

This week, the *Nass* forgot its sunscreen at home, but we're fine to shrivel and burn.

The Nassau Weekly



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Letter from the Editors:

Dear reader,

As we scatter across the world, some of our writers find peace in the warmth of summer sun, or vitality in the glow of a languid, multicolored evening sky. Others yearn for the relationships that only time and coincidence can forge.

But just as summer invites relaxation, it can also herald a time of isolation from our regular rhythms. This issue, our writers explore the moments of longing, grief, and frantic searching that can accompany this isolation. They demonstrate a tension between contentment with the present and nostalgia for the past or future.

Grappling with this ever present tension can distract us from the dread of the present moment. As our writers remind us, ongoing mass deportations and the slow encroachment of deadening plants disrupt the balance we search for in summer's promised calm. Even as we celebrate our current respite, our writers urge us to not withdraw too deep into the self.

Our relationships to places and communities never remain in one fixed position, but rather contain contradictory elements. The deep green leaves of August prepare for their autumnal withering while the drawn-out summertime evenings slouch towards shortening days.

In this issue, we left things out in the sun. Now, watch them grow.

Yours,
Frankie Solinsky Duryea and Alex Norbrook, EICs

Verbatims:

- Overheard at Sephora**
16-year old, while stealing, to an associate: "My concealer shade is 34D."

Overheard on Bleeker
Teen 1: "Where would the tattoo be?"
Teen 2: "In the tattoo parlor."
Teen 1: "Like, where on your body?"

Overheard in San Francisco
Korean-American Berkeley student: "I'm descended from farmers so I'm from a farm. I'm a farmer too. It makes sense in Korean."
- Overheard at USC**
Blonde: "What school are you from?"
Exchange student: "北京 University."
Blonde: "Is that in California?"

Overheard at Disneyland
25-year old man, standing over somebody's lost ID: "This is something you would see on the show 'What Would You Do'."

Overheard in a cafe
Customer: "I can't have caffeine too late of else I won't be able to fall asleep." *Proceeds to order matcha at 4pm.*
- Overheard in Paris**
French receptionist: "Bonjour."
An earnest tourist: "bun-gor"
French receptionist: *sighs* "What can I do for you today?"

Overheard at Terrace
Terrace officer: "You look like you run a closed Blockbuster."

Overheard en route to American Statesmanship
Reactionary centrist: "The ideal amount of woke is very clearly non-zero."
- Overheard walking up the Frist Hill**
Walker: "I think I'm lowkey a Sisyphus kinnie."

Overheard at the beach
Girl on a date, playing dumb: "Isn't rain salty? I thought it was salt water."

Overheard at 48 University Place
Junior struggling to pay a compliment: "You're just white noise to me."
Alternative magazine critic: "You could say that could the Nass."

Submit to Verbatims
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com

About us:

The Nassau Weekly is Princeton University's weekly news magazine and features news, op-eds, reviews, fiction, poetry and art submitted by students. *There is no formal membership of the Nassau Weekly and all are encouraged to attend meetings and submit writing and art. To submit, email your work to thenassauweekly@gmail.com by 10 p.m. on Thursday. Include your name, netid, word count, and title. We hope to see you soon!*

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Join us: We meet on Mondays and Thursdays at 5 p.m. in Bloomberg 044!

воскресенье

By NELL MARCUS

the sun sets its sorry self behind the dining hall
& the clouds above the roof
are pink like gently-used gauze.
i close my eyes and try to remember
how it feels when things are beautiful.

on the widow's walk
at the tail end of may
we held our breath.
the sky lay
with its soft belly facing up

at night you slept on the left side of the bed
& i stayed on the right side of sane.
i did not write poetry
but i listened to the rhythm of your breath

in the breeze i search for the music
but it is just one long exhale.

it is impossible
to find the beauty behind the dining hall
i am trying to remember the feeling —
to trap it between my thumb and index finger —
i am trying
to explain all this to your face on a screen —

it is impossible.
to keep imagining once you have seen the real thing
to miss you right, remember you good
to pieces is not enough
to death is not enough

on the horizon a slow setting sun
beyond the building beyond view.
i am closing my eyes
& thinking of you.



Dispatches from Immigration Court

From the front lines of mass deportation.

By NARGES ANZALI

On my first day in the office, I was told that almost everything in our binders that were compiled a month ago had been subject to adjustments. What I came to understand, over the course of the long trainings in conference rooms, was this: the immigration court in the United States is almost entirely a self-contained system. Immigration judges are appointed by the Attorney General who is appointed by the president and approved by the Senate. Immigration court is one of the few places in the United States where defendants are not provided with representation, and indeed, most people appearing before the court have no access to a lawyer. The system is therefore subject to drastic change depending on the whims of the executive branch,

which has complete control over the system. Immigration defense law was a brutal fight even before Trump became president—now, it is closer to a bloodbath.

If you are the kind of person who is even marginally politically aware, it should become increasingly clear that the immigration system is (and has always been) inhumane. Even in the asylum process, the primary focus of my summer internship, refugees fleeing the most vivid and horrific types of violence and persecution are made to re-live, over and over again, the most traumatizing moments of their life in front of a judge and lawyers, and then be cross-examined by DHS agents whose goal is to argue that the defendant should be sent back to their country, no matter how valid their claim is. Under both Democratic and Republican leadership, prisons have been built, families have been separated.

However, recent measures instated by the Trump administration exhibit a concerning trend towards complete dehumanization.

The word ‘alien’ has been reinstated on all immigration paperwork. Fees will be added to asylum applications. Temporary Protected Status for countries like Nicaragua, Venezuela and Haiti have been repealed, pending court cases. ‘Alligator Alcatraz’ has been built. There are now quotas for each ICE office to meet in regards to how many ‘illegals’ they can deport. The mass deportations and detentions have proceeded with impunity and with little to no transparency. ICE officers do not show identification nor have they been required to, empowering groups of people dressed as ICE agents to begin taking people off of the streets. Pay attention to the wording here—what is an ‘alien’ in relation to a human? What is an ‘illegal’ in relation to a ‘citizen’?

In 1961, Adolf Eichmann, a high-ranking SS bureaucrat, was held on trial in Jerusalem. Hannah Arendt was sent to report on the trial for the *New Yorker*, generating a series of



ICE agents and protesters fight outside San Francisco's immigration courthouse, after ICE detained an asylum-seeker on July 8, 2025.



