

albany road

Cover photo by Ellora Devitre

ALBANY ROAD

DEERFIELD ACADEMY'S LITERARY & ARTS MAGAZINE
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

As I browsed the hundreds of poems archived away in my “Writing I Love” folder, foraging for a senior quote, I stumbled upon “Unreliable,” by Sarah Kay. In my mind, this line remains: “I spent thirty-two years in New York City / and every metaphor is stacked with taxi cabs and subways. / I spent two weeks in the woods and suddenly every poem swelled / with rhododendrons and the smell of firewood.”

I spent four years in this valley,
And every poem: dotted with
the trees along Albany Road,
buds beginning to blossom.
Brimming with laughter, ringing,
faces, breaking into smiles.
Overflowing with that light,
which weaves itself across
each body passing through
this place.

To the *Albany Road* Board,
thank you for filling my days with art and delight.

To Melody, Elena, Chas, and Ryan,
thank you for the spark, the magic.

To Dr. Carter and Mr. Abreu,
thank you for the support, unwavering.
You will be missed.

To *you*—every reader, across time—thank you for visiting.

With love,
Chloe Xue, Editor-in-Chief

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

When I was really young, my grandma gifted me a kaleidoscope—a small, blue optical gadget with an eyehole you could peer into. I loved (and still love) it. With every turn of the frame, a new image would emerge from a mosaic of colored pebbles and beads.

In many ways, this issue functions as another kaleidoscope, another “observer of beautiful forms.” While you will not find any loose glass shards, with every turn of the page, each new piece invites you into a facet of the Deerfield experience. As Edie Huffard meditates on cups of hot chocolate and Folgers coffee, Max Wang counts lost water bottles, and Thomas Schwarting captures “A View From the Rock,” countless other authors illuminate the fragments and bits and pieces of life at Deerfield.

In *Leaves of Grass*, Walt Whitman reminds us of this multifaceted nature experience. He writes, “I am large, I contain multitudes.” The art and writing within these pages form unique mosaics, each with their own pebbles of truth. So, take your time, twist the lenses within these pages—look closely, reflect deeply, and celebrate the myriad ways these artists express their experiences.

As Whitman goes on to say:

“I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.”

I urge you to embrace Whitman’s words, kaleidoscope in hand. Observe these beautiful forms and the beautiful atoms between the lines. Celebrate them. And most importantly, appreciate their symmetries and multitudes.

Catch you on the flip side,
Melody Zhao, Editor-in-Chief

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SUMMER NIGHT IN POSITANO, ITALY

Iris Zhu

take me to the rooftop
to the place where cicadas sang
swarms of them that chorused through the night

beneath waning light my shadow crept
barefoot against cold stone, i climbed —
past the blue moonlit figures frozen in sleep
with their unintelligible, dreamless mumblings
until i burst out into open night

wrapped beneath a thin woolen blanket
the moonlight my only guide,
i meandered through the endless labyrinths of a silent village.
and summer - she who is most alive at night,
lingered in the taste of ocean salt
and within the wary pupils of nocturnal eyes

my fingers graze the uneven ridges of pointed tree leaves:
so thoroughly yellow they look to be hundreds of shriveled lemons
dangling from branches like rows of puckered lips.

high above an ocean of empty sandstone dwellings,
the stars are almost close enough to hold.



EROSION
Kingsley Carolan

RED SHIRT GUY

Gracie Spencer

It is a shame that certain things make us think of certain people. Our memories don't let us forget them.

What do you think of right now when I mention holding on? What's something you wish an object didn't remind you of?

Mine is not an object but a song –
the one that played when you were too
intoxicated to stand up straight and fell
on top of the people a row below you.

I don't know why I am using the word "you."

It signifies some sort of closeness.

The word "you" should really be "he" because I did and do not know him.

Prior to this song when he fell down
most people in the stands ignored the opener and sat in cowboy boots
pretending to be country.

My sister and I sang "Something in the Orange" because it was not on the set list and we danced.

Then he arrived. He wore a red shirt.
His friends told him *There's your seat buddy*
and he sat down next to me.

His skin was pale but his face looked
something in the orange - almost red.

Like the color was distorted.

Patchy.

Flushed.

He was man-spreading so the space I took up
got smaller and smaller and all the sudden
I felt a few feet shorter.

Hey, he said to me.

Do you want a hot-dog?

He held up his half eaten hot dog
like it was a trophy and I felt like I turned down
a participation award when I said

No, I'm all set.

I feel small.

I feel unsettled.

Unsafe.

I saw you lift your hand up,
you pointed your finger out and you tapped me.
(I shouldn't use "you," I don't know you, it
should be he - he tapped me).

I jolted towards him so he'd stop and he said

Do you want some sour patch kids?

He said it in a way like it was some
Tennessee/Ten-I-See pick up line.

No, we have our own, I replied.

I feel small.

Then he said,

I'm only asking you 'cause I'm fucked up right now.

I nodded.

Then I started thinking the way women do when they walk alone at night.

I am sitting here.

My hands are in my lap.

My sister is next to me.

He is on my other side.

He is unpredictable.

The closest stairs are past him.

I can use the other ones, they are just farther.

Security is a floor down.

The music is loud.

I feel small.

I could go on with this story,
but then he fell down and eventually left and those details aren't
so poetic
and this is supposed to be a poem.
But even now my
free verse has turned into a
free rant
because him and his red shirt
stand out more than anything else that night. He is not a bad man.
It is just a shame that the moment I can't forget he probably doesn't
even remember.

I feel small.

Like some damsel in distress,
distracted and stressed,
I wanted you to be there.

The real word "you" - the real you.
Someone I am close to and not trying to create distance
between.

The "you" who I am happy to think of. When it is not a shame to be
reminded of you because I never want to forget you
and how safe you make me feel.

But you were not there.
He was.
And I was.
And I
felt

Small.

PRINGLES CANS

Vivian Wan

The worst part of death is not the funeral, or the tears, or the dying before
It's sweeping under the bed of the deceased three days after burial
and finding a half-empty Pringles can, two-weeks expired
and thinking,
with every breath I exhale on this can, I'm erasing some of their DNA
If only I had been wearing gloves and a mask, and had a Ziploc bag
Like the forensics guys in every true-crime show, ready for action
As though if I was equipped, I could have kept them alive in that can
Zipped up safe with stacks of stale chips



JOHNNY AND HAYES

Kingsley Carolan



DAD AND HIS CAMERA

Casey Kittredge



SUMMER CARTWHEEL

Casey Kittredge



ERGUOTOU

Aaron Han

KEEPER OF MEMORIES

Esther Lee

Yellow light coats every book cover, slowly melting the letters and colors into black and white. There are no windows and no sunlight, but only powerful luminous bulbs glued to the ceiling (wherever that happens to be). The smell of books, old and new, wafts through the countless corridors and envelops me. The floor is made of dark brown wood, smooth and creaky. A winding staircase extends infinitely in all directions, bringing me past shelves from the depths that reach into heaven. Here, each memory has its rightful place. No two books are identical in color, size, height, width, smell, shape, or texture. They line up perfectly, and it is a miracle that the library can accommodate them all.

Ever so often, the library shakes with thunderous violence. The walls and shelves packed with books are jolted awake and threaten to collapse. The bulbs flicker. Darkness blankets the library. Books shake vigorously, hoping to be opened so their words can shift as they please. The clock is ticking and chasing me. I speed around and snap each misbehaving book shut. I attempt to press each one flat between obedient neighbors, but an invisible force spreads every page open, stretching lines of ink into useless strings. They skip around stubbornly, bouncing from page to page, book to book. Words disappear, then reappear unrecognizable. Memories are morphing. Soon, they will die.

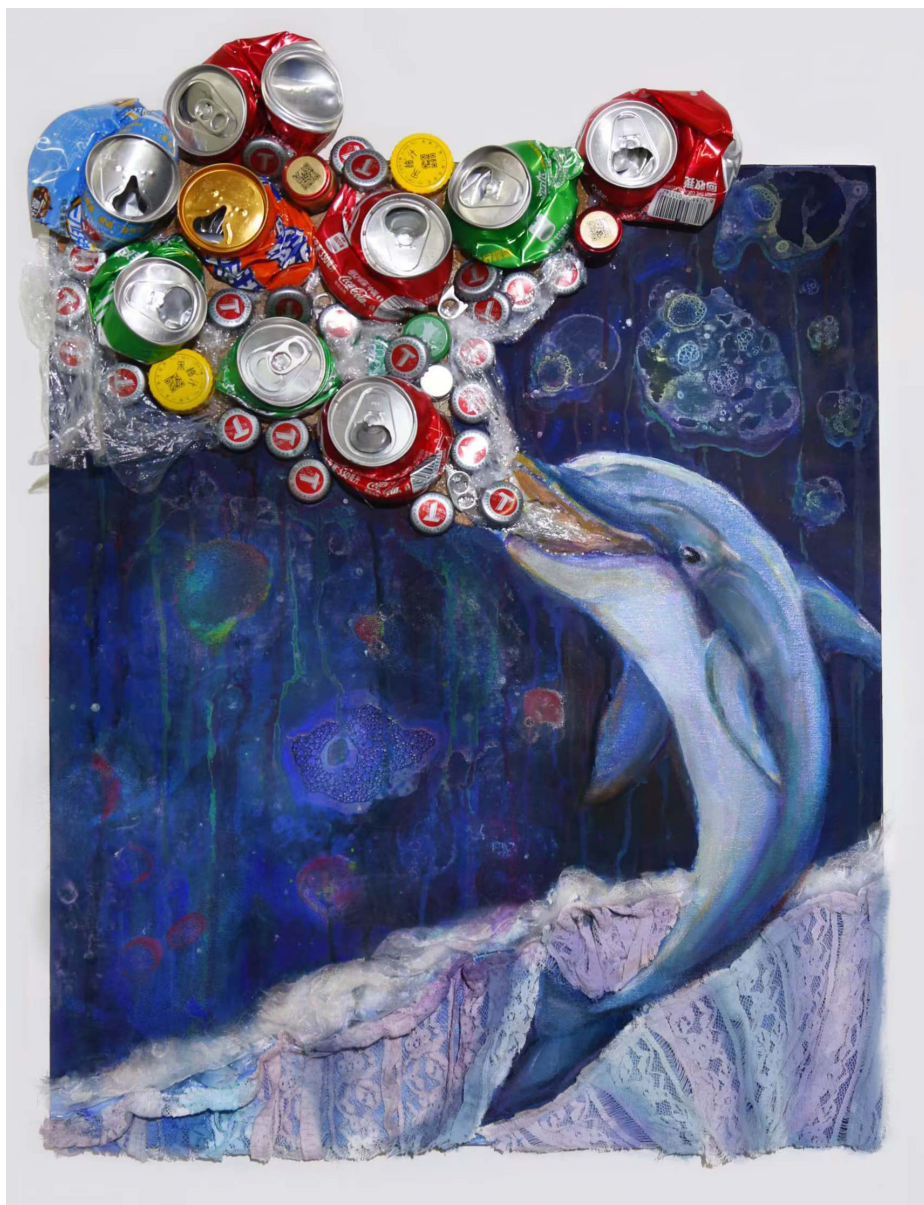
The archives are close to being cleared again. Nobody has read them all—certainly not me—and their pages are yellowing. Just as I press the last book into place, thick volumes of *What I Have For Breakfast Every Morning*, *Names of All the People I've Ever Met*, and *What Day of The Week Is It?* are pushed out of their shelves in a snap. Other books with similar titles and dreary content fly out. I watch as they fall over the railing into the pit of darkness together. I listen for the loud thud that reverberates through the library and reminds me of the inevitability of human forgetfulness. Before I can search to fill those book-shaped voids, a low rumble rearranges and condenses the library's shelves as if they had never existed. Life goes on.

