

VOLUME 84 | SPRING 2024

THE BELLARMINE REVIEW

THE LITERARY MAGAZINE OF FAIRFIELD COLLEGE PREPARATORY SCHOOL



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THE BELLARMINE REVIEW

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The Bellarmine Review is the literary magazine of Fairfield College Preparatory School. Our mission is to celebrate our students' creativity by providing a venue for their words, their artwork, and their lived truth. +AMDG+

COLOPHON

This issue of *The Bellarmine Review* was designed and laid out in Canva. Headings are set in Inter. Body text is set in Cardo, except Matthew Martino's "A Jar of Honey," portions of which are set in Halimum and Laquer, and Ryan Sheppard's "The Letter," portions of which are set in Homemade Apple.

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FOREWORD

Oh, how we've grown! This thought rings in my mind as I reflect back on this issue of *The Bellarmine Review* as well as the arts at Fairfield Prep. When I was just a small-fry freshman entering this foreign landscape, I had no ambition to out myself as a writer. In my mind, I was afraid of being launched into some social limbo, trapped for the rest of my days.

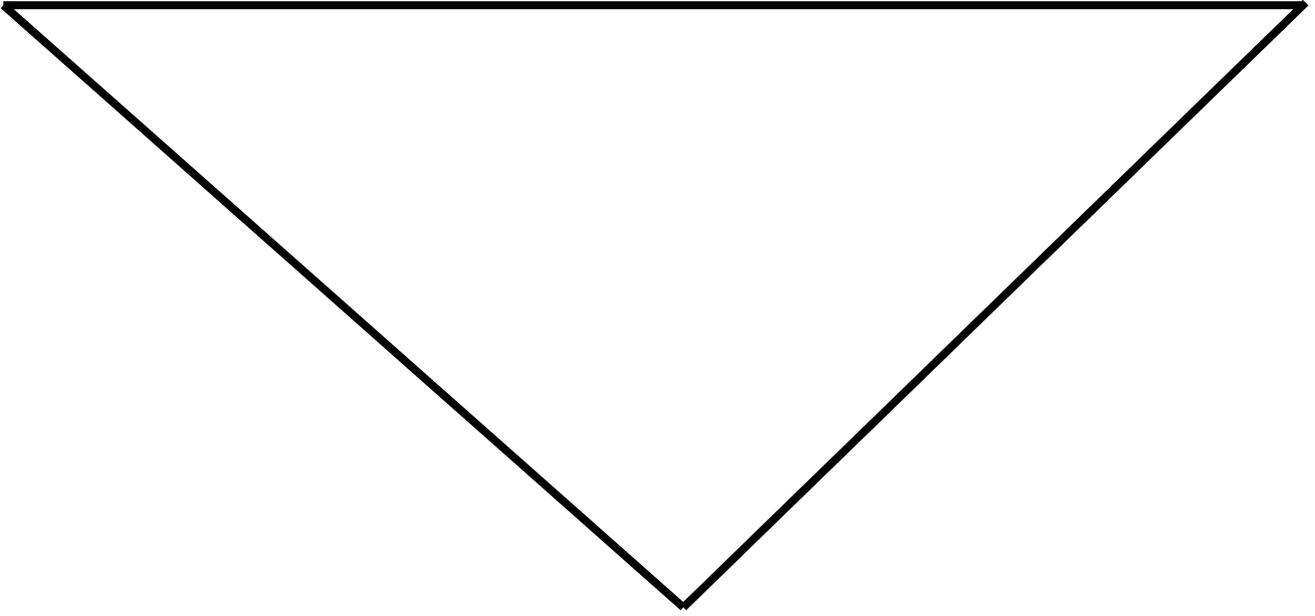
Now, I could not imagine anyone at Prep not knowing about the happenings of our arts community. Music, theatre, visual art, and most especially writing all hold a special place in this community. In B403, Creative Writing Club explores the creative channels that are embedded in the men of Prep. We produce this magazine, which is more than just a showcase of our writings. It is the breath of all the arts at Prep. Here, we give back to the Prep community the fruits of our inspiration.

I would like to thank all of the contributors in this issue. Our essays come from students in Mrs. Callahan's AP Language and Composition class and Mrs. Hoover's American Film and Drama class, and include some personal college statements as well. I also offer a huge thanks to Mr. Denby for organizing Prep's second annual Bad Hemingway Contest for juniors, and to the many faculty judges who read entries for this contest as well as our Writing Royale and April poetry contests. Their time and dedication made this issue possible—without them, we would be all but lost!

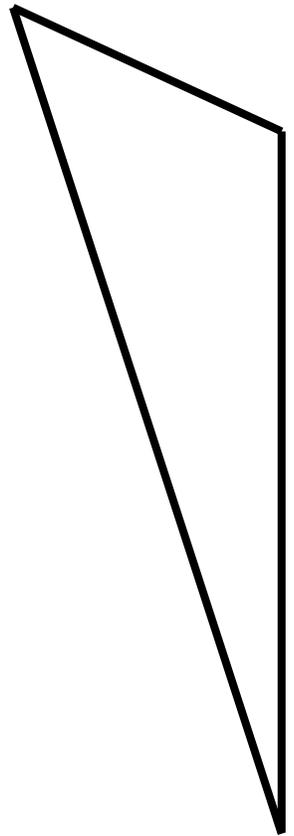
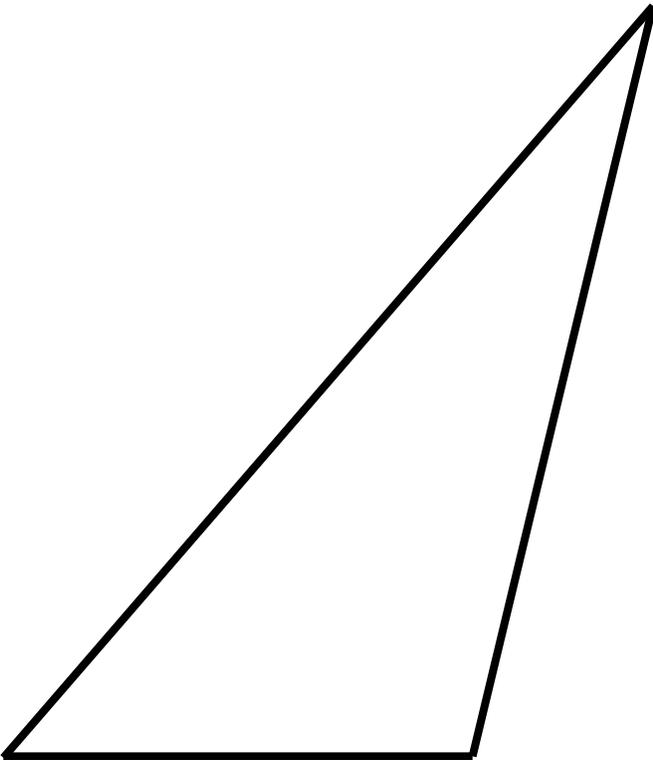
This project means so much to me, as it represents the growth of arts and creativity within the halls of Prep. At times, I have felt that the world has lost its creative mind, but works such as the ones in this collection give me hope for a future with young men who express their lives within the beautiful boundlessness of art. Thank you again to all who have worked so diligently on this issue of *The Bellarmine Review*, and a special thank you to you, who are reading this—you are the driving force behind the world of art that we all cherish.

Sincerely,
James Callaghan '25





POETRY



THE PEACHES IN THE BASKET | BEN LESTER '25

The peaches in the basket
Are bundled beneath my tree
Summer gifts anonymous—
I know not whom they are for

Escaped patch off Eden's leaves
Unforbidden, you are new
A sweet redemptive promise—
I no longer wish to hide

Away, feign the innocence!
Weep...as you whisper to me,
Behind man's guise of pleasure—
I am searching deep within

The peaches in the basket: A
bounty which few may eat.

ME AFTER 4:00 P.M.

The car rolls eighty.
Heart flutters Like the Motor,
Caffeine in my hand.

LOST AT A FUNERAL

The air was heavy
My throat blocked by my mourning
I could not console

OVERCOMING RAGE

My face is more reddish
Than the bleak time I was punched.
I'm learning to change

WHEN I WAKE UP THINKING

*Outside the world was gone.
The leaves and grass were done.
A dark cacophony*

*Was the mimetic world.
All men, lost in the trough.
His breath and muse were lost.*

*Unbeknownst to the world:
Was the pitch-dark back room.
Perhaps it was death's tomb.
A boiler room.*

There was a hole in the wall.

I am free

*I saw crystals, a path descending into the unknown.
Each was a berth of a memory—pieces of knowledge.
I could only see ten steps in front of me ere being consumed by the darkness.
Even though I could not see ten strides in front, I saw real light.
The crystals emanated colors unseen.
They housed some breath of life ungiven in the face of unforgiving darkness.*

*Behind me was someone.
Its face like a prism.
It without form or shape.*

It did not bother me though

I kept descending into the cave.

The brightness and power of my footing helped me in seeing intelligence for what it was: color.

*I had some recalescence where I remembered all of the struggles of humanity. They were all but
amiss in the face of our shared experience and love.*

Wake up.

I said wake up.

It's all numbers, man.

WHY DO I DESIRE A TIME PASSED AWAY? | MATTHEW MARTINO '25

Why do we desire a time far away
Only to be wishing back those days

Why do we gallop for the finish while the gates open
Only to reminisce, broken

Why do we want to run, learning to walk

Why are we so ignorant, untaught

The pain of lost time is the most savage of them all
for it is indiscernible, eternal

Yet, to enlighten it as pain, to dignify it as a rain
would be to empower it

I shall rather not sour this

For, it can only cause damage should you beget this:
You ought not bend with it

As an old brother used to say,
“In my age, I have no regrets, no fears or pains—I refuse to have any shame—
For living is the act of victimizing our epoch”

“I will say to you: grab it by the neck and suck the death out, for, scarcely then...
And if maybe only for a moment...
can you sustain”

A clock will tick forward never to halt
So I command you: *STOP*
And, if you must, smash that very watch

THE PINNACLE OF MOTORSPORT | OLIVER MASCERA '25

Formula 1. The pinnacle of Motorsport.

Racing. What does it take? Skill? Guts? Or does it simply require luck?

To race is to drive fast and to drive fast is to disappear.
Disappear on the track.

Scream.

Lights. Track lights and sounds. The sounds of the screaming engine.
The safety car's yellow lights flashing.

Turn. Turn the corner. Accelerate. Your neck moves and your body is
pushed back.

Scream.

Straight away. The engine screams. You look to your left: driver. You look
to your right: driver.

Focus. Focus on the engine. Focus on the sound.

Look again. Alone. Alone on the track. It's just you and the car.

Scream.

Voices. The pit crew calls. Ignore. You must keep going. The tires will
survive.

Turn. Losing traction. Spinning as you turn. You should have listened.

Pull in. The crew scrambles. You are raised. You hear the drills turn. The
bolts fall. You count. One. Two. Done. Your tires are new and you are back.
Dropped onto the ground.

Scream.

Back on the track. Look to your right: driver. You look to your left: driver.

Focus. Alone. It's just you. It's you versus the track.

Will you survive?

Scream.

Scream to the end.

Scream until it's finished.

To race is to drive fast and to drive fast is to disappear.

Disappear on the track. Fade away from the world.

Scream.

JOY OF THE PUZZLE | ALEX SALAZAR '25

Solving the Rubik's cube had seemed impossible.
It had been like a question unanswerable.
One day I looked online for a tutorial,
And found that solving it was categorical.

Solving the puzzle, which had seemed unthinkable,
At once, without issue, to do I was able.
Decoding the chaos that'd been inscrutable
Now seemed too easy, definitely doable.

It had been a spell, now just a series of steps,
And I wasn't very keen to put in more reps.
What'd been a source of magic to me in the past
I now saw that even I had surpassed.

With the cube's mystery having been dispelled I
thought I had discovered all the secrets it held,
That until I learned about a fast method spelled
CFOP, this was the method I beheld.

I got faster at solving, realized I'd been wrong,
Actually that magic had been there all along.
The spell had not come from the cube's difficulty.
It was the joy of the puzzle that had struck me.

AN EXCEPTIONALLY HOT EVENING | JOSHUA SALAZAR '26

It's hard to hear; I could die at any
Moment. It's hard to see; I could die at
Any moment. On my back are many
Chemicals; I could die just like a gnat.
I am surrounded by bubbles; I could
Die at any moment. Surrounded by
Living things, I am liable — I should,
Realistically, for these things — to die
At any moment. They move, some hunt, some
Are hunted; I could die any moment.
The deeper I go, to death I become
Closer. You should invest in atonement
Because then you are able to escape
Certain death in this watery landscape.

SEA GLASS | DANIEL TRISTINE '25

I walked in straight lines
Along rows of rocky sand.
Stones, shells, seaweed passed
by, They were useless to me.

My friends told me about the colors:
The blues are rare; reds, rarer.
I looked, but none caught my eye.
Does everybody get the browns?

The sand crunched under my feet,
A soft, irregular noise.
Sometimes a broken shell would surprise
My feet and raise my voice.

My face was down,
But my ears were at my sides.
I could hear the subtle sea,
But not see it.

Soft, crashing waves,
Carrying on the sand.
Why couldn't they reach me?
The gulls would not come near.

After walking, I grew tired,
I could not ignore my ears.
I look up, and see
Vast blues, sunset reds.

I forget my sea glass,
I admire the sea.
Its waves shape all:
Glass, rock, and me.

THE LOST MIND | JAMES CALLAGHAN '25
WINNER OF THE SPRING 2024 POETRY CONTEST

To whom this may concern,

My mind is a kaleidoscope desolate of Color.
It is trapped in a labyrinth,
endlessly plunged in the darkness of winter.
No longer can I be distracted by the simplicities of life.
Find beauty in the unequivocally beautiful world.

This place is filled with Colors that I cannot see,
I am blind to the hues of our world not because I do not know them
But because I have lost them.

I am walking in an endless cycle,
each day, each week, each month, each year a cruel copy of the prior.
Every action being done with the same fake smile
the same meaningless nods that I give to my friends.



