This week, the *Nass* takes a break from our melancholy. Cliché-be-damned, we delight in what we can.

# The Nassau Weekly


November 20, 2025

In Print since 1979 | Online at nassauweekly.com

Volume 49, Number 18

# EVERYTHING WILL BE OKAY



Dear dearest,

There's a schoolyard question that goes something like: "Would you rather know *how* you are going to die, or *when*?" The question is perverse, with both options becoming increasingly tortuous the longer you think. It's easy to pretend that the question is hypothetical, ignoring how inevitable knowledge of *both* often is. For the people forced apart by circumstances, the quickly aging, the terminally ill, foresight of ending is inseparable from the end itself. We are all approaching finality of some kind. So if the end is unavoidable, why sit on it and think?

The hardest move to make is to forget the imminent ending. Conscious distraction seems antithetical to every impulse of self-preservation. Approaching this volume's conclusion, it is difficult not to get anxious about the future. I'm trying to hold on to what I lovingly know, not letting time-limits ruin remaining time. The end is nearing. But I am so focused on the now that when everything goes black—I just might miss it.

**Until our next last time,**
**Frankie Solinsky Duryea, co-EIC**

## Masthead

## This Week:

**Fri**

**Open until Nov. 24 LCA CoLab**
terms for existence, a show by The Black Arts Collective

**Sat**

**2:00p-4:00p + 8:00p-10:00p, McCarter Theatre Center, Berlind Thtr.**
2025 Princeton Dance Festival

**Sun**

**2:00p-4:00p Hamilton Murray Theatre**
Theatre Intime Presents: Fefu and Her Friends

**Mon**

**7:00p-8:00p New Graduate College, Common Room**
Capoeira

**5:00p-7:00p Friend Center 113**
Why the Essay is Necessary, w/ Vinson Cunningham and Emily Greenhouse

**4:45p-6:15p Friend Center 113**
Fierce Urgency and Fugitive Pieces: The Contemporary African American Essay

**4:00p-5:00p Taplin Auditorium, Fine Hall**
Early Music Princeton Concert

**5:00p-6:00p Wallace Hall 300**
Dilemmas in Inequality Speaker Series: Lisa Diamond

**Tues**

**12:30p-1:00p Milberg Gallery**
Guided tour: "Forms and Function: The Splendors of Global Book Making"

**Wed**

**10:00a-8:00p Hurley Gallery**
the heart knows its own bitterness (Manifest): Exhibition by Abigail DeVille

**Thurs**

**8:00a-9:30a + 11:30a-1:30p Whitman College Dining Hall**
Thanksgiving Holiday Meal

**11:00p-1:00p Baker Rink 109**
Women's Ice Hockey vs Yale

**10:00a-11:30a Whig Hall, 201 Senate Chamber**
Princeton Debate Panel's World Championship Spars

## Verbatims:

**Overheard near Dillon gym**
*Bisexual guy:* "All the guys are so boring, even the maoist. I need to go back to women."

**Overheard on Frist 300 level**
*Student 1:* "He just wants a curly-haired Jewish person."
*Student 2:* "Oh my days."

**Overheard in Forbes dining hall**
*Self-proclaimed Existentialist:* "Not to Jaden Smith right now, but can we talk about the political and economic state of the world?"

**Overheard on Blair Walk**
*Girl on phone:* "Yeah the family is trying to keep it quiet! Who knows what would happen if it got out?...Yes, the triplets!... Yes, they are 12 siblings in total"

**Overheard in a Murray Dodge convo on the Epstein files**
*Student:* "Who else fujoshi-ing out over Bill Clinton and Donald Trump."

**Overheard in New College West**
*Practical friend:* "I think in my next life, I'll be a biologist or a psychologist or something."
*Philosophical friend:* "In my next life, I'd like to be something with wings..."

**Overheard on Nassau Street**
*Girl:* "Look, Fleet Feet!"
*Guy, seductively:* "mmmmmm, feeeeeet!"
*Girl:* "Do you wanna go in?"
*Guy:* "No..."

**Overheard outside Lewis Center for the Arts**
*Law enforcement aspirant:* "I'm bad at lying and I'm even worse at telling the truth. "

**Submit to Verbatims**
Email thenassauweekly@gmail.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!

**Read us:** nassauweekly.com

**Contact us:** thenassauweekly@gmail.com
Instagram: @nassauweekly
Twitter: @nassau_weekly

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

# Kaleidoscope of an Ending

"My perception of time is distinctly geometric: I trace the progression of years in counterclockwise circles that thicken like layers of pencil. I wish I could distinguish between them."

By NATASHA WIPFLER-KIM

I. HANDBALL COURT

At the end of summer, the air is lukewarm, and every movement feels like swimming. Before it starts to rain, I sit on the pavement of the handball court, my knees drawn up in front of me, my back curved like a shell. It's a juvenile posture, and I relish the scraps of concrete stuck to the undersides of my legs.

You'll forget me, you say, you've said every day that summer. And I say no, I won't, and you don't believe me, and so it goes. But I know that I am right, because every time I walk by my elementary school and peer through the chain links of the fence, I see myself standing there, poised to run to the next painted circle. So much pity for that empty space, who doesn't know that in eight years she will stand on the other side of the fence. I see her in front of the shop window where we stopped on the way home to critique the dresses; she is sipping hot chocolate—one of those rare mornings when we made it to school early—in the Starbucks on the corner. Commercial, particular. It closed, boarded-up non-space for a year or so, and now a bagel store: commercial, no longer particular.

II. HIPPO PARK

We walk downtown through the park because you want to go to the gym and I want to go home. To the left is the playground with hippos close to my preschool, large ceramic hippos full of little children. They bend around each other like intestines. The mouth, open—a head peers out. Limbs always disappearing up through the gap at the bottom, in between the legs. I have a recurring dream in which I slip through a gap close to the ground, but it is too small and I get stuck. Or maybe I make it through, but then I am inside the hollowed-out hippo, surrounded by children who slide in and out of the walls. I cannot make it through the gap again. This dream feels like a memory; I once cried inside a hippo for three days.

It starts to rain, a few drops and then everything. I start to run, because I was here when I was younger. My arms grow slick and water slides down my face—when you cry lying down, the tears run sideways into your ears, except I am vertical so they run straight down, gathering at my hairline and spilling over my forehead. I am leaving tomorrow; I am desperate to feel youthful. When you told me you would come to my house every day, neither of us believed you. In spite of ourselves, this has been an August of scraped knees and frisbees run over by cars, of shrieking half my words. But I feel the weight now, of summer extended past its boundaries. A sort of loan.

I come to a stop in the middle of the path. To my right, the highway, and then the river. When I turn around you are gone, no, you are in the bushes behind the bench. I walk toward you, unsure of how to be witty about this. Sway a little, but not too earnestly. Seems like effort has been ground into me, stuck to my seams. A step to the left, towards you, a step to the right, like a waltz. I want to learn to use my body somehow. A step to the left. I want to be pre-packaged and safe, with collapsible arms.

You meet my eyes, behind the leaves, and come out looking chagrined. In this little play, my role is cheerful. I am dancing. It is raining. I spin in a circle, palms upward and incomplete, and see myself through your eyes: small and refusing to put on my jacket in the winter cold. You walk in a straight line. But neither of us is good at parties. We once left the music in the other room and sat on the cold floor of the kitchen and talked about feeling time withdraw like a disenchanted lover. We both had an awareness of the days we had left. You were keeping count. I thought about the fractions of things—a half of a half, time splintering off. It feels wrong to not be enjoying yourself properly, you said. To not be in that room next door, with the perfect way to move your shoulders. She slid forward, shimmering. The gears turned. I could feel myself shimmer on the kitchen floor with my hair hanging around my face, not windswept.