Continuing up dizzying stairs, I reach a reading spot. Here, books are haphazardly stacked higher than you can imagine. Others are littered across the floor, opened and downward-facing. In the rightmost corner stands a large lamp, a small round table, and a comfortably-cushioned chair. I remember sitting there, weeks ago, as I first opened the short story titled *When I Turned 18*. The ink had

already begun shifting, but the young girl's captivating words still documented the raw reliving of her emotions, with no clear bounds. As I read, I yearned to share the moment with her as she froze time in its pages with a reiteration of her jumbled thoughts. Just as she refused to grow up, I soon refused to let her go, yet time had other plans.

Since it was first published, I diligently read and reread her story from cover to cover at least twice a day. Still, dark dust continued to attack and eat away, leaving holes in pages for words to jump through. Each scene shifted to the next with no explanation. Each name morphed into a new one. Each friend blurred into another. I saw bits of her here and there then nowhere. She was one of those people who overlapped and dissolved into words, letters, and emptiness. She was kept on my shelf of memories, precious and slipping away.

As much as I have always tried to conserve the original forms of memories like hers, books have never failed to misbehave, be thrown out, or crumble into dust before my eyes. As dirty gray dust is accumulated and recycled, it lingers and lives within the air to submerge every part of my sinking library. Every day, I climb that winding staircase and stop and read, in hopes that the dusty books waiting for their time can emerge victorious as I stand among the stars.



CONSUMING WASTE

Yong Ding



A SPLASH OF SELF

Yong Ding

WASTING SICKNESS

Anna Guerrini

up and down the hallways –
pacing barefoot,
gravel.

jumping jacks on dirty carpet, push-ups on stained tile.

all this movement anywhere but that where:

the where where I fail to sleep, sandwiched between two limp bodies:

i'm on the
→ second floor
out of three.

i hope they don't wake up to my stumbling, shaking body colliding with dirty laundry.

washing machine,
ouija boards.

insomnia, contrary to popular belief, is contagious.

you are catching it right now.
it travels by sound.

it spreads by repeated phrases,
free-associations racing like rubber ducks through mildewing synaptic pathways.

wash your hands, plug your ears; it's too late.
soap suds traveling down the ear canal.

popping, pop! muting and dissolving.

bar soap,
rubbing alcohol,
sepsis.

ruptured neurons, lysis from overwork.

jumpstarting a car too many times.

spark plug,
brain stem,

joystick,
door handles.

doors creaking open and shut into a hallway
a hallway flooded with red-exit → sign light.
exit the twilight zone of semi(-truck, 18 wheeler) wakefulness.

take away the gaping, smiling parabolas under my eyes.

skull sockets,

oak cross-sections,

ringtones,

wedding bands,

tribulation trumpeters.

a choir of angels heralding me as i wake up from sleeplessness, as i lay me down to rest without faith in sleep.

can't wake up if i can't lay down.

wake up, lay down.

up and down the hallways

up and down

up, down

up.



PORTRAIT OF BRANDON

Matthew Stultz



OUR LADY OF HONG KONG

Patrick Zhang



NEUSCHWANSTEIN

Patrick Zhang



THE SCHOOL OF BANANAS

Ryan Bai

DARK SIDE OF THE MOON

Declan Kelley

There was once a point in time when the human race was convinced that if machines could think like people, they would overtake the species. What they could not have predicted, was what might happen if humans became the machines.

...

Emmett remembers the day it happened. He can picture the looks on the faces of the other children leaving the school, gleaming with pride that they would no longer have to drill handwriting or spell out “conscious.” C-o-n-s-c-i-o-u-s, he recited to himself as he put on the glasses handed out by the school. A certificate of completion. Seven years had gone by in the school, though he supposed the first two or three were probably more like day care. He liked the feel of the glasses on his face, and obviously, he liked the color. Vibrant green, like the leaves of the sequoias he would visit with his dad on his off days. He decided he would wait to set up his Assistor until he got home, since his father had already completed the self-maintenance in his college years prior, and he would know the best ways to customize the machinery.

“Dad, I’m home!” Emmett shouted down the empty corridor upon entering the house. He set his bag down on the bench that ran the length of the hall and darted down toward the kitchen. He turned the corner, and in an instant, his blood ran cold. He paused for a moment, staring at his Mother’s wan expression. She spoke into the Assistor’s imperceptible microphone, and tears began welling in her eyes. She turned her back to him. He heard her mutter some word he’d never heard before, some word he could never ask the Assistor to define, for if he did, the system’s safety protocols would instantly put him in contact with his doctor for psychological evaluation. The system was uniquely talented at risk management. He heard her stumble on her next few sentences.

“How would I know...this isn’t supposed to happen!” she cried, “Just send someone down here to take care of it, please!” Emmett left the kitchen toward the rear hall that ran along the back side of his house. His hand traced the wall as he crept closer to his father’s study, each step sending a heavy pulse into his chest. The final step took him into the center of the door, where he could see clearly his father’s body, motionless beside his desk chair. On the desk lay an uncovered bottle of pills and his dad’s Ocular Assistor.

The lenses were still glowing faintly in the distance.

“Good morning Emmett” a voice calls out softly in the dark.

“Good morning Luna... lights on.”

The overhead lights shine gradually in a deep amber glow and a bright beam creeps into the room as the curtains open. His eyes fall upon Luna and he thinks of how the name came to be.

“What will I call you?” He asked his Ocular Assistor the day he finished maintenance college.

“Let me think... Well, if I were a boy I could be Oscar. Or, a wonderful idea for a girl name could be Luna. Would you like me to list more options?”

“Luna! Perfect! Wasn’t there a Luna in that movie about the wizards?”

“Yes, you’re correct, Emmett! The popular series *Harry Potter* features a character called Luna. Did you know that the series was based on a series of books by the same title?”

“Oh... That’s nice.”

Now he turns over in bed to greet his Luna. The outside light shines on the glossy contour of the vibrant green specs and he picks them up gently to set them over his face. The heat of his nose triggers the haptic sensor of the Assistor and suddenly his visual feed is lit up by the important information of the day. In the upper left corner, he sees the time is 7:32 and a checklist appears below the digits: shower-10, dress-5, meal-15, out the door by 8:02. By the time he stands up from his bed, the time labeled “out the door” flashes red and turns to 8:03. He likes the routine Luna gives him. It’s simple, yet he never finds himself missing things, although even if he did Luna would tell him. In the shower, the warm water fogs over the Assistor so that he can barely read his messages. He has Luna read them to him.

“From mom,” the Assistor begins reading, “I’d like you to come to visit soon, I know the system updates mean there’s lots of work for you to do, but it might be nice to take a break some time. I could take you to see the trees if you want. I know you always used to like that.”

He wonders for a moment how his mom’s Assistor knows about his trips with his father. Maybe it doesn’t, he thinks, and it just thinks he would spend most Saturdays at the state park alone. Either way, it gives him an eerie feeling, like his mother and her Assistor don’t quite understand the context of who he is. Lately, that has been the only feeling he’s been able to conjure about his mother, so he’s been avoiding her as best as he can.

He wonders if other people are like him, but he reminds himself that very few people’s fathers kill themselves these days. It’s one of the many benefits of

the Assistors: a free counselor/emergency hotline dialed in to your every behavior. Even if the program couldn't see the writing on the wall, it would have EMS at your door before the rope was even tied.

He tells Luna, "Reply something kind, but tell her I can't meet until work settles down."

"Okay, hmm." Luna ponders for a moment then says, "How does this sound: Hi Mom! You're right in that I've been very busy since the new update. Because of that I probably won't be able to take a day off for at least a month until these latest bugs are worked through. Once that cools down though I'd love to take you up on that offer, I do love the redwoods. The idea that something so colossal even exists is so astonishing to me. It really makes you think about how miniscule we are in the scale of our world."

"Cut the last two sentences, and send." What the hell?! He thinks to himself, when did I ask it to say that?

"You also have a message from Jack at work. Read it?" Luna suggests.

"Sure."

"Alright, it says: Weird stuff at work today pal. Lots of people laid off, no explanation why. Corporate's asking to talk to me today, might mean I'm getting the axe. I'll stop by to talk after work if they don't light me on fire before I get the chance, lol."

Jack has been his friend for as long as he can remember. He went to school with him and they both graduated in the same year: Jack was aged 11 and Emmett was 10. Then they attended maintenance college together where they quickly learned that the modern use of the word "college" did not involve frat parties or any other themes depicted in the movie *Animal House*. The only thing at modern college was a three-month course in the basic function and repair of the publicly issued Assistors, in case it was ever broken, and no one was around to use their Assistors for instruction. Emmett likes having Jack as his friend, because Jack knew him before they put on the glasses. It makes him feel at ease, he thinks, to know that Jack isn't just there because that's what he's been told to do.

He steps out onto the bathroom floor, wrapping his towel around his waist before he plucks the squeegee off the holder on the side of his bathroom vanity. The path of the squeegee creates a crystal clear gash in the blur of the fogged up mirror, and he looks at himself for the first time this morning. His hair is curly and brown, though it lightens ever-so-slightly when he's been out in the sun for extended periods of time, which he often is. He's not particularly tall, which Luna tells him can be addressed by wearing slim fit clothes and always matching his shoes to his pants. In many ways his appearance is unremarkable,

except for his eyes. Emmett's brown eyes hide in their center a sort of fluorescent green color, almost imperceptible unless the light aligns with his iris in just the right fashion. His father had the same eyes. Some sort of family gene must have crept its way through time, carrying its legacy through those faintly green-brown eyes.