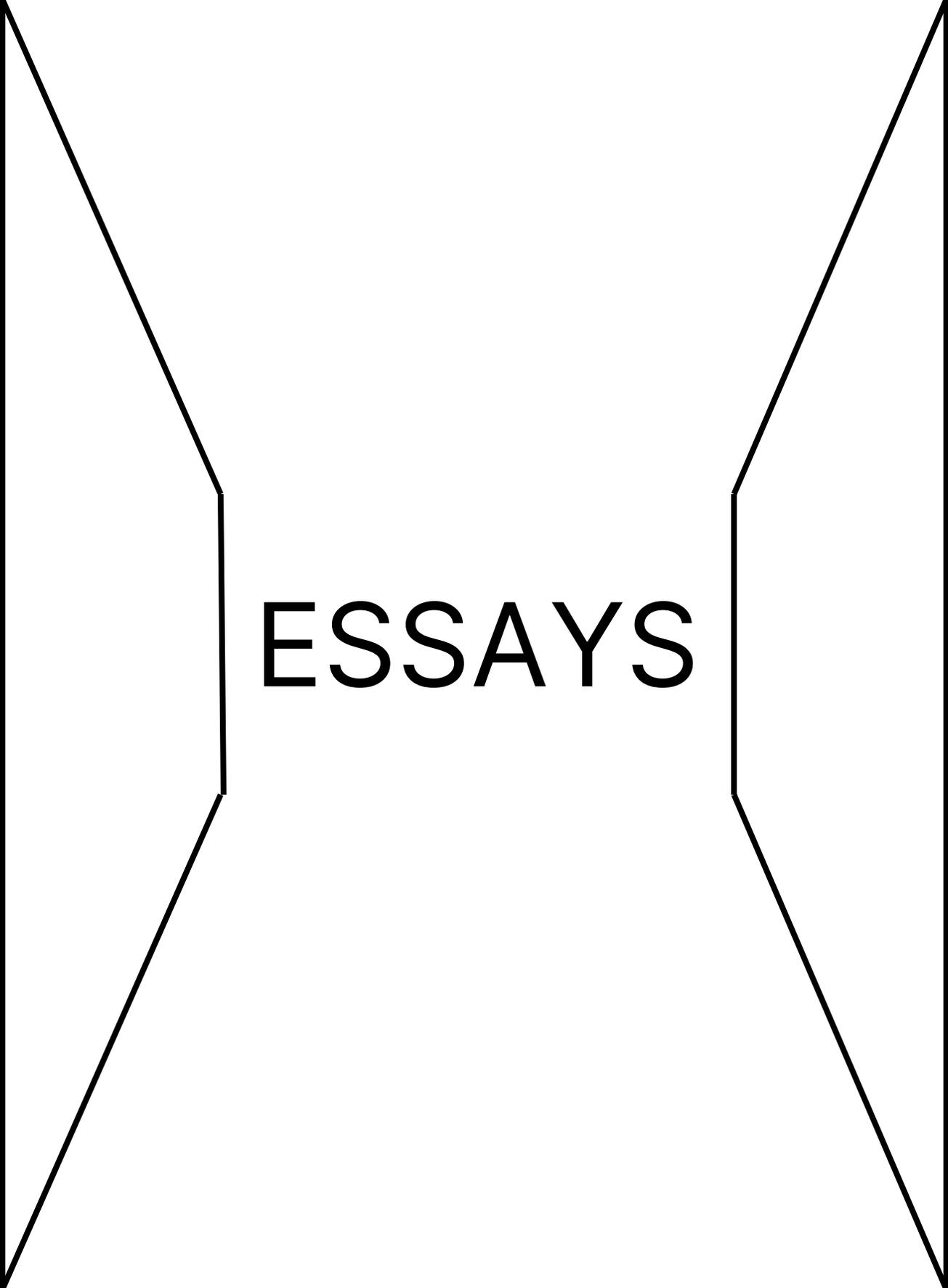
LOST FOREVER?

All I want is to feel like I belong
But I do not, and I never have.
As I pass by those who I know
My face burns me with their ridiculing eyes.

How can I feel like I belong when I don't know if I want to?
I am scared to be indifferent, but all I want to be is indifferent.
For people to pass over me and let me live.
But the hands of my own mind have me in a choke hold,
So how can I expect other people to let me live when I cannot do it myself.

I want to feel like the Colors I no longer see are worth observing.
Yet those Colors scare me. I am so lost in this dark labyrinth,
so much that I no longer know if I want to find my way out.

Sincerely, the Lost One



ESSAYS

LOVE FULFILLS THE LAW | SAMUEL ALVAREZ '24

Growing up, I always felt different from the other kids in my class. I didn't know what it was then, but I knew that no matter how hard I tried, I could never be like the other boys. It wasn't until middle school that I discovered the word that described my experience: "gay."

Unfortunately, the word also came along with the connotations of girly, weird, sinful, and damnation. I heard these thrown around whenever the gay community was mentioned. After this self-realization, I told my parents because I believed that I could find solace and acceptance in them. However, since they were Christians, I was met with resistance.

"How could you do that to us after everything we gave you?"

"I don't want you to suffer in hell, I want to see you in heaven."

"I can't imagine having a gay son."

These words and this experience stuck with me for a very long time, seeping into the fabric of my being. At that time I had believed "gay" meant liking the same gender, simple as that. However, my negative experiences influenced my definition of being gay; because of this, I grew up with a lot of self-hatred and doubt. The one thing that gave me a sense of identity felt like it was stripped away from me, leaving me feeling naked and ugly. Despite that feeling, I rolled up my sleeves and smiled like it was no big deal, hiding from the truth—my truth—that constantly stared at me in the face, desperately waiting to be embraced.

Luckily, I got to high school and met an amazing group of people who when they heard the word "gay," associated it instead with acceptance. It was during my sophomore year when my definition of being gay changed. It was no longer as simple as liking someone of the same gender or carrying any bad connotations. Angelia taught me that family means more than blood; Ky taught me to not care about what others think of me and to do my own thing; Tommy taught me to be

brave and embrace who I am; and Priscila taught me that having a relationship with God while being gay is possible. My newly founded friendships allowed me to come to terms with my sexuality and come out to them and most importantly, myself.

THROUGH MY EXPERIENCES, I'VE LEARNED THAT NOBODY SHOULD EVER HAVE TO HIDE THEIR TRUE SELVES FROM ANYONE, WHATEVER THAT TRUTH MIGHT BE.

Today, being gay, to me, is something unique and special because of the way I see the world. It is about breaking the boundaries of society and going through a unique experience that many others before me and some today couldn't fulfill because of the same fear I had when I heard "gay." I was inspired to educate people further about the LGBTQ+ Community: In my junior year, I became the president of my school's gay-straight alliance: R.E.I.G.N.S. (Respect Education and Inclusion of Gay and Non-Binary Students). With this new position, I planned to educate not only my school but also those close to me, especially my little brother, who may have those same negative connotations about being gay that may hinder them from exploring their truth.

To further this mission of love and acceptance that I believe in, I plan to represent and defend queer youth who have gone through a similar experience as I have through my college years and even after that as well. Through my experiences, I've learned that nobody should ever have to hide their true selves from anyone, whatever that truth might be. If it weren't for the friends that I have today, I would have never realized that love, my love, is unconditional. As long as I know this, I'll continue to love whom I love freely, with no restrictions—even if the closest people to me do not accept me.

LIFE IS LIKE WATER | JACK BOYLE '24

It was early morning, the sun just beginning to peek through the trees on the horizon, when the day had finally come to test my limits against the rapids. It was something I'd been looking forward to for a while now.

My dad told stories of the first time he went whitewater rafting at Kennebec River up in Maine. Now that story has become a reality for me. The thirty-minute bus ride over to the river made me much more anxious than I should have been, but then I had no idea what lay ahead of me. Eventually, it was finally time to set out onto the river. The sun was beaming now, with not a cloud in sight as my group and I carried the huge raft above our head as we took the final steps toward the gushing river. At that moment I recalled the tour guide had told us if we ever fell out of the boat, we'd need to keep our feet up to avoid being sucked under by the rapids in a whirling fashion. The possibilities of what could go wrong kept running in and out of my head: Could the boat flip? What would happen if it did flip? How would I get back on if I fell out?

WE SHOULD ALL LEARN TO FLOW LIKE WATER, SINCE IF WE DO, WE CAN FIND OUR WAY THROUGH ANY ROCK.

With all of this in mind, I eventually just got one last look at the nature around me, took a deep breath, and hopped on the raft with no regrets. We immediately were given commands to begin paddling. "Right side, left side, all ahead, all back!" our tour guide screamed over the sounds of gushing water. I was somehow feeling raw excitement and fear all at the same time as I paddled toward the infamous "Big Momma" Class 4 rapid directly in front

of me. White water splashed in my mouth as I was yelling with excitement. Then we were coming up on the nine-foot drop when our guide yelled, “Hang on.”

I grabbed the rope and wedged my feet under the seats of the boat just as gravity began to take effect on us, violently pulling us down nine feet until we came crashing down on the water below us. After a few more bumps, to say the least, I also got to experience the calming part of the river. The rapids slowed to a smooth, constant flow as I grabbed the inflatable banana kayak and broke off from the group (not wandering too far of course). Everything, from the distinct animals to the tall, lean, green trees, was breathtaking. I was enjoying the clear, cold water when suddenly I saw the reflection of a bald eagle. I cocked my head around and there it was in all its glory. I had never seen a bald eagle before. Its bright yellow beak contrasted with its dark brown body covered in feathers. It looked straight at me too, perched up next to its nest, staring into my soul. Perhaps I was its next meal? I guess I’ll never know, because I didn’t stick around to find out. There were so many sights to see, deer left and right, beavers, ospreys, even a moose. The sheer beauty of it all was too much for my eyes to handle.



However, the most amazing piece of nature was right under my nose the whole time: Water. You see, water truly is something amazing, even more amazing than America’s favorite bird. Water can be cold or hot. Water can be violent or calm. Water can be clear or murky. Water can bring forth life or end it. Water is the driving force of all nature. There is no life without water. No matter what obstacles I faced on the rapids, the water kept me moving through it. We should all learn to flow like water, since if we do, we can find our way through any rock.

CHANGING WITH THE SEASONS | TOMÁS GALLOZA '24

Too Hispanic to be Black, too White to be Hispanic, and too Black to be White.

I have been Hispanic for seventeen years. Yet, all my life I have been asked, at any family event my prying aunts attend, “Why can’t you speak Spanish?” Unfailingly, a battle in my mind occurs, every molecule in my being fighting one another to stop me from retorting. Inevitably, my right mind wins this battle for the ages. I tell my aunt, “I can understand Spanish. I just can’t speak it.” It is an exchange that happens at least once a year. Then, without fail, my extended family begins to bash me in Spanish, somehow forgetting that I know what they are saying. The bashing does not stop at home, however. It continues at school. “You’re white,” my friend Derick says to me jokingly. “You don’t even know how to speak Spanish.” Last time I checked, I did not have to speak Spanish to be Hispanic. Yet, that simply does not seem to be the case. Raised in Bridgeport and a resident for all my life, I have constantly been told, “You aren’t Hispanic. You’re white.” I am told this by those who are supposed to support and validate me. I am too White to be Hispanic.

I have been Black for seventeen years. But, apparently, I am not. “We’re not black,” my mother tells me as she drives me home from school. “We’re Dominican.” My mother, unlike me, is from The Island. The place where heaven touches earth, with sand like golden dust and water as blue as the sky. The place that Christopher Columbus colonized, a hub for the Atlantic slave trade. The same place where nearly an entire race of people were replaced by African slaves. My family, descended from those very slaves, is, according to my mother, not black. “We are not African. We are Dominican,” she says. “You’re not black. You’re Hispanic.” These are words my friend Farrell shouts at me in a joking tone. He and I laugh this off, as we always do. But this laughter does not heal the wound created by being denied my identity. I am too Hispanic to be Black.

I have been White for four years. It seems, though, that I have always been, without even knowing it. “Oh yeah, we’re Italian. Your great grandfather emigrated from Italy to Puerto Rico.” A sentence said so nonchalantly by my father, as if it did not cause a paradigm shift in my journey to find myself. I have never felt white. I never knew I was part

MY MOTHER, UNLIKE ME, IS FROM THE ISLAND. THE PLACE WHERE HEAVEN TOUCHES EARTH, WITH SAND LIKE GOLDEN DUST AND WATER AS BLUE AS THE SKY.

white. I mean, how could I? I am only one-eighth white, yet according to those who deny me my heritage, that is what I have always been. Going to a predominately white private school as a minority kid who has only known minorities his whole life changes you quite a bit. You talk differently, you walk differently, you dress differently, you make yourself different. All of this, to fit in. You do your best to change, to be accepted. Then, when you get there, you somehow become “that one black kid” that people have around to say they have a black friend. I am too Black to be White.

) (

I lie there on my bed staring at my old, beige ceiling that crumbles at a gentle touch. As I sink into my sky-blue sheets, I say to myself, “Maybe I just can’t fit in.” The biggest lie I have ever told. I get pale in winters and dark in summers. I am the only one I know who changes races as the seasons change, an ongoing joke in my friend group. Yet, I took that and made it a badge of pride. Because the only place I need to fit in is my own skin.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ROCK WALL | MATTHEW MURPHY '24

It stands tall and sturdy like nothing could ever make it move. It is indestructible, almost like a god made it. The rock wall surrounds my house almost like a cage, trapping me within its towering structure and protecting me from the dangers that awaited me outside the wall. With its worn, uneven surfaces, this massive formation has stood the test of time during my formative years. It looks like it has been taking the beatings of the world that were projected to be for me.

Within these walls were a playground, a soccer net, a trampoline, and a massive yard to run and play in, a child's dream backyard. I remember camping in our backyard, making s'mores, and hanging out with friends, living the life I had always dreamed of: my perfect world. This ideal world started to fade as my imagination started to expand, and my thoughts swarmed my mind. I became intrigued with the world and wanted to adventure out to find the hidden treasures that were calling my name from beyond the wall. I contemplated disobeying the one rule my parents made, "to stay inside the wall," many times. Still, my obedience to follow the rules so I would not get in trouble hindered me from climbing the wall and adventuring into the unknown.

HOW FAR WAS I FROM HOME? WHAT LURKED IN THE SHADOWS? AND WOULD ANYONE REALIZE THAT I LEFT?

