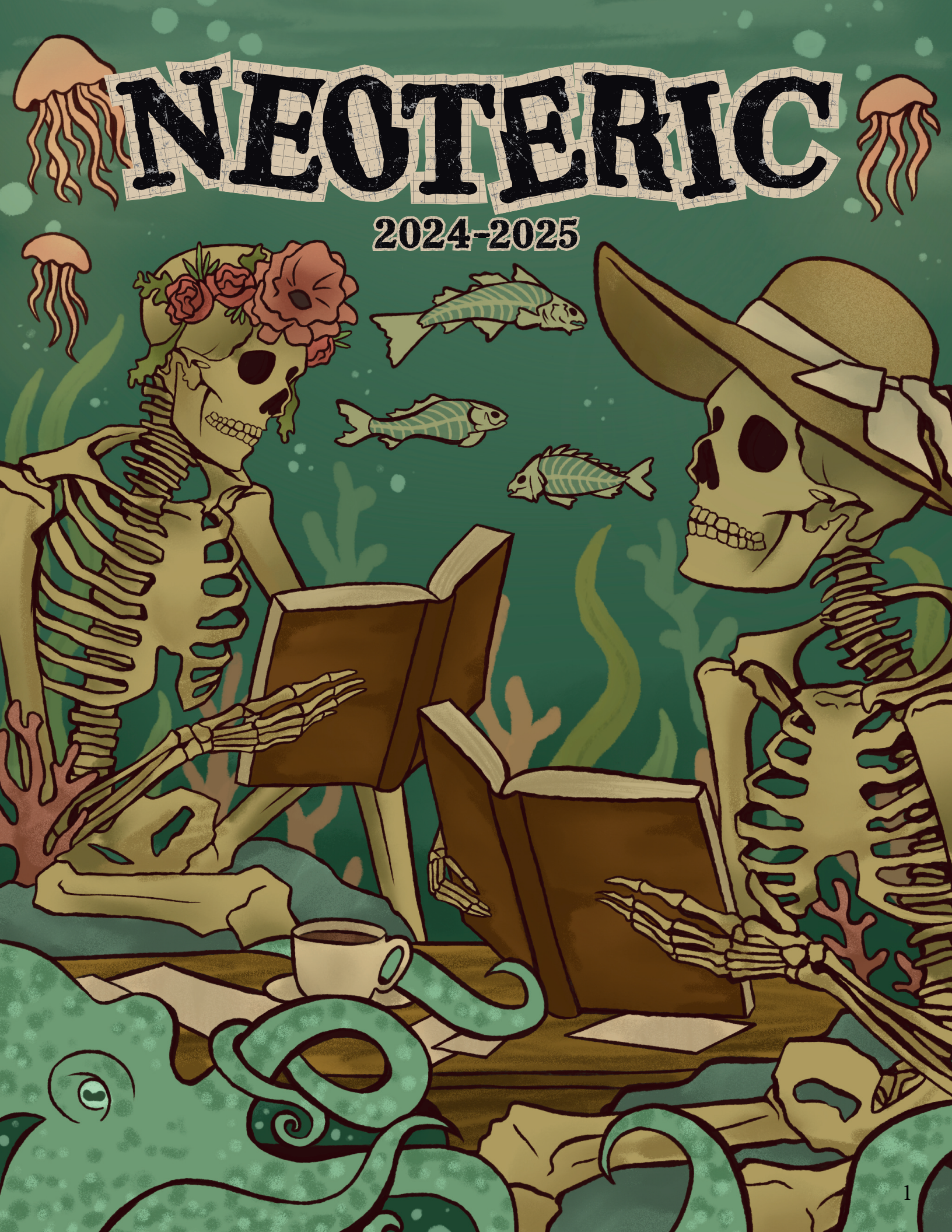


# NEOTERIC

2024-2025



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2024-25

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

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Dearest Readers,

The River Ridge Literary Society is pleased to present the 2025 edition of our *Neoteric*! We know you've all been anxiously awaiting its arrival, and... honestly, so have we. We've been slapped with obstacles left and right while trying to doll her up, and I think every one of us is going to sleep a bit easier now that it's finished. However, before showing off the product of our labor, we'd like to take a moment to thank everyone who made this possible, so please take a moment to pretend to read our acknowledgements.

First off, thanks to every single person who submitted to the *Neoteric*, whether your piece got in or not. Without your poetry, art, and writing, we wouldn't have been able to create this magazine. Or maybe we could've, but it would've been very blank and very boring and I doubt we would have made much money off of it. If your work did not get in, we hope it won't discourage you from submitting again next year. Or, if you feel you have been unjustly scorned, feel free to take it out on Mrs. Mandarino's Creative Writing 3 and 4 Honors classes. Just wait for a day where I'm not there, pretty please. The Creative Writing 3 and 4 Honors classes were also responsible for the painstakingly (emphasis on the pain) creation of the magazine by hand (or Canva, technically), so an extra thank you for joining us in the valiant battle against Canva's nonsensical editing tools.

The cover your eyes have been dazzled by was made by none other than Phoenix Mauldin, my groveling buddy and our Managing Editor. Thank you, Phoenix, for your time on the cover, and for the support you've given me throughout this year at our meetings and events. I probably would've had a heart attack and keeled over on stage if you weren't up there with me. I don't doubt the club will be in good hands next year.

Speaking of our events, if you attended either this year, thank you so much for showing up to either read and/or support your loved ones. We're proud to be offered the opportunity to pull the writing community together... and apologetic (but not remorseful) that said writing community had to sit through my desperate groveling for money, like some 18th century street beggar.

Finally, thank *you*, the reader, for supporting our club... and reading all the way to the end of this note.

We hope you enjoy *Neoteric's* Spring 2025 publication.

Signing off,  
Alex Harris

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# FATHER

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ALEX HARRIS, '25

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## SAVIOR

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PHOENIX MAULDIN, '26

---

I am not religious,  
but sometimes I wonder  
if those in heaven  
would not envy the freedom of hell.

Of course, the devils and demons,  
those fallen from the sky,  
the world's first neglected  
and abandoned children,  
would reach for salvation,  
long for security,  
cry for their God,  
Their Father Who Art too far to save them.

But is the crushing darkness,  
the cold shoulders and  
deaf-eared ignorance,  
any worse than the blinding pain  
of a guiding light  
long since turned overbearing?

Do the angels ever look down  
at those that rebelled  
and wonder what it's like  
to not live under His watchful eye?  
Do they crave escape?  
Do they secretly hope that one day,  
they'll fall too?

They will, for envy is a sin,  
and only when they find themselves  
trading wings for horns;  
innocence for independence;  
safety for freedom,  
will they realize why they were told to  
enjoy their youths.  
And only then,  
will they realize why they never could.

---

# STAR CHILD



---

ALEX HARRIS, '25

---

She should have already been asleep. There were no windows in her room, but she knew the moon had long since peaked in the sky, and if her father had come in to find her up so late, he would be very cross.

Well. Maybe not. In truth, she could not think of a single time when her father had been particularly cross with her. She suspected he was too tired and sad to be angry, which was a shame for him, because being angry was a very stress-relieving activity, but it was far less so a shame for her, because it meant he did not yell when she tracked dirt over the floor after playing (i.e. digging) in the courtyard. Yelling hurt her ears, and it was best to be avoided.

——  
*“The ache of her muscles is nothing like the ache of the stars.”*  
——

At any rate, her father was very busy, which meant he would not come to check on her, which meant she was free to stare up at the stars carefully painted on her ceiling for as long as she wished.

It felt like they were calling her, sometimes, but she was too far away to answer. It was frustrating in a way that not even being angry could solve, to see the lights so far out of reach. The painted ones did not soothe the ache completely, but sometimes it was nice to pretend that when she stretched her arm to reach for them, it was the real stars resting only a few feet away.

That night, she lifted her hands, and she did not pull them down until the weight of her eyelids was too much to bear.

She should already be asleep. Her muscles are sore and tense from fighting, and she knows that their recovery will already be stilted by the rocks digging into her back from underneath her too-thin bedroll. It will not do to deny them another factor of recovery, and she tells herself so beneath her breath. Still, she does not go to sleep.

The ache of her muscles is nothing like the ache of the stars. There is no tent above her-- hers ripped a week ago, when she had attempted to shoot with her best friend's bow-- so there's nothing to shield her from their tantalizing taunts.

No, not taunts. The calling is not a mockery, nor has it ever been. It is tinged in the same desperation and frustration she feels in the knowledge that she cannot follow. It longs as she longs, reaches as she reaches. The stars' light tendrils bounce against the silver of her armor, splaying out like a hand against her pauldron, surrounding her like they can tug her straight into the sky to rest beside them. But they cannot. She knows if they could, they would have done so already.

Still, she replies, as she has done for as long as she can remember. Her hand lifts automatically, stretching as far as she can stretch without having to sit up, and the light gathers at the metal tips of her gauntlet.

This time, she does not have the energy to support her arm until she falls asleep. Even if she did, there is a battle to be fought and a war to be won, and that must come first. So she closes her eyes and lets it fall back to the bedroll with a dull thump.

She will fall asleep soon. In a few days, she will fall asleep for the final time, as all things must, and it will not be timely or fair. Her blood will pool around her in a dark red, like her childhood sheets, and she will lie with the dirt and grass as her mattress. There will be no yelling for help-- no one will come, and yelling always hurt her ears anyways.

Her armor, dirty and jagged in the center of her chest where she will have been stabbed, will not reflect the starlight as the cover of night slowly overtakes the sky.

They will flare in her vision, and she will know, instinctively, that they are panicked, and distantly, she will be too, but mostly she will be tired and sad. She will not feel the aching, this time, as they reach to curl their light around her. She will barely even feel her hand as she attempts to lift it towards them one last time, an infant reaching for its mother.

Her eyes will not close before her hand falls. It will clatter down against what remains of her cuirass, and it will be the most helpless she has ever felt, looking upon the stars and being unable even to pretend she could answer their call. She will want to close her eyes, but her eyelids will not listen. Still, her vision will fade. Black around just the edges, at first, devouring more and more of her sight like a fire consuming a painting, until all that remains is a single star, burning at the center.



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## MYSTIC NIGHT

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KADEN RIVERA, '28

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# NOT AN ANGEL

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PHOENIX MAULDIN, '25

---

I told myself that it would only be for a day. But that day bled into the night, then night bled into the next, all because I saw a girl.

We met when I saw her resting against a tree, hands tangled in the moss as she leaned her head back to let her hair tangle in with the ridges in the bark. Her eyes, though brown in the shade, were amber when the sun peered through the swaying leaves.

She had stared back at me, and I felt myself weakening. I remember feeling confused and afraid. She could see me, *feel* me, though she was not supposed to be able to. But I could not sense any fear within her spirit as she sat still, unmoving but certainly not paralyzed with terror.

I asked her name, and that was when the wind blew, and the leaves shifted again just enough for the light to pour into her eyes.

"Ferrin," she whispered, and I felt a soft thumping in the core of my being that was never there before as something golden met something strange. I do not have a humanoid vessel of my own, nor do I have hands like her. I am nothing but skin, eyes, feathers, and bones when I form myself in Eden, stardust and blurry concepts otherwise. I am millions of chromatic things and some things all at once, but we still found ways to touch each other's souls and caress each other's minds.

Ferrin found a way to let me hold her.

We play together in the wind over the rolling green hills, and I wrap myself so comfortably around her sides as she laughs. When she bathes in the lake, I surround her and lap at her freckled hips. When she writes beneath the old willow, I hang down from above and touch her bare shoulders.

There is nothing about this girl that is anything less than beautiful. Even her yellowed teeth and red-webbed sclera, even her dotted arms and spotted face, her scratched legs, and her frizzy auburn brown hair, like the waves of a muddy creek.

We lay together as the sun sets. Beneath the apple tree, she rests on my plumage and I envelope her almost entirely.

I kiss her face with quilled lashes. Her two brown eyes met my thousands. I wonder how it may be to go about being alive without feeling so overwhelmed. I wonder how it may be to go about being human, like her.

"Kroma," she says my name, voice honeyed as she reaches one arm back to feel me there, "When I pass away, I hope that we are able to become one. I hope that when my body decomposes with the soil and the worms, that I am becoming part of you."

It is a morbid thought, and not quite something I cared to put a lot of thought into. I had not considered for very long that Ferrin would die eventually.

What may feel like a lifetime for her is blinking for me. Every one of my thousand eyes is burning to stay open, to stay in this moment with her forever.

