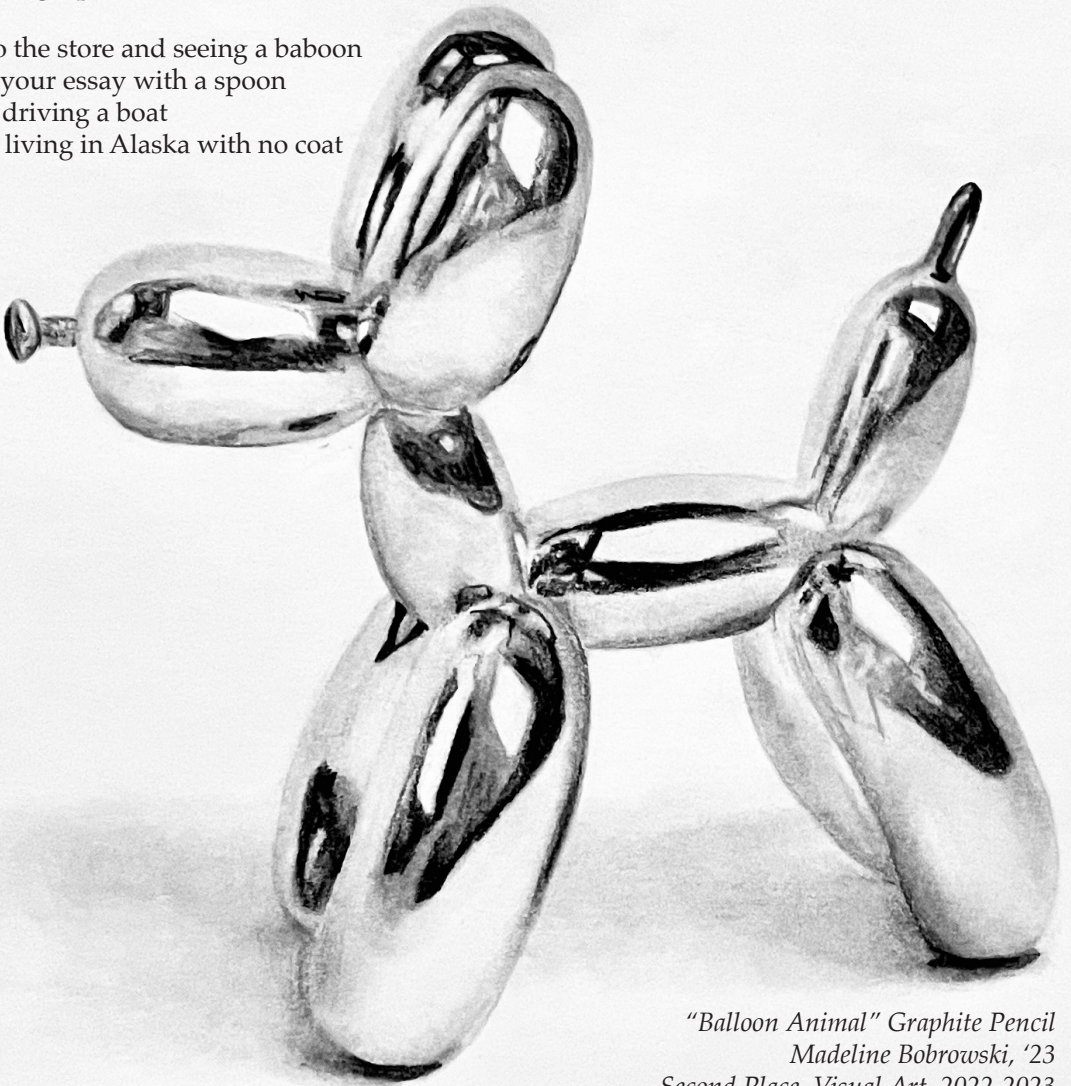
Keith Polin, '24

It's like seeing a dinosaur when you wake up in the morning
Hearing an old book roaring
Having a cat with 3 heads
Or seeing your ancestors come up from the dead

Watching a car start to fly
Seeing cows fight over pie
Walking from Canada to Brazil
Or eating dinner with a monkey named Bill

Jumping 90 feet in the air
Going to school with floating chairs
Playing basketball with a group of birds
And writing a poem with 50 thousand words

Going to the store and seeing a baboon
Writing your essay with a spoon
A shark driving a boat
Or even living in Alaska with no coat



*"Balloon Animal" Graphite Pencil
Madeline Bobrowski, '23
Second Place, Visual Art, 2022-2023*

Pleasant Pines

Marissa LaDuca, '22
First Place, Nonfiction, 2021-2022

"No" Alexander Woltman, '25

The first place that I was brought to in the United States after leaving China and enduring the long plane ride with a strange new family was a small camp in the Adirondacks. I was adopted in July 2005, and at just 12 months old, I had little grasp of the world around me. My entire extended family spends several weeks of the summer in a quaint town named Speculator; this was my first home. Within this town was Pleasant Pines, a camp with six small cabins that, for a few short weeks a year, held my relatives and close family friends. As a one year old, I had no way of understanding the impact that camp in that small town would have on how I view myself and the necessary skills in my life.

Growing up adopted, I always had my insecurities. Confusion often clouded strangers' faces, and they stared at me while I walked with my white parents. My family has loved me since the beginning, and we feel blessed that our family was brought together, but the feeling of being an outsider with the people I should feel the most comfortable with followed me. These are the people I was expected to talk with about all of life's problems, essentially revealing my most vulnerable self. However, talking about adoption individualized me and made me feel I stood out even more. To cope with these insecurities, Pleasant Pines has always been my favorite place to turn.

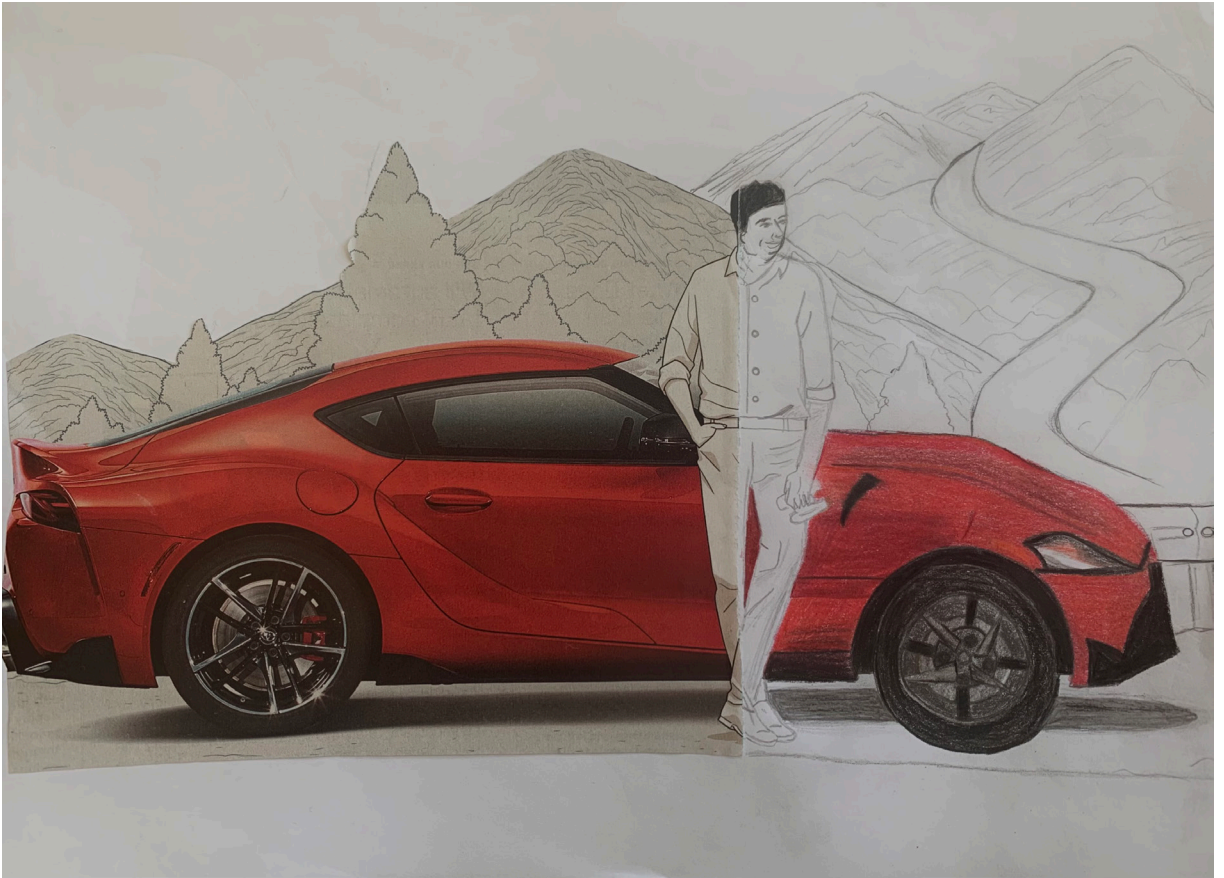
Although never a shelter from my problems, the camp gave me a chance to explore new interests, future passions, and my own sense of self—independent of how others saw me. When my cousins and I were young, playing make-believe was essential. We would play on our favorite rock, beneath the pine branches, or in the lake until sundown, constantly coming up with new storylines and focusing on the smallest details, like the designs on our pretend

fairy wings. While this may seem trivial, those days playing in the mountains of upstate New York have sharpened my attention to detail and creative thought processes.

Summer weekends in the Adirondacks encouraged my love for the outdoors. With no television, I was forced to look outside for entertainment. My family often kayaked in local mountain streams or hiked to waterfalls, caves, and mountaintop fire towers. I fell in love with exercising and being active. Even now, whenever I find myself stressed due to schoolwork or sports, I head outdoors for a walk or run to remind myself of the easy days with the towering green pines and refreshing atmosphere of Speculator.

Evenings spent sitting around the campfire, telling stories, roasting marshmallows, and seeing everyone around the fire, even if it was just a faint orange glow on their faces, helped assure me of the insignificance of what other people thought about where I was born. This community at Pleasant Pines consisted of various people with different backgrounds, some related to me through adoption, some through proximity and experience, but none related by genetics. Nevertheless, we all sat in the evening, sharing marshmallow sticks and bug spray, together, staring at the night sky, searching for shooting stars. I began to think of us as one big family. So what if I looked different? This was my family, my community, and I loved them more than anything. I was just one of the kids, eating s'mores and searching for satellites by the campfire.

Those summer weeks at Pleasant Pines helped me develop the skills of thinking creatively, being adventurous, and holding onto self-confidence: all lessons that I needed to learn in order to move past my insecurities and transition into the next phase of life. I intend to keep these lessons close.



"Finish the Drawing" Mixed Media, Carly Christie, '23

Usufructuary

Macie Baron, '23

He tossed me the keys, and let me take it for a spin.
The soft red leather gripped my finger tips,
a brand new steering wheel with red seats,
my foot to the gas, moving so fast that time began to slow.
Effortlessly stitching back and forth through lanes
like a surgeon stitching up a fresh wound,
slicing each air molecule in half, speeding down long roads.
An impressive machine, just born from the production line,
with skin polished red, shining in the darkness of the night.
Heading into the city his car makes heads turn,
controls people's gaze, stealing their attention,
gluing their ears towards the direction of the V10 engine
roaring as loud as a lion, echoing off the towering buildings beside it.
His car is nothing less than a luxury, an honor it was to drive,
something that I would never in my lifetime be able to call my own.



"Altered States" Kalliopi Alexis, '22

The Villa

*Courtney Schierek, '23
Second Place, Nonfiction, 2022-2023*

The medieval village was filled with cobblestone and stucco houses no larger than two stories and were tightly compacted together. Thousands of steep winding cobblestone stairways ran throughout the town. The beautiful ancient arches were scattered across the cobblestone church of La Donna, best known as Mary. Underneath the village ran a small jewel-blue river which flowed gently through the mountain; it was where many locals went to relax and cool off during the blistering hot summers. In front of the village stood a milky-white concrete road bridge that towered hundreds of feet over the ground. It was held up by large pillars and conjoined two ends of the mountain together. Although many of the locals disliked the road

bridge, its size and design were breathtaking and got the attention of many newcomers, including myself.