My integrity on following the rule towards staying inside the wall stayed intact until a heavy wind and the collapse of a tree broke the barrier and made a path into the forbidden. My curiosity pulled me closer and closer to the wall until I stood three feet away from the dark pathway, looking back at my house of warmth and comfort and thinking about what the worst could happen. Nothing was stopping my eight-year-old self now, not even the

wall. I walked for four minutes, but it felt like I had been walking for miles, not knowing where to go or what to look for but only knowing that I had eyes on my back, watching my every move. I would turn around, and no one would be there, as if they disappeared in the shadows of the trees.

I was overcome with fear and uncertainty about where I was. How far was I from home? What lurked in the shadows? And would anyone realize that I left? I missed the safety of the wall and wished that I just obeyed my parents' rule. Instead, I continued walking for a couple of minutes until I got to a body of water as open as the great seas going on and on. The only thing that I could see was the land across the way with a herd of deer drinking from the blue, glistening water that shined in the sun's radiant rays of energy. It felt like home. It felt like safety. This feeling is something that I never thought I would find beyond the wall. It confused me; I didn't know how to feel. Should I be happy? Calm? Thrilled? Or should I be nervous about what crept in the shadows and anxious about the walk back home? It was all unknown to me.

Since then, I could never get the image of the water out of my head and kept on being called back to that same spot along the side of the never ending reservoir. Every time I went after that, it just kept getting easier and easier to break my parents' rule and to walk right through that crack in the wall. I came to learn that it is not what lies within the forest but beyond it. The dark forest was just the thing that made me stronger, but it was the reservoir that made me feel safe.

Grasping the idea of safety and comfort outside of the wall, which I had spent my whole childhood in, helped me to come to reality with the world. I shouldn't hide behind the walls of my childhood but instead break through them and see the world for what it is. Which is a place filled with obstacles and challenges that try to tear me down, but at the end of the dark, forbidden tunnel, there is always light filled with the joy, hospitality, and comfort of our childhood.

DISAPPEARING DOLPHINS | LUKE TRENCH '24

The world was barren and dark. It was the middle of the summer around 6:30 AM, and the sun had yet to rear its bright head. There was no life around, no birds, no lizards, no turtles, no creatures of any type. Amelia Island was dead silent, a rare occurrence.

I stared, sitting, waiting, groggy; the only thing keeping me awake was my girlfriend by my side who was munching on Club crackers. I gazed down; the clock on my phone read 6:45 AM, and the sunrise was supposed to be at 6:32 AM. I sat and stared more out across the dark desolate landscape. There was just barely enough visibility to see the waves crashing against the shore, in and out, in and out. It was mesmerizingly boring, and I felt my eyelids grow heavy again; I had gone to sleep at 1:00 AM. Where was this amazing Florida sunrise everyone had talked about? It was still crisp, chilly (for Florida), and grim; nothing like during the day. Suddenly, the sun peeked over the clouds, rearing the top of its head, creating life in the world promptly. The clouds began to illuminate and glow. Shimmering gray with orange hues, pink hues followed. Its suddenness took all the doubt and silence out of the world. It filled it with color again. It was the world I knew. I peered from left to right and left to right as the vastness of the sky and the bright light consumed me all at once. It was as if someone had thrown a flash bang; it was blinding yet eye-opening. I squinted, admiring it for a while.

After my eyes adjusted, I looked around at the beauty traveling across the sky, the streaks of light traveling with no bound or end. It was striking and as if the world had suddenly been turned on with a light switch. After the shock dissipated, I immediately recounted the stillness of the ocean. Unchanging. Consistent. However, this consistency was swiftly broken by a fin.

My conditioned mind jumped to conclusions. *Shark!* I thought, terrified at first. However, I noticed a curve to the fin and its multiplicity. The fins, similar to the waves, dipped in and out, in and out, at a natural rhythm. They were smooth, luxurious, coordinated, flowing, wavy, stable. The dolphins were black in color, calming, their blowholes visible even at this range. They

were incredibly slick, versatile, fast-moving, and in sync. They existed for one second, fully a part of the beautiful image in front of me, and disappeared the next, diving into the vast ocean and invisible to any onlookers.

I THINK IT IS APPROPRIATE TO ONLY REVEAL ONESELF WHEN ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY.

Something was beautiful about the dolphins, something that was indescribable. Their addition to the image was subtle, yet monumental; it added life to the scene but also took it away every second. They were temporary in an untemporary image. The sun, eternal; the ocean, eternal; even the shore, eternal; the dolphins, ever changing.

The dolphins, as fast as they were revealed, were gone again. After the fifth dip in and out of sight, they ceased to exist. I watched intently waiting for the fins to perturb out of the water again, but I was only met with stillness, nothingness.

I had found a relation to the dolphins and knew they only revealed themselves when absolutely necessary. The dolphins appeared nonexistent to the human world except when they needed a breath and then disappeared again when it was no longer necessary. There is something captivating about this. The sun revealing the dolphins too; they were present (or temporarily present) the entire time even before the sun arrived; however, they were unseen. Regardless, the dolphins had one objective and one reason to appear; they had a sole purpose of arriving at the scene. They were the only inconsistency in the scene. Sure, the sun would rise again and the ocean's waves would crash, but the dolphins were off fulfilling their duty, only doing what was necessary to keep them alive.

I think it is appropriate to only reveal oneself when absolutely necessary. Working under the darkness without light until all at once you are revealed. You are there the entire time, but no one notices you until the beautiful scene or result comes to fruition. It is important to work in these times without praise, or pleasure, or love, or care because when the scene comes together, you will be a major living part of it; something special and innate.

SCAVENGED | CAMERON WILLCOX '24

In the few quiet hours of night, the moon casts its silver glow upon my humble suburban neighborhood. A strange symphony begins to play amongst the resting trees and dewy grass. The leaves begin to rustle and the pitter patter of paws on the pavement herald the arrival of the night's nocturnal beasts. Raccoons. I loath raccoons. With their bandit-like masks and nimble fingers, they traverse around my neighborhood like they own the place. This would make more sense if this facial pattern was that of a crown, but it isn't. It is a mask, illustrating the con artists that they really are. They are scavengers, incapable of surviving without the scraps of others.

I hate chores. Specifically, taking out the trash. Does anybody genuinely like chores? Anybody? I don't. I know you don't. The trash sat patiently on the dimly lit patio. The orange light just barely shimmering off of the aluminum yogurt lid, as it waited to make its journey across the yard to be transferred from one trash can to another. Somewhere within my procrastination, a raccoon found its way into my trash can and began to dig in. It was my trash. He didn't deserve it. I ran downstairs and grabbed my bat, ready to kill. A couple of swings and the THUMP of my slamming of the back door scared him off, thankfully. It was finally time for chores—time to make that journey across the yard. I don't know where this sudden inclination to take the trash came from. I mean in reality, the raccoon was just lightening the load. Was it really that bad? Should I have even swung at him?

See, the hardest part of doing things is the aftermath of doing that thing. All that striped critter did was live. He was made to live off of others with such glorious trash as my own—he was made to scavenge. I did not want to take the trash out, yet I did once the raccoon found interest in my garbage. Sure it creeped me out and I may have just scared him off in fear, but I know it was more than this. Something felt wrong about a critter like him digging through my belongings. Something felt wrong knowing he did nothing to work for that empty yogurt container and that half-eaten apple and the empty bag of cereal with sugar powder in the bottom and the orange peels of

five or so different oranges and even the plethora of wrappers from Halloween candy. Something was not right. It was me. It was garbage! Garbage that I was not going to even look at for the rest of my life, and that I have a whole lot of left.

HE DID NOTHING TO WORK FOR THAT EMPTY YOGURT CONTAINER AND THAT HALF-EATEN APPLE AND THE EMPTY BAG OF CEREAL WITH SUGAR POWDER IN THE BOTTOM AND THE ORANGE PEELS OF FIVE OR SO DIFFERENT ORANGES AND EVEN THE PLETHORA OF WRAPPERS FROM HALLOWEEN CANDY.

Should we let scavengers scavenge and sit back in pity of their misfortune, or should we take action? Now, I am definitely not saying we become the idiotic seventeen-year-old with a baseball bat, ready to swing, but I do believe there is a level of action necessary to be tended to when presented with the misfortune of society. Pity is merely the first step of taking action, but it is not the only step we should take. It is infuriating to see your hard work chipped away by those who do not have such work, but for the most part, they cannot control it. Raccoons were born to survive. People were born to survive, and they will do whatever it takes to prevail. We cannot punish those in need; we must embrace them. We are not meant to live like raccoons, but we are meant to protect those who do. Don't be like me. Keep your bat in your basement. Go out and talk to that raccoon; be a helping hand.



WHAT THE 14TH AMENDMENT MEANS TO ME | SAMUEL ALVAREZ '24

14th Amendment, Section 1: “All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”

Growing up, I had never given much thought to our country's Constitution. I was too wrapped up in wondering which toys I wanted to play with or what would happen on next Tuesday's "The Flash" episode. Despite knowing about my family's background, I never took much interest in learning more about the stories about their journey to the U. S. Even today, that surprises me, since my entire family emigrated here to the U. S. decades ago, whether that be illegal or legal.

My father came here legally when he was in his twenties. He arrived in New York, leaving his entire family behind in Ecuador to live a better life here. He knew little to no English and had no one to rely on except himself. For a few years, he lived alone until he had a family friend, who later became my godfather, who housed him until he was able to get on his feet and look for a path to residency through marriage. He was later able to petition for my older brother to immigrate here as a permanent resident and recently in the past three years, he petitioned my older sister as well. Today, he is a proud U.S. resident, working part-time at Costco and successfully working in real estate to provide for his family.

My mother, luckily, had people she could rely on since she came here through her father, my grandpa. My grandpa left the Dominican Republic to give his family a better life here in the U.S. After receiving his residency, my grandpa petitioned for my grandma, mom, aunt, and uncle to immigrate to the U.S. as permanent residents. Knowing little to no English, my mother's side of the family was able to go through this experience together, trying to

find ways to build a new life here. Today, my mother and the rest of her family are proud United States citizens and she works full-time at Costco to provide for her family.

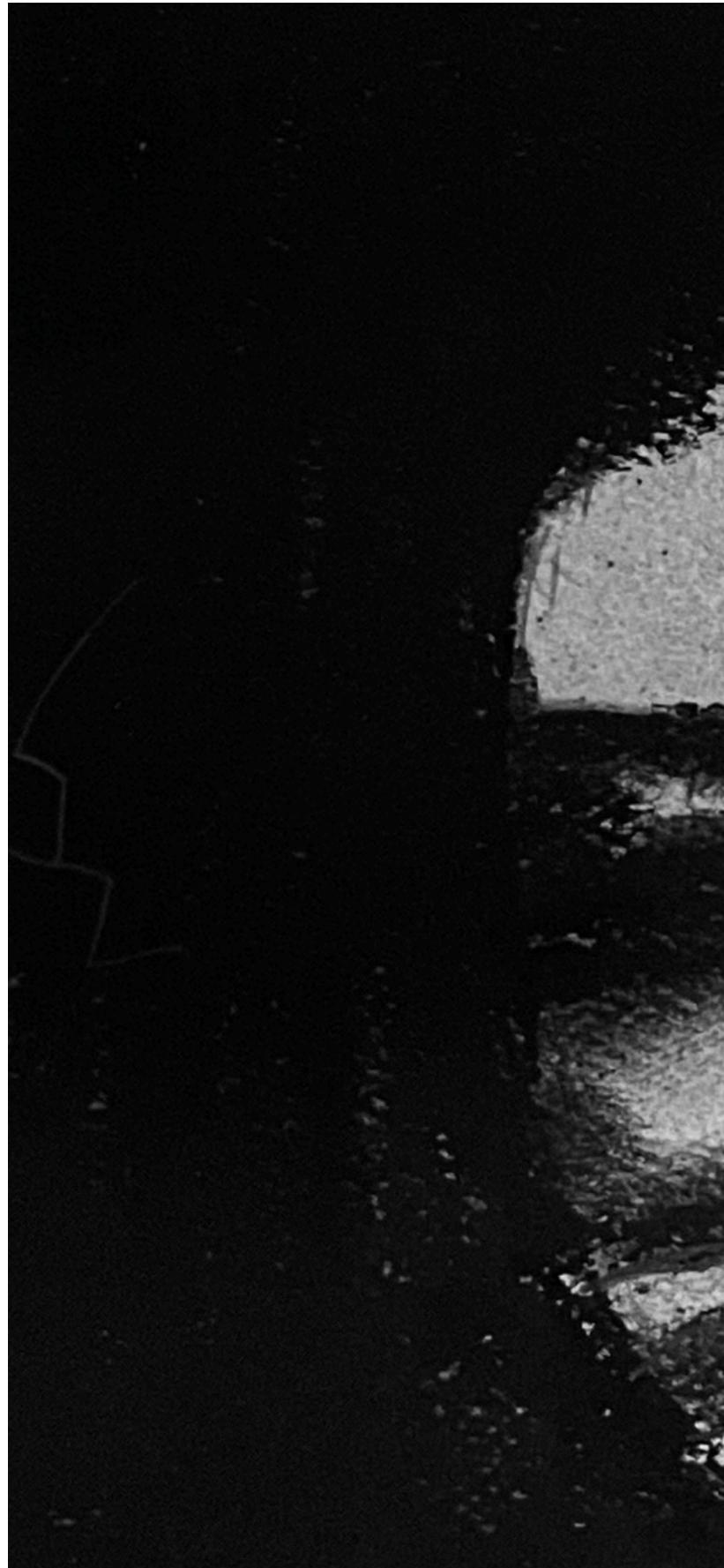
My godmother has a similar story, but unfortunately with a different ending. My godmother came here on a tourist visa. Around the time she had met my parents, she was supposed to leave the country, but when news came to her that my mom was pregnant with me and they wanted her to be my godmother, she stayed. For more than twelve years she lived in the United States, being a second mother to me. She raised me for the majority of my life: being a huge part of my religious, academic, and personal life. My godmother was the only other person, except for my mother, who knew me inside and out, even more than myself. That's why it tore me apart when I found out that she had to be deported back to Peru in October 2015, missing out on my formative years and not being able to attend my high school graduation. It never made sense to me how an active, functioning member of American society could not be seen as an American citizen and allowed to become one. While in the U.S., she attended Sacred Heart University, received two degrees, worked at a dental office, and was an active member of the Dioceses of Bridgeport, teaching CCD classes. She was someone who devoted her life to goodness, respect, freedom, justice—all American values. She should have been given that opportunity, that privilege to be an American citizen because God knows she is more American than the government officials on Capitol Hill.

