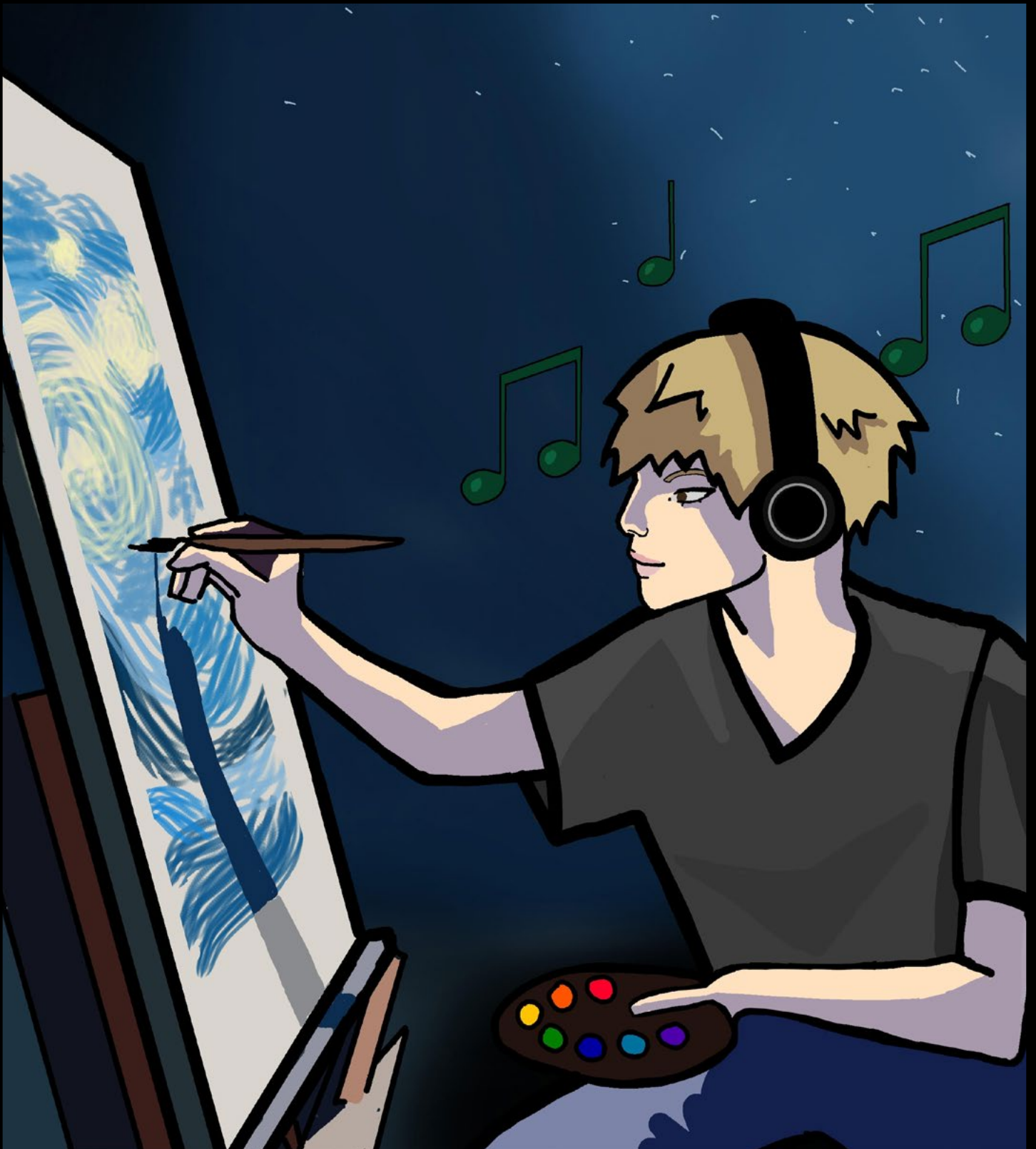


LABYRINTH



2025–2026 | COLUMBIA HIGH SCHOOL



2025-2026 Columbia High School



The New Yorker cover art by Rea Irvin, 1925

Where did the cover art for this year's issue come from?

The first issue of *The New Yorker* featured a portrait of Eustace Tilley, a character drawn by the magazine's first art editor, Rea Irvin. He has reappeared on the magazine's anniversary issues, often in different guises - as a woman, a dog, and even an insect. *New Yorker* covers, [are made up of] "images that will be relevant, images that will make you laugh, images that will move you." And for decades since its 1925 debut, *The New Yorker Magazine's* covers have projected a sophistication befitting its literary pedigree.

Columbia Students were invited to submit their modern day interpretations in a schoolwide contest. The chosen artwork is featured on the front and back outside and inside covers.

Credit goes to:

Front Cover: Alandra DeLeon

Back Cover: Margaret Louise RapiRap

Inside Front Cover: Emily Craven

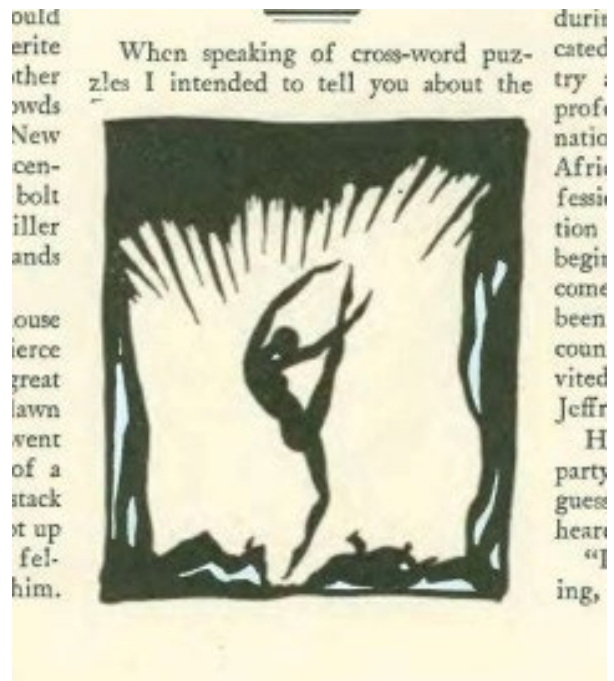
Inside Back Cover: Andrew Hastings

Also noted are the "Spots" illustrations, by CHS Artist, Margaret Louise RapiRap

Labyrinth Staff participate in regularly scheduled workshops where they explore and attempt to emulate various styles and genres in both artwork and writing. In a nod to the *The New Yorker*, our staff spent an afternoon exploring the history and development of "Spot Drawings".

"Spot illustrations in *The New Yorker* are the small, whimsical, black-and-white drawings sprinkled throughout the pages of the print magazine. Running without titles or captions, they primarily serve as visual "fillers" for the print layout, but have evolved into an iconic, celebrated art form of their own."- *The NYPL*.

"From the magazine's founding in 1925, *The New Yorker* utilized spots created by a rotating roster of artists to break up walls of text and add breathing room for the reader... For decades, multiple artists contributed individual, standalone drawings in a single issue...In contemporary issues, spots remain a bastion of print...many artists continue to provide charmingly remixed, eclectic drawings of animals, objects, and imaginary creatures that perfectly complement adjacent articles. Because they are entirely physical, spot illustrations remain the only piece of *New Yorker* content that appears exclusively in the print magazine and nowhere online."- *The New Yorker*



Spot from the first *New Yorker*, artist unknown

LABYRINTH

2025 – 2026

Advisor: Patricia Shaw

Editor-In-Chief: Trinity Ryf

Secretary: Jaxin McClave

MEMBERS:

Emily Bacher

Fiona Clague

Khloe Ciraulo-Natale

Hailey Miller

Deidre Quail

Jocelyn Shafer

*Special thanks go to **Bailey Freemantle** who stepped in as Publication Coordinator- this year's issue would not have been possible without you. More thanks go to **Andrea Neiman**, **Fred Rudofsky**, and **Jason DeFrias** for encouraging student submissions. A final thanks goes to **Kate Banks** and **Jessica Hladik** for coordinating the Publication Celebration.*

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Published by the students of Columbia High School, East Greenbush, NY 12061
in cooperation with the Questar III Communications Service.

Senior Spotlight | Deidre Quail, Art Editor

FULL SNOW MOON

Why does the Full Snow Moon
mock me with its rays,
enrobing Summer's warmth
on Winter's hollow frame?