I had always heard stories of my grandmother's hometown of Villa Santa Maria, a small village located on the side of the Appanenni mountain in the Abruzzo region of Southern Italy. The village that laid asleep during the day, but at night became bustling. The streets were narrow and made of a greystone pattern that was hand-paved hundreds of years ago. Along the side of the roads stood the close-packed two story linen-tan stucco houses with terracotta tile roofs. Traversing up the winding roads led to the village's hotspot. A road which was bigger than the rest and housed cobblestone buildings of



local businesses; this is where a majority of the restaurants and shops were. The road was the place where locals and newcomers came to interact at night.

As you reached the hotspot, the smell of fresh basil and tomato from the sauce and mozzarella cheese of a newly-cooked pizza filled the air; you can't help feel the sharp tingle in your nose from the dark rich espresso of the bars that turn into cafés for the morning. On the road was a small town square where an empty stage stood during the day, but at night the echo of the band blaring music could be heard from other neighboring villages on the mountain. During the night the road was closed off as crowds of people swarmed the restaurants and bars that laid out plastic tables, giving front-row views to the rich sound of Italian music at the town square. Going past the square led to smaller, more narrow roads, which only locals were able to drive through as the thick stone walls on either side were inches away from any car that drove through. The village roads tapered because they were constructed for horse and buggies. If you were unfamiliar with the place you might eventually drive yourself into a section as narrow as a rabbit hole where no car could squeeze through. Thus the majority chose to walk, as the journey from one end of the village to the other was only ten to fifteen minutes.

It was known as the town of chefs and had a famous cooking school stationed in a large white-stucco building at the top of the village. Many of the people in the town learned to cook through the school or learned through their relatives. Regardless, they all knew how to cook and cook well...

My grandmother's house that was now owned by my Uncle Rocco stood outside the main road. It was a rundown two-story stone house that had a rusted fence and an

overgrown brick pathway. The inside wasn't much better, the place lacked any furniture or decor, but as you entered the main doorway there was a large, beautiful white and black marble staircase that seemed to be out of place. In reality it was very common for these ancient houses of Villa to have marble staircases as it was familiar building material at the time. The house had a downstairs garage that you could enter outside by opening two large rotted wooden doors with a flat piece of metal that ran horizontally to the door to make it more sturdy. You could also reach the garage on the inside by a small metal-backed spiral staircase that my older brother accidentally fell down the first time we visited and cut his head open. Besides storing my uncle's tiny rusted old red truck, there he would host the big family pig roast. Inside the stone garage that was no larger than twenty feet on each side were two long white tables with wooden oak benches where my thirty relatives and I sat while we ate from the tiny roasted pig my aunt cooked for us.

Since the majority of the villagers slept in until noon, the main place to go during the day when the town was ghost-like was the river. You traveled down hundreds of steps going different directions until reaching a small path that went through the woods. This led you to a calm spot on the river with large boulders that were smooth with many caving indents, almost as if an asteroid had landed into the river. The clear jewel-blue water was brisk and kept you refreshed as the bright melting sun shone down on you through the openings in the trees. My cousins and I laid on and jumped off the asteroid-like rocks into clear blue water for hours. Eventually we were called up for dinner, which either included going into the town square or my uncle's garage.



A Promised Wasteland

Grace Benthin, '23

Add another strand.
Keep spinning that precious web—
you may need it soon.
One day, milk and honey will run dry.

Keep spinning that precious web—
cling to each shimmering thread.
One day, milk and honey will run dry.
You will be left with only this.

Cling to each shimmering thread—
make sure that they hold.
You will be left with only this—
a fragile snare to trap rotten flies.

Make sure that they hold—
add another strand—
a fragile snare to trap rotten flies—
you may need it soon.

Crickets

Olivia Loeffler, '24

When the last ripple disappeared into the water, I finally felt calm. All I could hear was the wind through the leaves and the crickets far in the distance. I felt my arm; the Louisiana heat trapped my sweat to my skin and I remembered how badly I needed a shower. But I stayed still, waiting for the water to move again. I could feel the crickets growing louder, like they knew what I was doing there. They probably saw the whole thing. The sound of the crickets rose quickly, like the swell of an orchestra. They were screaming, asking me *Why? Why? Why?* I turned away from the lake, running. The thick foliage engulfed me and the clearing of the lake was gone. I whipped my head around, searching for any familiarity. I was only met with the crickets' awful wails. I was only walking now, too scared of falling in the dense forest. The trees scraped my arms and legs as revenge. For getting lost in that place, for going there at all. I was clicking the lock button on my car key, only able to faintly hear the beeps over the thundering cries of the crickets. I followed it until all I could hear was the deafening shrieks of the crickets and nothing else.

Precedented Times

Eryn Mikulicz, '22
First Place, Poetry, 2021-2022

"Virus Is Twice as Deadly for Black and Latino People Than Whites in N.Y.C."
The New York Times, April 8, 2020

on tuesday a peasant is sick
on sunday the stench of death fills the city
so completely you cannot avoid it
so pungently you can taste it
the pope is not there to bless the dying
in their flea-ridden shacks
he has fled to his villa

"Asian American University Students Fear for Elders After Spate of Racist Attacks"
Chicago Tribune, April 2, 2021

a group of jews stand in the center of the town square
in a moment they will be encompassed by flames
now they are encircled by mobs spewing accusations
"you poisoned the wells!"
"you murdered my family!"
the group prays for silence and
waits for the burn

"Antiabortion Supporters Rally in Washington as Supreme Court Weighs Overruling Roe v. Wade"
The Wall Street Journal, January 21, 2021

a loaf of bread costs a month's income and
the sound of cannons grows more resounding each day
perhaps during a break in the blasts
a woman wrote a pamphlet called
the declaration of the rights of woman
but it was no time for that nonsense
her decapitated head frowns at our mouths agape

"Republicans Oppose John Lewis Voting Act, Say Update to 1965 Law Is Not Needed"
The Washington Post, January 19, 2022

a black man tries to vote in louisiana
first they ask him about his grandfather
then they threaten him with their white hoods
finally if he has pressed on to the ballot box
they lynch him by moonlight
from the grave he asks us
"that's news?"

the clock's pendulum swings eternally to and fro
why are we caught off guard
when it comes hurling towards us
again?



"Misty 2" Marcello Switzer, '24



*"Land of La'ad" Kacper Domoslawski, '24
First Place, Photography, 2022-2023*

Death



Midnight

Samantha DeTample, '24

Who stays awake 'til Midnight?
those who do not make a sound.
a child that lays stiff in fright,
who stays awake 'til Midnight.
silhouettes that work in feeble light,
even whispers won't be found.
who stays awake 'til Midnight?
those who do not make a sound.

"Expanse" Pastel, Anna De Leao, '23

The Disappearance of a Boy Named Charlie and the Curiously Macabre Events that Followed

Grace Benthin, '23

Many children have gone missing from Frenchtown Park over the years, and many of their bodies have washed up on the edge of the creek. Many, but not all. The only body that was never found belonged to a boy named Charlie, the first in the long string of disappearances.

Charlie was about ten years old, slight in stature and quite scrawny. His teachers would later describe him as a fairly ordinary boy, intelligent, but soft spoken and hesitant to participate in class.

This wasn't a result of timidity, Charlie simply didn't care for school too much. He found lessons to be tedious. The teachers scolded him and his classmates ridiculed him. When he was left alone, Charlie was much more content. He very much enjoyed playing games and exploring. His favorite pastime of all was going to Frenchtown Park. The playground equipment was always colorful and exciting, but he preferred to splash in the creek, climb trees, or, if it had rained the night before, Charlie liked to explore the trail. Like any other boy his age, Charlie was fascinated by all manner of ugly or slimy creatures, but especially frogs. He had found that there were quite a few of them that lived on the trail, and right after a rainstorm, when the ground was still damp and cool, was the best time to hunt for them.

So, when Charlie was walking home from school, he would often stop at the park for a little while. The day he went missing, he was delighted to wake up to a storm outside of his window, but his frog hunting hopes were quickly dashed when his mother told him to come straight home after school that day.

He protested, insisting that the frogs would all dry out when the storm was over, but his mother explained to him that the frogs

wouldn't dry out, they'd simply return to their ponds rather than hopping around the forest. With that, she sent him off to school. Charlie huffed, still upset, and not entirely convinced that all of the frogs would be there waiting for him the next day, but he agreed to come straight home.

All morning, Charlie watched through the classroom window as the rain slowed to a gentle drip. By the time the teacher let the class out for recess, the rain had stopped altogether. It was cold and wet outside, and though some of the children had their complaints about the weather, Charlie couldn't have been more ecstatic. He spent recess dashing back and forth between the sandbox, the swings, and the mulch-carpeted playground. He had a talent for finding particularly filthy puddles, in which he jumped up and down, caking his shoes with mud and splashing himself with murky water.

Charlie found a great deal of entertainment tromping through mud puddles, but he still wished there were frogs or salamanders for him to play with. Even a tadpole would do quite nicely, but he didn't see any. He stopped splashing, and instead scoured the playground. He started by looking at the edges of the puddles, since frogs enjoy ponds, and what is a puddle, really, if not just a smaller pond? But Charlie quickly realized that if there had been frogs in the puddles, they would have been frightened away, or worse, squashed by all the jumping and splashing that he had been so gleeful about just moments ago.

Frenzied, Charlie checked all of the puddles, and, once he was certain that no frogs had been squashed, he began combing the rest of the schoolyard. Determined as he was, Charlie still couldn't find any frogs. By the time the bell rang and the kids were corralled back into their classrooms, all that Charlie found was a handful

of worms, wriggling on the soggy mulch.

Disappointed, Charlie sighed and made his way back to class. Worms were alright, he figured, but they weren't very interesting. For the rest of the day, Charlie sat in the back of the room, half-heartedly filling in his worksheets and waiting for the day to end. When it finally did, he silently tucked his things back into his backpack and followed the queue of students out the door. The other kids all scattered as soon as they were out of the building, ready to spend the rest of the day playing since it was finally Friday, and no one had any homework to worry about.

Charlie walked slowly, dragging his feet. He didn't get to play, he had to go straight home, like he promised. He sighed as he walked past his gallivanting classmates. It wasn't fair at all, he thought, that everyone else should get to enjoy themselves while he had to sit at home all afternoon. Hanging his head, he set off on his way. Charlie's mud-caked sneakers squelched as he walked, leaving a trail of dirty footprints in his wake. After a few minutes, he noticed that the squelching had stopped, and the sidewalk was clean of footprints. He looked up to see that the sun had started to come out, drying up the muck on his shoes. As he looked up at the sky, Charlie saw that there weren't any clouds at all anymore. There was no sign at all of the storm his mother had warned him of. In fact, the weather was perfect, and if he asked when he got home, Charlie figured there would be no way his mother wouldn't take him to the park.

He stopped walking as he pondered this idea, and frowned. He had warned her that it would be too late to catch frogs when the storm was over. And still, she had told him to come straight home. Charlie shook his little head. Sometimes grownups said things that just didn't make any sense. He glanced across the street at the park, his eyes lighting up.

He decided to stop for just a few moments, just long enough to walk around the trail. It would still be shady and damp enough that he might see a frog, and he would be home soon enough that his mother would never know.

Once Charlie arrived at the park, he headed right for the trail. The water level in the creek was still higher than usual because of the rain, and the current looked quite strong, so instead of wading right through it, like he usually did to get to the trail, Charlie decided

to take the bridge. It was old and rickety, and he absolutely detested the way it bounced and swung, but still, Charlie scurried across, flinching every time he heard the boards creaking.