This initiated me to do some research and try to find a solution for my godmother since I thought this country wouldn't defend her right to opportunity. I was exposed to our Constitution and its amendments for the first time and I read that document God knows how many times. I hadn't realized then but, having thought of it in the past week, the Constitution had defended my godmother, in a rather simple manner. The 14th Amendment gives every person, regardless of legal status, the right to due process and equal protection of those laws. I realized that she was given the opportunity to stay. She was able to get her case appealed in front of a judge many times

**THE 14TH AMENDMENT
GIVES EVERY PERSON,
REGARDLESS OF LEGAL
STATUS, THE RIGHT TO
DUE PROCESS AND
EQUAL PROTECTION OF
THOSE LAWS.**

as any other citizen of the United States would. This amendment is rather very foundational to American society for the main reason that it will protect all persons no matter their legal status and will protect people like my godmother against others who believe that illegal persons residing in the U.S. should have no such rights, rendering us as not a “person” as the 14th Amendment says.

Today, she is currently living in Peru, unemployed due to medical conditions, working hard with my family and attorneys to try to return here to the United States, through legal means.





BECOMING AMERICAN | TOMÁS GALLOZA '24

I, Tomas Bradley Galloza III, was born at 2:59 PM in Milford, Connecticut, U.S.A. I live on Hancock Ave on the northwest side of Bridgeport, Connecticut. I have lived there my entire life. I was born in America; therefore, I was born an American, thus giving me the rights that every other citizen in America has. On my mother's side I am Dominican, and on my father's side I am Puerto Rican and Italian. I am not a citizen of any country that is not the U.S.

My mother was born and raised in the Dominican Republic. Our family has lived in the Caribbean since people have resided there. Yet, I am here, in America, thanks to the bravery of my mother. She traveled to a new country with the help of my grandmother, who was an assistant to a fairly rich family who lives in Connecticut.

With their help, my mother was able to come to America and start a new life here, which, looking at my mother's actions, must have been terrifying. She left everything behind, I mean, she literally left everything behind. She left her friends, her family, her job (which is so confusing to me). My mother had it good in her home, and while it may not have been sunshine and rainbows, she was a lawyer; she got one of, if not the, best educations

the Dominican Republic had to offer, but she wanted better for her children. So, she did the most selfless act I have ever seen someone do, and left everything behind, for me and my sisters.

My father was born in America. He was born in Connecticut, thanks to my grandparents, who came here from Puerto Rico. He and his brothers were the first generation of Gallozas to be born natural citizens of America. Though the story of how my father and my uncles got here might be lame, I assure you that the rest of this is not.

The 14th Amendment states that “All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside.” This amendment was ratified on July 9, 1868. This amendment has been in place for 155 years, and yet, my family has only been here for around thirty of those years. Which means that the amendment worked, for me at least.

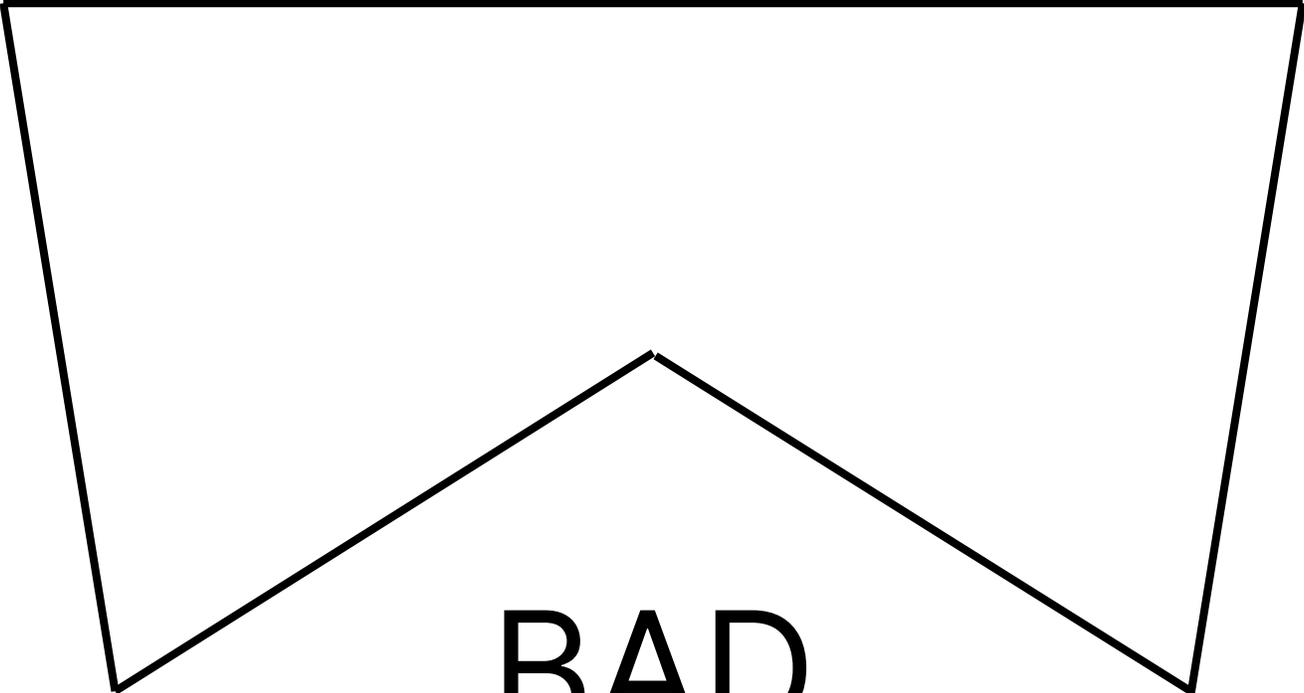
There have been an ungodly amount of cases where the 14th Amendment hasn't really worked. Instead, it has separated families via organizations such as I.C.E., families that were simply trying to do the same as my mother: have a better life, if not for themselves, for their children. These families had hope because of the 14th Amendment. The promise of a better life is one that the 14th Amendment seems to guarantee, but thanks to things such as anti-immigration laws, this wonderful amendment (on paper) is used as a trap to lure people in and kick them straight out of America.

My family is one of the lucky few who have not needed to fear being kicked out. On the contrary, my entire family is composed of U.S citizens. Even my mother, who was naturalized through marriage with my father. Is that not amazing? Now I'm not talking about how wonderful the 14th amendment is, I'm talking about how awesome my family is, especially my mom. She was at the very top of social hierarchy when she was in the Dominican Republic. She had an amazing education, she was a lawyer, she was building a life that was absolutely wonderful. Then she came here and went from the top of society to the bottom, a woman of color. Which, for someone so awesome, that seems super unfair.

But that is what happens for a lot of people when they first come into America. They go from the top of society to the bottom. All because the constitution never specifies what the hell it means to be a citizen or how to become one. Is that not absurd? All of these specific rules, all these forms of checks and balances, but never once does the constitution state how to become a citizen, or who even really counts as one?

Now we have more of a “definition” and way to become naturalized. But, I want to spend one second on naturalization. It is the most complicated, annoying, and tedious process I have ever seen. To be a legal immigrant is a twelve-step process that has to be done every six to ten months of which you need SOMEONE ELSE FOR. In order to get your green card, which takes three years of being a citizen, you then have to do another process which on paper seems simple but will actually take months if not years to do. It is a terrible system, but one we need to have because of the lack of definition in the Constitution.

But this lack of definition makes the fact that I am standing here amongst you all today even more amazing. It is what allows for someone like my mom, an immigrant from the Caribbean, to become a citizen, and what allows for me to be born a citizen. That is what makes this amendment so important to me, because I would not be here today without it. I would not even exist if not for it, so I would say that is reason enough to make Amendment Fourteen important to me.



BAD

HEMINGWAY

STORIES



A JAR OF HONEY | MATTHEW MARTINO '25
BAD HEMINGWAY CONTEST RUNNER-UP

255 DAYS BACK

With one hand he lifted the comb and poured it into a jar. He took gladly to suppressing the bees with smoke. He didn't like them. They didn't like him. The trees started to rustle in the distance, grazing his face for a second. A nostalgic warmth took hold of him, leaving as quickly as it entered. He snapped back, fighting the earth for it with his right. It took to his clothes instead.

365 DAYS PAST

It came in the mail.

Timothy Lawrence
11 Madison Street, San Jose

Major, it's me Timmy. Can you believe it — the war is over, or has been. Well, anyway I just moved to this small town called San Jose, and, well, I heard it's near you. It's been so long. I want to start a farm, maybe even come
vi

—He was interrupted by a tear staring him back. Usually its nothingness would have angered him, but he was pleasantly surprised.

9 MONTHS AFTER

“Hey, Peter.”

“Uh-huh.” His voice was interrupted by the bread they had found.

“You think...I’ll see him again? You think he’s OK?”

Outside the barn a large cloud was approaching over the vast hills. Plenty of hay lay around. In fact, he knew it would be perfect for sleeping. The wood floors were never comfortable—nonetheless dry.

“Well.” The railing bowed beneath his weight.

“Let’s just say, that’s not something you need to worry about . . . I mean you.” He looked out to the incoming clouds.

“Look, kid, you have a life ahead of you. Go to school...Heck, once we get out of here, get married.”

“It’s just...I need to know, after what happened. He could be dead!”

He snapped up, met his eyes again, and took up a deep stare.

“Hey, don’t think like that. He’s fine. I mean, you saw the medics get him.” He wasn’t sure, but he didn’t have to be. Major would want them to continue. To finish.

13 MONTHS AFTER

He tried to steer, but he always wrote with his right hand. Dirt in the air, he met the day head on and chest out. His sleeve flapping in the air. Two jars of honey sat next to him along with his pocket knife. He had thought about bringing his gun—there had always been rumors of outlaws—but he couldn’t use it anyway.

EGGS AND ALMONDS HERE

“Old Lisa. . . Nothing can stop that old woman.”

The road split. The one up north led past some almond and fruit farms to the armory up in the city. This was where he had turned last time. This time, he went west.

5 MONTHS BEFORE

“You always eat that?”

There was a power, but subtle gentleness to his voice. The voice of a large man—most definitely a confident one.

“Yes, sir.” He shuffled to attention. His lips still held some of the honey that he had spread.

“Say, what’s your name again, son?”

“Timothy... Timmy.”

2 MONTHS BEFORE

They had taken cover in some foliage just west of the town. He had shot someone but wasn’t sure if he had really kicked the bucket. Small raindrops began to roll off the pointed leaves, taking to his head. Next to them looked to be the naked frame of a house that had been taken over by large rose bushes. The air was heavy, and, for a moment only, the safe sounds of a world before could be heard. For a second, he felt a thorn dig into his arm.

“Dammit. You got a bandage, Major?”

“Shhh, we’re hiding, Timmy.” He turned toward him; he wanted to be compassionate. On the edge of some slim pine tree sat what looked like two emeralds. A perfectly rounded rock flew by, and Major hopped on it. He looked surprised.

13 MONTHS

The door was a dull red and cracks of paint lay at his feet. The broken facade stood as a testament of a winning battle to dust and rocks that littered the cracked concrete. A couple wildflowers stood tall against the rose bushes. A couple vines lay underneath his feet. A young woman revealed herself from the door. She was soon joined by a tall slender man whose hand seemed to have lost to the roses. He looked conflicted at first but then ran to him only grimacing slightly at his sleeve.

“Careful... Wait till you see what’s in the box.”

CHANCE AND CHOICE | DANIEL TRISTINE '25
BAD HEMINGWAY CONTEST RUNNER-UP

Smoke drifted with a rosy smell. Pachelbel's *Canon in D* began beyond the door. Old limestone columns rose on each side. She turned toward the older man.

“What if I won't be happy?”

“You will, trust me.”

“How do you know?”

“I was.”

She grew silent for a moment, and looked beyond the door. Coming back from her trance, she turned to the man again.

“What if he isn't the one?”

“Hm?”

“How could everything have perfectly led me here, with him, of all others?”

“Who am I to know? Life just seems to work itself out. You'll see it more when you get older.”

Her eyebrows furrowed, mouth opened slightly, then closed. She looked to the ground and saw tile patterns in many shapes: rhombi, triangles, and swirls all connected and organized in lines. Drawing her gaze closer, a floral pattern covered her lace dress, which lay on the patterned tile. A faint smile crept on her face.

She walked through the door, with them right behind her. She looked back often, consistently met with pressing looks. Rosy perfume and strong cologne mixed in the air. Bill Haley played overhead. Bumped and shoved to the front, she came into contact with him. His jacket was pressed, his hair in wavy curls.

“Well, are you just going to stand there?” She turned her head, but those familiar faces had already passed. Wishing to leave, she forced herself to stay.

“I’m not sure, am I?”

“Hey, you came up to me.”

Her eyes squinted, but soon loosened as she silently drew breath.

“Well, I didn’t mean to.”

“Fate works in strange ways.”

Her jaw loosened but fists tightened. Her nails lacked any polish; her wrists, jewelry.

“I assume you are here for someone? What’s her name?”

“That depends, what’s yours?”

They surrounded her as deep breaths were drawn through her smile. One claimed it was their arm; the other, their shoulder. No eyes, however familiar, were met. She looked forward, into the distance.

Beyond the colorful glass panel he stood, and from it she stared. Her eyes traced the shapes on the floor, etching a line from herself all the way to him. Between them, there were people. Lots of them. Some cried. Some smiled. Firm expressions and lighthearted ones. She stood up on her toes. It was difficult with high-heels, balancing. Still, she had a better look of his pressed jacket and wavy hair.

“Why did I accept it?” she asked, walking to the older man.

“Because you knew.”

“How did I know? Was it really truly one-hundred percent me?”

The older man chuckled, but then straightened his face. “When you said yes, how were you feeling?”

“I don’t remember. Excited probably? Everyone says that though.”

“But *why*? Were you excited because you knew everyone else would see it as something exciting or because you truly found it to be so, because it mattered to you? What were you thinking of when you agreed?”

“Our future. Him. The way he smiles, the way he cares, the way he cries. Something like that.”

“Do you trust him?”

“I should, yes, but I’m still so so so scared.”

“Do you trust yourself?”

She drew a quick breath. Her exhale was silent and slow.

