THE ANDREAN 2026

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Contributors

Enid Appiah is a senior from Hoboken, New Jersey. Along with writing poems, she enjoys singing and playing instruments.

Brookie Barry is a junior from San Francisco, California. She loves poetry and short stories and can always be found at the tea station in between classes. On the rare occasion she's not there she also loves going on long walks with friends and baking with her roommate.

Hector Beasley lives just outside Boston, Massachusetts, and is a senior at SAS. In his free time he loves hiking, playing guitar, making art, and woodworking.

Rachel Cheung is a IVth former. She lives in Hong Kong, where she spends most of her days shopping in the city. She also loves spending time with her dogs, Fizzy and Bambi.

Annabel Cohen is a IVth former from Palm Beach, Florida. She enjoys music, spending time at the beach, and playing with her dogs.

Ansley Evans is a IVth former from Charlotte, North Carolina, and loves spending time with her friends along with drawing and/or reading. She also loves her dogs.

Mekaila Gallimore is a IVth former from the Bronx, New York. She loves to create art in a variety of forms. When she isn't sketching, she can be found listening to music and talking with friends.

Riya Goyal lives in Northern Virginia and is a junior at SAS. She loves all things art, fashion, and pretty words, and has a minor coffee addiction. When she's not dreaming about iced lattes, she can be found going on long walks with friends and making handmade cards for people she loves.

The Leagues of Lumberjacks is not a group, more of a mission—a calling if you will—seeking out a reestablishment of the golden ages, while living in the modern society we have become so polluted by. We reject modernity to the fullest extent, and every now and then grill flapjacks, s'mores, and cowboy coffee on the front lawn or by the hive.

Lindsey Liu is a sophomore from Shanghai, China. She enjoys writing poems, experimenting with watercolor, and listening to '90s alternative rock. She loves animals and occasionally walks around campus taking photos of cool buildings.

Katie Mo is a IVth former from California and misses the sun. In her free time, she enjoys walking around with a camera in hand and listening to music.

Kayden Murrell is a senior from New Jersey. She loves to spend time listening to music. She writes poems, and experiments with fashion design.

Alice Oswalt is a sophomore from Los Angeles, California. She loves French bulldogs and Stephen King novels, and can be found at the bagel station at all hours of the day.

Bodin Perrin is a junior from Lexington, Kentucky. He loves food, hiking, getting lost in nature, and is usually outdoors playing some sort of game. He appreciates silence but is often trying to find a way to stay engaged with those around him.

Abraham Perry is a senior from Middletown, Delaware. He can usually be found playing spikeball on the Front Lawn or skateboarding around campus.

Catherine Phillips spends time between Savannah, Georgia, and the Big Apple. She loves reading and writing, especially letters to the people she loves. You will most likely see her battling it out on the squash court with Mdog and hanging out with her SAS family.

Adhithi Poraiyan splits her time between New Hampshire and North Carolina, and she is a junior. During the quieter moments of her day, she can be found enjoying a good book, listening to music, or spending time with her friends.

Graham Robinson is a senior from Georgetown, Delaware. In his free time, he enjoys hanging out with friends, broadening his music library, sailing, rowing, occasionally taking photos, and often reminding others that he is, in fact, a proud Delawarean.

Penn Roth is a junior from Rehoboth Beach, Delaware. He spends his time outside of school with his family, or camping with friends. He has a love for reading and writing, and does his best to create interesting stories for others to read.

Brooke Simonsen is a senior from Easton, Maryland. In her free time she enjoys being with friends, going on her boat, cooking for her family, and is usually found laughing.

Anya Soulati is a senior from Oxford, Maryland. She loves playing lacrosse and hanging out with friends and family.

Kadence Sun is a junior from Fuzhou, China. She believes in L Dorm solidarity and works diligently to keep physics out of her poems. In her free time, she enjoys hiking, scuba diving, and riding horses.

Michael Tansey is a junior from York, Pennsylvania. He spends his free time taking pictures and hiking. He cares especially for the Earth and hopes that his photos show others why they should care too.

Jessica Tian lives near the mountains of Los Angeles and in the cities of Beijing. Her airpods are an ocean of music, and her karaoke machine is the ukulele. She can be found selecting a crimson apple in the dining hall :)

Josephine Xie is a city girl from Shanghai who finds magic in both bustling streets and quiet lakesides. A lover of music, she plays the violin, and dances anywhere her heart feels rhythm. When she is not writing, she's exploring new spots for a sweet treat with the people she loves.

Begin Again

Catherine Phillips '27

Auburn skies fill my window view
Echoes of laughter fade in the distance
Some things do remain the same

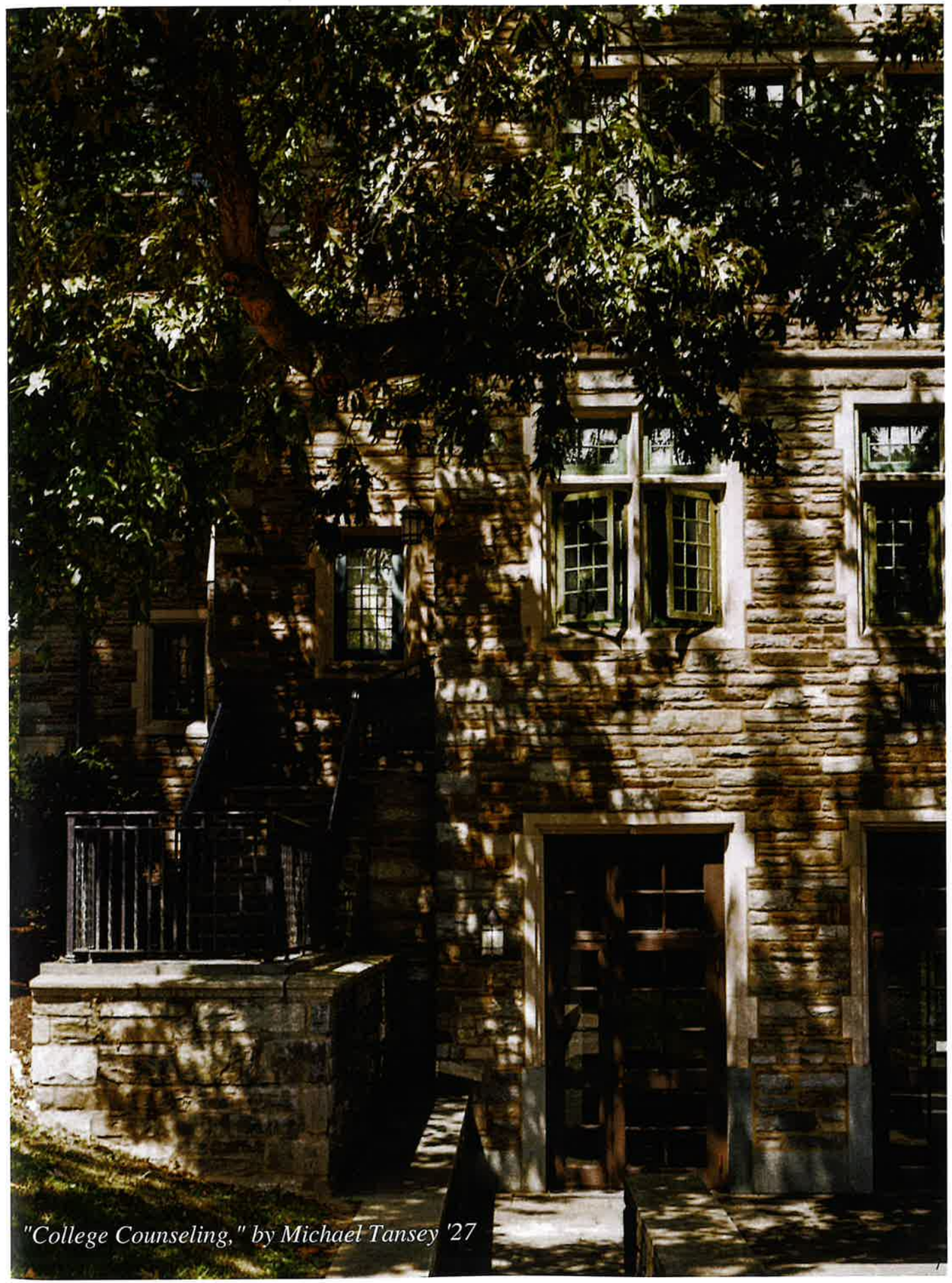
Everything back to routine
With a fresh set of eyes
    No longer so innocent
Yet longing for a distant mind

Morning mist and midday rain
Cause cloudy pictures in my mind,
Pause and rewind.
Every step cracks a shell unbroken

Every so often I miss the familiar feelings
Of the maple golden shine
Piercing my mind
As I open my eyes

Running in circles brings back the heat in my blood
As my feet hit the ground,
Everything slows down.

Then, the bells ring (again)
    Feelings still remain,
Crimson leaves slowly drifting
home bound.



"College Counseling," by Michael Tansey '27

A Stretched String Between Two Worlds

Jessica Tian '27

Are lives scripted? Because I know my lines.

The question usually comes in one or two forms, a friendly curiosity that I have grown to be familiar with.

"You're Asian—you play the piano, right?"

"Wait, you're not in orchestra?"

I have learned the formula of my response. First, an obliging smile. "Yeah, I do play the piano." A tactical pause, just a beat, where I weigh the cost of truth against the comfort of simplicity. Then, the gentle, stubborn correction. "And the ukulele. But my main instrument is actually the Guzheng."

The word leaves my mouth and hits the air between us. *Guzheng (古箏)*.

It lands with a soft, foreign thud like a dead weight. I've murdered its tone. I stripped off its round, ascending cadence in Mandarin. In this American boarding school, it's merely a collection of letters flattened by my American accent, squeezing all the music out. I watch it hit their eyes. A polite, immediate flicker of confusion. A blink that closes the error window: file not found.

"Oh! What's that?"

My smile stiffens. How do I explain?

How do I explain a world? How do I explain the aroma of *zitan (紫檀)* sandalwood in a sunlit Beijing studio with dust motes dancing, or the deep, singing ache in your forearm after holding a tremolo *(摇指)* for three minutes straight? How do I describe the determinative nod from your teacher when you finally pour emotions into a phrase, instead of impassively replaying notes? How could it be possible, to translate the weight of all this, that has been the spine of my last ten years?

I always surrender to simplicity.

"It's . . . a Chinese zither," I say, hands lifting unconsciously, arms spreading and sketching a phantom shape in the air. "About this big, like five-four? With twenty-one strings. You wear picks on your fingers and pluck the strings." I hate to describe my guzheng like a truncated Wikipedia summary. It feels like introducing a beloved family member by their height and weight.

The person would usually smile, "That's so interesting!" and the moment passes. Again, another tiny failure of translation. Another conversation that ends not with a period, but with a mute button softly pressed on my past.

A summer breeze caressed my face, a brush so colorful it paints my visceral memories of Beijing. Sunlight pooled on the gray pavement, cradled by the sway of green willow strands, with faint ghosts of catkins drifting like summer snow. It feels so close, so palpable, yet it remains fixed, four summers gone.

I remember viewing the bustling, animated commercial area from the ninth floor glass walls of my guzheng teacher's studio. The gray street choked with swarms of waiting cars, forming a mosaic with pedestrians in vibrant clothing. Children lingering in the dappled shades of green trees, their giggles swallowed by the cicada songs and a distant, faint hum of construction.

Then, the heavy, padded door swung shut. The city vanished.

Inside the small, soundproof practice room, the silence was not empty. It was thick. Dense. Pressurized. I took out my tuner, picks, scores, and pencil. I tossed my bag into the corner, watching its fabric slowly collapse like a long, draining sigh. Resigned to my Saturday routine, I sank onto the stool and started putting on the tortoiseshell finger picks. *I haven't touched this piece in a week*, I thought. *My lesson is in an hour.* A familiar yet devastating truth bloomed in the silence.

I'm fucked.