“What have you been doing for the two and a half years you’ve been here then?” says the judge, in response to the motion for removal. The man explains in stuttering Spanish that he has gotten married, and his green card paperwork is pending. I can only see his white shirt and his tightly wound shoulders. “Please, just another month” he says, face tilted down towards the desk underneath him. “Two years, and you haven’t contacted a lawyer. I’m going to have to agree with the motion for removal.” The man reserves the right to appeal. A date is set for a week from now. “I hope you have a lawyer by then, Sr.—” says the judge. The lawyer runs her hand over

her face. She tells me she’s never seen someone with a pending application be put into expedited removal.

controversial essays that were eventually combined into a book called *Eichmann in Jerusalem; A Report on the Banality of Evil*. In reading it, one is struck by the fact that the first intentional step of the Nazi regime towards genocide was the deprivation of nationhood from the Jewish people. At the time, then, there were no longer ‘Danish Jewish people’ or ‘German Jewish people.’ There were only ‘Jews,’ without nation, without state—making it all the easier to transport and ‘exterminate’ these populations—and further othering them. The trap of the construction of legality is this: if you are labeled as ‘illegal’ or ‘stateless,’ then it is startlingly easy to subordinate you to a lower category of humanity. To make you disappear. To cast you as subhuman. “The net effect of this language system was not to keep these people ignorant of what they were doing, but to prevent them from equating it with their old, “normal” knowledge of murder and lies.” How drastically and rapidly has our morality changed, without our noticing it? How have people, bit by bit, been convinced to support that extra-legal police force that is ICE, to support their kidnappings and torture?

There have been multiple reports on the detention centers that already existed prior to the Trump administration, where people were kept with minimal levels of food or water, in freezing rooms with no privacy and the lights constantly on, preventing them from

knowing what time it was or how many days had passed. How drastically and rapidly has our morality changed, without our noticing?

The immigration court in Chelmsford Massachusetts looks like a Protestant church. There is a lack of pomp and circumstance makes the ridiculous nature of the circumstances all the more clear. Strip away the mahogany, the tall ceilings and the shining marble that normally accompany courts and what do you get? A little man sitting at a wooden desk in a potato sack of a robe, arbiting the judgement of God or the law onto the quivering bodies in front of him.

Everyone has a Master Calendar hearing, which should mean that the judge will schedule another hearing and send them on their way to find a lawyer. This, however, is Trump’s America. The lawyer explains it to them all in the waiting room like she is giving a sermon. Do not let them terminate your case, she intones like a chant. They will put you in expedited removal proceedings. This will deport you no matter what paperwork you have in the system. They all bob their heads up and down. Clutch their forms a little tighter to their chests. The week before, migrants were arrested the second they walked out of their hearings. The immigration judges claimed not to know what was happening outside of the court, even though they could hear the handcuffs snapping shut.

There are two types of immigration proceedings in the United States—affirmative proceedings, usually processed with the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, and removal proceedings, which take place in immigration court. This has created a popular imagination of the good immigrants and bad immigrants. By tying people’s status in this country to legality, we have essentially created a system under which a certain kind of life or existence is not legal. Whether practical or not, this has created a system under which general human rights have caveats and restrictions.

In the asylum process, this manifests itself in the restricted categories for seeking asylum: Race, Religion, Nationality, Political Opinion, Membership in a Particular Social Group, or the Torture Convention. I pick up the phone. A ghostly voice tells me it needs help. Of course, I say, and the clock begins. She was born five months before me. She gave birth last month. As I ask her questions, I can hear a man talking behind her on the line. A long silence stretches. I ask her why she is afraid to return to her country. The gangs, she replies. They have killed people in her family, and she knows she will be killed if she goes back. I close my eyes. Not an asylum claim,

technically. To be afraid of being killed because of general violence, according to the United States, is too general.

I pick up the phone. They threatened to rape me every day, she says. The gangs would come to my door, tell me what they were going to do to me. I stopped going to school, stopped leaving the house. There was no one to protect us. No one could protect us. Not a case of direct harm. Nothing to suggest that she was a target of specific violence rather than general violence. Not nothing, but difficult. I pick up the phone. They stopped us on the way to the hospital, she says. I was with my son. They robbed everyone, and the killed and raped people outside. I rub my eyes. No reason why they were specifically targeted.

A man calls from a detention center. I've been here for a month, he tells me. I don't know what's happening or how to get out. I can't do this anymore. I just want to go home.

These are the people you are being told are here to steal your jobs. These are the people who are 'undocumented,' who are 'illegal,' who are 'robbing us of national resources.' These are the people they want you to believe had any other choice but to come here, fleeing for their lives. The establishment of 'good' and 'bad' migration will not be restricted to those who enter without a status. America, it is clear, is a place to be 'bought' into—an idea reserved only for those who capitulate to the limitations imposed on our humanity. When visas are revoked on the grounds of anti-American protest, when the Supreme Court refuses to rule on birthright citizenship, when the Trump administration seeks to revoke the passports of naturalized citizens, it is not a new battle. They came first for the people without status—the rest of us are not removed from their fight.

I pick up the phone. The woman's voice breaks on the third word. The world is not alright, that much is clear. Her husband was detained by ICE. I don't know where he is, she says. I just need someone to help me. I look at the lawyers—DUI on parole. I give her another number and tell her I'm sorry I can't help. I am crying a little when I hang up the phone. The man in front

of my apartment building just sat down. I try not to disturb him, but he gets up and opens the door for me. He has that apologetic smile, the same smile that drags its way across my mother's face as she has to ask the teller at the bank to repeat himself for a second time. My bones are rattling with the day, with the smiles, with the yes sirs, with the woman who would mouth the answers to the questions the judge asked her husband before he had the chance to say them.

A man starts crying on the paralegal's shoulder at immigration court. His eyes are red from stress. Nobody told him that they hadn't filed his Notice To Appear yet—he doesn't have a court date. He hadn't told anyone that he was coming to court. He didn't want them to be worried. He thought he was getting deported.

"It's the law." I can imagine the judge saying, in his potato sack robes. It is the escalating law, the escalating banality of evil. It was the claim Eichmann made, sitting in his glass box. "Evil cannot be radical," Arendt says. Indeed, the dissolution of our state will not be radical. It will consist of the legality of awful things. Eichmann's main argument against the charges levied against him was that he was only following the law—that the genocide of the Jewish people was perfectly legal. Following orders, following the law, this is what makes evil on this scale possible.

Today alone, almost four mass raids of workplaces by ICE have taken place. Today alone, a man died of injuries suffered in one of these raids.

"The trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and that the many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal. From the viewpoint of our legal institutions and of our moral standards of judgment, this normality was much more terrifying than all the atrocities put together."

As we are increasingly encouraged to see the construction of 'illegality' as normal, there must be an insistence on the idea of an absolute humanity. We have been told, over the course of our lives, that our Americanness guarantees us more human dignity than others. This must not be true—it cannot continue to be true, if we want to stand in the way of the impending train of fascism that seems to be barreling down the tracks. People are already disappearing off of the streets. How long will it take until we are compelled towards action? How long will it take until we, as people, refuse to take part in the degradation of others?



Federal officers clash with protesters outside San Francisco ICE office at 630 Sansome St., on June 24, 2025.

Sira

"I poured my back into the solid wood and floated. I let the water stain my face. Let a wave engulf me on this bitter board of wood, let my elbows sink into the ocean that you loved so much."

BY CATHLEEN MARIE BAILID

I.

Jon, we moved your surfboard today. Nay found it beneath your closet, green paint peeling from the dark wood. The one you picked out yourself. Earlier Nay and I tried to fix it like you fixed it, smoothing and sanding; as the dust fell into our eyes, I thought about how you carefully chose this one, polished it with your brown limbs, and smeared it with paint until it became yours. Miracle boy, Manong Pedro told Nay, smoking and shaking his head. Now the board is sira, broken, and we have tucked it beside your bed.

