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Mars Sutton '26

Interested in joining The Moxie Can editorial team?

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Dear Reader,

This spring I was given the opportunity to become the new managing editor of *The Moxie Can*, and I enthusiastically accepted. Since then, it's been quite a journey- collecting college lit mags across the Northeast, experimenting with different formats, and thinking about how this magazine can grow. But these efforts are not why you are holding this issue.

This magazine exists because of the efforts of a certain incredible few. First, Thea O'Rourke. She founded this magazine and made it into a true institution. Thank you, Thea, for trusting me to carry it forward. Bard College won't know what hit them. This is, was, and always will be, your magazine.

Ms. Giangulio also deserves immense praise. Her steady support and extensive behind-the-scenes work, particularly working with the printer, made this issue possible. And thank you to Mars for creating the cover art on such short notice.

Finally, to the writers and artists: you are what makes this magazine beautiful. I know it takes a lot of courage to put your truth out there. Truth and Courage- has a nice ring to it.

Will Smith '27
Managing Editor

LUNCHTIME ORANGE

by Anonymous

Two imperfect half moons
Lay neatly upon my lap
Her silent reminder of our impermanence –
A fragile blessing

BLUE VANITY

by Anonymous

Pencil glides across my eyelid
Two oily blue ovals stare,
Wide eyed –
Expressive.

Sliding the eyeliner between my lips
Lapis explodes across each bud.
Curled tongue
Gently licking its greasy tip,
Ink now pressed against my wet flesh –
Ugly bruised tongue girl.



UNDYING LOVE
by Rayna Yan '27

COLLEGE ESSAY

by Hayden Anderson '26

Our family's idea of fun is a group project. My grandfather built the house I was born in, with my mom at the chop saw cutting lumber for my dad to nail in place. Growing up, I spent weekends happily weeding and mulching garden beds, harvesting potatoes, pressing cider, and hauling brush. Even building a snowman was approached with dedication: using a ramp to heave the massive torso, smoothing each ball until perfectly round, then marvelously accessorizing. I grew my sense of self by working in the sphere of my parents' enthusiasm. Spring-cleaning the garage or pulling invasive bittersweet gave me a sense of accomplishment, leaving me with a satisfied buzz. But I didn't fully understand the value of work until my family salvaged a grocery store.

Roy's Market sits on a corner of Main Street and has been the heart of my hometown for over a century. Thornton Wilder wrote *Our Town* here, and the store's front stoop with its comings and goings is still a stage for the profound ordinariness of daily life. When the family who ran the store for generations announced they were leaving, we knew the town wouldn't be the same without it.

Our first month was a fiasco. The wreckage included dried milk encrusted on shelves, the meat grinder in need of a chlorine bath, and a stained ceiling tile concealing duct-taped trash bags failing to contain a leak. When an elderly customer drove through the front window, the symbolism felt a little too on the nose.

My family and I worked alongside volunteers scrubbing floors and counting inventory to reopen the store. Working behind the counter for the last two years, I've seen why so many pitched in. Roy's is vital to our town. I am struck by the loyalty of the older population as they climb the three front steps and push through the heavy double doors, there perhaps to buy our homemade beef stew for that night's dinner, and stretch it to the next. I witness how each conversation in the checkout line is equally sustaining. There's a quiet, bird-like man who comes in every day with a one-dollar bill in hand to buy a 99-cent bottle of water.

He has terrible arthritis, so he asks me to unscrew the cap, always leaving me the penny. Now we make this daily exchange of cap and penny wordlessly, with just a smile. I recognize people come here for many things. I see what it takes to feed a town.

You can tell a lot about people from their groceries, and I find myself imagining their lives. Some pay with the quick swipe of a card, others with food stamps; once, a boy dumped an entire jar of change onto the counter. Loneliness, necessity, or celebration beat at the heart of each red plastic basket.

My workday is filled with repetitive tasks. Groceries need fronting, expiration dates need to be checked, floors mopped. I spend frigid hours in the walk-in cooler feeding hunks of sirloin into the meat grinder, struggling to contain its worm-like spray. In my dreams, I'm behind the butcher's counter completing orders, a conveyor belt of meat cuts running through my mind. At the cash register, I scan barcodes with a metronomic pace and memorize the produce numbers. With each completed action, I begin to feel something larger reverberating through these mundane tasks. Making straight lines with products, labels turned neatly forward, becomes more than just my job description; these actions are gestures of care.