“Ferrin,” I say her name, trying to replicate her tone as I contort my distorted form to reach her beneath me, “I would like nothing more than to be part of you as well.” There is a pause between us as I consider the logistics and the possibilities. I have always wanted to be something other than what I am. I have always wanted to be a human.

“Your body,” I begin again, “lend it to me one day, before you die. Lend it to me, so that I may go with you.” Skin stretches painfully over bone as I make an effort to stroke her cheek. I fear myself and close all eyes but two. “Let me consume you, so that you do not have to go alone.”

Through tunneled vision I watch her smile. “Then promise me something,” she requests.

“Anything.”

“I want you to love me forever, so that you may love yourself. Love this body and the marks on it that I cannot possibly learn to in this life just as you do from so high above.” She shows me the spots on her nose and the strawberry marks covering her legs. I inhale every wrinkle and crease of her skin. I drink in every detail and live every perfection. Without thinking, I grasp her promise and hold it tight. Ferrin grows older, but I stay beside her. As is expected of her, expected of a human girl, she marries a nice man. We still talk every day when I pass her home, built in the garden where we met. It feels so wrong of me to be jealous of the man she married— he is kind to her and has given her two young children— but her eyes are sad and dull.

I wish she could have married someone like me instead. Then, I could picture us as girls together, as opposed to a strange woman and her concept.

If I was a human, then Ferrin would be the love of my life.

It is years later when Ferrin grows sick. At first, I tried to avoid it. She never told me a thing, but I knew. And she knew, too. If you run from death, like a hungry wolf it will hunt you down. But if you are to accept it, then it will take you quietly and gently— perhaps in the middle of the night when you are asleep and will feel no pain. Life is beginning to take its toll on her. On my girl, my Ferrin. Years of that push and pull, that taking so little and giving so much that humans like her do— for her body, and for her soul— has become far too much to bear any longer. I remember our promise. I go to her in the middle of the night. I open my maw. This is where she is meant to be.

There is a mess of her blood and bones as I take her away. Every part of her devoured whole into my form, to digest until we share a body. She doesn’t scream or yelp. Not even once. It does not take long at all for me to change. It is painful to feel the human ache. It is so, so painful to be human. I check my reflection and Ferrin stares back at me. I stare back at her. I have destroyed this body. There are bags under my eyes and the marks on my skin have grown. I have destroyed this body. I feel too sluggish to walk. I have destroyed this body, like shoving a puzzle piece where it does not quite fit. My skin is too tight. I cannot be contained. Is this what it is like to be human? To feel every change with every sense, how do they bear it?

This is not how I am supposed to be.

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# SHADES OF LIGHT

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CLAIRE HORNER, '25

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“He’ll have the *coq au vin*,” Kira says, the low timbre of his voice complimenting the ambience of the restaurant. “I’ll have your *salade laitue et noix*, but go light on the vinaigrette for me.”

“Your food will be out shortly, sir.” The waiter nods, and he tucks his notepad into his apron pocket. Once he walks away, Kira picks up his glass of wine—a *sauvignon blanc*—and offers it up.

“Cheers?”

His partner stays silent, and Kira shrugs. He clinks his glass against the one on the table, taking a sip.

“Well, *darling*,” and oh, Kira’s tone makes Tao want to throw up. “You’ve barely touched your *châteauneuf-du-pape*. Is it not to your taste? I can always order a different type for you, it’s no trouble. Though I wouldn’t suggest the *mourvedre*—”

Across the room, a man slumps over at his table and a woman shrieks. Kira’s eyes flash with maniacal glee, but it vanishes as quickly as it appeared.

“—for *obvious* reasons. Shall we take our leave?”

Tao glares at Kira, making sure the other man can see how the back of his hand flicks out from under his chin, palm facing up. He moves to hide his smile by turning his head to the side.

“This has been a terrible date,” Kira sniffs, standing up. He takes the lead, and Tao falls into step behind him, disappearing out the back door as paramedics burst in through the front.



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## SILENCE

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JENNA NGO, '26

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# TAKE FLIGHT

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RO BAILEY, '26

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## AWAKENING

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ABIGAIL MOORE, '27

---

A certain tragedy comes from knowing  
that you will never escape.  
No matter how thin the chain that binds  
you may be, it holds tight.  
Created in your trap, when your true  
purpose is to explore the landscape.  
Just months later, everything comes down  
under the cover of night.

Was there enough time for him to know  
what was happening?  
Or did it all end in an explosion, with only  
the scent of gunpowder  
to prove that it was an accident, a hiccup;  
his screams couldn't have been louder.  
Just a few lowly barrels that needed  
reexamining.

Some kind of sick, twisted karma for  
causing your plight?  
All the colors that you never got to see fly  
until the roof of the studio is gone, and all  
that's left is the sky,  
letting in the light.

The light that was praised for how it fell  
on you;  
shining as if you were born without a  
semblance of a fight.  
What remains are fragments of what  
could be,  
residue of a career that never got to take  
flight.

---

# I REMEMBER

---

KAYLA CHANDLER, '26

---

I can't remember  
when the feeling first crept in,  
when I looked down at my hands  
and felt shame.

Shame that my skin was dark,  
something I felt I had to hide,  
something I wished I could erase.

I can't remember  
when it finally stopped-  
the love I had for my curls  
replaced with the longing for  
blonde waves.

I can't remember  
when I began to question  
my history.  
When the stories I was told  
stopped feeling like mine,  
when the heroes I was taught to admire felt distant,  
their struggles  
reduced to footnotes in a world  
that moved on too quickly.

I can't remember  
when Dr. King's name  
stopped being a beacon of pride,  
when it became a reminder  
of how far we haven't come,  
when his dream felt less like a promise and more like a mirror  
reflecting all the work still not done.

I can't remember when I decided  
to be anything but silent.  
When I learned to laugh off their jokes  
to wear the degrading names as armor  
only to shed tears later  
in the quiet of night.

But I remember the day  
standing in front of Obama's portrait  
with the words "We shall overcome"  
etched into the frame.  
I stood tall,  
my skin no longer feeling foreign,  
but now  
a canvas of stories.  
A map depicting strength  
and resilience.

I remember the pride  
that built in my chest-  
not just for myself  
but for my people.  
For the people that had to march  
their feet worn from the cracked pavement.  
For those that linked arms,  
and stood against a world filled with hate  
and sang words like "We shall overcome."  
So I could stand here now  
and hold my head up.  
A testament to their courage

My history.  
Our history.  
Once a burden  
now a foundation,  
steady and unbroken.

It's the ground  
I stand on.  
Finding courage  
to fight  
and to shout  
"We shall overcome."

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# COQUETTE

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SHAELA ADSIT, '25

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*I desire the things that will destroy me*  
*In the end*, Sylvia Plath said in a book  
Too romanticized for modern society  
What a shame we as girls look at those words  
And think yes, me too  
We start out as little girls with  
Our mothers tying pink ribbons in our hair  
And getting our hits of dopamine through  
Brand new barbies and baby dolls  
Nowadays we look at girls,  
Young girls with their shorts too short and  
Stanleys and Sephora products in hand  
Trying to be adults without the adult parts they don't understand  
Or maybe they do as they're gifted phones  
Before they hit the third grade  
Listening to influencers more than  
Their own mothers and then we begin to wonder  
Why their moral ground lies so low  
Listening to women tell them all their flaws must go  
But remember it's all foreshadowed  
Because they can't say you have to be skinny  
Instead, they tell you it's just what's healthy  
And then we wonder why the  
Self-destruction runs so deep  
Watch as we get older and  
Wear our addictions on our sleeves  
Like coping mechanisms we're proud of  
Us with our vapes and fingers down our throats  
Hollow eyes and barren souls  
Empty save for the burning desire to  
Get better  
Be better  
Feel better  
But in the end, it's never enough  
Because all we've ever wanted is love  
The love we feel we haven't received as we  
All grew up with broken families

Resulting in us not even having a shred  
Of love for ourselves so how can  
We love anything more than our one hit wonders  
Hitting them again and again  
Losing sight of what really matters in this world  
Clothing ourselves in negativity and calling it  
An aesthetic  
Wrapping our diet cokes and drugs in pink bows  
But remember I'm just a girl  
The excuse we can use to cloak and justify any action  
We make just because we have breasts on our chests  
Oh, isn't it just so darling that society as a culture  
Allow us girls to pick ourselves apart like vultures?  
Skin and bone is always the goal  
Smaller and  
Prettier and  
Pinker and  
Sicker  
The finger continues to scroll deeper into  
The rabbit hole of lies we know are lies  
But continue to convince ourselves  
Are truths no matter the price  
We say the soul is a small fee to pay if you  
Would remove a few inches off my waist  
Vanity and pride masked by mental illness  
We laugh off the voices in our heads  
Because who knows?  
It might just be the next trend  
Scrolling and scrolling just keep going  
Deeper and deeper  
It will never be enough  
Our generation so easily influenced  
Everything romanticized  
Even thoughts of wanting to die  
But isn't it just so pretty to lie  
Smile I mean scream I mean smile  
Insanity running so damn deep  
It's like we forgot how to speak

But then we feel like we're failing even more because  
Remember that we need to be speak up and  
Be feminists and  
Screw the patriarchy or whatever  
Taylor Swift said in a song about heartbreak  
Heartbreak which we so readily invite into  
Our lives because wouldn't that be  
Another aesthetic?  
We want to make a difference but  
Can't leave our beds  
Society just keeps killing the girls  
It doesn't consider your size or your age or your race  
Because you might be thin but have an ugly face  
You might be pretty but have a wide waist  
You might have the looks but zero fashion taste  
Everything comes with expectations  
Everyone just telling us it's time to lock in  
Head up eyes down  
We are nothing more than a byproduct of this  
Machine called the system  
We say we don't need a man yet  
Are hopeless romantics  
We say we want to be independent but  
Readily accept anything given to us  
We say we are fine  
Then swallow our pills prescribed for  
Anxiety and  
Depression and  
OCD and  
ADHD and  
PTSD and  
Bipolar disorder and  
Bulimia and  
Anorexia but  
We are fine!  
Keep that in mind next time you see  
That girl with shallow eyes and deep divots in her collarbone  
The one with pink ribbons she tied herself?  
That one you just met?  
Don't worry about her,  
She's just coquette.

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# WEIGHT OF FOOD

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MAKAYLA JONES, '26

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# SOLITUDE

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SHAELA ADSIT, '25

---

A fruit bearing tree stands in a field alone,  
Her uprooted roots rooted in  
Soil that isn't home;  
Her fruit is picked clean  
Against her needs as  
Hungry hands have discovered  
Her beauty and  
The life that pulsed in each bite  
Of her fruit,  
She would paint juice-dribbled smiles  
Against starved lips,  
But now she has no more fruit to give.

Hungry hands turned to  
Greedy fingers and  
She was picked clean  
Before she could scream,  
Fruit turned to leaves turned to twigs  
Turned to she  
The whole of her was uprooted and  
Used and discarded,  
Replanted in a barren field with  
No other tree to cling her roots to.  
Her bony fingers clamoring to get  
Just a little higher and  
Reach out for some life force  
Embedded in the sky.

She didn't seem to notice as she stood alone  
Her roots could stretch wide and  
Become overgrown,  
No other roots mangled hers and  
She could take from the life-filled  
Earth as she so pleased.  
So, as she stood planted  
In the barren field alone,  
A bud of bright green began to grow  
And she could see  
That maybe to grow you just need  
Room to breathe.



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## GROWTH

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SHAELA ADSIT, '25

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# CHANGE IS EVERYTHING

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ETHAN GARFIAS, '27

---

A deer lies in the field  
Quiet and still.  
The sky glistens with diamonds of all shapes and sizes.  
The cool fall breeze whispers through the night,  
*“Don’t cry my young fawn.  
For your antlers will grow back bigger and stronger come spring.  
They should be greater, longer, and much more elegant than those  
of which you have lost.  
There will be no cracks, no faults, no imperfections.  
Do you not wish for new antlers my fawn?”*

The deer hesitated,  
his fragile hooves shook with doubt.  
Moments of his life started to flash across his mind.  
Friends, family, failures.  
Life, death, pride, accomplishments, shame.  
Every crack and flaw in the deer’s antlers represented a piece of his life,  
of his soul.  
The deer came to a decision and responded to the breeze:

*“I do not wish for new antlers.  
For new antlers will never replace those which I have lost.  
Forever will I remember every crack and every fault for they have come to shape  
my very being.  
Both good, and bad.”*

The deer did not know how the breeze would react,  
only that it could not bear the inevitable loss of another pair of antlers.