He reached the end of the bridge in no time at all, sighing in relief when he felt the sturdy earth under his feet. The trail wasn't very long at all, and it went in a loop through the trees, so no matter what, Charlie would end up back where he started in a little bit. For no particular reason, Charlie chose to start his trek on the lower end of the trail, and work his way around to the higher. He kept a careful eye out as he walked, not seeing any frogs yet, but admiring the lush green forest. He paused every once and a while at the trail's edge so he could touch the springy moss that spread over the tree trunks, or try to pluck a leaf from one of the higher branches. Charlie looked up at the trees, noticed how they bent toward each other, forming a sort of leafy canopy above him. He liked those trees, they always gave him the feeling that he was in a peculiar tunnel of some kind. What Charlie didn't notice was that the greenish light that filtered through the treetops was beginning to fade.

Even as the trees became more sparse and his tunnel no longer kept him from seeing the dark clouds that were gathering, Charlie still didn't notice them, turning his attention instead to the creek, which bubbled along down below the trail's edge. He had almost reached the spot where the trail looped back around when he found his path obstructed by a fallen tree.

Charlie knew that the tree must have come down during the storm, but he did not know the best way to get past it. The trunk was extremely thick, far too thick for Charlie to simply jump over, so he decided that the only thing to do was to go around. This too, however, quickly became an issue. Before it had fallen, the tree had been on the side of the trail, at the ledge above the creek. Since the tree was so large and strong, it also had a strong system of roots twisting under the dirt, which, when the tree fell, were ripped from the ground as well, leaving a gaping hole where the tree once stood, rendering the earthen ledge fragile and prone to collapse. So, Charlie definitely couldn't go around that side.

But, as he looked more closely at it, Charlie realized that he couldn't really go around



"Railroad to Paradise" Paige Kucharski, '25

the other side either. He would need to hike through thorn bushes, poison ivy, and a thicket of trees so dense it would be near impossible to see where he was going. Besides, he couldn't even see the other end of the tree, so there was no way of knowing how far he'd even have to go to get around it.

Charlie considered turning back, but he desperately wanted to avoid doing so if possible. He was a stubborn boy, and he had made up his mind to go all the way around the trail, so that was exactly what he planned to do. He decided to keep looking for a way around, and maybe try climbing over the trunk if he got really stumped, and only when he had completely exhausted all other options, would he turn around.

Fortunately, Charlie didn't have to dwell on his conundrum for too much longer. This wasn't because he found a solution, but rather, his attention was caught by something else. He didn't take note of it at first, when he saw the greenish blur from the corner of his eye, he figured it was a leaf blowing in the wind.

Then, he heard a soft croaking behind him. Delighted, he whipped his head around just in

time to see the frog as it sprang from the dirt trail to the edge of the tree trunk, right where the roots were sticking out of the ground. It landed with a plop, and resumed croaking.

It was the most wonderful frog in the whole wide world, Charlie thought, staring into its beady frog eyes. It was an incredibly plump frog, moss green in color, and it was covered with a slick mucous, which, in Charlie's opinion, made it look like a great big shining emerald. He grinned at the frog, who did not acknowledge Charlie, turning its attention instead to a nearby fly.

While the frog was distracted, Charlie crouched down, creeping closer so that he could try to catch it. He pounced, hands outstretched, just as the frog swallowed the fly. It let out a panicked croak, hopping to the other side of the trail. Charlie had been so close, he even felt one of the frog's slimy little legs brush against his hand as it jumped to safety. Crouching again at the roots of the tree, Charlie prepared to grab at the frog again. It had started to rain again, and Charlie's mother surely had noticed by now that he was late, but Charlie remained oblivious, riveted by the frog.

Just as Charlie was preparing to reach for the frog again, a bolt of lightning flashed in the dreary sky, startling both the boy and the frog. The frog leapt into the creek, and Charlie cried out, turning to look at it. As he turned, Charlie slipped. The rain was coming down hard now, making the ground slick and muddy, leaving Charlie scrambling to regain his footing on the ledge. He clawed at the earth, trying to grab onto the trail, the tree roots, anything that would keep him from tumbling into the rocky creek.

Charlie was panicking now, and the more he struggled, the more of the ledge began to crumble away. He sobbed, he tried to catch his breath, but was only able to sputter and cough as the rainwater flooded his mouth and nose. Charlie clutched a root that stuck out from the mud, holding on as tightly as he possibly could. His knuckles turned white, his hands were scraped raw, and he began to cry out in pain from all his thrashing and struggling. The rain came in sheets now, and Charlie's little hands kept slipping, he kept grabbing at the top of the root as he slipped, trying to keep himself from falling.

Cold, and soaked to the bone, Charlie started to grow weak, losing the feeling in his hands. He could no longer tell if he was holding firmly onto the root or about to lose his grip. His tears became indistinguishable from the barrage of raindrops in his eyes. His breathing became more and more shallow, and just as suddenly as the earth had collapsed below him, Charlie passed out.

He dangled for another moment, his body limp and waterlogged, before his fingers slipped from the root. He plummeted, straight into the icy and unforgiving waters of the creek. The current was relentless, dragging at him ceaselessly, but he was caught on the jagged rocks that hid under the water, which kept him from drifting away.

The next morning, Charlie woke up. His lungs were swollen with creek water, and his heart pumped nothing but raindrops through his veins, his blood instead leaking from deep gashes left by the rocks. His clothing and skin were both torn, both soaked with water, blood, and scum. Charlie was dazed, and though he felt vile, he had absolutely no idea that he was dead.

He lifted his head from the creek and looked around. His eyes had started to become

cloudy, but looking at his injuries and his surroundings, he was able to deduce that he had fallen from the trail. He was still numb, unable to feel the gaping wounds, but he saw the blood, and knew he couldn't very well stay in the creek. Charlie stood, and, movements disjointed, started to drag himself back up to the trail. He managed to grab onto the roots of the fallen tree, and to his relief, he was able to pull himself up enough to get out of the water.

The storm still raged around him, and he was scared that if he did make it back onto the trail, the wind would carry him right over the edge again, so he decided not to go back to the trail. Instead, Charlie grabbed onto the roots once more as he climbed, and he pulled himself under them, into the place where they had been ripped out of the ground. He nestled himself into the muddy crater to wait out the storm.

Once the storm ended, Charlie was able to focus on other issues. He wondered if his mother would come looking for him, or any of his classmates. His eyes, now glassy and cold, widened in horror when he realized what would happen if his mother found him. He had broken the rules, he was supposed to come straight home from school. Maybe his mother hadn't yet realized he wasn't home, or maybe she would be angry with him when she found him. What if she wouldn't take him to the doctor? He knew he was badly hurt, but she had warned him, she had known this would happen, so what if it was too late to do anything?

It didn't make sense to Charlie, but it also didn't make sense to him when his mother had told him to come straight home, so he decided the best thing to do would be to stay where he was, so he could figure things out for himself. Surely, he could hide in his crater for as long as it took to decide on a course of action. The roots covered the top, so Charlie wouldn't be visible from the trail unless he stuck his head out. This made for a fine shelter, and ensured that nobody would find Charlie's hiding place.

His shelter was a bit dirty, but Charlie didn't mind. He quite enjoyed squishing the mud between his fingers, and spending time with all the critters and bugs that lived in the muck with him. Even the occasional frog would make its way into the hole, so Charlie was quite content.

Peeking out from between his nook one day,

Charlie saw one of the students at his school, a little girl, heading down the trail. He was just about to call out to her when he noticed that she wasn't alone. Her mother and father were just behind her. Surely they would tell his mother that he was at the park. Thankful that he hadn't said anything, Charlie sank back under the cover of the roots, and waited anxiously for them to pass.

It was a few days before Charlie saw another kid his age on the trail. This time, the boy was unattended, so it would be perfectly safe for Charlie to reveal his presence. Perhaps, he mused, the boy would even like to go frog hunting with him. He lifted himself up onto the trail, slowly and silently so as not to startle the other boy. When he saw Charlie, the boy gasped anyway, recoiling with horror at the rotting creature that had appeared before him.

Charlie, unaware of the ghoulish state he was in, was baffled by the boy's reaction. He didn't realize how soaked his clothing had become with blood and filth, couldn't feel the blotches of mold that had begun to eat away his skin, and his clouded, glassy eyes couldn't see the exposed bone through his bleeding and withering flesh. He called after the boy with a voice roughened by the decay in his throat, urging him to come closer.

Instead, the boy turned and fled. Desperate and bewildered, Charlie followed him on broken legs, his numb fingers grabbing onto the back of the boy's shirt, pulling him back. The boy struggled to free himself from Charlie's cold grip, wailing and begging for release. Charlie held tight, begging just as loudly for the boy to listen, to stay just for a few minutes. The boy showed no sign that he had heard Charlie's cries, and went right on screaming, calling Charlie a monster and a ghost.

Charlie froze, wondering what the boy meant? He wasn't a monster, how could he be? No, he was just an ordinary boy, he was sure of it. In the moment that he stopped to ponder this, the other boy wrenched himself free. Feeling the boy slip away, Charlie's confusion was replaced by a blind rage. He hadn't done anything wrong, hadn't done anything to deserve this cruelty, but still, the boy refused to let up. It wasn't fair, and he wouldn't allow it. He pounced, crashing into the boy, knocking him to the hard ground.

The boy thrashed and flailed, Charlie

slamming him back down when he picked himself up. Each time, the boy landed closer and closer to the edge of the trail until, with one final shove, Charlie pushed him over. He hit the water with astonishing speed and drifted down the creek. Charlie, finally satisfied that the boy would leave him alone, slunk back into his hole.

Charlie stayed on the trail from then on, fearing that if he tried to go home, his mother would be just as angry as that boy had been, even though Charlie certainly didn't deserve it. As he decomposed, he grew more and more bitter. He was even quicker to turn on the children who refused to spend time with him, plunging them into the creek without remorse. He was content when he was left alone with his thoughts and the hum of the forest. He was content to stay hidden when families walked by, since he knew that parents would keep their children away from him, keep them from spouting their vile insults.

It was when the children came without their parents that Charlie's bitterness seeped to the surface. He became malicious, pouncing, taking lives with the same glee he used to find pouncing on frogs in the mud. He sat, feet dangling off the ledge, his sunken eyes following the bodies down the creek, watching as the blood that spilled from them mixed with the foul water. As he looked, his mouth twisted into a ghastly smile. Once the bodies were out of sight, he would bury himself back under the roots of his fallen tree, where he waited for the next child who was foolish enough to cross his path.

So, children continued to disappear, and though Charlie was never found, people soon accepted that he was gone. It wasn't difficult to surmise that he must have gone down to the creek the day he vanished. As rumors began to circulate of a beast that stalked the trail, the town came to the conclusion that Charlie was its first victim, that his body still lay in the forest somewhere, mutilated and worm-eaten. And this conclusion wasn't wrong, not entirely. There was a creature that lurked among the trees, clogging the waters of the creek with children's corpses, and Charlie never did return from the forest. Instead, he stayed hidden beneath the tangled roots of the fallen tree, where he still sits today, keeping a cold and watchful eye on the trail.



"Old Barn" Tyler Unkert, '22

Cattle Mutilation

*Samantha DeTample, '24
Second Place, Poetry, 2022-2023*

He opened up the barn door
His cows could not be found
Their hay beds had all risen
Their hoof prints marked the ground

He pursued the trail of cow tracks
They left dimples in the mud
They scattered on the grassy slope
The hilltop gathered blood

He traveled through the pasture
The crop fields were trimmed low
The cows had all been left to rot
Their skin laid out like dough

The man cried out in horror
His loving cows were gone
He cried until he couldn't breathe
He wept until the dawn

His sorrow carried through the day
His grief persisted into night
He could not carry on this way
He doused the barn in scorching light

Squashed to Bits

Ellis Gubbenet, '23

I clung to the mast as hard as I could with all six of my barbed legs. The breeze in my face made me feel insecure, and threatened to knock me off. I gazed about the boat and saw more of my kind, each clinging just as I was. When the ship finally struck shore, we flew, revealing the red beneath our spotted white wings and taking flight as we searched our new home. It was promising, with many trees to suck sap from. Promising, it was, until the first boot stomped. The genocide had begun.