I now see how my love of a good project and my commitment to a job well done are the building blocks of connection. Taking on things together is how you grow a family, a town, a community. As I step into the world, my circles expanding, I will carry this capacity with me and a faith in what small gestures of care can build.

THE CANDLE

by Ace Agnes '28

Tick-tock, tick the wick again
The candle is your only friend
He loses his head the brighter he gets
Just like the best, the very best

The worst, the very worst
Once was, once never was
Alone in a desert of shimmering blue
Shells and diamonds shining so true

Wish wash, wish the schtick again,
The dull, the drull, the ick again
The tune you sung to your friend
Who is now a puddle on the floor

Through the green the yellow, the ocean door
Past the walrus, the shell, the purple floor
The orange fire inside your soul
Tearing this poor wick apart

Drip-drop, fish for the wish again
The nightmare is the only end
To the dream, of your tall bright friend
Who can't show you the way anymore

Tick-tock, tick the wick again
Shine and burn and wilt again
Crackle, and lose your precious head
To make the darkness dead, long dead

Dead dead dead dead!



HEATED CHIVALRY
by Mars Sutton '26

THE WORLD LOOKED RED

by James Houghton '27

One's opinion on oppression can be swayed in many different directions;
Beliefs on pro life, war, and equality,
but one is never able to change their blood.

One's blood can never change, your own life can never be removed from you or deemed
different to yourself.

No matter its consistency, feel, or shape, it's what makes us human.

Then comes the oppressor,
the singular being that has no color, with the job of singular oppression and gain of power
for themselves.

Those elected through themselves with a strive for their own.

Then comes war,
merciless bloodshed depicted with its own color, unjustifiable action, persuaded to be
blamed for safety and belonging.

Making miles and miles of spewed blood all for the gain of those superior.

Leaving those spared to witness the aftermath via the grace they chose to give within
divinity,

At that moment, the world looked red.

As said, the oppressor has no color or religion they're bound to, other than the one they are
destined to spread across the world.

Said leaders, with their power coursing through their veins, Shall not show the red they've
made and shed.

Trick the masses, fool their thoughts and opinions.

May the only thing louder than their own voice be the gavel in your palm.

Manipulate their minds until they feel like a different type of person.

Like they're not of the same power,

like they're not human,

like they're blue-blooded.

They will see the error of its ways, but not be able to change it.

Unable to cure red all over.

Keeping complete power in those knowing what they themselves are, and want, and need.

At that moment, the world looked red.

Aid from those the same as them, under different color flags, with the same color inside of
them.

Using those under them to keep a masquerade, fueling themselves and growing off of the
emotion.

Riots,

an attempt of curing the damage already made by those aware of their actions and admit-
ting to their mistakes and differences.

These protesters will crowd the streets, forcing a presence of opposition.

An opposition of blue-blooded maniacs.

Twisted on the belief of curing the actions made and the future already guaranteed and slated.

Forgetting that, they themselves were the same color.

Shackled by ice in the deepest layer of hell, as a saint would enforce.

Then comes power.

Belief that you're superior to a point post death, having risen above distinction of your color or being.

So powerful you'll never be equal,

They'll never see you eye to eye even in a coffin.

And at that moment, the world looked red.

powers, all put in humanity, bring the entire species to array and despair, caused by red.

Belief for change, oppression of power, quelling protests, all wanted and caused by the same color of people.

Not to anyone else, not to their surroundings, but the inside of their body.

With the entire species seeing themselves with the same blood, and same want.

As the inside of all of them is the same color.

and only then, the entire world is red.



FEAR IS POWER

by Ace Agnes '28

UNTITLED TRIPTYCH

by Molly Burman '27

I.