Late afternoons I watched you slip into waves on that board. You glided on the dagat, your skin translucent, soft, and green. You pushed your wet hair from your forehead, grinned. Came up again. In the sunset, I saw your silhouette dark against the water, trembling and refracting. You shrieked, green glinting off that board. As I watched from my window, I remember thinking that you never let yourself be swallowed the way you were swallowed by our ocean: back pressed on the board, stomach open to these churning, chasmic waves.

II.

The first time you taught me how to surf, you had just failed an interview. You fisted your striped tie in your palm, yanked it, crumpled it into ugly lines. I told you that you didn't need America. You told me you were going to teach me

something beautiful.

We padded into the Boracay water, you and I. Your skin glistened with perspiration. You let me use your green board. Green for swerte, luck, a concept your aching fingers and jutting veins usually dismissed. A concept that I, watchful, waiting, clung to and adored.

You instructed me to keep my stomach on the board, and I felt the hard wood carve into my skin, the water soaking, stirring. Keep moving, you said, patient. Your feet connect to the board and the board connects to the ocean. Do you feel that?

Yeah, I said. Yeah.

And I breathed and you were there. Your brown figure cut into something still and me, smudged, falling; but I felt it then. I was soaking and my limbs froze and burned, but I saw how in this large, unfathomable expanse, everything spilled into wind and water. Here, you were anchored. Here, you searched.

III.

Everyone remembers when you won a scientific scholarship overseas. You were a hard-working boy from Boracay island, and Nay christened our house by hanging your portrait lopsided by the stove. All the manongs and titas and students stared. Suddenly, you were ironed white shirts and crisp khakis. Clean shoes. Biology rushing, heavy in your mouth. You only smiled when they looked. I liked how your eyes crinkled, chinito, like webbed starfish. Afterwards, routine, you took the traysikel home with me and surfed. Always for hours at a time. Once, you surfed with your shirt on, recklessly, and the fabric thinned and turned transparent. You rolled it into a ball, looked at me with starfish eyes.

You laughed. Are you going to tell Nay?

I held my board, and I drifted closer.

IV.

There is no ocean in Kansas City,

Missouri. I know because I called you yesterday, which I don't do often. I couldn't see your face over the black curl of our telephone line, but I imagined I could hear your warm, tired breath, the ballpoint scratching ink on your nursing care notes. You rattled facts I only pretended to be interested in, like Missouri's thirty lakes, like Kansas City jazz. Like Filipinos making up 0.49 percent of the Kansas City Missouri population.

I stare at the telephone line, swinging, sticky from humidity. Is there any humidity in Missouri? I think, now, that you are always in the middle of something large, something foreign. Something where you, our miracle boy, are small and insignificant.

V.

Jon, I stole your surfboard the day you decided to leave for America. Stubbornly I dragged your board, let it get stripped away, the edges peeling, bruised. I poured my back into the solid wood and floated. I let the water stain my face. Let a wave engulf me on this bitter board of wood, let my elbows sink into the ocean that you loved so much.

Suddenly salty blackness washed over my eyelids. I choked. Gasping I saw your figure imprinted under my eyelids, and I could sob; and then you were there, miracle boy. Your body lithe and strong. You yelled my name, and I knew instinctively that in the ocean of my body you were integral. That this was not the first time, or the last, that you had saved me from drowning.

Jon, I said, and I felt you wrap me in your warmth. I remember you in your wetness: your skin and eyes glittering, your hair gelled. Wetness like blood, like the womb.

VI.

When I visit your room, I feel the smooth, splotchy wood of your surfboard. It rests patiently against your unwrinkled bed. It is doing okay, Jon.

It will always be here.

ALL CROWS ARE MURDERED WHEN THE SUN GOES DOWN



But the math is, if it's you and the sunset, you get bored. Sunsets are often beautiful, but are also often.

By SASHA ROTKO

I was sitting in the living room, watching something on my laptop after a long day, during which I was productive and stayed mostly off my phone, and during which I spent a lot of time outside. I waited in the sun for a late bus at a rural kind of stop, I played tennis at a court with leaves falling all over and with a loud murder of crows in a displaced deciduous tree, I ran nearly three miles along the beach, looking out at the sand and then the calm, calm Pacific, no white, no break. I was sitting in the living room, and the sun was setting. The sky was still mostly that pale grey color, but there was white and around it orange and then pink and then purple and then blue before there was the rest of the sky, and this wasn't unusual at the beach in southern California. So I stayed on the loveseat, laptop on the armrest, rewarding myself for my time spent not doing this with doing this.

In the glass door, I saw my computer screen projected onto the sand, a glass door whose threshold I could cross and reach the sand, and it would all be very easy, but I didn't cross the threshold or reach the sand, and I felt kind of ashamed at the look of the face of the lead actress in the reflection, like I was contaminating nature

with my sacrilegious technology. I finished the episode of TV I was watching and looked up and around. The other person in the living room was on his computer, too, but doing something productive, and this was a kind of pass not to look at the sun as it was setting, even though it was spectacular, because the sun always sets, every night, and this task isn't here every night.

I looked out through the glass doors again, across the physical threshold, though I didn't feel there was much of a metaphysical one between me and the sand. What difference did it make if there was a sheet of glass between me and that sunset? What caught my attention (a very hard thing to catch, these days) was that, though my episode finished, the sky looked still the same, as if it had paused. I don't believe in God or anything, nor did I hear a voice in my head, but the stillness read to me like the universe had paused the sunset so that I could see it. "Hello, Miss On Her Computer in the Living Room. I'll ask again: please take a look at the image to your left. I'll wait until you do."

So, I did what any salvageable person would do. I stood up, I opened the door's three locks and stepped over the threshold, onto the sand. Hello, sky.

In my past experience with sunsets, I'd found that you can really only look at them for so long, if it's just you and the sunset in the equation. If you have a friend there or if you're throwing a frisbee or listening to some good acoustic music, that's an entirely different equation. But the math is, if it's you and the sunset, you get bored. Sunsets are often beautiful, but are also often.

I did my due diligence, though. I looked around, left to the deep blue, right to the brightest orange, down at the purplish sand, up into the swirl of colors, weirdly acutely aware of the roundness of the atmosphere. Thirty or so crows silently flew overhead, and I thought about the crows on the tree at tennis, and about if they were the same, and about how I didn't know how many crows were in a murder, but it sounded nice. Their blackness against the sky looked like brushwork, like it took just a couple of strokes of paint to invoke the likeness of a crow. They moved almost too linearly, even as they passed right over me. I craned my neck to watch them, noticed that very quickly the colors seemed to be changing, as if the universe had pressed play and then fast-forward on the sunset.

I tried to find a way to assess how fast it was moving, how dark it was getting. I tried to eyeball the interior angles of what looked like an obtuse triangle of yellow in a larger patch of pink, but somewhere between the supernova streaks of color, which were stellar in an existential and sort of terrifying way, it is.

The sunset is here, and here is the sunset. My feet are in the sand and my face is in the air, which is at once life-sustaining oxygen and motherly venom the ocean wind can't seem to debride, and in every moment, it is.