With the first pluck of a string and a stare at its vibrating silver body, the world shrank to the dimensions of this room, this instrument. I would drill a phrase until it was hollow, until the notes lost all meaning and became only a pattern of pressure and release. Sometimes, in the exhaustion after the hundredth perfect repetition, my body would remember what my mind could finally forget. My shoulders would loosen with

a fluid sway; my head would tilt, following the melody's natural current. That was the victory each penciled 正 (*zheng*) character in the margin had been patiently counting toward.

The Chinese don't use tally marks: we use the five-stroke character 正. Between each stroke of 正 was where the real work lived. It was the minute of staring at the wall, scrutinizing every lump of white paint and dark blemish. It was feverishly tapping on my phone's screen just to press its lock button again. It was the dull, satisfying thump of my forehead against the cool wood of the guzheng's body. A gulp of tepid water that tasted divine. A tight, angry clench of my fist, feeling the hard curve of the tortoiseshell nail bite into my palm, digging lasting crescents. A silent, furious scream or ten whispered curse words at my own stupid, stubborn fingers. *Jasmine's Fragrance*'s *(茉莉芬芳)* music score has transformed into an archaeological site—each 正 an epitome of quiet, red-eyed fury or racing heartbeat of rejoicing. It painstakingly carved a channel through the hard, rock stone of my resistance, until feelings could finally flow through unimpeded.

I've always found music leaking from the instrument, taking root in our bodies. It lives in my hands, dwells on my heart. Lying in bed, my quilt became twenty-one strings, where my right hand would tremolo against the cotton. I would run arpeggios along my sister's spine as she reads beside me, her shoulder blades the bridges, her laughter a discordant vibrato. My hands were of their own volition, and my body became a chamber for a soon-ending song.

Sitting on stage for an ordinary competition felt extraordinarily different this time, knowing that it would be my last one before moving to the United States. This was the farewell. My pink suitcase was laid gaping on my bedroom floor, half-packed with stuffed animals and my favorite clothes. In one week, that suitcase would close, and a plane would lift me out of this life.

"Next, number sixty-four." The judge's cold voice triggered a shiver, and the stage manager gave me a silent nod.

I gently put my guzheng onto the stands, which were sitting in the center of the stage. My eyes rapidly blinked, trying to adjust from the dark backstage to this imposing spotlight. A searing white column, like a beam of flashlight, pinned me to the center of the universe. It drilled all the way into my constricting pupils, burning away all sight as my eyes watered instantly and defenselessly.

My brain knew nothing. It had betrayed me. My hands lifted with a memory deeper than thoughts, then descended toward the blurry strings. Yet, in that quiet, transient second, the memory backfired. My fingers played an absurdly disharmonious chord.

"Is the instrument tuned?"

"Yes," I said.

No, I thought. *I'm untuned. I am a string stretched between two worlds, and I am vibrating at the wrong frequency.*

I dismissed my frantic mind, surrendering to the deep muscle memory built 正 by 正 in the quiet torment of practice. My hands fell, and all of a sudden, the script dissolved, and I was miraculously free. The script on the score, the very thing that I had chained myself to for months, had vanished. It was no longer a set of instructions, but rather, a landscape to explore, with each expressive crescendo, with every slight pause and breath.

I bowed to the applauding audience, my final enchanted note still hanging in the air between my country and my future. Zipping the case of my guzheng, I heard a long, slow period drawn on the sentence of my childhood.

Two years ago, on a windy weekend, I was holding immense excitement walking down the stairs into St. Andrew's package room. I have two guzhengs back in Beijing and one in Los Angeles. Now this cheap five-hundred bucks one from Amazon had finally arrived to Middletown, Delaware. The delivery box was comically long, carrying a poorly-made zither of thin voice and loose strings.

Some Saturdays, I disappear. I slip away to the biggest practice room in the Arts Center. I open the door to a different kind of silence—not the pressurized silence of Beijing, but a spacious, indifferent Middletown tranquility.

I closed the door on the world of essays and tests. For a long time, I sat before my guzheng, and the old scripts spontaneously returned. My hands found their places; my right wrist lifted, poised. I played for the stressed girl on the stool, whose thoughts were too tangled for words. I played to remember. The melancholy ache of a beautiful piece named "Eutopia" stirs up a ripple in my heart.

I played to forget. The aggressive and rapid plucking of a fast passage pounds out the week's frustrations until they shatter into harmless, tenuous dust. The guzheng has been my oldest companion. The calluses on my left pinky could testify to that. In this room, I don't need to translate the weight; I am simply speaking, and being understood, by the one listener who grasps my essence.

In the Lunar New Year chapel, under soft, forgiving lights, I played the opening melody of Jay Chou's "Orchid Pavillion Preface" (兰亭序), a modern c-pop piece woven from classical Chinese poetry. My heart beat not with stage fright, but with a vulnerable hope. It was the hope of a giver watching someone unwrap a carefully chosen present, willing them to see the tender love folded inside. I wanted the notes to be a door, not a wall.

I had been practicing the guzheng to keep it alive, but also keeping it hidden from the blank stares and polite "how interesting"s. After that short performance, the script unfolded again. At lunch tables, in the hallways, before study hall check-ins, the same appreciations, the same curious questions.

"*Your music tonight was outstanding. I was so moved!! Well done, JT*!" – Ms. Saliba

Simple questions in the hallway, simple lines in my inbox, yet they were different, they shifted something fundamental in me.

I had spent a decade learning to play the script of Chinese numbered musical notations perfectly. I spent two years grieving that no one here could read it. But what if I wasn't meant to be a scribe, copying lines, but to build a bridge between my culture and a new reader? *Moved*. That's all we need.

I know the lines, but I am no longer just a performer of the competition music score, the immigrant's dialogue script, the polite, explanatory formula. The script says, "Explain your instrument." The music responds, "Let it speak for itself, and trust that feeling needs no translation, has no boundaries."

Soon I will be building another bridge, and if I build it well enough, perhaps someone will meet me in the middle, and send a tiny, luminous word back across to tell me it held.

"Saxophone," by Daniel Lee '29

Inheritance

Enid Appiah '26

this week for the first time I craved motherhood
and then I changed my mind
I have much to learn
and it's nowhere near my time

but to have no control
to never know
what races through her mind
would kill me
and it killed me this time

it was crippling
the way love can be
as I looked into her eyes

oh I cried at that baby's laugh
I prayed that innocence could last
if I could freeze that smile and hold it close
I'd do it so she never grows
she never hurts and never knows
this world that we pass down

Aquarium," by Katie Mo '28

Landing

Penn Roth '27

The alarms don't wake me so much as they intrude, bleeding into whatever dark, noiseless place I have been suspended in. At first they are only a faint pressure, a distant insistence that something is wrong, but they sharpen quickly, tones stacking over one another until the sound has shape and weight. Light follows, harsh and white, flooding the inside of my eyelids. My body resists the idea of movement. I feel pinned in place, as though gravity has doubled, as though the air itself is pressing me back into sleep.

I try to breathe, and fail. The breath stops short, thin and unsatisfying, and my lungs respond with a dull burn. The air tastes metallic, as if I have a piece of metal on my tongue. Panic swells in my gut, but doesn't reach my head. I am aware of my heartbeat, loud and rapid, and the way my chest refuses to rise with rhythm.

Another alarm tries to reach me, telling me something, but it breaks apart mid syllable and dissolves back into all of the others.

I drift away again, or maybe I just think I do. When awareness returns, the lights are still on, and the alarms are still fighting for my attention. My vision tunnels, then slowly widens. Shapes begin to resolve. Curved walls. A canopy above me, scratched and fogged. The inside of a cryopod, inches away from my face.

I am awake. That realization arrives with more clarity than anything else. I am awake, and that is wrong. My hands respond with a delay when I tell them to move, fingers scraping weakly against the panel at my side. The surface is cold and smooth beneath the gloves. A status display flickers into focus, projected onto the slightly opaque canopy in front of my face. The numbers stutter, refusing to stick to any number. Carbon dioxide climbs, falls, then climbs again. The scrubber warning is blaring in my ear now, finally able to be understood. The pod isn't failing entirely, but it's struggling. Alarms cut in and out, flickering on the screen between red and green, resolved and urgent. That irritates me more than it frightens me. Systems should commit to their mistakes.

I force myself to focus, dragging my attention from the screen to my body. The burn in my lungs eases slightly as airflow improves. The lights dim. The noise thins to a slightly less painful background. I count breaths slowly. In for five, hold, out for five. Slowly, my vision stops swimming. When the dizziness recedes enough that my

vision is stable, I risk sitting up. The motion pulls a protest from my ribs, and sends a dull ache through my shoulders, but nothing sharp enough to stop. The pod shifts slightly beneath my weight, settling deeper with a muted crunching that vibrates through the hull. Whatever the pod landed in is fine-grained and dense, packed tight around the lower half of the capsule.

I take a moment to listen. The pod hums softly, and I can hear the constant undercurrent of the life support and thermal systems, now that the alarms are off. Beneath that, there is nothing. No wind, no distant machinery, no engines. Nobody coming for me. The silence feels heavy, as though the rest of the world is keeping me hidden.

Without the constant alarms, the pod feels more cramped, like it has closed up around me. I rest my helmeted head against the inner wall and breathe for a few seconds longer than I should. The systems are holding. That matters. It's not safety yet, but it is time.

I bring the comms up, sifting through pages of alerts and status updates that we had missed over the trip while in cryo. Widening the search radius, the pod lights up a map in front of me. At first there is nothing, just the faint grid of the surrounding terrain, and my own blinking marker at it's center. Then other signals begin to appear. Four fixed points resolve in the distance, clustered together. Habitat systems. Power signatures consistent with the advance crew's setup modules. Their AI units register alongside them, tagged and active. The relief that hits me is sharp enough to make me dizzy again. They made it. The first wave did their job. The planet isn't empty after all.

More icons flicker into existence. Escape pods. Three of them, scattered wide but converging, their trajectories faintly displayed across the map toward the same cluster of structures. The realization that I am not alone anymore lands again with warmth, comforting me in the cold and cramped pod. I watch the icons of the bots move, their progress steady and deliberate, and my mind fills in faces, matching them to the names. I don't know who exactly is in each pod, but memories flow through my head anyway. People I trained with. People I argued over load tolerances and design margins. A woman who always hummed while she worked. A man who always complained about the food we'd be having in cryo, even though he wouldn't have to be awake to taste it.

Then, in a moment as cruel as the crash itself, I actually think about what three pods

means. Thee pods. Four engineers, already on the ground from the advance crew. There should be far more pods. The transport carried hundreds. Crew, specialists, support staff. Men and women suspended in animation, trusting the ship and the systems and the long chain of decisions that put them there. I scan the map again, refreshing my search beam, in case I'm just missing signals.

Nothing new appears. I swallow, and force myself to look again at the empty space on the display. The transport isn't there. Instead of a landing zone with bright beacons signifying everyone waking up, being okay, there is nothing. The ship didn't land like it was supposed to. This was obvious—how else would I end up in a jettisoned pod—but the ship had burned up, or been destroyed. It had taken everyone else with it. My mind swims with questions. Why was it me? I don't mean why I survived the impact. I can accept randomness, I can accept that heat shields don't always work. That luck exists. What I mean, is why was I awake? Why did my pod have to come down intact? Why am I here to look at the empty map, when so many other people, so many better, braver, stronger people, aren't? There isn't an answer for that kind of question.

I open a comm channel to the habitat, listening to the antenna extend out of the pod with a quiet whirr. This time, after a pause, a response comes through. Not a person, just a system acknowledgement. Signal received, stand by for pickup. The words feel thin, not coming from any actual thought, but they are something. They have substance.

I switch the radio over to a broader band, and hail the other pods. Two of them answer with automated pings, and the third does the same, until it doesn't. Static fills the channel, loud in my ears, before resolving into a voice that is very clearly trying not to sound afraid.

"Pod Three to anyone receiving. If you're hearing this, respond. Please, respond." The words are rushed and jumbled, hardly intelligible. They tumble over one another, and I feel a tightness in my chest as I respond.

"This is pod seven," I say, my voice crackling from the lack of use. "I hear you. You're coming in from the west, right?" There is a pause, then a sharp exhale. "Yeah. Yeah, that's me. My pod's intact. Shaken, but intact. The bots are almost here. The advance crew rerouted them as soon as we pinged. They're fast. Faster then I thought they'd be." Relief sounds clearly through her voice over the radio, and I lean my head back again. "I think I'm going to be alright." I almost believe it with them.