The breeze let out a heavy sigh,  
Shaking the fields and whistling through the wood.

*“My child, I cannot prevent you from growing new antlers.  
As fall turns to winter, time will pass, and you will grow.  
You will understand as time goes on that as inevitably as you will lose your  
antlers again,  
Winter will turn to spring,  
Spring will turn to summer,  
And the cycle will repeat again.”*

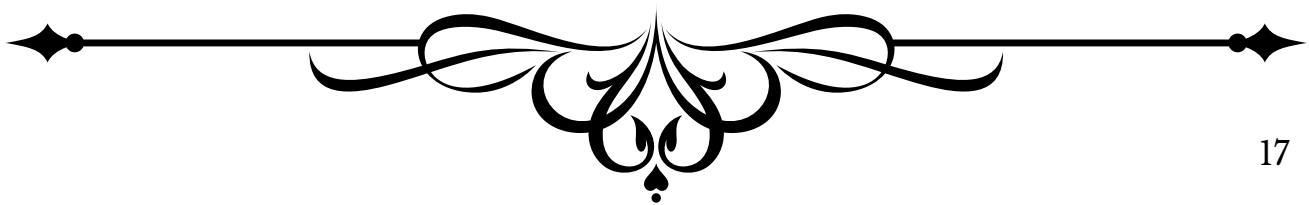
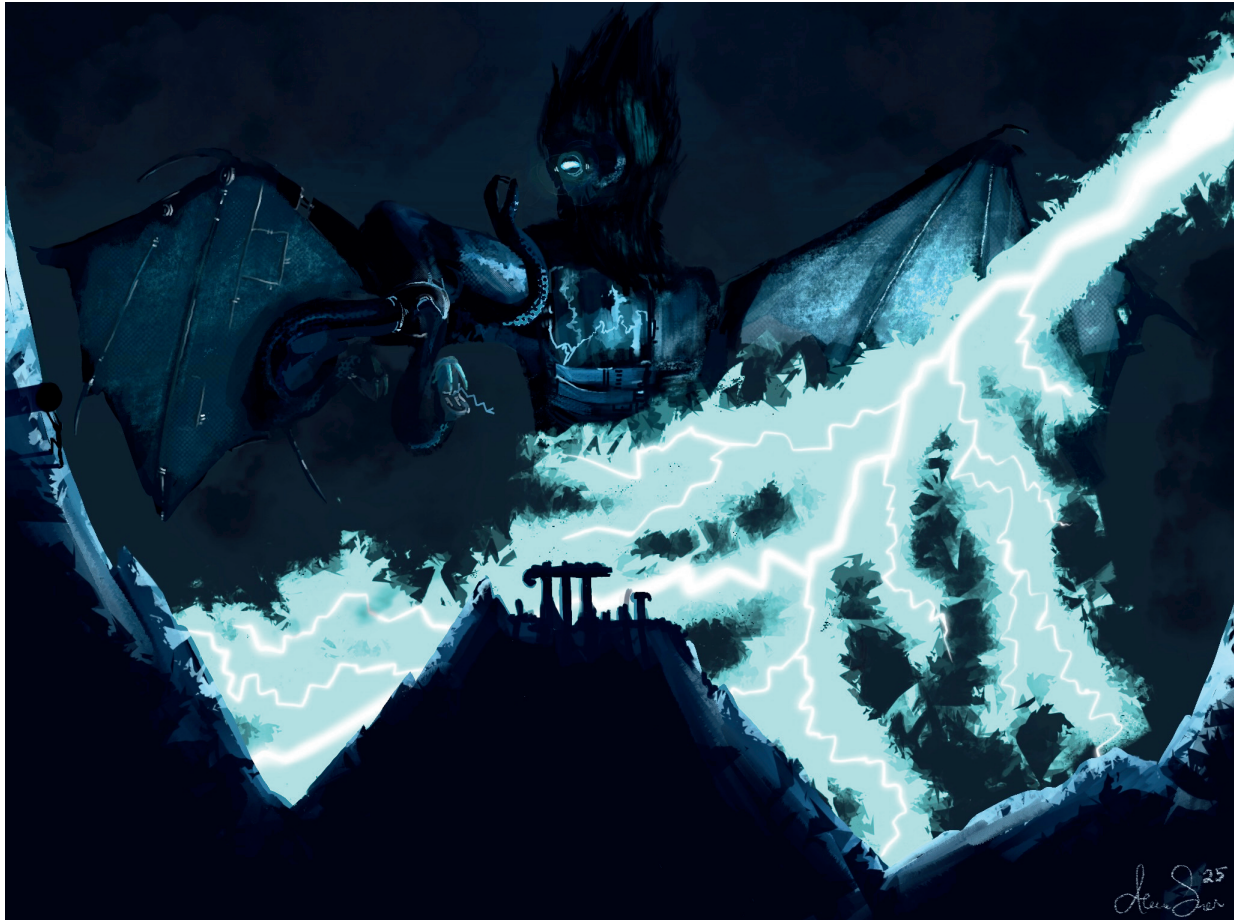
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# WRATH OF TYPHON

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ARIANA SCALA, '26

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# WARMTH

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RO BAILEY, '26

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Warmth is what kept me believing that I could survive after the events of the past few months. Though I dreaded what was coming, the heat emanating from the body beside me allowed me a few moments of clear thought.

We had been lost in the Ural Mountains for almost three months before help came. Two of our men's bodies plagued the path we had taken, the only solid evidence that we had not eaten them. The press, however, didn't seem to think that was enough.

Some parts of my brain wished we had never been saved, or that I alone had been left there. Uncertainties and unanswered questions concerning what was to come next suffocated me. The only thing that kept me grounded was my friend's hand in mine.

He squeezed it slightly, swiping his thumb over my knuckles the way I had never needed to tell him I loved, before giving me the look I hated. A soft glance of pure concern, a silent 'What's wrong' or 'Are you alright?' It was warranted, as I never had been able to conceal what I felt. Still, I couldn't handle that he knew, because that meant that everyone looking at me could tell.

My friend had gone through more than I had, taking the unnecessary burden of keeping us all alive. I wanted more than anything to ask him what I could do for him, but the thought frightened me.

I knew he was a good man, an honest one, but I would've done anything he asked. I realized that he didn't know he could destroy me. The blind loyalty that I had come to learn I would never be able to control stayed in the back of my mind as he dipped his head lower to make eye contact.

"Hey," he whispered.

"Hey," I put on my best rendition of a smile. I watched him, studying the way his jaw moved when he spoke and took solace in the fact that I knew I could trust him to be gentle with me. He allowed me to rest my head on his shoulder as we were taken back to society. We spoke in quiet hushes. I kept my voice low because I didn't have the energy to go any louder, he kept his down because he didn't want to frighten me.

I tried hard to joke, to smile, to show him that I was the same woman as I had been before. I wanted so badly to avoid being seen as weak, but I was back on that mountain every time I closed my eyes.

The snow was taller than any of us, and for a split second, I thought that I would rather die than have to live with the memories.

It was nothing but a fleeting notion in a moment of utter frailness, but it stuck with me. I didn't mean it in the least, but why had it crossed my mind in the first place?

Before I had the chance to spiral, my friend squeezed my arm.

“We’re here,” he hummed.

“Hm? Oh.”

We were the only two not in critical condition after the journey, so we had been taken to a less busy hospital to be fully examined. He held his arm an inch from my lower back as we stepped out, a reminder of how he had carried me through the blizzard that ended the lives of someone I had considered a friend.

I did what I could to conceal him from the press as he walked inside, feeling like it was the one thing I could do to repay him. To the best of my ability, I straightened my back and put my arm around his shoulder. Ice was still crusted on my boots, and we were already being accused of murder.

Their words were too jumbled and loud for me to catch anything, but I was able to catch the gist of it. 6 people went hiking in the Ural Mountains, and only 3 came back. A single body was unaccounted for and the media, out of everything they could’ve sensationalized, chose to focus on that. We were already on the news, and I guessed that the first article would be out before I was able to change my clothes.

My friend sensed my apprehension about us getting separated, so he asked the nurse for a moment of privacy and turned to me.

“I’ll be right back, I promise,” he smiled softly before linking our pinkies, “Alright?”

I nodded, not trusting myself to talk. We were both safer than we had been in ages, but acid built up in my stomach the second he was out of my sight.

Thoughts of the thousands of worst things that could happen filled every crevice of my brain. If anything happened in the time we weren’t together, I wouldn’t be able to protect him. Images so clear that they could’ve been memories flashed behind my eyes. When we were out there, I knew he could die any minute. That feeling never went away.

I knew where I was, what places my body hurt, why they hurt, and that I was not in danger. Despite knowing there was no reason to be afraid, I was terrified to the point of tears. The nurses kept telling me to take deep breaths, repeating it until it didn’t sound like words anymore, but the beating of my heart wouldn’t slow down. I dug my nails, long and broken from the excursion, into my fingers and dug into skin until I couldn’t focus on anything but the pain.

Once I had completed my physical examination and bandaged up any of the wounds I had gotten, I was allowed to change into someone’s extra pair of scrubs and sit in the waiting room. I had no idea where I was supposed to go. My home was countries away and my flight had taken off while I was lost in the wilderness.

All my belongings had been lost, including any form of identification, and my family would still be on the plane when the morning came.

Just as I was starting to wonder if I would get away with spending the night in the waiting room, my friend came out.

“Hey,” he tried to kneel down in front of me, but I shook my head. “My mom was able to get here quick. Perks of working at an airline, y’know? Anyway, I want to get out of here. Are you staying here or do you want to come with me?”

“I’d like to come with you,” I forced my voice out.

His mother paid for two rooms. One for her, one for us. To my relief, there were two beds. She loaned me a pair of her pajamas before releasing the both of us for the night. I spent far too long in the shower, only getting out once I realized that my friend had to get cleaned up as well.

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*“I don’t feel guilt.”*

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“You doing okay?” My friend asked from his bed after we had turned the lights out.

“As okay as I can be,” I shrugged. “I feel sick.”

“This will brush over soon, we just have to keep our mouths shut,” his voice was a low hiss.

“What about-” I started to ask about our friend in the hospital, still in critical condition.

“He’s not going to make it. I made sure of that.”

I was too afraid to ask him what he meant. I trusted him. He had kept me safe, he had kept all of us alive.

“I’m freezing,” I whispered, shuttering as I curled in on myself. “I don’t know why I’m still cold.”

He climbed into my bed but stayed over the covers. His arms wrapped around me tightly, immediately providing warmth.

“I am, too,” he sighed. “I think we’ll just have to get used to it.”

“I need you to know that it wasn’t your fault,” I spoke as quietly as I could without mumbling. “We all would’ve died-would’ve starved if-”

“I know,” he shushed me. “I don’t regret what I did. I don’t,” he paused. “I don’t feel guilt.”

“He would’ve-” He cut me off again, “We wouldn’t have made it even if I didn’t do what I did. I don’t feel bad.”

“Mhm,” I could only respond with a nod.

In a sickening way, that comforted me. I didn’t want him to hurt, not after everything he had done.

No one would have understood if we told them what he’d done. With my cheek pressed against his beating heart, I swore to myself that I would protect him until the day that I died.

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# DO YOU WANT TO SEE THE WEST WITH ME?

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MEGAN CLARK, '25

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In the span of one week, I lost everything. My job, my house, my girlfriend. I got fired for yelling at a customer, she claimed I had made her iced chai latte wrong. I hadn't. But the customer is always right.

I lost my house when my roommates kicked me out. They said I '*killed their vibe*' all because I stopped going out binge drinking every night because one, not everyone has a massive trust fund that is seemingly never ending; and two, we are all adults now and drinking is much less fun than it seemed when we were teenagers.

I lost my girlfriend, and I'm not really sure how that even happened. She laid it out in a text with the classic, 'it's not you, it's me.'

So, I sit here at a bus station, hopping on a Greyhound to Colorado. My uncle Wayne, also known as the sweetest, most selfless man in the world, offered me to let me stay with him. He made it out to seem like it would be a big help to him, me moving home and helping out around the house and the farm; but really, I know he feels sorry for me. I mean, I'm twenty-three, and I have no semblance of adulthood left.

The Greyhound's seats are uncomfortable. It's like sitting on cardboard with some paper on top of it. From Los Angeles, California to Georgetown, Colorado is around a full day's trip.

I silently send up a prayer that I will be able to peel myself from this seat by the time this trip is over. Then I take out my headphones and start blaring the most metal music I can find in my library in order to scare away anyone from sitting next to me.