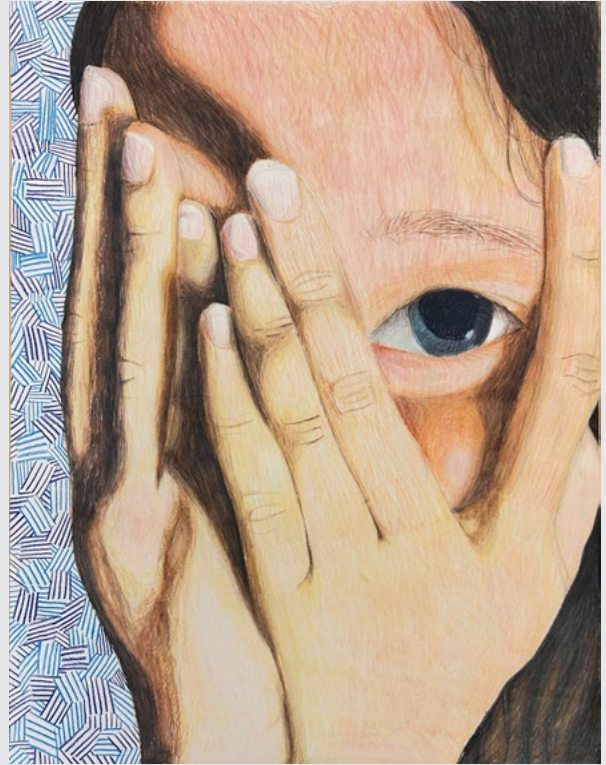
To herald foreseeable future,
when Death thaws way for Spring;
if the ground beneath turns pliant,
flowers, my bride will bring.

Our contract is an old one,
sewn by blood, not thread.
Bold lights sever memories
of the day that we were wed.

I awoke to feel her sleeping.
I cried to know her pain.
Her dowry was the solid ground,
and her life-giving rain.

Now, their screens have blinded me
to her gifts and cursed their names;
I shiver so at Winter's frost
and burn at Summer's flame.

And yet, my bride, my flower,
she brings them without care,
and so the Full Snow Moon
reminds me she is there.



Visions



ABOVE Weird Grandpa

LEFT The Photo



UNTITLED

by Deidre Quail

Reach into the well of your mind. In its depths, I'm sure you can find a test, or a match, or a performance. You stayed up late, you studied and practiced, you stressed between periods. It was your last thought before you fell asleep, and your first thought when you awoke. You tried so hard, because at that moment, that challenge was everything. You needed to pass, to win, to ace it. And when that moment arrived, it was gone in a flash. But you wouldn't get too comfortable. There would be other challenges, more to work for again and again. Because you tried. Because you cared.

Today is the day to look back at those moments and laugh. They seem silly now, now that you're moving up. You've got important things to do, a life to get on with. "High school was a crazy time, but none of that matters anymore," you say.

I think, "You may be moving up, but you're not moving out."

Because the past is a well. Deep in the water, lie your regrets, floating beside your nostalgia. The memories that once splashed onto the surface have sunk to the bottom, but they're never gone. Each droplet has gathered into the well of who you are. However, you can't linger by the top. If you fall in, you could drown.

You will find another team to join and play another match. Because the present is a bucket. You fill it with the water you have, the best you can, because you care. Once the bucket is full, down into the well you empty it. Another moment, and you'll fill the bucket again.

attend a new school and study for another test. Because the future is a river. Not just a river, but an estuary into an ocean, reaching out to the great vastness. In those waves are every moment you dream of. Any water droplet could be yours, you just need to reach for it.

You will find a new stage for your performance.

Because life is full of moments. Each one, just a droplet in your well. You will find another reason to stay up late and stress and practice.

If no one fills a well, the water will become stagnant. Stagnant water becomes undrinkable. But you will fill the well.

You've reached the mouth of the river. The ocean is broad, but so is your past. The moments you once dreaded with all your might now lie dormant at the bottom of your well. Every step you took to get here has built into the strength you need. Your next steps are rolling in the surf. Gather them in your bucket, and feed you well.

Senior Submissions

THIS PLACE WAS ONCE MY ESCAPE

by Kylie Caringi

I dreaded walking into this school every morning, but at least it wasn't a warning.

The school doors were once a guard, for when life was getting too hard.

At home, I kept my head low; there was nowhere else for a kid to go.

No one could reach me through that door. At least here, I wasn't a victim anymore.

Finally, that house was in the past; high school was here at last.

The bad was gone, but the days dragged on.

I'm tired of the tests, I'm tired of the halls, I'm sick and tired of these four walls.

I complained about the classes, the stress, the routine. I wished life would hurry to something unseen.

But I must remember that this building stood, all throughout my childhood.

I forgot what this place had once been to me. I forgot that boring used to mean free.

But now I'm here, at the end of it all, looking back down these familiar halls.

They watched me grow up, they gave me my time, they held me together in ways that were unassigned.

I didn't love school every day I was here. But it was always there, year after year.

Leaving it is bittersweet, hopeful, and hard. Saying goodbye to a place that held up a guard.

Now I'm leaving, and it's strange to admit: I'm grateful for a place I once resented a bit.

Graduation means stepping into something new, chasing the dreams we once barely knew.

It's saying goodbye to the life we've known, trading these halls for paths of our own.

No looking back at who we were before, because the world is waiting, and it will not wait anymore.

I WANTED LAURELS

by Mary Weinheimer

I wanted laurels.

I wanted crowns of gold
I could hold in my hands
as I grew taller and brighter and louder
and hold high as I walked across the stage
so I could tell the earth,
I've made it. I've won.

yet bronze-plated feathers and sealing wax
stare expectantly on the table before you.

the sun wastes no time on its daily path,
although the birds sing
as they whisper to you
that you've run out of time.

so even as your hands shake,
you lift each feather, one by one;
you cannot pass any one by.

there's the science project from second grade,
the essay you wrote in ninth,
the time you ran off between sobs hoping nobody saw,
but hoping too that one person noticed
(they did, even if they never told you so).

you glue feathers together,
and each tear that falls as you work
evaporates in the steam of your wax.

minute by minute,
feathers and memories and tears gather
into one tremendous collage
of everything you are
and everywhere you've been.

the wax will never feel dry enough,

the feathers never numerous enough,
but at some point in your work,
your seventeen years of life
will be rendered exhausted of feathers,
memories,
lessons,
and your wax will run cold.

so you must spread your wings of bronze
no matter if you are afraid,
and you must fly
and fly
and fly,
as far as the wind will take you.

you built your wings yourself;
have faith in them now.
for life isn't about presenting laurels
for being the prettiest girl
or the most inventive student
or holding your fragile seams together the longest.

it isn't about laurels, I realize,
as I circle above the expanse of sea
and my bronze wings of life carry me.

it was about freedom,
and finding,
and building the wings
to fly upon.

over the sea in wings made
from scars by our own hand,
we will not let ourselves fall.

we are finally free.



Bailey Freemantle



Earth's Purifier by Andrea Neiman

POEM #1

by J. Hladik

Barrier

Songs of twilight crickets
drift into my ears.
Can they hear what I am thinking
or smell all of my fears?

Vehicles streaming past,
faceless strangers at the wheel.
Would they care what I am thinking
or acknowledge how I feel?

Blanket of distant clouds,
a barrier to the sun.
Will they sense what I am thinking
or see what I have done?

Silence can be deafening,
no message, text or call.
Does anyone
hear,
see,
smell,
sense,
or care
to know me at all?

POEM #2

by J. Hladik

growth

unsure
unknown
unsettled

insecure
ill-equipped
unadvised

reclaim
reframe
reimagine

well-intentioned
witty
& wise



Valerie Cafarelli



Bailey Freemantle

DIDACTIC (adj.)

by Kate Hastings

Fighting to fit in
is a battle for
invisibility.

If you win, you become
a transparent,
permeable
shield.

Fighting to please others
is a battle for
resentment.
If you win, you grow hollow,
mere echoes
in your core.

Fighting to be loved
is a battle for
despair.

If you win, you only
delay
the killing blow.

Fighting to be heard
is a battle for
glittering horizons.
If you lose, those
vistas will
wait.

Fighting to understand
is a battle for communion.
If you win, your
home encompasses
the world.

Fighting to accept change
is a battle for
equanimity.
If you lose, you still win,
in time.

Fighting to exist deliberately
is a battle for
inspiration.
If you lose, you drift.
If you win, you truly live.

UNTITLED

by Lisa Daley

As I sit in my favorite place
soaking in His gift
so perfectly painted before me ...

The rolling hills of green
streaming with trees
and newly sprouted corn fields

White “snowball” speckled apple blossoms
Butterflies dancing among
the brightly colored pedals

The warmth of His rays
glistening through the gentle blue sky

I find myself inches away
separated only by glass
peeking in on a jay
adorned in vibrant shades of blue
nestled in its nest
protecting and caring for its future

Its own hope for tomorrow

It brings me back to the whole picture
Majestic is its Creator
Overwhelmed in the show of His love

May His splendor never cease
to take my breath away.