III. REVOLVING DOOR

You're going to forget me, you say outside the revolving door. I stand on my tiptoes to hug you, and you are rectangular and remarkably unpitying. I once asked you if you'd ever composed music. A string quartet, you said, and it was pretty good but then you listened to Beethoven. I stopped writing years ago, after reading too many words and

ART BY GEORGINA DOMINGO ALSINA
PAGE DESIGN BY RAVEN REID

feeling like there weren't enough left. I tried to say something about how it feels impossible to make anything from scratch, how creation is more like foraging. Had you really thought you were better than Beethoven, I asked instead. You shrugged. Beethoven didn't go to Juilliard.

You didn't mourn your compositions, and you won't mourn me. You are practical and you have another prediction to satisfy, another argument to win. You confront the passage of time, pinning numbers to days so that they're easily identifiable and there's no escape. As for me, I number the times we sent the frisbee spinning around the tree as golden dusk sliced into our eyes, lulled by your refrain—only half-irreverent—and the repetitive smack of plastic against my palms. Wasp-ridden, it was: we find out only later, our unpricked skin a miracle. I number the movements of your hands as you stumbled by the river, and the circles we looped around the same block as night settled down, a ground-level apartment, shutters closed. I create a map out of momentary flashes, I walk across the street and across five years, two days, six months at a time, retreading the same paths, calling images to my mind: they always fall short.

Your hair hangs down over your eyes, and you are not accusatory, just soft, and I feel like nothing can be helped. Wet with the rain falling, I do not get any wetter.

IV. BELOW THE XY-PLANE

You call me five minutes later. The gym is closed. With the phone pressed to my right ear, I listen to the rain in the park; with my left ear, the rain of 76th Street.

We are both silent. The gym is closed. I am always struck by how much meaning relies on novelty; a prolonged ending grows tiresome eventually, must lose itself. You know this, and I wonder, briefly, why you called.

You say, suddenly: you have to take math in college. It's like vegetables, essential to a healthy diet. Without it you'll get scurvy.

You've said all of this before. Every line is almost scripted. I know exactly how you take out your familiar abrasiveness and turn it over when you're feeling homesick.

You accuse me of leaving the plane of reality by graphing our respective coordinates. This, too, resurfaces in our conversations. Like motivically-driven narrative, speech always circles back, consoles itself with the same patterns. You, (1, 1, 2), hovering around the origin. Me, (1, 1, -1000), far below the xy-plane. You have a point, because even as I listen to you list malady after malady which I will inevitably contract as a direct consequence of studying English literature, I see you wandering beside the river, your voice warmly irreverent, retracing our steps from this afternoon: the artificial river which runs all the way through the playground, the monkey bars where you broke your arm the summer before second grade.

My perception of time is distinctly geometric: I trace the progression of years in counterclockwise circles that thicken like layers of pencil. I wish I could distinguish between them. If only they expanded a little each time—flattened, they would look like the rings of a tree. I delude myself, on occasion, into thinking I can start at the center and run my finger outward, skipping from year to year within the stillness of one day. In reality, they are stacked one on top of another: each day with the hum of its previous iterations running underneath it like an old videotape.[1] I stand at the top, peer down, toe the ice. Sometimes I wonder if I retrace my steps enough times, maybe I'll fall through. This path is not only ours—I walked along the river one January, attempting to think myself back in time. But thinking is time-dependent, and I felt myself moving forward instead. When I checked the ice, there was no imprint.

I know that this is not you. It is not January, you are warm and damp, you do not dwell. Do you watch yourself swing through the air, weightless as your hand has not yet missed the next bar? You pass the benches we sat on, sprinklers we ran through; we used to stare across the river without seeing. Do you slow down for a moment to stare at the two figures on a bench? One leans forward, his hand hovering over a chessboard. It moves like a waterbug, flashes of stillness. The same jokes, the same gestures. But I enjoy every one of your iterations.

---

1 Anne Carson, The Glass Essay

ART BY ANELISE CHUN
PAGE DESIGN BY SOPHIA MACKLIN

# Thoughts from my time sitting on the windowsill of a castle in the Czech countryside

Is it better to not understand than to be misunderstood?

By BRONWYN RAFIEYAN

My body forms triangles and rhombuses in the negative space between limbs and sill, my back leaning against one side of the window while my toes push into the other.

There is no screen, and I'm warm from sun that doesn't quite reach my face, as I'm still sheltered by the awning of this opening in the castle wall, this threshold between my work: the computers, the Python scripts and the proteins and the endlessly running programs, and the vast countryside of South Bohemia—the mountains in the distance covered in a dark green tapestry of trees, the bright blue sky overlooking the field of wildflowers that bound the castle gardens below me.

Out past the terrace under me is a fountain, the constant rhythm of its stream punctuated by the shouts and laughter of children; Ukrainian refugees playing in the surrounding fields, calling out to each other in a language that, while now familiar to my ears, is still meaningless.

Language barriers are supposed to be isolating. They leave you separated from everyone, unable to understand or to be understood. But no talking means no need to perform. No pressure to be interesting, funny, and polite; to ask the right questions and have the right answers; to explain who you are and what you're doing here and what you want to do with your life.

It gives you time to think. To be with your thoughts, uninterrupted. The shouts of the children below act as background noise to the words in my head, rather than a story for my brain to follow.

Earlier that morning, I had gone on my daily walk around town. I was watching cows graze in the fields and admiring the mountains behind them that surround the town of Nové Hrady, my home for the past couple months, when an older woman greeted me. "Dobrý den!" I replied, unreasonably proud of the simple phrase that was one of few I could confidently speak in Czech.

My ears were soon filled with the sounds of hard consonants and staccato syllables as she began to converse with me, not knowing her words were nothing more than a rhythmic clicking to me. I interrupted her as soon as I could to explain that I can only speak English, and she let me continue on my way with a simple apology.

As I walked on, I felt the strange relief of not being understood—free from the responsibility of exchanging small talk with passersby, and from the need to explain myself; to her, I could be anyone. She didn't know where I was from or why I was here, and I couldn't answer her questions, real or imagined, even if I wanted to.

This lack of understanding is in many ways comforting. It gives me space to breathe, away from scrutiny and expectation. Yet it also imparts what can only be described as an overwhelming feeling of loneliness. There aren't many people to talk to in the castle, and fewer still that understand me. The town is small: there are probably the same number of cows as there are people.

But I've learned to live in this loneliness. The sill is wide enough that there is space for my book to lie to the right of me, splayed face down, spine bent in the middle, so I won't forget my page. My journal hides under my legs, pen resting on top, low on ink from filling too many pages with too many thoughts that have nowhere else to go.

This solitude offers a form of safety. I don't know the answers to most questions I am asked. I'm unsure of most things I do. Sometimes I get overwhelmed by even the simplest social interactions. Even when people speak the same language as me, I somehow find myself still being misunderstood.

My friend once told me that my spirit animal would be a canary because I talk so much. It's funny, because no matter how much I say, I never seem to get across what I truly mean. And when it really matters, my brain moves faster than my mouth, and I get stuck. My thoughts spiral and spin, making figure-eights in my mind, while my tongue remains frozen.

