CREAN LUTHERAN HIGH SCHOOL

THE mirror

A LITERATURE & ARTS MAGAZINE

7TH EDITION



Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the **LIGHT** of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." **John 8:12**

THE mirror

LETTER FROM THE student editors

In John 8:12, Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." This year's edition of ***The Mirror*** reveals how the inimitable, brilliant contrast of light and darkness lay the grounds for our everyday lives. Our one and only light, Jesus, guides His creation towards hope and assurance, as reflected through these pages. Unlike previous editions, this issue steps away from color, instead adopting a chiefly monochromatic design throughout.

Throughout this edition, light is perceivable in an abundance of ways; on stage in ***Stage of Light***, where it exemplifies reminiscence, legacy, and honor, and in ***Light of the World***, where it highlights faith and the promise of Christ. At the same time, pieces like ***Reflection*** and ***Canyon of Light*** exhibit darker, constricted spaces, capturing what it feels like to navigate uncertainty. Nevertheless, light persists—blazing through in vivid works like ***Forced Blindness*** and ***We Can Still Fix This***, reminding us that hope is never fully lost.

Many pieces in this edition emulate the abiding tension between light and darkness. Light, then, is not as unvarying as we may have thought before. As exemplified on the cover, faces from around the world, diverse and each uniquely captivating, exude light. Though divided by crisp cut lines and a piercing contrast, light prevails; just as it does in mankind. Whether through celebration, adversity, or reflection, these works reveal how light diligently casts the world around us.

Light promises the world an inexhaustible illumination: the promise of the sun's glare, the moon's gleam, and city lights perceptible from space preserve our confidence in its arrival. Light is what brings this world to life, just as it does in the pieces of art and literature featured in this year's magazine. Without light, we would endlessly wander in darkness without direction or guidance. Thankfully, by the grace of God, light helps us find truth, certainty, and hope, even in the darkest of times.

Light sustains and unifies; it flares unto us, making visible what each and every one of us has to contribute; it is exposed within us, through what we value most. Through these pieces of literature and art, we hope you are encouraged to seek light, appreciate light, and shine light upon not only your own life, but also on circumstances that seem veiled in darkness–or on others who may need it more than we realize.

With gratitude,

SPECIAL THANKS

Letter from the Student Editors 1
Table of Contents 2
Mundane Morning | by Lauren Baik 3
The Risen Garden | by Bela Salgado 4
Gone is Good, but Home is Best | by Stella Hubinette 5
In His Glow | by Penny Liang 6
I Can't Sleep | by Addison Pak 7
Folded into Time | by William Hsu 8
The Ocean Wakes | by Nina Chang 9
Surface + Frame Exploration I | by Hannah Benjamin 10
Memory | by Annie Zhao 11
In the Light, I am Saved | by Emerson Lee 12
In the Gentle Hand of Time | by Sarah Hsu 13
The Old Woman | by Annie Zhao 14
Shapes of Space | by Ruijie Lucy Liu 15
Carry the Flame | by Maryse Labatia 16
Ad Astra | by Cosette Choi 17
Reflection | by Cosette Choi 18
Loveable Life Laments | by Diego Wang 19
12:08 am | by J.D. Lim 20
Forced Blindness | by Grace Lee 21-22
Memories to Cherish | by Eugene Ban 23
Aiming Towards Light | by Lucia Wei 24
Ink Cocoon | by Snow Zhu 25
Living Contradictions | by David Roche Jr. 26
Nightmare | by Emily Kwak 27-28
The Thinker | by Joanne Kim 29
Unanswered | by Layla Alimadadian 30
The Power of Forgiveness | by Lauren Lu 31
We Can Still Fix This | by Hailey Baik 32
A Distinct Greediness | by Violet Woo 33-34
Finding You in the Wild | by Charlotte Burlingame 35
Monochromatic Wings | by Logan Miller 36
Canyon of Light | by Luke Bailey 37
The Light at the End of the Tunnel | by Cora J. Fox 38
Light of the World | by Noah Lee 39
Corruption of Evil | by Grace Lee 40
Stage of Light | by Amelia Albelo 41-43
Finale | by Hailey Baik 42

TABLE OF contents



Mundane Morning by Lauren Baik '28 | Acrylic

The Risen Garden

by Bela Salgado '28

A lack of motion, yet not quite still,
Like wind that stirs but does not thrill,
Bones that whine for a fleeting touch,
Lungs that once burned, now asking too much,

Stumbling now in silence deep,
A hollow hush where echoes sleep.

Better days used to bear,
The pulse of the earth, the breath of air,
The strike of will, the fight, the dare,
Reduced to a wisp, barely there.

The garden within, wilted and worn,
Once bright and busy, now ragged and torn,

Amongst the storm of abundance lost,
A hand once firm now pale with frost,
The once steady grip, and voice that stayed,
Ripped away like a string that frayed.