It had not rained in seven days. Seven days of open sky and the kind of sun that filters through trees like honey. But Ketchikan had a way of holding rain like an anxious child holds its breath. There was a constant dampness to the air, the moss beneath my feet shone with dew, and the tide pools tucked into the crags of this peninsula still teemed with so much life that the starfish had to crawl across the rocks and atop each other simply for want of space. The sky was so many more colors than a foggy rainforest should permit, and the water that stretched until it met the green mountains held those colors in an embrace of ripples and light. For once, my mind is quieter than the world surrounding it, which is an orchestra of crashing waves and seagulls and my goddaughter's constant, excited shrieks at every starfish and anemone and shell, as if she did not grow up in this town, on this rock, in this world. Irelynn never was a quiet child, and so when she settled beside me on the rocky ledge, her tiny legs kicking out over the water, I was shocked by her silence. But she did not just have eyes reminiscent of captured waves and hair like deer pelts and Sitka spruce—my eyes and my hair—she also had my mind, and it seemed that she, too, had felt it. The sea and the sky, the rocks and the grasses, and all the invisible, invertebrate creatures of the land were waiting for something. I put my arm around Irelynn. The sky opened up, and the rain began to fall.

II.

I understand now, what it was the silence was waiting for. Since the wheels of my plane screeched down across the runway and the hiss of the mechanical doors had let in air that smelled like fish and salt and the freedom that is childhood, the sky had shone cloudless and golden. Because Ketchikan had known that I was not yet ready to remember the rain. Irelynn leaned her head on my shoulder, a few strands of silken hair falling across my coat, and I realized that the rain that had raised me had decided when the seas were safe to lift sail and when the fish would be rising, had, in turn, raised her. The arm I had around my goddaughter, so full of wonder and joy, was an arm I had around myself. She was the very same child I had been when the world had looked as wide as the sea before us. I felt a bit like a drop of rain that had been carried across mountains and rivers, evaporated in the heat, and returned to the sky, over and over again, until I found myself falling upon the same waters from whence I

had come. And I understood, then, that I was still a child of possibility. Still a soul that leaps at every new starfish and anemone and shell, and goes quiet to listen to the music of the earth. Although I was taller, older, had experienced more loss and felt more weariness than the girl beside me could ever contain, here I was holding her. Here I was holding myself. And here was the rain, tracing down my cheeks and over my hair, welcoming me home.

III.

When the child had first emerged from the plane, we had been confused. The grasses recognized the press of her feet into the dirt, but not the size of her shoe. The sunlight traced the curves of her face and found them to have been stretched and changed. The wind carried the sound of her voice over still waters, but was unfamiliar with its tone. The press of time had worn thin our memory of her, and yet we knew her, for she had left us an echo of her soul, transcribed into the body of another. And now they sit, absorbed and echoed and refracted in the colors surrounding them. Side by side in a space where memory gives way to dream, gives way to reality. And the birds can see it in her eyes, and the moss can feel it in her touch, and she understands. We rise to sing in the form of wind, gather as clouds, and fall as rain. And as we cascade from the sky, we fill her heart with whispers. *“You see it now, how all things draw back here. How the rain corrodes stone and dampens fire and sets lives equal and one. Just as we have done for you, we do for her.”* Suddenly, the droplets that mix with the salt of the sea are indistinguishable from those that trail through the salt of the once-child’s tears. *“You are a part of our cycle. She is a part of our cycle. And now the two ends of the circle have been drawn together.”*

“And now you are home.”

POLKA DOT PJS

by Anonymous

It was mid July, when a young girl with freckles and sunburnt skin became aware of herself.

This young girl spent most nights floating amongst dreams of pixies and orange juice. She had the kind of dreams which smelled of banana bread and peonies, and when she rose in the morning the sunshine seemed to outline her silhouette as if she was holy. One morning though, one that fell around mid July, was a morning marked by the sound of carnations blooming and the birth of a woman she did not want to know.

That morning, when the young girl awoke, she sprang from her bed as if the floor depended on collision with her small feet. Contrary to most every morning that summer, the sunshine did not dress her up in the hue of an orange halo as she leapt from her sheets. She did not smell of baked goods or fresh flowers, and she could not remember if she had dreamt of fairies and citrus that night. The young girl did however have a strange beating in her chest as she ran through her bedroom door, down the hall, and into the bathroom. As she turned to look into the mirror, she began to see this once familiar body morph into nothing but a swirl of colors she could no longer recognize - she felt a weight within herself that was too foreign, too terrifying, and too mature for a girl of her age. And suddenly, she began to cry. This young girl with freckles and sunburnt skin gripped the edge of the water basin as she wept for the unfamiliar stain on her polka dot pj pants, her crooked teeth, the sound of her mother's lullabies, and *the strange woman who faced her within the mirror.*