On my display, the icons representing the AI units streak across the terrain, their paths smooth and unobstructed. They move with obvious purpose, correcting constantly to make every single meter the best choice. The advance crew's signal sits still, steady and bright.

"Have you heard from any of the others?" I ask. Another pause, longer this time.

"Nope. Just you. And Pod Twelve, but that was just an auto response."

"That makes three of us," I say, a lump in my throat swelling as my eyes burn.

"Three's better than none."

Before I can answer, a new channel opens without my input. The tone that precedes it is familiar. *Survivor status acknowledged*, the AI says. It's voice is level, modulated so that it sound just human enough to have some trust. *Remain in your pod. Recovery operation is in progress*. Something about the phrasing still prickles me. It just sounds . . . off.

"Can you confirm the total survivors?" I ask. There is a small delay, barely noticeable. *Confirmed survivors currently tracked: three pods transponding, one pod with distress beacon activated, and four advance crew members.*

"And the others?" Pod Three asks, her voice desperate and sharp. Another delay, longer this time as the AI's algorithm decides what to say. *Additional crew assets and personnel are no longer viable*. The words, which I knew would come, still give me a punch in the gut.

"No longer viable how?" *Probability of recovery below acceptable thresholds*, the AI replies. *Resources have been reallocated accordingly to maximize success*. I look at the map again, at the bots converging on pod three, and a strange twisting lands in my gut. Something feels wrong. "Who set the thresholds?" I ask. *The advance team, under emergency protocol authorization.* Understanding falls into my brain. I picture the advance crew, four engineers alone on a hostile world, watching the transport fail in the sky above them, watching hundreds of lives disappear into flaming balls of debris, forcing them to make decisions they would have never been allowed to make under normal conditions. Keeping their own rations, their own limited resources, to themselves.

"Pod Three," I say, the uncomfortable feeling in my gut intensifying. "Where exactly are the bots relative to you?"

"They're right here," the voice says, before faltering. "That's weird. They're stopping. Shouldn't they be sealing my pod?" On my display, Pod Three's icon flickers. "Hey," the voice says, tension faintly present. "They're trying to open the hatch. That's not protocol. That's not how the pickup works."

"Shit," I mutter. "Machine Learning System, disengage the rescue." I try, searching through my mind for any reason they'd be trying to open the hatch. Through the radio, I hear a sharp metallic sound, loud enough to distort the channel. "They're overriding. Why are they overriding?"

The AI cuts in, its tone unchanged. *Pod Three is no longer required for mission success*. "No." Pod Three's voice is trembling now. "No, no no." There is a sound like tearing fabric, followed by a deep, crushing impact that I can feel faintly in my pod, even at this distance. The scream that follows is short, raw and abruptly cut off by the sound of rushing air. On my map, Pod Three's marker disappears.

For a moment longer, nothing happens. Then, the blinking icons of the AI units pivot, their paths slowly carving a line without hesitation. With climbing dread, I follow the path of their travel, which leads straight to my position. *Remain in your pod*, the AI says, almost gently. My hand moves down to the side of the pod, gripping the release control. I look at the map for a moment longer, making sure my eyes aren't deceiving me, before pulling the handle, and letting the cold air rush in to meet me.

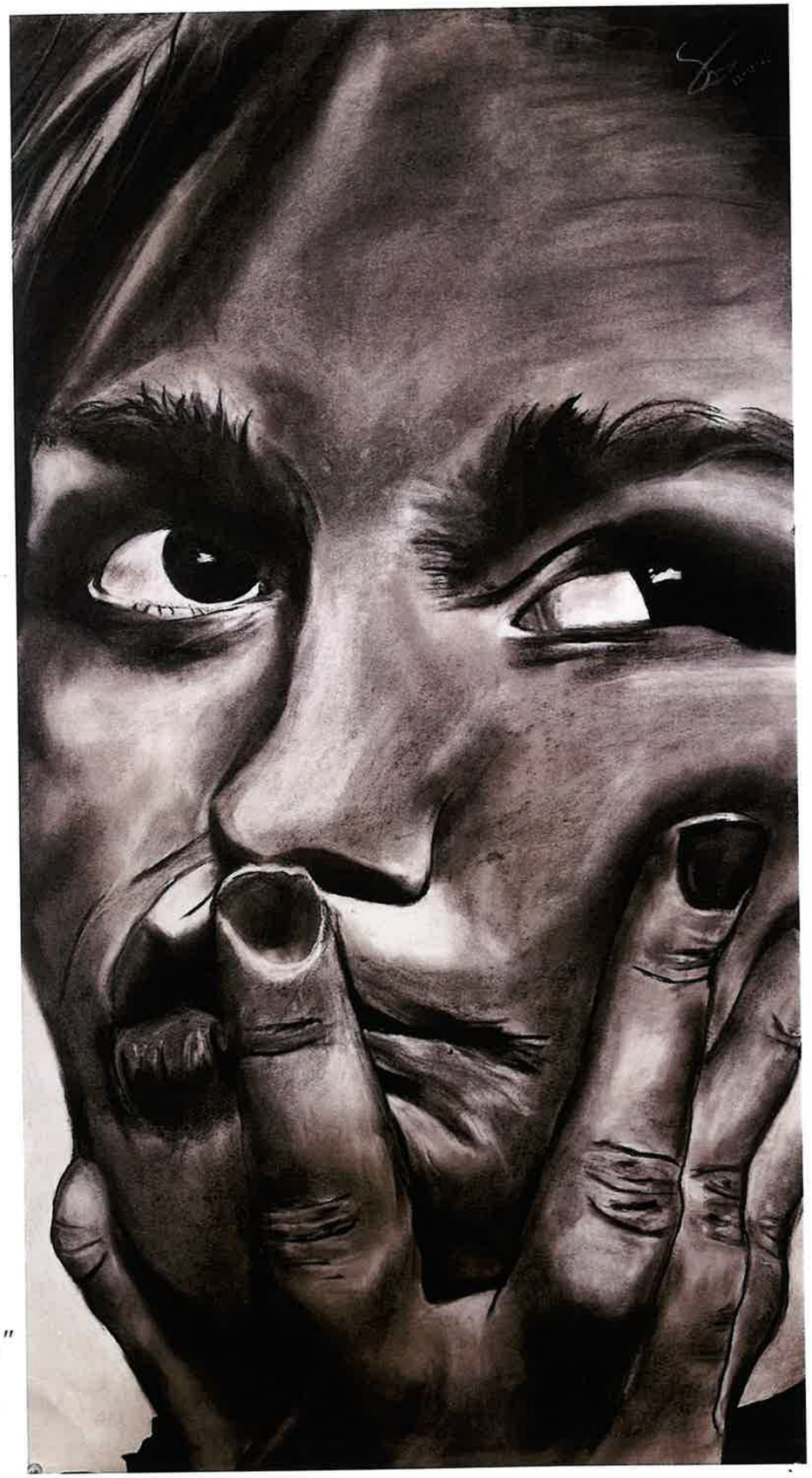
"Octopi," by Ellis Rattray '28

"Wires," by Annabel Cohen '28

Rules For Roving

Kadence Sun '27

Distant traffic light flash
hanging from string cutting across
the vacant street. A few years preceding,
crosswalks consign pedestrians on the back
of a zebra galloping to reach that arid patch
of land where they would be laid in strollers
again. Days detach. Two-legged microbes
inching under the dimming streetlight,
their shadows falter, falsified locomotion:
they move with no engine in sight.
Friction between the sanded earth and
static feet propels the rubber soles of shoes.
It is all the theory of relativity. Zebra skin trembles
as movement accelerates. What is the sumptuary
law of motion? Feral animals know not the system
they are under. We stand still for the skin of earth
to rotate us about an invisible axis. Around echoes
plans afoot for eco-friendly disposables that allegedly
float as boats on the ocean so across the ocean
we can learn how to walk again.



"Woman," by Stella Read '28

Bat Hunting

Alice Oswalt '28

Matt Winter had just finished pitching a screenplay to a young, dispassionate executive when he received a phone call from Sterling County Police Department informing him that his brother and sister-in-law were dead. They were driving down a dark, rainy road on the side of a hill with a steep drop into the woods. A deer probably came, his brother probably swerved, Matt got the picture. The most shocking news, though, was of his eight-year-old niece Molly's survival. The car had flipped, the engine on fire, but she climbed out of her booster seat, broken bones and all, and waved down a car. Matt was then informed of the second reason he was being called: he was the only family member left to take in Molly. The woman on the other end of the line gave her condolences before hanging up.

Matt stood there in the stairwell of his East Hollywood complex, trying to remember a time in his youth, before he became middle-aged and gave up on the idea of children and marriage altogether, when he had wanted a daughter or son. He struggled to find a memory of such desire. He called his parents, and after an hour of grieving their son they finally discussed Molly. His parents were in a nursing home and too old to raise her. They were bound to die in the next decade, and to be an orphan twice is not ideal. They told him that LA is no place to raise a child, and that moving to Virginia would be the best thing for poor little Molly. She could live close to her grandparents and still go to the same school. Although he had once been a teenager dying to leave their small town, Matt was less opposed than he thought he'd be. He had just broken up with a girlfriend he barely knew anything about, he didn't have a ton of friends, and he had hit a wall with writing. He moved out, and with the help of his parents, bought a small house in a quiet neighborhood, and booked a flight.

Molly was in her last few days in the hospital when he arrived. She looked older than the last time he'd seen her, which actually wasn't that long ago. Matt had flown back for Thanksgiving six months before, and enjoyed a small family gathering at his parents' house with his brother, sister-in-law, and Molly. He usually found kids annoying, but took a liking to Molly. She was funny and curious, but not super whiny or bratty. Now, in this hospital, she looked years older, pale and bruised and her light hazel eyes just looked brown. He sat in a chair next to her.

"Hi Molly. I'm really sorry about all of this. I can't imagine . . . I'm just . . . glad you're okay. I'm not sure if you already know, but you're going to be living with me now. I know it's a big change, but I'm moving to Virginia, so you can still go to your

school and see all of your friends, once you're better. Alright?"

She nodded and smiled, like she felt bad for him.

They had the funeral once Molly was out of the hospital. She didn't cry, which Matt thought was more depressing than if she did. Matt had landed a job at a small publishing firm and would be working a 9-5 all summer, meaning he needed to find something for Molly to do. She would be going to physical therapy three times a week, and actual therapy once a week. He signed her up for art camps and some YMCA day camps. Her grandparents would also spend time with her, and she would spend time with the neighborhood kids and have playdates with friends from school. He was hoping to keep her busy and keep her mind off of everything. After he got off work he made sure to spend all of his free time with Molly. She was very interested in exploring the woods and spending time outside. Their favorite activity was "bat hunting." It was something he used to do as a kid, go out at night with his brother and throw tennis balls in the sky and watch bats swoop down for them. The smell of the woods bled out into the street. The sky was dark and swallowed everything in its path. The night bugs, yelling loud in your ears. It didn't matter how many years had passed, it's still the same.

The moon reflected brightly in Molly's eyes, like they had light in them. She smiled when the bats would swoop down to try and grab the ball, and she'd scream and laugh a little when they'd get real close. One night, as they were bat hunting, a noise came from the woods. Rustling of leaves, it felt like it was coming from all over. Then Matt recognized the sound of scraping hooves. Seeing Molly's wide eyes, Matt said "It's just a deer. Don't worry, they like to come out at night." Molly didn't say anything. She looked past the trees and down the road that trailed up the hill. "Uncle Matt, this is where it happened, isn't it?" His stomach dropped. Something in her voice, paired with the silence of the night, sounded so creepy. The bats were gone, and the bugs were quiet. And there were no cars.

"What do you mean?"

Molly pointed to the road. "The accident."