I awake to an alarm on the small screen in front of me. My stop is next. My music idea failed miserably. There's a woman holding a sleeping baby sitting next to me, and she herself fell asleep. Somewhere along the way she fell to my shoulder. I know they say never to wake a sleeping baby, but I gently tap the baby in hopes of it waking up, and in turn waking up her mother.

Luckily, this plan works, and the baby yawns before starting to poke at her mother's face. She shoots awake, her head removing itself from my shoulder and leaving a cold draft of air from where her head was pressed. She looks at me, gasps, looks at my shoulder, and gasps again.

"Oh my god. I am so sorry, that is so embarrassing," She whispers the last part under her breath in the direction of her baby.

"No, it's okay. I just woke up by myself. I hope my music didn't bother you too much before my headphones died," I decide to be polite.

"Oh gosh no, that's why I sat next to you. This one only listens to metal. I mean with most kids it's *Baby Shark* or

something, but not her. I guess it doesn't help that metal is the only thing I listened to while pregnant," she rambles, and now that I can see her whole face, not smashed up into my shoulder. I notice the bags under her eyes and the bruises adorning her like a necklace. I also take into account how pretty she is.

I send her a polite smile and reply, "Well, that just means you have the world's coolest kid. What's her name?" I ask partly out of curiosity and partly because a metalhead baby is really cool.

"Oh, her name is Clara, mine is Elaine," she smiles genuinely at her daughter.

"That's beautiful, I'm Sean," I hold out my hand to the lady, and then the baby as well. I am broken out of our interaction by the alarm on the small screen in front of me ringing again, signalling that the bus is approaching my stop. It's then that Elaine's alarm starts ringing too.

"Headed to Georgetown?" I ask with a laugh, because I honestly couldn't imagine the coincidence of complete strangers going to the same place, and sitting next to each other on the same bus too.

"Actually, yeah, hopefully not for long though," she then turns to her baby and hikes her voice up to finish the rest of her sentence, "Hopefully it's just a little stint at grandma's house before we can get our own place."

"Hey, it happens to the best of us, I'm headed home as well, to help my uncle out on his farm." I leave out exactly why I'm moving back home.

"Oh, well, how generous of you." Then I cave. I am a terrible liar. I want to make her feel better, so I spill my guts.

"Well, when you lose your job, house, and girlfriend all in the same week, I guess that is the natural thing to do. Or that's what he said to make me feel better." She laughs at this, and then realizes she's laughing.

"I'm sorry for laughing but, damn, your job, house, and girlfriend in *one* week? And I thought we had it bad." We laugh as the bus comes to a halt.

"Well, thank you, you have a very comfortable shoulder," she jokes as she gathers her bags, and heads for the front of the bus.

"Oh no problem, any time," I tell her as I do the same. When we reach the sidewalk outside of the bus I somehow manage to get her to give me her phone number. I let her go with an offer of friendship, a babysitter, or simply if she needs anything, and while I was watching her walk away, is when Wayne decides to honk the horn of the old rusted truck.

"Was that Elaine?" Wayne asks me as I hop into the truck.

"How do you know her?" I ask, bewildered.

"That's Tabby's girl, you know from up the hill? You two used to play together as youngsters," he laughs as he pulls out of the parking lot. I can't reply, I'm too busy reaching inside my memories for a certain blonde-haired beauty.

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# THE IMPORTANCE OF FANDOM

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PHOENIX MAULDIN, '26

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There's never been a point in time where people haven't come together as a community to celebrate something. From the hands of paleolithic humans interlocked on the walls of caves to ancient religious holidays spanning continents to every modern media sensation, it's always been a staple of humanity to socialize and congregate with like-minded individuals who share the same interests.

Nowadays, people go to convention centers to cosplay and buy physical art prints, and sites like Archive of Our Own and Wattpad for fanfiction, but it hasn't always been like this. In fact, these staples of fandom are rather recent developments. The first fan conventions only originated in the late 1930s for fans of science fiction, and the first fanfictions were printed in magazines, often featuring a theme that still resounds and lingers in the fandoms of today: placing two characters together and imagining how the story would go had they been in a romantic relationship through the power of imaginative writings.

Why is any of this important at all? Well, for the same reason that having any hobby or interest at all matters. A teenage girl falling in love with her favorite band or music artist isn't too dissimilar from a middle-aged man spending his Sundays at a sports bar watching football.

Both people are positively impacted by having an outlet to bond with their friends, be that by listening to loud music at a crowded concert together or the rush that comes with a cheering group seeing their favorite team achieve a touchdown. While one wears a jersey, the other wears a graphic-print T-shirt from Hot Topic. While one will make bracelets to trade, the other will host a barbecue in his backyard. And yet, while one is considered widely socially acceptable, the other is looked down upon as childish or inconsequential. But fandom's impact goes beyond the way it brings people together though.

In fact, it can be a way for people to express their identities as well. One of the first fandoms that comes to mind for many people involved in internet culture is the influx of men and boys that began to like the show "My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic" in the early 2010s. While the show is traditionally targeted towards girls, it helped many people become more open-minded when thinking about what they can enjoy, and how media doesn't inherently have a gender. It's also important to note that participating in a fandom encourages people to do activities that they otherwise would not.

Commonly, many people discover that they enjoy art or writing by drawing fan art and creating fan fiction of their favorite characters.

So, despite the many positives that come from participating in fandom culture, why is it something that is highly looked down upon? It's possible that the blame could be pinned upon the stigma created by loud voices with bad behavior. Just like adults who casually go to view a Disney movie are viewed as immature because of the few that spend every dollar to their name on Mickey Mouse-shaped items, those who currently happen to enjoy games like Minecraft and UNDERTALE tend to be looked down upon due to their fandoms having been central in 2010s cringe culture.

From the participants in famous SMPs getting outed for serious matters, to fangirls claiming that a character can be theirs and only theirs, to photographs of suspicious plastic pony figurine displays posted on deep internet forums, there's never not something absolutely insane coming out of a fandom at any given moment; but that's no excuse for the epidemic of bullying that's begun to replace classic fandom etiquette.

Overall, it's key that in spite of any drama surrounding a particular fandom that everybody always remains respectful of those around them. Since participating in fandom culture can help people improve their social lives, become more accepting, and find hobbies that they enjoy, it's clear that fandoms are an important part of many individuals lives that should be at the very least respected as such.



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# TORTURED POETS

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PRESLEY BREEN, '25

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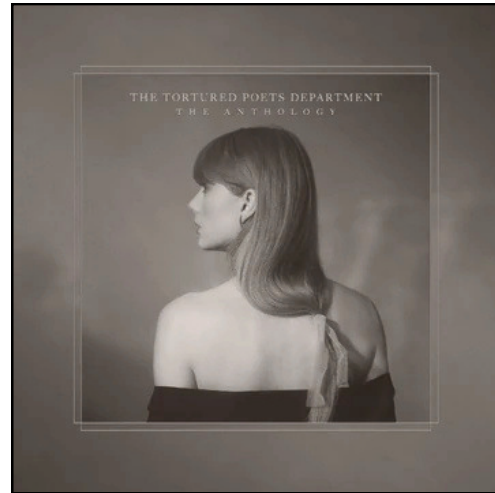
Have you heard Taylor Swift's new album, *The Tortured Poets Department*? It's like a total emotional rollercoaster, and I am here for it! Taylor really knows how to capture all the feels, and this album is no exception. From heartbreak to finding new love, she takes us on a journey that's super relatable and real.

—•••—  
*"They show that even after going through tough times, you can still find happiness and be totally in love again."*  
—•••—

The album kicks off with some major heartbreak vibes. Songs like "loml" and "The Smallest Man Who Ever Lived" are all about the heartbreak of losing someone you really loved. It's like when you break up with someone and it feels like the end of the world. Taylor's lyrics are so raw and honest—you can really feel her pain. It's almost like she's reading from her diary, and you can't help but feel all the emotions with her.

Just when you think you can't handle any more sadness, Taylor switches things up. Songs like "So High School" and "The Alchemy" bring a wholly new energy. These tracks are all about moving on and finding someone new.

They show that even after going through tough times, you can still find happiness and be totally in love again. It's a cool contrast between the sadness of loss and the joy of new love.



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THE TORTURED POETS DEPARTMENT

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TAYLOR SWIFT

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It's like Taylor is reminding us that there's always light at the end of the tunnel.

One of my favorite tracks on the album has to be "So High School." It has a super catchy beat, and the lyrics are all about those butterflies you feel when you start dating someone new.

Everything about it feels so intense and exciting. Taylor's voice is so sweet and playful, you can't help but smile when you listen to it.

Another standout track is "How Did It End?" This song is about a relationship that started great but eventually has once again captured all the feels and created an album that we'll be listening to on repeat for a long time.

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# WHAT IF WE NEVER LEFT?

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ZAHRAA ALMAREE, '26

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What if we'd stayed, not been torn apart,  
Grew in the place where we left our hearts?  
Walked the streets we knew so well,  
Laughed where every memory dwells?

What if the soil beneath our feet,  
Still held the warmth of childhood's beat?  
The school bells ringing in our ears,  
No need for goodbyes, no need for tears.

What if our hands had stayed entwined,  
Fighting for peace, with hearts aligned?  
Could we have built a stronger place,  
With pride and love in every face?

What if our skies had stayed so blue,  
No war, no fear to make us move?  
Would we be whole, not torn in two,  
Still holding onto what we knew?

Now we drift in foreign lands,  
Our hearts scattered like grains of sand,  
Chasing memories that slip through time,  
Of a place we can never leave behind.

What if we stayed, never had to part?  
What if we could heal the ache in our hearts?  
Do you think we'd still be broken tonight,  
Searching for home in the shadows of flight?

But here we are, miles away,  
Dreaming of a land where we used to play.  
What if we never left?  
What if we could go back,  
And find the pieces we lost along the way?

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# ENDLESS LONGING

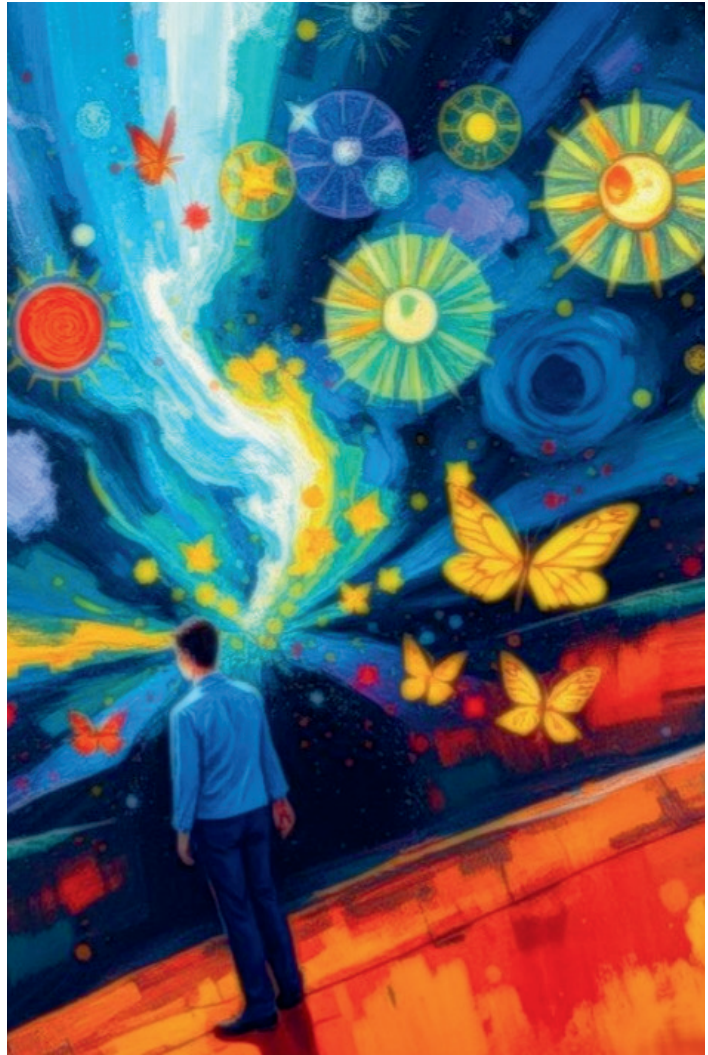
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MIA RYBA, '26

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At some point our friendship changed  
When innocent jokes about us as  
lovers  
Turned into reluctant denial  
When sitting beside each other  
Turned into stolen glances  
I tell myself I'm misinterpreting  
The endless nights of dark loneliness  
Turning into glowing longing for you  
Our friendship is only something new  
Our friendship is only friendship

Do you feel the same?  
Does only my name make you smile  
Like yours does to me?  
Does your chest ache  
When you say it's only a joke  
Like mine does when I lie  
How much longer must I wait for  
The endless longing to fade away  
Only for a cliché love story  
To be left with an unsatisfactory  
ending.