FACE BEHIND GLASS
by Ace Agnes '28

SUBTRACTION

by Chloe Guo '27

I. What Happened

I was ten, sitting too close to the TV, the glow of it flattening everything in the room except them. The girls on *Dance Moms*, Season 1, the OGs, moved like they already knew how to be looked at. Their hair was always smooth, their smiles bright and easy, their bodies small in a way that felt neat and right. I remember Paige the most. Blonde, blue-eyed, light in every way I wasn't.

I didn't think it all at once. It came quietly, like a realization you don't want but can't unsee: I look nothing like them.

After that, it became a ritual. Every birthday candle, every 11:11, every fallen eyelash balanced on my fingertip, every dandelion gone to seed, I wished the same thing. Not vaguely, not abstractly. I wished to wake up as her. Paige Hyland. Or at least someone close enough. Someone blonde. Someone thin. Someone whose face didn't feel like a mistake.

Because if I could look like that, then maybe everything else would fall into place. Maybe I wouldn't be the girl people skipped over. Maybe I wouldn't hear the jokes, the small comments that stuck longer than they should. Maybe boys would look twice. Maybe girls would want me beside them, not behind.

I started noticing everything about myself as if I were a problem to solve. My freckles, scattered across my cheeks, suddenly felt loud. My hair, thick and wavy, felt wrong, like it refused to behave. My body felt too much, too visible. Even my eyes, just black, felt like they were missing something important.

I didn't say any of this out loud. I just kept wishing.

II. How I Remember It Now

It's strange to think how a single moment, just watching TV, could rearrange something so permanent inside me. At ten, I didn't have the language for it. I didn't know words like "beauty standards" or "internalized racism." I only knew comparison, and that I was losing.

Now I can see how narrow the frame was. A single show, a single look, a single kind of girl presented as worth watching, worth praising, worth becoming. And I believed it without question.

But belief doesn't stay abstract. It settles into the body.

Chemicals straightened my hair until it stopped fighting back. Lasers erased my freckles like they were stains instead of something that belonged to me. I shrank myself, slowly at first, then urgently, until it wasn't about looking like someone else anymore; it was about disappearing enough to feel acceptable.

What I thought was transformation was really just subtraction.

Pieces of me, gone. Not just physically, but in quieter ways too. The ease I once had in my own skin. The ability to exist without constant evaluation. The version of myself that didn't think every room was an audience.

And the scariest part is how reasonable it all felt at the time. Like I was just doing what needed to be done.

Looking back, I don't just feel sadness. I feel a kind of anger too, not at myself, but at how early the script was handed to me. How convincingly it told me that I was wrong as I was.

III. How I'll Explain It One Day

If I ever have to explain this to a child, maybe, or even just to a younger version of myself, I don't think I'll start with the show. I'll start with the feeling.

I'll say: there might be a moment when you look at something, or someone, and suddenly feel like you've been placed outside of it. Like there's a version of the world you weren't designed for.

And in that moment, you might think the solution is to change yourself.

You might believe that if you fix just enough things, your hair, your skin, your body, you can earn your way back in.

But I would tell them that this feeling is not the truth. It's a story. And not even one you wrote.

I would tell them that the world is very good at showing you only one kind of beauty and calling it universal. And if you're not careful, you'll spend years trying to translate yourself into something you were never meant to be.

I would be honest, too. I would say that I tried. That I got close, in some ways. That I lost things I can't fully get back.

But I'm still here.

And I'm learning, slowly, unevenly, that the parts of me I once erased were never the problem.

If anything, they were the only parts that were ever mine.