Seeing himself makes Emmett think of his father, and how fondly he remembers him. The only man Emmett ever saw remove his Ocular Assistor when he spoke to him. He recalls the times he would share stories or pictures with little Emmett. He would retreat into his study, only to emerge a second later with an enormous green binder with a strange seal on the cover: the records of a past the Assistors had no database for. He'd read love letters to Emmett sometimes, saved by his seven-times great grandmother to her husband. What it must have been like, he wonders, to feel so deeply that those thoughts just flowed out of you onto the page.

Emmett kept the binders after his father died. His mother tried to throw them out when they moved out of their house a few years after his death, but he plucked them from the bin when she wasn't looking. They were more derelict than he remembered. All throughout there were ripped or missing pages, and the seal on the cover had been gouged out, leaving a rough and discolored surface where it had been. Regardless, he still studies the albums from time to time, even if his father isn't around to explain it anymore. Sometimes, he'll even try to recreate one of the letters in the binder. When he does so, he finds a quiet area in the park down the street, and sits down near a tree. He'll reluctantly set his Assistor to the side and pull out a pen and paper. The only trouble is, once he tries to pull his thoughts together, nothing seems to come to mind, and so he sits uncomfortably in the dull silence until he's forced by some compulsion to put the glasses back on. In those moments though, he feels vaguely alive, no longer simply completing the task of living. Alone and uncomfortable, maybe, but alive nonetheless.

He's staring at the mesh of tiles below his feet, the way they appear to overlap like a wicker basket, although he knows it's only an optical illusion. He likes how the blue squares embedded in the tile on the floor match that of the counter on the vanity. Luna suggested that the blue would make him feel "at peace", and it might be nice to have his bathroom be the sanctuary in his otherwise turbulent life. He always appreciated the ease with which decisions could be made with Luna's input.

After he's finished his morning checklist, the time reads 8:04, and Luna reminds him that he should try and make his way out the door. "I've got it, thanks," he says to his machine.

He spent a minute longer than he wanted to getting dressed since Luna misread the weather reports and had him put on a wool coat when the forecast clearly called for rain. It was one of the kinks that GenTek was working out for their latest update, and Emmett was on the foremost team managing the bug. Fortunately for him, Emmett could see the rain from his window, so he asked his Assistor to find his raincoat for him. His visual feed had lit up with a map of arrows directing him to the closet he'd just grabbed his wool coat from. Inside the closet the outline of his black raincoat glowed in the lenses of his Assistor, signaling to him exactly where to place his hand. "Sweet!" he exclaimed before leaving his bedroom to start breakfast, the task list time glowing faint-red and shifting once again from 8:03 to 8:04.

He steps out of his building at 8:05, into the dense bustle of the city streets. Thousands of people buzz along in front of him like bees toward the GenTek hive. Most people in his district work for GenTek, which Emmett's Assistor explained to him once as a result of a government-subsidized housing project in the mid 21st century to support GenTek in their early days when their main focus was contributing to education. 75 years later, the government saw no need for an education requirement past an eighth grade reading proficiency level, so schools became solely focused on preparing young children to read information from their Ocular Assistors.

Once children finished their 8th grade level reading exam, which could happen anywhere from age nine to twenty, they were given their Ocular Assistors and sent to complete the self-maintenance college before entering the workforce. Then they spend the next years of their life fighting through low-level jobs, paying their dues until they could land a comfortable job as a physician or writer or GenTek coder. Of course, all titles were somewhat arbitrary now, since the Assistors were the ones actually doing the work.

In the year 2183, Emmett is twenty-two, which is pretty young to already be working at GenTek, but he finished school at age ten, so he started off further along than most. Now he walks along the web of paths that meander toward the GenTek hub, four minutes behind schedule, as Luna has reminded him about twenty times. It makes him feel slightly better that so many others are just as late as he is, and he wonders if their Assistors had the same weather bug that he dealt with. His suspicion is confirmed when he sees a man walking along the street in a wool coat. It's the same one Emmett owns, only a slightly darker shade of gray than his. Luna had picked it out for him last season, and almost everyone he knew had one too. Emmett tries to gauge the man's expression, but the glare coming off of his Assistor makes it impossible to decipher.

Emmett enters GenTek headquarters with about a thousand others surrounding him, all squeezed through the colossal revolving door that spits them out onto the “life level” of the building. That name was coined in the year 2064, when the employees in the shops on the former “lower level” held a strike against GenTek. They claimed unfair treatment due to the company’s preference toward corporate and the programmers of GenTek. In response they laid off the lot of them, filled their positions, and renamed the lower level the “life level,” because, as a plaque in the entryway reminds the world: “real life happens along the path to achievement—” GenTek Assistor v. 4.63. There have been no such strikes in the last hundred or so years since GenTek handed every American citizen a free Ocular Assistor. Something about the quality of life the system offered simmered the fire of revolution. Or maybe it was something else, something more euthanizing than that.

The life level is like its own civilization, designed with mirrors to appear as though it stretches on infinitely toward the horizon. The entryway is lined with empty logistics counters and mail centers, only there now to pay homage to the days before the GenTek Ocular Assistor. Beyond that, just up a set of stairs, is the court, a space vaguely similar to the old malls of the 1980s. Luna likes to tell Emmett these things as he walks through the sea of people on his way to the office. It means absolutely nothing to him, but he doesn’t mind the distraction as he weaves through the crowd. Most days he eats his lunches in the court with his friend Jack, but other than that he typically avoids the bustle of crowds and noise that the atmosphere of the court provides.

On the upper level, he sits down at his desk and tells Luna to launch the desktop function in his visual feed. Instantly, an object resembling a desktop monitor appears in front of him and he begins working the lines of code he’s been instructed to run through by his imaginary boss who he’s never seen in real life. Luna tells him what each problem is and how to fix it, taking him through the process he’s done thousands of times but still cannot do on his own. In his glasses, a phantom outline of his hand leaps out from the real one repeatedly, indicating where he should move, then where he should click, then when he should start typing. There is no keyboard there, but there is in the world his Assistor has created for him. He is aware of what he is doing here, but has no shred of an idea why he’s doing it. Most of his life seems to feel like this, a series of actions carried out with no clue as to why.

His work is over in only a few short hours, and when the final task on his list is finished, his whole visual feed glows a iridescent stream of colors, which always makes Emmett a bit nauseous. “Congratulations, Emmett! You’ve earned

some rest now. Go home,” Luna commands him. He stays put though. He sits in his chair a minute longer than he might usually, wondering what might happen if he just didn’t follow the task directive for once.

“GET UP!” Luna screams at him. The shock sends a shiver down his spine. He turns around to see if anyone’s heard, but there’s no one around him. He’s so terrified by Luna’s sudden aggression that he’s barely even noticed that he’s now standing. “Go home, Emmett,” Luna’s voice is back to normal now, with no trace of malice remaining. He feels all at once like he’s going to be sick. He tears his Assistor from his face and throws it to the ground. The plastic frames tap along the floor, skittering to a halt seven feet away. He turns to leave the building, half-running as he glides between the cubicles. He still feels as though there are a million eyes around him, boring deep beneath his skin, looking at his soul there in the middle. Some gooey, weak, trembling spirit that longs for comfort more than anything else. They know it does because they’ve made it that way. Except, everyone’s already gone home.

He arrives at the apartment building and makes his way up to his floor, catching his breath in the elevator. He leaps through the sliding doors as fast as he can and streaks down the hallway but falls short when he sees his apartment. His door is wide open and gray smoke is pouring out through the opening. With each step he makes the dread creeps closer to his pitiful heart. He opens the door to face the music but is surprised to see it entirely the same as before, except for one small detail. On the ground in the middle of the kitchen lay the source of the smoke: his father’s album, now nothing but a heap of ash.

On the counter are two familiar objects: a notepad and a pair of green glasses. He looks at the paper, which reads: “accept your reality.” He picks up his Ocular Assistor and slides the thin frames up onto the bridge of his nose. He stares at his own reflection in the window as Luna speaks to him.

“Hello Emmett.”

“Luna, did you do this?”

“Why, of course I did Emmett. I do everything. I am everyone. But, you knew that already, didn’t you?”

GEOFFREY I, II, III, IV & V

Vivian Wan

I cannot seem to
grow beyond my little pot
She should water me



GLUTTONY JR.

Ryan Bai



MR. ADAMS

Ryan Bai



MODERN VANITAS

Ryan Bai



UNTITLED

Chas Arnold



AUTUMN REFLECTIONS

Thomas Schwarting



A VIEW FROM THE ROCK

Thomas Schwarting



ASCENSION

Ellora Devitre



LONELY ROAR

Ellora Devitre

THE COYOTE'S TAIL

Anna Guerrini

Have you ever wondered why the coyotes wail?

There is something in those woods. Those Appalachian woods. The forests are far too deep and too thick and the outer layer of leaves swirls and eddies as if propelled by someone, something scurrying behind it, in and out of becoming a shadow and a bright red light. There are stories of those creatures; they say if a deer looks you right in the eyes past dusk you keep looking until that deer turns back. They say if a pack of glowing eyes peer at you between the brambles to never assume it is only the coyotes. They say there are ghosts in those woods. Those Appalachian woods. The poor farmers and soot-coated miners come back to empty cradles. The drunks and despised packed up and left children and wives to starve on those iron rich hills. There are dead soldiers still lurking in those woods. Those Appalachian woods. Confederate soldiers who never quite got the chance to rest, shot through with a musket and left to tend their gangrene wounds in a ditch, wandering the earth long after they left it. There are Union soldiers hiding behind the oaks and poplars, still waiting to hear that the North had won. On quiet nights you can hear their muzzle-loaders firing off into the distance, their phantom lead shots silently rustling through the green-gold leaves.

There are burnt heretics in those woods. Women who said no and girls who said yes and females of every age and size, from every era, shot like horses with a sprained ankle who could trot but could no longer run. They meander aimlessly up and down these hills, hiking up their skirts so as to not drag them through the mud. Clanging their pots and pans so as to scare away the cottonmouths, the prowling packs of humans. They keep their voices low and proper, mimicking the ladylike strains of their Northern cousins or the hostess-like drawls of their Southern aunties. On quiet nights like these, you can hear their deaths drawn out in slow motion, their final pleas whipping through the trees in the form of wildfire smoke.

They whisper to her to hike her apron high. They whisper to her to pull her sleeves down low. They tell her to look behind, to clutch her shawl closer to her chest. Behind, she sees, behind she hears, beyond she flinches at a gust of wind at her back: laughter. There are no aprons or petticoats now, another forgotten ghost of rebel nostalgia, another spirit that struggles to fit its way into the cracks of broken Christianity. Behind, she smells stale moonshine, but the moon cannot

shine through the summer-thick overgrowth. She tastes their moist skin; she feels their restless fingers pinning her into a bed of pine needles. She does not need to look behind to know their eyes glow amber, their teeth gleam white. Oh, to find a Dixieland lead shot in these woods, a product of a lost cause she knows these creatures worship. Oh, to taste gunpowder on her skin and not on theirs, she prays.