“If I can. I just—how can I trust my thoughts? I think one thing someday and then something else another day.”

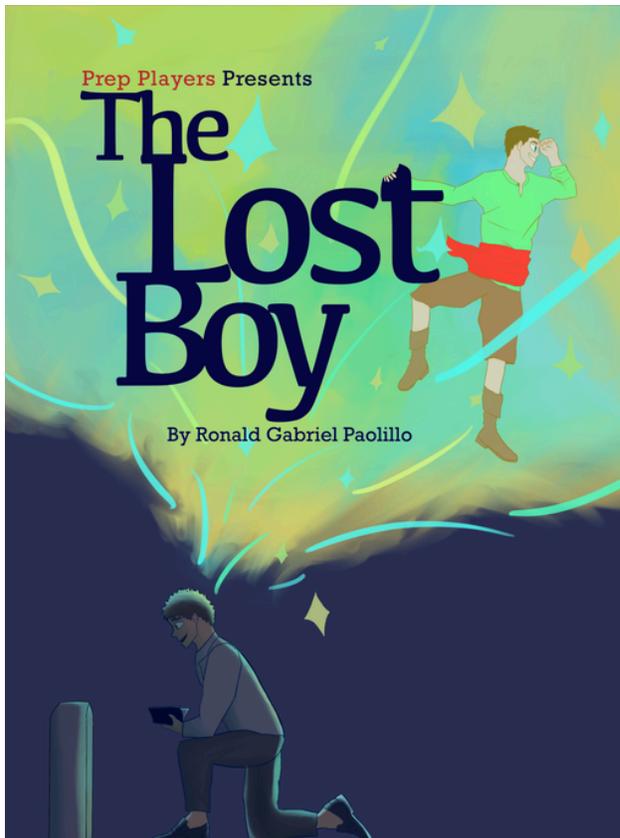
“Your thoughts will change, but your heart will not.” The old man paused. “What did your heart say when he asked?”

She listened. Overhead, the song played its final verses and silence filled the room. She looked back.

“It said yes.”

“You are ready, Eleanor. Let us go.”

Eleanor and the dear old man centered themselves on the path. The ushers opened the doors. A line in the tiles traced straight to where he stood up ahead, but Eleanor did not look at it. Instead, she looked at him, then her foot, lifted it up, and took a step forward.



SUNSET HARBOR | BRYAN MARIN '25
WINNER OF THE 2024 BAD HEMINGWAY CONTEST

The hospital witnessed a scene of solitude, the quiet interaction between two souls living in utter darkness. Monitors beeped, a repetitive reminder of the fragility in time. The room brimmed in ill-lit shadows, gripping onto the dense weight of untold stories and tears.

“Is there someone on the other side of the room?” the kid quietly asked.

“No, the doctors just like placing two beds in one room,” replied a scratchy old voice.

“I can’t see you. See the curtain?”

“I don’t.”

“Well, I don’t want to bother you but noticed something about this place?”

“For Chrissakes, no, kid. Don’t start.”

“Look, it’s a ghost town in our room.”

“Guess people really don’t enjoy hospitals. Perhaps too much bad news.”

“How about the other rooms with all these visitors? They’re coming in and out.”

“Quit this crying, kid.”

“How about how the sunset looks? Don’t you wish you could see it from here?”

“Sunsets are for those with windows.”

“No, they’re not.”

“Look around. What wall here is ever going to give us a glimpse of the damn horizon?”

“Let’s just shut our eyes and imagine.”

“Imagining sunsets in a ghost town, huh?”

“It’s in the mind.”

“Hey, let’s imagine some visitors while we’re—”

“God, I can’t do this being alone shit!”

“I’ve been alone all my life before this bed.”

“My family ... lost them in a storm. Boats devoured by the sea,” said the

kid.

“Fella, storms are unforgiving,” answered the old man.

“Sometimes you know I feel like I could’ve done something myself. Changed the course of that storm. Changed something within those dark clouds.”

“Know what ... let’s just share the rain. See, I took a bullet for a kid who hasn’t made an appearance in this damn place.”

“Well, I guess my mom was right. Job never got easy answers.”

For hours the cold hospital room now in a deep silence: an equilibrium beneath the two. The monitors’ notes, once conflicting in the odd symphony of loneliness, now beat together in unison as a shared rhythm now. The echoes of their new conversation merged with the steady reverberating beat of their combined monitors.

The kid cleared his mind and set it back to the landscape with an approaching sunset as he squeezed his eyes shut.

“Remember your cliff dives in the past?” asked the kid.

“The good days.”

“Man, it’s that one feeling, sorta being suspended in the air for a second.”

“Son. You know those were the places where you really learned to face your toughest fears. These high spots around us, now dare us for that one dive.”

“My God, the clear and calm blue water. Man, I can’t wait.”

“Time stopped for a moment, right before just one dive.”

“I see it, the sun, I can see it! It’s fighting the darkness,” cried the kid.

“Listen here...we all got our battles, son,” the old man said. “Some just fight them in silence.”

As his words remained high in the air, a profound quiet spread around the entire room. The monitors now seemed to cry in silent sympathy. The revolving shadows around shifted and deepened further to the sterile walls amidst this silence.

“The sunset is strange now ... it’s not dipping completely into the horizon like it should!”



But now there was no response. The room completely embraced a stillness quickly transcending two barriers: life and death. The fading heartbeat on the monitor resonated with the silent loss.

“Hello?” the kid called out.

“Where...are you? Christ! Why me?”

There was no response to be heard.

The kid’s monitor refused to stop, continuing its relentless beat like a dedicated drummer. His breathing pace steered out of control. His pulse raced through the monitors. He was left alone now; left to journey through the rough meaning of the old man’s fading words in a room with a different kind of silence. As the air hung heavy in the empty ceiling doctors rolled out a bed from the room and they returned to the room again.

“Is everything all right, hon?” a doctor asked.



**WRITING
ROYALE**

The Writing Royale is Fairfield Prep’s annual short-story contest, open to original works of fifteen hundred words or fewer. This year’s competition welcomed an even dozen submissions representing members of the freshman, sophomore, and junior classes. These were read anonymously by a panel of faculty judges who nominated five finalists, whose stories were forwarded to this year’s guest judge, the writer and teacher Michael Brelsford ’07.



Michael Brelsford is honored and thrilled to partner with *The Bellarmine Review* this year. His own short fiction has appeared in *Post Road Magazine*, *Peatsmoke*, and *The Bookends Review*. His story “Independent Alice” received the Nicholas J. Rinaldi Award in fiction, and his first novel, *The Breadwinner’s Fireworks*, is forthcoming. A member of Fairfield Prep’s Class of 2007, Michael holds an MFA in writing from Sarah Lawrence College and teaches at Fairfield University.

Mr. Brelsford had this praise for the finalists:

RUNNER-UP: THOMAS ADAMS '25, "I JUST WANT SOME SUSHI"

In "I Just Want Some Sushi," Nick meets friends for a Saturday dinner in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. The sneakers, the puffer jacket, the Subaru Crosstrek, Apple Maps, Spotify, the wealthy town itself—all speak to the narrator's comfortable life. Recalling the treacherous world of his recent read, Dante's *Inferno*, Nick seems haunted by this Rockingham County existence, agonizing over parking spaces and restaurant choices. The evening seems constantly on the brink of "something bad happening," but nothing horrible ever materializes. Or does it? Is this world of luxury and privilege, a world where we just want our sushi, in fact a kind of inferno, a certain hell?

RUNNER-UP: BEN LESTER '25, "SOLDIERS OF A SEPARATE WAR"

"Soldiers of a Separate War" explores a profound moment of regret. At a table in Gabriel's Bistro, Michael encounters his estranged friend, Elias. Though Elias admired Michael for his intelligence and became his protector against bullies, they eventually fell apart due to mutual jealousies. Michael was the academic, Elias the athlete. When Elias got accepted into his dream college, Michael was caught off guard. This story embraces its realist genre by focusing on what an experience of loss is like rather than how life should be—the hallmark of a talented and wise writer.

RUNNER-UP: ALEX SALAZAR '25, "ANTLERS OF ICE"

Sal digs graves, buries his neighbors, and wonders if his father will ever return from the frozen, mountainous world in "Antlers of Ice." The narrative centers around Sal's pursuit of a stag through the treacherous winter, rifle in hand, defying his mother's insistence that there is nothing to hunt. As he chases this gorgeous animal with icicles hanging from its antlers—a crystal-clear image effortlessly painted by a writer who knows beauty comes with restraint—Sal becomes even more fatigued than his prey. The story teaches us that redemption will come when we don't give up hope.

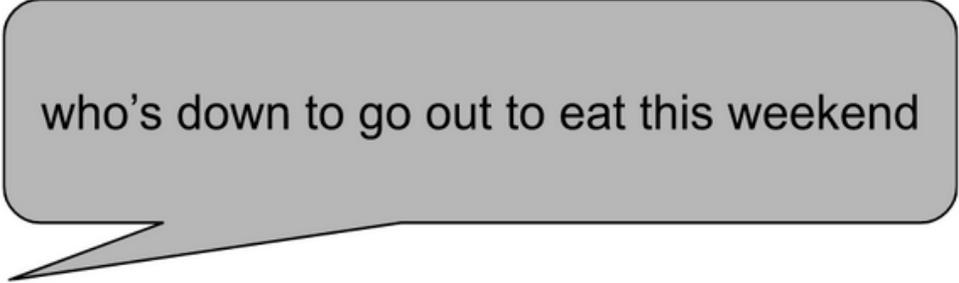
RUNNER-UP: RYAN SHEPPARD '26, "THE LETTER"

Estelle is already exhausted from grief when she finds "The Letter" from her deceased father. We learn from the first line that the attic in which she finds the letter is a kind of living presence, welcoming her with "its musty embrace." It is filled with things from Estelle's relationship with her father, most notably a chess set where the king has toppled over. In only a few short pages, this story teaches us how to love, how to mourn, and how to move on. It is not in the avoidance of pain that we find peace. The attention to detail is remarkable, showering the reader with a sense of place. This writer knows that a short story exists on its own terms, plays by its own rules. The title makes us assume that we will read this letter, that perhaps the whole story will be epistolary—but this writer is too talented to be predictable.

WINNER: QUINN LOMBARDO '26, "GREEN HELL"

"Green Hell" reads like the final journal entry of a soldier entrenched in jungle warfare. The war is not specifically named, expanding its significance almost into the realm of allegory. An also-nameless narrator seems to know he will die in battle and all but hopes for it. His girl having moved on to another man, there is nothing for our soldier at home. This prose throbs with a consistent voice, pacing, intensity, honesty; the writer demonstrates the ability to craft an ending that resolves while pointing to the future. The title helps us towards a theme: soldiers often know a unique existence that is at once living—green—and dead: hell. "Green Hell" comes from the heart and displays a staggering talent.

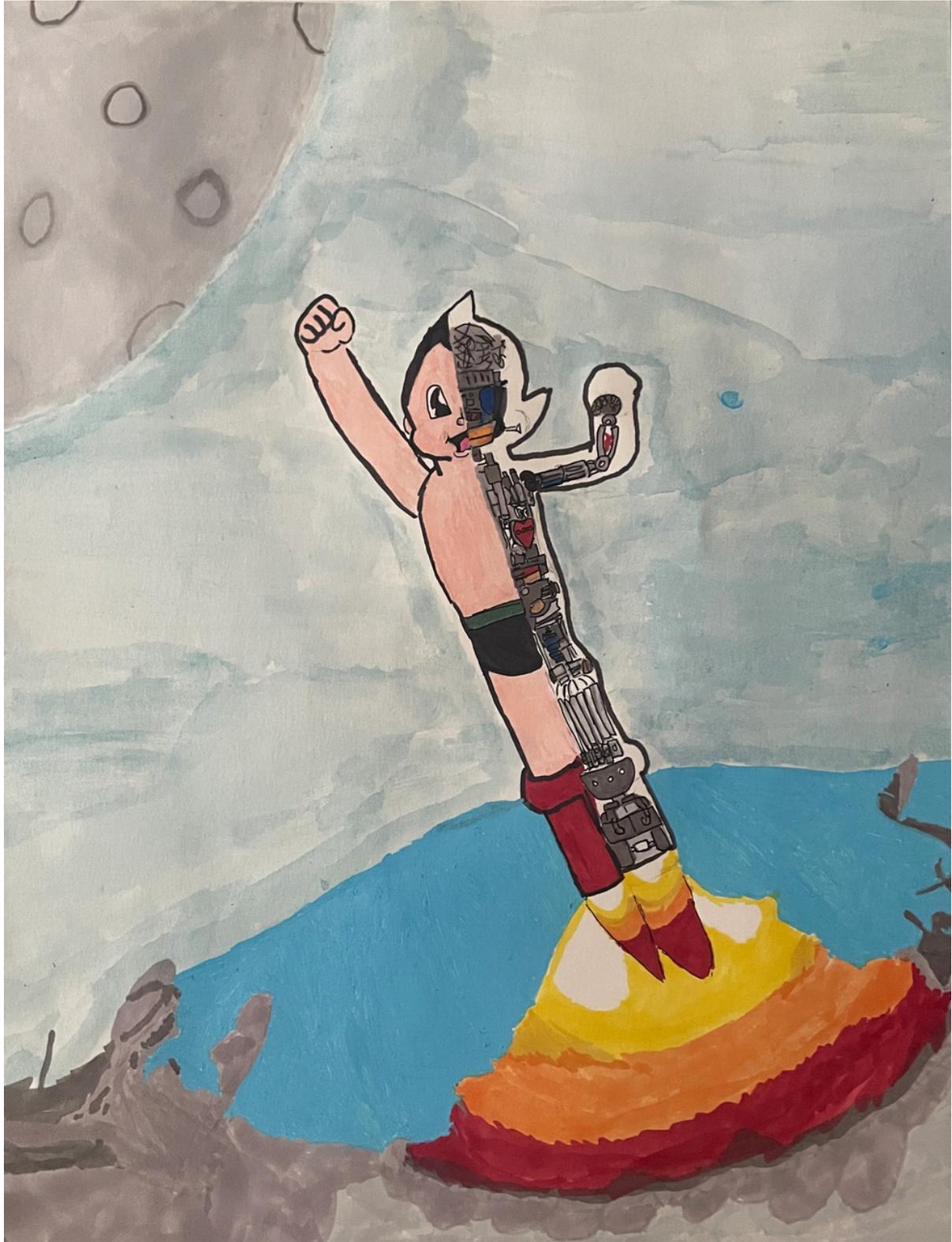
I JUST WANT SOME SUSHI | THOMAS ADAMS '25
WRITING ROYALE RUNNER-UP



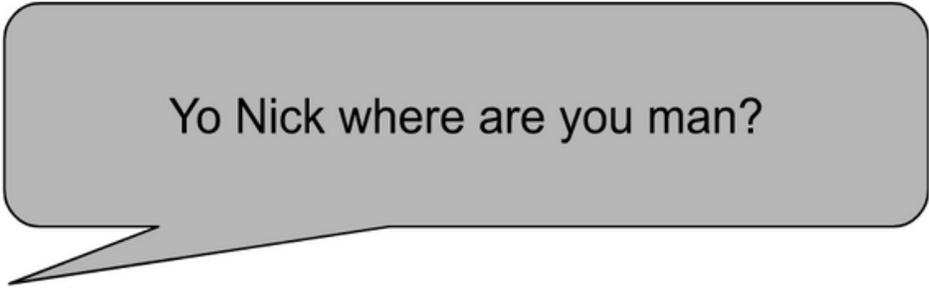
who's down to go out to eat this weekend

When the message lit up my home screen, I thought I was in for a Saturday night of good sushi and good conversation. Now, in hindsight, I should've known the situation I was getting myself into. I buckled my belt, slipped on my sneakers, and donned my puffer jacket, the only means of protection against the New England winter. It was one of those outfits which could be casual or formal depending on the crowd, and it was my best option at the time. With nothing but the guidance of Apple Maps, my Spotify "Rock Classics" playlist, and the dependability of a Subaru Crosstrek, I made the perilous, seventeen-minute journey to Portsmouth. The dark trees which lined my path, or maybe the simple solitude, gave my travel a far more eerie ambience, as if there was something nefarious lurking. For a moment, I thought I was lost in the thick forest, but the single, solitary stop sign showed me the way. I made it through.