"Ladybug" Graphite Pencil, Kristin Rule, '23

daisies and all their dead stems

Erica J. Wagner, '25
First Place, Poetry, 2022-2023

i burned our bed with the candle of aphrodite;
the goddess of love wouldn't know what to say if
she ever laid eyes on me.
love is loudest afterwards, once something's
died:
makes you wish it never was, or at least, makes
you wish you tried.
lo and behold: the thing that never opened its
eyes!:
writhing under venus and its heat – under
burning lust it fries!

what's to fear when two become one?
and what's to believe when forever is done?
oh, down the wishing well my money goes;
the foggy water below doth nourish an
ever-blooming red rose.
bitter winter and biting snow have warmed me,
for summer hath killed me, and autumn never
warned me.
why do i carry such a sword,
when the battle of love has made me so bored?
gone are the days of dancing and gems;
so alone in the ballroom is where i waltz with
daisies and all their dead stems.



"The Definition of Love" Katharine Bach, '23, First Place Photography, 2021-2022

Man's Best Friend Until the End

Julia Cabete, '25
Second Place, Fiction, 2021-2022

Everyone is gone. It's been two months since the bacon was left out on the counter. At first, I was delighted to find that Mom and Dad had left it in a perfectly pleasant place for me to snatch it. They always made sure to push it just out of reach, in the center of the counter. This time, it was mine for the taking.

The first hour was exhilarating. After the third, I waited patiently for them to come home. Two hours passed since they were supposed to be home from work—maybe they were just out buying snacks? Sometimes Mom did that after work. Then the sun went down, and the warmth of the afternoon tile floor faded to a cool, uncomfortable, frosty glaze. After the third day, I came to the conclusion that something terrible must have happened to them.

Now, the roads are laced with thick layers of dust that tremble with every step. Once wickedly bright canary lines marking this way and that have now become lost beneath clumps of dead leaves and empty soup cans. Perhaps a week ago the cans would have had remnants of their fillings tucked away in the crevices of their interior, but I have checked these streets once, twice, even three times by now. Even the fragmented bones scattered along the streets are picked clean. There isn't a drop—nor a living creature—left.

I plant my paws in front of a shop I've passed by almost daily, although today there is an opening in the doorway. My prolonged inspection allows for the warm asphalt to embrace the pads of my feet like little cozy socks. It reminds me of cool days when the sky gets dark and sad, and Mom and Dad invited a fiery dancer into our home who greeted us with warmth. I lay with my paws outstretched, and the dancer's flaming fingertips plucked at my hair strings. Things were pleasant then.

Now that dancer is gone, rarely seen again. Her mother beams high in the sky during

the day, but her furious tugging at my coat is nowhere near as comforting as the tiny dancer. In fact, it's excruciating at times.

The asphalt bares its teeth at me now, threatening to gnaw off my toes. My feet are begging me to move out of the scorching summer sun. The store smells of particle friends and damp plastic—these things more inviting than the rows of sharp, pebbled incisors on the streets. The opening, although jagged in some places, seems big enough for me to jump through. The claws of four days worth of hunger strike the inside of my belly, prompting me to enter.

White-hot. Rain. My leg seethes with a stinging fury as the musty air hits the broken skin. I stifle the urge to gag as the bitter scent of rust plugs up my nose. Usually, when this happens, Dad scoops me up and tends to my wounds. I have always found his rough, calloused fingers to be quite comforting. They are big enough to cradle the entirety of my body, yet despite their size, they remain gentle. His campfire tone would often lull me to sleep during nights I was afraid to be alone.

But I am alone now, and my ears cower at the silence of his absence. I've learned that I can't sit and cry—that would only attract the attention of those who are also plagued by an empty stomach. I must move on.

The store has an odd flavor to the air. While the entrance was guarded with dust bunnies and therefore smelled musty, going further into the store awakens a strangely familiar scent that leaves my tongue dry. The air is foul, yet this familiar flavor laces the strong presence of trash, feces, and rotting flesh. Something has definitely been here, but it has been reduced to scraps of tissue and bones. I lap up whatever rotting morsels are left; they leave an unsettling flavor on my tongue, but they settle the aches of hunger for a short while.

I prod and pry at the scattered wrappers and crushed cans, but the scavenger quadrant in my



Untitled, Brian Zipay, '24

brain is fighting with the curiosity quadrant. My nose is deterred by that familiar scent, and I just can't shake it. I decide to follow it.

As I round the corner of a nearby aisle, I recognize the smell. It's similar to the pungent-yet-sweet stench of Mom's running shoes after one of her workouts. I walk further, and the sour scent of rotting flesh begins to intertwine with something sickeningly sweet.

It smells like Mom's perfume.

I'm running now—as fast as my small paws can carry me. It's a pretty large store, one that is unfamiliar to me, and the layers of dust being kicked up have plugged my nostrils, so it's difficult to pinpoint the smell exactly.

Wait, there. There it is! I'm running faster now. The scent is blinding.

I'm so close! Here? No, there. Around that corner. It must be.

I pounce around the corner. There she is! Mom's sweet strawberry curls stick out like kinky springs from her head. She parts them from her face as she would do to the beaded curtain we had at home in the kitchen. Underneath reveals the patches of dirt and unhealed gashes scattered on her cheeks. Her eyes carry purple patches like when she would come home late in the evening and cradle

me on the couch. Her cracked lips split as the corners curl into a smile—this is when she sees me.

The soft hands I've been craving to be caressed by stretch out towards my belly, and I anticipate being lifted into the air so that I can be at the perfect level to kiss her face.

But then there is pain. Why is there pain? I cry out for help, but Mom doesn't respond. She's smiling. Why is she smiling? I'm hurting. Mom, this hurts.

That same copper smell returns, only stronger now. My belly feels light, and I can feel my insides moving. Something sour slips onto the floor, and it feels as if a weight has been removed from my body. Mom's hands are red. Mom, are you hurt? I try to reach out to comfort her, but I can't.

It hurts. Mom, this hurts.

I can't really feel anything anymore. My body has become light, and my vision has blurred.

I can't see Mom anymore. But I know she's there. I finally found her. I'm so happy I found you, Mom. I can't see. I can't hear. I can't feel anything. But I can smell Mom's perfume. The scent is sweet, and I feel happy.

I am home.



"Dexterity" Katharine Bach, '23

Lies

Linsey Godown, '24

she sat, alone, in the dark corner
filled with guilt over her actions.
no one is going to mourn for her
since you are creating distractions.

lies flood out of your mouth to
only make the situation worse.
if people saw what she went through
then maybe she wouldn't be cursed.

the darkness overcrowds her mind
leaving her with little memory
of who she really is inside,
along with a reminder of her enemy.

all it took was one awful rumor
to be spread throughout the whole
school just for the humor.
Was this really your goal?

Look at how miserable you made
her feel and the happiness she lost.
so much pain that she turned to a blade,
Nothing is ever worth that cost.

Lovecraft

Natalie DeTample, '24

"It would help my shaky nerves if I could dismiss what I now have to think of the air and the sky about and above me. I never feel alone or comfortable, and a hideous sense of pursuit sometimes comes chillingly on me when I am weary."

– "From Beyond", H.P. Lovecraft

Lovecraft's work had always intrigued Henry, and the story "From Beyond" was no different. He wondered if there really was something that humans just failed to see. Or maybe refused to see. It didn't mean too much to him, but he was curious as anyone would be. He'd of course had his fair share of things that "go bump in the night," but he wasn't frightened of the unknown easily. Henry worked the average office job that was as boring as could be, but provided him with a comfortable life. He thought he had nothing better to do in his free time than explore such an idea.

So he did what any person curious about another world would do, and looked things up on the internet. He read all about third eyes and other spiritual nonsense that he didn't understand. Despite this, he still tried to "be more aware," and he thought it may have started to work. No real correlation could be made, for he did begin to lose much needed sleep and everyone knows what a lack of sleep can do to the brain. He found mysterious noises would



"The Other Line" Isabella Margotta, '24



"Unknown" Meghan Sebeth, '25

occur more often and caught glimpses of something he could not put a name to. All this made his work performance poor, and he was forced to give up the idea or he would lose his job. But even as he straightened out his sleep, things continued to happen. He would lie in bed for hours on end, just listening. Listening for the faintest of whispers and shuffles. They were enough to keep him wondering. He believed he was making progress.

It was three months later when he was fired. He had begged his boss not to, told him all about his studying and his situation, but to no avail. Henry had made so much progress since he had begun. He could see things now. He wasn't exactly sure what they were, it was always seen out of the corner of his eyes. Bits of movement and dark shapes. The first few times it had happened he felt flurries of excitement. It was now just old news, another part of his day.

It was a Thursday morning when he saw it. He was brushing his teeth and looked up to the mirror. In its reflection, he saw something new above the shower curtain. It was like a person,

but not. Something was off about it, besides the fact that it shouldn't be there. It was almost peeking over the curtain, finger-like stubs gripping the pole that held it up. Henry just stood there, unable to move. He blinked and it was still there. It was unbelievably unnatural looking. All he could do was walk out of the room. Toothbrush still in hand, he sat down on the couch and stared blankly for what seemed like forever. What Henry had first mistaken as excitement was now feeling a lot like fear. The last thing he wanted to do was go back to the bathroom. So he went about his monotonous day until night came around. He had to go back in the bathroom and make sure the thing was gone before he could sleep. Toothbrush in hand, he entered. He was immediately relieved when nothing was there, though he didn't dare open the curtain.

That night he laid in bed, desperately wishing to fall asleep. Thoughts of the thing could not escape his mind, and he needed it to be day again. He heard a shuffle come from across the room. Henry didn't hesitate to think of the thing from the shower prowling upon

him. His heart sank and he closed his eyes as tight as possible. Silence. And then a whisper. Mere inches from his left ear. He could feel the puff of breath lingering. His mind was racing, too much to identify what had been said. "Henry," maybe? Or a simple hello? A language of another kind? It was silent now, besides his rapid heartbeat. It was as if his ears were twitching, searching the silence for any sound at all. Nothing else happened that night.

Henry hesitantly entered the kitchen that morning. He had only gotten a couple hours of sleep. He didn't know what to do with himself, if he truly was scared of the thing he'd been looking for, the past four months would have been a waste. His heart skipped a beat as he realized there was something near the doorway. Now normally Henry would turn to find nothing, but the thing was back and standing there. Half of it was hidden by the wall, the other top half stuck out. It was as if it was watching him again. Henry was trapped in the room, there was no way in hell he was getting anywhere near that thing. He shrank into the corner until there was no more space to squeeze into. There he sat for the whole day, watching the thing as it watched him. Sounds came through the room every now and then. Some sounded like sad attempts at English, other times sounded as if piano keys were being played one by one. He did not take his eyes off it the whole time. Even when the sun was gone and darkness filled the room, he knew it was still there.

At some point, Henry fell asleep, but there was no way of knowing when. He awoke to the sound of birds chirping. He snapped up to find the thing gone. This didn't make him feel any better, though. He went straight to the computer while he had the chance to look up what he'd seen, but his eyes were drawn to the date. Something must have been wrong with the computer, it said the day was Tuesday. He could've sworn it had just been Friday. There was no way he had been knocked out that long, it had to be the computer. He got almost three minutes into his research when something ruffled past the door. He quickly turned to look, but there was nothing there. He turned back to the computer to research, but some kind of faint fog hovered all around. He researched anyways, all the while whispers

came and went. After a fruitless hour of typing, he retreated to his room. As he opened the door he saw movement from all around that left in an instant. He flicked the light on to find the faintest outline possible hovering next to his bed. He didn't even stay to find out what that was. He quickly walked to the living room and, feeling almost childish, brought his three pieces of furniture together to create a sort of fort. He spent the tormented night there. And the next one. And the next one. And the next one.