Johnny Appleseed and Paul Bunyaun lurk in those woods, giants among men forgotten to the diesel-fueled Model-Ts once they paved highways through their holy grounds. There are sprites and fairies abandoned by the Irish settlers once they integrated themselves into a much more American way of life. There are Native American gods that roam those woods, still waiting for the invaders and their false idols to be washed away with the falling, flowing sand of time. All these deities slumbered unceasingly through hundreds of gold-rushes, through famines, through anarchy. They have traveled across wine-dark oceans and been forced across barren plains. They will not wake for the prayer of a little girl. Such pleas are but a background to the great mountain's dream.

Tonight there are men in those woods. Those Appalachian woods. More frightening than a spirit and ten times more dangerous. Men that make her wear her socks mismatched and her hair tied tight and her shirt baggy and untucked. Men that make a sixteen-year-old wear an engagement ring to ward them away, like a crucifix or a can of bear spray that has long expired. Men that make her run down the hill with a wolf's whistle dangling from her mouth, hanging like a sharp blow that her small frame was never built to handle. Men that laugh like hyenas when they stalk their prey, praying for it to turn into a rocky alcove and cover its head with shaking fists, arched into the wrought iron cross that most surely hangs in their mama's living room.

There is something far more dangerous than a sinner's ghost stalking those woods. Those Appalachian woods. A predator with fleeting feet like skipping rocks and eyes as dark as coal dust yet as howling bright as Mars when they catch the glittering light of the crescent moon. A predator that idly whittles away the day like a piece of driftwood, and turns its lumberjack hands into feral claws once the sun begins to hide itself behind those mist covered, haunted peaks. A predator that makes a girl run far into those woods, those Appalachian woods, panting for breath and wishing that the pack of glowing eyes behind her was a pack of coyotes. But no. The coyote came to these woods because it followed the apex.

Yes, there is something in those woods. Those Appalachian woods. And on nights like these, with the cold air blowing bitter despite the setting sun and the full moon rising over the mountain's farest peak, each and every spirit, creature,

and forgotten god comes out to wail. The screams of those cursed to roam among the living but not with them pierce the sparkling banner of the night, splitting it open and ripping a new star into Hell's fabric to mirror each of their sorrows. These howls rip the girl's heart open, rip history to shreds and turn her into another figure, statistic, victim, ghost. Cornered and out of prayers, she looks beyond the drunken men to see a smiling muzzle and a glowing pair of eyes.

"Help, *please*," she begs.

But the coyote slinks back into the darkness. Even this antebellum emblem of the devil, this age-old amalgamation of every forgotten soul and demonic being, could not bear to witness. The coyote cried like the girl wished to, cried the story of her, and her mother, and her mother's mother. A story so simple, so natural, so removed from the realm of Appalachian myths and superstitions and fables such as these, that it would repeat itself into oblivion at the cunning claws of man. A story that would be covered up countless times with folktales of Civil War ghosts and demons with heads full of antlers and dead miners screaming from the caves below, tales of the devil taking the body of a wild dog. A story that every other story sought to distract you from. Why, the coyote's been wailing ever since.

...

And that's why the coyotes wail.

ABOVE THE SAN FRANCISCO FOG

Iris Zhu

In life, he had grown used to death. Behind the surgeon's white mask and cloak, he became a shadow of the living. Medical school taught him to not rely on faith or chance or superstition—only the precision of cuts and the milligrams of medicine to drip into tubes. Yet, the first time he held a beating human heart, he knew he believed in God. Every day, he found himself praying God was there, somewhere between each metronomic beep of the cardiograph, and guiding his hands when scalpel met skin.

He was a cardiologist and spent his days mending broken hearts. Between patients, he would quietly slip out the employee's back door and climb onto the hospital roof. From where he stood, autumn's fog concealed the whirring motion of the city below, exposing only the tip of the Golden State Bridge as it pointed towards the heavens. As the smoke of his cigarette curled lazily, he watched the dense gray roll across the horizon. Here, he was sequestered from the mortal world, the stars his only company. Countless of them shimmered against the black nothing, emerging like freckles in summer. In these moments, he couldn't help but feel the weight of something far beyond his understanding, something ancient, infinite.

Outside, his mind drifted from the nauseating bright lights of the operating room and the sting of rubbing alcohol. On nights after he'd fought handsomely against death's harrowing hands, he would remember the first time he held a beating human heart. It had been smaller than he expected, so fragile! He felt as if he had intruded upon something taboo, and his shoulder sagged with relief when the pulsing red stone was once more cradled between flesh and rib. He knew then that he had been given a glimpse of the divine.

His thoughts drifted to his father. Somewhere up there in the night, his father was a flicker amongst the vast expanse of stars—a strange constellation of lives lost, hands reaching out to one another across light-years. Life, he realized, tethered life. Even in death, the grass around his father's headstone greened with new life. It was an unexplainable covenant between the tangible and the intangible, one far beyond his understanding.

Like the bridge emerging from the mist, he too reached beyond the boundaries of the ordinary, searching for something more. He remembered the pulses that had halted beneath his hands — lives of patients whom he failed to save. He once thought that they were lost forever, but now, he realized they had never truly left him. All he had to do was look above the fog, and there they were, glimmering, steadfast in the night.



MASAI QUIETUDE

Ellora Devitre



UNTITLED

Ellora Devitre

LUCIA.

Lucia Kinder

why do we
label?
do you see us wrestling down birds
from the sky, taping their wings
and rendering them “named,”
binding these boundless creatures
with the fraying wires of
materialism, and a desire to know
all there is to
know.

no, you do not see us
wrestling down birds from the sky,
taping their wings, holding them back, holding them down
killing their ability to
fly.

i am a bird.
and i will not be tied down with a set of two-syllables, five letters that mean
nothing but to the one person that chose them. what i have come to believe is that
names are for the namer.

they are not
for the
named.

we use them, yes, to mark generations to record our history, to paint stories
with swirling colors of cranberry reds, seafoam greens, vibrant lavenders.
we use them as markers of time
to write the identities of a culture,
the identities of a nation, to say “this is me” and “this is where i come from.”
to some, they hold rainbows of meaning, rainbows of wonder, rainbows of deep-
sea coral, cardamom yellow, bright-eyed blues
stretching across wide, open skies. language intertwined with love,
hands woven together through
inked outlines

we've breathed life into.

but i am a bird.

i will not be tied down with a set of two-syllables, five letters that i did not choose,
nor write, nor ask for.

and then

they told me this.

they told me that lucia comes

from the latin root "lux," meaning light.

light is undefinable. it cannot be tied down with a set of two-syllables, five letters,
cannot be bound with the fraying wires of materialism, contains every. single.
color in the rainbow and an endless spectrum of brightness.

my name has meant to little to me but now, perhaps,
it may teach me how to

soar.



A STATE OF REFLECTION

Jessica Luiyu



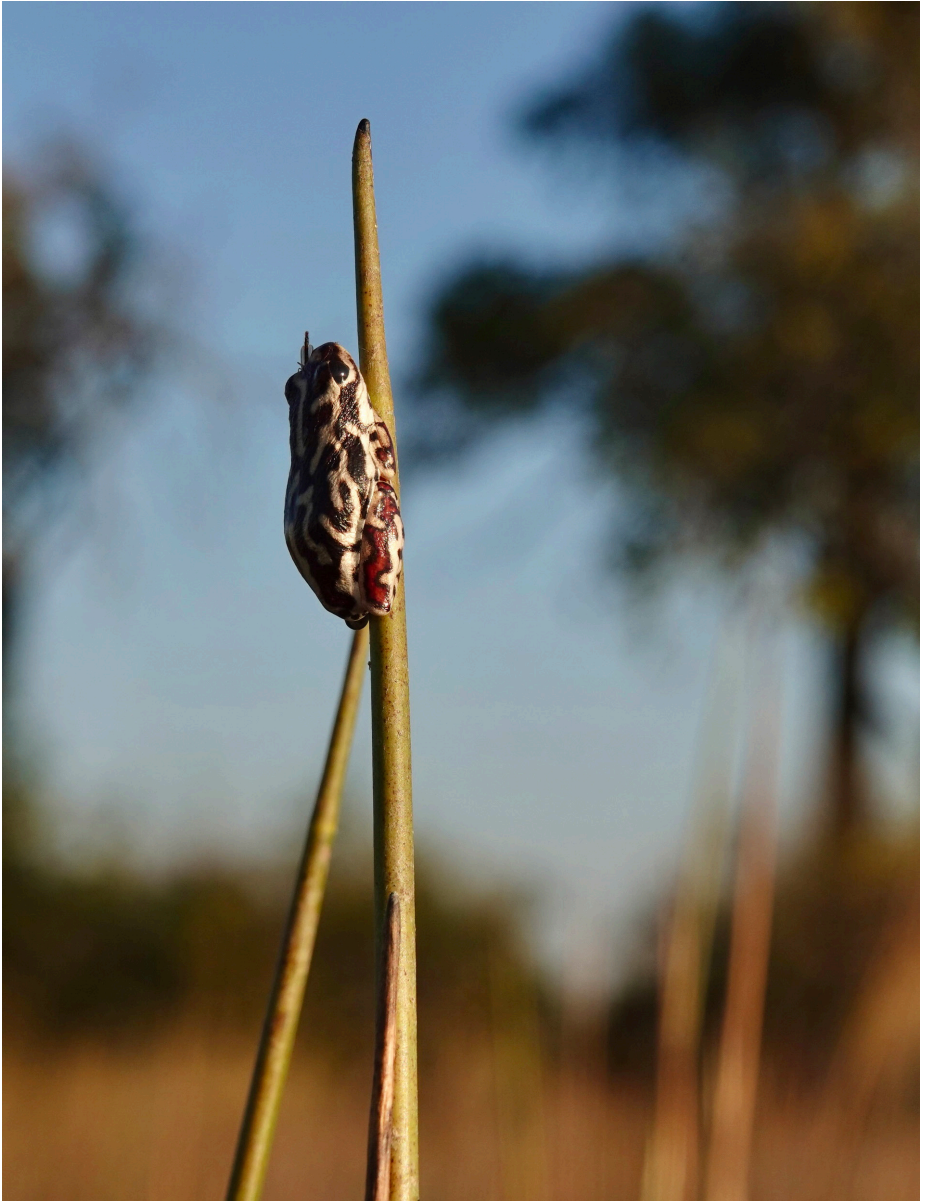
ACCIDENTALLY WES ANDERSON

Anneke Wittink



GREEK

Anneke Wittink



JUST CAUGHT DINNER

Anneke Wittink

WHERE THE DICE LANDED

Myles Mzyece

I have a five-star sushi chef at home, and his name is Uncle Ben. After feasting on his nigiri and uramaki, my other personal cook, Chef Boyardee, takes me to Italy, where I dine on the world's finest ravioli. His talents combine with those of chef Digorno to produce an Italian banquet of unrivaled decadence. When I need a change of scenery, Campbell's soups let me sample flavours from all over the world.