I can't tell, exactly, but I think I prefer not being understood to being misunderstood. Maybe it's better not to talk at all than for what you say to be interpreted wrong, for your voice to betray your mind.

As I sit on the sill, straddling the world outside the castle, where I am safe from these inquiries and from the pressures of even simple conversation, and the world inside the castle, where English ties me to expectations of articulation, intelligence, and engagement, to know who I am and what I want, I feel suspended in a liminal space.

Between freedom and obligation. Between a world where I can be whoever I want or nothing at all and one where I must be ready to define myself, over and over. Between solitude and scrutiny. Between my thoughts and my words.

Someone calls my name from the kitchen, a room over from where I am perched. It's English—familiar, heavy.

For a moment, I wish I didn't understand. That the sound could stay distant, untranslatable.

I hop down from the sill and go back to work, leaving the window and the outside world behind.

ART BY EDEN REINFURT
PAGE DESIGN BY ARIANNA HUANG

# Because We Were Girls Together

BY JEMIMA SMITH

*Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,*
*I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;*
*I know the voices dying with a dying fall*
*Beneath the music from a farther room.*
*So how should I presume?*

*(from The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock)*

Because We Were Girls Together
(a golden shovel)

I think we both know that I have not known loveliness like you have
and this is a sharp comfort to me, because I am comforted by what is known.

Lucky children, we were. Round like eggs, ruddy we were and knew the solidness of the
jointed hip. Hands led us firmly into insect evenings,
salted mornings,
wet-paint afternoons.

Quietly and carefully I
whisper to you the sum totals—all that I have
unconstrained by days. Nothing measured,
nothing, measured. I was sticky like a child, like flypaper, straining for everything out
of our joint mangled grasp. My
body nestled comfortably in your tissue paper life:

co-conspirators, flicking away traces of the outside world with
restless fingers. My tongue was made for bitterness; anger, resentment, coffee.
You have always been sweet. I devour, and you learned to measure your meals in spoons.
You laugh with painted eyes. You sing. I
bite. Or else I am worse, that is to say, quiet. Now I take stock of what you *just don't know*
and speak about it to no one. In corners I marvel at the
violence of growing, the reedy / sleepy sloping of our voices,
the fussing / dy(e)ing
of our hair. You ripened with
a poise no one gave to you, left me with a
feeling of the slow, velvet dying
of the leaves in fall
waiting dutifully for the dull pain that comes with being beneath.
Whining: why was I denied the
spring? You always refuse to sing with me, any music
was yours from a very young age, from.

And listen I know you don't like opening up to people and we haven't talked but I had a
terrible thought today about how we are weeks of brackish words, hours of phone calls
farther
than we have ever been. And I was thinking of sulky holidays, sharing an aching room
and in unsubtle sleep we curve and hold each other so
close, almost exactly like how
we did as round girls. So please tell me what I should
do with that. How do I talk to you how often should I
call should I call? I don't want to presume

ART BY MABEL MARQUEZ
PAGE DESIGN BY SOPHIA MACKLIN

# no machine

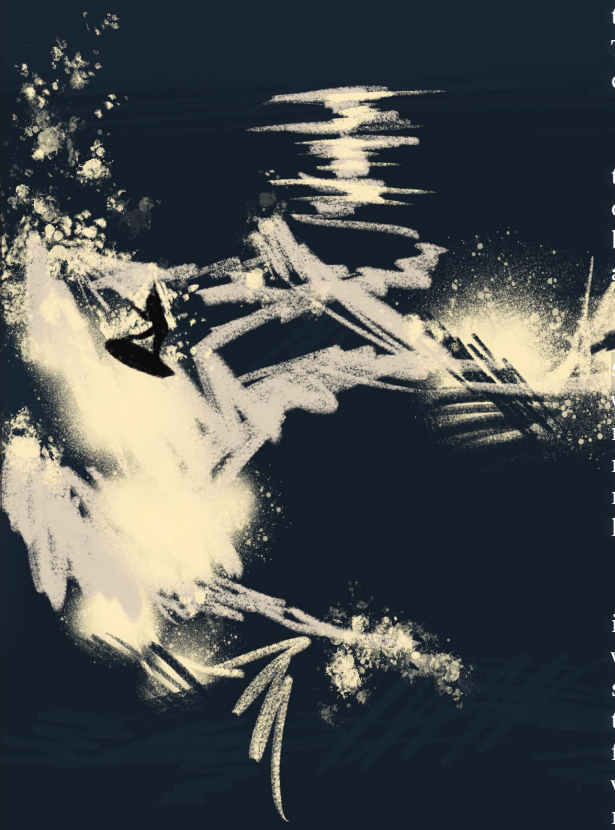
By ROYA REESE

In lieu of goodbye I send
a tiny house in the mail, flimsy
porcelain talisman a weak
barricade. Like Joni I become
cellophane, no personal
defenses, the wrapper on
a pack of cigarettes, the dirt
on the road of your espresso
cup — in sand in bone you
will learn to drink it. I let
the machine watch

as you return to safety or maybe
never leave, how can we
ever be sure; the hands
of the clock turned to *mortal*
*peril* at all times. To assign
certainty when all we have
are watercolor pomegranates
and faint prayers at peace, a rosary
no longer in use but still
in motion.

ART BY SARA SHEN
PAGE DESIGN BY SIOBHAN RIORDAN

# Liquidation



"That could be anyone, I think. The beach, the cliffs, the moon, just something with a voice that sounds like Margaret. The ocean could have picked up her accent and dissolved it, carried what I know as Margaret—black hair, sports bra, raspy voice—and released its latent sound into the cold wind, back to me. A lure."

BY CLAIRE BEELI

Every time it begins the same: the ocean, pitiless and sparkling.

Today a woman with spiky black hair, a bikini top, and long shorts jogs in. The water doesn't cling to her or beat her away as it might children or the uninitiated. She knows how to handle it. She sets the board on the surface and slips her body onto it in one swift, seamless move that flows into the round motion of her paddling.

A wave rises to greet her and I can see even from the shore how her hips and shoulders tuck into her torso to leverage the tip of the board over the wave's crest. The ridges of her spine rise like drops of condensation down her back.

My camera whirs softly, focuses. I snap the photo just before she dips back down over the wave: her head is tipped up, sunbeams exploding in the transparent crest, a thin veil of water spraying up before her.

It's a good photo. I've earned a minute, so I stick my hands under my knees to warm them. The sun is just beginning to needle at my back, but not enough to heat me through. My skin is dry, tight across my face, and when I lick my lips they taste like salt.

It's a wonder I've lasted as many mornings here as I have, huddled in a sarape with only a coffee and my camera. The surfer, Margaret, thinks it's a wonder that I've been photographing her and her friends for almost two months and haven't been in the water any deeper than my ankles. Each time she mentions it I try to smile and tell her that it's a photo series I'm working toward, not a surf competition.

Margaret starts to paddle in front of a growing swell so I stand and pick up the camera again, fingers aching a little as I poise them over the buttons. She's farther out this time, so I jog up to the shallows for a better angle, skirting around the shadowed sand where the tide has just been.

She slides to her feet. Snap. The barrel is sneaking up behind her, propelling her away from me. Her back ankle disappears into it, her long thigh. Snap. She even abandons the wave gracefully; the sea seems to open a dark pocket for her, and she vanishes into the unreadable surface.

I'm so lost in the viewfinder and Margaret's grace that I don't notice when the sea surges to lap at my ankles. I stumble back from the shock of cold and plunge my toes into the hot, dry sand.