My garden within, a dry desert,
Yet many seeds planted, in response to the hurt,

A race brought to a quiet end,
My ribbon torn, the losses blend.
Left with the weight of what has been lost,
A fading hope, with too high a cost.

But despite emptiness, yet faint and small,
A spark remains, though shadows fall,
A whisper stirs through the dim and frayed,
A voice calls me to be swayed.

A graceful light appears, comforting the pain,
Thanks be to the loving God who forever reigns.

Gone is Good, but Home is Best

by Stella Hubinette '29

The plane takes off, the future is bright,
Relaxation begins its flight.
In Sweden grandpa is waiting there,
With hugs and lots of love to share.

From my loving family I must depart,
And that then brings a heavy heart.
There is a longing that I cannot hide,
Because they live across the world so wide.

Then Italy takes away that gray,
Right by the beach is where we play.
I jump into the ocean clear,
With peace and laughter very near.

This annual trip must come to an end,
Farewell to every place and friend.
We arrive back home to that scent that gives rest,
And remember that gone is good, but home is best.



In His Glow by Penny Liang '27 | Photography



I Can't Sleep by Addison Pak '27 | Acrylic on Wood

Folded into Time

by William Hsu '28

The letter lay quietly on the table,
but the moment it was written,
it learned how to feel.

Soft sentences stayed on the page,
small, silent, and shy,
each word whispering its meaning.

It was meant to be delivered,
placed gently in her hands,
that was its only wish.

But fate played a little game.

The postman dropped it by mistake,
and the spring breeze saw it,
soft and sudden,
it stole the secret away.

The wind carried it far,
the rain rewrote its lines,
the sun slowly softened its color.

It came close again and again,
near her street,
near her window,
near her wandering steps.

So close, so near,
yet never there.

Time did not stop,
chances did not stay.

The letter grew quiet,
folding feelings deep inside,
hiding hope in its heart.

Years passed,
slow and silent.

At last, one day,
the tired wind let it fall
into her hands.

She opened it slowly,
the paper was pale,
the words were weak,
the love was lost in the lines.

The letter arrived,
but it had already expired.

Because some love,
soft and sincere,
if not said in time,
will slowly slip away.

And their story,
like this lost letter,
came close many times,
but never truly reached.

The Ocean Wakes

by Nina Chang '27

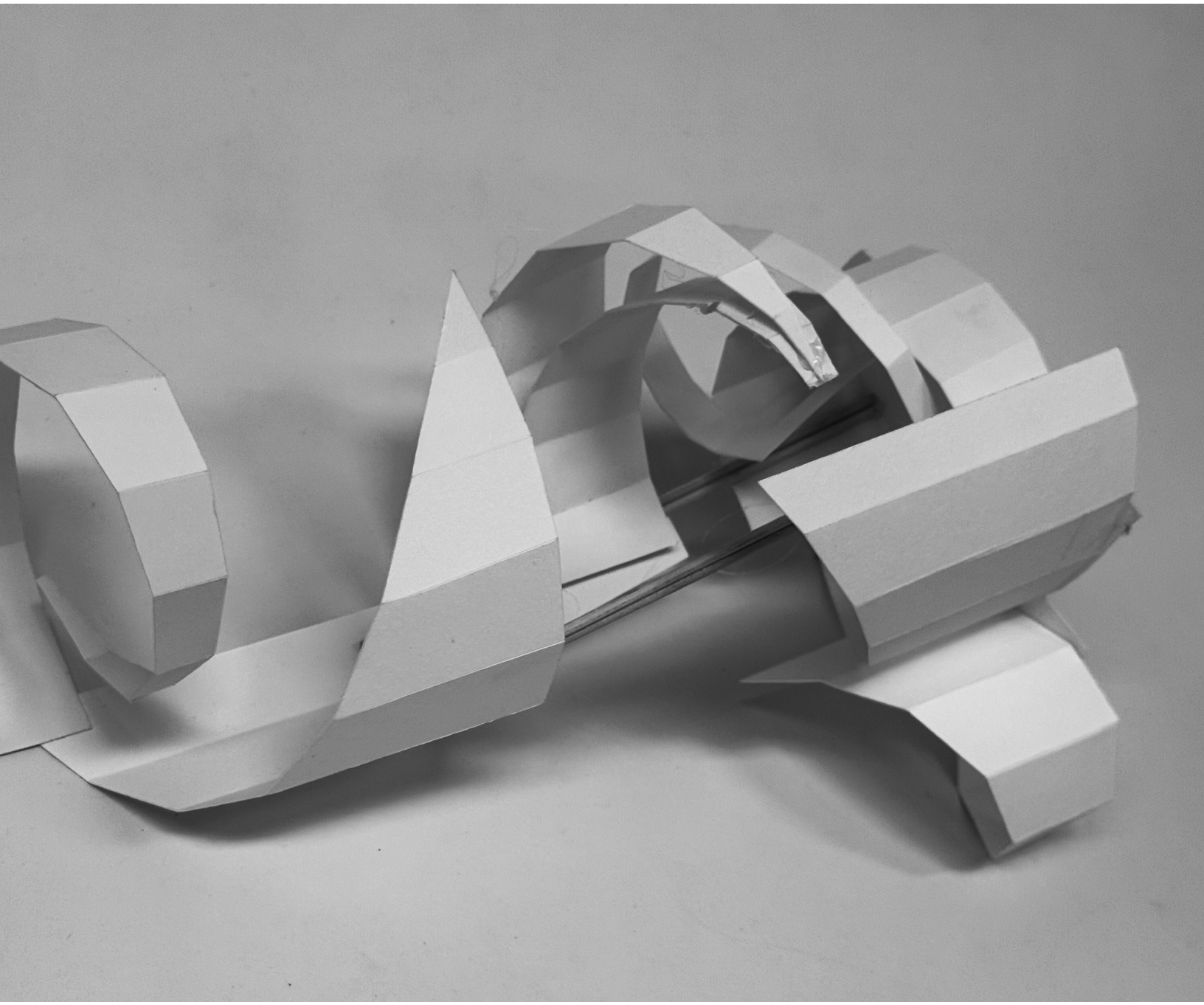
The delicate beauty of the morning bore a world of subtle stillness, as if time itself paused in perfection to welcome the light of day. Stepping out onto the hotel balcony, the world below seemed nonexistent, suspended in sleep, as if it belonged only to me. The crisp air carried hints of salt and a quiet breeze, imbued with the faint, earthy scent of the ocean lying just beyond the horizon. Tropical finches chirped softly, a gentle morning song echoing through still air. As I walked towards the infinity pools, the horizon blurred into an intricate dream of watercolor, and the sky and sea met in a quiet balance of tranquility.