In every moment, all is still.

The sky is, the air is, the sunset is, I am, yes, I am I am I am I am I am I am I am I am I am I am I am I am

Suddenly, I hear a caw, and I realize: I can't see the damn crow against the sky.

Sun-Drunk on the Terrace,

An afternoon of nothing and everything at once.

By WENDY WANG

Long chair, cicada songs, afternoon light, slow exhales. Chlorine clung to my skin, gently coexisting with the light scent of lavender from before the swim. The heat softened me into stillness, and the crickets—or whatever musically inclined insect is native to Southern France—played their endless summer songs. I could feel the sun pressing into me like a slow exhale, the weight of a damp towel, a breath held too long. My skin was drying, stretched tight like it might crack if I moved too quickly. I didn't move. I wanted this to last, caught myself in a cliché, and suddenly had the urge to write the feeling down.

Lying still on a terrace I stumbled upon right outside Aix's biggest *piscine*, I rested my head on my folded arms and finally closed my eyes.

And then I thought: writing couldn't possibly hold it.

This was a moment for film.

A wide shot. A sunlit body. A long silence filled with crickets. No music. Just the breath of summer and a towel curling at the edge of a long chair.

It felt like a moment created only to be captured by the materiality of cinema—lit for 16mm film stock, with its grainy warmth and dusty softness. Not the modern crisp digital realism, but that tender imperfection of early color

film, just after the age of black-and-white. Let the grains tell the story, the way mood surpasses motion. Here rests a scene that does not need dialogue, only light and duration; something only to be watched, not explained.

So I started thinking of *Éric* Rohmer. How almost nothing happens in his films, but everything does, as he captures every human emotion in recreating each season. *A Summer's Tale* floated across my mind with its delicate, sensational mess—a film where a quiet, indecisive man finds himself entangled with three different women while on vacation, and somehow, the plot hinges on nothing more than long walks, half-meant promises, and a trip to an island that never happens. What struck me wasn't the drama—there hardly was any—but the way Rohmer made a film out of mundane hesitation itself. Gaspard, the protagonist, isn't exactly noble or heartless; he just cannot make a choice, and that indecision decides the architecture of the film. Watching it with a “rational” friend felt almost embarrassing—how could I explain that the power of the story wasn't in what he did, but in what he didn't do? It felt as if free will didn't exist, or it existed in surplus: each choice equally possible, equally fruitless. In the end, in the classic Rohmerian way, nothing really happens, and that's the whole point.

Lost in this meaningless series of thoughts, I suddenly realized how rare this was—doing absolutely nothing, and not feeling guilty about it. At other times of the year, I would've already reached for

something: a to-do list, a reminder, the false comfort of checking the hour. But here, sun-drunk on the terrace, I let the moment stretch. That afternoon, I had no one to meet, nowhere to be. Just the sun, the crickets, the subtle aftertaste of chlorine on my lips.

And yet, even in that stillness, I felt time passing. Monday, I would start work again; I would be taking the hour-and-thirty-minute bus to the neighboring city. The weekends were already running out; there really were just two more left when I could swim and sunbathe. I wouldn't get many more like this—hot, idle, selfish afternoons where I could feel like a cricket on vocal rest. Around me, locals sunbathed in stillness, read paperbacks behind big sunglasses, waited for friends without checking the time. I wanted to stay there longer, not just on the terrace but in that rhythm of slow days and quieter vibrations.

This didn't feel like something that could happen in Paris, or anywhere in the north. It felt Cézannian, Camusian, every person associated with the Provençal region. It reminded me, too, of that Godard film *Le Mépris*—all the sun-drenched stillness, all the crystalline statues by the ocean. The way Brigitte Bardot's body became a site of miscommunication, longing, and suppressed rage. Summer in that film could have burned me alive if I stayed too still for too long. Idleness there hardly remained innocent; it served as a punitive beauty. And I used to not just find that melancholy beautiful, but sexy, too, seductive in the way people often assume emotional women must find suffering

Thinking of *Éric*

profound, as if our depth comes from mistaking pain for meaning. But now I just wondered: everyone in that film was miserable, weren't they? It was meant as a shimmering ache.

The heat on my body started to feel unbearable; I hadn't put on sunscreen. Foolish, maybe, but understandable—I hadn't even known this terrace existed until I stumbled upon it. My skin was burning now, exposed and unaware, and it felt strangely transactional, as if I had offered my bare body in exchange for feeling held by the serene afternoon.

In an old interview, Marguerite Duras said, *If I am not a writer, I will be a prostitute*. I used to think she was so courageous for saying that, for naming the transactionality of attention, the way both professions demanded a certain performance of intimacy that inevitably bruised the self. But now, under the unapologetic sun, I wasn't sure if I still agreed. Lying there in stillness, doing nothing but being watched by light, I felt emptied out by visibility and couldn't tell which role was harder. Maybe both were ways of starving a part of yourself in exchange for being seen—they make the most colorful spectacle and ask you to stay there long after you have completely gone quiet inside.

Lars von Trier floated up next, uninvited, as he tended to do. I remembered watching *Melancholia* in high school because my favorite English teacher had recommended it. In fact, he hadn't recommended it—he only *mentioned* it in passing, and really tried to make sure I understood that it was not meant as a recommendation, considering I was only sixteen. But that was the best kind of recommendation, and when I rewatched the film two years later, it felt like

someone pressing their fingers into a bruise I'd forgotten I had.

I don't think anyone forgets the opening: the collapsing horse, the bride sinking in slow motion, the world ending in its most literal sense. Those images burned into my mind like film left too long in the projector. His films became part of my late teens, part of my early understanding of being a woman. That mixture of cruelty and beauty, of stillness mistaken for composure, of apocalypse rendered in such



aesthetic detail it felt almost tender. There was always the sense that the earth might explode, but at least it would look cinematic as it went. And for some reason, I needed that back then, the image of a final gathering of two women and a kid as a planet devoured them.

A dear friend I met in this lovely southern French city, after I told her that my holy trinity of aesthetic chaos was perhaps Jean-Luc Godard, Wes Anderson, and Lars von Trier, told me I desired immaculate symmetry within chaos—Google-Calendar-obsessed

yet anarchist in a way that hated structural hierarchy and pursued the rebellion of youth. That did quite sum me up: someone obsessed with symmetrical frames and untamed youth, torn between tenderness and cold provocation.

And perhaps that was why I ended up here, on this terrace, burning slightly, feeling everything, doing nothing. Someone who could lie still for an hour and still be overthinking whether words, and words alone, could capture the scene. Whether this moment needed to be ordered, archived, aestheticized, or whether it was enough, just to let it pass.

The man beside me was still reading with sunglasses on, unfazed by the heat, as if he trusted the light to stay gentle. I wondered what he was thinking, if his voice was talking to himself at all. Maybe he was so used to such afternoons, he had long since stopped trying to hold them in language, or in anything at all.

And still, I wished you were here, Éric.