Margaret drives me back to her place in her old yellow Bronco. A stack of faded Sex Wax air fresheners swings from the mirror. We're heading south from Leo Carillo State Beach in Malibu and the day is depthless pale gray, taupe cliffs dropping straight from PCH down to the water.

"Usually you can see Catalina from here," she says.

"I went there once when I was younger," I say. "By boat from Long Beach. I met my friend's friend who went to high school on the island and she'd never heard of Switzerland. Like, she said, 'What's that?'"

She hums, switches lanes without turning on the blinker. "Switzerland isn't the most important place in the world. You should take a jet ski instead of the boat. There's a trip you won't forget."

I picture myself straddling a jet ski, my hair streaming behind me like a banner. "I don't think I'm meant for that kind of thing."

I watch her eyes in the mirror, trying to gauge what she's thinking, and she looks up and briefly locks her gaze on mine.

"Don't be silly, baby. There's nothing you aren't meant for."

The next morning is windless and warm, and I watch Margaret's friend Nick jog into the ocean through my camera lens. He gets his knees high in the shallows, probably to reduce drag, but it flicks up sprays of water that splinter the low straight sunbeams. By some miracle of topography we're on a south-facing beach, and the early light streaming in parallel to the ocean reminds me of photos I took in Death Valley at sunrise. There's nothing to interrupt the clear, flat brightness.

This far into the photo series, I've started to recognize style in surfers. Nick's is reckless and rougher than Margaret's; he teeters up to the tip of his board and hangs five, a motion that transports me again to the desert and how the ravens curled their talons over dry branches. He backs into the center of the board and gets real low before kicking into a high flourish that I snap a photo of right at its zenith—his longish blond hair flung back, seawater fanned out in front of him, brilliant.

Like it was nothing he cuts back over the top of the dying wave and starts to paddle out again, arms chopping up the water. It's at least two hours before he's tired out. After he's already loaded his longboard into his tattered blue Chevy truck and gotten into the driver's seat, he has to unbuckle, come back around, and open my window because I can't figure out the crank mechanism.

Personal space doesn't seem to exist to him; he soaks the right half of my sweatshirt with his damp wetsuit, wedged between me and the open door, before he turns back and smiles hugely at me. He looks so freckled and goofy and I smile back.

We listen to Sublime on the way to Margaret's place, each of us with a breakfast burrito. For once I actually hear the lyrics of "Wrong Way" and I'm a little disturbed that it's about a child prostitute and no one has seemed to care since 1997. I ask Nick about it.

"That's what they're saying, though, dude," he replies. He swivels his whole head around to look at me, totally ignoring the road and gesticulating with one hand. "It's the wrong way. Everything is totally twisted. The guy singing is just doing what he can in a wrong world."

I think that there's more the speaker of the song could be doing than staring at the child prostitute and taking her "to the can," but Nick is bopping his head to the beat and finally focusing on the road, so I don't say anything. He drops me off and dials the music even louder as he rumbles away. On the porch I Google "wrong way," and all that comes up are articles about deadly car accidents. I turn my phone off.

Inside, Margaret is doing dishes by hand in her little blue kitchen. Her dark hair is sticking up in a dozen directions and she's wearing boxers with a short-cropped tank top, humming to some Brazilian music I don't know.

She spots me and smiles, turning down the music. "Hi baby. How was it with Nick?"

I step up beside her and start drying. "Good. He's photogenic." Her dish towels have little yellow-centered daisies embroidered on them. "I feel like I know what shredding is now."

That earns a bright laugh. "He's a little mental, yeah. He'll get thrown around like he's in a washing machine and pop up a full minute later, totally cool and, like, euphoric."

She's handing me clean dishes faster than I can dry them. "He said the weirdest thing about a Sublime song, though. That much time underwater has to do something to your head," I say. I try to glance at her to check her reaction, but I'm blinded by the low sun through the window behind her. By the time I blink her face into focus, she's winking at me, handing me a bowl.

-

Margaret is hosting a party that night, and because I'm living with her, I have to attend. I don't mind so much. I like being carried away into the surfers' boldness, their easy openness. Blond people start to trickle in around eleven, and by midnight, they're hanging off of couch arms, pressed up against her walls, and perched on her kitchen counter. Everyone is athletic and easygoing. Limp joints, like little crooked fingers, make their way around.

Bree, who I photographed a few weeks ago, steers me into a ring by the TV. "This is Jeanie," she says, hooking a hard arm around my neck. I try to relax my shoulder muscles. "The talent of a generation. She's going to bring back the surf rag."

I laugh loudly, because I'm three beers in and confident and I like being around these happy, pretty people. "I just stand there and take pictures."

Bree leans into the ring and whispers, breath hot on my cheek: "She's going to come surf with us tonight."

I laugh again, but the tanned faces are grinning at me wide and white enough that I hesitate. "It's like one. The beaches are closed."

Something cold makes contact with my neck and I turn—Margaret, pressing a Corona into my flushed skin, a lime wedge already shoved down its neck. She takes a place on my other side, an arm around my waist, and says into my ear: "Get in the car."

-

Leo Carillo again, opaque and sparkling. I've never been scared of the ocean until now. It's unbearably loud, the way I'd imagine the roaring inside a nuclear plant's cooling tower—a massive scale of noise, an infinite mass of shifting vapor, an incomprehensible churning of power. The wetsuit Margaret lent me does little for the cold. I stop when I'm up to my knees.

Margaret just touches my back. "Come on."

The moon hangs heavy in the sky. "I won't," I say, but I keep trudging away, trying to lift my mind out of the frigidness. I set the board down and heave myself on, flexing and pushing my toes against the waxy tail end, trying to remember Margaret's crash course. Duck dive. Pop up. Stay low. Balance. Come on.

I paddle. I probably look like shark food from below. I glide over a few small, unbroken swells with no problem, even though my breath stutters each time I catch a bit of lift at the top.

I come down over a swell and glance up. A real wave rears up over me, dark and bristling with foam, as tall as a man. My

arms tremble at the edges of the board, I suck in all the breath I can hold, I try to shove my board down, and I dive.

For a moment everything is burning, the cold and my lungs and my salty eyes. Bubbles stream against my back. The invisible hands of the currents yank at me, at the board. For a moment I can't see my hands or board in front of me, I can't see the surface in any direction but from above—the cold, glittering look of the surface, sealed over me, traceless.

I knock my feet down. The nose breaks out of the water and my head with it. I gasp for cold air, fumbling to wipe the salt water from my eyes without letting go of the board.

Before I can recover there's another wave, descending on me like a vulture with huge dark wings, and it's all I can do to turtle dive—roll onto my back and hope my board doesn't let me drown.

I yell for Margaret when I surface, hair plastered to my face, at least a cupful of water down my throat. She sounds my name back.

"How do I get in?" I shout, trying to at once trace the sound of her voice behind me and watch for oncoming waves. "I'm not doing this."

"You can," she says, disembodied. "That next one is you. Turn around. Paddle, come on."

That could be anyone, I think. The beach, the cliffs, the moon, just something with a voice that sounds like Margaret. The ocean could have picked up her accent and dissolved it, carried what I know as Margaret—black hair, sports bra, raspy voice—and released its latent sound into the cold wind, back to me. A lure.

I listen anyway. I hold on to it: Come on. So I wait for an unbroken wave to pass, then extend my leg awkwardly and rotate my board 180 degrees. Margaret's silhouette comes into focus, a soft line on her board that blends with the curves of the waves. So she was there. She sticks her thumb up silently.