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## LANGUAGE OF A SILENT UNIVERSE

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ABIGAIL MOORE, '27

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# TAKE MY NAME, IT'S BEEN YOURS FROM THE START

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MEGAN CLARK, '25

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*July 9, 2005, Frankie Burke*

"Jump on three!" Sergeant Bell chanted repeatedly as each cadet jumped out of the plane with fear-stricken eyes. It terrified me, if I were to be honest with myself. However, I didn't have time to question why and how I got to here, right now, minutes away from jumping out of a plane, in basic training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina; because it was Cayde's turn to jump. I met Cayde on the first day of basic training, his last name comes before mine, them being Burrows and Burke; and so, we were next to each other in almost everything. Cayde is my only friend here. The judgmental minds of the stereotypical eighteen-year-old boys in Army boot camp are not accepting of a queer joining the Army. But Cayde, when he sat with me in the bunks--and I warned him---said was that everyone here should only care about one thing: serving our country.

Over the weeks we've been here we began telling each other anything. I told him that I never cared to 'serve my country,' but my father signed me up the day I turned eighteen. He hoped it would fix me. Cayde told me that it was more of an obligation for him. His dad served; his dad's dad served. It was just what you did when you turned eighteen in his family. My eyes were glued to Cayde as he nodded at Sgt. Bell one last time before winking at me and jumping from the plane. Bell looked over at me, signifying that it was my turn now.

As I peered over the edge of the plane, I saw Cayde waving to me, and with a nod to Bell I jumped.

*September 17, 2007, Frankie Burke*

The sound of the convoy whirring to life awoke me from my daydream. I often get lost in the what could have beens. What if? I hated that question. In all the training I received I would never be able to answer that question. What if I broke contact with my dad the day I turned eighteen, and never let him drag me to the recruitment office that day? What if I quit, or purposely flunked everything in order to get rejected? What if I never met Cayde? What if I never fell in love with him? What if I never told him I loved him? Would he have taken the assignment in Iraq? Would I have accepted the assignment furthest away from him and ended up halfway across the world in a third world, country patrolling villages and handing out supplies?

I love what I do, helping people. I never thought I could come to love something I once hated with such tenacity. But when I pondered that many soldiers don't ever make it home, I realized that I was living with tunnel vision. I focused every ounce of my energy on hating; hating my dad, hating the army, hating Cayde. It gnawed on my soul, tore me to pieces, and cooked it until the outside began to char. On my twentieth birthday, as I blew out the candles on my MRE, I looked around at the soldiers who surrounded me.

None of the closed-minded people from basic, but soldiers who really only cared about serving their country, and they were all singing to me. The village children came down to join, and I knew then that I had been living without gratitude or an ounce of self-preservation. The hatred in my heart would've eaten me alive before the army ever could.

I wished to forgive. To forgive my Dad, for the way he was raised. To forgive Cayde for not being ready. To forgive him for leaving. When I woke the next day to the sound of the village children frolicking in the square, my birthday wish had come true. So now when I daydream, I think of Cayde's freckles, scattered like a treasure map that led to his beautiful heart. I think about every single curl on his head. Every single one of his favorite things, and aspirations. Each and every thing I loved in life was because of him. I loved the way grass crunched, but only when it crunched underneath the weight of his boots. I loved the way hair looked after being windblown from running through obstacle courses, but only if it was his hair. I think that I cared far more about Cayde than I ever have for anything else in my life. Because he was the way he was, I am what I am today.

I think back to a time when I was naive, but upon looking back in place of hate, and sadness, I feel warm, and a sense of fondness.

A door closed, but without Cayde I would still be the bratty teenager I was when I shipped out to Fort Jackson. For that I feel immense gratitude.

*October 24, 2010, Cayde Burrows*

I met Frankie in the blistering heat of summer. We had been assigned bunks

in basic training. Whispers had sprinkled across the cadets that there was a gay kid.

They had taken bets on how long he'd last. This made me worried. What would they do if they found me out? Would they treat me differently too? Just because I was hiding a part of myself from the rest of the cadets? I was part of the team, a comrade. The only person that ever saw the part of me I kept buried deep down in the depths of my heart and mind was Frankie. Frankie shone sunlight on the part of me that never saw the light of day. I let Frankie and everything he brought into my life go because I was afraid. Afraid to be myself.

Instead, I ran much farther than a half sane person would. I ran across the world. Wherever the army would take me first. Just because I was scared. I played the part of a dedicated soldier. I played it for a long time, until one day I snapped. I was the weak link of my squadron. Not because I wasn't physically fit enough, or skilled enough. I had been hand-picked to be sent there, as my test scores were exceptional. I was the weak link because I was unfocused.



*"What if I was brave, just once, long enough to tell him I loved him, too?"*



It's easy to be unfocused when you have no idea where the person who held your heart was. I shipped out before Frankie did. I left without saying goodbye. Simply placed a kiss upon his forehead while he was sleeping, and slinked out of the tent before he could wake up. My dazed and anxious state of mind was the reason I lost my leg.

I was in a convoy, traveling to a supply drop in a remote part of Iraq, when we were ambushed. I was the guy who was supposed to be watching, waiting, anticipating an attack. We were in a high-tension standoff awaiting further orders. Our job in Iraq was to rescue hostages taken in terrorist bombing incidents. I should've been watching. But I was in a fog. Thinking about the what ifs. What if I was brave, just once, long enough to tell him I loved him too?

The rest we could've figured out together. The thing that parted the mist of my mind was the ringing in my ears. I couldn't see anything.

I looked down at my left leg and I couldn't see anything.

I was honorably discharged three months later, after it was safe enough for me to be transported back to the states. So, as I sit in a wheelchair at the end of the first row of seats, watching Frankie glide across the stage, get pinned with his Sergeant service ribbons, I beam at him; for being braver than I ever could have been. For having more brains than I did. For learning to love, and leave love behind, and for allowing said love back into his life a year ago when I showed up on his doorstep during his break in a contracted assignment.

I always assumed I would be the Sergeant Burrows of the army, not Frankie. I also assumed Frankie would never willingly take my last name since he's the one who proposed to me. I guess what they say about assumptions is true.



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# BETTING ON YOU

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PRESLEY BREEN, '25

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It's always been you, from the time we were twelve  
I find myself lost in thoughts of you, a smile playing on my lips  
We're like a scene from a rom-com, quirky and sweet  
Our laughter echoing through the streets,  
Hand-in-hand

We stumble through moments, young and dumb  
Like the time you spilled coffee on my favorite book  
Or when I tripped over my own feet, landing in your arms  
Each little mishap, a chapter in our story

Your eyes meet mine, a spark of something real  
And in that instant I know, I'm betting on you  
Through the ups and downs and twists and turns  
You're the one I've always wanted

So, here's to us: the unexpected, beautiful mess  
To the moments that make us laugh and the ones that make us cry  
With every scene we create  
Every line I write  
To my best friend since I was twelve  
I'm betting on you, forever and always



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# GRACIE GAVE US, SHE GAVE US

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SHAELA ADSIT, '25

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Simply put, singer-songwriter Gracie Abrams' fourth album, *The Secret of Us*, is an international success that tugs and tears at your heartstrings. Released on June 21st, the poetic masterpiece contains thirteen original tracks with an additional five on the album's deluxe version that was released on October 18th.

The album centers around lost love, found love, and just a touch of delusional love. The opening track, "Felt Good About You" launches you into an expectation filled song that introduces the heartbreak narrative with lines like "Felt good about you till I didn't" and "We were fighting more than laughing." The song highlights the cliché of a lost love while incorporating an upbeat rhythm to immediately draw you in.

The album continues along with bigger, more noticeable chart toppers like "I Love You, I'm Sorry" and "Risk" that further blend emotional melodies with relatable lyrics. Albums work best when you can understand the singer's feelings and Abrams does this exceptionally by illustrating her own experiences in such a way that everyone can relate. Each song holds its own beautiful and unique musicality, with my leading favorite being track number twelve, "Free Now." The first half of the song goes along slowly whilst reflecting on a painful breakup with emotion filled lyrics, like "Almost loved you but I didn't."

The second half of the song picks up quickly as the bridge begins with Abrams beautifully illustrating herself processing the emotions to end up with a sense of freedom through some of my favorite lines, including "It was harsh 'cause I lost what I wanted" and "Every page that I wrote you were on it." She ends the song by exclaiming, "All I feel is free now," perfectly intertwining heartbreak with acceptance.

The most well-known track off the album, "I Love You, I'm Sorry," has achieved 508 million streams on Spotify and the YouTube music video has 16 million views. The iconic song has gone viral on every platform and in personal experience, it was my 2024 summer anthem.



THE SECRET OF US DELUXE

GRACIE ABRAMS

32

This album truly showcases Abrams' incredible lyricism and musicality, and with this album my favorite artist is finally getting the much-needed recognition she deserves. Another honorable mention from the album would be "us." including the absolutely iconic feature of Taylor Swift. With Gracie's fame skyrocketing as a result of her opening set for Taylor's Eras Tour, it seemed only necessary to include the world-renowned artist on the album. Their voices blend together harmoniously to navigate the likes of another poetic heartbreak song.

The deluxe version released just a few months later as a result of the overwhelming success of the original version.

The deluxe version, adorned with a new cover and font color, featured five new songs and the live versions of "I Love You, I'm Sorry," "I Knew It, I Know You," and "Free Now." With a god-like bridge and excessive TikTok popularity, "That's So True" became another one of my favorites on the deluxe version.

Overall, *The Secret of Us* is a wildly successful album by an incredible artist whose vocals and lyricism have finally captured the hearts of people both young and old all over the world. I truly cannot wait to see how she will awe us again.

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# CORRIGERE

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EMMA TURNER, '26

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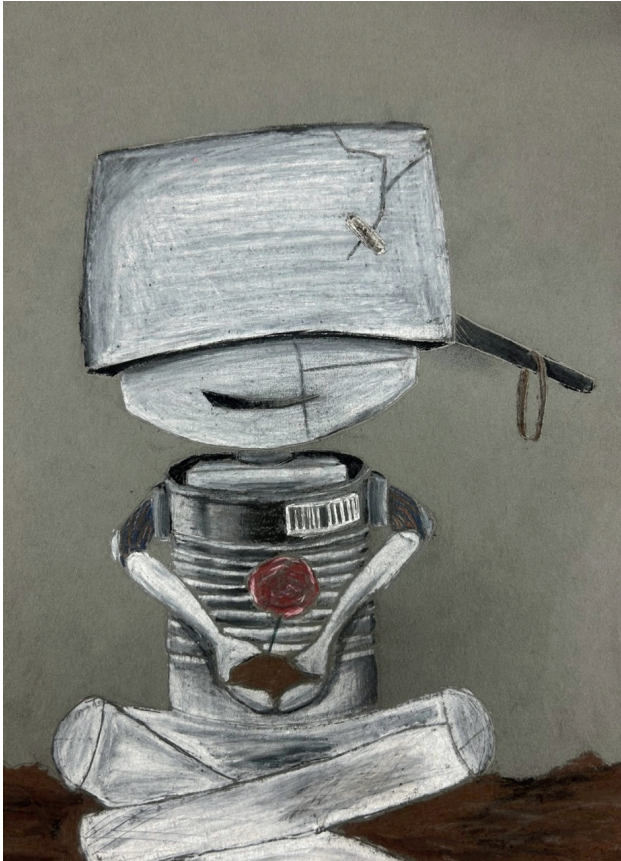
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# WHITE DUCKS AND HALF- WILTED PANSIES

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ETHAN GARFIAS, '27

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**LONELY ROBOT**  
CRISTALINA SOARES, '26

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The ducks float on the pond  
like stars in the night sky  
Suspended, they float still  
While a garden of yellow pansies and  
blue irises lay  
Humming in the gentle morning sun.

You showed me this place,  
This magical place.  
You gave me this breath of fresh air  
That I've needed for so long.

But it is so far  
I cannot tend the garden  
or feed the ducks as I please.  
Of course, I can send water for the plants  
And bread for the ducks,  
But I worry the pansies will wilt and the  
irises will fade.