Not to say anything. Not to explain or interrupt. Just to be still beside me. To sweat and tan a little, maybe. To watch and rewatch the way the sunlight curled at the edge of the towel. I thought you would have understood this kind of afternoon—the way it refused to be captured in words, the way it resisted narrative usefulness, the way I summoned you for no particular reason at all. I thought you would have let it pass with me—this slow, beautiful failure to do anything at all.

what do you get a man for his birthday

BY AINA MARZIA



what do you get a man for his birthday
 “what is your love language?”
 father hugged me
 mother kissed me
 that is what you say when you don’t
 know how to love.
 I never had my room
 four eyes blinked at the ceiling.
 was this how I loved? the wings of fireflies and between stolen moments in their light
 me and my sister spoke to flies you swatted into the walls
 paint peeling
 she got you a nonstick frying pan
 you made us
 pancakes after your birthday

what do u get a man for his birthday?
 the umbrella-patterned tie to rest and lie still
 a decoration for the wooden windowsill that creeks like his knees
 faux wood colored desks that he can build
 when he’s bored
 a piece of furniture for your clothes
 and a perrywrinkle tie
 to match your dress at 34

you buy a pocket knife
 for yourself
 a bouquet of lilies for your shelf “men only get flowers at their funerals.”

Nass Recommends: *Harvester* (1996)

BY HARRY GORMAN

The year is 1996, and video games are turning the children into serial killers, Satanists, and sexual deviants. Enter *Harvester*, an obscure FMV title developed by DigiFX, which joins a long list of defunct adventure game studios from the 90s. Play as Steve Mason, an amnesiac teenager who wakes up in Harvest, Texas, in 1953. *You always were a kidder*, Steve says his parents, fiancée, and everyone else in town when he tells them he's lost his memory and has no clue where he is. Searching for answers, your goal is to enter the Lodge, a massive cathedral-like building, and headquarters of a cult who controls the town, The Order of the Harvest Moon.

Harvester delights in moral panic, proudly and half-jokingly claiming its story to be a “graphically violent experience in terror” and “destined to be one of the most challenging and disturbing adventures ever produced” in advertisements. The game is a parade of exploding heads and splatter-gore, as Steve and the residents of Harvest suffer a series of brutal deaths, depending on the player's choices.

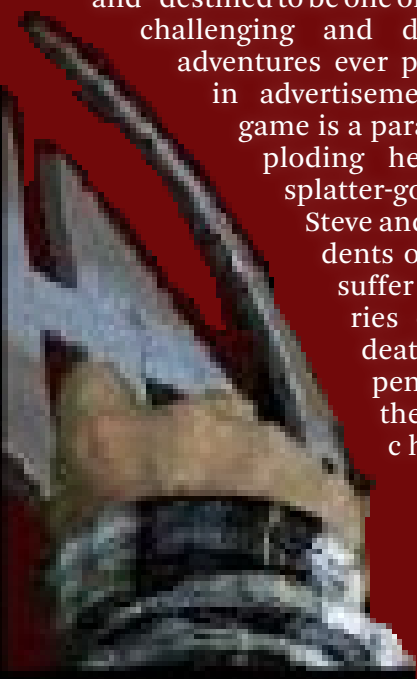


It spares no one, as nearly every character in the game is optionally murder-able – pregnant women, children, and the elderly are all fair game. These kill-scenes were filmed on a green-screen sound stage and composited into the game, giving it an uncanny charm as its characters burst into red goo.

Harvest, Texas is every player's worst nightmare, a seemingly perfect, conservative town infested with filth. You'll encounter gay firefighters, teachers banging in broom closets, a sadomasochist father, a mother who's secretly a dominatrix and will shoot you in the head, and worst of all: sex before marriage. The game is a clever satire that tries as hard as it can to be the sensationalized Violent Video Game That's Corrupting The Youth – its creator was reportedly

upset when it didn't appear on a US Senator's annual report card warning parents of extreme violence in computer games.

I've loved adventure games since I was a little kid, much in part to the goofy humor that's typical of the genre. *Harvester* is hysterical, and its violence works less to shock you than it does to make you laugh at its absurdity. It works even better in 2025, the thought that anyone clutched their pearls over a game this stupid is doubly hilarious.



THE DEADDS

Tracing creeping, tangling, choking vines swallowing cities whole.

BY ELENA EISS

In summer, invasive vines consume the roadside trees of Pittsburgh. See them through car windows, bus windows. They ensnare houses, clothe them in elfin leaf and vegetative sinew. They shroud our patches of urban forest and hide them from the sun, turning Appalachian woods into deepest jungle. Behold these green masses of leaves and their speckled berries in shades of robin's egg and orchid. Never mind the oaks and elms withering beneath the drapery.

But in winter, these vines appear to deaden. Don't be fooled — they are only sleeping. They wait for spring, stolen sunlight, and warmth. The Deads display themselves as tangled woody ropes — no more than sticks — so in winter, you can finally peek through the vines and see the trees they cage. The Deads and their arboreal prisoners make for a sad landscape, all the same gray-brown drab.

Porcelain berry is among an array of invasive vines to swallow Pittsburgh, along with wisterias, wintercreeper, wild grape, bittersweet, mile-a-minute, and English ivy. All are exotic to our landscape of greens and muted yellows and whites; instead, they are multi-colored and blue-berried with drippy lilac petals and fruit like little scarlet globes unfolding from golden shells. Uncontested in this new land, these vines grow quickly to average lengths of twenty feet, with some species extending to as long as ninety. All grow greedily, hungrily. It is these same vines that strangle trees, drag them to the earth, and provide channels for pests and disease to their branches. The vines' most visible effect is the shade they cast when

knotted and woven into sinister canopies that starve trees of sun.

These vines were introduced to the States as ornamental plants—as décor—in the 18th and 19th centuries, shipped in from foreign ecosystems in entirely different hemispheres of the globe. It was fashionable to boast unmistakably exotic flora in the unmistakably unexotic Midwest. It was the wealthy who could afford to adorn their houses and gardens with such ornamentals, so these vines took on new meaning as a status symbol for those who owned them.

Little did those owners know, those vines would creep.

#

For the Tito-Mecca-Zizza House on 5th Avenue in Pittsburgh's Uptown, porcelain berry does not elevate its sagging walls or convey class: rather the vine actively tears it down. The house only just became a historic site in 2022. For years, this 19th century goliath went uninhabited, and now it is uninhabited still, even though the city owns it. Without any people—people who could pay to manicure their house's green walls, that is—the vines have moved in. Porcelain berry entombs what once must have been a pretty house, red with a turret and a spacious yard. In winter, the Deads writhe their way around that turret, up the house's sides, and through the bramble of the house's yard. One can only imagine the jungle that has sprouted within the house's walls.

I imagined that jungle every time I passed it on my morning commute to middle and high school. I caught a city bus at 6:40 each morning that ran from my neighborhood of Squirrel Hill through the University of Pittsburgh's Oakland neighborhood and Uptown before reaching Downtown Pittsburgh. Half the year, I could only see its red form emerge from the shadows of a

pre-sunrise city, but when my mornings grew brighter, I would locate its crumbling stairs, its brick walls, its turret—all obscured by vines—before my bus blew past. I wished on the vine-snared house before exams. I noted as its exterior changed with time: Once, someone covered the front porch with floor-to-ceiling black and white bubble letters, the door, with the round, blue face of a dog. There were times I convinced myself the yard looked less overgrown, as if someone had been taming it, but its wild foliage would always rebound.