I paddle. My arms begin to burn. The wave is catching up, boiling up behind me with the force of a jet engine. The shore is getting closer, faster, and my board is starting up a thin white wake.

I press the heels of my palms into the board, whole body tensing, and push up—slowly, it's more vinyasa than it is pop-up, but the wave is giving me a little leeway, a sigh of extra time to set my back foot down, my front, and lift my torso away from my bent knees.

The board is tilting forward, and the acceleration of the wave threatens to knock me over so I shift a little onto my heels, which seems right. Each movement's effect is amplified exponentially. The wave isn't as tall as I thought—it only comes up to my waist—but I can feel its power thrumming even through the board the same way I've felt the shifting muscles of horses under the skin. It's electric, the whipping air, the silver flush to everything, Margaret's friends yelling.

I lean forward, into the speed. Dumbly I think: the ocean is so huge. This wave is so powerful but I'm only grazing the barest edge of the sea's hugeness. It's not a scary thought. When it's over, I fall back into the wave like it's a bed, like I've won.

-

My reward for surfing, as it turns out, is more beer. Nick lights a small fire and we huddle around it with blankets and wet hair, listening to the wood crackle. We're out of limes. Everyone is thawing, drunk, and a little high from the surfing, if not the joints.

We're loud. I throw my whole head back to laugh up at the sky when Margaret's cartwheel fails halfway, and Nick's screeches scare away the birds when I tell him a story about my Connecticut mother's first time smoking. For the first time I can remember I'm at ease, like there was a coin flipped in my stomach that's been spinning around itself for years and just now settled.

Nick has had at least four beers and half a joint at the fire alone, but I'm practically meditating as he blasts us back down PCH. I don't know what's wrong with me. I came out of the water and everything was lighter than before, and hours later gravity still hasn't settled its mantle back over me. I could crank open the Chevy window and hang my whole torso out of it, or light a trash can on fire, or sleep under a bridge, and nothing would have consequences.

I fall asleep on the couch, two other surfers tangled on the carpet next to me. The world is still swaying from the beers. I don't dream, and when I wake, the sun is just about to come up. The sky is dark, a little bruised around the horizon.

I don't check the time. The whole place is breathing deeply. I pick up my backpack, step over the surfers, and go lightly down the stairs to Margaret's quiver of boards in the garage, all mounted on wall racks. I take the one she lent me last night, with thin blue stripes down the middle, the crosshatched pattern of wax smudged from my feet.

There's a bicycle down there too, with a rack for the side. I strap the board onto the side of the bike, press the garage door button, and listen to the gears groan, watch the sliver of daylight underneath grow to a band, to a full bright rectangle. When the door is open I pass through it, out to sea, unhesitatingly dissolved.

---

*This week,* Claire Beeli *takes the* Nassau Weekly *surfing. Can we 'hang ten,' you ask? Not quite, not quite...*

# Où sont

Distributing flowers at food banks is more than a frivolous act.

By VIVIAN CLAYTON

Behind the Carrefour in Aix-en-Provence, there was a parking lot closed off to regular customers. Rather than a sprawling terrain of asphalt segmented by clean white lines, the landscape was defined by five-foot-high piles of empty pallets, haphazardly strewn grocery carts, and dumpsters overflowing with could-have-been anniversary bouquets soaked in spoiled milk. Egg shells, and their yellow guts too, muddied the pathways carved between these makeshift barriers. It smelled of rotting, wasted food.

The stout waste manager lumbered about in an electric blue vest embroidered with the grocery store's logo. He guarded his clipboard close to his chest, as though the inventory records were confidential, and barked orders in rapid French. I followed his instructions carefully, only touching the shopping carts filled with donations. Every morning, we packed the nearly-expired food from these carts into our van.

Most days, a single cart was filled to the brim with flowers, contrasting the muted hues that filled out the rest of the scene—brown dumpsters, gray compactors, black skid marks. The season, July in the south of France, offered a simple explanation for the abundance of donated flowers. Still, they seemed out of place in the trunk otherwise filled with crucial sustenance.

Secours Populaire is a French non-profit that serves people experiencing poverty across the country. This particular branch includes a subsidized grocery store, supplying fresh produce, preservatives, and, often, flowers. Anyone in the community making an income below a certain threshold is encouraged to sign up for a biweekly time slot to shop. The goods are inexpensive—10 cents for a box of pasta—but not free. The choice of what to buy, and the act of buying itself, preserves the dignity of the customers.

While working there this past summer, I relished being assigned to the task of picking out a bouquet for the customer while they paid. I coordinated the flowers to the customer's outfit, learned the pronunciation of obscure colors in French, and struck up conversations with the receivers about their preferred flowers. The act became routine, a key step in the customer's experience. Until one day, no flowers were donated.

The first customer did not mention the change in routine, but the second, along with her daughter, noticed. While the customer paid, her child craned her head towards me and asked, où sont les fleurs? My chest tightened. I choked out the simple explanation—there were no flowers today.

The mother's face fell, then broke into a mirthless laughter. Her head shook slightly, as if the movement would expel her disappointment. With a short exhale she hoisted her grocery bags onto her shoulder and placed a hand lightly on her child's back to lead her out of the store.

Flowers are most commonly gifted to mark intense moments in our lives: sickness, success, birth, and death. In each scenario, they are emblematic of a deep care for someone, of their necessity to be noticed.

The question of necessity is often brought up in the context of food insecurity. The common perception of SNAP, which predates the current destruction of this crucial social program, is rooted in a healthy caution against corruption and an utter intolerance for greed. This perception is the result of the program being sensationalized.

On January 13th, 2017 an article entitled, "In the Shopping Cart of a Food Stamp Household: Lots of Soda," was published in the *New York Times*. Just shy of nine years later, a similarly panic-inducingly titled article, "Should Food Stamps Pay for Soda?," made the front page. The second article was published weeks after the Trump Administration's budget passed, which set off a detrimental deterioration of SNAP.

The similarity of the titles over time signals the stagnant perceptions of food insecurity in America. The underlying assumption about people living in poverty remains the same: irrational and wholly avoidable choices, such as not wasting money on soda, lead to this situation. The identical data set used to write the article signals the stagnant efforts to find a solution. If policymakers and researchers indicated a need for this data over the past decade, surely a more recent survey would be available to reference.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) survey used in the articles indicates that all households in 2011 spent more money on soft drinks than on any other food item based on point-of-sale calculations. Non-SNAP households spent an average of 4% of their grocery bill on soda, while SNAP households spent 5%. These findings suggest the need for a country-wide focus on nutrition, or at least they did in

ART BY PHOEBE PINDER
PAGE DESIGN BY SOPHIA MACKLIN

# les fleurs?

2011. This evidence does not justify the mass villainization of families who rely on SNAP to avoid food insecurity.

Secours Populaire closes every August. After reminding a customer that this would be his last appointment before September, his eyes momentarily went out of focus, he squeezed his daughter's hand, and the words *okay-ça-va* escaped in a sigh. I presented the produce, the option of pasta or rice, the preservatives in stock, and then what remained in the fridge. Restless from the wait, his daughter rummaged through the basket of candy next to the cashier. He attempted to calm her, *attends mon chou*, without turning towards her, and asked how much the candies cost.

"One euro for ten, bringing your total to 11.50," my co-worker responded. The customer reached for his wallet, the metal inside clanging as it moved. He emptied the contents onto the counter and counted out the coins, just barely reaching 10.50. He looked at his daughter and shook his head, *pas des bonbons aujourd'hui*.