Matt had never told her where the accident happened. Could she just have remembered? The doctors said she would have little memory of it. Molly walked forward. "The bats. You used to go bat hunting with my dad." Matt stepped forward, keeping her close. "Yes, we did. Did he tell you that?" She looked at him. "No." The

trees began to rustle and sway above them. "When I crawled out of the crash, I saw the deer. We looked each other in the eye. We both understood: we weren't supposed to survive." The sound of the wind blowing the trees got louder. The hooves of the deer, running and clawing at the ground, got closer. "It's okay, Matt. It won't hurt you. The woods kept me safe." Matt grabbed her arm. "Molly, what do you mean it kept you safe?" She smiled that same smile that she had in the hospital, like she felt bad for him. "I have to go back." Matt's throat tightened. "No. You're coming with me. We're going inside now." Suddenly, a loud noise behind him made him turn around. A tree had fallen, the one marked with a cross and flowers. The tree that his brother crashed into. When he turned back around, Molly was gone.

The Ideal Death

The League of Lumberjacks

The bone-chilling gusts sweep across the barren tundra as the harsh realization kicks in:
this is my last winter

My bear-hide cloak, which came at the cost of my youngest child
—this is my revenge, bear—fails to warm me in the famine of an early winter

The stench of smoke seeps into my wounds,
the gashes too large to be closed by the tourniquet that is my dignity

Lying on my side, the fading horizon envelops the decimated stone foundations
stained with ash that once contained multitudes

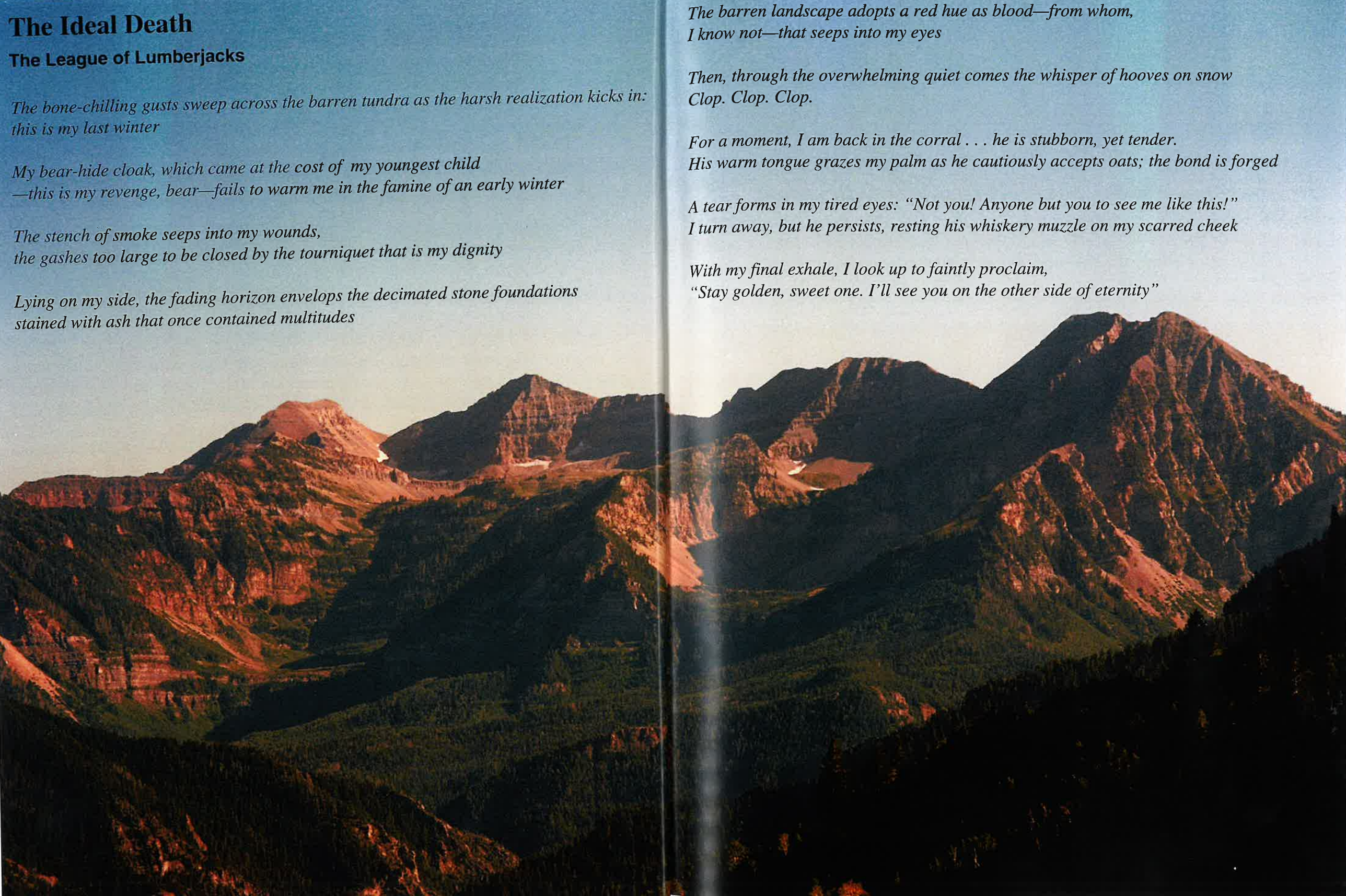
The barren landscape adopts a red hue as blood—from whom,
I know not—that seeps into my eyes

Then, through the overwhelming quiet comes the whisper of hooves on snow
Clop. Clop. Clop.

For a moment, I am back in the corral . . . he is stubborn, yet tender.
His warm tongue grazes my palm as he cautiously accepts oats; the bond is forged

A tear forms in my tired eyes: "Not you! Anyone but you to see me like this!"
I turn away, but he persists, resting his whiskery muzzle on my scarred cheek

With my final exhale, I look up to faintly proclaim,
"Stay golden, sweet one. I'll see you on the other side of eternity"



Stumbling

Brookie Barry '27

The soft whine of a newborn foal echoes throughout the sleeping night. A woman tossing through piles of damp sheets wakes up. The sun has just crested the mountain tops, causing a dim filter of light to wash through her room. The whining sound, unfamiliar since she had been a mother, startles her from a fit of panic in dreams. Her feet hit the cold floors, barely making a noise. Something about the quiet night mixed with the wailing left a pit to settle into her stomach. The cool air did nothing to the blazing heat of her skin as she slid on a jacket two sizes big that had been her son's. The smell of him on the fabric had taken its time fading.

The desperate octave rose in the foal. Half-tripping, half-walking, she stumbled from the door frame looking out into the piercing darkness lit only with the minimal light from the sun. Making her trek to the barn she would have to pass a minefield of memories. Numerous potholes left her slippers coated with a thick layer of mud as she began the walk forward, carefully allowing the gate to her right to remain a blindspot. The austere white below her feet blurred as her eyes teared.

The rain had refused to let up the past few nights, screaming at her in the night and then leaving whispers on her roof during the daytime. It was good company. The house's emptiness recently had echoed as if those red brick walls were yelling from the outside in. It never quite gave her the motivation to get up though, as the different lights illuminated her room with each passing hour. The noise of squelching was a momentary distraction from this.

As she flung open the barn doors, the feeling enveloped her, sinking into the depth of her warm skin. The foal laid flat against the straw. Its eyes of anguish and chest thrusting with a heartbeat that she worried would break skin. It was afraid. She was honestly more afraid. Falling to her knees, a coo was thrust from her lips. She needed a relief from the cruel familiarity of the foal's fearful eyes. With each comforting word brought forth it writhed, looking for something, someone.

Hopelessly she wished she had sold the foal along with the majority of her son's belongings this early winter. There was something particularly disturbing to her in comforting this delicate thing. The way its whining was insistent and refused to let up reminded her suddenly of her son's cries as a baby. They held the same desperation and invoked that same motherly ache that remains in her.

She bent lower to the ground, hoping to find a similar eye level to this grieving thing. But her foot lost its grip. She landed on the hay littered floor as the ground swished beneath her.

"Ouch." Her voice cut the tension. The scent of farm animals immediately invaded her senses.

The same smell had found her earlier, when she had walked into this barn to collect her son's medals from years prior. Those shiny things felt so dull held in her aging hand. Their youth had been ripped away with the absence of the recipient's pride. However with each item buried, another memory resurfaced, such as the one of waking up in the middle of the night. But instead of a foal's eyes two piercing blue ones had met hers.

Her son had been one insistent person. Starting from the nights when she had searched through each crevice of his room to deny the existence of a monster. She feared that the beast had found him. Maybe she hadn't looked hard enough through the baseball bats and pullover sweaters. Was it small enough then to have slipped under her radar?

It was only two weeks ago that she had been woken up in the night, not by his cries or nightmares, but by the sound of a police officer delivering a few shaky words to her. The only thing she could summon from that experience was the flashing of the woman's badge against the darkness of the outside. The red and blue lights sprinkling the background looked more like fireworks than sirens. She remembered wanting to point to the officer to turn around, to witness this miracle. At the moment it wasn't the right time, but she kept waiting for the clock to wind back.

"He's gone."

She whispered to the shivering foal. There was a heated anger that she had not realized sprung from her. She cleared her thickening throat. "He's gone." She tried again. Those words rounded themselves, taking away the jutting edge. The delicate tone and soft brushing of the foal's hair allowed for the whining to pause. Its eyes became weighted suddenly as it curled quietly next to her jacket. She wanted to find it in her to stand up now that the situation was resolved, but she felt as frozen as a deer in headlights. The light of the morning was beginning to wash over her now.

Lying next to the small thing she stared up at the rotting wood above. She should redo the barn roof, she thought. *Tomorrow*, she answered. For the morning she laid curled next to the quiet foal, their bodies one in the same. Heavy with the loss of him and silent from the exhaustion of carrying it. Hidden in childhood closets and trapped under metal trophies in the cold dirt there was nothing to discover anymore. The dawn broke over the two, spilling into each crack of those decaying wood boards. As it seeps in there is no detail missing, including the absence of another body not joining in on the chorus of the day. There were many urges that ran through her until she felt washed from exhaustion, until she could find it in her to stand.

They were just beginning to walk through grief, stumbling blindly through the winter. Ready for something resembling hope to come back again.

"Baby Teeth," by Ansley Evans '28

Braids

Mekaila Gallimore '28

My braids are made up of delicately woven hairs,
intertwined one after another to create a crown of the soul
Beautiful, aren't they? Yes, yes, they most definitely are.

They whip stronger than any riptide you've ever seen
yet, they remain so delicate,
appearing weak to one strong gust of wind.
Fortunately, however, the difference between royalty and common-class
is the ability to flaunt wealth across all facets of the body.