UNTITLED DIGITAL COLLAGE
by Thea O'Rourke '26

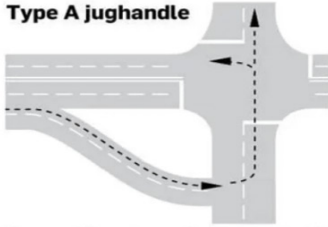
JUGHANGLES

by Roy Joseph '27

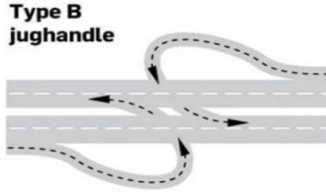
JUGHANGLES

New Jersey uses three typical jughandle designs

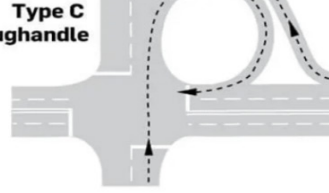
Type A jughandle



Type B jughandle



Type C jughandle



Source: New Jersey Department of Transportation

THE STAR-LEDGER

One: Experiencing

It was a regular morning during a sunny June day. I woke up, got ready, made myself breakfast, and then just chilled. At the time, I was watching Abbot Elementary while my laundry was getting washed. Hours went by as they do, and I was still waiting for the Blink notification on my phone.

Once I got it, I slipped on my outside sandals from the mud room and went out the door to greet them: Hayden, Aaron, Xan, and a new face, Will. From there, the rest of the night went by in a breeze. A tour of my house, Aaron is taking pictures of my baby photos up on the walls around my house. Then we drove to dinner, in which Xan couldn't comprehend New Jersey jughandles. Then Hayden and I told the waitress that it was Aaron's birthday. We ended by lying around on my fluffy carpet. Enjoying the brisk spring night. It was a great day.

Two: Experimenting

I remember this day as one of the calmest days in June. I realize now that this wasn't just about me seeing some friends or making a new one. But it represented a bridge being opened. Like a new neuron pathway forming in my brain. It was about me realizing that my two worlds can collide.

Aaron taking photos of my baby pictures wasn't just him making fun, but it represented me being open to vulnerability, which was younger than my freshman year. The Jughandles represented how even though they where I'm from isn't that different at all, but it takes some getting used to. And lastly, the birthday prank proves that at the end of the day, we can all appreciate harmless jokes.

Three: Experienced

I learned from this that the code-switching that I perform is so much more than just my vernacular or the way I acted. It served as a reminder of the unrealistic guidelines that I had made for myself to simply fit in with my peers. It will still take me a long time to truly learn how to stay true to myself, no matter what my environment is, to learn adaptation without assimilation. But, at least, this one day served as an awakening, to not only expand myself but also to understand that people from the other 49 states can't drive.

THIN SHELTERS

by Oleh Lahoda '28

In the forest, trees stood silent,
Still as if they were listening.
Rain softly pressed on the tarp
As my friend and I tied it between two trees.
A shelter made from rope, cold hands,
And a simple will to stay dry.

Each drop struck the tarp with a rhythm,
A random but consistent sharp sound,
And for a moment
The sound carried me somewhere else:
To the city where I fled,
Where the sky is fully open,
With airstrikes that you feel
Before you can fully fear.
The same reminder
Of how thin the shelter can be.

The cold in the forest wrapped around me,
The same cold that filled our car
As we waited at each of the Russian checkpoints, afraid to speak.
The trees stood frozen like the soldiers we passed,
Tree branches reminded me of the AK-47
That Russian soldiers would point at our car as we approach them.
Thirty-five Russian checkpoints,
Eleven hours without food, water,
Or even stopping for the bathroom,
Because the road cut straight through battlefields,
Where stopping meant not surviving.

In the west of Ukraine we also searched for cover:

New work, new friends,

New answers to the questions

We thought we would never ask.

The war has separated us.

The orange flare from missiles that were killing civilians would keep me awake,

Just like the rain hitting the tarp.

We stretched and tied whatever rope we had,

And slept under whatever roof we could find.

The tarp was simple yet it proved my point:

Every shelter we build,

From fear or hope,

Is a reminder that we will keep going forward,

Refusing to be broken by any rain.



MAN'S CHOICE

by Ace Agnes '28

POEM ONE

by Dash Brooks '29

I've tried to keep the blood off my hands,
To keep the demons of my breath that wait ready and eager to be free from my forever locked lips
from escaping,
never letting them bite and wound even those who have wounded me so greatly,
That they gave me these little demons that are my thoughts and words.

Perhaps if I give them time, time to swirl around in my mouth,
Slither down my throat and twist tightly around my heart
They will go away, maybe they will tire themselves and relent.