Some parents choose soda over fruit to quiet the whines of their children. Some cannot afford to make this choice. It would be impossible for any parent to simultaneously prioritize a child's happiness and health in every decision. Yet, this premise is ignored when the decisions of parents reliant on food assistance programs are being considered. In these cases, we turn to well-established newspapers to find characterizations of this population as ungrateful, wasteful, and greedy. We compensate our communal generosity, which funds these programs, with the right to impose strict moral oversight.

Greed and generosity, especially on the communal level, are difficult to define. Broadly, if greed is giving others less than what we owe to one another, generosity is giving more than necessary. This interpretation seeks to balance, based on what individuals have to give. Matthew Desmond, while researching *Poverty, by America*, found that the top 20% of the income distribution receives 40% more from the government than the bottom 20% because of tax deductions and subsidies. This purely means-based conceptualization, however, oversimplifies these definitions, diminishing the beauty of generosity and underestimating the prevalence of greed.

Another aspect of my work this summer included walking around Aix-en-Provence once a week, dragging carts filled with water bottles and sandwiches over the cobblestone, pedestrian-only streets. Rather than rushing past the people sitting on the streets surrounded by plastic bags, we struck up conversations. After I placed a sandwich at the feet of one woman, she put her fist in my empty palm. When she withdrew her hand, she left behind three coins. I protested but she insisted, *tiens, pour ceux qui en ont besoin*.

When contextualized by the philosophical theories of Reinhold Niebuhr, generosity and greed transform beyond the confines of economic status. He argues that the recognition of the inherent self-centered nature of humans is what allows us to strive for higher morals. Essentially, most people are greedy most of the time. Thus, rather than the opposite of, generosity becomes the exception to greed. It is the rare act of giving to others, without comparison to what others give or care for how the gift is ultimately used. It is a conscious effort to notice others.

I bought flowers a few weeks ago for my boyfriend as a welcome-home-sorry-you-broke-your-collarbone gift. My heart warmed at the sight of his endearing surprise as I pulled them out from behind my back, and ached when he revealed he had never before received flowers. He had yet to experience this simple miracle. At each glance, the feeble petals emit a potent sense of care. Each time you notice the flowers, you are reminded that you too were noticed.

ART BY NINA OBIDAIRO-DANIELSEN
PAGE DESIGN BY ARIANNA HUANG

# Falling Back

A *Nass* writer takes in the changing of the season.

BY ANNIE WANG

When it starts to get cold outside, my skin turns red if the wind blows against me for an extended time. The cold air also causes more nosebleeds because my nose bleeds easily when the air turns dry. Another thing that I do easily is sweat. So, even when it is cold, I don't wear as many layers as I would like to in the mornings because I know I will regret it in the afternoon.

Last year, in late October, my nose suddenly started bleeding while I was on a run in the early morning. When I first felt the sensation in my nose, I thought it was just runny because I was cold. I sniffled once, then again, and then by the third time tasted blood. I raised my hand to my nostril and when I looked back down it was red. The only thing I could do was stand in the road and pinch my nose and wipe the blood onto the sleeve of my black hoodie. I still wear that hoodie on runs since red stains aren't visible on black.

This year I have been wearing a lot of white, but I used to avoid wearing white, actually, because I was scared of staining it. I still get nervous about stains on white, but the good thing about colder weather is that I have to carry some outer layer with me. Red is a color I always avoid wearing with white, but the other day, I tried on a red sweater while I was wearing a long, white skirt. It reminded me of what one of my high school friends used to say, that the red and white together looked like a "bloody tampon."

Periods themselves are another reason why I avoid wearing white bottoms, but white is a summer color anyway.

On Halloween, I had tomato soup for lunch. On November 1st, I had tomato soup for lunch again, but at a different place and with a friend. The two soups were different shades of red. We sat outside where there was a soft breeze, and the air smelled like figs from the cheese shop across the street. At the table beside us, there were four other people together, about my parents' age. Under the table hid a small white dog. My friend laughed at the dog, lowering her voice to tell me it would make a good snack for a large bird. I wore white both days and didn't spill anything on me either time.

On November 2nd, I woke up early and was surprised to see sunlight peeking in from below my blinds. I checked the time on my phone and was disappointed that I only slept six hours, until I realized it was actually seven. I wondered if my roommate would wake up before her alarm too. When I went on a run that morning, I wore the same black hoodie I always wear. The cuffs at the end of my sleeves are loose, so I have to roll them when I wear it now. The following week, I would be running my first race since high school, except this race was longer than anything I did in high school, and I was going to be much slower. A few other runners were outside. Dog walkers too, but they wore more layers than the runners. Two street signs read EINSTEIN DR and OPPENHEIMER LN. I didn't notice the names of any others. The houses I ran past had Halloween decorations up, some with a few lazy pumpkins posed on the patio while others had inflatables. All of these houses are grey or white, which is different from the neighborhoods filled with red brick houses back at home.

The fall colors were more prominent this time of year: most of September and October were green. Now, there were a lot of orange and yellow and red. The trees were stripped only of some of their leaves, and the brown leaves on the ground crunched underneath my feet. My legs felt heavy, and I was conscious of how hard it was to lift my knees as I ran. I didn't struggle with breathing until I stopped running, when I felt upset enough at myself for stopping that I wanted to cry.

On the walk back to my dorm, I thought I must be getting my period soon. When I ran for my high school's team, I lost my period for a few months. My last one came in the summer, when it was hot and sticky outside, and my mileage was increasing each week for the fall season. I knew not having my period was a bad thing, but I liked not having to worry about bleeding through. When I got it again, it was during the start of the new year. In the winter, I was running less because of the cold and because it was the off-season. I used to actually cry about running back then, but at least I was a lot faster.

When I got back to my dorm, I was cold and decided to take a hot shower. With daylight savings, I can run outside in the early mornings, until March, when everything is green again. In the shower, I smell rust and see blood by my feet, circling down the drain. I bring my hand up to my nose, and it's red.

ART BY BENJAMIN MARTIN
PAGE DESIGN BY EDEN REINFURT

# houston texas

BY CALLISTO LIM

*after a letter about a friend*

houston is warm and smooth and deep and dark and red. It is the feeling of holding a mug in two hands, of wrapping my hands around a lover's lower rib cage and knowing *this is home*.

houston is brown brackish water washing up against concrete and water stains on bayou walls. It is the feeling of cold waves thieving sand out from under my feet and an understatement of *I think I'm homesick*. It is knowing that no air will ever smell as good as the air in the pickup line outside the airport, rain-tinged and earthy, and it is feeling my father's stubble catch on my hair as I hug him for the first time in, maybe ever.

houston is gnashing teeth and liberty-spiked hair colliding against the foot of a DIY stage in some old backyard or porch or warehouse, wet heat shaking with sound. It is sweat and skin crushing me into all the space I've ever needed and it is flight through turbulence, rolling and roiling and red-eyed, my fists held up to protect my face.

houston is serene in a way that suggests *this is the slowest it'll get* and it is knowing that new york city is way too fast and it is the outline of my roommate sleeping across the room as I sit up in my bed and try to cry quietly because *here is not home* even though it has all the makings of one.

houston is the ceramic teapot that I fill with tea leaves and ginger when I feel sick and it is the small hand-shaped cups my parents brought back from some trip abroad. It is sitting around the dining table with my sisters when they came back from college and sipping rooibos deep into the night. It is catching up with people I've never had to.

houston is wearing tank tops until November and flashing my hazard lights in monsoon rains, long rides on bayou bike paths that get dark before the rest of the city and dog-walks on suburban trails in late fall, when the evenings are finally cool enough to go out. It is early morning skate park trips with friends, sitting and skating and smiling until the sun forces us into our cars.

houston is the white tablecloths of dim sum restaurants that my mother takes us to on saturday mornings, the tea spilled and collected around the base of the teapot and it is walking with my grandmother to the car afterward knowing that I should be savoring this moment because I do not have many moments left with her and the last time she hugged me she said thank you 嵘嵘 (my chinese name) and I wiped away tears after closing the car door.

houston is summer nights that stick to my skin, sitting on a park bench in some odd corner of the city, looking across an empty field toward a skyline I have known all my life. And I am staring out at those flat-topped skyscrapers inside their thin highway halo and my eyes are following those buildings up, up, up to a few small stars scattered above my city. my city, houston texas.