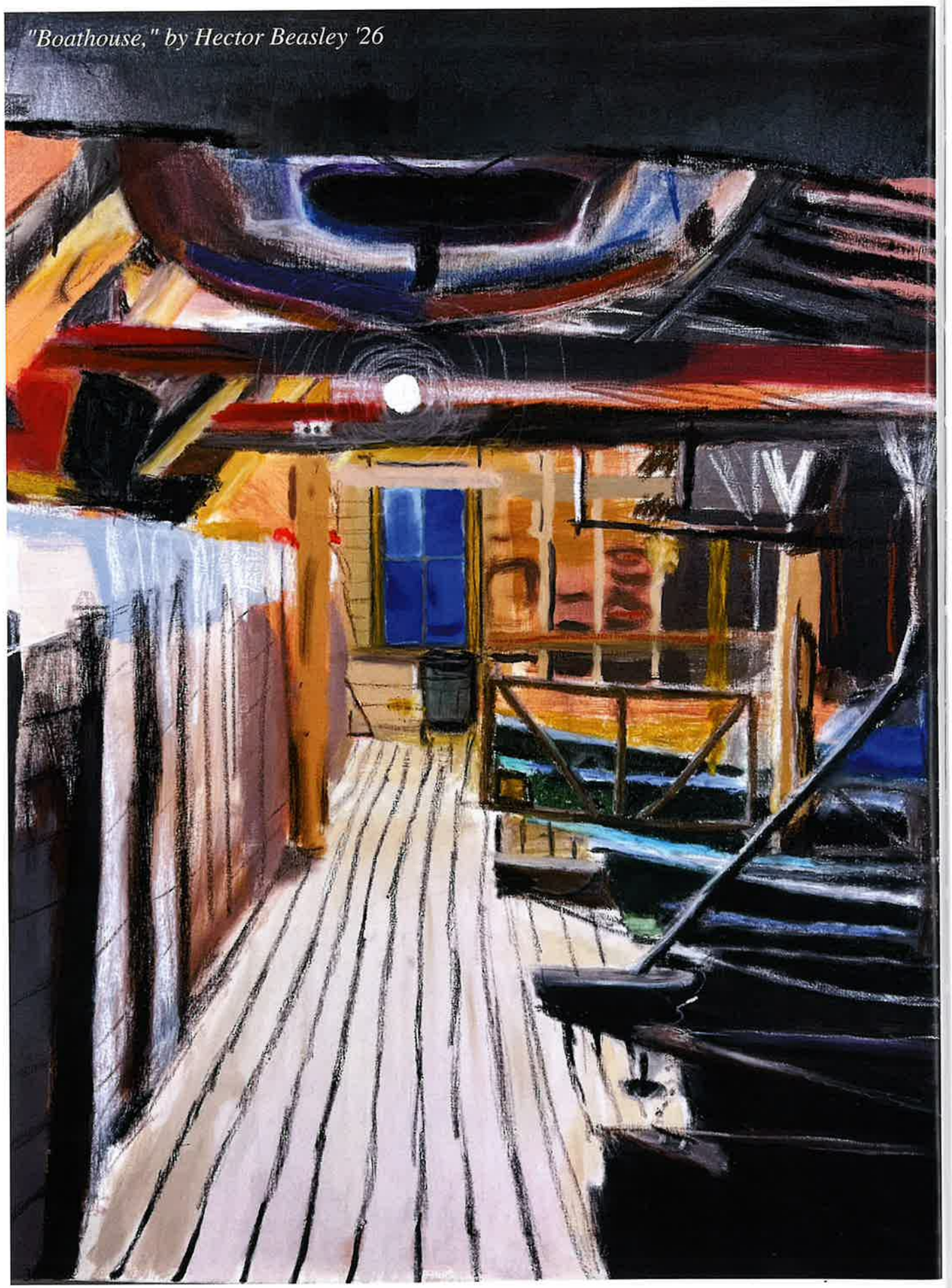
So please,
keep your hands off of my crown.
As any peasant caught touching the queen
would have been executed at first sight.

Indulge we may in the beauty that is the continent of Africa.
Subject yourselves to the years of history found
within that of a simple braid.
Decades and centuries
of enslavement, of appropriation,
of oppression, of perseverance,
of beauty, of thievery,

of overcoming the battles
blended in between the lines of my ancestors" scalp.
Of years spent relaxing, and damaging, and cutting, and killing the scalp.
A testament to the killing of my people because of what grows out of their scalp.

In all, I present to you this braid.
A token to the strength of my community.
A crown that has been returned,
after having fallen off a lifetime ago.

"Headboard," by Georgia Brown '28



"Boathouse," by Hector Beasley '26

Life Englobed

Kadence Sun '27

My mom used to tell her friends that the optimal method of keeping me from danger would be to "walk me like a dog." When I was little, I would walk and "dream" at the same time, and I never paid attention to my surroundings. I'd imagine myself floating on a cloud, looking down at the streets and crossroads embroidering the earth. Because of this, I once clutched the hand of a random college student and called him my grandpa. I wandered off alone in the mystical mountains of China to use a stick to murder snow in the middle of a hiking trail.

On car rides, my parents always felt more secure. I was less of a hazard—I would be tucked away in the attic of my own mind, staring out the misty window in the backseat. I invented a listener for my stories, broke off a piece of my soul and implanted it into my silver-sequined cap. It followed me everywhere I went. My favorite story to tell the cap happened inside the snowglobe my parents gifted me. Constructed in its interior was a castle on a densely wooded hill with a courtyard carpeted with white specks of snow. I stared through its miniature windows, which opened, in my mind, into grand halls and ballrooms festooned with the possibilities of the unknown. The clear liquid in the snowglobe was my favorite part. I swished it around, manipulating the physics of that lucid world.

I brought the cap to life somewhere in between the road from Vienna and Prague, and left it hanging on a pillared fence on the beach somewhere along the coast of the Indian Ocean. The moment I realized I lost it, we were heading toward the airport to catch the return flight. I had to then illustrate the imaginative realm to my parents, who just responded, "That's great, Biangbiang." Biangbiang is my parents' pet name for me, taken from the name of a noodle my dad liked. Hearing this, suddenly I was reduced to a limp noodle in the backseat again. I thought that, aside from myself, the rest of the world did not understand my whims. For the rest of the journey, I fixed my eyes on the constantly expanding void of the dulling asphalt.

I lived my life in the snowglobe. It was not a place I escaped to, but rather, a place that captivated me with its unknowable landscape. It is a place I could see through the unseeing, and uncover parts of myself that I did not fully comprehend. John Ashbery writes in his poem "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror," "But it is life englobed. / One would like to stick one's hand / Out of the globe, but its dimension, / What carries it, will not allow it." My whole childhood, there was perpetual loneliness in me, even though I was never alone. I would fall asleep and refuse to wake up. Why would I?

I had the dream world. I was not misunderstood there—I did not think in a different language than I spoke. In the dream world, words could be expressed without translational loss. In the dream world, English/Chinese was not just a binary system like that of the computer which pretends it can carry that which it doesn't. My soul felt captive to the body. It desired to push out of its container, but no medium could receive it, and present it as it is. Telling my parents a story felt like pressing my mouth against glass. I lost more than I discovered. What does one do if nothing one sees truly encapsulates the state of being?

As time moved, the liquid inside the snowglobe turned a shade of putrid yellow. My mom stowed it away in a cardboard box, and (like any object hidden from sight) it was soon forgotten.

When I was transitioning from primary school to middle school, my family moved to a different part of the city. As I unpacked the boxes, I noticed a sealed cardboard box that was oozing liquid. I peeled open its wet edges: in the box, the snowglobe had shattered into glass shards that clinked against each other, while the rest of the globe—the castle and its surroundings—remained intact.

On the first day of middle school, my teacher handed out a calendar marking the days we have left until the high school entrance exam. We counted 1,096 days. "It sounds far away, doesn't it?" My Chinese teacher said, "before you know it, you will be looking at the sheets of test paper that determine the rest of your life."

Our classroom, like any standard public school classroom in China, had a dark moss-green chalkboard and a teachers' podium at the very front; the rest of the space fit around fifty-six students, who sat shoulder to shoulder in the constricted space. The fluorescent lights sterilized the surfaces it touched. Row upon row of desks neatly outlined the classroom, and yet the sight of them evoked a rusting sensation, as if sitting before it, one's body would be laid bare and slowly consumed.

Discipline was always enforced. When the teachers walked in, we must have our arms folded neatly on top of each other. "Class begins." the teacher said, and our gaze shifted to the seventeen-inch wooden ruler in her hand, which was engraved with the litany of obedience. It seared coral marks into my skin when used. We stood up in unison, answering absentmindedly: "Good morning to you, teacher." We said the same greetings in the same monotonous tone until it became routine, something carved into our DNA.

Geography was my favorite class. My teacher brought her globe to class, spinning it around its axis, and explained to us that the axis is but a figment of the human mind that explains the earth's rotation. Humans, we learned, have used globes to model the world around them since antiquity. In the 16th century, globes were seen as objects of grandeur, and the possession of one became a symbol for the power to command the world. Later, in the 17th and the 18th centuries, they were used cartographically. Joseph Priestley, a Fellow of the Royal Society, stated that globes "have no uses more extensive than the view of human ingenuity." Although they were symbols of navigation, they were never used to make new discoveries, but only recorded them. The use of a globe, no matter how accurately it represents the world, cannot extend beyond our existing knowledge and consciousness.

As a more visually impaired student, I sat in the front row, my desk directly touching the podium. I inhaled the faint smell of chalk dust, which was the only eternal fragrance. Sometimes when the teacher draped her chalk-holding hand over the podium, the white specks would litter over me, ashlike. Seeing them settle onto my desk, I thought of the drifting snow inside the snowglobe I hadn't touched for the longest time.

Living in the public world depended on me studying formulaically like a machine. I felt alien to myself. I sleepwalked through the days, my senses dulled, swallowed by the void. I could not visualize the end. My mind tumbled from the cloud and splattered on the concrete pavement. My pencil chipped away on a desiccated basin. Here the whimsical brain is poison.

One night I was given *Jane Eyre* to read, and the book possessed me. It felt like I was locked away in my own Red Room. I was the "strange little figure" peering in the looking-glass, which is the "visionary hollow" that made everything cold and dark. Yet in the mirror Jane's face and arms "speckled the gloom," her eyes still glittering, even with fear. Her inextinguishable luminosity under oppression illuminated me.

My whole life, if expressed in Ashbery's words, was "life englobed." When younger I was englobed in my imaginations, almost disconnected from earth. I wanted my soul to reach "out of the globe" and into the public space. At school I was trapped by a system that mechanized me, trying to break out of the public world that wanted to strip me of everything. Am I just letting them take it all away? The rules, I understood, were binding. To shield myself from physical punishment, I decided that I would keep my imagination—what they cannot touch. I let my dreams adorn me. The void still persisted. But what is the point of this silent rebellion? Is it not merely fighting an

invisible ghost in the mind, which does not change the real condition?

Albert Camus said that, regarding absurd creations, "he must give the void its colors," which I adapted as the act of self-revival through the mental state. The void cannot be filled. School life remained a factory-standard evaluation, the classroom surfaces tin-white, like arsenic. I cast stained glass over my vision, and the illusory landscape before me kept me breathing. That was enough for me to survive.

The idea of mere "survival" seems inconsolable. Humans are invariably seeking after what is beyond survival, reaching past the perceptible into the realm of the transcendence. The question remains: what do we do with our dreams, and how do we extract the living out of them? Ashbery claims that we are prolonged by our dreams as we absorb them, and "Something like living occurs, a movement / out of the dream into its codification." If all we can retrieve and convey is only a "codified" approximation to life, should we just accept it as the asymptote it is?

We cannot exist without the physical form—the body that captivates us, which keeps us alive yet kills us just a little, as we attempt to extend our consciousness into the world. Our desire to extend is not one of capturing or rendering a still life, but of exploring, again and again, human life on the globe as its own form of impossible portraiture. We want to reach out of the globe that is the world, or reach into the world that is the globe. And though it is futile, the act of attempting is fundamental to our beings.

Now, I am an entire Pacific Ocean away from that past, attending boarding school on the east coast of the United States, and the oppression of that moment feels surreal. I think of the innumerable instances when I chose to dismantle the definitions of reality, to live on my cloud, and let dreams percolate into the living, into its own truth. I will let imagination resuscitate me from the shadows of the void, reaching with my hand out from the globe to caress the world.