Bailey Freemantle

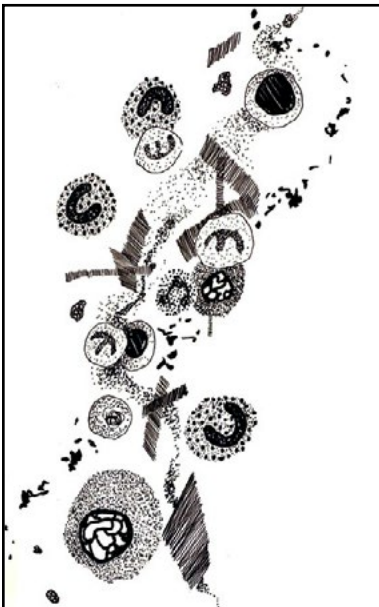


Valerie Cafarelli

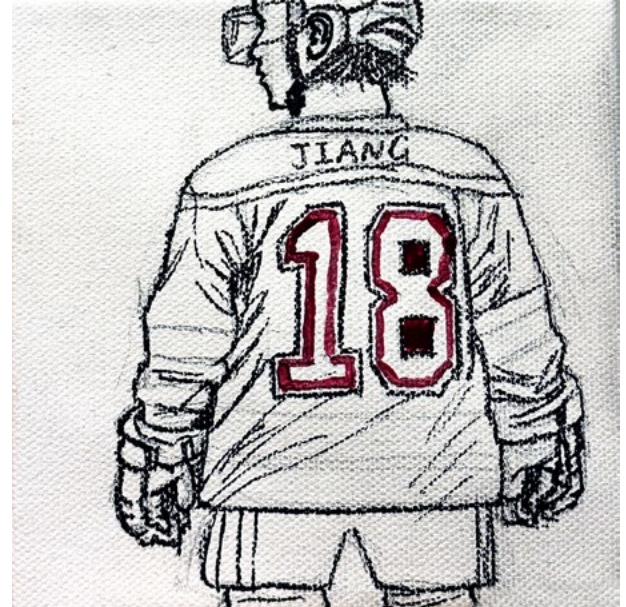
13 WAYS OF LOOKING AT POEMS

by Fred Rudofsky

- I. When I look back on my life
Has it been like a pre-written poem
Or have I been writing it myself?
- II. All the early songs and stories I heard as a child?
They were poetic, and I knew them by heart;
they never ceased to amaze me.
Dr. Seuss was like Shakespeare,
And The Beatles' "Yellow Submarine" was an
odyssey
That took place under three minutes.
- III. The poem was written, and re-written.
All of its flaws diminished;
Gradually, it began to shine.
- IV. I wrote her poems for over two years
And none of them won her heart.
No words can express the waste of time—
Just as no words can express love.
- V. Seamus Heaney took our class on a walking tour
Of Dublin, telling us stories of Joyce, Swift – and
Yeats.
Yeats, the poet who put Modernism on the map
In a country anchored in the past.
- VI. The sonnet challenge was memorable:
Seventeen students in the honors class of
twenty-seven
Wrote and then recited from memory their sonnets
To earn two points on their Q2 average!
- VII. Why write a haiku for a bonus question?
Why not?
Remember: you will create something that never
existed before
In this universe.
- VIII. The poet sat along the river bank
His thoughts drifting like the fallen trees
From the ice storm last month.
- IX. She heard the guitarist sing a ballad
Out in the park
And each time he voiced a new rhyme
Someone dropped a coin in his case.
- X. The world is spiralling in hate and ignorance
And now is the time when we need poems
To set things right, even if for one hour.
- XI. Blank verse, free verse, terza rima—
Poems of all kinds, poems to speak for us
Long after we're gone and forgotten.
- XII. Follow your dreams
Into the rhythms you alone may hear
And you will never fail,
And you will never lose focus.
- XIII. What do you want from me?
I'm a poet.
Not a doctor, a soldier, a teacher—
Yet I can do their work, only better.



ABOVE & LEFT Alison Hosier



Catherine Jiang

"THE DETECTIVE WHO ONCE LIVED UPON CHRYSTIE STREET"

FROM AN ELEUSINIAN MYSTERY

by Margaret Louise Rapirap

"So, um, Mr. Artyomov, you're gettin' me as some . . . assistant?" she decided to ask, while Alexey was clearly examining his elder brother and the papers he held in the likeness of a detective. "'Cause that's why I'm, er. . . here, right now, yeah? Cause you's the one that does . . . the mystique things, and you need a . . .

"An assistant for a detective?" He huffed, then he simply grunted. "Why, yes, that is precisely what I had said, though I cannot be assured that you believe that is what I mean verbatim . . . See, the gods certainly do not give me cases . . . though they do not give me quests, either. As I've told you, I have taken upon myself the responsibility of 'protecting' the old gods' magic, whether it be to tell a fisherman that he had never seen a hippocampus or to absolve a few street murders perpetrated by a lycanthrope. It's an interestingly mundane profession, see. Much like a detective, though."

"Well, I thought you were just another odd detective, sir. Your detection reminded me of a detective Mr. Greenwood liked real good."

"Ah, yes. Is he the same English detective I'd mentioned?"

"I 'on't remember his name, sir," she stammered, shyly. "But I remember he had a thing like, 'When you've, er,'"

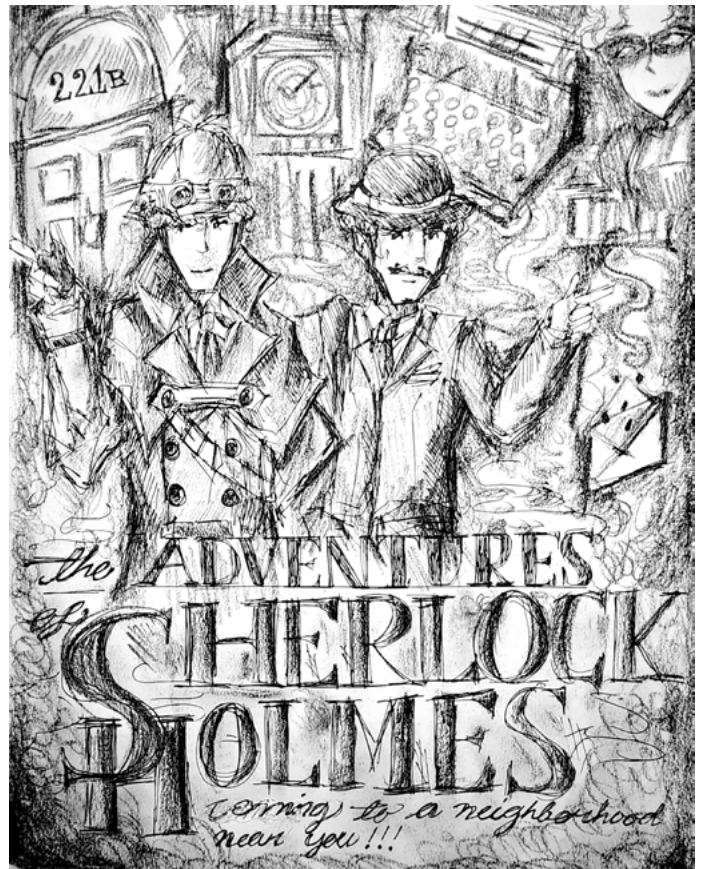
"'When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.'" he arched his eyebrow at her.

"Um, yes, sir," Robinia frowned a little, wondering why he was arching his eyebrow in such a way. Doubt, presumably.

"I must ask you, do you know what is impossible and what isn't? After our encounter with the empousa, are you so sure?"

"S'ppose not."

"Then we can consider that saying defunct. Nothing is impossible or improbable when seeking the truth. We mustn't ignore the pantheon of impossibility when faced with the world of the gods! Now, what was I thinking of doing? Oh yes, Hector. Do you mind?"