Maybe I can release them to the forest with a scream no one will ever hear,
Forever echoing listlessly through the mountains,
Ricocheting off silent trees.

Perhaps I stand like the trees,
Tall and silent, never to be heard by the world.
To be always watching distantly,
To give and never receive.

But the demons never fly free from my lips.
They fill me to the brim.
Bitterly entwining and merging with my destructive words that are ready to hurt on my tongue,
But I'll bite down on them and spit out the blood with my unheard screams boiling away within it,

And wipe it from my teeth so I can look up,
And give the world that wounded me a halfhearted smile.



TIGRESS
by Max Young '27

POEM TWO

by Dash Brooks '29

In the night when the sun's rain has melted down to a gentle golden haze,
she creeps out of her cold dark cage.

The sun's radiance is a tough act to follow, but the moon,
Though she may be shy, is a worthy competitor.

Even if her melancholy aura blinds her.

The sun is loud, and stains the air with his presence,
his wrath heavy and hot on the land.

There is no way to escape the stern hand of the sun.

Looking into his blazing eyes is intimidating,
in the sun, though he shines bright, he is hollow in how he loves.

He's bright and kind from a distance,
but a scorching storm of angry heat up close.

And one day he will erupt, and kill the ones around him.

But the moon, she slowly drifts away from the world,
and one day, we will lose her.

We take for granted her gentle touch, until she is no more.

She weeps in silence silver dew drops left to find in the morning,
illuminated by the sun's spite,
until she weeps herself away.

The moon will never cry out loud,
she will keep it all inside.

But her silence is a screaming plea,
she begs to be let out.

But she's always there, even in the day,
quietly watching from above,
crying her silent tears,
her voiceless words turn into stars to haunt her.

Though they will die,
they're bright long after they've departed,
visible from the earth she's confined to.

The sun is inhumane,
burns the earth's creatures and the moon's children,
blistering their skin and igniting their joy to lifeless husks,
and using his power to mar the moon's quietude and elation.

Beneath the moon's pale hands,
her creatures may be at rest,
safe from the terror of the sun.

They may dance,
and sing,
and let their spirits and creativity rule their souls
and let burns heal.

Look up to her,
smile and wave,
ask for a story.

If you're quiet enough you can hear a trembling whisper,
sinking to the earth,
a cool breeze shakes the meadow grasses and spirals up your legs.
Shoots up your spine,
rests on your shoulders and then rolls down your arms,
and seeps deep into your soul.

SPLINTERING DAY

by Max Young '27

I saw splintering spines spiraling into his eyes, adorning his clustered brow.

Once they've grown, how could it have started?

Why could it have started?

After all, a thornbush seed can look as pretty as a periwinkle.

He continued striding in the sun whilst his peers played outside

Not one scratch or yell, smiling like the morning light even as the blood calcifies.

How could nobody tell?

Are they distracted?

Their peripherals say not.

Why is nobody doing anything?

Who was I to him?

I was his closest; I don't know why.

Was it guilt that sent the pronged leaves into bloom?

He now lies where bushes wilt

His weeds now tug at my chest.

Now who is here to help me?

No longer the only one who is forced to understand.



BUTTERFLY
by Max Young '27

SOMETHING TO BE SAID

by Anonymous

I think there is something to be said for the flame that will not burn out.

We bet:

That the candle will die in a minute

In ten

In an hour.

But I have learned that, like the Cardinal in our gray winter trees,

That fire will stay just how long it can.

They say a candle is a human soul.

But I think this one is many.

I wonder:

If each and every thread were its own little candle.

A bundle of sticks bound together in wax.

All those spring twigs in a choir of flame.

That voice that doesn't go out.

I think there is something to be said for the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker who climbed
up my stone wall.

A steep, gray surface.