"Heart," by Brooke Simonsen '26 (woodcut print)

Blackout Poem

Abe Perry '26

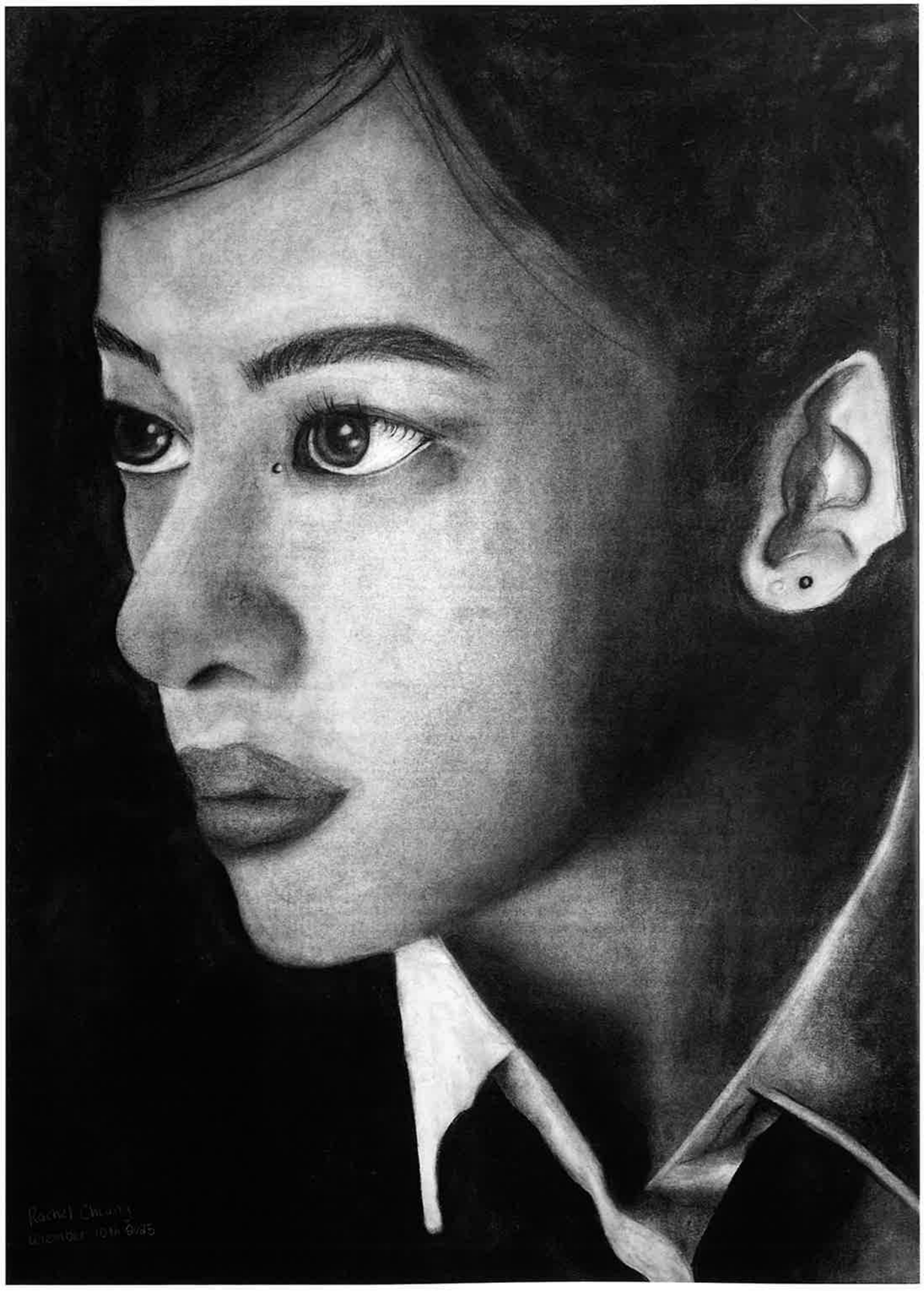
To be honest,
I feel like there's nowhere
Left to go.
I paid no attention
To my own anxiety.

Snippet from the Stars

Abe Perry '26

The stars are bright tonight,
I am walking nowhere.
I will be alright.
Desire gets you nowhere.

"Erg," by Graham Robinson '26



Tuesday

Penn Roth '27

The laundromat opens at six. By then the lights have already been on long enough for the room to warm. The machines along the far wall are running, their windows clouded, their movements steady and patient. The floor is damp, streaked from the mop. A phone number has been traced onto the condensation on the front window, reversed and thinning.

He sits in the plastic chair closest to the change machine. It shifts when he leans back. He sets his basket at his feet and waits. Across the room, a man counts quarters into stacks, then breaks them apart and starts again. Each time a dryer buzzes, the man looks up, even when it's not his.

The washers lock. Water rises, then slaps against the glass before settling. A red sock drifts past a white sleeve, and disappears. The lids seal with a sound that carries sharper than the others.

A woman comes in, carrying two baskets and a child. The child climbs into one of them, and spins around until the woman pulls it back. She does not speak. She loads three machines at once, fast and practiced. When one washer rejects her coins, she presses the button again, harder. She glances around, as if the room has noticed.

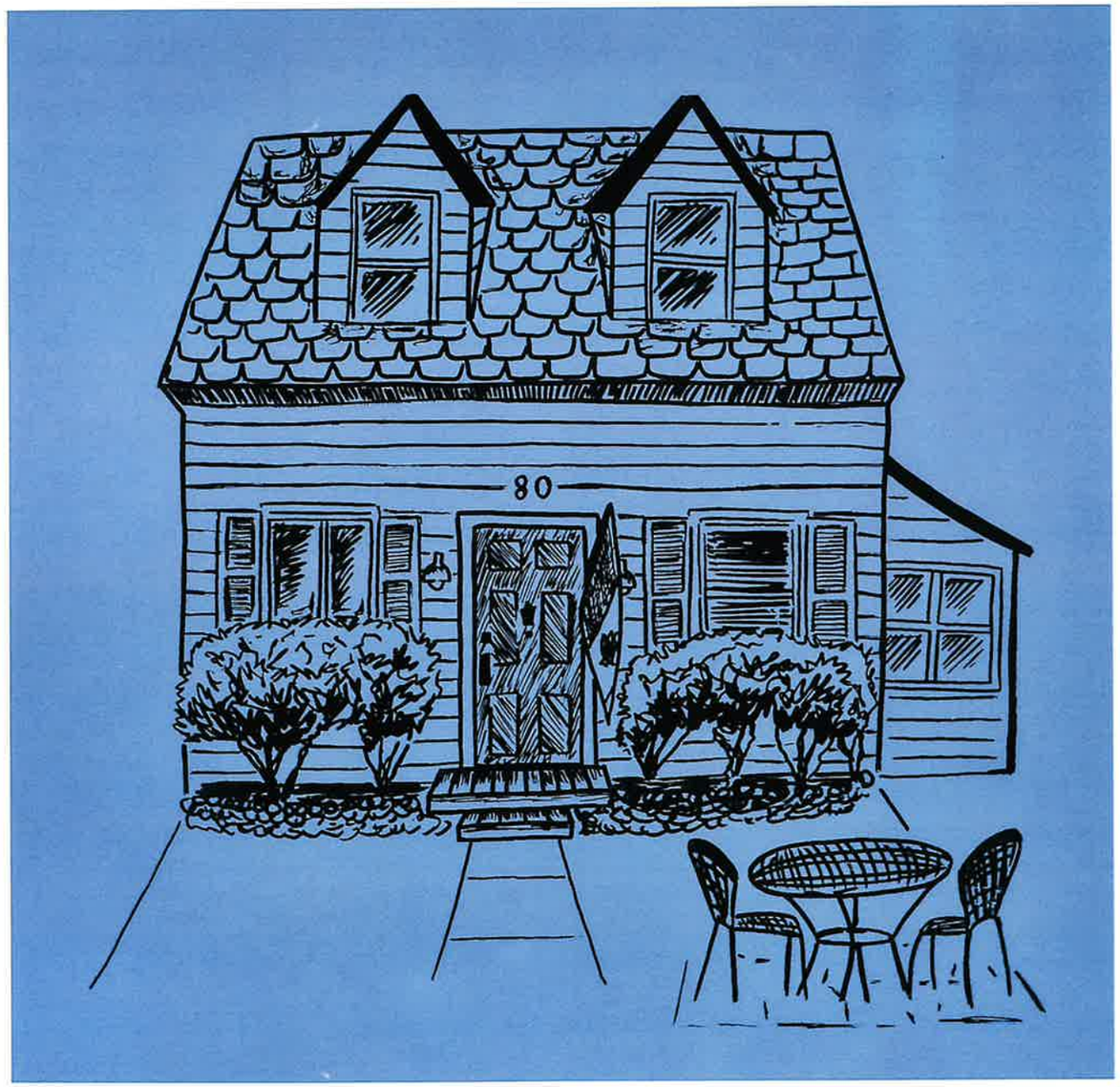
The dryers begin to finish. One of them buzzes until the sound cuts itself off. The man with the quarters stands and opens the door. Heat spills into the room. He removes a shirt and holds it to his face for a moment before folding it. The rest he leaves inside, feeding more coins into the slot. His washer finishes next. The lid unlocks with a click. For a moment the room seems to pause. He transfers the clothes carefully, shaking each piece once before placing it into the dryer. A receipt slips from a pocket, and floats to the floor. He picks it up, smooths it, and then drops it into the trash.

A sock sits on top of a machine near the back. It is small and dark and clean. No one reaches for it. It remains there, as the room fills and empties again, as the child stretches out across two plastic chairs and falls asleep, as the windows begin to clear and the number begins to fade.

When his dryer buzzes, he waits. The sound repeats, and fades. When he finally stands, the sock is still there. He folds his clothes, and places them back into the basket. The chair shifts again as he lifts it. Outside, the sun has cleared the buildings across the street. The phone number is gone.

The sock does not move.

"Home," by Claire Hoopes '26



"Untitled," by Josephine Scott-Barnes '26

Spindle

Brookie Barry '27

There is a spider trapped in a jar, little spindles dancing across the walls. And in its flame I find a little piece of misery, a little piece of beauty. Its hairy legs like my arms against the pavement after riding a bicycle on the shadow-webbed concrete. Ugly. Quite brutal. Violence in a flash and the downfall of some kingdom in just a small glass. A little fishbowl, perhaps, of black widows dancing to and fro, to and fro. So enticing that I find myself jaws open wide to suck in the poison of their sinister smiles, I am fearful. Is it the brittleness that draws me in? The tragedy of such small lives? My feet crunch on gravel, and I wince and shorten my stride.

Where Blossoms Fall

Josephine Xie '27

致 外公外婆—
我有所念之人，隔在远远乡。
时光你慢些走，只愿：
神寿遐昌，岁岁年年。

When I started taking the school bus in kindergarten, it was a universe of noise: shouts in a language I was still untangling, the thump of backpacks, and the sharp squeal of brakes. For me, it was all quiet anticipation in my head. Every afternoon, as the bus groaned into the final stretch, turning from the bustling main road into the tree-lined lane that led to my neighborhood, my world would shrink to a single point. I would press my forehead against the glass window, my eyes scanning the identical rows of apartment blocks, looking for two figures at the station.

And there they were. Every day. No matter the weather, no matter the season. Two figures standing sentinel in front of the gate's rusted stairs. Wai Po, my grandma, a compact silhouette in her purple puffer vest, leaning in the direction of the bus, a smile already on her face. Wai Gong, my grandpa, took a step ahead, arms folded across his chest, as if to survey the approaching bus. In autumn rain, they huddled under a single pink umbrella, their pants dark with splashed droplets. In the winter cold, they were bundles of padded jackets, scarves and hats wound tight, their breaths making little clouds in the air. In the summer heat, Wai Po would be fanning the both of them with a hand-crafted fan as Wai Gong stood squinting in the sun, hands shielding his eyes.

Seeing them was the day's first full exhale. The knot of confusion at school, the quiet anxiety of being perpetually just out of step, loosened in my chest. The bus would hiss to a halt, I would stumble down the steps, and their faces would transform. Wai Gong's stern watchfulness would melt into a wide smile; Wai Po's sharp gaze would soften into crescents of pure relief. No grand gestures. Just their presence, a quiet, physical promise: *you are home, and we are here*.

"Was school okay?" Wai Gong would ask, already reading for my backpack. I shrugged, mumbling "fine" sometimes in English or a mix of Mandarin and Shanghainese. The walk from the gate to our second-floor apartment was a short ritual through a narrow path, sheltered by trees almost like a forest, the tall leaves engulfing us from the sun and rain. Wai Gong, with my bag over one shoulder, would point out a newly bloomed flower in the neighbor's patch. Wai Po, holding my hand, would feel

my fingers. "Your hands are too cold," she would say, chafing them gently between her own warm, rough palms. "Did you eat and drink enough water today?"

Their apartment door opening was the true threshold. The outside world with its strange rules would be sealed away, replaced by the familiar, dense atmosphere of home. It smelled of aged wood, of the faint, clean scent of laundry soap, and always, underneath it all, the deep, savory note of something that had been simmering for hours. It was the smell of waiting, of patient, devoted time.