I hope to visit the garden come summer,  
But fear what I will find.  
You've shown me this garden of love,  
But when the time comes that I finally  
arrive,

Will I find a garden of love?  
Or will I just find  
A garden.

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# THE MIND OF A GERMAPHOBE

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AVERY BOURGET, '28

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I hate going out. I feel like a disgusting human being. Touching the car door—who knows who else has gotten their germs on the handle? My brother goes in first, thank God. Why am I like this? Not even my therapist can make sense of it. I sit in the middle seat so I'm not near any of the doors. We drive off to the mall. It reminds me of Christi. Poor Christi.

All the doors in the mall are disgusting. Hundreds of people touching everything, touching their faces, their food, toilet stalls, doorknobs. It's sick. Every corner I turn reminds me of Christi. Poor Christi.

My brother opens a door and tries to push me inside. No! He can't touch me. He's sick just like Christi. Sometimes I feel like I'm the only one who ISN'T sick. Everybody touching everything, from doors to animals, even each other. They're all sick, just like poor Christi.

Christi was the sickest of them all. She was so sick; I couldn't even touch things she touched or even be around her. And so... I was forced to cure her. What? She was sick. Too sick. I can't get sick. Maybe I should cure my brother like I cured Christi.

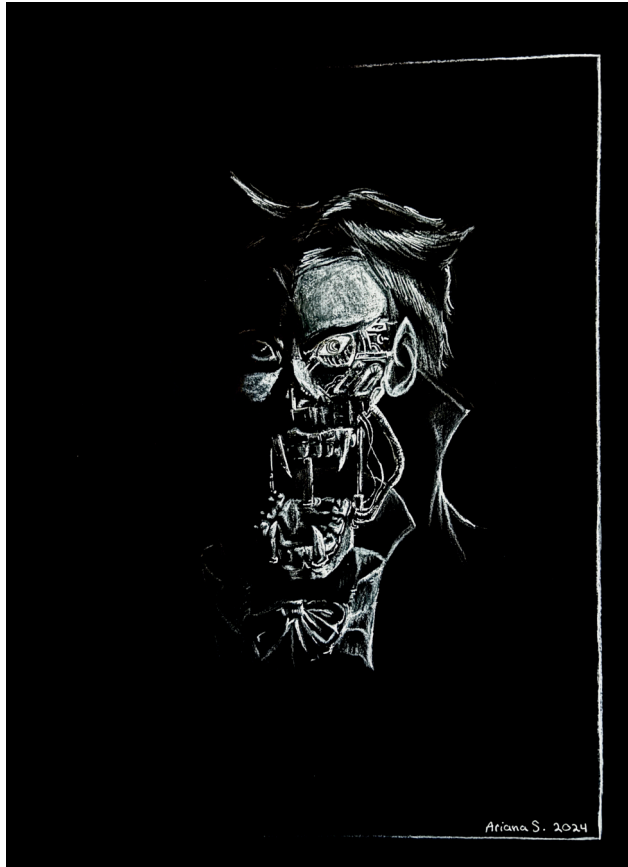
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# INFECTED

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BLAKE SEITER, '26

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## TRANSYLVANIAN CYBORG

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ARIANA SCALA, '26

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A plague rots the inner vessel,  
striking at the core—steaming,  
hissing at goodness as his roots of rage  
pull through arteries and pores,  
all-consuming,  
infuriated—impossible to identify,  
impossible to exterminate,  
pestering one's soul,  
unending,  
Untended,  
Unreal.  
time crawls just as the corruption does,  
popping veins,  
pustules growing as it gnaws  
with an unforgiving tooth  
and a sad, sad face,  
speaking down to all and to itself,  
living and dying,  
breathing,  
choking,  
spreading.  
and as the final flashes of light escape,  
and as with each second air depletes,  
good spirits flee with a wheeze  
in a blink,  
souls seeking souls to never find them  
and turmoil seeking clarity  
to create normalcy,  
though they are bound  
to opposite ends of their realm,  
fated to lose every drop of blood  
as their other piece does the same,  
watching,  
waiting,  
fading.



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# THE FAVORITE GAME

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KILEY STEWART, '27

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She plays with words like cards in hand,  
A knowing look, a sly demand.

A whisper here, a twist, a claim— Lying  
is her favorite game.

White lies, a sugar-coated, harmless tale  
To make the truth sound soft and pale.

"I love your hair; it looks so great!"  
(Though deep inside, she knows it's  
fake.)

A compliment, a nod, a grin,  
She tells the lie and lets it spin.

No one's hurt, it's just pretend—  
A little fib to keep a friend.

Omission, lies; she tells the story, just  
not all

The parts that matter slip and fall.

"Yeah, we hung out, it wasn't wild,"  
(She leaves out drinks and being exiled.)

The missing piece, the half-truth plays,  
She lets them guess, and she walks away.

Not quite a lie, not quite the truth,  
Just blurred enough to seem uncouth.

Pathological lies, but then the game  
turns something more,

A thrill, a spark she can't ignore.

"I swear, I met a movie star!"

"My cousin owns a fancy car!"

She spins the tales, she weaves them  
tight

Convinced herself they must be right.

And when the cracks begin to show,  
She smiles and starts a brand-new show.

She plays the game, she plays it well,  
A castle built where falsehoods dwell.

A teenage queen, a careful plot,  
But the truth is one thing she forgot.



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## 1990 RX-7 FC

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TOMMY EICHENMULLER, '27

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# HAPPINESS

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ETHAN GARFIAS, '27

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Happiness: the state of being happy.

What is "happy?"

What makes someone feel so filled with joy and excitement that they must express it to those around them?

Maybe it's a good test score,

A short conversation with a crush,

A simple smile from a friend in the halls.

But what if someone isn't happy?

Sadness: the state of being sad.

Who is sad? Who is so willing to go out of their way to express feelings of gloom and despair to those around them?

Is being sad ok?

Is it ok for someone to walk through their day,

Miserable and discontent,

Only to wake up the next morning just to repeat the cycle and feel the same way all over again?

Passing glances from friends that whisper,

"Are you ok?"

"Do you need anything?"

"I'm always here if you want to talk."

Echo through the halls like pins falling in silent rooms.

But what right do I have to take that time away from them?

Selfishness: The state of being selfish

When someone is sad are they being selfish?

When you're ranting to your friend, do they not have anything better to do?

Is it truly necessary to feel these emotions anyway?

After all, when I drag my friends down with me,

Into a deep and dark pit of sadness,

I am only taking away their happiness so I can have it for myself.

I could be proactively trying to fix my feelings instead

Organizing the thought-full desk in my brain

Sweeping up the clumps of tasks off its oddly yellow floor into a garbage can never to be seen again.

But what if I embrace the sadness?

Contentedness: The state of being content.  
To be content is to be free,  
Free from want, from need, from reach.  
Is there not equilibrium in everything?  
Maybe I have to embrace the sadness in order to feel happiness.  
Maybe to be content with my life, myself, my work  
I have to find an equilibrium.  
There's a certain comfort in sadness  
Knowing that eventually it will end, and you will be happy again.  
However, there is a certain discomfort in happiness  
Knowing that eventually it will end, and you will be sad again.  
*This* is equilibrium.  
*This* is happiness.

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# FIXED REALITY

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KATELYN KRAPFL, '26

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# THE BURIED LANTERN

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COLE WILSON, '27

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I cried reading through our messages tonight.  
It's been over a year since I've seen you  
And I miss our fights  
Our little banter.  
Your presence lit me up like lanterns  
In the night sky.

But why  
Why did I blow out the light  
On my own lantern  
And create a pattern  
Of darkness  
Without the harness  
Of my emotions?

They vanished on expeditions  
Wandering  
Leading an empty soul  
Into a six-foot-deep hole  
Into the soil  
And buried  
Covered in dirt  
Hungry and hurt.

I promised to never let them out again  
Never to see the light of day  
To rot and decay  
And sink into the clay  
Of this earth's crust.

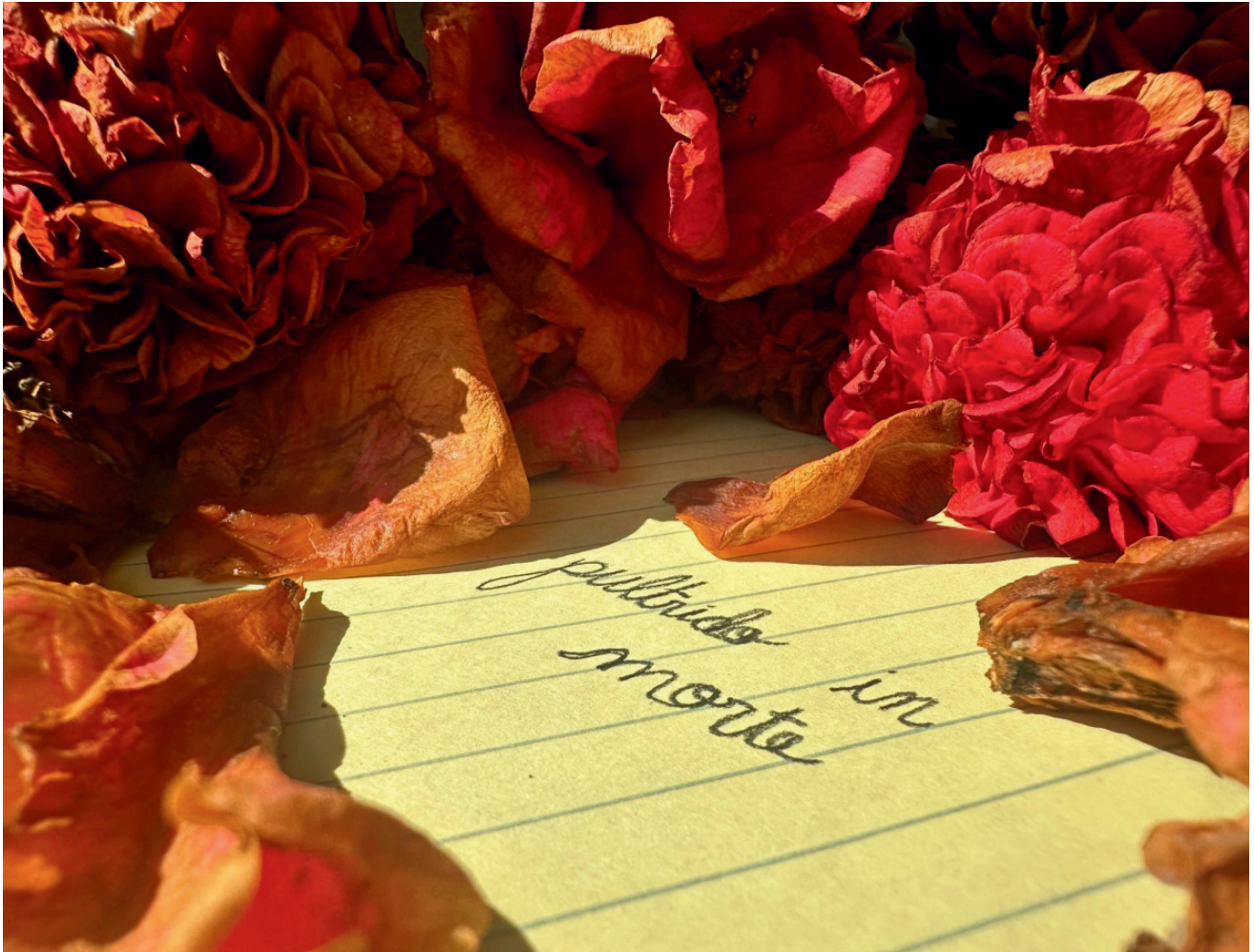
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# BEAUTY IN DEATH

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CLAIRE HORNER, '25

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# TRUST PANDEMIC

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ZAHRAA ALMAREE, '26

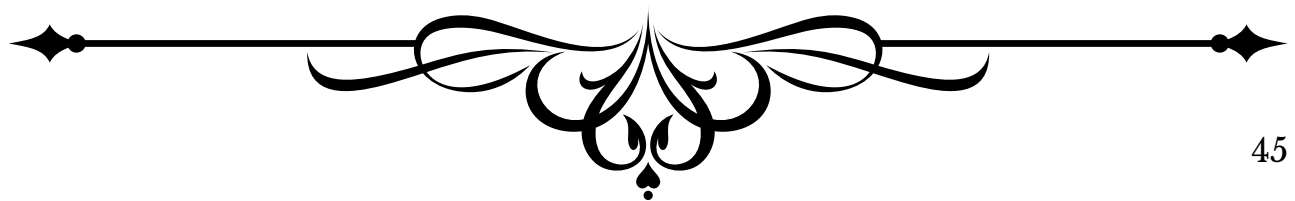
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Sometimes, the ones you trust the most  
Are the ones who leave you like a ghost.  
You give them your heart, your soul, your time,  
Yet they weren't worth a single dime.