The infinity pools shimmered like liquid glass, catching the sky's awakening and reflecting the landscape of color in soft ripples that wavered in a dance of light with every passing breeze. The whisper of the wind followed the soft splash of waves; the distant cry of a lone seabird was absorbed by nature's stillness. Early workers offered gentle smiles, their presence unnoticed yet grounding in the calm of the morning. As I dipped my finger into the clear pool, the water rippled and shimmered like spun crystal, and I felt a surprising warmth linger against my skin, a gentle contrast to the delicate chill of the chlorine. A white staircase descended gracefully from the pools towards the sand, each immaculate step gleaming like ivory, pristine and purposeful, forming a path carved for the sole purpose of arrival. The grains of sand, coarse and warm beneath my bare feet, waited like a patient beacon, a hushed reminder of simplicity, texture, and the unspoken invitation that welcomed me like a gentle promise.

The beach stretched endlessly, empty and serene, a sanctuary untouched by time. The world felt still, no interruptions, only the unbroken rhythm of crashing waves. Hills bordered the edges of the ocean and framed the secluded beach. The sun began its slow ascent, spilling a spectrum of colors across the horizon: shades of deep pink rose, soft gleams of lavender, streaks of yellow pastels, like soft silk unraveling across the sky. Each color effortlessly merging with the next, mirrored in the rolling waves that receded with a rhythm powerful yet graceful.

The waves themselves held a quiet majesty, ceaseless in ritual and devotion. The ocean's surface glittered under the first light as teal and turquoise hues reached hidden depths, each crest emerging with white foam, curling along the edges of the tide like delicate lace on a gown. The sand clung to my skin like memory, unwilling to let go, each grain a quiet reminder of permanence. Every motion, every sound, the entirety of the ocean's routine felt like an intentional breath, performing for no audience but myself, infinite yet grounded to my soul.

Beneath all the perfection lay a quiet fragility. The sun rose higher as shadows retreated, and the soft edges of the landscape sharpened. The tide grew stronger, and what had seemed eternal shifted. I stood on the sand, soaking in the warmth of the morning sun on my skin while the waves brushed my feet. The ocean reminded me that beauty was never still; it breathed and moved, yet inevitably passed like dawn yielding to day, dream to reality. The cycle awoke not just the earth, but my soul, evoking awe and a sense of completeness I had rarely felt before. The moment lingered, a quiet testament to how beauty exists in stillness. There was comfort in this realization as the world rose with every passing day, each sunrise a reminder of the grandeur around me.