SL

# To Be **Black** Here

*Four students reflect on what it means to be Black at Princeton today.*

By NAZARETH NAPPER

In the first weeks of the academic year, many Black Princeton students noticed that what little presence they expected from their demographic was even lower than they had imagined. Those students looked around and asked each other... "Where are all the Black people at?!"

Their observations were accurate. The Black student population decreased from around 9% in the Class of 2028 to 5% in the Class of 2029, the lowest it has been since 1968, four years after the Civil Rights Act was passed.

To get their perspectives, I spoke to four Black underclassmen about what it means to be Black at Princeton today.

**Princess Fodeke '28**, from Hahira, Georgia, is a member of the Mathey College Council, the Black Student Union (BSU), the Edwards Arts Collective, and serves as Social Media Manager of the Food Bank Express.

Coming from a town of just over 3,000 people, she discussed how being from a rural area motivated her to apply to Princeton. "I wanted access to better opportunities that an Ivy League School could provide," she said.

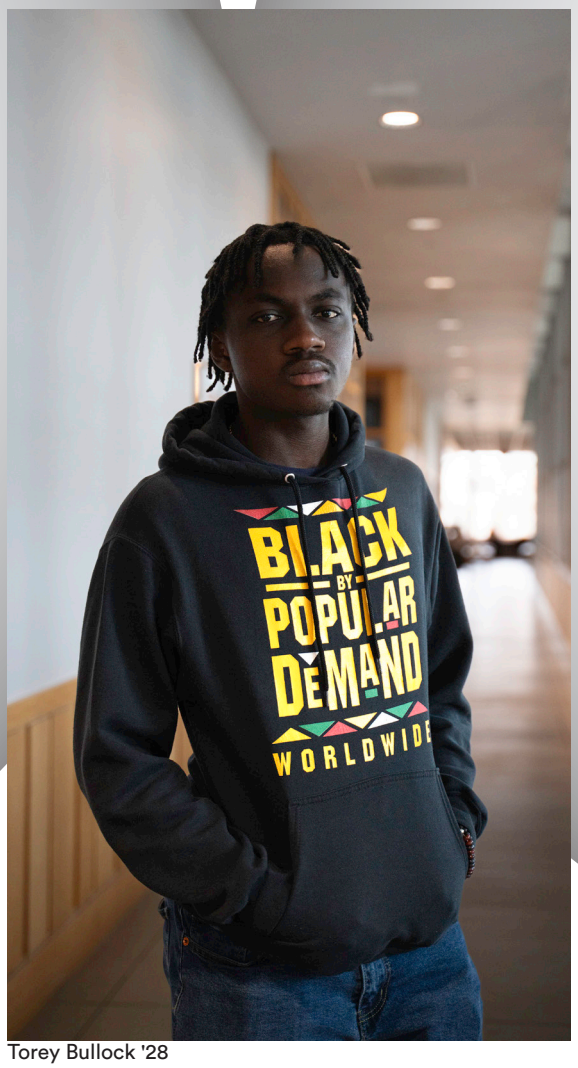
Fodeke expressed her views on the necessity of being herself as a Black student on campus. She's concerned about the future of the Black community at Princeton.

To Fodeke, Blackness at Princeton could mean many things. "But for me, it's just doing what I do here, because I am Black," she said. "That, to me, is being Black at Princeton: going through extracurriculars... as myself, not changing who I am."

Although assured in her identity, Fodeke stressed that it has been "disheartening to see [the] decline in the Black population recently." She added, "It's hard to decide what to attribute it to, because our year was the year they got rid of affirmative action, but we still had similar percentages of Black people to previous years." In contrast, the Class of 2029 "had a stark decrease."

Affirmative action policies began during the Lyndon B. Johnson administration, concurrent with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, with the specific purpose of giving Black Americans the opportunity to catch up in the workforce and in education. Programs were under the watch of the Office of Federal Contract Compliance and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC); other minorities were later added as recipients of these benefits. But in June 2023 — the year that most of the Class of 2028 applied — the Supreme Court reversed the policies in Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College and the University of North Carolina.

Fodeke added that she hopes to see some sort of alternative to affirmative action emerge from Princeton in the future to combat the waning numbers that have been reported. But that future is not guaranteed. "We'll have to see," Fodeke said.



Torey Bullock '28

**Torey Bullock '28**, from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, is Community Outreach Chair of the Generational African-American Students' Association (GAASA), active in BSU, and University Relations Chair of the Princeton Progressive Law Society (PPLS).

Given his connection to affinity groups and social justice work on campus, Bullock expressed concern that affinity group involvement may suffer. "With funding for [student] groups changing and decreasing for affinity groups, there has to be a change in how affinity groups try to collect funding for different events," he said.

Budget cuts of 5-10% across various University programs have impacted student life in many ways, including the end of Wintersession. Surprisingly, though, funding for different student groups has been left largely unchanged. To avoid the budget cuts impacting campus life, the university has increased the funding of the Projects Board, ODUS's primary funding source for Student Groups, by $20,000. The impact on affinity groups has yet to be reported.

Bullock speculates that lower populations will lead to a lack of a

PHOTOGRAPHY BY FAITH HO
PAGE DESIGN BY RAVEN REID

meaningful presence on campus: "[We] would have to change the whole structure of things so that we can create a stronger black community... So I think [there will] definitely have to be a change, and it's definitely going to be a challenge because of the low population."

**Emanuele Gerratana '29**, from Atlanta, Georgia, expressed that she has found her community in multiple ways on campus by interacting with others from the Atlanta metropolitan area, playing French Horn for the Wind Ensemble, and participating in affinity groups such as the Princeton African Students Association (PASA), BSU, and GAASA.

Gerratana said that the noticeable decline in Black student enrollment concerned her, "especially since I believe education to be a right, [including] higher education."

Gerratana's views seem concurrent with the original purpose of the Affirmative Action policies, stressing that "There shouldn't be any factors barring you from pursuing higher education." She believed this ought to be the case, given the strong emphasis on higher education in the job market.

Gerratana's concerns reflect another potential future decline outside of the classroom. "If these institutions continue to decrease their Black enrollment," she said, "We are going to see a stark decrease in Black professionals in our workforce, [and] this cycle is gradually going to continue."

Gerratana also feels that the university could do more to set a precedent that they and other higher education institutions should be committed to having demographics that are more reflective of the country, "and do more for those students when they are in these institutions to make them feel welcome."

To Gerratana, inclusion is a necessity. "If we are going to pride ourselves on a diverse campus with admits from all 50 states or multiple countries, then we need to do everything we can to make those students truly feel at home here," she said.