I'm trapped inside a trustless maze  
Lost in doubt, stuck in a haze.  
The word "love" just fades away  
A fleeting lie we all obey.

I'm drowning in a trustless tide  
Where truth and fiction coincide.  
Faces blur and voices fade  
In a world where loyalty decayed.

I'm living a trust pandemic  
I befriended the devil; now, I'm repenting,  
Asking God for forgiveness,  
Knowing you've been my worst sin—  
Yet somehow, I'd risk it again.



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# CARELESS

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JACOB HETRICK, '25

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Life is hard,  
the hardest part is caring,  
it's easy not to care:  
to never reach out,  
to indulge frequently,  
to ignore the seemingly  
never-ending  
scream of the world.

I can easily work just enough  
to drink myself away;  
I can easily close the curtains  
and seek solace in the shade;  
I can easily stand by  
and let the current take me  
and let the world have its way  
and so what?!

Call me a nihilist!  
Call me a pessimist!  
Call me afraid and weak!  
Call me a loser who weeps!  
Call me and scream,  
"You're wasting, kid!"  
but I don't care!

I don't care!  
Because it hurts.  
And if I care  
then I will be afraid  
and I will be weak  
and I will cry;  
and you'll still scream,  
"You're wasting, kid!"  
—but now it will hurt.

Yet a bird flies against the wind  
and is lifted higher for it.  
For the work that wounds him, a  
man's hands are tougher.

And the water erodes stone  
only to reveal its denser core.  
It may be harder to care  
but it is stronger.

A man cries because he cares,  
but he is willed to do better  
Better is seeing the signs  
and being so "foolish" to assume.  
Better is meeting that friend before  
he is determined to destroy.  
Better is the morning after  
Armageddon never happened.

So life is hard.  
So apathy is comfort.  
So one day will be the end.  
But who says that's today?  
Truthfully, apathy is defeat.  
And so let's care  
For a better day.

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# THE BEST

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ETHAN GARFIAS, '27

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You will never be the best.  
No matter how hard you try  
how long you practice  
how much you study  
You will never be the best.  
Nobody will.

Nobody will ever be the best.  
The same way the soldier at war  
will never return home the same.

The same way the rabbit on the side of the road  
has no chance of surviving.  
The same way the bastard child  
whose mother is gone,  
and whose father is a drunk,  
can never experience truly loving parents.  
Being the best is being perfect.

There will always be more you can do.  
You can always play better  
you can always act better  
you can always be better.  
No matter what you do  
someone will always perform better than you.

Someone is always going to be the best.  
But at the same time  
No one is the best.  
Every conscious being is the best  
even though every conscious being  
is also the worst.  
Everyone has done something the best  
and everyone has done something the worst.  
However, being the best and the worst  
never will be relevant.

When someone is relevant  
people think of them;  
They have left their mark.  
Regardless of whether they are the best or the worst  
They are relevant;  
They have made their mark.

Being the best is being relevant  
but being the worst is also being relevant.  
How do you become relevant when you can't even  
be the best?

And how can you be the best when you can't even  
become relevant?  
You don't.  
You strive to be yourself.  
You strive to be who you are  
in your rawest and most exposed form.  
Letting the entire world see  
The cards from which you draw on  
Is the only way to be relevant  
and is the only way to truly be  
The best.

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# LOVE, MOM

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PHOENIX MAULDIN, '26

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I'm getting tired of the affection.  
It suffocates and binds me so painfully  
Head to tip of toe  
And I drown in it.  
I'm in too deep.  
You have pushed me under.  
Your hand to the crown of my head  
My palms knotted to my shoulders  
My entire being submerged.  
You just won't let go of me.

I can no longer see the surface.  
Is this really what it feels like  
To be loved?  
If it is  
Then I don't really like it.  
I don't like the way you hold me.  
I don't like the way you speak to me.  
I don't like the way you love me.  
I don't like you  
Anymore.

When I was little  
I felt so much taller.  
I could touch the bottom of the ocean  
And feel the sand beneath me  
With my head still above the sea.  
But I want to swim deeper now.  
My mother was my lifebelt for so long  
Until I felt pulled back to the beach  
Where I would lay longingly at the shore.

The waves would come in  
And they would lap at me over and over  
again

Straight at my face.  
The salty water in my nose  
So much I could taste it in my throat.  
You are less of a life preserver  
And this is nothing  
But a noose around my neck  
An involuntary suicide  
Keeping diving freedom afloat.

So I unknot my net  
Slip myself free enough to go  
By myself  
Alone.  
Yet I find that the raging storm  
Is far too strong to bear without a hand to hold  
And I am thrown beneath the waves  
By life's hardship's alone.  
I'm tossed deeper  
Losing air as I sink  
Past bursting bubbles  
Ad into nothing but blue.

Now that I am older  
I feel so much smaller.  
I am angry all the time and I don't know why.  
I harbored all of my rage into a bottle  
And I threw it off into my painful sea  
Where it washed up on your shore  
And you stepped on the shattered sea-glass  
Only trying to take a stroll  
Only trying to see me.

I can no longer see the surface.  
This is what it is like  
To push away love  
And I do not like it.  
I do not like it one bit.  
I miss the way you hold me.  
I miss the way you speak to me.  
I miss the way you love me.  
I love you more than  
Anything.

I won't get tired of the affection  
No matter how much I want it to feel  
like pain.  
You grab me and pull me into your  
arms  
Holding me close  
And I feel loved;  
I'm sorry that I went too deep.  
But you understand what was in my  
mind.  
You deciphered the cryptic ink on my  
hands.  
You are my mother, after all.  
Please never let go of me.



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## SUPER AWESOME CAT

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AUDREY SARVIS, '26

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# QUACKERS THE DUCK

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ISAAC INFANTE, '28

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**QUACKERS**

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ISAAC INFANTE, '28

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A small little duck  
Who was round as a bun,  
Came around the block  
With a large minigun.

This little duck  
Was cunning and nifty,  
And had the power  
Of a Ford F-150.

His large minigun  
Would vibrate and rattle,  
Every single time  
He went into battle.

Although his minigun  
Was twice his size,  
He would still cause  
His enemies' demise.

He had no fear  
Of going into war  
Since he always said,  
"I've played these games before!"

So always stay safe,  
You don't want to be struck  
By the little guy  
Known as Quackers the Duck.

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# CHAMBERED NAUTILUS

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SHANNON FLAHERTY, '26

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Beneath the surface of the sea where sunlight danced, shimmering ripples of every color peaked through. A tan mermaid with a rainbow tail glided through the water like a living prism, her scales gleamed with every flick of her fluke. Pearl swam through the warm salty water admiring all the life around her. The fish with bright beautiful colors, the coral with even more vibrant shades, and those admiring her scales. Pearl was the only mermaid in the sea with scales of every color, so those who got to look upon her were very lucky.

Through the turquoise waters, Pearl spotted a sea turtle. He looked wise and gentle, his movements as steady and timeless as the ocean itself. She swam past him in an attempt to direct his attention to her unique scales, as she thought he had probably never seen anything like this before. The turtle didn't look at her tail, his eyes didn't move from the coral reef. Pearl didn't know why, but this made her unhappy. Everyone loved her scales. The turtle disappeared into a cave far too small for Pearl, but she didn't mind. She knew their paths would cross again.

Pearl's room was a sanctuary of shimmering hues, bathed in the soft, iridescent light that filtered through the water above. Seashells, some as large as a human's head, were scattered along the coral walls, their pearlescent surfaces glowed faintly in the dim, blue-green light.

Seaweed curtains swayed gently in the currents as she lay in a bed of smooth algae-covered rocks supported by seafoam. Pearl brushed through her hair with a small, jagged piece of coral and pushed it back. She thought of the turtle and how he ignored her. Was he looking at something more beautiful than her? There was no way, she had been told all her life she was 'the most beautiful fish I've ever seen,' so he must've been playing hard to get.

The next day, she went looking for the turtle, asking everyone around if they'd seen him.

Pearl asked the Guppies, "Have you seen Seymour, the small sea turtle?"

"No!" the school of guppies all said at once.

She went to the zebrafish, "Have you seen Seymour, the small sea turtle?"

"No, but maybe Crab has," the colorful fish said.

Pearl went to find Crab, but she found Salmon instead and asked, "Have you seen Seymour the small sea turtle or Crab?"

"Look at his house. That's usually where he is. As for Crab, he's at the reef," Salmon told her.

Pearl had to swim past the reef to reach Seymour anyway, so she found crab on her way, "Have you seen Seymour, the small sea turtle?" she asked the old crab.

"What do you care?"

Pearl was shocked by his rudeness. “I would like to be his friend, thank you very much. He’s one of the only fish around here to not have had the pleasure of seeing my tail.”

Crab laughed, even wheezed at the mermaid. “Seymour don’t care none about your shiny scales,” he managed to say.

Pearl swam away: hurt, but not defeated. She knew if she could talk to him, he would want to be her friend and admire her like the others. Pearl swam past the reef singing softly, her voice echoing through the depths. As she reached Seymour’s cave at the edge of the reef, she saw him. She twirled and glided, sending waves of iridescent colors rippling through the water. Despite her best efforts, the turtle still remained unresponsive. Pearl grew frustrated. It was at that moment she noticed Seymour’s eyes were a color she had never seen before.

As she swam inches away, he finally spoke “Who’s there?”

“Pearl, the rainbow mermaid! Can’t you see me and my wonderful tail?”

Seymour’s brow furrowed and he turned towards the voice. “I can’t see you, but it’s nice to meet you, Pearl.”

Feeling hopeless, Pearl started to leave, if he couldn’t see her tail, he had no reason to like her.

As she swam away, Seymour spoke in a warm voice, “I may not be able to see your tail, but I can feel your joy in the currents. You bring light to the sea even if it’s not visible by my eye.”

Pearl blinked in surprise; she was so focused on her looks and the attention she wanted that she hadn’t stopped to consider the qualities that truly matter. She felt a sense of peace wash over her as she swam back to Seymour.

With a newfound understanding of herself, she swam beside him, sharing stories and listening to his wisdom.

They spent hours together every day, not for admiration, but the joy of connection. Seymour taught her things she had never dreamed of and became her best friend. Seymour helped her learn beauty isn’t about being seen, it’s sharing her light with others whether they can see it or not.



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## EXOTIC KOI FISH

CRISTALINA SOARES, '27

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# FESTIVAL NIGHT

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KILEY MOORE, '25

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*'Crackling of fire beyond the point of his hidden cove, shouting and the sounds of howling dogs searching for the familiar scented trail of an Oni. A bounty sat on top of Iōn's head. Something felt off, no humans went this close to Oni territory. Maybe they figured out where his kind lived and started hunting parties. A part of him screamed it was a dream, but it all felt too real for one. His head peeked from behind the rocky granite mountain wall slowly, his wide, bright eyes shined with the reflection of the fire from the search party and his hopes of surviving laid dim. Iōn backed away slowly before curling into a small corner to hopefully keep himself fully hidden. The shouting stopped, maybe he was safe for one more day or for the next few hours at most. Getting up from his previous comfortable hiding spot, he stepped into the sickening cold of Japan air which made him smile, a sigh of relief escaped him. After a moment of peace has past, a sudden use of someone's hand ripped away Ion from his home, screaming for someone to save him before-'*

Iōn woke up with a shout, mentally telling himself it was all a dream, and that he was safe at home. Nothing was coming to harm him, especially the humans he always played with located ten miles down Mount Yari. He blinked multiple times to fully bring himself back to reality; his gaze adjusted to seeing his only two inchworm friends he named 'Yarn' and 'String'. Of course, he knew the difference between them both: one was bright green and the other was

bright green— actually, there was no difference, he couldn't tell who was who. All inchworms look the same to him, how can he himself tell the difference between a green inchworm and a green inchworm? It was impossible, but he let this thoughts slip for a while.