I remember reading *Inferno*; I came across the line "Abandon every hope, who enter here." I thought about the despair Dante felt at those gates, the complete absence of hope, the overwhelming adversity. In my mind, I could know how Dante felt, but I could not feel those emotions as he did. Outside the realm of fiction, are there any instances where one is genuinely hopeless? I didn't think so, until I needed to park my car in Portsmouth. Even in recalling this memory I renew my fear. It must've been ten, no, fifteen



minutes of aimless wandering, K-turns, and dysfunctional maps until I finally found an open lot. By then Shawn had called me several times, and was trying to again, repeating that same message:



Yo Nick where are you man?

“Shawn, please just have some patience. I’m trying to park!”

Much to my chagrin, Shawn did not have patience. And, as a tertiary element to my stress, I had Santos waiting for me as well. I knew I could not stay here; my friends needed me. Either to spite my unfortunate circumstances or to prevent any further delay to our dinner plans, I sprinted to the sushi bar—an incredible physical feat. There, outside the door, I abandoned all hope. There was a certain look on Shawn’s and Santos’s faces, a look which we’ve all seen before, and when Shawn shook his head it became superfluous for him to say, “Look, man, it’s not happening.”

“What do you mean? Do you have any idea how difficult it was to drive here?” “It’s packed,” said Santos, breaking in, “and we didn’t get a reservation.”

“So what are we gonna do?” I was beyond frustrated. It had been weeks since I’d had any Japanese food, and now my one chance was being stolen away. My hopes were crippled. As far as stages of grief go, I had already made it to bargaining.

“All right, let’s just scrap this whole idea and go to that diner down the street. It’s nowhere near as crowded.”

“Eh, I don’t know about that. It won’t exactly live up to Orem’s. Plus I bet it’s empty for a reason.”

“Damn. How about we drive to McDonald’s?”

And then Shawn said something awesome. I’ve heard that during solar eclipses or other celestial events animals may behave oddly. Crepuscular

animals—frogs, for instance—may mistake the sudden darkness for twilight, and behave asynchronous to their biological clock. Looking back on this night, I wonder if some other strange misalignment in the stars prompted Shawn to brazenly suggest Vida Cantina.

“Shawn, you’re trying to get us into a Mexican bar? I thought we were just getting sushi,” I said sarcastically.

“What? No, that’s not what I meant. I—”

“Do you do this every Saturday night? No wonder why you’re so tired on Mondays.” “Nick, there’s a restaurant in the back.”

“You know, Shawn,” Santos added, “this explains why you’re never free to hang out on weekends.”

“Dude, shut up.”

“All right, all right, I get it, man. Let’s go inside.”

“ . . . ”

“Did you bring the fake IDs?”

“Santos!”

Of course Shawn didn’t wish to go to a bar. And neither was Vida Cantina an actual bar. But it was funny to see Shawn taking agency over our night’s plans. Shawn, the same Shawn who’d always be caught at Barnes & Noble, mysterious as night—it was spectacular. Yet much to my surprise, there we were, a twenty-first-century triumvirate, seated in our own booth, deciding on our entrees. The neon lighting and the excess of decoration were like the visions of a bad dream. And, it was a hot building. I reluctantly ordered some chicken quesadillas, a coward’s decision. I felt as though I was letting myself down. I’m pretty sure Shawn got some fajitas, but to be honest I don’t remember. So there I sat, among the gluttonous and vain, and I struck up conversation.

“Shawn, do you speak Spanish?”

“No, me and Santos take French together.”

“Neat, and are you still interested in learning German?”

“Yeah, kind of, we need to *einsperren*, Nick.”

“You talking about *einsperren* or *aussperren*?”

“What’s *aussperren*?”

“Eh, I’ll tell you at lunch.”

Although that last phrase seemed English, I was actually just talking nonsense. The particular dialect I was speaking is known as rubbish, and it’s indigenous to my homeland of New Hampshire.

“Santos, you speak Spanish, right?”

“Yeah, that’s right.”

“That’s pretty cool. I’ve been trying to learn it for a while. Shawn, do you hear this song?”

“Yeah.”

“This is peak Spanish music, and I’m gonna teach you some of it.”

“Please don’t.”

“Can you say, ‘*Si quieres dinero, lo siento, no tengo?*’”

Santos was starting to crack up.

“Santos, what’s so funny? What’d you just say, Nick?”

“Nothing, man, just say the sentence.”

“*Si quiere*. . . could you repeat that?”

“*Si quieres dinero, lo siento, no tengo*. Santos, did she take your *dinero*?”

“Nick, what the hell are you saying?” Santos chuckled.

“I’m just trying to educate my good friend on the Spanish language. You see, Shawn, ‘*si quieres dinero, lo siento, no tengo*’ translates into ‘If you want money, I’m sorry, I don’t have any.’ When I asked Santos if she took his *dinero*, I was referring to the story which the song recounts. What at first seems to be an arbitrary dispute over wealth is actually a nuanced exploration into the role money plays in relationships. The speaker is confronting his friend, who, asking for money, is denied, because ‘she’ took his *dinero*.”

“You’re not performing a literary analysis! This isn’t English class, man!” Santos yelled quietly.

“I kind of am, though. Maybe you just don’t appreciate poetry the way I do.” If the food hadn’t arrived any sooner, this sad excuse for a conversation may have continued. And at this point, I was getting into it. In fact, I was just about to bring up Borges when I was interrupted by the serendipitous chicken quesadillas. Serendipitous, that is, if my expectations for the evening hadn’t been sushi.

“Nick, you think you’re ready for the English test Monday?”

“Yeah, I think so, I’m going to use the study guide Dante made. He—”

Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday to you!

“What the hell is that?”

We glanced around. What was this song? I looked to my side and saw the five waiters awkwardly singing “Happy Birthday” to a confused and bewildered middle-school boy and his two friends. Happy birthday? Please. I wanted to ask for the check, but I was trapped. My friends and I were boxed in the booth, with nothing but the comfort of disdainful chicken quesadillas as we waited for the check. And how awful it was that we couldn’t split the bill! Incoherently and with great ineptitude did we scramble together twenty dollars each to pay the check. We only needed to share a glance to say, “Let’s leave.”

And so we walked, and we walked far. Outside of that Malebolge we were greeted by interminable sidewalks and street lights, the pinnacle of liminal space. We wandered through the labyrinth of concrete and bricks until we could find that elusive parking lot. Shawn asked, “What’s that sound in the distance?” And I told him that we’d see for ourselves soon enough. This giant river was in the distance, and so was the silhouette of some ferry boat. Few cars populated that asphalt basin, and the only conversation to be heard was chunks of ice breaking in the river torrent. Before entering our cars, we exchanged a few words in our dialect.

“You know, this was pretty chill. We gotta do this again sometime.”

“Sure, but next time let’s get some sushi.”

“Is next week good?”

“Yeah, it should work for me. See you then.”

I was a bit distracted by all the constellations, but I began the mountainous journey home.

SOLDIERS OF A SEPARATE WAR | BEN LESTER '25

WRITING ROYALE RUNNER-UP

In “Gabriel’s Bistro”, I sat comfortably alone, attentive to the evening’s clientele. Within the café, customers varied: there were socialites and loners, seated next to lovers and friends. Each customer, it seemed, contributed to a shared atmosphere, of which anyone and everyone was welcome.

This much I noticed, secluded at a corner reserved, presumably, for the introvert. I was surrounded by dusty bookshelves, the likes of which could only be found in a coffee shop, though are nevertheless nostalgic. It was here, finally, that I enjoyed my dessert, awaiting Elias Bernhardt.

Elias and I had grown up together. We, despite a noticeable lack of shared interests, had become fast friends in grade school. There was a protective element to our friendship; initially, he—the archetypal athlete—was drawn to me. Elias Bernhardt, to my eternal confusion, was intrigued, evidently, by my solitary, bookish lifestyle. This much was clear from the start: young Elias defended me regularly, shielding yours truly from bullies and the like. Naturally, our respect for each other was mutual. Throughout grade school, and into our teenage years, we kept our bond.

Yet, gradually, Elias and I became estranged. The falling out occurred sometime in senior year, in which, for one reason or another, we grew jealous — I of him and he of me. Elias, of course, was a prospective superstar, on track to become a successful college player of virtually any sport. I, meanwhile, had a burgeoning career in academia, receiving my fair share of accolades. Apparently, neither Elias nor I felt secure in our own accomplishments, feeling threatened, rather, by the personal successes of the other. Hence, come graduation, Elias and I lost touch. In the ensuing weeks, I thought of the man very little, if at all.

Imagine, then, my surprise to see Mr. Bernhardt this evening, entering “Gabriel’s Bistro”. In a word, I was shocked. It was late summer now; I had not seen Elias since the commencement ceremony. However, here he was, and, by the looks of it, he, too, was alone.

A keen extrovert, Elias identified me at once. He, being privy to social walked over to my corner, gesturing to say hello.

“Michael!,” he exclaimed, surprised. “You know this place?”

“I’m a regular,” I teased, smiling hesitantly. “I see you’ve found my little nook.”

“Yes, it suits you.”

Elias gestured towards my table.

“Do you mind if I sit?”

“Of course not. Actually, I would love the company.”

(This exchange of ours, banal and clearly transactional, seemed never-ending. Obviously, I felt we were avoiding a big *issue*.)

“What are you reading?,” Elias asked.

He was pointing to a novel—one I had taken from the café’s dusty shelves.

“Steinbeck,” I answered. “*The Grapes of Wrath*.”

“Oh, sure,” he drawled. “I remember from school.”

“Yeah,” I responded, suddenly uncomfortable. “Well, how have you been anyway?”

“Fantastic,” Elias answered. “In fact, Shelley and I just returned from Europe.”

(A trip to Europe did not surprise me. I knew Elias came from money.)

“You and her are still together, then?”

“Yes!,” he asserted, smiling. “As a matter of fact, I almost proposed in Paris.”

“You?,” I exclaimed. “Elias, you’re only 18!”

“Ridiculous, I know,” he admitted. “I was drunk, though, and, unashamedly affectionate. God, I probably sang like a troubadour!”

I laughed.

“Well,” he added conclusively. “It didn’t work out.”

(Immediately, I assumed the worst.)

“Are you going to break up with her?”

“No,” Elias assured me. “Nothing like that.”

“Then, what is it?”

Elias considered the question.

“Michael,” he responded, deep in thought. “I think I hate weddings.”

My jaw dropped in disbelief.

“Obviously, in Paris,” he explained, “I adored Shelley, and no less,” he insisted, “than I do right now. Still, that thought—this idea of a wedding—made me...apprehensive.”

(Admittedly, Elias had piqued my interest. The thought of him being a married man was almost too much—too much in and of itself. How could a best friend, I wondered, become a stranger in a matter of months?)

“Elias,” I said at last. “You’ll do it for me.”

(My candor, apparently, was unexpected.)

“What?” Elias asked, confused.

“Elias,” I repeated. “I want you to marry Shelley. If you love the girl,” I added, “then, you’ll marry the girl.”

Elias chuckled. (I noticed his voice was tinged with melancholy.)

“You know, it’s funny,” he said. “When we were kids, I had you pinned as best man.”

And there it was: the big reveal. Again, I was reminded of the distance—this insufferable distance—between Elias and I.

“Is everything alright?,” I inquired.

“Yes, Michael, everything’s fine,” he replied curtly.

By this point, the café had emptied out significantly. Gone, it seemed, was the vibrancy—the color and the sound—of the previous hour. Meanwhile, I thought desperately of what to say.

“I want to be your friend,” I finally implored.

Suddenly, Elias’ face turned sour.

“Michael,” he scolded. “Did you have to start?”

He paused.

“Where were you in May, anyhow?”

“Wha—what do you mean?” I stammered.

(Unfortunately, I knew exactly what he meant. May was the month Elias received the acceptance letter: he had a full ride to the school of his dreams. Regretfully, May was also the beginning of the end, so to speak, of his and my relationship. Needless to say, I had touched a nerve.)

“I accomplished something,” he said, “which you knew, deep down, I had earned. I was proud of myself, finally. Well, why—tell me why—you couldn’t understand that?”

“Elias, I always understood,” I replied in earnest. “I wanted you to succeed. I only wish you had wanted the same for me.”

“You must be joking?,” he sneered.

“No,” I insisted. “I’m being honest with you.”

Elias scoffed in condescension.