Everything had proceeded to get worse each day. More sounds and more movement and more things. They were everywhere. Henry knew he must be losing his mind, but he didn't know how much longer he could put up with it. He had to put an end to things. He had blocked off the room where his computer lay, for some of the most unnatural things happened there. He only had his brain to rely on for an answer, and that was no trustworthy source. He mustered up the little courage and sanity he had left and decided to go to the source of the problem. The thing he had first seen in the shower was when the unbearable things had begun to happen. He was going to find it, it must be somewhere here, watching. He stormed from the pathetic cover of his fort and threw open the door to his bedroom. Many things were there, but not what he was looking for. He ran to the kitchen where the colored fog had taken over. It wasn't here either. The only place left was the bathroom. If it wasn't there, well, Henry didn't know what he was going to do if it wasn't there. He didn't really know what he'd do if it was there, either. He opened the bathroom door slowly, scanning the room as it opened. He became disheartened as he saw it, right where it had first been through the mirror. He stood frozen, just like before. It took what felt like two hours before he could move. He inched towards it. It didn't move. He was right beneath it when he froze again. Looking up at it now, he was more frightened than ever. There really was so much happening on its faceless body. And at the same time, nothing at all. In a final and hopeless attempt to find an answer, he flung back the curtain. A light brighter than light itself overcame him. His body went limp. And his mind, blank.

It started with one shimmering light, tumbling
ever further in a trail of blazing glory. The stars
were falling. Each leaf shriveled and fell at the
slightest brush of it. It shattered on the grass,
with a sound as if the most fragile type of glass
had been broken. The grass around it wilted in
seconds, but not even a bunny batted an eye.

The patch went untouched for years, hidden
in the grove of trees. But as people sought new
places to move, the trees were uprooted and
replaced with houses, ones with shingled roofs
and bright pastel doors that squeak when they're
pushed too slowly. Rose bushes sat along the
front porches, still small, but beginning to bloom.

Eventually, someone found the fallen star, still
shattered in pieces on the ground. With a curious
mind, they reached out to touch it. The pieces
disappeared in a smoke and left the patch in pitch
black. It was as if a thick curtain had been draped
over it.

That night a rain of stars came down, a fatal
dance through the sky. A symphony of shattering
could be heard all over. Even the deep sleepers
awoke to the noise, the tiredness in them did not
stop their eyes from widening immediately.

People don't like when the strange cannot
be explained, and so they were set into a fit of
panic. More stars were found, but they still kept
their warmth from the fall. Their saffron sheen
was alluring, and the people who touched them
shockingly discovered that these stars would fit
back together in a perfect puzzle and ascend back
up.

The people rejoiced, thinking that they were
saving the stars. What they couldn't see were the
stars hurtling toward the others and colliding.
The crash could not be heard from Earth. All that
could be seen was a burst of light. The people
thought it was the stars being put back into
place, but they were being knocked off balance.
The intricate spacing of the constellations was
becoming undone.

The people laid their heads down that night,
thinking the stars had been restored in their spots
in the night sky. They didn't see the stars dying,
the clashing above killing them instantly. They
didn't see the downpour, the shards that pierced
through the sky.

The stars were long dead once they hit the
ground. They turned to dust before a person
could even get close. That morning, all eyes
opened but could not see. The stars had shrouded
the world in darkness before the sun could rise
for dawn.

Fallen Star

Samantha DeTample, '24

Scattered and Lost

Ellis Gubbenet, '23

Nimbly, I dodge the incoming giants.

Try as I might to fly, I am knocked down. Yet again
sent skittering along the ground.

Now, my wings are torn,

My eye, crushed.

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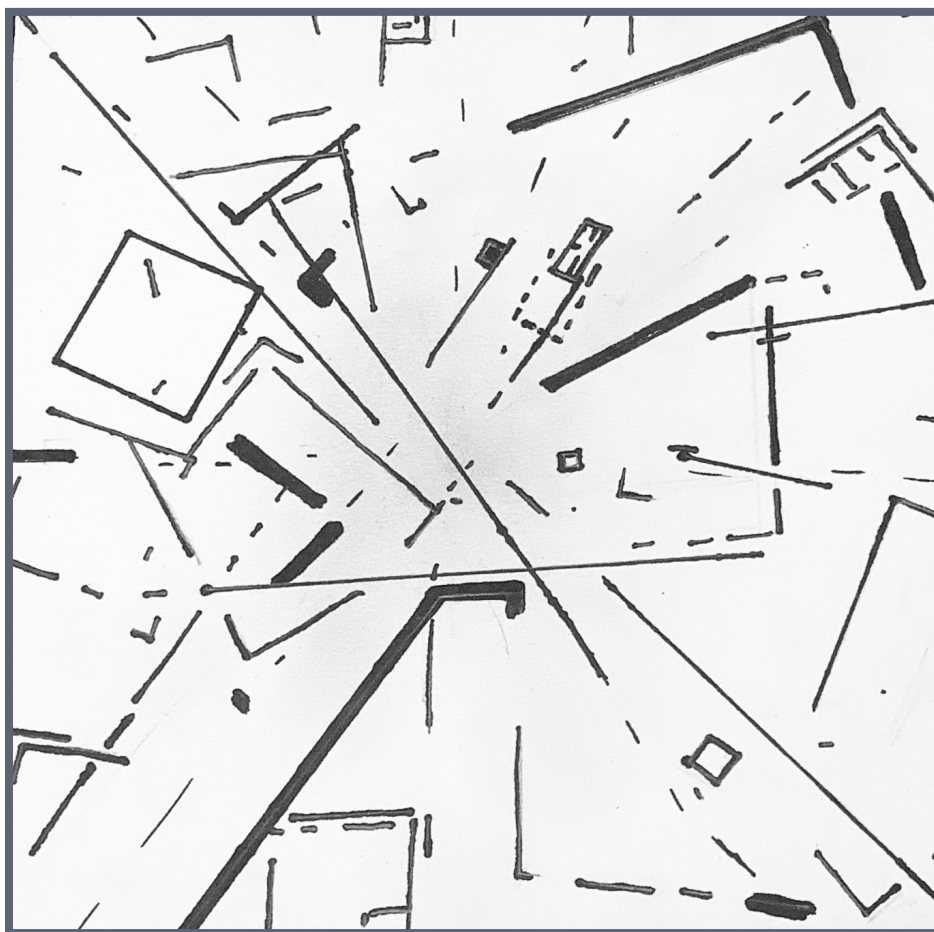
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ng liquid down my face.

There is no part of me unchipped.

And like all those lost within the pages of time,

I long to be found.



"Lines" Pen & Ink, Mackenzie Campbell, '25

In my last year as a senior at Delaware Valley Regional High School, I wanted to focus my art portfolio's theme on using portraiture as a way to capture human emotion through the female perspective.

AP
ART
STUDIO:
HANNAH
HIRSCH
'23

I have experimented with different mediums such as marker and acrylic paint. By using a lack of background imagery, the portraits depict personal moments in a subtle way. These portraits have become indirect self portraits, representing feelings I experienced while creating those certain pieces.



"Despair" Color Marker



"Alienated" Graphite Pencil



"Inscriptions" Matte Board, Paint Marker

At its core, my portfolio this year has been an exploration of the written word. Guiding the entire series was really just one question: How can I incorporate text into visual art? I wanted to consider every aspect of text — its meaning or lack thereof, the physical act of writing, and the reasons why we write in the first place.

AP
ART
STUDIO:
GRACE
LAGUARDIA
'24



On a more technical level, I wanted to explore how words can create rhythm and contrast, becoming semi-abstract lines and patterns in and of themselves. This involved a fair amount of experimentation, as is expected from any long-term project. Some things were constant, like the black-and-white palette and use of original writing (ranging from personal to philosophical to entirely incoherent) while other aspects of the project shifted and evolved throughout the year.



"Tapestries" Paper, Paint Marker

AP
ART
STUDIO:
NATALIA
SOSA
'23

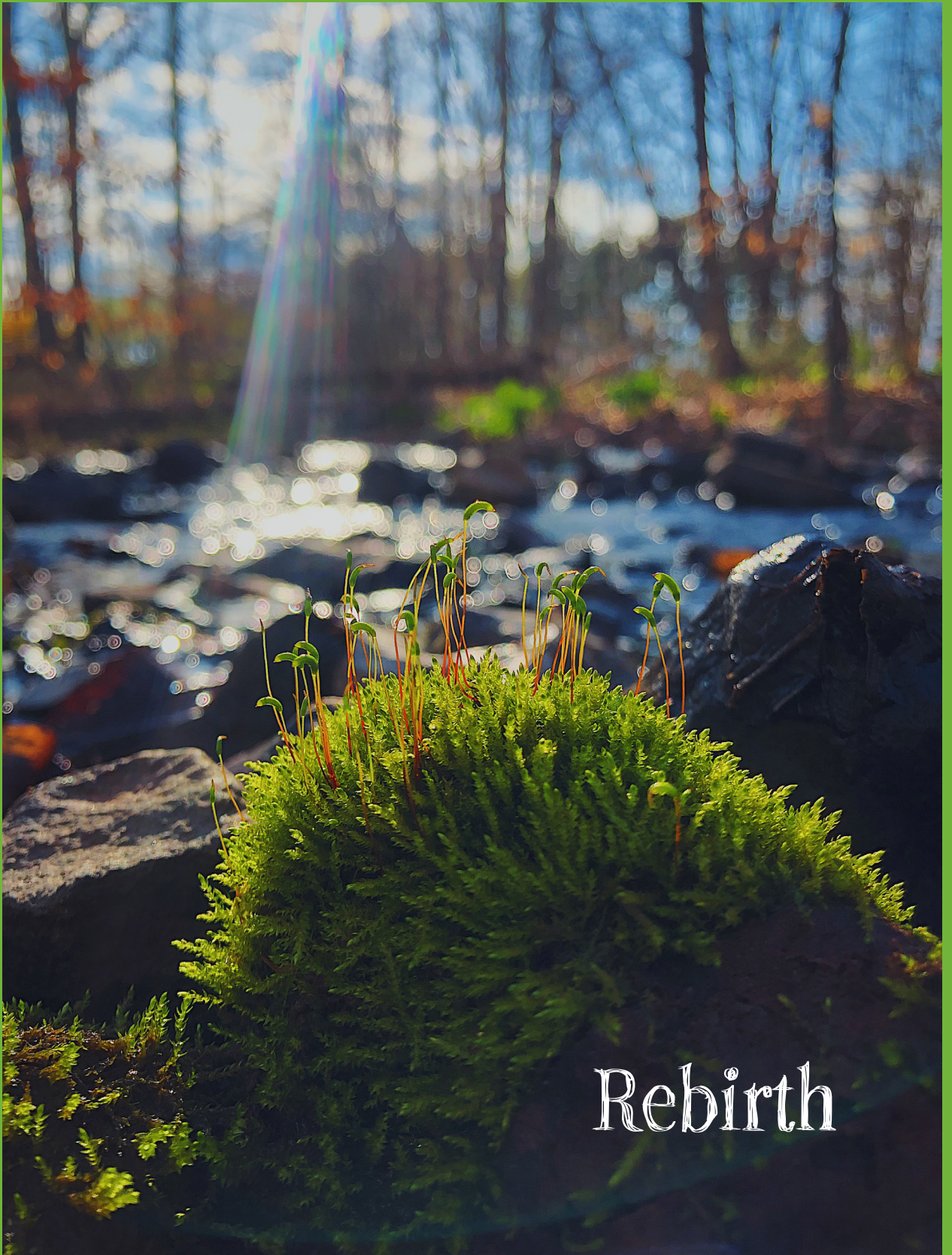


"UPC" Digital Media & Photography



"OPD" Digital Media & Photography

My pieces represent how we are all just numbers and data to big corporations, not only customers but also the employees: not real, living individuals, but as statistics and sources of profit. Nondescript and organized in large groups, each Walmart online order receipt is like one faceless person in a crowd – they have no life or identity, just their last name and order number. In the piece "UPC," the numbers overlapping the customer's portrait is the identification number (UPC code) of the item they are purchasing, representing that the person is identified by their item. My piece "OPD" is about the employees in the Online Pickup and Delivery Service who are judged only by their time and accuracy. If one does not have good accuracy or time, they are the people that tend to be the main target when Walmart is looking to let people go or cut hours.