The sounds of marching and laughing made Iōn's ears perk up in a curious manner, they twitched and wiggled to figure out why the village folk were cheering. "Alright Yarn and String, don't get lost, okay? I would hate to replace- I MEAN! Find your brother again." He swiftly got up, grabbing his Kubi Bukuro (a string bag used by the samurai class) and stuffing it with his figures made from pebbles, clay and some pinecones if rarely. Once the preparations were done for his trip, he then made his way down Mount Yari, smelling the same flowers, the same seasonal cherry blossoms, and different rodents that were always scurrying with him. The breeze blew through his shaggy, yet fluffy black hair making his red, joy filled eyes close with the warm orange gaze of the sun. That all came to an end when the village came into view. The lanterns shone through the thick treetops. He could see the wooden housing that always had the smallest porch ever, and the soft use of red for shrine openings.

The clearing for the village was close enough for him to step on the dirt which he had left a mark on for the last decade. He searched for the source of chanting and laughter, finding a large group of people dressed up as scary verions of Oni's,

or the stereotypical red Oni's with wide, bright yellow eyes and large bellies.

He found this repulsive and downright gross. As an Oni himself, Iōn never had red skin, his skin was milky white and teal fades along his horn, fingertips and on his cheeks, but it was nowhere close to the red look. He finally got closer to the packed crowd, then stepped on something that burned his poor skin. His eyes widened and finally identified the object. Beans. Beans were the only things humans used to scare off evil spirits and bring good fortune for years to come, which indicated this was a Setsubun parade. Iōn backed away from the village, which alerted villagers to shout and scream about the very presence of him. Beans hit his skin, making his hiss at the pain but his adrenaline pumping through his veins to get away from the pain.

He hid away inside the forest that surrounded the village, grabbing a mix of aloe vera and calendula to treat his aching burns and wounds. Soft winces escaped his lips, body trembling from the burns but slowly relieved as the herbs and plants helped to keep any infection or inflammation from starting. Iōn looked through the trees and watched the Setsubun continue, he couldn't help but curl into a ball to cry away his sorrows.

Soft pitter patters made Iōn look up from his ball form, noticing what looked like a young boy barely six years old handing out a small flower crown made from ambrosias. "For... me?" Iōn said in a rather confused manner but nevertheless took the crown and placed it on top of his head. "This is really pretty, thank you."

The boy nodded with the happiest smile on his face but then tilted his head with a look of childish curiosity, "You aren't that scary.

My mama and papa always said Oni's are scary beasts, but you aren't."

Iōn chuckled in response, carefully and gently ruffling the little boy's hair.

"And you are just the sweetest." Iōn grinned wide to show his yellow-like teeth and sharp tusks.

"I also want to give you this." The boy handed him a pair of Geto clogs, with a sandogasa (ronin hat), a kyahan (baggy leggings), and a traditional hakama (kimono) which looked like it would swallow Iōn alive.

"Thank you, you are way too nice." Iōn almost became tearful from the kind gifts.

"I have to leave now," the boy stated softly, stepping back and taking a bow of respect then running off back into the village.

"Wait!" But it was too late for Iōn to get one last response back, "I never got your name..." he mumbled to himself before getting up, placing the clothes on to himself and then making the trek back to his home up in the mountain. "Maybe being an Oni ain't so bad." He chuckled and then disappeared within the woodland trees once more.

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# DANGERS OF ESCAPISM

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ALEX HARRIS, '25

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## CUPCAKE

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DANIELLE FEDERLE, '27

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Fiction is *the* most popular media category, especially in the way of teenagers. Sci-fi, fantasy, real-world fiction, historical fiction— any fictional genre is preferable in terms of entertainment to non-fictional genres. In fact, a good portion of people probably stopped reading this as soon as they realized it was an article. Which, in truth, I cannot blame you for, because I am in the vast majority of people that find more interest within the imagined world than the real one. It's hardly surprising that anyone would want a break from their own problems, in short intervals. However, escapism tends to spiral out of control swiftly.

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*“Our generation doesn't struggle with a lack of work ethic...”*

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There are a thousand things to stress about in a single day: grades, graduation, jobs, relationships, home life, etc. Putting these off to watch a movie or a show relieves some of the overlying tension, but eventually the relief ends, and you're back where you started, which leaves you with two options. Continue procrastinating, or actually face what needs to be faced. And no one wants to face what needs to be faced, so instead we keep procrastinating, which is especially an issue for our generation with our easy access to entertainment.

So the loophole keeps looping and the sand keeps sinking and we are pulled further and further into escapism. When we finally muster the strength to tell ourselves enough is enough, we find the workload has *tripled* since we last checked on it.

Once again, there is an option. Get to work, or have a breakdown and go read your favorite book to make yourself feel better. And the latter sounds way better than the former.

It's an endless mess that keeps tangling until we can't escape our own escapism, and suddenly that B you had in English is dropping down, down, down, and your anxiety is going up, up, up.

Our generation doesn't struggle with a lack of work ethic— we want to get it done. We know it needs to be done. But surely it can wait. Just one more page, just one more episode, and then we'll get it done.



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## FAIRY DOOR

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ALEX HARRIS, '25

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# OKLAHOMA!

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RO BAILEY, '26

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The River Ridge High School production of Rodgers & Hammerstein's classic musical *Oklahoma!* will be premiering at the end of April and running for 4 shows.

*Oklahoma!* is a classic and well-loved musical that first came out in 1946. It's set in a farm town before Oklahoma became a state. The show follows a cowboy named Curly and his attempt to court the lovely, headstrong farm girl, Laurey. The musical was based on the 1931 play by Lynn Riggs titled *Green Grow the Lilacs*.

This will be the last show directed by our beloved theatre teacher, David Keith O'Hara, and he has given us no reason to believe that he will not go out with a bang. Starring Quentin Parkes as Curly, Bella Boytsan as Laurey, Lana Greene as Ado Annie, and Olivia Maggio as Aunt Eller, this star-studded cast is certain to impress both old and new viewers of the Royal Knights Theatre Company.

With the help of the experienced vocal director, Mr. Darrell Huling, and Broadway dancer, Mr. Chris Sell, every aspect of musical theatre will be displayed brilliantly.

Rehearsals are already happening in the Black Box, and the entire cast is working as hard as they can to exceed everyone's expectations. This large crew is made up of a diverse array of ages and levels of experience, from people who have been on stage since

they could walk to those who had never imagined they would perform in front of an audience. David Keith O'Hara has mentioned Oklahoma for years, and he is very eager to do it as his last show. He expects it to be a box office success, as this is a well-loved story that is sure to attract people from all over the state. His most recent show, *All's Well*, which was a musical rendition of William Shakespeare's *'All's Well That Ends Well'*, was another show he had been wanting to direct for ages. If you ask me, I'd call that an impressive last year.

I was able to speak to the director and have him answer a few questions.

**Q. How long have you wanted to direct Oklahoma?**

A. About 20 years, ever since I became a high school theatre teacher.

**Q. How long have you been directing?**

A. I started when I was 17 years old and I'm 65 now. How many years is that? 48 years.

**Q. What is your favorite part of this show?**

A. I mean, my favorite thing about Oklahoma is the sense of community. This is right at the time that Oklahoma was getting ready to become a state, and even though there were differences, they realized that their differences didn't really mean a lot.

**Q. Is there anything you'd like to say to the people planning on coming to see the show?**

A. It's not often that you get to see an old style musical like this and sometimes people need to be reminded how great they are.

Thank you, Mr. O'Hara!

I was also able to interview Tallen Huerta, who plays Ali Hakim.

**Q. How long have you been acting?**

A. 4 years! My first role was "Professor" in a production of *Once Upon a Broomstick*.

**Q. What's your favorite part of this show?**

A. The song 'It's a Scandal, It's an Outrage.' A very hilarious number. But, my favorite part of our production has definitely got to be the acting.

**Q. If you had to play any other role in this show, what would it be?**

A. Ensemble, because it's fun to focus on and see other aspects of the show. Also, you're typically involved in more numbers.

**Q. Is there anything you'd like to say to the people planning on coming to the show?**

A. I hope y'all enjoy this fine ol' fashioned show of ours. It's a real delight for us to put it on! Couldn't have done it without all your support.

Thank you, Tallen!

As a member of the ensemble, I can safely say that this show is one that will impress. With a large cast that will be working tirelessly until they are on the stage, *Oklahoma!* will stun an audience of all ages.

The Royal Knight Stage Company of  
River Ridge High School  
PRODUCTION OF  
**RODGERS & HAMMERSTEIN'S**  
**Oklahoma!**  
Music by **RICHARD RODGERS**  
Book and Lyrics by **OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN II**  
Based on the play  
"Green Grow the Lilacs" by Lynn Riggs  
Original Dances by **AGNES DE MILLE**

THURSDAY <b>APR 24</b> 7:30 PM	FRIDAY <b>APR 25</b> 7:30 PM	SATURDAY <b>APR 26</b> 7:30 PM	SUNDAY <b>APR 27</b> 2:00 PM
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Directed by David O'Hara | Choreographed by Chris Sell  
Musical Director Darrell Huling | Stage Manager Olivia Berberena

**THE CENTER FOR THE ARTS AT RIVER RIDGE**  
FOR TICKETS & INFORMATION, SCAN THE APPROPRIATE CODE

	General Admission		Reserved/ Preferred Seating
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Presented by arrangement with Rodgers & Hammerstein, A Concord Theatricals Company (concordtheatricals.com)

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**OKLAHOMA!**

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Troupe 5031

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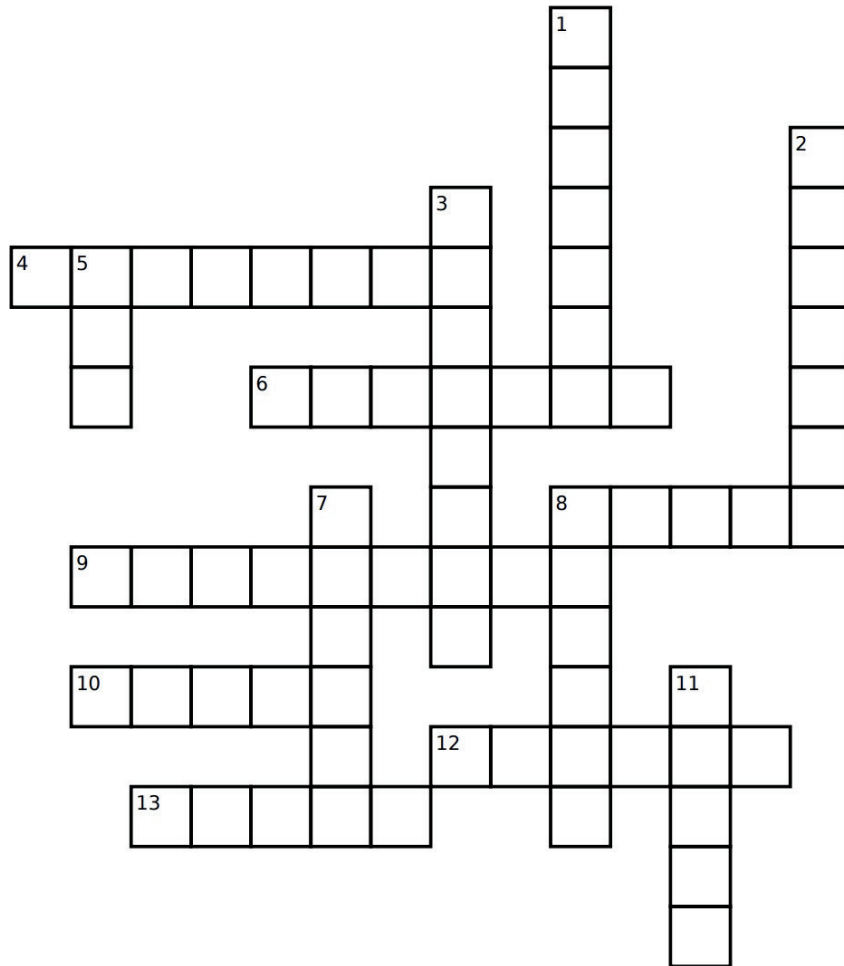
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# CROSSWORD

CLAIRE HORNER, '25

## DOWN

1. "Fact, or \_\_\_\_\_?"
2. Genre that love stories belong to
3. The name of this magazine, formally
5. The "A" in FAME
7. Like *The Onion*
8. Not prose
11. These can be found on shelves



## ACROSS

4. RRHS'S local Cthulhu enthusiast
6. Present participle of the verb "write"
8. The opposite of 8 down
9. "Tangerine" in Italian, or the club's sponsor
10. Genre that's half science, half 1 down
12. Genre that's creepy, spooky, and scary
13. A book in three acts—or something new

## ANSWER