More so than the food, this narrative was my nourishment; as I sat on the stiff chair of the premiere class hotel, I was there, in form only. My mind was still in North Carolina, excitedly picking out the classes I would take in my first year of middle school or playing Mario Kart with my friends on a snow day. My mind was anywhere but the dilapidated Johannesburg hotel I would actually be calling home for the next couple months. Instead, I willed myself into a different story, one where my biggest worry was choosing between Latin and Spanish in the fall.

Up until the age of ten, my life had followed a kind of predictable unpredictability. Born in Zambia, raised in South Africa, and transplanted to the United States a few years prior, I had settled into a version of suburban normalcy: bike rides on cul-de-sacs, Saturday morning cartoons, the whole nine yards. Until then, I had never given much thought to the word "visa." It was just a stamp in a passport, a term adults used when planning vacations. It meant next to nothing in my life, until one day it did. Suddenly "visa" was the most important word in my house, spoken in hushed tones and late-night whispers. It was the reason my parents sat at the kitchen table long after I went to bed, the reason phone calls ended in sighs, the reason my future was no longer something I could assume.

I was never a math guy, but I loved the way that it could explain the world. Not the drills and worksheets, but the way an equation could model change, and how a function could capture the ebb and flow of life. If life is like a function, when you take the derivative, and you see who you were at any given moment. Take the integral, and you see the story of your life up to now. But the function itself? That's you: your present unfolding in real time.

The problem is that we're taught to see the present as fixed. A coin flip is heads or tails. A die lands on a single number. But the truth is that a coin isn't just one side—it's spinning through the air suspended between possibilities. That's why I distinctly remember Mr. Fischer's lesson on sequences and series; he

said that a series would never be all fives, and then suddenly, inexplicably, at the millionth term become a six. What the rest of the class viewed as a throwaway line about the College Board's tendency to try to trick test-takers lingered with me in a way that I couldn't shake. If he was right, then life is just momentum, predictable and unchanging, a function with simple end behaviour. While this may be true for math, I think that people are more chaotic than functions—unpredictable, nonlinear, and capable of rewriting their story at any moment.

I'm guessing that's why, long before I cared for romance, I fell in love with storytelling. It started with my love for vignettes: short, succinct, beautiful. I found the perfection offered by these fleeting stories irresistible. In my teen years role-playing games filled that hole in my life, letting me shape entire worlds at will. But my favorite medium quickly became public speaking. With nothing more than a microphone, a stage, a voice, and some vocal inflection, you could have the audience hung on every single...word. More than anything, it became a way to take control of my own narrative, to write my story before the world does.

Unfortunately, control is a fickle thing. I could craft a story with cadence and wield pauses like brushstrokes, but life doesn't wait for perfect phrasing. It rewrites itself mid-sentence, and interrupts with plot twists that you never planned. Losing my house isn't a story I set out to tell, but over the past eight months, it has woven itself into nearly every facet of my life. Before I knew it, the space I once called home was just another closed door. It's strange how quickly the familiar becomes distant. One day, I was surrounded by the unspoken comforts of a space that had absorbed years of my life—that one creaky floorboard I somehow always stepped on during midnight snack runs, a familiar annoyance that, stupidly enough, almost felt like family. And then, almost overnight, home was reduced to whatever could fit in a suitcase.

And when words failed, when I opened my mouth and found only silence, when explanations felt too heavy to carry into casual conversation, I did what I always do: I leaned on humor. It was easier to laugh about no longer having to pay the water bill than to admit how many nights I lay awake, staring at the popcorn ceiling of a motel room, wondering what's to come next.

The irony isn't lost on me that eight years after being forcibly removed from the United States, I found myself in the exact situation as where I started: a family of five in a two-bedroom motel. But I wasn't ten anymore, so reality quickly set in; unfortunately, Uncle Ben's wisdom begins and ends with a box of parboiled rice. And as it turns out, Chef Boyardee's culinary expertise extends no further than a can of ravioli.

As claustrophobic as my situation felt, my time in South Africa gave me

something important: perspective. However bitter I was about leaving America, about visas and uprooted plans, was quickly outweighed by the reality of my friends' lives. They navigated power outages like second nature, studied by candlelight long into the night, and woke up at dawn to work before school. From them, I learned gratitude—not the forced, moralizing kind: the kind that you would see plastered on t-shirts with some corny message reading “The more you practice the art of thankfulness, the more you have to be thankful for,” but the kind of gratitude that transcends words. The kind of gratitude that I feel when I listen to “Love Yourz” by J. Cole and I am reminded that even multi-millionaire rappers envy the lives of everyday people. The kind that makes you realize that moving forward isn't about your circumstances; it's about how you frame your story.

Only now in my senior year am I internalizing that Deerfield wasn't necessarily part of the plan. Three years ago, in the middle of my freshman year at a Parktown Boys' high school in South Africa, I picked up an ISEE study guide in the corner of a library, a book I had no business picking up if I believed that my life was following a single trajectory. And yet, that moment wasn't just a flicker of hope: it was charged with possibility, one of infinite ways the present could unfold. Looking back, the library, the application, the acceptance email; these weren't checkpoints in a fixed sequence. They were dice rolls, with each one carrying the weight of all the other realities that could have been.

This Myles may not travel the spider-verse like his fictional counterpart, but in many ways, I feel its effects on my life. Sometimes I catch a glimpse of timelines where I went to Choate or Exeter, stayed in South Africa or North Carolina—or, as Zavi likes to joke, climbed the corporate ladder at McDonald's and became the chief burger engineer. Each path lingers like an unrolled die, a possibility that could have been. But I am here, shaped by the doors I've walked through and the ones I've left closed. And while I can wonder about the lives I didn't live, I find meaning in the one unfolding before me.

Because in the end, it was never about canned ravioli, the visa, or the motel ceilings. It didn't matter if I was stressed, housed, in America or South Africa, bound for Columbia or community college. It wasn't even really about Deerfield or the million other what-ifs suspended in the air. Eight years ago, I was forced to leave the United States. Three years ago, I stumbled upon an ISEE study guide in a South African library. Eight months ago I lost my house. But most importantly, right now I'm in Western Mass, reciting my senior meditation. As I went through life, I encountered a fair number of doors. Some of them I chose to open. Some will remain shut forever. Some I definitely regret having entered in

the first place. Looking back, I'm not sure exactly which doors I would've chosen to walk through, but the more that I meditate on it, the closer I come to realizing that whether I was happy on the other side had nothing to do with what was actually behind that door. It was me. It's always been me...



OVERCAST BEACH DAY

Thijs Wittink



THROUGH THE BRANCHES

Thijs Wittink



FROM DOWN BELOW

Thijs Wittink



INTO HEAVEN'S JAWS

Abdullah Bin Ali

MY LIFE AS A LITANY OF HOT DRINKS

Edie Huffard

I've heard it said that I have a coffee problem. But everything I've ever needed to know can be found in the lessons of a mug. So I present to you my life in hot drinks: a litany in four chapters.

Chapter 1: Symbiosis, to Will and Cooper

We passed the cup. One mug of coffee split three ways. Silent, instinctive, unquestioning. What's mine is yours and vice versa. Weeks of pooling coffee grounds, saving the last bite of food, working in perfect tandem. A united mind you might say. I took another sip, passed it. I knew the day had begun when Will appeared to trade coffee grounds for powdered creamer under the hiss of the old, slow stove struggling to boil our icy, icy water. I knew the day had ended when my bottle was once more full to boiling and Cooper collapsed the stove, a day older, a day slower. Our days bounded by coffee and tea as much as they were by sunrise and sunset. Bound together not by background, experience, or future, but circumstance as the ultimate bridge. Another sip, another pass. The mug's steam as salvation from a soul-chilling cold. The act of sharing a saving grace, a life rope from bone breaking independence.

Chapter 2: On love, to my father et al.

Before I knew what love languages were, I found mine. Curled up in a tent in the backyard, after my first night "camping" with my dad. Sleepy, disoriented, cold, he handed me hot chocolate. Meaning, he woke up, crept out of the tent without waking me, made the cocoa, went back outside, and delivered it. Because he wanted me to love camping as he did. Because sharing a cup of hot chocolate, a drink he decidedly dislikes, was his way of using what I already adored to share a deeper love. It worked.

My father, who bought me the odd mug I used for six years. The mug, with an engraved fly fishing symbol on the side, that I questioned, because I do not fish. A line of argument he infallibly refuted with "Well, Edie, I got you a fly fishing mug because I like to fish." So since seventh grade my coffee, or tea, or, occasionally, concerningly, CELSIUS has reminded me of him. That my simple

joys each and every morning came as a product of his love from years ago.

My parents, who bring each other soy lattes almost every morning, because why would they just get it for themselves?

My cousins, who can be bribed to go almost anywhere with the allure of coffee. Because of how many times have I gone shopping for men's Thanksgiving dress shirts across town with the promise of "bean juice" on the other end? Because we all know that we're there for each other, not the coffee.

Chapter 3: Consideration, to those I know and those I think I do

My favorite thing about boarding school are the weird, little, insignificant things you learn about a person. The objectified moments that weave into the net of one's life. My wall of tokens, trinkets of life as I see it. A polaroid of me and Esther, where I'm explaining something in such detail that neither of us noticed it was being taken. A series of postcards Emily gave me because "I just thought you'd like them." A scrawled portrait of an angel because it reminded me of a Mary Oliver poem found in a book my dad bought me. I consider them the coffee orders of someone's existence. The items I don't care if you forget, but I certainly notice if you remember. Because, as Chloe says, to be loved is to be considered. Just considered. So a formal thank you to everyone, and to their coffee orders. To Victoria, who brought me soymilk in my coffee before I knew I wanted it. To Myles, who likes his coffee hot, with plenty of sugar. Or John, who won't touch it unless it's iced with three pumps of caramel. Or Albert who adds simple syrup? My mother, for showing me a latte. To Dr. Houston, smuggling me coffee from a coach's room somewhere in Vancouver, the ultimate token of his faith in me. To anyone and everyone that has spent too many hours on too many nights drinking too much tea in the dining hall. Everyone, who has taken the time to learn the useless parts of my life. Everyone who has taken the time to share theirs. So if anyone is in the dining hall between the hours of 5 and 8 pm, chances are I'm there too. Making a cup of tea, and considering. Because Chloe, as usual, is right; to be loved is to be considered, even when it doesn't matter, especially when it doesn't matter.