Surface + Frame Exploration 1 by Hannah Benjamin '26 | Mixed Media



Memory by Annie Zhao '28 | Printmaking on Linoleum

In the Light, I am Saved

by Emerson Lee '28

I reach up
But I can never find
The stars in the sky

I scream out
Until I can't
Anymore

I run towards you
Legs pumping
And reach out

I grab your coat
And then I feel
Alive

I feel the peace
The light
That you carry

It's stronger than the sun
But it doesn't burn
It warms

My broken and desperate soul

In the Gentle Hand of Time

by Sarah Hsu '27

Cruising down the 5 freeway, the late afternoon sun pouring through the car windows, everything seems to hum in quiet harmony. I slump in the back seat, half-awake, tearing open after-school snacks with sticky fingers, while a chilled bottle of Yakult sweats in my palms. Outside, the mountains blur like green and gold watercolor brushstrokes as we speed along at eighty miles per hour. My eyelids grow heavy, swaying with the rhythm of the tires on the road, yet the moment we exit the freeway, my eyes snap open. I know what awaits me–a place where the clock loosens its grip, a time when the ordinary turns into something magical.

At the front door, my grandparents embrace me with warmth and familiarity. Their laughter fills the air, gentle and comforting, followed by the inevitable question: “Have you eaten yet?” The scent of jasmine tea, both earthy and floral, mingled with the sweet and refreshing fruit pie, hypnotizes me as I sit at the table. Above the entryway, a deer head hangs high above me, watching with its glassy eyes. The walls hold memories: framed Bible verses, faded childhood photos that create a gallery of love, and the tiny lines that measured our heights. Stacks of traditional Chinese calligraphy books lean neatly against the wall, their pages tinted with little smudges of ink. Boxes of Taiwanese pineapple cakes with cute wrapping designs are stacked like tiny treasures.

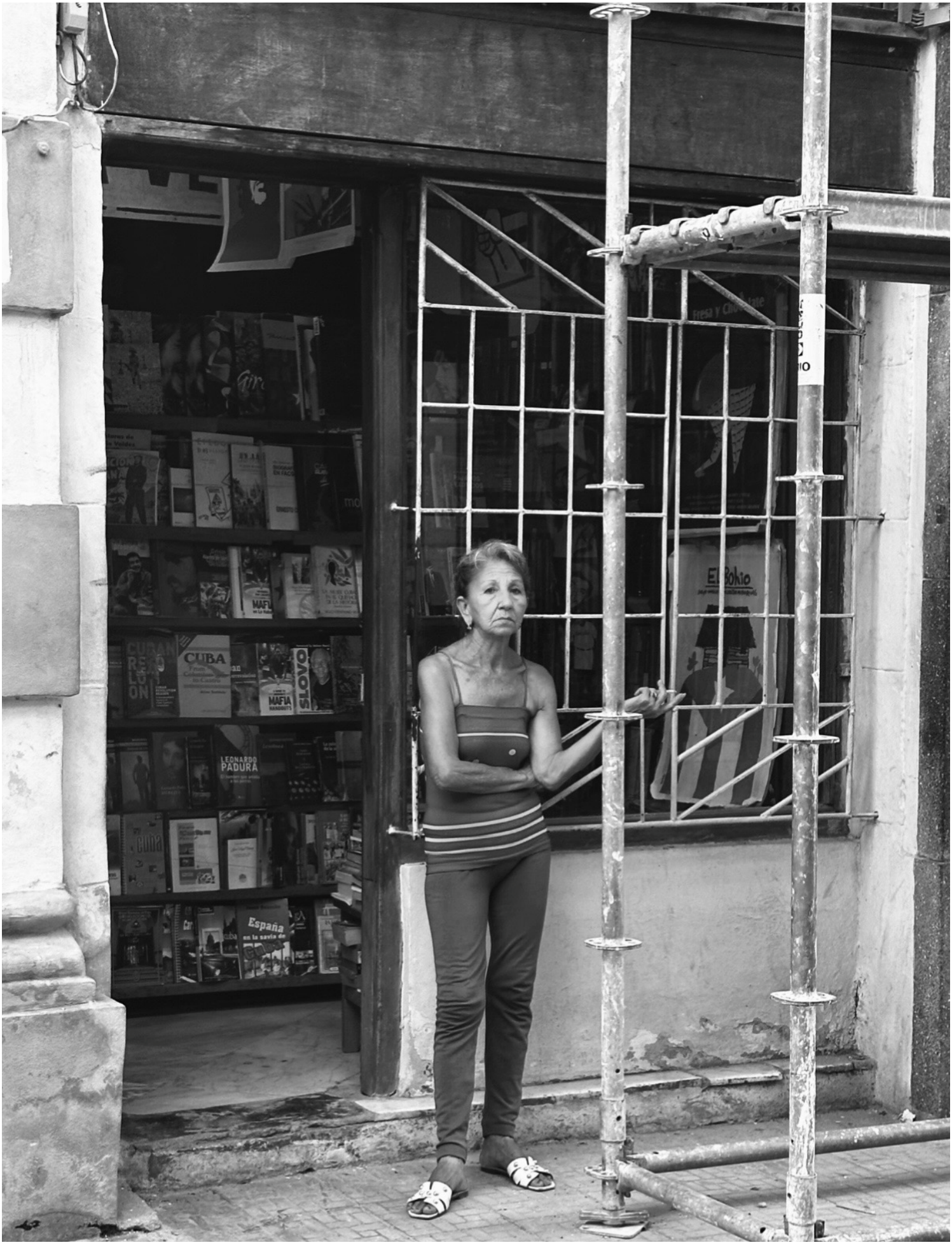
Near the window at his desk, my grandpa, quiet as a cat, works silently with a brush in his hand. Elegantly and slowly, paint glides across the paper. The faint scratch of his pencil or brush, accompanied by the occasional sigh of wind rustling through the curtain, reveals a quiet wisdom and serenity, the kind that only comes from a life fully lived. Sometimes, he shares stories of how his father taught him the art of calligraphy. Other times, he guides my clumsy hands and teaches me the meaning of each curve and line.