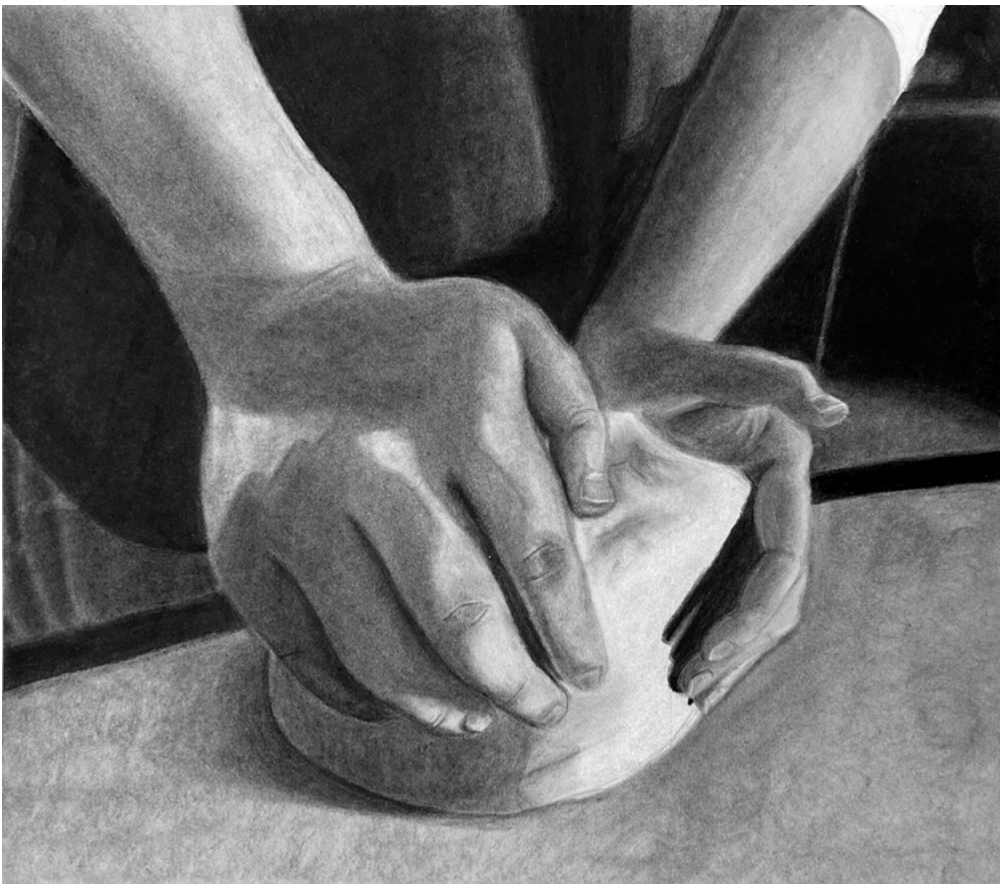
Alandra DeLeon



Trinity Ryf



ABOVE & CENTER Jenna Rytel



Creature of the Wheel by Jack Davis

13 WAYS OF LOOKING AT JAMAICA

by Giovanni Green

- I. 14 great parishes on this island
Called Jamaica with
- II. The wonderful heat,
Warm summer sun all
Year-round, shining down.
- III. The bustling streets filled with people,
Taxi drivers yelling, "One an' redy!"
The beautiful streets of downtown Jamaica.
- IV. The beautiful sound of birds
And the cool country breeze,
Makes you feel so free.
- V. The beautiful hotels next
To the seaside.
- VI. The beach's so beautiful,
and clean- the sun glimmering
off the ocean waves.
- VII. Playground where the youth
Go to play;
Old or new, they're all as one.
- VIII. Big yellow buses are going all
Around the city from Halfway Tree
to Portmore, from Kingston to Spanish Town.
- IX. People are living under bridges,
And in gutters;
Oh, how cruel life can be sometimes!
- X. Lives lost day by day-
What to do, what to say?
- XI. Third-world country
So divided, but more
United during the World Cup debate.
- XII. The street's so safe at day,
But so dangerous at night!
- XIII. Oh, how this island is
Still the best home
One could have.



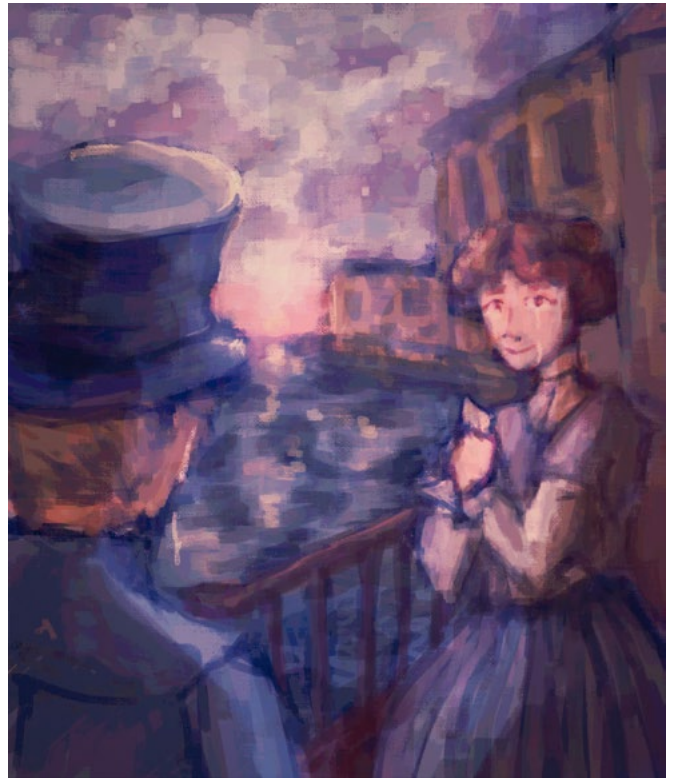
Self by Piper Gentile



Unga Bunga by Natalie Jordan



Penelope's Loom by Margauet Louise Rapira



Interpretation of Dostoyevski's White Night
by Margauet Louise Rapira



Stay Gold/Car with Boys by Darcie Greene



Piano and Lamp by Alandra DeLeon



The most redeemable highly esteemable, ultimately graceful and entirely respectable George Windybank III
by Alandra DeLeon

ONE STEP AHEAD

by Teagan McQuide, Ellie Jagger, Kylie Caringi

Log Entry 1: 9/14/2025

Today, Robert Bianchi, infamously known as serial killer The Executioner, was declared guilty on five counts of first-degree murder. I've been working on this case for almost a year now, and it wasn't until the death of Christina Bell, The Executioner's fifth victim, that I, as well as my team, began to suspect Mr. Bianchi. We had almost nothing on him for the first four kills, when a sudden influx of incriminating evidence appeared as if out of thin air. At the time, we were all just relieved that we found a convincing lead... but now? I don't buy it. I've been hesitant about mentioning any doubts to my team, especially since the case has already been closed, but there's this nagging feeling inside me that I missed something. It all seemed too easy. I mean, how can an investigation go on for almost eight months with clean crime scenes and unviable leads, only to have everything laid out in front of us after the fifth kill? It just doesn't add up. On top of all that, the profile doesn't fit. We classified his MO as a single gunshot wound to the back of the head, execution-style: organized, controlled, power-driven. That means planning,

patience, and restraint, and would characterize him as an organized offender who is motivated by a desire for power and control rather than spontaneous rage or sexual gratification. This profile involves high levels of psychopathy, a complete lack of empathy, and a submissive superego. A lack of forensic evidence supports his level of planning. There was a recurring chemical smell at each scene, likely chloroform. The killer most likely selected his victims carefully to establish a sense of control over them, tying them up and drugging them. However, none of the bodies were purposely hidden; all of the victims had been found within a week of their death, unhidden and out for us to find. This suggests that, although the killer seeks to avoid complete detection and likes to plan his crimes thoroughly rather than impulsively, he seeks attention. He wants us to think that he is the one in control and that there is nothing we can do about it. We originally suspected that this was the work of a skilled hitman, involved in a criminal enterprise. After carefully taking apart each kill, the ideology doesn't fit. There was no specific victimology, as his kills ranged from black to white and female to male. The goal of simply

eliminating a target doesn't add up either, since none of the victims had much in common. At first, Bianchi seemed like a good fit. Being a charming and borderline narcissistic businessman in his 30s, it makes sense, but upon further investigation and interrogation, the traits don't add up. He doesn't fit the profile. All of the evidence was there, though. The fingerprints and hair found at the crime scene, the lack of an alibi for that night, the gun...it had to be him, right? But the way he talked and the way he carried himself were nothing like what we had profiled. You would think that someone who took so much time to meticulously trap and "execute" each victim, hide almost all forensic evidence for eight months, and never bother to hide the bodies wouldn't go down so easily, right? Bianchi didn't do it. We locked away the wrong man; he isn't guilty. I just need to prove it.

Log Entry 2: 9/28/2025 - 12:32 p.m.