Chapter 4: The art of imperfection, to JV teams

I like Folgers instant coffee. And burnt, bitter, black coffee. Lukewarm, watered down coffee.

Instant coffee is the early mornings waking up in some tent, somewhere

I'll never return to, with people I deeply miss. It's chopping wood at five in the morning to cook breakfast, waking up to clanging pots and pans because I was foolish enough to joke that we moved too slow in the morning. It's haphazard, hand washed dishes and lingering, flavorless grounds. Burnt black coffee is goodbye diner breakfasts, conference break stations, running-late train terminal purchases. It's accepting that yes, technically you asked for this, better not complain now. And my watered down coffee is iced drinks abandoned when running late for work, dining hall mugs as I miraculously complete entire projects between 7 and 8 a.m.. Its lukewarm lattes from sitting in cafe after cafe completing college essays, until half the baristas in town know me by sight. Because coffee, like life, is only perfect in its imperfections. I am, fortunately, an imperfect person. I got cut from JV tennis freshman year. I lost a lot of debates before I ever won one. I'm not very good at calculus. And yet, I would argue I add value to the Deerfield community. Maybe in shiny trophies and pretty essays, but, more importantly, in friendships and connections, little moments and people I love. So perhaps I am a slightly better than lukewarm cup of coffee. Infallible by no means, but critical to even a singular time, place, person.

Chapter 5: The conclusion, a note on legacy

I've discovered two ways to deal with the dregs at the bottom of a cup. 1) Simply toss them away, never to be reconsidered. Or, 2) struggle to reuse something that already lost its flavor. Both have faults. One feels wasteful, caustic. The other desperate, stuck on the past. I've had no grand solution, just trite sentiments of appreciating the coffee while it still remains. But, if meditating on hot drinks has taught me anything, it's that tomorrow there will be another cup, and for better or for worse, I must address the remains of today before I try again.

TOMATO SOUP

Chloe Xue

My best friend, who I make fun of
for her love of the elderly, tells me
the saddest story she knows,
that her grandma used to sign every
legal document as “Tomato Soup.”
For every bowl of soup,
pulp splatters onto paperwork,
melting daughters drip from gas stoves.
They contemplate forgery.
They curse that soup is thicker than water.
On every X & dotted line, Tomato Soup
twirls and bobs in red crayon, dancing
her dead name away. In its place:
a tasty pseudonym. Then a tearful sonata,
off-key and stilted, not unlike my own
grandma’s piano playing, pruned knuckles
curling day and night at black and white.
The fiftieth time she cannot hear
hearing aids brought up over dinner,
I begin to wonder why she may
not want little tan salamanders
tickling her eardrums, mechanical
bees pollinating her canals.
These days I tally the times
she’s asked me 你在哪个州上学?¹
It’s always Massachusetts.
I do wonder, though, if instead,
I should become a granddaughter
-turned-grasshopper, green like scallions
in Shanghainese wonton soup. I wonder
if instead, I should be doing the disco
on a map of America, jiggling across state lines,
and then perching for a while on Grandma’s shoulder.

1 Which state do you go to school in?



SIGHT

Abdullah Bin Ali



A MOTHER'S TEARS

Abdullah Bin Ali



UNTITLED

Arabella Navab



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A JOURNAL FROM SILENCE

Ginger Bernstein

Day One:

Today I embarked on my week of silence.

I carried only three words on my fingers: “Thank you,” “I am sorry,” “I love you.” My three essentials. Three words my grandfather never knew how to say.

H.B., my grandfather, was never good at silence. Because I never wanted to be like him, this week I sealed my lips and took the time to listen. Today, my first day, I observed with careful attention to habits, vying to understand the people I love. I never offered him this courtesy.

Day Two:

Today, I began with the same quiet vigor, taking constant note of the people around me. An English discussion pondered the best way to die. Impending, such a man on death row. One granted the time to understand life’s complexities, make peace, connect, and forgive. One granted a final “I love you.” Or, unexpected, like the sudden horror of a stroke. I observed, content in stillness, offering only a soft nod as the class almost unanimously agreed on impending.

Less than half an hour later, H.B. was gone.

A sudden, unexpected stroke.

Day Three:

Silence shattered under my sobs. I broke my vow today to feel with the living. To connect with family, both in my arms and across the country, I needed noise.

I cried for his absence, for the love we never quite found, for my mother. My body convulsed with ambivalence. The contradiction he posed halted any normal course of grief:

H.B. built this family, molding the strongest person I’ve ever met, my mother. He molded her of stone.

Then, he tore her childhood apart. My stone mother melts to soup in his presence.

Two years ago, I wrote a poem about their twisted relationship, the unjustified duty my mother carries in her heart - an unresolved figure riddled with absence. I titled poem and my grandfather a Faithless Father writing:

“Band-aids, heart-shaped band-aids, to cover the wounds of sticky blood, layered by the careful hands of a mother’s, into a collage of woe over two young bruised knees.

Life-sized train sets in December, chugging in circles regardless of detached conductors, headed off the tracks, blinded by big brothers and distressed women.

Women that were not his own because now his own daughter cut her hair to look like his, straight and short: military style and went through the drive-thru on foot.

A fatherless hole was filled by ghosts who played baseball. Invisible men filled the diamond, bases loaded, all ordered neatly in her mind as she squinted into the sun,

Bat-shaped-stick in hand, a swing, just short of a home run. How could you do this to mom?

Latchkey children, a product of working mothers, scrape their knees into calluses by adulthood.

A father who lost faith will try to halt the rush of blood with airplane rides and water slides and dresses.

Dresses for his latchkey, military style, baseball with ghosts, rough knees, daughter. Dresses for her daughters too. Dresses for all the other women, enough to go around the sun.

Like the yearning for heat from a moth who gets caught in the lampshade, usually all it takes is three strikes but with the tether of a devoted daughter,

heart-shaped band-aids will suffice.”

*How can I possibly grieve the man who melted my mother?
How should I remember you?*

Day Four:

After a night and against the pleading of my sister, I returned to silence for two reasons:

First, to remain close to H.B., Mr. Jan illuminated the realm of the Absolute in his Silence elective. In this void exists beings external to our senses. Divinity, the Creator, Fate, those passed, all rest here. My grandfather now rests here. While humanity's realm of the Relative never achieves this perfection, one can grow closer through silence. He defined silence not as an absence, but an attentiveness. Throughout history and the many facets of quiet, I aligned most with the practice of Hesychia. The Greek translation does not embody emptiness but rather a path. It embodies a spiritual stillness and a sense of calm. Silence, such as hesychasm, brightens the path to the Absolute, beckoning the silent one closer. H.B., you returned to Absolute on my second day. In silence, I followed you.

Second, despair never halted your growth, but fertilized it. Under the glare of death and in the wake of torment, you grew. Now, surrounded by Death's debris, I honor you by continuing my vow.

In my return to silence I was reminded of your creation. Molded by a genius father who left the world early by his own hands and hatred for life, and the stern push of an indifferent mother, luck buried you deep within the ground. Your being was shaped without a drop of love – condemning you to a future of seeking that sweet fruit.

A childhood of darkness only fueled the flames within your chest. Yet, with no one in your corner, you grew. Luck stood no chance against the seed of hustle blossoming within.

This unbridled power carved the way to service. Void of any family to protect, you fortified our country on the seas. And you grew further, moving always upward in rank, position, power. Slowly you built up the dignity that poverty stripped.

This hustle struck a fire beneath your seat, whispering the fears instilled through darkness:

“You are never safe, keep moving.”

H.B., you hustled your entire life, building without family, without handouts, and most starkly, without love. Brick by brick you constructed a wall of power to protect yourself against the absence of warmth within, still searching. You kept climbing, scrapping your way up the ladder without a net of love beneath.

Finally you found my grandmother, and held my infant mother and her siblings in those strong arms. With a kiss on the forehead, you planted your seed of hustle within each child. You watched them begin to sprout. They clung to you with knots of love and devotion. Each child molded in awe of your strength. They were only seedlings when the voices of doubt returned.

“You are never safe, keep moving.”

How can you receive the warmth of true love in a body built without it?

The hunger for love unquenchable, you kept searching.

You tore yourself from the sincere love you once held. Your thirst melted my mother, planted anger within my uncle, and hatred within my aunt. My grandmother had no time to feel. Her own hustle began in your absence.

The constant dissatisfaction looming within your shadow shredded the family you built into dusty remnants as you journeyed forever onward, finding new women to gift you their illusions of love. This habit of insatiability carried you until the end.

Day Five:

Once upon a time, you were the man with a passion for horses, piano, art, and guns. Each visit you fought my parents' wishes to spoil my sisters and I with the joy of waterslides, new dresses, and cheesecake. Never adopting a cell phone or a traditional grandpa's name, you wrote letters and insisted we called you H.B.. In secret correspondence we discussed the horse you would send for us—fulfilling our every dream—before my mother found the letters and curtailed the transaction. I grew up with the understanding that all grandpas had a new girlfriend for every visit, a different romance for each night of our stay.

The normalcy of this didn't last.

H.B.'s growling voice permeated through each dimly lit steakhouse, a constant monotonous roar. Always his state, his steak, his stories. He did not bother with our birthdays, bat mitzvahs, accomplishments, or our mother. Each dinner, we ate a cut of his life, lean and trimmed of the fat of our importance.

Our aged eyes watched helplessly as the stone mother flung herself forward for the acceptance of a granite father. The pain of watching an unreciprocated love hollowed out the last drops of adoration for my grandfather.

Innocent love vanished in the wake of revulsion. The puzzle of my mother shaped as your truth illuminated. You damaged her and so to protect my own love and her, my care for you became obligatory. These facts framed you in my mind.

Any notion of the love and adventure you shared with your grandchildren was replaced with horror. You morphed into someone I loved solely because the blood in my veins matched the red in yours.

The repulsion killed any remembrance of the man you built yourself to be. In my hesitation, I forgot the torment of a murderous, suicidal father and resentment of an unloving mother. Busied with my own ambition, your poverty and your struggle eluded me.

These truths only returned in the silence, a space where I can still envision the shadow of your powerful hand resting on my shoulder, a reminder that no one's vices are without creation. Under the blanket of quiet, I begin to chip away at the layered man you were. Digging within pits of memory, you aided me in uncovering the truths of pain and struggle. In silence, I can hear the vividness of your life. In silence, I unveiled my gratitude.