“I think, Michael,” he said, spitefully, “that you’re an ingrate. Somehow, you became...a pathetic ingrate.”

I glared at Elias.

“Sure, Elias,” I concurred. “I must be pathetic. How else would I have let you and your savior complex ruin my life?”

The café turned deathly quiet. Meanwhile, a thin Frenchman, dressed in an all-black outfit, approached my table, abruptly interrupting Elias and I’s meltdown. The man I recognized: he was the owner of this quaint establishment.

“Will that be all?,” he asked politely.

He was pointing to my dessert—the remnants of my espresso and cheesecake.

“Yes,” I replied, embarrassed. “Thank you.”

“No!” he insisted. “Thank you very much!”

The man left with my tableware. I turned again to Elias, whose face made me practically ill. His lips were tightly pursed, as he gazed aimlessly towards the ceiling. I was aware, ultimately, of the weight of the situation, fearful of the damage done. Elias turned to face me.

“I guess that will be all, Mike,” he said.

Elias got up, motioning towards the coat rack by the door.

“Elias, I...”

I called out to my friend, but it was too late. My whispered plea was drowned out by restored chatter, and, again, I was alone. Still, pride consumed me; plagued with guilt as I was, I much preferred to wallow in self-abasement than suffer an apology. Besides, Elias deserted me; clearly, he

wanted his space, and who was I to deny him of it? Still, I felt horrible.

Ten minutes to midnight, everyone had left Gabriel's Bistro, with the exception of the thin Frenchman. He kept to himself, singing softly by the café entrance. Despite my temper, I noticed him.

His melodies were haunting: each line he sang—every note—had its own character, dressed with a rare melancholic sorrow. I guess I was transfixed.

"You sing a beautiful song," I said.

The Frenchman smiled, squinting toward my alcove.

"Much obliged," he answered.

(Suddenly, I realized that the man, despite singing in French, spoke to me in the clearest of English.)

"What do its words mean?," I asked, fascinated.

He smiled again.

"The refrain is beautiful," he replied. "It goes..."

The Frenchman began to sing:

*Man is always in a fight
To craft his life as more
Though he is as much of what will be
As what once came before
Man would soon find nothing if
By pride he settled score
So every man's a brother in me
A soldier of a separate war!*

Lost in the Frenchman's serenade, I thought, again, of Elias Bernhardt. Yes, he was unlike me; yes, our ambitions were different. Still, there was once a time I called Elias friend: then, as I recall, his dreams were my own, inseparable even from what I wished for myself. But now, I was alone, and deservedly deserted by the fruits of my labor.

"I'm sorry," I said in haste to the Frenchman. "I've made a terrible mistake."

I rushed out of Gabriel's Bistro, and, in my hurry, I spotted the Frenchman once more. Closing for the night, he flashed me a profound, intuitive smile. Seeing this, I knew, finally, I was ready—truly ready—to know Elias.

ANTLERS OF ICE | ALEX SALAZAR '25

WRITING ROYALE RUNNER-UP

The shovel cut into the hard earth. It sank into the frozen soil underneath the thick layer of snow that blanketed the ground. The shovel pulled up the dirt and snow and dropped it aside. The shovel sank into the earth again. The dirt crunched as the shovel pierced it.

It was a clear day. The sun shined brightly—but not warmly. The sun was bright. The ground, still frozen. The shoveler stopped digging for a moment to rest. His breath was visible. It reminded him of the smoke from a bonfire. He looked over towards his home. A thick cloud of smoke puffed from his chimney. “At least they’re warm,” he said.

He got back to digging. It was slow going, but the hole gradually got deeper and wider. After a while, it got to be the right size. He put down his shovel and walked back inside. “It’s dug,” he said.

The doctor was wrapping the body in a burial cloth. “Thank you, Sal. I wish I didn’t need you to do this, but with all the men gone...”

“Don’t mention it.”

The body and the doctor both looked wispy and hollow. The doctor left and called out to everyone in the village. Then he and Sal walked outside with the body.

This wasn’t the first time Sal had dug a new grave. Several spots around were marked with wooden crosses.

Sal and the doctor put the body down next to the new pit. A small crowd had gathered around. They looked almost as dead as the deceased man himself.

The doctor spoke a while about the dead man’s contributions to society, but Sal didn’t listen. Finally the doctor stopped talking, and he and Sal lowered the body into the grave.

After the body had been lowered down into the pit, Sal refilled it. The crowd mostly dispersed. Only the dead man’s family stayed. Sal fashioned a wooden cross for this grave and drove it into the ground.

“I’m sorry for your loss,” he said without inflection to the dead man’s wife. She smiled at him kindly, even though there was not much kindness left in her.

Sal went home. The door creaked as he opened it. A gust of hot air greeted him as he walked in. Inside, the shelves were barren.

“I wish you had come to the burial,” Sal said. “Mr. Alder was a good neighbor.”

“It wouldn’t have made a difference,” his mother responded. She was huddled together with Sal’s sister in front of the fireplace.

Sal sighed. He sat down with his family to warm himself up. Then he got up and took his father’s gun off the wall.

His mother scoffed at him. “Give it up. There isn’t any game left around here.”

“I have to try,” Sal said. He slung the gun over his shoulder.

“Please don’t,” his mother pleaded. “I don’t want to lose you, too.”

“Dad’s not dead. He can’t be. He promised us he would come back!” Sal looked his mother in the eyes. “Until he does, it’s up to me.”

“You’ve tried for weeks without success! Every animal around here is either dead or hiding in burrows underground. There’s no point.”

“I have to do this,” Sal said. He left the house and set out for the mountain pass, which was around two miles away. Sal’s village was located in a valley at the feet of some mountains. The mountain pass was the only way out of the area that didn’t require mountain climbing. It had been closed off by an avalanche. Sal checked it every day just in case it had opened.

It was still obstructed.

Sal was not an experienced hunter, having only started accompanying his father on hunts that fall. He hadn’t successfully hunted a single animal since his father left. Nevertheless, he went into the mountains everyday, hoping to bring back food for the village.

Sal hid in the bushes. He waited for a long while, twiddling his thumbs and toes to keep them warm. They stayed cold.

“What am I even doing...” he muttered to himself. “Mom’s right. It’s hopeless.” He put down the gun and got up.

That was when he saw it—a flash of light from the corner of his sight. He looked, and saw a pair of brilliant antlers. Icicles had formed on them, flowing directly off the antlers as if part of the structure. The animal to whom the antlers belonged was a stag. It stood proud, as if totally unaffected by the frigid weather and lack of food. It was the most magnificent animal Sal had ever seen. He stared at it far off for a few seconds. Then he remembered he had a job to do and crouched down. His hands shivered from the cold. He tried to take aim, but his arms wouldn't stop shaking. Nevertheless, fearing that the animal would leave at any moment, Sal fired.

The bullet hit the snow just in front of the stag. It jumped and ran away.

Sal slumped his shoulders. "That was my one chance!" He watched as the stag ran away. Because of the shining icicles on its antlers, he could see exactly where it was, running through the woods. Sal made a decision not to return home without that stag. He slung his gun on his shoulder.

He pursued the brilliant animal as it ran through the forest. It bounded up the mountain, so Sal climbed up behind it. Soon Sal's coat wasn't enough to protect him from the biting winter wind at this height.

Just as Sal pursued the stag, exhaustion and the numbing cold pursued him. He got colder and more tired every minute. The animal scaled the treacherous crags and cliffs of the mountain effortlessly, but Sal had to follow with a great deal of effort. Many times, Sal considered giving up the hunt. Even if he caught it, the stag would not be able to feed the whole village. It wouldn't even feed just his family until the end of winter. Was there really a point to this? Even with the stag, they were still doomed. Sal's dad and those who had gone with him were probably dead in the snow somewhere, unable to bring back food and supplies as they had promised.

Sal tripped on a rock in the snow and collapsed. He was on the verge of giving up, but the stag stopped a hundred feet ahead of him. It was at the peak of the mountain. Sal had a clear shot at the animal. He pulled the gun from his shoulder, aimed, and fired. It hit. The stag crumpled to the ground, and the icicles on its antlers shattered.

Sal hurried up to the peak. He found the stag there. It was still alive, and it looked at him. Sal saw life in those eyes. More life than he had in himself.

“I’m sorry.” With one more shot, Sal ended the stag’s life. At that moment his exhaustion finally caught up with him, and he slumped down and fell asleep. He looked as dead as the stag.

Sal woke up in total darkness. The stag’s corpse was still next to him. It was frozen solid.

He hoisted the stag onto his back. It was incredibly heavy. “Should I even bother? I took your life to save mine,” he said to the stag. “But I can’t even do that. What’s the point?”

Sal looked at the stag and saw a glint of life in its eyes, preserved even after death. Those eyes told him not to waste the life he had taken.

“Of course. Even if it’s just one more day... even just one more hour!” Sal steeled himself and began the journey down the mountain.

His eyes adjusted and he realized that it wasn’t as dark as he had thought. The moon was out and its light reflected off the snow, illuminating the mountain with a quiet glow.

It was hard to avoid falling with the animal on his back, and he slipped several times. But he made his way down anyway.

As he neared the village, he saw fire.

He saw it coming from the middle of town. His house was in the middle of town! Sal dropped the stag and ran to town. His fears mounted as he entered the village. A huge fire awaited him at his house.

But it wasn’t his house that was burning. It was a bonfire, set up a safe distance from his home. There was meat roasting on the fire. His father was there, and everyone who had left was back. And they had brought food. Sal approached his father and hugged him. “I thought you were dead,” Sal said.

“I promised I’d come back, didn’t I?”

“You did.”

THE LETTER | RYAN SHEPPARD '26

WRITING ROYALE RUNNER-UP

The attic greeted me with its musty embrace as I climbed the narrow staircase. Shipping boxes, dusty and battered, formed jumbled piles of his old stuff, each telling a tale of forgotten treasures. Silken threads of cobwebs, hanging low from the wooden ceilings, created a ghostly tapestry. It was as creepy as it was beautiful. Dangling from a string, a solitary light was all there was to illuminate the attic. Its pitiful glow was just enough to allow me to survey the chaos. The scent of wood filled my nose. I felt like the low ceilings and dark walls were closing in on me, whispering stories of the past.

Every piece of junk had a small memory attached. I spotted baseball gloves and a ball, each stitch telling the tale of a little girl laughing, learning, and playing catch with her father. A chess set caught my eye—a relic from the evenings he would spend teaching me the intricate strategies of the game. Every piece stood tall and unmoving, preserved for eternity, like a testament to his memory. Among the stoic soldiers laid a fallen king in solitude. I reached for the piece, grasping it in my hand. I traced the curves of the king like I was a blind girl reading the braille of memories passed, and played with it absentmindedly, losing myself in the memory of the first time I beat him. He was distraught after losing to the same girl he introduced the game to, and moaned about how “the student should never beat the master.” I chuckled softly before delicately placing the chess piece back on the board, laying it back on its side.

I continued sifting through the scattered mementos. Each one seemed to open a floodgate of emotions and stories of the adventures of a little girl and her father. Amid the clutter, I spotted a little brown guitar, strings worn from the countless chords he had strummed. His singing was admittedly not the greatest, not unlike a banshee screeching at the top of her lungs, but he was magical on the strings. My mind wandered to a chilly winter night. The feeble flames of the campfire weren't doing too much to combat the cold, but as soon as he strummed those chords, the frost retreated. Each note was a spell, chasing away the chill, leaving me wrapped in a feeling of warmth and

an unwavering sense of safety.

As I searched through his scattered belongings, my eyes landed upon a single envelope, with my name written across it in perfect cursive. It lay surrounded by the clutter of the attic like a tiny island of order in a vast sea of disarray. The crisp edges and pristine condition of the envelope were in stark contrast to the absolute mess it was hidden in. I hesitated for a moment. My fingers hovered over the envelope while I contemplated whether I wanted to discover its contents. The longing and grief urged me to open it and unveil the contents within, but there was a part of me that feared what I might find, a part that was afraid of the emotions that waited for me within that sealed envelope. That fear threatened to take control, to hide from whatever this package contained. I stifled the feeling with the realization that this might be the last thing I ever received from him. I unceremoniously ripped it open. He would be beside himself to see all the effort he spent making it look fancy go to waste. I emptied the desecrated envelope of its contents. It was a piece of paper, expertly folded. Flattening it out, I realized that it was a letter. The dim light shone on the first words, written in that perfect cursive.

To my star, Estelle.

Those words looked me dead in the eye, pinning my gaze under the immense weight it carried. Those words were a gateway to the past, a way to hear from him one last time, yet they were laden with emotions I could not face. Two years had passed since his departure, but the wounds of his absence were still raw. I felt no inclination to dwell on the past and rip off the bandage over the emotional scar. The walls drew closer, boxing me in. The feeble light blinded me, yet the darkness consumed. The smell of wood became unbearable, assaulting my senses and making my head spin. I felt like an insect trapped in the cobwebs, just waiting for a wave of emotions to scurry in on eight legs and sink its teeth into me. Dust flooded my lungs, suffocating me.

I needed to escape the oppressive grasp of the attic. I couldn't bear another moment in that attic. I turned on my heel and made to leave. With each creak of the dusty stairs, I descended further into my loathing. The sound

grated on my nerves, and my eyes stung. Sorting through the clutter was my daily torment. Each item was my painful reminder of his absence. I hated it. I hated the attic. I hated the boxes, filled with clutter that was priceless, yet not worth a dime. I hated the smell of wood and sawdust taking over your nose, and I hated the dim light hanging by a thread as well as the darkness swallowing everything whole. I hated the intricately woven cobwebs, and those steps that creaked with every step made. Most of all, I hated him for leaving me, for condemning me to search through this waste every day, looking for anything that could just make it feel like he was here again, yet the idea that I would find anything was terrifying. I wasn't delusional enough to think I had closure. Here I was, searching through dust-covered piles, just to find a small piece of him hidden within the chaos. No, I didn't have closure, but I couldn't grieve again, either. The wound wasn't healing, but it was closed. Why would I tear off the scab and expose it to the flood of emotions that would undoubtedly come with this letter? I couldn't put myself through this again. I was content to wallow in my sadness instead of facing the music and accepting that he was really gone. Or, I thought I was.