Beyond the sliding glass doors, my grandparents' backyard is its own universe, filled with the tang of lemon blossoms, the sugary sweetness of guava, and the nutty scent of fig trees. Squirrels dart across the branches, mischievously stealing the fruits, only to be chased off by my grandmother's sharp yell. My siblings and I race to the pool and dive in. Splash! The water suppresses our squeals before we float back up to the surface. As I rise for air, I see my grandfather plucking fruits while my grandmother laughs, her scolding softened into affection.

On other days, the kitchen becomes the place where I learn to create. Standing on tiptoe, I stir the sizzling, cubed spam, wash the rice, and add soy sauce to the wok. Oil snaps. Steam rises. The wok hisses as we pour in the leftover rice to make the perfect golden fried rice. Each motion feels like a performance: the clatter of the spatula, the rising steam, and the golden, crispy finish of the rice. My grandmother's hands move quickly as she multitasks, helping and rolling long strips of milk candies. She cuts them into even pieces, wrapping them in bits of crinkly wax paper, and packages them in cute little bags for us to bring home. We carry them home, crinkling in Ziploc bags and savoring each piece like a chewy treasure.

Every visit was a new chapter in my book of life. However, time, stubborn and unyielding, always presses forward. There came a time when we stopped playing with fake phones and started scrolling through real ones. There came a time when we stopped going to the pool every afternoon, trading splashes for stacks of homework. There came a time when we stopped playing pretend and started facing real situations. There came a time when we stopped singing and dancing in public, our voices dimmed by fear. My first heartbreak wasn’t from a person, but from realizing that childhood itself slipped away so quickly.

Still, those moments breathe within me. They taught me to see the beauty in the smallest things: the dancing of the trees, the singing of the birds, and the smiles of my friends. I continue to create memories with my family and friends, each one flickering with the same golden light that once danced across my childhood.



The Old Woman by Annie Zhao '28 | Photography



Shapes of Space by Ruijie Lucy Liu '26 | Charcoal

Carry the Flame

by Maryse Labatia '28

Faith abides
Hope abides
Love abides

Among all stands love
Arise and set it aflame
Sustain it with passion
Much fragility and perfection

Through love we became
In His eyes
He saw it was good
Giving us the purpose of delicately loving

The Messiah
Us disciples must follow
Through this passionate flame
To fill our minds with its peace

Love

Patient
Kind
Bears all things
Believes all things
Hopes all things
Endures all things

Pass along the flame
Mark it as a seal upon your heart
The strongest winds cannot take it out
The strongest waters cannot quench it
Rains from the clouds cannot take the flame out

For love stands above all
Patiently waiting to be lit
Bearing all things
Hoping for what is to come
Dancing delicately in God's embrace

Ad Astra

by Cosette Choi '27

The silence is vast
(Endless
As though it's thick enough to swim in
But too thin to swim through
And too wide to swim past)

It presses downward
(Inward
Because there's no downward in endless black
That swallows your breaths
And drowns your feedback)

Your tether is gone
(Severed
It snapped so quietly you didn't notice
With your hands outstretched
And grasping absence)

The thing you want doesn't want you
(It can't
Your face is protected by fiberglass
Against stars too far for warmth
And it can't love what it doesn't see)

You reach anyway
(Longing
You search because that's what you've always done
But your fingers find nothing to curl around
And your nails scrape emptiness)

And so you drift in slow motion
(Or float
Or fall infinitely into deep space
Saltwater moons spilling from your eyes
And orbiting until they freeze)



Reflection by Cosette Choi '27 | Photography

Loveable Life Laments

by Diego Wang '27

To start with high expectations
Just for abandoning to appeal
For reasons obvious,
Wearisome and irritating.
To think that I could return, from a nauseous
milieu to a hotbed of hopeful illusions.
To think I could run
But only just rot in poor taste,
When darkness veils and soothing wraps
My long lust for the merciful selfishness bursts,
Closing my vision, sealing my senses,
embracing my threads of declining seeds,
I again, subtly, fell into the devastating gift of the darkness,
Throwing my insides out and letting the outside seep in.
To think I could beg for mercy from the unforgiving darkness,
Leaving bitter trails that only I could savor.
But with rhymes and fading paperbacks, the darkness evaporates
into nothing with a tiny smudge of light. Midnight whispers,
muffled by the ever-growing gleam,
make its appearance scarce and unwelcome,
Return with high expectations with high faith



12:08 am by J.D. Lim '28 | Photography


INSIDE

Memories to Cherish

by Eugene Ban '26

Dear Dad,

Thank you for mornings that began
before the sun knew my name.