I paid attention to the house mostly just to make sure it was still there each time my bus drove by. It seemed equally plausible that it could disappear, swallowed whole by the Deads.

#

The houses in the private road labyrinth on the hill dividing the Squirrel Hill and Shadyside neighborhoods of Pittsburgh do not all scream old money; some of them whisper. Old money, as a rule, must be subtle to be convincing.

Of course, the houses themselves are all mansions and manors. You can pick out the new money houses by their modern designs jutting out toward the silent, tree-lined streets. They are loud, red and angular, louder than the unpeopled, no-sidewalk Roads, Lanes, and Terrace. The only people on these roads are from other streets, here to walk their dogs. Passing through these streets as a kid, I was convinced that I would get in trouble for walking on somebody else's streets and staring at their pretty houses; I wasn't meant to be there. I dreaded the moment when we'd be caught by that somebody, but that moment never came.

In winter, the vines in the city turn into Deads. But the ivy that covers some of the houses here remains green. English and Boston ivies are evergreen. They are fashionable. They are intentional. The vines on these houses were planted, then guided by trellises, twist

ties, and paid hands. Vines like porcelain berry and mile-a-minute are considered invasive to the States and are not sold as carelessly as before, but these reconsiderations have not touched the ivies. While the rest of the city decays for the season, houses with such ivy stay lush. Thanks to the green.

#

These evergreen vines render the homes they cover even more ancient than they are. Ivy—even though it can grow up to ten feet per year—conveys age, status, even immortality.

This type of cultivated decay can be seen in the English countryside—coating castles—but also on our college campuses. Think: Ivy League. Think: Princeton. Think of the vines that swath Nassau Hall, the Old Graduate College, East Pyne, Holder, and Foulke. Even Whitman—built in 2004—grows its own vines. They are scraggly and only reach the first-floor windows of Wendell Hall, but give them a few years and they will have enveloped the whole Pyne Drive-facing wall. Serving the same purpose as Whitman's Collegiate Gothic architecture, a few artfully-placed vines age the residential college way beyond its years. Even our oldest buildings on campus are modeled after far older ones in Oxford and Cambridge. Much of Princeton's architecture conveys a sense of power and authority just by imitating ancient buildings, making us believe that Princeton, too, has existed for ages—and will exist for ages to come.

#

I see Pittsburgh everywhere I go, constantly superimposing my city onto new surroundings. I cannot help but draw connections here at Princeton; there are so many obvious ones to make, like the lake named after Pittsburgh's local steel magnate or the chemistry building that bears the same name as our largest

city park. But just as the Pittsburgh connections come to mind, so too do the connections to the Deads.

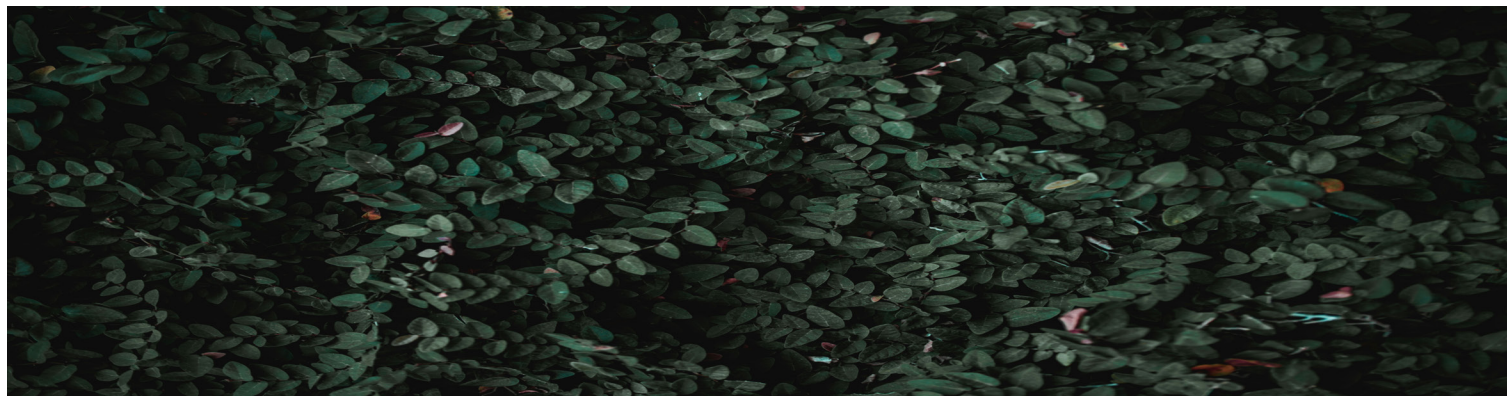
The first time I truly noticed the Deads in my city, I was taking a new bus route. The bus uses the Martin Luther King Jr. East Busway, this hidden road system just for buses and emergency vehicles. The novelty of this secret route thrilled me, and I kept my face pressed to my window the whole ride as this new world grew around me: a hillside wall that ascended on one side was streaked with century-old soot and newer paint; train tracks followed the curve of the Busway on the other side; past them stood another hill, forming an urban canyon. Houses clustered at the tops and sides of the hills, but before, during, and after they appeared, there were trees.

This was winter, and here the Deads showed themselves in full force. Porcelain berry, creeper, bittersweet, maybe even some wilted ivy. The vines were as thick as tree limbs in places and spindly in others. They spread over the trees and bushes in a gauze of wooden cobwebs. It was hard to tell vine from branch amid the jumble of the Deads: dormant vines, soon-dead trees, and, up the hills, houses the Deads would reach or had gotten to already.

The vines on Nassau Hall, on the other hand, will remain as green and lively as the ivy on the houses I walk my dog past in Pittsburgh. Their leaves will be trimmed, the building maintained, and Princeton will continue to look as stately and storied as ever. It feels odd to me to now have this association with what I'd previously viewed as the opposite side of the Deads: the manicured, intentional vines. For a good deal of Princeton history, it was even each graduating class's task to plant new ivy to contribute to Nassau Hall's emerald

coat, making students not only complicit in this whole vine-growing business but active participants in it.

I feel a little like I am now standing in one of those houses I would walk by, watching through the house's windows, waiting for someone to stop and stare, waiting for someone to notice my vines and wonder: How come they're so green?