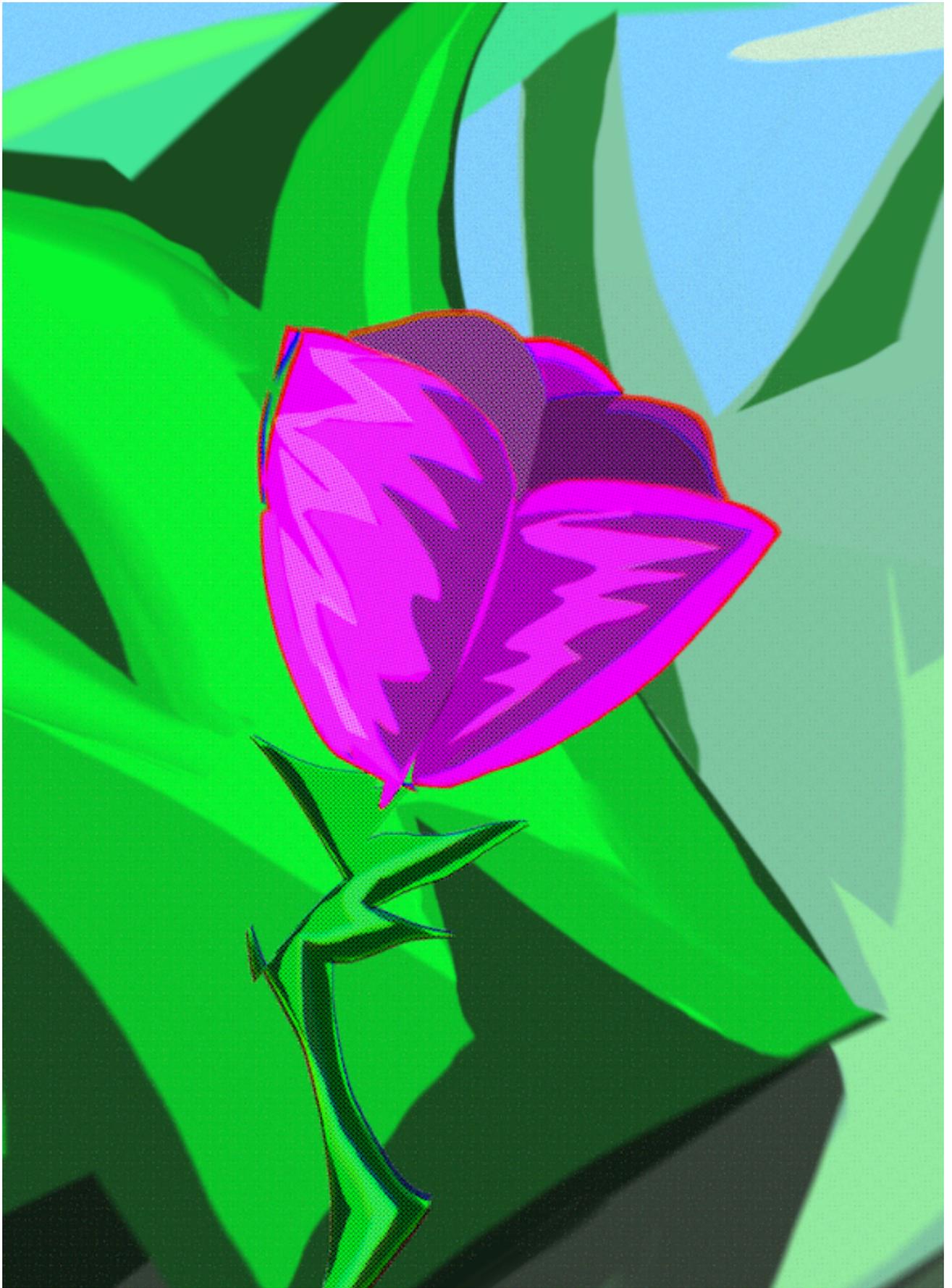
Many days and nights went by. I refused to step foot back in the attic and give the memories any chance to return. With each day, I was sure that the once-perfect letter and envelope were collecting dust like all the other useless relics sitting in boxes up there. However, I wasn't prepared for the anniversary of his death. We had a big ceremony, with speeches and sobbing and the whole lot. I couldn't take another monologue on his "gentle soul" or a profound poem on "his goodness and compassion." I left the ceremony early, much to the displeasure of all the others gathered there. I didn't care. I went straight to the one place I swore I wasn't going back to.

The musty embrace greeted me once more, and the smell of wood was ever-present. The narrow stairs creaked with every step. The ghastly tapestries of silk were in their full glory, and the walls seemed to shrink with every step, pressing into me from all sides. The king still laid on its side. Everything was exactly how it was before, yet it wasn't how it ought to be. I traversed the piles once more, reaching the area where I had ripped the envelope open previously. A piece of paper with a crease in the middle was

left on the floor. It was still spotless. Not a single speck of dust touched it. I didn't want to touch it. I was afraid, yet again, of ripping off that bandage, of tearing off that scab. However, surrounded by silken threads, messy boxes, and claustrophobic walls, I came to the realization that some wounds need to breathe. I couldn't run forever.

To my star, Estelle.

Such bittersweet words, ones that filled me with joy and sadness, a phrase that transcended space and time. I read on, each word opening the floodgates for the memories to come pouring through. A raging river of emotions rushed through my mind and soul, and I found myself lost in the grief of his death. Salty tears hit the perfect letter, staining it forever. And in this moment, in this terrible attic, crying onto the last words I will ever receive from my father, a sense of peace washed over me. The raging river became a refreshing stream. The walls stopped creeping closer. The smell became pleasant. The light gave the room a homey feel, and the darkness felt comforting. In this terrible attic, I found peace. I had never seen something as beautiful as those cobwebs through my teary eyes.



GREEN HELL | QUINN LOMBARDO '26
WINNER OF THE 2024 WRITING ROYALE

The hot stuffy air clings to my body like a blanket. The cold sweat trickles down my muddy face and into my eyes. All I hear are pounding gunshots, roaring jets, thunderous explosions, and desperate screeches from dying men. All I smell is napalm and death. I can't taste anything. It is twenty-two hundred hours. I can't sleep. I can't ever sleep, even when I'm sleeping. I have nightmares. Nightmares of not waking up, nightmares of waking up, nightmares of being back home. I used to write letters to her every day. Looking back, I wasn't writing for her. I was writing to keep my sanity. It let me think about something other than the jungle. It took me away from all the ear-piercing noises and noxious smells. This has been the longest year of my life and yet somehow it has gone by the fastest. I do not have any friends. The pain of losing a friend is tenfold the happiness I would have spent with them. Our platoon is going on yet another mission tomorrow at six hundred hours. Our goal is to move deeper into the jungle and take out as many of "them" as possible. Many of the men in my platoon let their darkness take control. They will kill an innocent. They will kill anyone; it makes no difference to them. I, too, have changed deeply in the past year. Before going back home, if I saw an innocent being harmed, I would have done something about it. Now I sit there and watch, numbed to what is going on. I used to be excited to go on a mission. Now it is a monotonous routine. I am just existing. I got to visit home about four months ago, and it is what changed it all. During those first eight months in the jungle, all I could think about was getting back home to a warm cozy bed and hot water. It is what

allowed me to fight with such vigor and have such close bonds with my friends. When I came home, I saw her and another guy. That hurt, but what hurt most of all was the fact that I had and have nothing back at home. My life at home is boring, uneventful, and safe. All I could think about in the jungle was coming home, and all I could think about at home was going back. I was obsessed. Sometimes I wish I could just be killed and be done with it. I want to be killed before I let the darkness consume me. I think it already has. I am hot and sweaty, and all I feel is agony and excruciating pain. I have nothing back home, and I have nothing here. I have nothing to live for and neither do the guys next to me. These guys next to me love the pain. They love the smell of napalm in the morning. They feel as if they are taking the pain for the people back home. They do not know the truth. When I visited home not one person said a word to me about the war. Not one of them thanked me. We are fighting a losing battle, and no one cares, and these guys love it. I want this war to be over, but I also don't want to go back home to nothing. I'd like to say the darkness hasn't consumed me, but it has. Darkness can come in many forms. For me, I have lost touch with reality. I think it is simply because I just do not care enough. Care enough about my platoon, care enough about my country, care enough about this war, care enough about me. I don't know what's real and what's fake. A lot of times I wake up, and think I am home, but I am not. I am in the deep dark jungle. I could survive or I won't. It doesn't make a difference to me or anyone. I'll just be another guy who died in a pointless war. The amount of support I felt leaving for this war was indescribable. I felt like a superhero. Now I feel like a villain. A villain with no support. A villain with nothing to go home to. A villain with no purpose in a green hell.

SPECIAL THANKS

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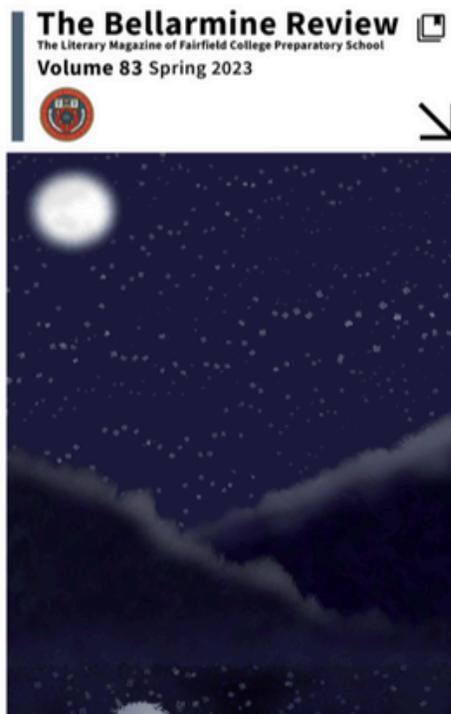
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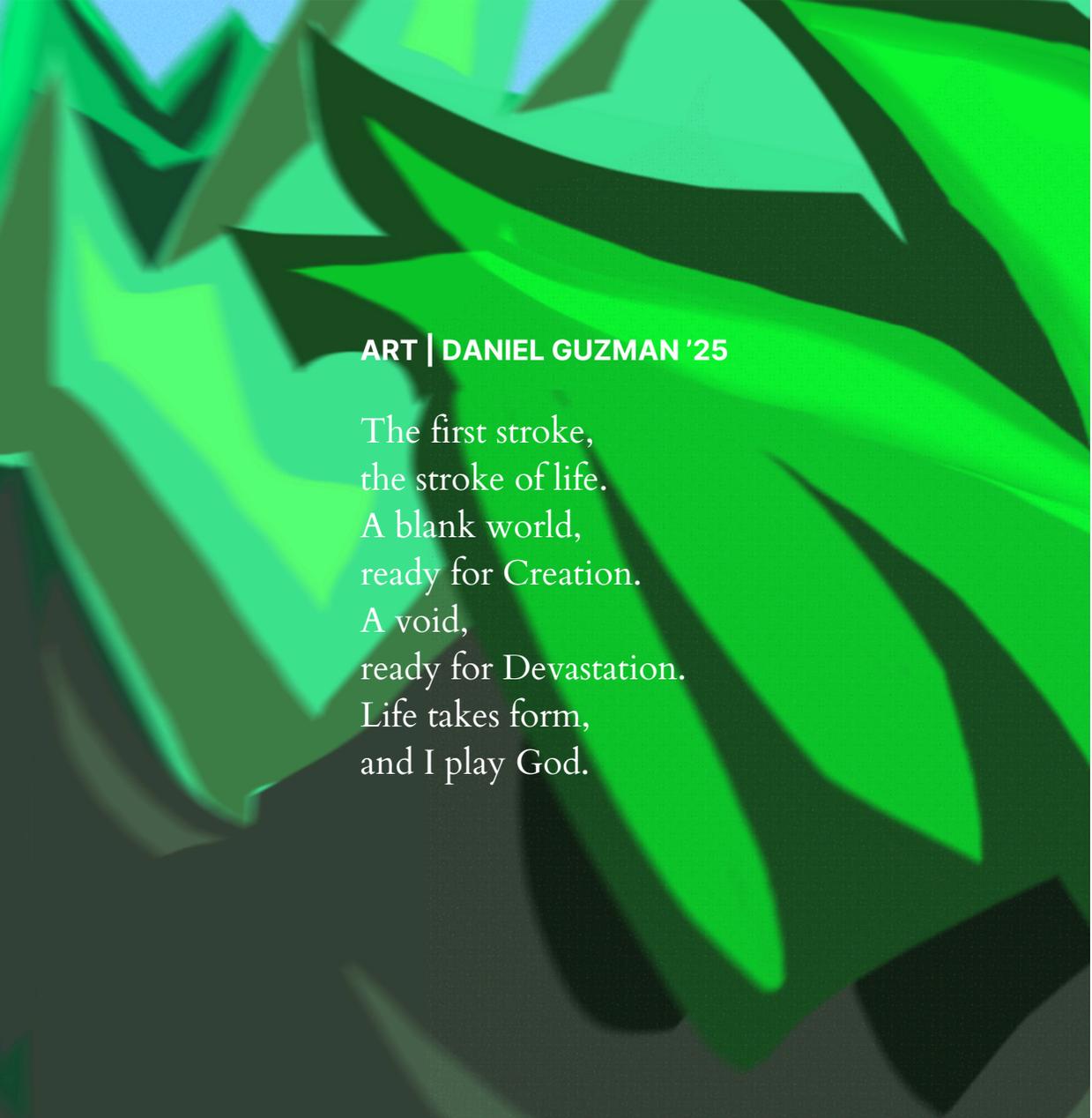


PRAISE FOR *THE BELLARMINA REVIEW*, VOL. 83



The Spring 2023 issue of *The Bellarmine Review* was awarded the rank of **Superior** by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Recognizing Excellence in Art and Literary Magazines (REALM) Program.

In this issue: Thomas Adams · Samuel Alvarez · Jack Boyle · James Callaghan
Christopher Contreras · Tomás Galloza · Daniel Guzman · Ben Lester
Quinn Lombardo · Lars Maechling · Bryan Marin · Matthew Martino
Oliver Mascera · Peter Moreno · Matthew Murphy · Alex Salazar · Joshua Salazar
Ryan Sheppard · Luke Trench · Daniel Tristine · Cameron Willcox



ART | DANIEL GUZMAN '25

The first stroke,
the stroke of life.
A blank world,
ready for Creation.
A void,
ready for Devastation.
Life takes form,
and I play God.