Thank you for the darkness pressing
against my eyelids as I begged for five more minutes.

I dragged myself from bed, half asleep,
complaining in whispers meant to delay the day.

You never raised your voice.
You let patience do the talking.

“It’s time to go,” you said
softly, like the day would listen.

The court was quiet,
the world holding its breath.

A ball snapped against concrete,
birds chirping in the distance.

“Keep your eye on the ball,” you reminded me,
as if focus were something you could teach.

Back then, I felt too early to matter,
too small to understand.

Now I know...
those mornings were not just practice,

Just you and me,
learning how to show up.

Thank you for believing before I did.
Thank you for standing there when I needed you most.

These are the mornings I carry with me,
memories I will always cherish.



Aiming Towards Light by Lucia Wei '27 | Acrylic on Canvas



Ink Cocoon by Snow Zhu '27 | Photography

Living Contradictions

by David Roche Jr. '27

White and black.
Cold and warmth.
Beauty and error.
All seem so insignificant alone.
But none were meant to be alone.
Walking together, side by side.
Walking forever, eye to eye.
Each one opposing each other in every way,
Yet there is wonder.
Yet there is hope.
Either one balances out the other,
In perfect harmony.
Both need to stay apart
As much as they need to stay together.
Their contradictions, you see,
Are what makes them beautiful.
None are found alone.
None are found forgotten.
One, they are weak.
Two, they are strong.
They need each other.



Nightmare by Emily Kwak '27 | Photography



 The Thinker by Joanne Kim '26 | Paper Sculpture

Unanswered

by Layla Alimadadian '26

How do you run from something inside of you,
from questions, that circle, that tighten, that chew?
The kind you outgrow but still they outlast,
the kind that don't leave, they just double back.

I'm reminded every time I look at this chair,
this room once loud with laughter,
Life spilling over, warmth in the air,
now hollow, now frozen,
Nothing to speak. Nothing to say.
Like the walls learned grief
and it taught them to stay.

How is it that people lie awake
counting the cracks on the wall,
instead of the choices we make?
Why them? Why now?
Why's it feel like the answer depends
on who's allowed to appeal?

Who decides? Who signed the decree?
The wise weighed their life and said finished to me.

Deciding if they rise or fall,
if they're forgiven or punished for all.
For one doubt too loud, one human moment
they weren't allowed?

Who decides to cut the string,
to say you've carried enough of this thing,
that your hands are empty, that this is the end?

All of this used to feel far away,
like a headline, a story, someone else's decay.

But then it was one. Two. Three
and suddenly you.

It's not far at all.
It's here. It's close.
It's the echo that stays when the room is a ghost.

I keep asking questions that don't reply,
keep staring at ceilings, keep counting the sky.

Maybe the answer is no one knows.
Maybe that's the truth we're scared to hold.

Just chairs that stay empty.
Just rooms that ache.
Just people learning how much loss it truly takes.