Rebirth

"Earth's Unnoticed Beauty 2" Julia Meyko, '22

The Moon

Grace LaGuardia, '24

Originally written on January 16th, 2023 and inspired by John Green.

The first full moon of 2023 was on January 6th. At the time you should be reading this, that was also the most recent full moon, and at the time I'm writing this, we are twenty-four days into the current lunar cycle.

I know this because for the past three years or so, I've had a widget installed on my iPhone which displays the following: a calendar, a minimalistic icon of a moon in its current phase, and a few moderately useful statistics like "level of illumination," all of which I'm yet to really understand. These are updated in real-time and adjusted to my precise location. The widget takes up a solid one-third of my home screen, and as time goes on, I've found myself caring about it less and less. Still, I can't bring myself to delete it — in true human fashion, I've developed a weird, sentimental attachment to the cluster of pixels, and it would be more trouble dealing with its sudden absence than its continued presence.

Maybe I should appreciate the widget a little more — the ancient Sumerian astronomers who invented the first lunar calendar surely didn't have access to a helpful digital phase-tracker, and neither did the first humans who looked up at that strange, shapeshifting light in the dark, wondering what exactly it meant.

Interestingly, almost all people throughout history have come out of their respective skyward trances knowing one thing: that there's definitely some sort of picture up there, painted in shadows and light. While our celestial pareidolia is consistent, our

interpretations definitely aren't — each culture sees something different, like a massive lunar Rorschach test. Before writing this, I was most familiar with the idea of the 'man on the moon,' but had no idea that other people might refer to the same valleys and craters as 'the woman with the basket on herback,' 'the rabbit on the moon,' or, most interestingly, Polynesia's 'the woman who pounds tapa' — a type of cloth made from hand-beaten tree bark.

In our mythology, we've also turned the moon into something greater. Across the board, ancient cultures have been fascinated by the moon's waxing and waning, seeing it as personifying the cyclical nature of death and rebirth. Some ancient Hindus believed that the moon was the 'waiting room' of souls who were yet to be reincarnated, while the Tatar people of Central Asia referred to the moon as the "Queen of Life and Death."

Embarrassingly, this was the real reason why I downloaded that moon-tracking widget. I think astronomy is cool, of course — but in the long, nightmarish weeks of lockdown, I was willing to believe anything just to keep myself alive. From my own mind and some vague knowledge of the aforementioned mythology, I created a system in which the lunar cycles became my most important measure of time. The new moon, though invisible, was a fresh start, washing away whatever had happened in the past cycle. It was my own death and rebirth. The full moon was also an occasion to look forward

to, and on those nights, I would find myself haphazardly throwing on a light coat, ill-suited to the extreme winter, and stepping into freezing darkness. I would walk the length of my circuitous, quarter-mile wooded driveway until I found somewhere sufficiently quiet, and would turn off my phone's flashlight. In those moments, as far as I could be from other people and with just the moon's light to guide me, only I existed. This is what got me through that year. The combination of self-reflection, time outside, and motivation to 'just make it until the next full moon' was entirely insane, but it was a way to survive.

All of this is to say that we, as humans, love finding things that aren't there. There is no dedicated woman eternally crafting fabrics on

the moon, and its phases have no real bearing on our quarantined lives. Both of these ideas are founded on nothing but literal tricks of the light, but we still turn them into symbols of great importance. No matter who or where we are, we have a tendency to assign meaning to the meaningless. It's true that in the end, the moon is only a rock — a very small and utterly insignificant rock, at that. Yet the meaning we project onto it makes it significant to us. Our minds can turn ordinary celestial bodies into rabbits, queens, and goddesses, and they can create symbols of hope and rebirth out of thin air. And although I don't believe in my moon-widget-mythology anymore, I do find it wonderfully human.

I give the moon five stars.



"The Wonders of the Night" Luke Hoffman, '25

Throbbing

Brooke Testa, '22
Second Place, Poetry, 2021-2022

I've always known
the hiss of cicadas
but never this.

While the swarm crescendos,
my ears ring
and my head throbs
in protest.

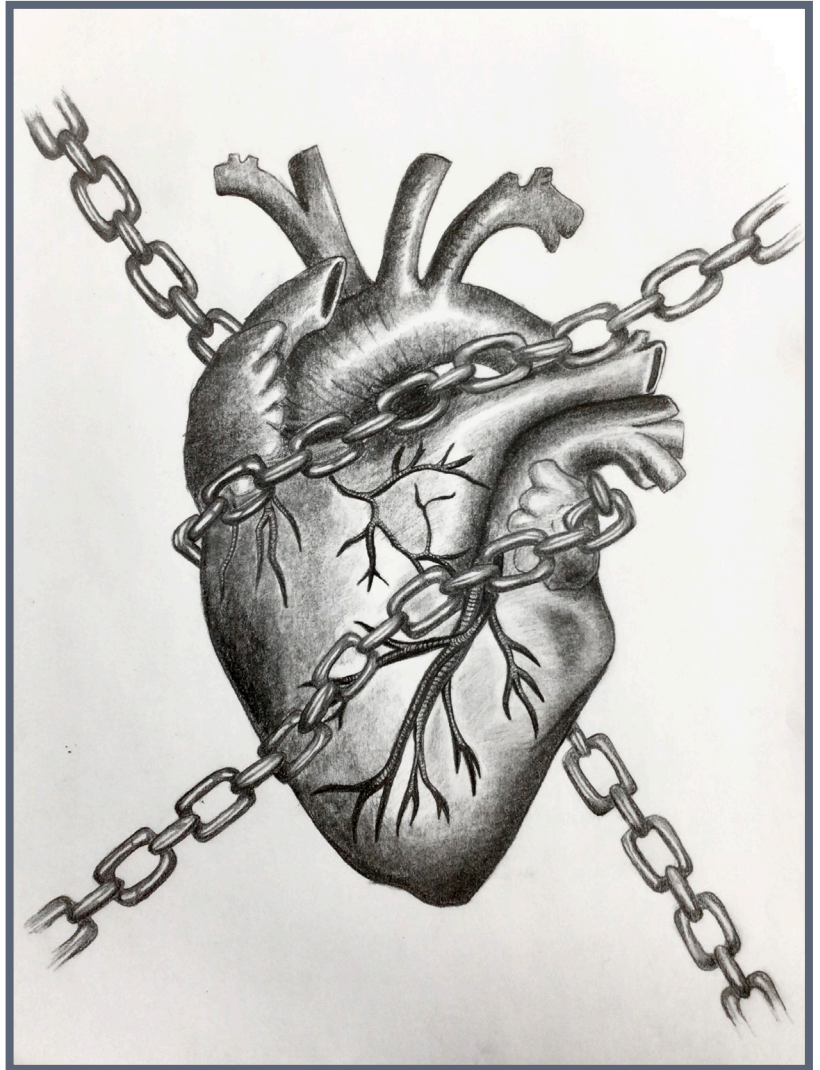
I fault a thousand little insects
which have always been here
deep underground
finally emerging.
There will be no silence
as they vie to be heard.

When the sound dies down,
I know
the soil will be better,
I know
the cry is natural
and impermanent.

But I can't stand it much longer.



"Cicada" David Brown, '24



Refugee

Sara Matthews, '24

*"Heart in Chains" Graphite Pencil, Brielle Bontempo, '24
Second Place, Visual Arts, 2021-2022*

Crowds of alarmed, frightened people
Grappling, trying not to swallow their own beating heart
Hurriedly scattering through what life used to be

All bare, calloused toes crunch
Over the rough scattered rubble

Trails of sticky, bloody gore
Follow the panic and disbelief

Through numerous rancid odors
Trepidation overpowers all

Fleeing for relief.



"Forever and Always," Graphite Pencil, Madeline Bobrowski, '23
First Place, Visual Arts, 2021-2022

If I close my eyes, I can precisely picture the cream colored walls of the cold, dreary hospital. From one of its creaky doors, the doctor entered to deliver my father's diagnosis. He struggled to vocalize, "This cancer affects only one in two million individuals per year." I am not sure why I clearly remember the color of the walls, or the exact tone the doctor spoke in as my mind fogged and vision blurred. I was paralyzed from the inside out. This chilling sentence left my family speechless for the entire car ride home. As we all gazed blankly out the window, silence dominated except for the occasional snuffles. That day, and that single sentence, shifted my perception of life as I knew it.

Several months before his diagnosis, my father had complained of intense pains down his side that made almost every movement a challenge. Adrenal Cortical Carcinoma, an extremely rare cancer, was invading the function of several of his organs due to the grapefruit-size tumor hovering above his adrenal gland. With days and nights spent by my father's side while he received his treatment, and an agonizing surgery to prevent possible spread, I never once saw my father lose his foundation of laughter.

Through days where his treatment would leave him bed-ridden, he would crack a joke to make us smile. I was there by his side the entire journey: the good, the bad, the very, very ugly. And as I helped him physically or changed IV fluids when he was too weak to do it himself, he in return showed me the power of a positive mindset and demonstrated how one's response to a situation is solely based on their attitude, not their circumstance. My admiration for him during this tribulation only blossomed, and my own perspective changed in concert with his when I received a medical diagnosis that had changed not only the way I lived my life, but increased the appreciation I had for it.

I had always been below average for my weight and height. No one ever questioned my growth delay, but my body soon began to show signs that concerned my doctors more than ever. My pigmentation faded, leaving me with a pale, sickly appearance. After several tests, doctors found the root of my growth delay. I had been battling Crohn's Disease for the past several years from the inside out, and my exterior was finally showing what

my interior had been suffering. I started an infusion treatment, a two-hour process every four weeks, -- one I will continue for the rest of my life.

Reflecting on that singular sentence of my father's diagnosis, it did in fact change my life, but not how I thought it would. My life did not change in terms of a specific outcome, but rather it changed my outlook. His response to cancer shaped my viewpoint of Crohn's, and like my father, I have never lost my positive mindset. I saw Crohn's as a characteristic of mine, not as an identity, and I learned how much strength was rooted within me. Through treatments and appointments, I focused on never losing my smile just as my father modeled for me during his fight.

Instead of allowing my diagnosis to act as a setback, Crohn's has been a catalyst to prove to myself I am more than just the disease. With my optimistic approach, I have discovered leadership qualities as a sports captain and Vice President of Student Council. I have dedicated myself to academics by challenging myself with rigorous courses. These characteristics will be applied in my life moving forward, especially in my future career as a nurse. I will strive to pass on the same positive mindset to my patients, to show I am there alongside them for the entire battle, just like I was for my father.

What Makes Me Me

*Rachel McIntyre, '22
Second Place, Nonfiction, 2021-2022*

LGBTQ+ Representation in Video Games

Edmund Dougherty, '24
First Place, Nonfiction, 2022-2023

Video games have been a part of my life ever since I was a kid. Ever since first picking up a controller and playing *Mario 64* with my older brother, I've always been fascinated with the depth of the worlds they create, and the real life interactions they inspire. Now, I look to study game design as a career, having never lost that passion for the medium. To say games are a part of my identity is an understatement; if you're aware of the cliché of the pretentious artist talking about their art as their very being, then you're aware of my feelings towards video games. Another large part of my identity, as you may have assumed from the title, is belonging to the LGBTQ+ community. I had discovered this about myself around the same time I began to really understand the history of video games and how they're produced. Of course, this made me interested in how these two core parts of my identity intersected.