I managed to get an interview with Robert Bianchi, whom I suspect was falsely accused. I'm hoping to gather as much information from him as possible, considering that all our forensic evidence points to him specifically; it has to mean something. Perhaps the true killer knows Bianchi? To have that much evidence to frame him for five serial murders, Bianchi has to have at least interacted with him. I know the interview alone won't render nearly enough information that could prove his innocence, so I'm not going in with high expectations, but hopefully it's a start. The process of setting up this interview was tedious, since I had to get permission from the facilities warden as well as consent from the inmate. My request to the warden of the facility was approved, along with a written consent form from Bianchi. I'm surprised he is willing to see me, let alone have a conversation, considering that I helped put him away. The interview is in an hour, and I won't lie when I say that I'm nervous. I don't know how he will react to the questions I have planned, but I can't back down now. I plan to record our conversation, so I can further analyze his tone and word choice. I don't want to miss anything I can use later on.

Log Entry 3: 9/28/2025 - Interview

*River North Correctional Center (Level 4 prison), Virginia
1:35 p.m.*

Bianchi: Agent Sloane, can't say I'm happy to see you.

Sloane: Mr. Bianchi, thank you for taking the time to speak with me. I do appreciate it.

Bianchi: Right, like I have anything better to do in here. You here to ask me questions or what?

Sloane: Yes, I am. First, do I have your permission to record this conversation?

Bianchi: Does your supervisor know you're here?

Sloane: I'm afraid that's none of your business. Please answer the question.

Bianchi: Yeah, sure, get on with it.

I don't want him to know that I don't think it is him, so I will address him specifically as the killer when asking questions.

Sloane: Great. Mr. Bianchi, how did you know your 5th and

final victim, Christina Bell?

Bianchi: I have already answered this question 1,000 times, and I know you know the answer.

I do, but I need to hear it from him.

Sloane: Please just answer the question.

Bianchi: *Sighs.* She was my coworker. We worked under the same person, but I rarely ever saw her; she worked nights, mostly. I never knew anything about her until I was accused of killing her. We may have spoken a total of two times.

Hm. That's one of the things that has been bothering me. Where is the motive? Of course, he could be lying. I will have to analyze this part of the conversation when I get back to my apartment.

Sloane: So, you're saying that you didn't know her. There was no bad blood between you two? Or perhaps an affair?

Bianchi: I am saying that I didn't know the woman. Why on earth would I kill someone I barely know? I'm a businessman, and I make good money. I'd be stupid to throw all that down the drain. I didn't kill Christina Bell, and I didn't kill the four others. I am an innocent man, and you people will pay for throwing me in this hole.

Sloane: Calm down, Mr. Bianchi. I mean no harm; I am just trying to gather more information. Are you still okay with that?

Bianchi: I'm tired. I think I'd rather go back to my cell.

I need him to feel like he can trust me. I need this information! I wasn't planning on telling him that I believe in his innocence, but I don't think I have another choice.

Sloane: Please just answer one last question.

Bianchi: Why should I? I don't owe you anything. *He starts rising from his chair.*

Sloane: Because I don't think you did it!

He slowly sits back down and hesitates.

Bianchi: What?

Sloane: I believe you're innocent. Think about it. What was your motive? Why didn't you fit the profile? Honestly, it didn't take a lot of thinking; I think my colleagues were just eager to catch the killer.

Bianchi: What do you want to know?

Sloane: Did anything unusual happen in the weeks leading up to your arrest?

Bianchi: I mean, I think someone might have broken into my house. I didn't really put two and two together until you pigs threw me in here because apparently my gun was found at the scene. I haven't touched that thing in years. It's been sitting in my closet in an old shoe box. All I noticed was that my clothes weren't where I left them on the rack, and I couldn't find my hairbrush.

This is all starting to add up: the hair found on the scene, and the bloody clothes found in his trash. Finally, I have something of substance!

Sloane: Hmm... Okay, thank you. That information is vital. I know I said that was the last question, but I just have one more if you don't mind. I appreciate your patience.

Bianchi gave a silent nod.

Sloane: Great. In the weeks before the murder, did you happen to notice someone following you? Like a car on your street you've never seen before, or perhaps simply the

feeling of someone watching you. Don't overlook anything. Every bit of information helps.

Bianchi takes a moment to think, massaging his hand over his chin. Suddenly, his eyes light up as if he's just realized something. Looking at his hands, he takes a moment to process the memory.

Bianchi: Weeks before I was bombarded with accusations, I was using the elevator going down to the parking garage after work. It was late, but there were still some people around. A tall man in all black got into the elevator at the same time as me. We both awkwardly got on, I think, causing him to accidentally knock over my briefcase. I wasn't mad or anything 'cause, you know, it was obviously not on purpose. Anyways, he picked it up for me, apologized, shook my hand, then got off on the next floor. It all happened so quickly, honestly, I was kind of confused because I didn't know why he would shake my hand and not even introduce himself or anything, and I remember at the time thinking it was weird how deliberate the handshake felt, *Bianchi speaks as if he's lost in thought, like he was making sure of something before letting go.* But other than that, I didn't think much of it. Just a strange encounter with a strange man. For the whole rest of the night, though, my hand, oddly enough, the same hand he shook, had this weird smell. Like a chemical smell, but it was also kind of sweet? I don't know. And then...

Smelling of chemicals but sweet... that has to be the chloroform that was at the scene of all of his crimes. He met the guy?! I knew it.

Sloane: Go on.

Bianchi: I was at the grocery store, like a couple of days later, I think, and I saw him again. We didn't interact, but I saw him just standing there, staring at me like I was some old friend or something. Again, I just went home and forgot about it. Oh, and don't ask me for a detailed description of the guy, I have a bad memory. I know he was definitely white, taller than me, maybe with blue or green eyes. I'm not sure. What a weirdo. You don't think that freak framed me, do you? What'd I do to him?

Sloane: Honestly, Mr. Bianchi, there is no way of knowing that right now. This conversation was very helpful. Thank you so much for seeing me. I've got to run. Again, thank you for your time. I will do whatever is in my power to get to the bottom of this. I promise you.

Bianchi: Hesitantly. Okay... good luck. I'm relying on you, Agent.

Sloane: Goodbye, Mr. Bianchi.

Log Entry 4: 9/28/2025 2:15 p.m.

The interview was smoother than expected. I'm not sure how to feel about all of this. On one hand, I managed to get a lot of pivotal information out of Bianchi, and this could really give me something to go on. It's not just a strong hunch anymore; this is real. On the other hand, though, I'm just left with even more questions. Who is this guy? What does he want? Why frame someone else when he was already getting away with it? It doesn't make any

sense. I need to get inside this guy's brain and see things from his point of view. I've got a lot of digging to do. I'm debating dragging anyone else into this. I'm not sure the bureau would be too fond of my going behind their backs. I'll wait until I have clearer evidence to go on, until there is zero doubt that The Executioner is still out there. Well, there's no point in stressing out over this right now, I suppose. The second I get any more information, I'll check in here again to log it.

Log Entry 5: 10/3/2025 - 4:36 pm.

I managed to get the security camera footage from the elevator at Mr. Bianchi's office building. But, I can't continue this case undercover for much longer; it's becoming too difficult by myself. I need to organize all my evidence and report it to the bureau as soon as possible. I think this footage is exactly what I need to, at least, reopen the case. 6:21 pm.

I was right. The footage shows the entire interaction between the suspect and Mr. Bianchi; he told me the truth. I have everything I need now to run a complete background check. Hopefully, I've finally caught the true killer. I know I'm getting close.

Log Entry 6: 10/5/2025 - 9:40 p.m.

My apartment was broken into this morning. I just got back home about 30 minutes ago, and although my door was still locked and nothing was stolen, I can feel that someone has been here. The small scrape on the wall, from what I assume to be the front door swinging open, and the disorganization of my case files tell me all I need to know. What game is this guy playing? How long has he known I've been tracking him, and how? I need to break this down. There is something that I'm missing. I see that the killer excels in three areas: planting evidence, controlling the narrative, and remaining invisible until he wants to be seen. For him to have framed Bianchi, track me later, and know when I'm alone, he needs a moment of access to both of us. I need to replay the elevator footage. I had to have missed something crucial that could explain all of this. 9:53 p.m.