The Power of Forgiveness

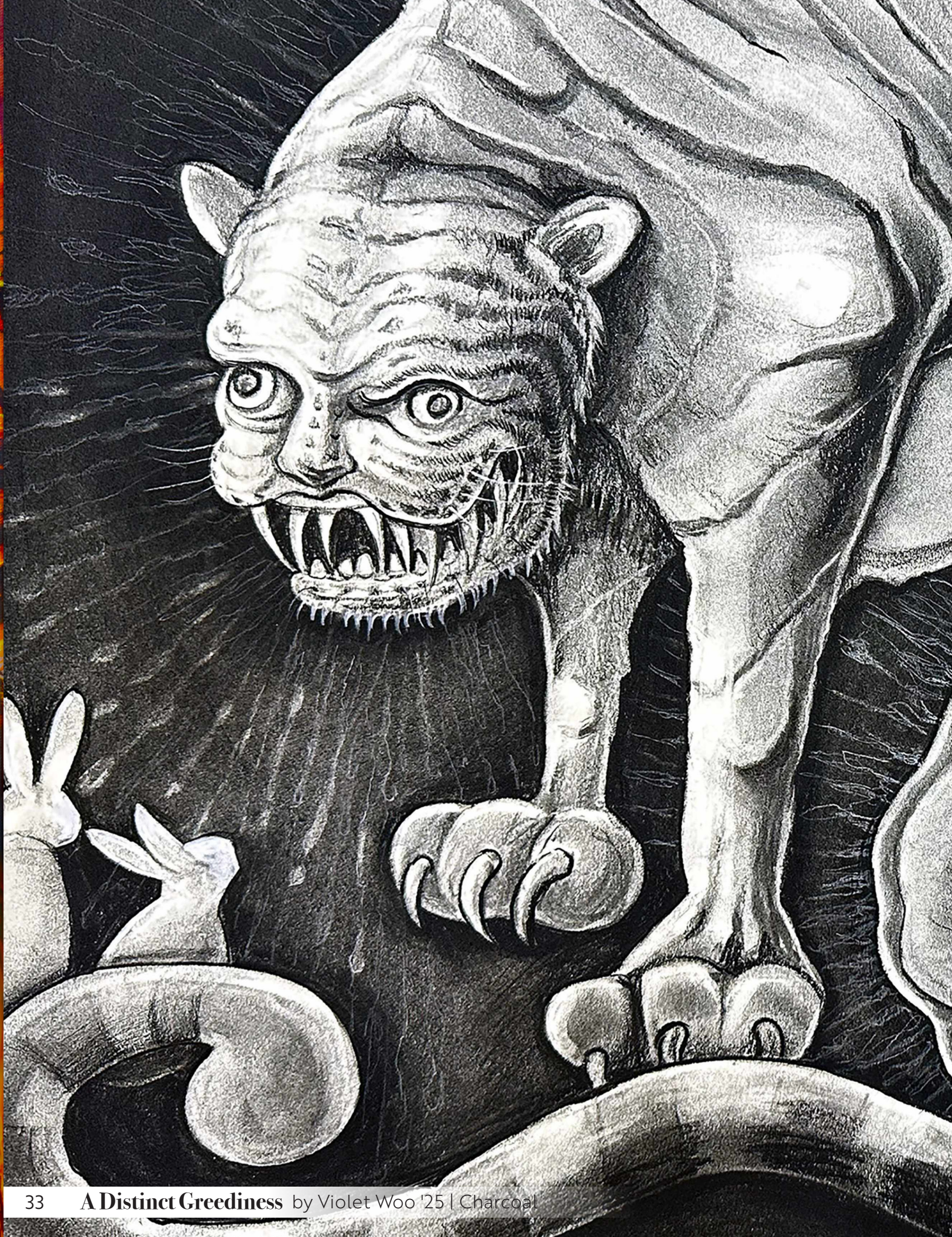
by Lauren Lu '26

A heart once heavy, bound in chains,
By bitter wounds and ancient pains.
Yet in release, a river flows,
Where anger fades and kindness grows.

No burden lingers, nor past's regret,
The soul finds peace, it won't forget.
Like Heaven's grace from up above,
God's mercy shines through boundless love.



We Can Still Fix This by Hailey Baik '27 | Acrylic on Canvas



33 **A Distinct Greediness** by Violet Woo '25 | Charcoal

Finding You in the Wild

by Charlotte Burlingame '26

In the thicket of trees and brush, I am held. A hush of green, as I stand alone on the damp earth beneath my feet. But I am not alone. Never.

For I see you everywhere. From the sliver of sunlight that brushes against my face to the warm zephyr that tickles the leaves high in the birch trees above me.

You are here. Above me, I catch the glimpse of a spider's web, such a delicate structure, yet so strong and true, a true symbol of grace in the morning's soft dew.

I see you, a robin, a flash of darting red, wings beating, to a secluded nest high in the trees, with the unspoken promise of provision for her young.

I see you too, in the rain, as it pours down upon me, yet I find myself looking at the flowers. Their fragile stems wilt as the sky weeps upon them, their pretty petals turning dull as the world is cast in brooding clouds.

But I know that it will pass, as the sun will soon return, knowing that their once frail stems will grow, their petals cast anew in hues of colorful vibrance in the radiating sun.

And I too, find myself put through trials by you, yet I grow, just as the flowers do.

You, the rain, the sun, the web, the robin in flight. Everywhere. I stand here, in your beautifully created world, and I am present. Just present.



Monochromatic Wings by Logan Miller '27 | Photography



37 **Canyon of Light** by Luke Bailey '28 | Photography

The Light at the End of the Tunnel

by Cora J. Fox '27

I could see the Light
At the end of the tunnel,
But I was afraid

The darkness had a sort of
Familiarity,
A bed in which I could rest my
Sanity,
Until the dawn of a new day

I could see the Light
At the end of the tunnel,
But the journey was long and hard

A valley of shadow and death
Where sorrows had reached new depths
For there, there would be no rest,

But the alternative was fraught
And it led to feeling distraught:
Remaining in the darkness
When such a light exists

I could see the Light
At the end of the tunnel,
But the shadow of my sin was long and black

It cast on the ground
All around my image,
Outlining my figure,
Defining the fringes,

But the Light saw me
A different way,
Not a person lost,
But a soul to save

He reached out His right hand
Of mercy and goodness
And pulled me in
Under a canopy of brightness

It shone over
The faults of my humanity
And rescued me from
The depths of my disparity

For I can see the Light
At the end of the tunnel,
But I am no longer afraid

Light of the World

by Noah Lee '26

And into the world Jesus descended,
Born the Son of God, the King of Kings, the Messiah,
Come as a light into the world, no longer shall we abide in
Darkness. He is our salvation to the
Ends of the earth, sent by our
Father in Heaven. We children of
God, of light, that in
Him, there may be no darkness at all.