As with most media, the LGBTQ+ community was not positively portrayed at the beginning. The first gay characters were in *Le Crime du Parking* and *Le Mur de Berlin va Sauter*, a pair of French adventure games by Froggy Software for the Amstrad CPC and the Apple II. These games show the old stereotypes front and center, namely the idea that gays were inherently more violent. They are both text adventures with a graphic interface, themed around solving mysteries.

In *Le Crime du Parking*, the murder of a woman left in a shopping cart outside a store was revealed to have been committed by a drug dealing gay man. *Le Mur de Berlin va Sauter* is more intense, as it has the main antagonist as a gay terrorist who plans to blow up the Berlin Wall to start WWII. The game also mainly has the player investigating the "seedy criminal underbelly" of France, which apparently is mostly comprised of gay bars and nightclubs. Needless to say, this was not exactly a very progressive game for representation, and serves more as an example of what the stereotype of the LGBTQ+ person was at the time; someone foreign, untrustworthy, and morally below the average person.

To contrast these games, let's talk about *Caper in the Castro*. *Caper in the Castro* is similarly a text-based adventure game with a graphic window, but stands in essentially complete contrast to Froggy Software's games. *Caper in the Castro* was initially distributed through the underground LGBT BBS. BBSs were very old social media, precursors to the forum sites modern social media was built off of. It was distributed as charity ware, being free and encouraging the player to donate their money to an AIDS charity. While not intended as a response to Froggy Software's games, (it's unlikely the creator would have even known they existed), its release right after is almost poetic, like its mirroring the growing contrast

between LGBT and anti-LGBT groups in the 1980s. Its slogan is, "It's not a game...it's a game!", and it couldn't be more fitting. The main character's name is Tracker McDyke, and the game retains that same level of subtlety throughout. The game's theming and portrayal of gay people feel much more in line with how they're widely seen now. However, like I said, this was only distributed through underground, tight-knit communities, and was even lost media for years. While *Caper in the Castro* was very progressive, it certainly did not reflect wider sentiments, especially in the other country where video games were popular: Japan.

While Japanese law was tolerant of homosexuality, public feelings were very much not. For an idea of how pervasive these feelings were, how about a look at what's considered one of the most wholesome gaming franchises: *Mario*. *Super Mario Bros. 2* as the U.S knows it is a reskin of another Japanese Nintendo-created game titled *Doki Doki Panic*. In Japan, in both the original game, and the Mario reskin, the character, Birdo is described thusly, "「自分をメスと思いこんで口からタマゴなどをはくヤツ。キャシーと呼ぶときげんががいい。」" This translates as, "He thinks he is a girl, and he spits eggs from his mouth. He'd rather be called Cathy." Specifically, the word for "thinks" used is *omoikonde*, which implies the subject is merely convinced of something, or wrongly believes it. Details like this being casually added to the manual of a children's game is not out of the ordinary for Japan, where anti-trans and cross-dressing jokes were incredibly common. For another example, when Capcom was pitching a *Final Fight* port to the Super Famicom (known as the Super Nintendo Entertainment System over here, or SNES), Nintendo showed concern over the fact that female enemies, namely Poison, were in the game. Capcom said they were simply transgender women, and the game was allowed to be released, featuring Poison. These sentiments didn't only exist in Japan, obviously, but these feelings really were more common than many think. Japan was much more blatant about it, but it's not as if trans people simply popped into existence a few years ago; they were well known enough

to be the butt of jokes and stereotypes even in the 1980s.

After the 1980s, games started to become more progressive. Many were still stuck in old biases: for example, *Police Quest: Open Season*, *The Beast Within: A Gabriel Knight Mystery*, and *Devil Summoners: Soul Hackers* all perpetuated stereotypes and continued to depict those in the LGBTQ+ community as perverted, strange, or just the butts of jokes. This is only a small sampling; the list could continue for pages. However, positive depiction also increased. The first game featuring same-sex marriage released, *Great Greed*, followed by one of the biggest PC RPGS featuring same-sex marriage as well: *Fallout 2*. Large industry figures also became more supportive, like Tim Cain, creator of the aforementioned *Fallout* series. Tim Cain, who was closeted at the time, began to insert same-sex romantic interactions into his games, like *The Temple of Elemental Evil*. Despite being the main creator of the original *Fallout*, he left Interplay during the production of *Fallout 2* due to the hostile internal environment towards gay people. The conflict between supporters of gay representation and those against grew as the 90s went on. *The Temple of Elemental Evil* faced controversy for its same-sex relationship option at the time of its release, with many feeling as if gay people should not be in video games.

Since I just mentioned *The Temple of Elemental Evil*, I'll use that opportunity to move forward in time to the early 2000s. The early 2000s saw a much larger amount of support for LGBTQ+, with support for the community becoming much more widespread and expected. Granted, it was far from being as it was now, but it was improved. Same-sex marriage was years from being legal in any U.S state, yet as always, politics and laws don't tell the full story. Public opinion was still much better, and as a result games began to introduce more complex LGBTQ+ characters. *The Longest Journey* (1999)'s main plot was focused on the development of a lesbian relationship between the two main characters. Characters like this were introduced to games like *Metal Gear Solid 2*, *Knights of the Old Republic*, and more. Even more notably, trans characters were

having their first non-bigoted appearances ever in the mainstream, even if these were always controversial. For an example on how much things had changed since the 80s, let's return to the *Mario* series. In *Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door*, there's a party member named Vivian. While this was changed in the U.S and German releases, in the original game she was a transgender woman bullied by her sisters for that fact. While there are certain things about how she's depicted in the original Japanese that may be dated, for example how she's described in the Tattle text, her inclusion is still a large step forward. She is the first transgender character in a game who's unambiguously heroic, and not either played off as a joke or as a scheming villain. Even *Caper in the Castro* only had them as background NPCs. The fact that the same series that played transgenders as a joke became the first mainstream game series to play them as a hero is very showing of the amount of change in LGBTQ+ recognition. It's no coincidence that this game was released only one year after legal transgender recognition in Japan; things were changing incredibly fast in the 2000s.

Interestingly, trans characters continued to be featured in Japanese games and removed from their English releases. Most notably, *Pokemon X and Y* feature a Beauty Trainer, a female trainer class, claiming she used to be a Black Belt, a male trainer class, but was able to look the way she does due to the power of science. The mention of the power of science is left out of the English release, making it much more subtle. The U.S, at this point, was still uneasy about trans characters in kid's media, still rooted in the idea of transgender people being somehow perverted. However, despite the odd case of censorship in localizations, LGBTQ+ representation continued to improve. In the 2010s, the representation exploded. While earlier decades were described in a few games, it would be very difficult to do so for the 2010s. The 2010s saw the rising perception of LGBTQ+ people as normal, and as fellow human beings that should be respected and treated as such. And so, you had games casually featuring gay, lesbian,

bi, and pan side characters, like *A New Beginning*, *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*, and *Nier*. Non-binary characters also began to see widespread recognition, most notably with the characters of *Minecraft* being officially treated as if they have no genders. There were games with more complex transgender characters, LGBTQ+ stories, and well thought out, genuine exploration of these themes and how they affect our lives. Most notably, LGBTQ+ players were being more widely recognized, with the rise of the design decision known as "Playersexuality", basically the idea that characters with romantic side quests should be able to date players of any gender, without creating specific characters to be gay or lesbian. While not a universal idea, it became much more widely known and respected in the 2010s, most notably utilized in *Saints Row IV* and *Dragon Age: Inquisition*.

By this point, alternate sexualities and genders were not only seen as more than a gimmick to appeal to a niche market or a tool for comedy, but were seen as a well of inspiration to draw unique stories and games from. Today, LGBTQ+ characters are incredibly common, and aren't treated as anything unique anymore, which is definitely for the better. Studying the history of LGBTQ+ representation through video games is not only interesting simply for the sake of it, (to me at least), but also because the media represents much more than the law does when it comes to minority representation. Yes, laws are vital for progressing civil rights, but those laws won't be passed in the first place without widespread public approval. Media represents that approval, as media is born from a specific society at a specific point in time. Law can only tell so much of the LGBTQ+ story; it is us who tell the rest. And what else could be the purest representation of a people other than their media? LGBTQ+ representation in video games is not perfect, even to this day, of course. There are still some who wouldn't want these characters in their games—a vast minority, of course, but it still exists. However, seeing how far we've come since the 1980s gives me hope that I'll be able to see characters that tell my story in my favorite art form.



Untitled, Pen & Ink, Macie Baron, '23
First Place, Visual Arts, 2022-2023



"Death" Avery Schaefer, '25

Haunted

Hayden Wagner, '25

Child, look at you decaying;
Your seams torn in two,
Colorful designs graying.
Why has time been so cruel to you?

Termites nestled in your bones.
Their home, it has turned.
Beetles hide under your stones,
A refuge from what was burned.

Stray cats sleep where you discard,
Grateful for the yard.
Crows salvage all your remains,
Loving what you kept in chains.

The ground wraps you in embrace,
Loving you for you.
The flowers cover your face,
Blooming so divine and new.

Beautiful you were in life,
So you are in death.
So peaceful an afterlife.
Child, was it worth your last breath?

Six Amber Eyes

Atticus Fiorito, '23

Chaos swirls, perpetually moving. The key to creating stems from such an abyss. It is a dark, deep realm, black and pooling. A hand reaches forth, pale and elegant. Clad in vines, nails of red, a marble palm bequeaths a flower to the deep. A creator is needed, and a creator appears. Something new must enter these worlds. A new brood, a new dynasty.

Yes, a mother is required.

Light seeps forth. Green, vibrant, porous. The luminous shade of lime spreads, filling a corner of the dark, sending a ripple through existence. The light transforms to vapor, sickly and throned. The ripple spreads, expanding in a waving pattern, ridden with discourse. The light breathes, bends, taking shape. The mist begins to settle, a light, dull, green color with accents of a regal bronze and red as bright as blood. A chitinous shell of a figure begins to stir in the ancient pool. Fragments of a mind and body intertwine, the sinew and tissue of a new design coming to the first moments of a life eternal.

Two eyes awake.

Four eyes awake.

Six eyes awake, total and complete.

The six amber eyes of a dull green crown gaze out into lightless space, and understand. The new being searches her mind, and

understands. She is a mother. Not only a mother, a queen. Yet, are they not one and the same? The six amber eyes of a dull green crown gaze into the night. New bones creak as the first of her kind rises anew. She is the creation of a goddess, born to be so in her own right. She will create, and in turn; in time, she will be family to them. She will be worshipped by them. She will be ruler of them.

The six amber eyes of a dull green crown gleam with ambition. There is no fear, only realization after realization. The mother inhales. Exhales. Insectoid breath, one after another, taking in the surrounding void, acclimating to life. Acrid lungs within the armored skin of an ascending queen prepare to breathe fresh air belonging to the material, the tangible, the physical. Soon to belong to her.

The mother wished for many things. Godhood. Parenthood. Leadership. She would claim them all, but if she desired worship, she required a title, a name. If she wanted love, adoration, her family would need something to call her. So the mother learned. She learned to form speech, words, a language all to her own. Her mind crafted phrases, limericks, and eventually, her words held more power than any could anticipate. The mother possessed anything and everything she could and would

say. This mother was meticulous, thoughtful as all should be. This unnamed silence would end. The untitled would die, and the notable would be remembered for all time. Such was the will of Kralinga, the Vaporborne.

This name was the first of many things she would create for herself. If the mother wished to soar, she would metamorphosize. The mother would fly and the clouds would bend to her form. A thick, papery substance expanded and thickened as two colossal wings sprouted from Kralinga's back, reaching jagged points complete with deep burgundy thorns. The Hive-Queen's body continued to grow, the plates of her exoskeleton splitting and settling into formations befitting her new regality.

Kralinga wished for sight, so sight she would have. Using the true vision she had discovered, Kralinga gazed out of the abyss and into the realities before her. Kralinga asked herself where her brood could thrive, and her six amber eyes squinted; scanning and staring through planes of reality, searching for a suitable place to create. She observed the material, the ethereal, the celestial. No crevice

was safe from her search, and after a time, it ended. Kralinga had not wasted such time, but used it well, and to her advantage. Her eyes now shone, glimmering, no longer limited to what lay in front of her. Kralinga had obtained the ancient sight, and now her six amber eyes could gaze from the beginning of space to its end.