I see a little woodpecker climb and climb above my head,

Reach a tilted stone, and

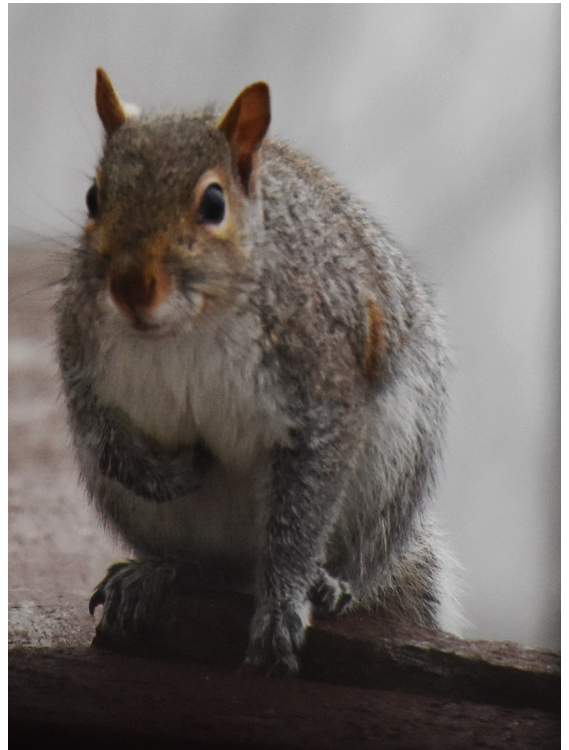
Clasping on, begin to call out.

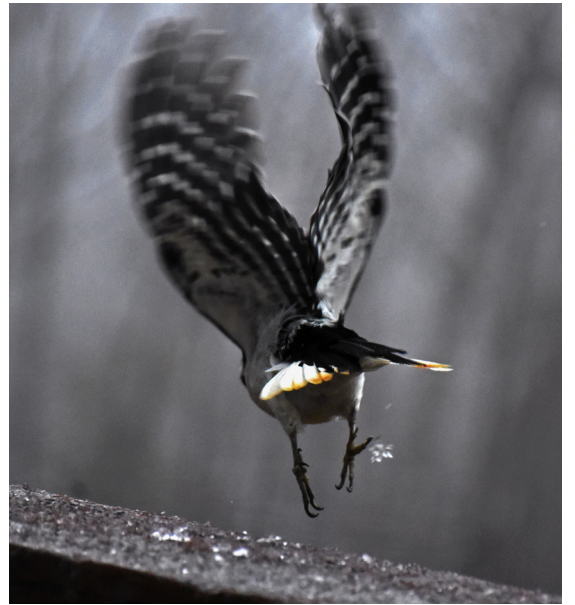
This woodpecker climbing.
Up and up it goes.
We may not realize:
It knows where it's going
What it's looking for
Maybe if I listen,
A very long time,
it will tell me.
And after I look a very long time,
I will see the golden feathers peaking out of the gray.

I also think there is something to be said for the trees that bend.
We think:
That the whistling is purely branches under the strain of wind.
That the rustle of yellow leaves is a useless reminder of summer.
That the wood toad's croak is flat and small.
But listen to a chorus.
Listen to the harmony of everything singing out in their thin, tired voices:
The trees that bend creak out their songs,
Unlike some,
Will lean for the sun,
But will not break.

Where do all those twigs come from?
From the seed of those orange branches.
Maybe the candle is only light.
Maybe that secret, yellow bird is only song.
Maybe the leaves will never turn the gray sky gold.

Aren't you glad to see bright leaves in the clouds?
That woodpecker will continue to sing in the din.
That flame will continue to strive in the dim.





PHOTOS by Shekeba Hashimi '27



DANCING IN THE MOSQUE
by Shekeba Hashimi '27

THE TAG

by Shekeba Hashimi '27

A couple of months ago.
Or maybe even last year.
I don't know when exactly.
I asked her what she would be if she could still go to school?
Two minutes passed.
Message seen.
Two blue lines on the screen.
Then her profile shows:
Zohra is typing...
Then—
I don't know. I never had the chance to explore and discover what I liked.
Not the answer I expected.
I read it once, then twice....
I never had the chance.
I never had the chance.
I never had the chance....
Have you ever had a tag on your clothes that you can't get off?
It scratches your back, but not that badly.
You give up on trying to get it off.
You tell yourself it's fine. I will be fine.
But a moment later, it scratches again.
You're not strong enough to get it off.
Nor strong enough to bear the discomfort.
Or a book that won't open all the way?
The pages near the spine refuse to loosen?
The words that are just out of reach.
You press it down to see.
And if you force it
The pages come off?
I never had the chance.
Her response follows me everywhere.
Like a dark cloud on a sunny day.
Exactly! A dark cloud doesn't belong on a sunny day!
It doesn't belong to me either.
It belongs to her. So why me? Why am I carrying the weight of her unfinished dreams?