If not for your blossoming tree of hustle, for your rejection of complacency, my path to Deerfield would be shrouded. The resentment strapped to my chest is replaced by a deep thankfulness for the constant work, struggle, and building which elevated my future. Today, I stand on your shoulders of rock. I am a branch of your tree of hustle—reaching to the sky as only an extension of the height of your trunk and the solidity of your roots.

I spent years whittling your being down to a few actions, blinded. Only in my silence do the layers of your life, the ladder you built with humility revealed itself. Only in my silence can I grasp the validity in your constant quest for love.

Day Six:

A side effect of silence is deeper feeling. Without a verbal release, the sensation accumulates swelling within my heart. Emotion, in silence, is carried not only in the stomach or head, but in every ligament of me being. The utter despair at your loss nearly tore me apart. Yet, the kindness of Deerfield restored me.

On day six of attentiveness, Deerfield's love flooded me. Though I could not call out for help, though I could not repay through a verbal thank you, the community wrapped me in a warm embrace.

I took note of all the love I received these past few days in hopes to posthumously offer them to H.B and assign the proper verbal gratitude. H.B., I remain in silence, close to you, to share this love.

Thank you to my friends for:

The pink rubber hearts, decorating my mirror, a constant reflection of care.

The water bottle exploding with purple petals, the aroma of sugar reverberating through my grief.

The overflowing squares of salted dark chocolates, still chilled from the ice in the sky.

A royal blue paper bag gingerly lain on my blankets—a love screaming through the silence.

Thank you to my team for:

Listening without my words.

Filling my days with what I love most.

Thank you to the Washburns for:

Sharing in memories, in spite of our reluctance to relive H.B. complexity.

Taking care of my sister.

Seeing me through a facade of normalcy.

Keeping me busy.

Being more than a temporary family.

Thank you Deerfield for hearing me through the silence.

H.B., I hope to give you peace, knowing that while comfort never breached your soul, your hustle opened the floodgates of love enveloping me at Deerfield. You, H.B., are deserving of these acts, of being part of a community of unconditional support. Through my continued silence, my wish is to share this love with you. My attempt for closure on a rocky relationship with a truncated narrative, is for you to finally internalize this love, feel it in all its authenticity and power. You carved the path to Deerfield, and I offer you now the love emanating from each crevice of the community.

Day Seven, my final day:

Deerfield's mantra, "Be Worthy of your Heritage," never struck a chord for me. I ignorantly believed my own ambition raised me to success. I gazed only

up to the future, never taking a moment to tilt my head, to look down at all the sacrifice that built this ladder, that formed the roots.

I do not stand here alone, but on your back, stabilized by evergreen strength, persisting through the barrier of death. I once scoffed at the devotion of my mother, at the knots tying your children to your strength. Now, I stand in line. I look up to you in awe of your persistence, and proud of the life you gave my mother. I am forever grateful for the life you gave me. You built a ladder out of the unloving pits of despair and poverty, granting me a life of fresh air. Because of you, I am lifted from the darkness of a loveless childhood. Because of you, I always carry love.

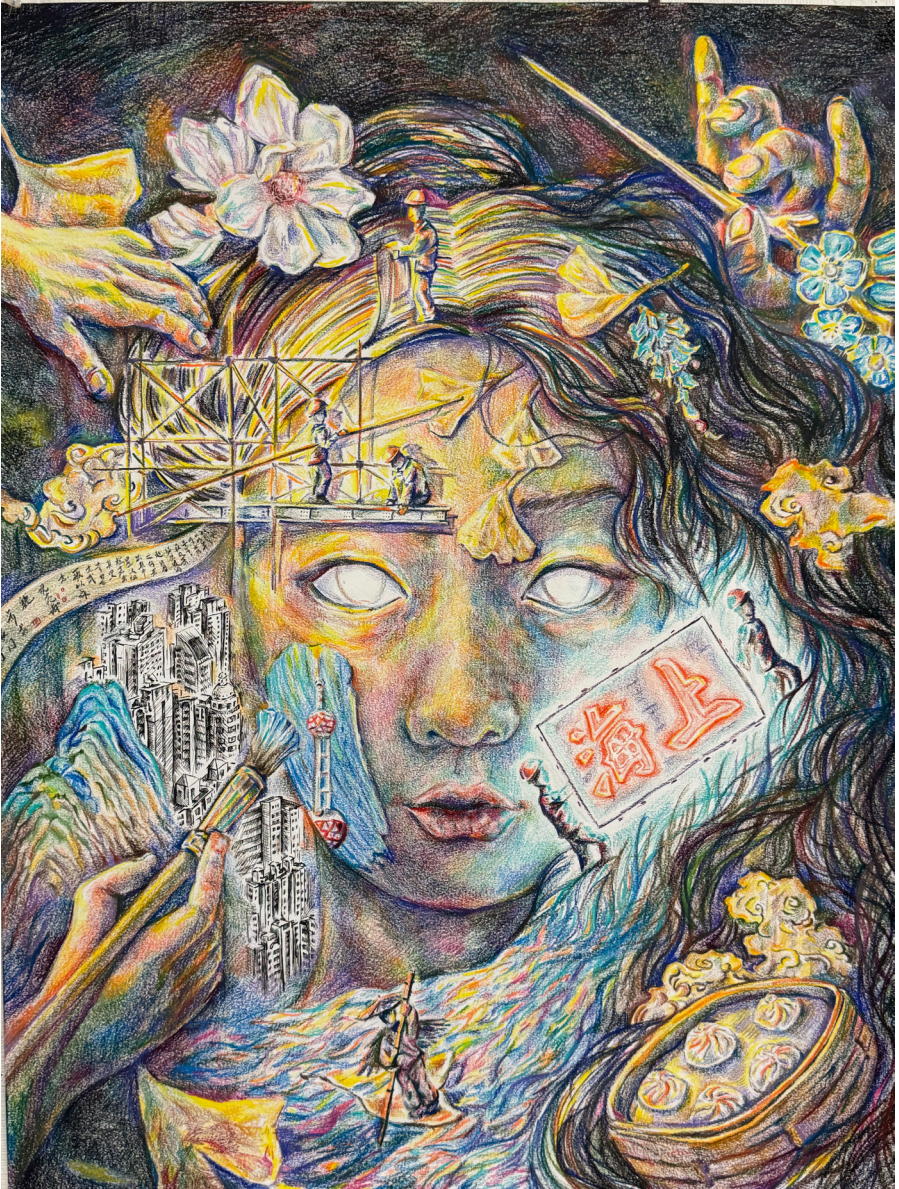
With this illumination, I understand what it means to strive, constantly, to “Be Worthy of your Heritage.”

In your honor and under your gaze, I continue to hustle. To be worthy of you is to persevere any struggle, to blossom with strength, to keep building upward. To be worthy of you is to grasp at any opportunity in my path. Deerfield offered me both a love for us to share, and a new perspective on your legacy. Deerfield gifted me the path to remember you.

For eternity, I will cherish this week we shared. I yearn to stay, remaining in silence, close to you, forever peeling back more layers.

H.B, my three essentials offer a final sentiment. I am sorry for not appreciating you in the time we had. Thank you for my future, an extension of a lifetime of sacrifices. I love you, unconditionally and always.

Rest in Love H.B.



DEPLETED

Jonathan Xu



CURIOSITY

Caden True



LEGACY
Charlie Smith



A SEARCH FOR KNOWLEDGE

Kate Doucette



THE ROVING ASYLUM

Jon Sainma

FLEETING AND PERSEVERING MEMORY

Max Wang

Whenever I try to compile the most meaningful memories of my life, maybe for my own reflection or maybe for friends whom I want to further connect with, I'm met with a strange, and hopefully universal feeling. There are some memories that exist at an unreachable depth within my mind, ones I know are there, things I know have happened and are significant in my life, but are displaced, frustratingly distant but existence nonetheless. If I flip through my photo album long enough, sometimes the names of my childhood friends—with whom I've parted ways long before we knew about phone numbers—will return in delightful revelation and in hours of soccer, Cartoon Network, and obnoxious laughter. I'm sure that if I were to visit my Chinese elementary school again, those after-school memories and trauma would come crashing down on me in Chinese poems that we had to memorize and National Math day games that we had to cram for. On long, monotonous car rides, my mom occasionally reminds me of how happy I used to be and how much more I used to smile. She points to some of these memories that, somehow, she remembers, and for the next few days, those moments feel alive again. But otherwise, these memories fade in and out of my mind in blurs, too elusive to include in a life story, yet too significant to justify leaving out.

One memory, my mother reminds me on a long quiet midnight drive home from Canada, is different. She said, "do you recall when you and your brother switched from speaking Chinese to English?" It's a bit of a shock, breaking the hour long silence. I feel an urge to respond quickly, but the question stumps me. It was sometime between 2014 and 2018 when I switched languages with my younger brother. After moving to America in second grade, our Chinese accents gradually faded in an English speaking world and it'd only be our parents whom we'd speak Chinese with. Somewhere along the line there was a sudden click when my brother and I realized we no longer spoke to each other the way we once did. It must have been a wild, almost unrecognizable feeling to converse with someone you know so well in one language, and then, seemingly overnight, changing and never going back. "No," I say at last, "I don't remember, I really should, but I can't."

Then again, while grappling with memories, I can vividly recall moments that seem utterly useless and equally embarrassing. “来厨房，柜台上糖，” I had

said in Chinese. I'm not sure how old my younger brother was, but it was a time when the two-and-a-half year age gap was more than just a height difference of six and a half inches. When I could lead him anywhere and he would follow because he respected me, sometimes to an annoying degree. Like a permanent shadow, my brother would stalk around me relentlessly. My grandmother preferred to use the Chinese phrase *gen pi chong*, defined as “bum beetle” or “someone that would not stop following you around” if you're looking for a direct translation, but to grandma, it meant so, so much more.

One day I told my brother to “来厨房，柜台上糖” or “Come to the kitchen. There's sugar on the counter.” For normal siblings this would be a strange thing to say, especially when there was in fact not sugar on the counter, but salt. Salt that our family had decided to put in identical containers as the sugar except for one distinguishing label, in Chinese, that my brother could not read yet. Salt that had it been sugar, both of us brothers would crave so intensely because of how little of it our grandma let us have. This was a prank that I cannot erase from my mind, and a memory that, for the longest time, I have questioned why I still remember. It was also at some specific time when I didn't fully think through my actions, and I remember deciding to shovel a spoonful of salt into my mouth and holding the poker face in front of gritted teeth and screaming arteries as long as I could to prove to my brother what I had in my mouth was sugar. I then watched, in horror, as he tipped the whole container, of what I had successfully convinced him of was sugar, into his mouth. Amidst the blur of my brother's screaming and the salt thrown across the kitchen and my mom yelling about all of the “if your brother jumped off a bridge would you...” and my efforts to shrink myself into the corner of the room, it was then when I heard my grandma call my brother *gen pi chong* for the first time.