She looked, and consumed the sight of a desolate place, dry yet lush, perfect for her spawn. It was time for Kralinga to leave chaos behind. She focused, and a cloud of green vapor poured off Kralinga's claw. Her unbreathed exhale expanded as if it prepared to breach a nonexistent barrier. The mist grew in all directions, expanding to form a translucent gate. Kralinga ran a pointed finger over the unseen veil before her, found the crack in the wall, and broke through.

The air here reeked of dust and desolation. Kralinga gazed out across the horizon, beholding great towers of orange rock, sand crunching beneath her colossal feet. Storms brewed in the distance, a great beyond of unrelenting desert. This would do nicely. And



"Another World" Maegan VanNorman, '22

so, Kralinga began to build. She constructed hives, great citadels under the ground for her soon-great legion. Power poured from her palms as she did so, the might of creation. Eventually, she was ready. It was time to create something new, something nearly impossible to create from rock and sand.

It was time to create life.

Kralinga looked down upon the cocoons in her chambers. Three of them, waiting, growing, developing. Kralinga set about mending herself after the task of creating them, and soon, she was not alone. Kralinga's firstborn became Auranell, and she bore an amber body akin to Kralinga's own eyes. Auranell radiated curiosity, but was frail, new, and unlearned. Kralinga spoke a greeting, and held her child before looking deep into her naive eyes. At this moment, a promise was made. This mother, and this child, together, would change everything.

But first, they needed more.

After many long centuries, Kralinga finally held what she was born to claim. Auranell stood next to her, four arms at her side, full in strength. She clutched a silver orb rife with knowledge, for she was the eldest child, and the most intelligent. Kralinga beckoned her second, Praethix, whose shoulders were broad and whose head was crowned with a mighty horn. His pale green skin shone in the sunlight, and in his arms he brandished a mighty pike. Flitting about behind Praethix was Vömaniin, the smallest of the three, yet winged, and fiery in color and spirit. The Court of Amber and Jade stood behind their mother, and gazed out upon a sea. Not liquid, but an ocean of figures crawling and writhing amongst themselves. Powerful, tall beings, crafting and feeding with four arms, more dexterous than anything they came across. Some of the mortals flew, some skittered across the sand, and some sliced through rock with a mere thought. Their bronze skin gleamed in the light of day, and they revelled within it. Armor-clad, massive undying worms danced above and below the ground. They digested and regurgitated, for they were to be Kralinga's Deathless Brood. All of them would feel a queen's wrath, a mother's love, and a god's watchful eye. They would feel the strength of Kralinga, the Vaporborne. Kralinga, Mother to the Hive. Kralinga, the

Chitinous Matriarch. All of these and many more, for her strength knew no bounds.

Kralinga's creator knew not what she had brought into existence. There was no malice, only a simple need. For what could someone who has everything want but more? Kralinga needed more. More space, more colonies. More places for her young to thrive. And that was what she would take. Auranell would be her navigator, and use her orb to discover new areas to grow in. Praethix would find his mother foes to crush, and they would fall under the force of his pike. And Vömaniin, who soared alongside her mother, would explore new courses set by her sister. She would fly across horizons and battlefields alike. Soon, many worlds bore stowaways of Kralinga's brood. A worm here, a hive there. She was meticulous, and no-one living could stop her.

But everything changed when Auranell looked into the dark, cavernous underground of a beautiful new place.

Everything changed when a face appeared in the Firstborn's orb, and looked back at her.

Everything changed when mighty Praethix met his match in battle for the first time in centuries.

Everything changed when Vömaniin's path of exploration was blocked by darkness she could not see beyond.

Everything changed when Kralinga found herself face to face with a woman of silver hair and grey skin, a deep indigo crown atop her head. Everything changed when Kralinga, the Vaporborne, was face to face with a fellow queen. Caves shook, underground cities became catacombs. For there was no battle such as that between Kralinga, the Chitinous Matriarch, and Liyalæth, Empress in the Dark. And so, the six amber eyes of a dull green crown burned with hatred, as did the two low blue staring back. The unstoppable had met the immovable, hence one must be destroyed. Such a relentless feud brought much ruin, and caused a new beginning. The beginning of unending destruction beneath the surface. The beginning of generations of warriors, of vast crusades.

Such a relentless feud brought the War of the Deep Queens.



The Great Pond King

Tobias Walter Stettler, '24

"Tapping into Serenity" Kacper Domoslawski, '24

There once lived a small toad in a forest pond, he was king here, and every day the toad bounced along on one of his adventures, and as he would go along his way, he would sing. One day the toad was on his march on the forest floor to get sticks to build a fire, and he started his song; "Hee ho, hee ho, to collect sticks for fire I go!"

He kept singing to his heart's desire when he was abruptly stopped by a snake. "What brings such a hideous creature to my kingdom? For I am the snake, king of the forest floor!"

"My deepest apologies sir, for I am the toad king, king of the pond! There is no wood in my pond, so I must travel great distances to keep warm at night."

The snake was displeased with this. "Sorry, tiny king, but I cannot allow you to trespass any further, you must leave." The little toad accepted this, and went to bed cold that night.

The next day he went out, he went searching for nuts and fruits to eat. All along his way, he

fed at night."

The squirrel was angry with this. "Sorry, feeble king, but I mustn't let you trespass any further, you must leave." The toad accepted this, and went to bed hungry that night.

The next day, the toad left his pond in search of a hat, to keep himself safe. He began to scale a large mountain, and as he went, he collected rocks and twigs and leaves. When he reached the top, and he could carry no more, he sat and began to weave his new hat. Once he was done, he placed it atop his head, and began his descent.

Before long however, a great hawk swooped down and swept the crown off his head. "What brings such a foolish beast to my kingdom? For I am the great hawk, king of the skies and mountains!"

"My deepest apologies sir, for I am the toad king, king of the pond! There is scarcely any building materials in my pond, so I must travel great distances to construct my hat!."

sang; "Hee ho, hee ho, off to get food I go!" The toad wandered about the branches and bushes, searching for things for dinner that night.

On his way, his singing was interrupted by a large squirrel. "What brings such an ugly beast to my kingdom? For I am the squirrel, king of the branches and brush."

"My deepest apologies sir, for I am the toad king, king of the pond! No food grows in my pond, so I must travel great distances to keep myself

The hawk was insulted by this. "Unfortunately for you, puny king, I simply cannot allow you to take things from my kingdom. However, I am feeling generous, so you may leave with your life." The little toad was too small to run from such a beast, so he went back to his pond without his hat, nor his supper, nor his firewood.

He sat in his muddy bed that night, cold, hungry, and distraught. "Why must I be treated this way? I am a lord just like everybody else, but I'm treated like the very dirt I sleep on. Is it because I'm small, or because I don't have anything to my name but this shallow pond? It's not my fault—I was merely born as such, a toad can't change what he is!" He fell asleep and his dreams were filled with a warm hearth and a bountiful meal, and firelight dancing off the gleam of his golden crown, embedded with the most flawless gemstones.

The next day, the toad woke up and started his march once again, only this time, there was no singing, there was no point anymore. As he went along, he could only feel hopeless in his situation, how could he ever become as strong or fierce as the others? He reached an overgrown falls, when suddenly a voice rang out to him. "Little pond king! What a great pleasure it is to have you here! Please, help yourself to the bounty!"

The toad was confused however, as there was no one around, the only other living thing in the clearing was a great willow tree in the center of the pond, its roots drawing the earth up to form a tiny island in the middle. "Hello? Is someone there? I can hear you but I cannot see you!"

"Come forth pond king, and you WILL see who is talking!" The voice gave a hearty chuckle afterwards, and the toad cautiously dipped into the water and swam to the island. Once he arrived, he found a little hollow in the center of it, and inside he saw a great feast on the table, with a burning hearth, and a shining crown hanging atop it. But as he went to enter, the voice caught him. "Wait young one, before you enter, I wish to speak to you!" The toad turned around, and he found that a great old frog had crawled off of the tree and hobbled down to him.

"My apologies sir, I was merely excited for the feast, and the warmth, and the crown, for I am the toad king, king of the pond! I have been left without any food, nor warmth, nor my hat

for days now, and my pond is not fitting for a king."

The frog at this gave a great laugh, amused at how polite the toad had been despite being repeatedly put down. "Don't worry young one, I know why you're here, and I know who you are! I also know that you've been through much to get so little." The frog led the toad to the edge of the water, where the moonlight reflected across the misty pond. "You see, look into the water, what is staring back at you?"

The toad took a pause to study their glimmering reflections in the water. "I see a great frog king, and I see a small toad."

The old frog now gave out a bellowing cry of laughter. "You fool! I am no great king, and you are no little toad! You are the POND KING, you rule over your domain however small, and you allow all the other lords to drink from your home no matter how cruel they have been to you! Why, they would all fall without your grace, and yet you let them treat you the way they do, why is that?"

The toad thought about that for a moment, and he couldn't understand why. "You see little one, it is your actions that make you a king! A fool can claim to be a lord, but he will never be one, because he lacks the virtues of one!" The toad pondered that for a while, and after a little the wise old frog spoke up. "Well, I must be off then, I have nothing more to do here."

The toad's head lifted at this, but he found the old frog was already gone. "Hello? Wise old frog? Where have you gone?"

From the forest, he could hear his hefty chuckle echoing through the moonlight. "Goodnight little pond king, this pond is yours now! You may enter and indulge in the feast and bask in the warmth, and you may don the hat that's inside hanging from the hearth. You are the great pond king, and you rule over your domain however small!" And with that, the toad was left alone on that little island in the pond.

The pleasant little bog was now his kingdom, and he turned into the hollow to indulge in the luxuries of his new homestead. As he went to bed that night he curled up into his new bed of warm moss, stomach full of fruit tarts and sweet cakes, and his hat of gold adorning his head. Thoughts and dreams streamed through his mind, and as he drifted off, he could only help but wonder what they would think of him now.

Beauty in the Inevitable

Hayden Wagner, '25
First Place, Fiction, 2022-2023

You have all heard of the myths of men long before us asking favors of Death. They ask it to cut their foe's life short or to make their own life longer than the rest. You have all heard of Death seeking to make others' lives shorter. But the truth is much darker, though not what you'd expect, bringing humanity's sins for the world to see. Yet it is simple: Death is a gatherer, not a hunter. Why would it answer the calls of mere man, when it will collect in the end? Why would it seek to shorten another's time when it will come sooner or later? Who is mankind to ask such a ridiculous thing of Death, and expect such a being to obey? It will not seek to hasten such an inevitable end and will rebuke those who try to. Who are they to deny Death's time and place? To cut short the lives of those who are so close to achieving glory? To presume upon its will that is so much larger than theirs?

You have all heard how Death comes to collect you. And when it does? It simply looks down on you and shakes its head. It enjoys seeing the light leave your eyes. When it sees you dying on the ground, it looks upon you with contempt, thinking of how pathetic one must be to die. Though forever a mystery to humans, Death treasures those who fight it with all their might. Those who pour everything into fighting it and denying it. Death watches every desperate scrap of strength and will and raw emotion poured out against it. And when your strength is lost, Death catches you, and carries you into the dark void, forever at one with all those who fought before you.

You have all heard how Death loathes those who strip it of its prizes, how it hates those who can stall its embrace for those who were to be taken next, how it hates doctors, defenders, and immortals for being able to escape it. The truth is more beautiful: more life brings more death. All those who are brought into precious Life's embrace are given to Death in the end, though not without a price. The more one lives, loves, sees, and does, the more the life is worth. Death is not one to take that away, when it can witness such a beautiful masterpiece shining in the night sky.

Death is
patient
beautiful
and, above all,
inevitable.



"Fallen Angel" Graphite Pencil, Kristin Rule, '23

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