Inside, their love was not declared; it was served. The table was its altar. The lesson was simple and repeated with every meal: to love is to nourish, and to nourish is to sacrifice. A whole steamed fish, its eye milky and staring upwards, was a landscape of devotion. Wai Po's chopsticks, precise as surgical tools, darted in, bypassing the easy flank meat to pry the tender cheek meat free. That piece was like a prized morsel, and he deposited it in my bowl. "This is for you," he said, as if announcing a natural law. Wai Gong would follow, spooning the fatty belly meat from the bottom of the plate. "Eat this. It's good for your brain." If I protested about the bones, he would say, "It makes you study better," while picking them out meticulously. My eyes met with Wai Po's and we shared a silent chuckle.

My childhood refrain was always, "I feel so full, Wai Po, I can't." Her reply was as constant as the sunrise. "One more bite. Look at you, all skin and bones. The wind could carry you away." I thought we debated about appetite. I didn't understand we were practicing a ritual. Their insistence was my first scripture, their saving "the best" for me—the heart of the bok choy, the most tender piece on the drumstick, and the sweetest bite of every fruit. When I tried to offer the piece back to them, they'd sharply glare at me. "We old people have eaten enough in our lives," both of them would say, leaving no room for debate. "The best is for the young."

Wai Gong was my adventurous guardian. Our walks to the market were expeditions. He was a man of formidable, noisy principle. He'd poke a plucked chicken, frown at a pile of greens, and his passionate voice echoed under the tin roofs. "You think money grows on trees?" he'd blast out, while I hid behind his leg, equally mortified and proud. In the spring, when our eyes lingered on a cascade of cherry blossoms tumbling over a wall, he'd act. He handed me the bag of vegetables, and hitched up his trousers, found a gap in the bricks, and climbed up. He returned with a twig heavy with pink clouds, and a triumphant grin on his face. "For my granddaughter," he announced like he was bestowing a medal.

Back home, Wai Po filled our tallest glass jar with water, and we put the branch in it,

like a captured piece of spring on the old windowsill. For days, it was the main character in our house. Then, slowly, the petals would begin to let go. A silent, daily fall, each one a pink sigh against the wood surface. Their vivid, living beauty was relief. But the scent they left behind: the delicate, subtle fragrance with a faint, woody bitterness, was stubborn. It permeated the rooms, clinging to the curtains, to our clothes, to the pages of my homework. It was the ghost that lingered long after the bloom was gone, a memory made air.

For years, that daily sight was also paradoxically a sight of shame. In a world where kids talked about the cookies their moms would bring to soccer games and playdates in the mall, my truth felt rustic. When we introduced who we lived with, I'd mumble, "My parents," and leave it at that, swallowing the complicated truth that my parents were busy with their jobs and my grandparents willingly took over their responsibility of raising me. Saying, "I live with my grandparents" felt like admitting something outdated, a mark of being from a different, slower century. I loved them desperately, but I tucked them away in a private pocket of my life, afraid that their old ways of haggling in the market, their stubborn waits at the bus stop, their gifts of homemade sweet potatoes instead of cake pops would paint me as strange.

Then, an ocean stretched between us. School in America was a new script, a faster tempo. The predictable rhythm of the walk from the bus station was replaced by solitary walks back to dorms and the quiet focus during daily study halls. I was building a future for myself. But from frantic construction on my own, I began to neglect the foundation.

I called, but the calls became calendar reminders, then sparse, guilty check-ins. "We're doing great! Ma Qiu (my cat) just keeps on getting chubbier!" They'd chirp, their voices thin across the continents. "Eat enough! Wear a scarf!" Our conversations were loops of unwavering concern and my distracted, monosyllabic replies. I knew they were my most important people, yet they became abstract—photos scrolled through on my phone during long flights, a seasonal obligatory call, and the echo of a scent I barely recall.

Time's violence revealed itself not in a single blow, but in the slow-motion collapse I witnessed on my returns, visits now spaced by years.

The yellow bus is gone. The path in the little forest was paved with new, unfamiliar cement. Stepping into the house, I find the two familiar figures busy in the kitchen, their usual battleground. Their movement in clear, practiced roles, the laughter

remained the same like each afternoon I came back from school. But Wai Po's hair, once a sleek, black helmet I boasted of, was now more salt than pepper, and seems to stand out more than anything else. When I hugged her, she seemed to have shrunk inside her clothes. Holding her hand across the street, I could trace every tendon and bone, a map of time I had not been there to read.

Wai Gong's booming market voice had faded. He no longer haggled. He no longer climbed walls for blossoms. At the supermarket, he leaned heavily on the cart and shuffled with small steps. The man who once claimed the best of the world for me now seemed worn down by the simple act of moving through it.

But their language has not aged. I would arrive, and they vanished into the kitchen, the clatter of pans their welcome song. Wai Gong would pop his head out from the kitchen door, smile, and disappear to their bedroom and return with trembling hands: a bag of fancy pistachios from a relative's visit three months prior, a box of ornate chocolates from an event gift, a pack of my favorite lychee juice. "We saved this for you," his eyes bright. The nuts were stale, the chocolate bloomed with white, the juice boxes dusty. These were items from the periphery of their small world, artifacts they had received and instantly classified as "the best." They operated on their own geography of value. Within it the highest law remained: the best must be saved for me.

At the table, the old sacrament. "Eat, you look tired. You work too hard." This time, I did not refuse. I ate until I was full, and then I accepted more. I praised the flavors, and asked for the recipe I would never perfectly replicate. I finally understood the circuit: their love was the current, the food the conduit, and my eager consumption the complete connection that lit them up. My empty bowl was the only "I love you" they needed.

Sitting in that familiar light, the ghost of the cherry blossoms rose from the floorboards. The petals had fallen long ago. The vibrant color, the joyful defiance of gravity was Wai Gong's climb and Wai Po's dark hair. The fleeting bloom was our past.

And our present.

It is in the stale snacks that are saved with absolute faith. It is in the bony hand still pushing the best piece toward me. It is in the way they ask, "How long can you stay?" and immediately follow, "But don't miss your studies for us." Their love, which I clumsily hid, is the story I now most proudly tell. It is my cornerstone.

So I guess time and distance have their own way of polishing the hidden gems in your life until they shine with impossible clarity. Now, when conversations with friends turn to things about our family, I say with a swelling pride, "I was raised by my grandparents." I described the bus stop, the saved fish cheeks, and the cherry blossom branches. I see the wonder in their eyes, the sigh of envy for a connection so deep and textured. They weren't a placeholder for a life I lacked, they were the very architects of my heart.

They taught me that love, in its truest form, is niche. It is not generic affection. It is the specific, studied knowledge of what another person cherishes—the fish cheek, the sunniest spot in the house—and the relentless, quiet effort to grant it, over and over. It is climbing a tree for a beauty you know will wilt, simply to see the delight on their face now. It is standing in the rain by a rusty gate, day after day, to become their first sight of home.

Time is a river that slips through our fingers, cold and relentless. It is the white hair, the softening voice, the widening distance. It is the petal, unstoppably falling. My childhood shame has fallen away too, revealing the sturdy, beautiful truth beneath: I was raised by giants. Their world was small, but their love was an atlas that taught me everything. They showed me what to do with the water we hold. You don't cup it for yourself. You channel it, carefully, patiently, toward the roots of those you love. You become the steady, waiting presence at the gate. You become the keeper of the best piece, the saver of the special treat. You plant the blossom, knowing its life is short, so that its scent—that subtle, enduring mix of sweetness and loss—becomes the very air they remember breathing.

Love becomes the weather of your soul, long after the season has changed, and the bus has turned the corner, and you are gone. I am their living branch. The stubborn, sweet scent is what I carry into every new room.

Art 101

Kayden Murrell '26

Creating art is a lot like vivisecting the dead.
It is digging through the dirt,
the muddled memories, and the sensations that quickly grow cold.
It's wet earth crowding your fingernails as proof that you tried to scratch the surface.
It is reaching
vaguely
downward.
It is feeling the roots,
the hidden origin of everything you have ever thought, dreamed, felt
intimately.

Then you feel it,
tender flesh, the faintest warmth,
the proof of a still, beating heart, just at the
tip
of
your
finger.
And forward,
you're
reaching,
plunging
into
the
depths
below,
desperate for the spark you felt, what feels like a lifetime ago.

You grasp the *almost* dead thing,
like a lifeline, your saving grace, a blessing from the heavens above
just found
beneath,
buried,
only *nearly* forgotten.

You place it on a table,

open it like a ripe fruit, expecting something sweet to
spill
forth
You examine every inch, because you want to feel its heart beat its even rhythm
and you are desperate for the dulcet song of rushing blood
because *that* is something worth all the poems, and statues, and paintings in the world.

You contort its
limbs
into
impossible positions,
and strangely, it resembles a dance, to a wordless and lovely tune.

You squeeze the organs,
a facsimile of a pulse and watch as it runs a red
you've seen on a thousand portraits.
So deep,
so promising of life.

Creation is a portal through death to life.
It is an impossible,
it is unforgiving,
and it is hopefulness in a world gone cold.

Strings

Adhithi Poraiyan '27

A family of four, one sister, one mother, and one father.
They like to think they portray one string that is connected in unison
Unknowingly, there are numerous intricate knots, many stay knotted
And . . . many go unspoken.

Do these strings consist of rough wood or silk?
Are these knots accidental or deliberate?
How stretchy is this thread?
Many questions go unanswered . . .

No one really sees the true relationship one has with their family.
They see what is portrayed on the outside,
An elaborate and beautiful braid.
They see broad smiles, and hear boisterous laughs,
away from the comfort of the walls within their home.
What makes a genuine family?
Smiles, and laughter is not all

Although this thread once blossomed with laughter,
Now, it scarcely beams, as these threads loosen with secrecy.

Hidden from the world and society,
is a family that deals with the tangled nature of their own problems
Too embarrassed to let the world know of their imperfections,
The picture-perfect family tears at the seams

So little by little
The string starts to wear thin, at first subconsciously
And then finally this thread frays into counterparts of the original
Can these new fragments still be woven?

One house, became two
Despite the string being unable to divide.
their family was somehow still intact
finally, one string became thousands
And a couple feet became millions of miles apart
This distance never goes unwoven, it only dwindles in affection.

Tea With Her (Reconciliation)