It was subtle, too subtle to notice the first dozen times. The way the man's thumb presses against the inside of Bianchi's wrist, just a fraction of a second longer than necessary. The way his fingers adjust, not nervously, but deliberately. Like he's placing something, or making sure it sticks. The smell. The chemical sweetness Bianchi described. I'd written it off as residue from chloroform, contamination from the crimes themselves. But that doesn't make sense, not weeks before Christina Bell's murder. The smell must have been intentional. If the suspect was capable of planting evidence, then planting something on a person wouldn't have been difficult. He didn't just meet Bianchi; he marked him. He must have placed a tracker of some sort on him. That's how he was able to find where he lived. The killer didn't need to guess Bianchi's routines; he watched them. Tracking Bianchi would have given him

access to routines, personal items, and timing. And once he was arrested, the killer didn't lose his target. He gained a new one. Me. Of course, the killer wouldn't just lose visibility of the situation. If he was careful enough to watch Bianchi all those weeks leading up to his imprisonment, what's to say he wouldn't notice any continued activity? I wasn't followed because I was careless. I was noticed because I couldn't let it go. I went back to the prison, the footage, to the man he thought was erased. I stepped into his sightline the moment I reopened Bianchi's life. And now the killer knows exactly what I have on him. Only later did the sequence become clear: the break-in, the theft of personal items, and weeks after that, Christina Bell's murder. Each step was carefully staged to frame Bianchi beyond a reasonable doubt. Now, the Executioner must be planning something else, this time involving me. But it took weeks before he acted with Bianchi. I'm hoping that buys me some time. I need to act fast and turn in my logs first thing tomorrow. Once the bureau knows what I do, I'll be protected, and I won't have to face him alone.

After a rough night of almost no sleep, Sloane managed to drag herself from the comfort of her bed and prepare to turn her findings in. She was finally able to prove something of herself. Eight long months of dead ends and falsely placed information, and now, The Executioner is no longer steps ahead. She is. Sloane goes through a quickened version of her regular morning routine, preparing for what's to come. As dawn approaches, Sloane's once dark

apartment flat begins to brighten with rays of the morning sky, illuminating the path from her desk, stacked with pictures, notes, and forensic files of evidence, to the door of her apartment. Dressed in a gray business suit, she takes confident steps towards her desk, analysing her work before she prepares to take it with her. Smiling to herself, proud of her hard work and persistence, she gathers the information in one large case file. She's about to turn around and head towards the front door when something in the air shifts. Suddenly, the room feels stiff, and she can sense an ominous presence standing behind her, getting closer. Sloane freezes in fear, every nerve in her body on fire with adrenaline. Slowly, she reaches for her gun, tucked in the holster on her belt, when she feels something cold drag itself against the back of her head. Sloane stops reaching and stays completely still. She smells that chemical-like sweetness, and immediately she knows. The Executioner. A million thoughts race through her mind in the last seconds she has before she is faced with the wrath of a madman. The last thing she understood was that the case had never been about finding him. Instead, it's almost as if Sloane, the whole time, was unintentionally helping him get to her. But it was all too late now. A single shot cracks the air, sharp and final, and the world seems to lurch as the force knocks her forward, the evidence that she once held in her steady hands scatters. As she hits the floor, sound drains away, leaving only the certainty that she was right. She solved the pattern just in time to become it. And knowing it has cost her everything. **L**



Margauret Louise Rapirap

UNTITLED

by Jesse Graiff

Blue Devils stand tall:
Spirit shines on Luther Road--
Pride of East Greenbush!

UNTITLED

by Tanner Skumurski

Columbia night:
Luther Road is quiet now--
Dreams walk into light.

UNTITLED

by Anonymous

Please do not be bland,
But also please do not gloat Or
be facetious.

COUNTDOWN TO EXTINCTIONS

STORIES FROM THE END OF TIMES

by Cameron Blaauw

66mya

The date is December 31, 66,051,000 $\pm$ 31,000 mya BCE. On the planet Earth, the dinosaurs were living what to them was another day in their lives, but to the world, it was their last day on this planet. Most creatures, like the sauropods like Brachiosaurus, Apatosaurus, and Titanosaurus, munched on their food as usual. Carnivorous creatures like Compsanathugs scavenged on dead creatures, which had the mercy of not experiencing the asteroid impact that would occur in T-5 hours. More Carnivores, like the famous Tyrannosaurus Rex (T. rex), were trying to fight a ceratopsian, most likely a Triceratops, eventually backing off and succumbing to the asteroid impact. More Carnivores like Carnotaurus were hunting the larger Argentiniosaurus, but unlike its larger cousin, the Tyrannosaurus Rex, it was able to kill the prey, but had most of its food stolen from by the larger apex of South America, the Giganotosaurus. Time skip to T-1 minute to impact, and the skies turned fiery-red, due to asteroid fragments breaching the skies and causing meteor showers, then the impact happens with a blinding light, killing anything within at least a mile of the impact zone.

FLYING FREE

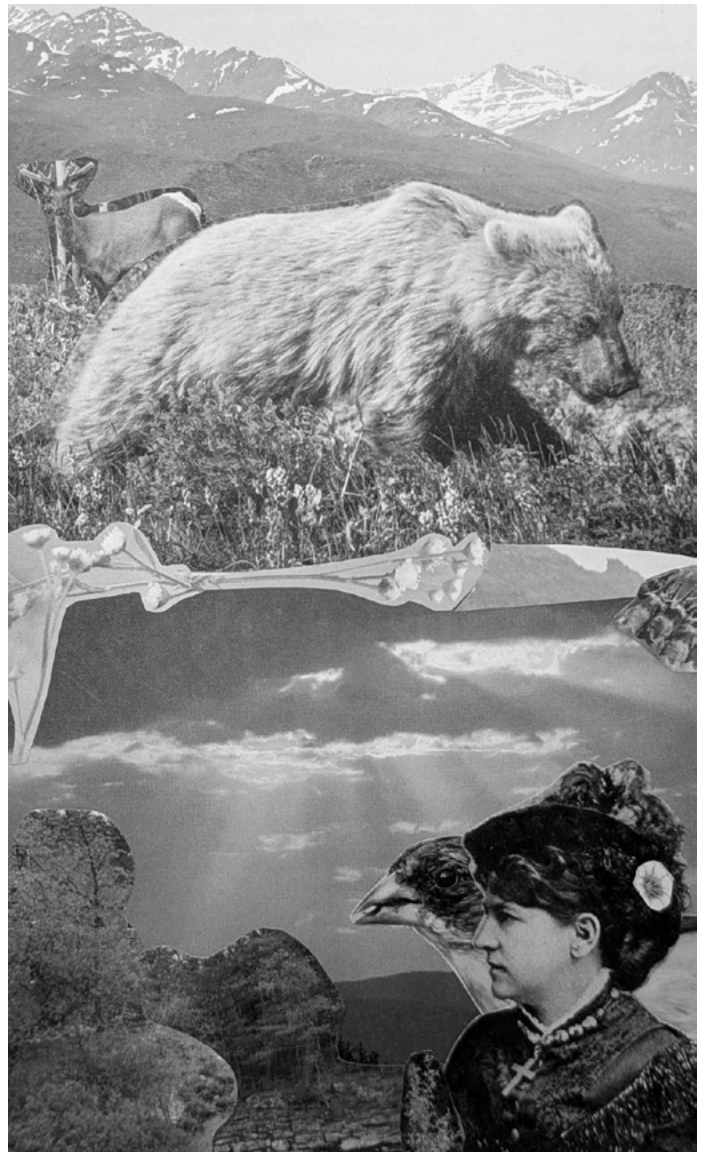
by Jocelyn Shafer

In my life,
I have tried new things
I have been curious,
adventurous,
and brave.

I have been cautious,
I have been scared,
I have been nervous and afraid.
But at the end of the day,
I have flown free.

I have soared many skies
of trouble.
Of danger.
But at the end of the day,
I am a free bird.

No matter the outcome,
I am flying free.



Trinity Ryf

NOSTALGIA

by Jocelyn Shafer

Never truly fades away
Over time, it
Stays,
Tugging at heartstrings, or
Accentuating the positive in
Life, so
Go and hold on to that nostalgia, because
It's
Amazing and beautiful.

13 WAYS OF LOOKING AT FLOWERS

by Emma Ketzer, Olivia Gavin, and Marcelena Lichiello

Among all the hardships
The small gestures are what matter most;
The flower sitting on the table after a long day
The smile or the blush on your cheeks.

The red roses fill the store in early February:
Love and passion grow
From simple seeds
To blooming bouquets.

Sunflowers bloom from their buds,
Waving their petals in the summer wind.
The bees buzz from flower to flower
The radiating yellow is as bright as the sun.

Lilies blooming in the spring:
The scent travels in the wind;
The purest flower
Symbolizes rebirth.

The colorful tulips pops in the green grass :
The red, pink, and yellow shine.
New beginnings start
While spring turns into summer.

Cherry blossoms fill Washington, D.C.
The pink and white light up the field,
Petals circling in the wind
As they fall off the trees branches.

Lavender fills the sound with a calming scent;
The purple buds sit in the vase
With spikes of blue shining through.