GIVER

by Emelia Dziedzic '27

He was always a giver
The kind that took special requests each morning
customizing our breakfast like we were each queens
Deserving of the world

He didn't have problems
Or maybe his problems were just so big
It wasn't for my ears
Somehow amidst his world slowly crumbling
I was still a princess
Drawing clubs and then diamonds until
I outplayed them all
Dealing my hearts away

I was too young then to understand what it meant
to give your heart away
Exposing yourself to the elements
Ripping the skin and flesh away
Until there was nothing left to give
Exposed

But even as the laser engraved his flesh with markings of God
Reminders that he was playing death
I was never left exposed
Never left long enough to consider
Because just as he had done the night before
He picked up my hearts
Willing to admit defeat

A STANDING EIGHT COUNT

by Greyson DeCoursey '27

I. The First Punch Lands

I didn't expect it to matter much...

I started watching Hajime No Ippo like it was just another show. Just a show to pass time, something with fights and energy and exaggerated wins. But the first thing that stuck wasn't victory. It was a punch.

Ippo getting hit. Hard. A powerful blow to the abdomen, to his chest, to his chin, Again and again.

This was not cinematic, not a typical clean victory. It was overwhelming to me. The courage to endure. The courage to remain standing even when you are taking blows.

There is a moment early on where Ippo doesn't know how to respond to his opponents movements. His opponent is a skilled boxer and a wall that seems insurmountable for a young inexperienced Ippo. But for some reason this felt more real. Because this was not just about strength. It showed what it means to adapt when things come at you faster than you are ready.

I remember watching this part thinking: Why doesn't he just quit?

Because Quitting would have made sense.

But he did not.

Instead, even if it meant taking blows to the abdomen, to his chest, to his chin, he kept showing up. To the gym. To the ring. To himself.

At the time, I didn't think much beyond that. It was inspiring in a general sense of "working hard" and "not giving up." The kind of messages you nod at and move on.

But something about it stayed.

II. The Space Between the Bell and the Breathe.

Looking back now, it wasn't the fights that mattered most.

It was everything in between.

The runs. The repetition. The discipline. The quiet frustration of not improving at the pace you would like. The way Ippo questions himself constantly is like background noise that he can't turn off.

I didn't notice at first, but it is obvious now; Ippo is not naturally confident. But he builds it piece by piece, through effort that nobody claps for.

That changed how I see things.

I used to think growth was supposed to feel like progress, like you would notice yourself getting stronger, or more capable. But most of the time, it just feels like you are stuck. Like you are doing the same thing over and over without visible evidence of the pay off.

That is what Ippo does.

And now when I think about it in my own life: in school, in sports, and even relationships. I see those same moments differently. The moments where nothing seems to happen. The moments that feel pointless.

They're not empty.

They're rounds.

You didn't win them in that moment. You survive them. You learn how to stay in the ring a little longer.

I didn't understand that when I first watched it.

III. What I Would Say When Someone Asks Why It Matters.

If someone asked me why a boxing anime like Hajime No Ippo stuck with me, I wouldn't talk about the fights.

I'd tell them about the feeling of not being ready.

About standing in front of something, whether that is competition, pressure, or expectations, and realizing you don't yet have the answers.

AND how that isn't the end.

I'd say: there is this character who doesn't look like a champion. Who doesn't talk like a champion. He just keeps going back. He keeps trying. A character that keeps getting hit, but won't stay down.

That is what matters.

Because inevitably one day, you are going to feel like you are behind. Like everyone else figured something out that you haven't. And it is a universal temptation to step out of that ring to avoid or to hide.

But if Hajime No Ippo taught me nothing else... It is always those who stick with it, those who persevere even when progress is frustratingly slow, who make the greatest changes.

I would probably leave out the exact amount of Ippo's losses before he wins.

Not because it is unimportant.

But because the lesson isn't about winning.

It's about answering the count.

Even when you're not sure that you can stand.

ART AND WRITING BY THE STUDENTS OF DUBLIN SCHOOL
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