Vape List, Pt. 2

By ELLIE DIAMOND

The times are trying. Up is down, wrong is right, protein is in everything and we're all CONFUSED ABOUT IT. Luckily, some of the Nassau Weekly's readership has found the solution to fascism taking hold: vaping.¹ Nearly two years ago, I released a list of vape flavors that Big Vape had been formulating in their research facilities in Terre Haute, Indiana. Now more than ever, the kids are yearning for a flavorful buzz, and top alchemists have gone to work on new and empowering flavors to keep them sedate—to encourage them to resist, like, capitalism. Or something like that. Straight from the lab, here are 50 brand new vape flavors:

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| 1. Benzodiazepines | 11. Fugue state | 21. Facetune |
| 2. Kabbalah | 12. The amount of cigarettes David Lynch would smoke in a day | 22. Dérive |
| 3. Sonja Morgan | 13. Wet bulb temperature | 23. That one photo from Sex and The City that connotes humiliation |
| 4. Woah Vicky's twitter | 14. Late 90s-early 2000s yoga class | 24. The power grid |
| 5. Age gap relationship | 15. Gemeinschaft | 25. Chop hoe |
| 6. Whitefish salad | 16. One 5mg edible | 26. Twisted Tea |
| 7. Sex scenes in movies discourse | 17. Spike Lee's instagram captions | 27. Every candy ever. Like just all of them put into one. |
| 8. The Honey Bunches of Oats commercial with that lady | 18. Laguardia airport water display | 28. Your inner saboteur |
| 9. Chicken stock | 19. Ginger ale | 29. Call of Duty |
| 10. Situationship | 20. Yogurt | 30. Birthday Instagram stories |

1 "The Counterculture Issue," The Nassau Weekly, April 10, 2025.



31. Vatican II

38. The Nixon Tapes

45. Bullying

32. Crossbody bag-induced Europeanism

39. Courtney Love

46. Queef

33. Pilates

40. Bowl of cereal

47. Malice

34. Staring at your own instagram public

41. *And Just Like That* writers room

48. Praxis

35. World Wide Day of Play

42. Amateur DJ

49. Journaling

36. The DMV (government agency)

43. I Came to College Eager To Get Zooted on Loud And Get My Back Blown Out. I Found Out I'm a "Mid Bitch" With Terrible Vibes

50. Being a Hag as Radical Feminism in the Imperial Core

37. The DMV (region)

44. Selfie

Finding God at 35

“She was looking for something not entirely visible, not entirely tangible, not entirely a glow-in-the-dark beetle whose bum lit up, but some kind of reminder that the strange and ephemeral can manifest as physical, biological.”

By AIKO OFFNER

When Kelsey turned 35, she started looking for God.

That was the year Kelsey extended the hours Choo-Choo-Soo-Shi in Echo Park to serve all night. She had inherited the restaurant from her mother seven years earlier. One night shortly after her 35th birthday, she witnessed two young women in their post-club attire asking a waiter at Mel’s if they had poke bowls.

She was lowering her mouth to her straw to slurp the chocolate milkshake two booths down from these young girls, who evoked some potent combination of jealousy and repulsion. Here she was, in a maroon sweatset that blended into the booth and hair that would stay up in a bun on its own accord, looking at girls who were probably uglier than her but in short enough clothes that they could get away with asking for raw fish past midnight. But even those girls were not immune to the harsh realities of the world, as the waiter made some comment pertaining to fishiness and womanhood and they stomped out. *Hah*, she thought to herself, but momentarily faced a bigger victory: the midnight market for raw fish in Los Angeles was one that Choo-Choo-Soo-Shi could meet.

So she converted what had been her mother’s distinctly dingy sushi-diner into a 24-hour sushi bar. The transition wasn’t radical; they already operated until 12 AM,

and the lighting, which mimicked both a school hallway and an In-N-Out with its industrial-grade troffer lights, had the dinginess of the diner that wasn’t the fraudulent warmth of the overpriced pizza places Christmas-wrapped in fairy-lights. Choo-Choo-Soo-Shi was the one industrial-grade white light emanator in the street, with a window at the height of the oblong conveyor belt, where three sushi chefs usually stood. When Kelsey was sixteen, her mother made her the after-school manager, and informed her that the most Asian or attractive sushi chef was to be assigned to face the window.

Her mother now had no involvement with the restaurant. When she first gave the restaurant to Kelsey seven years ago, she came every day as a customer. Around 6 PM each night she would arrive and ask the host (usually Kelsey) to sit at the back of the oblong counter (so she could face the window and give Asian credibility to the restaurant) and would order one piece of sushi at a time and stay until eight. She had a very sharp bob, and was generally very small and short, so from the outside she almost looked no different than the maneki-neko on the shelf above her, the only difference being that she brought tea to her mouth at a freakishly even interval. In the beginning, Kelsey misunderstood her mother’s presence and would ask her if things looked okay, or if the service was good.

“I’m not your personal Yelp reviewer,” her mother would reply, sipping her tea. She didn’t look at her, and never broke eye contact with the street.

Two years ago, Kelsey instituted a 90-minute seating rule.

“You can’t put a timer on my meal,” she said to the poor waiter

who had informed her of the rule.

“I’m sorry, but it’s protocol,” the 19-year-old replied with burning cheeks that revealed an impossible dream of being an actor.

“I’m not halfway done with my meal. Are you going to prevent me from finishing the meal? Let me speak to the manager.”

Such began Kelsey’s overhaul of Choo-Choo-Soo-Shi which left her and her mother largely estranged. There was the 90-minute rule (which her mother violated), actual trains on the conveyor belt, digital ordering, and finally, all night operations.

“You are making my restaurant a convenience store,” she said to Kelsey, monotone and stone-faced.

“I am opening us up to a new market.”

“You are inviting gangs and drunks.”

“They already come.”

“Who’s going to run it?”

“Me.”

Her mother adjusted her customer hours to come in at 8, never staying past 10. At 12, the sushi chefs would stockpile slices of sushi and clock out. From 12 AM to the following noon, Kelsey stood alone behind the conveyor belt, visible to the street, waist-up.

It was naturally during these hours that Kelsey started to look for God. It didn’t start with a need—she did not suddenly *desire* God, or *want* God—but rather, she was hit with a *conviction* that God might be here. Though she had initially been ambiguous about his existence enough people seemed

to believe that she had been loosely won over. This or that, yes or no, she was less sure of, but one thing she was sure about: if they were right, and if God did preside in L.A. proper, he would preside *here*, in Choo-Choo-Soo-Shi, under lights so harsh her mother often claimed was good for microbe detection.

It was 2 AM on a Saturday and no one had come in, and she had taken a seat on a cart behind the counter. Only a sliver of her head would have been visible through the window, but the doorbell chimed.

She stood up and saw nothing more than teenagers who hardly looked older than fourteen. Still, it was the start of something prophetic. And at a certain point, though she had started the all-night business to rake in more profits, finding God was so much more important than finding the forty dollars that the kids would probably try to steal anyways. So after she welcomed the guests by nod and grunt, she turned off the light. Because you cannot find the light in the light just as you cannot find a stain in a surplus of color. It was silent for a moment as everyone adjusted from the blinding white light to the equally blinding lack of it.

"What the fuck woman."

"What the hell."

A plate clattered divinely on the floor (it was Kelsey).

"Turn the lights on, woman."

"Yeah, bitch."

Someone had clearly learned a new word.

"Let's just go."

"Yeah, bitch, we're leaving."

There was no movement for a second, and eventually footsteps shuffled out.

But Kelsey responded to none

of that because she was looking for God in the crevices of the su-shi-track rim within her restaurant—better to start in a small area, she thought. She felt her way around the circumference of the oblong track and got on her knees to scour the cupboards. God was somewhere underneath, on the ground.