The bright red from the Hibiscus radiates off;
The five leaves are delicate.
The flower of pride,
Its The bright color catches your eye.

Iris casts a bright blue color–
Siberian, Dutch, and Bearded
Thriving in the summer sun.

The Lilac blooms with white, pink, magenta ,and blue petals–
The heart-shaped leaves flow.

Find people who'll grow flowers in the darkest parts of you
And the flowers bloom like madness in the spring
But the right person can grow them any time.

The prettiest flowers grow from the darkest places,
Slowly building themselves, until their moment to shine,
Revealing a beautiful arrangement of vibrant colors.

Flowers let the bee slowly take from them
Slowly, losing parts of themselves.
Yet they know it is worth it
For they may share their beauty with everyone else.

GUM

by Yash Mansharamani

If I have learned anything in my 17 years of life, it is to always, always carry a stick of gum. Gum, for all its worth, is one of the most versatile objects, and one that we so often take for granted. Derived in its natural form from resin, this chewy, sticky compound we call gum was used in nature as a kind of band-aid made to heal the tree's damaged bark. One could still see roots of these healing connotations, for example, when one offers a stick of gum to an anxious stranger preparing to take her NYS driver's test.

We were both waiting an impossibly long time, and I could tell she was nervous because her feet were tapping like a sewing machine, and she was taking intermittent deep breaths. There were probably a whole host of things I could have told her to assuage the nervous feeling. But, instead, I reached into my pocket and pulled out a stick of Trident. "Gum?"

You see, always carry a stick of gum. In fact, the repetitive, chewing motion relieves stress, as the act of chewing itself increases blood flow to the brain. In this sense, a stick of gum really can be a "small good thing" to steal a phrase from Raymond Carver. And, it is precisely this idea of gum, little-thing-that-is-not-so-small-in conjunction with the gum-giver, a person who finds the value in little gestures—that, combined, make this substance a worthy staple in everyday pockets.



Spot drawings by Margarete Louise Rapirap

SPARKLES IN THE WINDOW

by Adley Peterson

THE POSITIVE SOUL: A HAIKU

by Jocelyn Shafer

"she's gold as the sun
brightening each and every day
the positive soul"

HUMANIZER

A METIS CLOCKWORKER STORY

by Margarett Louise Rapirap

"Using AI Text? Make it Human— use the Humanizer."

Text. Text. Text. Words flashed in Metis' eyes, over and over and over and over. Would she know what it would mean? Would the words hold any significance, spark a single thought in the brains of her peers? Perhaps it didn't matter anymore. It was Human now, after all. There was no need to proofread it, no need for corrections, for it was simply, perfectly, Human.

But then she had not written a single word at all. She had never laid her eyes on it, never hastily typed on her pristine key-board until 11:59, much less thought about it entirely. Why would she? She had perigosto stick classes with her friends, newfangled air sports her parents wanted her to do... sleep, go to school, sleep, go to school— she wasn't just busy, she had a monotonous routine she desperately needed to stick to.

Reading and scrolling and liking this and disliking that, Metis agreed upon reading the monotonous, wordful wordless paper's results. The clock neared midnight, and her eyes were half-closed. Maybe her classmates were right— this was an easy shortcut, easy enough that she could do her chores while doing it. Why paint when you can just blissfully fold the clothes as the computing device does it for you? Metis was lucky the paper she was given was nowhere near a painting, as it was merely an analysis of The Grand Inquisitor.

She took a bag of Cheetos and began to read it. She had internally expected a sort of childish essence to it, a misspelling here, a gross metaphor there... as it was the Humanizer, wasn't it? But she was only met with the blankness of the paper. She did not just feel X, she also felt Y. She scrolled through X, X, and X— and she was very sure the number of em-dashes was greater than X. What is X? What is Y? What is this equation? Would it matter? If X does not matter, is it zero? Why would she need X? X? X? X?

It didn't matter anymore, did it? Nobody told her what mattered about it. She dropped it and picked up a piece of loose leaf instead, writing her own answer to X.

I didn't mean to kill him. That thought comes back to me in pieces, never whole, like a memory that refuses to settle. It loops late at night when Sparkles curls against my ribs and the house is quiet enough for my mind to get loud. I didn't wake up that day planning to end a life; I didn't sharpen a weapon or rehearse a confession in the mirror. What I did was far smaller at first, angrier, yes, but still human.

Harvey Benning lived two houses down from me, a 45-year-old accountant who lived alone. He had the kind of face people forgot easily: pale, clean-shaven, bland. We'd exchanged hellos for years. Sometimes he'd stop to pet Sparkles when I took her out on walks. She would sprawl out on the sidewalk, white fur dusty from the grime on Earth's surface.

"She yours?" he once asked.

"Sure is," I'd replied.

Sparkles had always been confident that the world was arranged solely for her comfort. She liked warmth, being admired, and knowing exactly where home was. That's why, when she didn't come back one night, I told myself not to panic.

Cats wander. Cats return.

By the second day, I was checking under porches and calling her name until my throat burned. By the end of the week, I was taping flyers to lampposts with shaking hands. Sparkles stared back at me from every grainy printed photo.

Missing. Weeks passed. People stopped calling. I started sleeping with the window cracked open, convinced I'd hear her jump back onto the sill. I dreamed about her constantly, dreams where she scratched at locked doors or sat just out of reach, watching me with accusing eyes. Later, I'd learn how the mind fills gaps when it doesn't have answers, how grief edits reality into something it can tolerate. At the time, it just felt like I was losing pieces of myself.

The night I found her, it was raining.

Not the dramatic kind, no thunder or lightning, just the persistent rain that soaked through fabric. I'd taken one last loop around the block, more out of habit than hope. That was when I noticed the light in Harvey's front window. His curtains were open wider than usual.

Sparkles was sitting on the sill. For a second, I honestly thought my brain had finally snapped. She looked unreal, glowing white against the dark glass. Then she tilted her head, just slightly, and my chest tightened in a way that hurt.

"Sparkles," I whispered as I stood from the sidewalk, hair drenched. I moved up his front porch, steps quiet, movement slow, until I stood before his bay window. I stared at Sparkles through the medium-sized gap in the curtain, her pink collar bright and unmistakable. She didn't meow, but her tail flicked. She knew me.

I stood there longer than I should have. Long

enough to notice the details my shock tried to ignore: a polished stainless-steel cat bowl on the floor, a litter box tucked neatly behind a plant, a scratching post that showed no signs of usage. Sparkles looked healthy, groomed, and fed. Kept.

I didn't knock. I simply went home, instead. That part surprises even me. How calm I was, how methodical. But anger doesn't always show itself outwardly. I pulled on a hoodie and latex gloves. From the back of my closet, I retrieved a small lock-pick kit I had. I'd told myself I just wanted her back. I'd never hurt anyone. I'd never needed to.

Harvey's back door was old, the lock cheap. The pick slid in smoothly, metal gliding across metal. When it gave, my shoulders relaxed despite myself. Inside, his house smelled like lemons and coffee, comforting smells that made my stomach twist. He was sitting at the kitchen table when I stepped in, reading an old newspaper.

He looked up, startled, his reading glasses slipping down his nose. "What the hell are you doing in my house?"

"That's my cat," I stated, pointing at Sparkles as she made her way towards the kitchen. My voice sounded steadier than I felt. His eyes flicked toward the moving cat. Something changed in his expression, not fear exactly. It was a look of calculation. Moral disengagement. Harvey didn't see himself as a thief, just a man who wanted a cat, found one unattended, and took it.

"She wandered in," he said. "I took care of her. You should be thanking me."

I laughed sharply. "You watched me put up flyers."

He stood. "She was better off here. You let her roam. She would've died out there if not for me."

The way he said it, so sure, so justified, made something inside me go quiet. Later, I'd think about how easily people rewrite their own actions, how they turn selfishness into kindness if it helps them sleep at night.

"You stole her," I said.

"I gave her a real home, unlike you."

And then he moved. Before I could stop him, he lunged toward Sparkles, who had frozen in fear, and grabbed her. He made a run for the front door, thinking he could run, thinking I wouldn't catch him in time. I did. I moved faster than I realized I could. I had quickly grabbed a marble paperweight from his dining table before my brain had fully processed what I was doing. Then, I ran.

The space between us closed too fast. The paperweight connected with his head in a flash. Thunk. It was the part of me I'd spent my life keeping polite, finally

slipping its leash, id unleashed, ego gone quiet.

He fell. Thud. The sound echoed. His body went down before he reached the front door. I stared at him for a long moment, expecting the world to shift around me. It didn't. Only silence and the soft whimper of Sparkles as she writhed out of his limp grip and ran into the kitchen.