If we walk in the light of the world—
Jesus Christ—we shall have the light of
Knowledge, of the glory of God, of
Life, by which we are saved. This is His
Message; this is the Word of the Lord. So it will be:

No longer shall we wander that directionless path,
Obscured by darkness,
Pushed down by the weight of our sin,
Quietly enduring the fate of inevitable judgement.
Revel in the light of the world, who has
Shone in our hearts, for we are the
Temple of the living God,
Unveiled through Christ's
Veneration



Corruption of Evil by Grace Lee '28 | Mixed Media, Feather

Stage of Light

by Amelia Albelo '27

We march.

Monochrome tuxedos and jet-black dresses, we are a stretch of darkness splattered with moonlight. We clutch hard black cases until our knuckles whiten, striding steadily forward with faraway, ethereal smiles etched on our lips. One hundred in a line, we musicians forge through the masses, through pungent sewers and dreary skies, through blaring horns and blinding lights, through fierce fire and disorderly beauty. Pretending to ignore the stares, we are stars, glistening along the pavement with one heartbeat. We set our gazes forward on the unprecedented future stretching before us: a cavernous chamber of historical significance, a revered room of the unknown.

As I contemplate the journey of a thousand miles for this moment, I imagine him walking these streets alongside me, knowing them by name. Calling them his home.

Each footstep touching this weary pavement, as this cement gasps for breath through ancient lungs, is a step closer to destiny. No one knows if I shiver from a chill or anticipation, if my awestruck silence is for me or for him.

Boarding the subway is like drowning underwater, dank and solemn, then being swallowed by a shining beacon of light. We sit and hold fast in this never-ending rush.

My fingers serenely copy words onto a Frida Kahlo postcard, a letter to him; the words are dripping with adoration en español, aching with longing, oscillating with beauty. They patiently await their fate: being tucked under a velvet chair, forever framed in greatness.

Another thousand footsteps and we drink in the shadow of our destination's brick exterior. Framed by graying posters, devoid of rushing civilians, this back entrance lacks glamor, but it trembles with purpose.

Like bursting through the belly of the whale, we climb a winding staircase and emerge into the greenroom. This room has witnessed the private moments of prodigies. Like the faces of geniuses portrayed on the walls, Tchaikovsky, Itzhak Perlman, Stevie Wonder, we are musicians too.

Now, to rehearse. A cacophony of noise erupts from our instruments as our fingers glide across the fingerboards like agitated spiders, striking each note with ease, reverberating with passion. When I remove his violin from my case, my racing heart stills. I press my lips to its ancient wood, whispering, promising to make him proud.

An hour passes like a second. We are guided through this sacred labyrinth of prestige, and at last, the moment arrives. Stepping foot on stage leaves me breathless.

Carnegie Hall.

Opalescent hues of gold and red float to my retinas in an endless dance of vibrance. Delicately curved golden architecture seizes my vision and threatens to throw sound waves around the room with terrifying force, a globally renowned mirror of music. Seats of red velvet beckon every human soul to ponder the mysteries of life in voiceless contemplation, to jump and applaud in raucous praise. Magnitude hovers heavily in this cavernous

continued on page 43



Finale by Hailey Baik '27 | Acrylic on Wood

chamber; one can tell by simply breathing its air. Even in his wildest dreams, could he have imagined this? And then I see him.

My grandfather.

For only a heartless duration of a moment, I catch a glimpse of his heavenly spirit, gently smiling from Carnegie's balcony seating. Dressed in a white guayabera, straw sombrero resting atop his head, chocolate eyes crinkling under world-famous lights, this is my Abuelito, his soul free at last. Nothing could stop him from attending his nieta's performance.

Like a storm pouring violently with the anger of the Divine, like light breaking through the clouds with astonishing beauty, my tears fall vehemently.

Our conductor's hands levitate indefinitely in space, poised for initiation. So gleefully taking part in this glorious order, this indescribable unification, this music that will forever be recorded in the chronicles of history, I tuck his violin under my chin, hold his bow slightly above these singing strings, and close my eyes.

Esto es para él.

Author's Note: In January 2025, I joined the Crean Lutheran Instrumental Ensemble and performed on the world's greatest stage, Carnegie Hall in New York. Performing as a violinist, I played my late grandfather's violin with unspeakable pride.

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