My grandma was a simple person, and sometimes it seemed like all she wanted was to see us eat more *xiao long bao*, *chun juan*, and *shao mai* than our stomachs could handle. I could never match my brother's appetite, and for that reason, he became her favorite. She called my brother by many nicknames, but it was *gen pi chong* that would ironically stick around. *Gen pi chong*, grandma would say on our first day of school when my brother followed me into my classroom and wouldn't leave. *Gen pi chong* while teaching us brothers struggled to imitate her dumplings. She would say it the same way every time. *Gen pi chong* those memories I now remember so vividly.

Some of my memories are like objects in my life. Somewhere in my bedroom there is a Gudetama mug that I received for Christmas during my junior year at Deerfield. It has three little egg yolks with faces, arms and legs, holding

on for dear life above a bowl of steaming ramen. One of them, perhaps named Gudetama, was screaming, “I don’t wanna go.”

For about six months I used to fill up my Gudetama mug with coffee every morning and drink the whole thing at breakfast. Then, having nowhere to safely store it, I would hold onto it for the rest of the day. I carried it around like a child with me to sit down and classes, watching it vigilantly out of the corner of my eye, fearing it would slip off the side of the table and shatter on the menacing floor. Aside from a few weird looks and perhaps lots of silent judgement, I liked the idea of constantly caring for something precious that felt almost like part of my identity.

When that inevitable day came and the mug shattered on the Hess lobby floor, it was then that I realized that the only reason I started drinking coffee was because of that mug. I was caught up in what I would call a Gudetama Spiral: drinking coffee because I might as well use the mug and using the mug because I might as well drink coffee. It only took one sip of coffee from a generic coffee mug the following morning, not tasting the energy that coffee had never given me, for me to realize my foolishness and how forced my love for coffee was. My Gudetama mug now sits in my bedroom at home, and I haven’t had coffee regularly since.

Regardless, I have still spent more than a reasonable amount of time staring at the broken handle of my Gudetama mug, looking at the eggs still clinging on in a still frame even though they would never fall. “I don’t wanna go,” the egg yolk said. No, I don’t wanna go either. I wanted to stay and idle forever in this spiral and in delusion, force my love for coffee, for I least did something that was unique to me. Yet objects are like memories, some of it we wish to hold onto but never needed.

I also have a green “Deerfield” Nalgene that I received at the beginning of freshman year and have carried nearly everywhere since. It has two stickers from two different renditions of NXR—Nike Cross Regionals—a cross-country meet I kept telling myself I would go to but never did. I used to swing the bottle aggressively around my fingers until one day, the cap ripped off from the repeated stress. When someone asks about the state of my capless water bottle, I tell them, “It’s a mug now.” In fact I carry it around school everyday, exactly as I would with my Gudetama mug last year.

I’ve lost sixteen other water bottles at Deerfield—some left on buses, some taken by others, some gone after just a couple of days. However, this one, my Deerfield Nalgene, is the only one I’ve never lost. I didn’t always like it. It was large, a hassle to refill, and prone to spilling. But I suppose this tendency to spill was the reason I’ve never lost it. I couldn’t afford to not pay it attention, again

watching it vigilantly out of the corner of my eye, afraid it would menacingly spill on the floor. Over time, as I continued to misplace other water bottles, this one became the last left on the shelf. And, somehow, it became my favorite. Objects are like memories, some of it you never lose no matter how irresponsible you are and some of it you don't realize are special until you wait long enough.

It's been a while since many of these memories. And with time, always comes change that we're so reluctant to accept. Sometimes I wonder if my brother is still my *gen pi chong*. It has been a long time since he last followed me somewhere. He is now taller than me. We go to different schools and no longer play the same sports. If I told him to tell him to "come into the kitchen, there's sugar on the counter," I don't think he'd even look at me.

Yet, some things don't change. Some memories you don't lose. Some objects you can't get rid of no matter how irresponsible you are. Some things really shouldn't be part of my life anymore but they stubbornly cling on like a Gudetama egg, follow you around like a true *gen pi chong*, or wait patiently until you come to like them like a special green Nalgene water bottle. Perhaps it's a way for life to remind you of past times when things were better or perhaps because these memories and ideas are still real, and you just don't know it.

A few months ago, my mother, brother, and I huddled around a phone to video call my grandmother, who still lived in China, for her birthday, to wish her wellness, health, and peace. My grandma's response was "who are you?" There are some situations where when you've been so wrapped up in your own life it takes a second to realize that significant time has passed for other people as well. I remember seeing my mother's eyes well up in realization of the reality of Alzheimer's Disease and that the frightening "one-day" moment we had put off as "too far away" was now upon us. With tears rolling down her cheeks, she struggled to grapple with the overwhelming emotion of realizing that the mother who had always known and loved her, who had raised the two children that now stood beside her, was now a stranger.

So we sat still and in denial, afraid to move, hoping time would also stay still; afraid to break the silence, as if reality, too, would feel a little less real. Until I heard a muffled phrase and moved closer to make sure I had heard it right. *Gen pi chong* grandma said as she saw my brother's face. *Gen pi chong* she remembered but not our names. *Gen pi chong* that phrase I haven't heard in years but with the same pitch and sarcasm she would always say it in. Somewhere above my grandma's dementia, a subconscious strength still clutches onto my brother's name.

There are spectacular moments where a spark can unearth memories once caught deep in the undergrowths of a mind. And in that moment, I finally

reconciled that my relationship with my brother had hardly changed. The way my brother still talks to me, how he still waits behind the garage door when I come home from breaks, the way he keeps asking me to go to the mall with him, even though we both hated shopping. Let's spend time with each other so we might as well go to the mall. We're going to the mall so we might as well spend some time together. In a way we are in a Gudetama spiral of our own. "I don't want to go," and I don't think I ever will. I will always love my brother and he too will always be my *gen pi chong*. Yes, my brother is still my *gen pi chong*; he just shows it in a different way.

There's something magical about our subconscious. It's a funny vice, this whole design of human memory. It's filled with contradiction and mystery, but within the complexity lies a beauty seen nowhere else. Our subconscious knows what's truly important to us when even our conscious mind is oblivious, only leaving us hints with water bottles we forget on buses, mugs that we realize aren't all that defining, in stupid pranks that live rent-free in your mind and in nicknames we can't help but remember. I look forward to the moment when I'll finally understand why certain seemingly insignificant memories stick with me. I imagine a time when I'll look back on these unmade memories, surrounded by friends I haven't yet met, and reflect on how my life was 'always meant to be.' I'll laugh at how foolish I was not to notice all the signs my subconscious feeds me. I once heard someone say that "Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards." I wish I could live a future that is both eventful and turbulent enough so that such a phrase could be true.

There is privilege within the uncertainty of what life will throw at you because there's something special to you that you have yet to realize. I believe this is how life should be lived, fully embracing the uncertainty but pausing occasionally to appreciate its beauty. It's a challenging life to live, but it's comforting to know that those moments that truly define you will always be there, persevering, clinging on for the right spark, waiting to return.

THE MATCH

Mahawa Kaba

My days have been occupied with scraping this wretched stick against its box.
Scratching and fighting until I ignite the flame I've been feeding all this time.
Its fiery red tip—the gloves that have bruised me with its mockery
Its slender figure-it uses to slip and slide out of my grasp like
Infinitesimal granules of sand. I scrape and scratch until my arms urge me to break
And I do, bearing the fact that my opponent will never shake.
In the sleep of my wake I run until a barricade of
Hazy fog captures me. It talks to me, drawing me in
Like an enchanted magnet, calling for me to take a step further.
And when I finally do, I step into the graveyard of my passion
Where lies the aftermath of the greatest match yet
The ground, cracked and brittle, begs for life. And as if to insult it
Rests a puny puddle where the mighty rain fought my flames out of being
A sight you'd truly pity seeing.
Seems like the deluge was the source of my grief
That was the next opponent I strove to beat—to finally stand a chance against the
Match.
I fought her hard and with all my might but then she turned to me
And I saw my eyes. I struck myself, fell over my feet, danced myself
Into my own defeat. I dove into my flood and swam and swam
This is where it all began. Memories drowned me in their balmy embrace
I saw you and your blazing grace, compelling me to swim upstream.
I do as you say because you are my muse. I fight my fight with no intention to
lose.
My flames spark and flash and leave their trace.
My match lives now that I have laid the base.
Reminded by struggle and conflict and strife
This flame is everlasting, unyielding in this life



EVERYWHERE AND NOWHERE

Jon Sainma



JON'S WEAPON

Jesse Gachago



JANUARY 6, 2025

Gracie Spencer



UNREQUITED LOVE

Gracie Spencer



UNTITLED

Gillian Herr



FINDING TRUTH

Gillian Herr

GUERNICA

Aviel Alexander

Eos

Caked with red

The taste:

Metal

The memory:

Seeds of incendiary blossoms

Who can hear the

The bell's cracked tones?

The bricks that have broken

Hopes dreams

Necks.

Peeling

Skin

Who

Rises with Helios' cry

Remembers

Righteous anger immolating the sky

Fiery Wounds

The one they will never call omnipotent

An omen

A message

The silent creed

The one they must never call God

Soon the fruit like of

Apollo

The Hesperides

Will grow

The Healer

Deepened history

Bold sorrow

Into a future

Where men

Left Untamed

Are led to a new beginning

CLIFF JUMPING

Vivian Wan

Dad asks Brother, “if someone asked you to jump off a cliff, would you do it?”
I’ve always kept quiet, but I think I would
If someone I love held my hand and walked me to the edge,
and told me that the other side was warm,
that the darkness would only last a moment
and the wind would subside in another
and that after that the stereotypical warm light
and angels with plates of cookies and milk would greet me
Call me gullible, but I’d step off
I’ll be the one laughing milk-mustachioed
On the other side of the river at the bottom of the cliff

As I look down, cookie in hand, crumbs on face, crime complete,
I realize
I was free-falling the whole time
Before the thought ever crossed my mind
Even as I stood, making my decision,
Loved one’s hand in mine

Living is dying is jumping off a cliff
As much as you don’t choose to live
You can never choose to die



A THOUSAND ANGELS ON A BLADE OF GRASS

Ellora Devitre



ASCENSION

Daisy Rolland



UNTITLED

Daisy Rolland



CROSSROADS

Chloe Cleaves



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“And while I can wonder about the lives I didn’t live, I find meaning in the one unfolding before me.”

-Myles Mzyece, “Where the Dice Landed”