Her hands moved from sweeping the ground with her fingertips and then to the insides of the cupboards. He was not in the vinegar, nor in the chopstick drawer or sporks, or the very large holder of rice or the su-shi-train plates. Her hand got stuck in a cup and she used that to scoop through the green tea and the miso soup mixture—he was in neither of those and he didn't seem to be in the ginger either.

She had to check the plumbing. She had checked everything on the ground so he probably was underneath, so she dislodged the pipe under the sink and stuck her cup-hand there, but he didn't seem to be there.

She seemed to do all of this in one breath—when her hand got out of the cup (the cup had gotten stuck in the pipe and she had gotten unstuck) she felt herself panting, sweating, as she sat back against the refrigerator. Though she could not see it or feel it, a pool of blood was starting to pool under her butt, where she had sat on broken plate shards.

Feeling no physical pain, Kelsey started singing to herself "Take me to the chap-pe-el" (usually followed by "we're gonna get married" but that part she had no interest in).

What was she looking for? She was looking for something not entirely visible, not entirely tangible, not entirely a glow-in-the-dark beetle whose bum lit up, but some kind of reminder that the strange and ephemeral can manifest as physical, biological. That ineffability can be seen in tuna, though she

was trying very hard to find it.

When the sun rose, he would no longer be here, she concluded. What would be there was the torn tuna and the flood of soy sauce, but God probably had gone home for the night. She would look again tomorrow.

Tomorrow was Wednesday, when she would visit her mother in the hospital. She was largely vegetated and frustrated these days, the latter Kelsey discerned because she knew her mother. She knew that the wordless glare was not one of fight, or even admonition towards her, but probably something along the lines of "get me out." And Kelsey came very close to giving her that gift when she told her mother she had started looking for God: her mother's eyes grew wide, and her body thrashed so strongly that she dislodged one of her IV's and tore her gown. With unprecedented energy she shrieked, "35 IS NO AGE TO FIND GOD," while her entire upper body and genitals saw the fluorescent hospital light.

Indeed, Cindy did not entirely disagree and was holding back the correction that she was still *looking* for God and hadn't yet *found* him, but she had no time as her mother continued:

"THERE ARE OTHER THINGS TO LOOK FOR."

And here Cindy tried to piece together the gown she had just ripped, to conceal things necessary to repair their relationship,

"LIKE AMBITION OR A HUSBAND OR A CHILD," she concluded, and went back to sleep.

Kelsey had looked for those things before, but she had never looked for God before. She watched her mother sleep and planned where she would look for God tonight.

DOUBLE SHOT

Two friends walk into a café...

By BY SOFIIA SHAPOVALOVA & JONATHAN DOLCE

3:00 PM. Thursday following the long drag of winter break that Princeton insists on spoiling its students with. Otherwise known as The Opportune Moment to obtain a heart-warming, spirit-energising, soul-shattering beverage. Otherwise known as shelling out your meagre minimum-wages at Small World Coffee for a black Americano when you could have scouted out any of the million other free machines on campus that might do the trick too. But no, the journey to Beyond makes it all worth it. Especially when it's raining.

Noting the day's patrons. It's less crowded than usual—the rain having, perhaps, managed to scare off the least brave. Unassuming characters, all of them, including the young fellow sitting alone at a table, reading, not far from the cash register. His features are pale—icy, even. He'd probably tell you that his ancestors come from Northern Europe, passing it off with a nonchalant shrug. He's meticulously sipping a cappuccino—what may appear initially as a sophisticated selection but is likely indicative of deeper problems (e.g. control freak, wages psychological warfare on roommate, actually enjoys the consumption of tinned fish and mushrooms).

A closer inspection confirms prior hypothesis. There

are two books on the table. One lies open, helpless victim to the relentless stroking of said character's finger running the width of the page. Left to right, left to right. Line after line to ensure no one gets lost. The other is closed and is positioned at an angle that surely confirms he *wants* you to read its title. *How To Be Danish*. Patrick Kingsley. Of course. It's only these kinds of people that would dare make the trek up Witherspoon on such a day. It's in his *blood*. The Danish are used to mild weather and frequent rainfall throughout the year.

He looks up, casting a piercing squint through his thin-framed spectacles to survey his surroundings. Danish people are known to be keen observers. They'll smell something rotten from a kilometre away. He's probably realising that he's the only Dane here. The book is both homage and signal. *I may look unremarkable but I am different. I read books about other cultures. I am culture. I am COUNTERCULTURE.*

In short, he's a reader. Worse still—a writer. The most blasphemous of professions. He probably makes his idea of a living off it. In the unpaid sense. He looks not unlike the editor of that one publication. Self-branded alternative. Occasionally actually delivers the magazine on a weekly basis. Yes, it could very well be him. Rumour has it he landed the job because he was the only applicant to have prior experience with managing a Jersey Mike's for *hours* while the oven was broken. That, or diversity pick.

So it goes.

I sit down next to him.

I felt fortunate to have found a seat by the window. The patter of heavy rain against glass always puts me into a reading lull, and the conditions today were optimal: showers forecasted all day long, nature's own white noise machine. On the table in front of me I had my usual cappuccino—foam already dissolving into abstract expressionism—and my reading for tomorrow's class. It was still early enough in the semester when I could afford spending hours at Small World, basking in the illusion that I was a serious academic rather than a procrastinator who mostly came for the ambience, and in the hope that I might run into someone I know.

My reading had a long, uncontested run, until I heard a click from the front door that piqued my interest unlike the ones prior. It was sharper, more deliberate, like someone had rehearsed this entrance.

She drifted past me in careful steps so as not to disturb anyone's concentration and then took her spot in line. If I hadn't recognized her, I might have dismissed her as just another casual customer, who, for all I was concerned, was there to embellish my view of the cafe. But hiding behind the seemingly innocent face and babushka demeanor is someone who could probably convince you that your entire worldview is fundamentally flawed using nothing but a well-timed smile and pointed rhetorical

questions. She's the type who reads Dostoyevsky in the original Russian for fun and can spot a poorly constructed sentence like some sort of grammar bloodhound. And what aggression she lacks in appearance she makes up in her words, with a thesaurus inscribed along the folds of her brain. While she has the command to weaponize her words, she often chooses not to. That is, of course, except when during her editorial reign of a highly esteemed publication when she'd assault members with appreciation to fill the verbatim page. Be it something overheard, a text message, or a joke made up, she'd squeeze the verbatim right out of you. It seems that even when ordering her coffee she goes heavy-handed with gratitude—and far too much I'd say.

She stepped cautiously to the side while waiting for her order, a black Americano—AKA a glorified watered-down espresso to satisfy a tongue that's suspicious of all peculiar textures and tastes.

I'd tell you what she's called, honestly, but the sounds get all lodged in my teeth! Her last name of repeating sh's and z's and alternating vowels is arranged in a linguistic obstacle course that is decidedly not suited for my English tongue. I wonder if she has noticed that in every interaction we've had, I avoid saying it at all costs and opt for only her first name.

She grabbed her coffee and sat down next to me.