I remember the way his eyes widened as he looked back briefly. Not in pain, but from disbelief, like the rules he'd relied on had suddenly changed. I waited for panic to come screaming in. It didn't. My ears rang, my heart pounded, but my mind was strangely clear. I checked for movement, but there was none. Sparkles meowed from the kitchen.

After that, everything became a checklist. I cleaned until my hands ached, wiped surfaces I hadn't touched just in case. I rid his house of everything related to Sparkles,

every toy, every piece of food, every single cat hair. I wrapped his body carefully, dragged it through the narrow hallway, and lowered it into a crawl space beneath his house, unfinished, damp, forgotten. I then erased myself as thoroughly as I could.

I carried Sparkles home, rain soaking through us both. Once inside, I showered and went to bed. Two mornings passed before I texted my sister and posted online about Sparkles' "miraculous return," crying just enough to make it believable. Evidence isn't just fingerprints; it's behavior. Consistency. I made it seem like Sparkles had returned two days after Harvey's death to rid the coincidence of her returning to me happening at the same time he'd died.

Three days later, Harvey Benning was found. Autopsy reports stated he'd been dead for only a few days. A postal worker was the first to notice the smell. Said it clung to the air in a way that didn't belong to trash or mildew. The kind of wrong that makes you step back before you understand why.

Investigator Clementine Clover came the next morning. She didn't arrive with flashing lights or raised voices. Just a quiet knock and a leather notebook tucked under her arm. She looked around my living room before she looked at me. She took in the framed photos, the endless amounts of cat toys scattered across the room, and Sparkles stretched out on the couch as if she owned the place, which she did.

"Ms. Rivers," she said gently. "Mind if we talk for a bit?" I ended up making tea. It felt like the right thing to do. Normal people make tea.

She asked about Sparkles first and said she'd seen the flyers around town. She asked about how long



Spot drawings by Margarete Louise Rapirap

I'd had her, where she'd been found, and what it was like when she disappeared. I answered honestly. Truth is easier to remember. Clementine nodded, jotting down notes, letting the silence stretch until I filled it.

"When did she come back?" she asked.

"Four days ago."

"Just showed up?"

"Yes," I shrugged. "She does that. I was just worried because it was longer than usual."

Clementine's eyes flicked briefly to the window, then back to me. "You heard about Harvey Benning? You know him?"

I felt my stomach tighten, but kept my voice steady and confident. "Yes, it's terrible what happened to him. He was a nice man. We said hi to each other occasionally," I said with a somber look on my face.

"Did you ever argue?"

"No."

"Where were you the night Mr. Benning died?" she asked.

I swallowed softly. "At home, likely in bed. I didn't leave my house."

She paused, pen hovering. People expect investigators to catch lies by force, but Clementine watched for something quieter, like hesitation, over-explaining, the places where memory stumbles. I gave her none.

"Several neighbors mentioned your missing cat," she said. "They remember the flyers. Said you were always outside looking for her." The implication was there. I knew what she was getting at.

I smiled sadly. "Hard to forget."

"Did Mr. Benning ever comment on them?"

I thought carefully. Not about what had happened, but about what could be proven. "He said he hoped she'd come home."

That part was true.

Clementine leaned back slightly. "When people lose something they love, they don't always act like themselves."

"I didn't hurt anyone," I said quietly. She studied my face, not searching for guilt, but for strain. When people lie, they work too hard. Their stories fray at the edges. Mine didn't.

After that, Clementine sighed softly and nodded. Before she left, she crouched to pet Sparkles. "Pretty girl," she murmured. Sparkles purred. At the door, Clementine hesitated, "If you remember anything else, anything at all, call me."

"I will."

She left without handcuffs, without suspicion she could name. She'd told me that the forensic team had found absolutely no evidence left behind, that whoever had killed him did a good job of covering up their tracks. That soothed my nerves.

The weeks stretched. Harvey's house stayed dark. Rumors came and went. The investigation slowed, then stalled. Sometimes I think Clementine knew. Sometimes I think she didn't want to.

When I first passed by Harvey's house after his death, I stared. Sparkles was on her leash. Her fur stood up while her back arched, a hiss exiting her mouth before she turned to dart away. I haven't passed his house since. I keep Sparkles inside now. **L**



Boo! by Piper Gentile

TRUE GOLD

by Durva Gajjar

The cheap stuff always fades.
You can tell by the way it stains your skin—
green marks where the shine used to be,
a reminder that not everything that glitters
was ever meant to last.

People are the same sometimes.
They trade their laughter
for approval,
their truth
for a seat at the crowded table.
And you watch them slip away,
layer by layer,
until you can't tell
who they were anymore.

But every once in a while,
you meet someone different—
solid through and through,
unmoved by polish or pressure.
No rust dares touch them.
No crowd can claim them.

They are the rare kind—
the kind that stays gold.

So when you find them,
don't let them go.
Because real gold doesn't glitter louder,
it simply endures.



TRUE GOLD

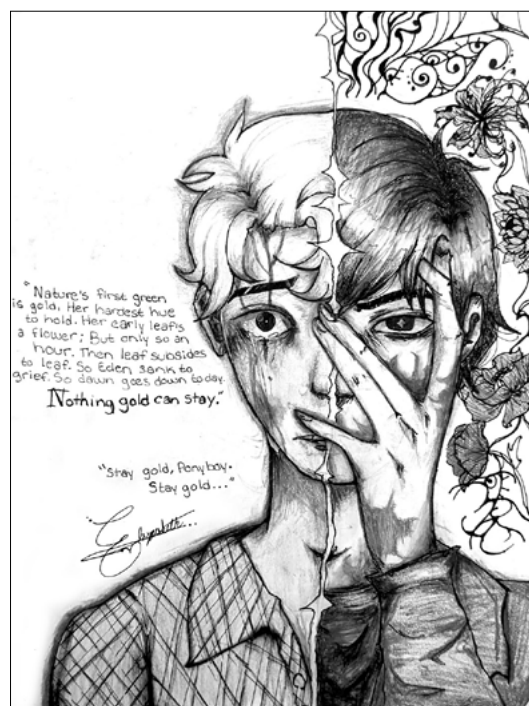
by Jocelyn Shafer

Do you ever notice
that cheap gold jewelry
will tarnish over time?
The rust eats away at it
sinking its razor sharp teeth into the chains
and biting down hard until there is no glimmer left.

Have you ever wondered
how your childhood best friend
got swayed into the crowds?
And how their color was stolen away
by the popular clique
until they are a whole different person?

Did you ever think
that some people
will just stay golden?
Like true gold jewelry
unable to be melted away
by the rust?

So cherish these people and
don't shove them away
For they may prove
that some things gold will stay.



Nothing Can Stay Gold by Elizabeth Carrier

2026 CHS Graduating Class Poet Laureate: **Eva Roberts**

ALL THE THINGS I'LL MISS

I'll miss my walk to the bus stop in the morning
not on the sidewalk, but right down the middle of the road,
where it feels like the street belongs to me.
No rush, no noise, just the trees leaning overhead, the soft blue sky, and my footsteps
reminding me that,

For a moment, the world is mine.

I'll miss the same creaky yellow bus I've been riding since kindergarten
the cracked seats, the sticky windows, the engine that groans like it's tired but loyal. I'll
miss watching the sunrise spill across the horizon from my seat, turning ordinary streets into
something almost holy.

I'll miss stepping into a building I know so well that I could walk it blindfolded
the stairwell that echoes too loudly, the endless hallways, the way the gym always smells like
crayons.

I'll miss moving through crowded halls filled with familiar faces, some I talk to, some I don't,
but all of them woven into my story.

I'll miss the classrooms, the ones where learning didn't feel like pressure but like breathing.
Especially the room that wasn't the prettiest or most aesthetic
, but somehow felt like home. I'll miss the late nights spent pouring myself into an essay, and
the quiet smile of a teacher who cared enough to really see me.

I'll miss how these years quietly taught me to live with my anxiety
not by taking it away, but by pushing me through it.

Every morning I still showed up, every hallway I walked, every presentation I gave was
proof that I was stronger than I thought.

I'll miss the little things I never noticed until now — the smell of the gym, the clock ticking
louder when I wanted the bell to ring.

I'll even miss the way people already seemed to "know" me before I walked into a room.

There's a strange comfort in being known.

But as much as I'll miss all of this, I'm also excited for what comes next.

These streets, these halls, and these mornings have shaped me
and now I get to carry them forward into something new.

So when we step onto our next road, we'll still walk right down the middle of it
confident, curious, and ready to claim our place in whatever comes next.

(We won't remember the little things but we can if we talk about them)



by Andrew Hastings



Columbia High School

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