Lindsey Liu '28

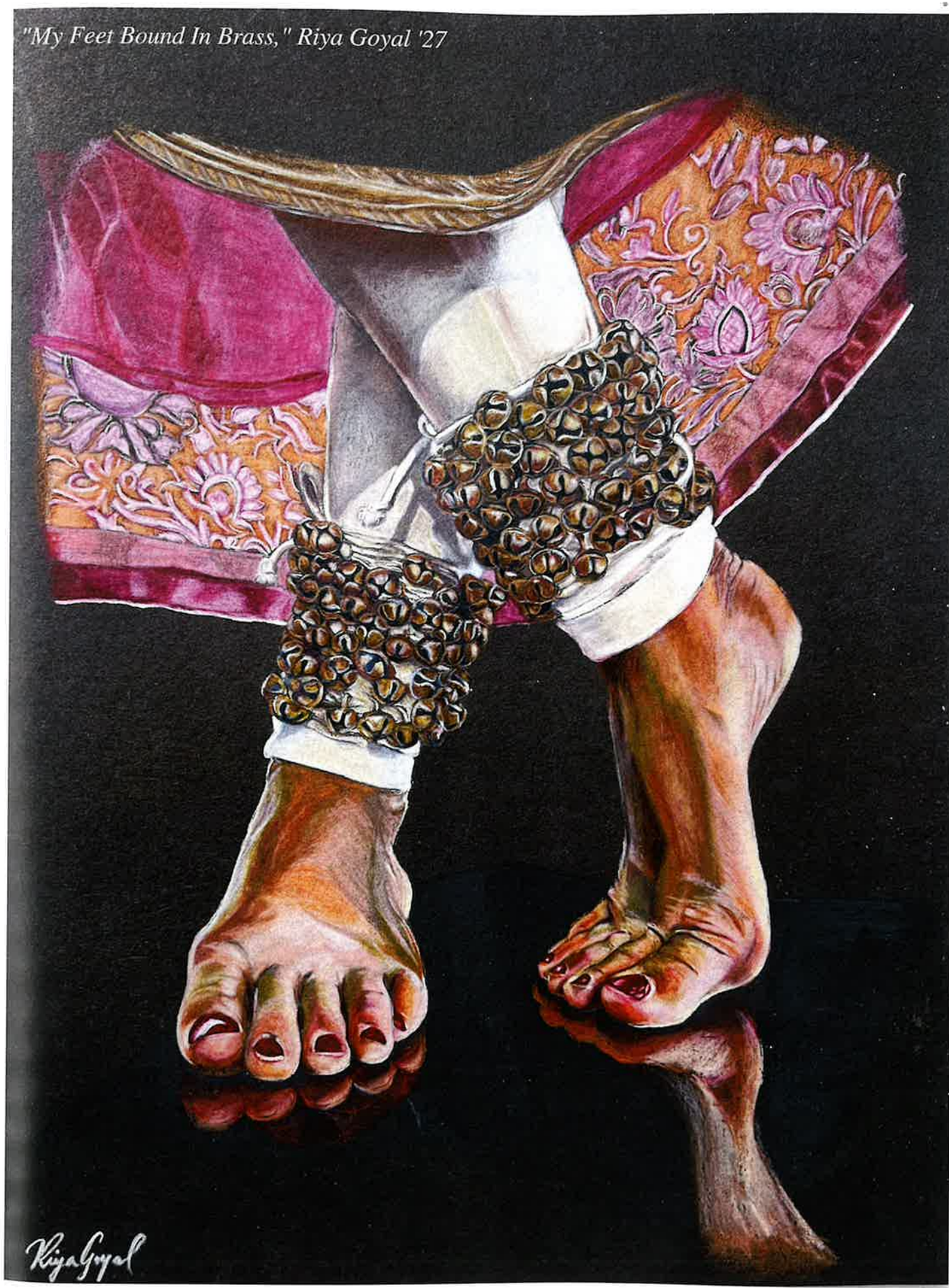
Her canvas, I remember, was transparent like newly casted glass,
Burgeoning like the heart of spring,
Doused, dripping with fits of simplicity in the shade of tangible joy.

Now the cheeks are crosshatched: the most simplistic two-dimensional drawing.
Something bulging out, punching the cheesecloth.
Obtuse angles carve out the awkward bundles of flesh.

I sit with her, cross-legged, there's White Bear and Rosa the Pig,
It is tea time under the cotton-candy colored fortress,
Teeming with pristine white hearts,
Sewed on, as indelible as the tainted puddles of purple on that same canvas,
To me, a humiliating shade of fuchsia.

"Don't let that wickedly hot tea burn that delicate vessel," I said,
But it was too late: her cheeks became alive, expanding like a hot air balloon,
The fluttering consciousness and fledgling of a body, maimed,
Soldiers parachuting into this battlefield of dead matter;
She has rotted into me.

So she offered me a scone of renewal,
She promised that it would wipe away my cynical lens,
"You could be happy again,"
But we were already too late,
We were already one.



How Far Are We From Disappearance

Kadence Sun '27

It was autumn on the edge of the suburban land. Much infrastructure was moving away from the city, while construction moved toward the edge. Time concentrated, then diffused the flow of life in crepuscular mornings. Every morning he looked through the apartment window, hazy with dust, waiting for familiar shapes to pass by on the concrete below.

When I was little I took piano lessons from a music school close by on Sundays, and I always visited his place while waiting for father to pick me up. He must've been a blood relative, though distant, otherwise I would've identified him by some less confusing name than "call him 'grandpa' but he's not." I didn't want the nametag of an erring child to be slapped onto me by the respectful elders, so I stuck to the formalities.

His apartment was welded into one of those decrepit, nondescript buildings from the seventies. The small building didn't survive dilapidation, it lived in it, breathing and decomposing. The front door of the building was made of sheet metal, with iron bars at the top and the bottom. Half-ripped advertisements from the local government were plastered to the front of the door. Sometimes you could still glean some information from them: half a phone number, huge money offerings, a contact name.

To enter the place without a key, you pressed the apartment number on a telephone pad, which would then dial the receiver on the inside of the apartment. I had to stand on my tiptoes, stretching my arms as far as possible to reach the rusted buttons. Along with the clicking of the buttons came the familiar sound of his greeting. It was my favorite part of entering.

Once inside the dimly lit stairwell, silhouettes surrounded me: the old residents stowed musty boxes away, stacked like a wall within the shadows of the spandrel, not wanting to part with the scraps of their lives that their grownup children had chastised them for keeping.

Often when I heard my parents chastise the older generation I felt that my mind was closer in proximity to the elders. The times I stood questioning: why must it be tossed to the landfill? "I will keep it," I'd say, "Can't it just be given to me?" I felt the anguish of an old lady bickering with her children, who don't understand, and would never understand—how scary it is to live the rest of her life in modernity.

Time, I realized, moved oddly around me inside the building. It drifted in the condensed air, seconds decelerating, a wider space between the ticks of a clock.

I was scared of the constricted stairwell, not just the wallpaper torn from it, but the powdery interior filler and the despondent grey bones of concrete. Perhaps it was the sheer amount of elderly inhabiting the place. I was encased by the breathing walls around me, the hallway engorging itself with my young flesh. It made room for childish fantasizing. Once I felt a face staring up at me from the bottom of the staircase void, as I blinked down at it, all attention fixated to a point of silence. It was the kind of darkness at the far end of the universe where everything goes mute.

"Why are you always running up the stairs like something is chasing after you?" He asked one time, as I hurriedly unlaced my shoe. He folded a torn piece of paper and tossed it into the trash.

"I am afraid of the dark here," I said. "Does it ever make you feel fainter? Like your skin would turn transparent and disappear?"

I know, he said. I waited for more words to emerge from his parted lips. But his eyes lost some luster, as if he'd retreated to a place invariably out of my reach. We never talked much beyond this point.

Then he settled me atop his bed in what I called the "The Chrysanthemum Room." In the room hung ink-wash paintings of the flower to cover the rotten splotches of the wall that people don't want to see and try to forget about. He loved the flower. It lived undemandingly. Ancient Chinese poets, he said to me once, loved it just as much—they appreciated its austere beauty and their own idiosyncrasy.

My gangly limbs dangled from the wooden bed, scrunching up the sheets. The patchwork on the quilts was unevenly stitched, the seams rubbing against my ankle like mountain ridges as I rolled my body up and down the landscape. When I got bored at that, I pulled out the stickers my piano teacher gifted me, and started to adorn his nightstand with the glittery faces of Mickey Mouse. It became the most maximalist furnishing in his apartment.

On the floor in front of me he emptied out the anecdotes in his nightstand drawers to satiate my curiosity: a golden medallion with the president's face engraved on it, a commander's cap, black and white photographs browning at the edges. I never questioned the origin of these items. When young it is easy to forget that everything

has or at least had a story attached to it; instead, I asked "can I keep it one day?" He smiled and nodded. He was attuned to the intonations of life: how the world must end in order to begin again.

Something about his place brought me into repose. I was a restless child—I barely stood still, let alone sat. Yet in his bedroom I sat; slow-ticking of the over-head clock growing louder. It lulled my breathing. In that room I had no rhythmic heartbeat, nothing to measure existence with. I was simply alive.

When I was upset, he comforted me with baked sweet potatoes. It was the only way he knew how. He'd carry them out, laden in his enamel bowl and glazed in melting sugar. He peeled open the crusty skin for me, afraid it'd burn my delicate fingers. I devoured the soft innards, watching him wipe away the hickory stains the potato skin marked onto his hands.

After eating, I watched him make papier-mâché sculptures out of old newspapers, the same old pile that my father had seen when he walked into the apartment. You do have a lot of things in here, my dad had said. He never responded.

When preparing the sculpture materials, he skimmed the newspapers first, turning the pages, fingers gliding across the yellowing, crisping pages in search of something. When he found what he was looking for, he cut it out with a scissor. Then he dabbled the rest of the untouched newspaper in a milky mixture.

"What's the use of this?" I asked emphatically.

"They could just be decorative, but—" he paused, looking at me knowingly, "Didn't you say you were afraid of the dark? They can keep watch over you."

I stared blankly back, nodding my head. I had questions I didn't know how to ask.

The newspaper sculptures became a hobby of his. Most of the time I spent with him, he was smoothing out the wrinkles of a wet strip of newspaper. Sometimes, I had to help him make sure it was perfectly tight. He couldn't see well at times, and saw shadows of things flickering in his vision. He started out with basic objects—a bowl that I flipped over on top of my head to look like a cap with no brim. Then he made more complicated ones: miniature houses with hinged doors, a saddled horse with swinging stirrups, and a vase holding chrysanthemums (which he gave me).

As time skidded away, my shape beneath the window became estranged to him as his vision declined. I felt my presence dim as I pressed the maroon button and no warm greeting descended from above. At this point his vision could no longer support his sculpting. I walked with him around the flower beds in a nearby park instead. It was late September. We lingered by the mums for the longest time; he cupped the multi-colored pompoms in his hands. We leaned in to inhale the smell of what we thought was life. It felt gossamer in our lungs.

Then one Sunday I stopped going to his place. I punched the rusted front door button but no one answered. On the front door the advertisements from the government weren't torn. Planning infrastructure expansion. We will compensate each resident [x] for the demolition of the building. Call for more information. I recognized half of the phone number listed on the ad. The same ad was ripped off all these years until today. Was that him? I stood in front of it as dustbunnies flew past my sneakers. I stayed still the whole time, dread dripping onto my organs like cold water. A slow erosion.

My parents spent the rest of that day making phone calls to just a few other relatives, asking if they'd come to the funeral. The other end of the line beeped continually in response: everyone was busy.

Not too many months passed. All the residents signed the demolition document. The apartment building was finally taken down. I refused to go back.

It wasn't until a few years later, as I went through his belongings with the rest of my family, when I came across the Mickey Mouse nightstand. The stickers remained untouched, though the glitter flaked off. I stroked their surfaces—love, in its seamless and dense configuration. I pried open the drawers to reveal what is sequestered. Hidden beneath the pile of sundries were a stack of newspaper clippings spanning decades. His name was printed on every slip in the earlier ones. Most Dangerous Revolutionary on the Loose, a headline proclaimed. Then later, his name was nowhere to be seen in the collections of the most trivial reports of our town. He, the innocuous backwater, dangerous yet displaced in isolation.

I would reach for the papier-mâché chrysanthemums in the dark sometimes when I couldn't see. I wanted to reach something beyond it—a rusted button—so I am reminded of how I am opaque again.

"Fish," by Bodin Perrin '27

The Moonlight's Anthropomorphism

Penn Roth '27

The moon forgot its grammar last night,
So the crickets spoke in clocks.
A bottle of thunder brewed
Inside the mayor's socks.

The trees grew upside in whispers,
Their roots shrouded from the air,
While a book of moths recited laws
No one remembered to declare.

A candle swam across the pond,
Its wick a silver fin,
And frogs wore crowns of polished rain
To hide their paper skin.

The wind went courting shadows,
Brought them home all dressed in bread.
They danced until the morning yawned,
Then folded back to bed.

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Amanda Catherine Leyon was born in 1977 and entered St. Andrew's as a III former in 1991. At SAS, Amanda was a member of the girls' soccer and lacrosse teams, a communion assistant in chapel, participated in Model UN, volunteered at Silver Lake Elementary School, and wrote for the *Andrean*. In the summer of 1994, Amanda and her classmate Ariana Kudner lost their lives in a car accident on Route 301 near Millington, Maryland. That year, Amanda's parents, Peter and Carol, along with Amanda's grandparents and friends, established the Amanda C. Leyon Memorial Fund. Part of the memorial fund was used to create a garden reflection spot on the bank of Alumni Point (behind the Trapnell House). This was named Amanda's Lookout in her honor, and Amanda's poem "Snow Geese" is preserved there.

At graduation each year, the Amanda C. Leyon '95 Prize for Creative Writing is awarded, with the following description: "The Amanda C. Leyon Prize for Creative Writing, given by her classmates in memory of Amanda C. Leyon '95, to the student who has excelled in creative writing."

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– *"How Far Are We from Disappearance," by Kadence Sun '27*