Emanuele Gerratana '29

**Kobi-Skye Padgett '29** is a student-athlete on the Track & Field team from Tampa, Florida. Being from the South was the main motivation to apply to schools in the Northeast, leading her to Princeton. She is also a member of Vote100 and BodyHype Dance Company.

Referring to what the recent decline in Black students says about the state of the country, Padgett said, "It says that we are not committed as a country to maintaining diversity, under the guise of racial fairness."

Padgett suggested that the country's history of racism has had lasting impacts on the Black community. She challenged what she saw as the University's parting from combating those impacts. "Black students can come here, have more opportunities, gain education, uplift their families," she said. "If we, as a country at large, aren't seeking to uplift, it just shows how we use racial bias when it's beneficial for some."

She added that "Race has been so determining of economic, social, and educational outcomes for the entirety of our country." Given this history, she thinks that the University should use racial identity "as a consideration because the country wasn't created on fairness," she said. "To now pretend like everyone's fair... or there should be equality and not equity, seems distorted."

Following the Supreme Court decision to remove affirmative action, the students I've interviewed and many other Black students on campus say to each other, "No one is coming to save us." According to them, this conclusion can mean two things: that some Black students may see no point in applying to Princeton, or that the ones who are here already will feel unsupported. Investments in and actionable change for Black people and all marginalized groups in the United States are no longer coming from the Federal Government and are not guaranteed ever to return. But many Princetonians feel like that fact is unjust.

"It would be silly to discount the hundreds of years of historical [and] racial traumas that have led us to the current moment," Padgett said. "To now be in a position where we're looking to say that race can't be considered as a factor for admission seems wrong, because race has been a primary factor in determining our history as a country."

---

*This article was edited and fact-checked as part of the* Nassau Weekly*'s journalism section,* Second Look. *Please submit corrections to* thenassauweekly@gmail.com.

# When blood is nipped and ways be foul

"Tears streamed down her face. She thought of her body gently sinking to the bed of the river, something lost."

BY SCARLETT HUNTINGTON

**I**

In the driver's seat of the car, a body curled up into itself. It was a pitiful scene, that of a fetal figure frozen in stillness. Then, racked by violent shakes. Then, still again. At one point, a hand extended out from the body to reach for the door. But the fingers were stiff, like those of a plastic doll, and unable to grasp the handle properly. The hand fell and retreated back into the body. Still again, save for an eyeball flickering beneath the eyelid and puffs of crystallized air hovering over dry lips.

The woman knew death came for her. Death, like a fox creeping out of a frozen burrow. It treads tentatively, but always advances.

When her eyes darted open, she sensed the fox was already on the hood of the car. She imagined it had leapt up noiselessly, gracefully—a smile twitched across her face as she thought of her cats at home, warm before the fireplace. The smile disappeared, though, when the fox's gaze pierced the windshield. She strained to lift her head and meet its eyes. In their amber irises, she searched for the glimmer of human apology. But instead, the black slits of pupils narrowed, striking something soft within her. The instinct to protect this softness—like a mother shielding her child—overwhelmed her fatigue. Her body bolted up, and she scrambled to open the car door. She pushed, but the door would not give against the packed snow, so she pushed again. She threw her shoulder into the door. She shoved again and again until the pain flowered from her shoulder, spreading to warm her fingertips.

Then, her body fell out of the car, into the snow. She limped to her feet and stumbled through the woods. The fox stayed perched on the hood of the car, watching her leave.

**II**

The woman arrived at the bank of a river, frozen over. She lay herself down gently in the center of the ice. If she had visited this river years ago, she would have seen how the water levels rose after a night of hard rain. She would have noticed how, overnight, the beaver's home was wrecked and the little paper boat impaled by a stray tree limb. She would have crouched by the riverbank, trailing her fingers through the rushing current, delighted by the cold shock on such a hot summer day.

Or perhaps, if she had come days later—once the waters had calmed, and sunlight dappled the landscape where tortoises hid among rocks and ferns blanketed the ground—she would have spied the lone fisherman. He waded until the water reached his waist. He cast his line out, then swung it up over his head—back and forth, he lengthened the whole of his stocky frame—and the woman would be thrilled by his precise choreography. After the fisherman had long left, the cold would descend and the river would freeze. Then it would thaw. Then freeze again. Somewhere in that time, the woman would die. Somewhere after the woman, two sisters will race on the ice, weaving plaits with their skates. One of the sisters will fall on her hands and knees and cry out from the cold.

But returning to the woman: her arms and legs were splayed on the ice as if to make snow angels. This, she thought, was better than the car, which trapped fear like stale air. The fear built pressure, making her contract around the childlike softness. Out here, everything was open. She could extend her limbs and press her shoulders into the ice. Her labored breaths grew steady. She waited for the fox. For the fox to emerge from the woods, to linger over her, perched on the riverbank. For the fox to leap down and rest on her chest. For its warm mass to rise and fall with her breath, until it grew still. She waited. But the fox did not appear.

Instead, there was a crack—a collapse in the ice a few feet from her—and desperate Life bursting forth. Nails clawed at the smooth ice, but slipped back into darkness. Knuckles tried to punch the ice from underneath, but grew bloody. The eruption of water struck the woman's body, sharp and stinging. Sluggish, her eyes fluttered open and searched for the disturbance, when another splash of water spurred her onto her knees. She clambered across the ice, towards the disturbance. When she was hovering just above the gap, she took a short breath and reached into the waters to grip a pale, slender arm. She used all her strength to pull the body out.

**III**

The man standing before her wore a neatly pressed black suit. His hair was combed over and plastic-looking. He was so clean he looked as if he should work in government, save for the flashy belt strapped around his waist, which suggested an affinity for old cowboy movies. The water seemed to have fallen off of him like latex—he betrayed no evidence of the violent scene she had witnessed just moments before.

She stood staring at him, until he

ART BY ELLIE CHOI
PAGE DESIGN BY RAVEN REID

took note of her, breaking the silence:

*"Can you point me in the direction of the playhouse?"*

"What?" she gawked.

*"The playhouse...where they put on plays,"* he responded with annoyance.

"Sir, are you okay?"

*"Tell me where the playhouse is."*

"I'm sorry, I don't know."

*"Where is the playhouse?"*

"Please, I don't know where the playhouse is."

*"Where is the playhouse?"*

"Please, I CAN'T HELP YOU."

...

Three paces of silence separated the two figures. Looking at each other, their breaths began to fall into the same cadence. The man's eyes softened:

*"Oh child, no need to get worked up."*

He stepped forward and scooped her up into his arms. He cradled her head as one does for a newborn — her grown-up legs dangled just above the ice. She surrendered to his embrace, thinking, now this must be the rest. She would die here, having saved one life to let go of another. Here, with this strange man.

This strange man, whose hand was now traveling from the crown of her head to the nape of her neck, letting her head fall slack. Whose fingers began to grip the soft flesh of her neck. Whose second hand was joining the first to wrap around her throat, gripping tighter and tighter. When she looked up at his face, for a moment, she thought there was no cause for alarm, for his composure remained the same. His eyes were cool and untroubled. Then, she felt her breath escape her—her eyes widened and she tried to scream, but she let out only a faint gurgle. Now it was she who clawed with desperation, pulling at his hands, scratching at his face, and kicking at his legs. She was not supposed to die like this, flailing about like a wounded animal. Images of sadistic burials flashed through her mind. Tears streamed down her face. She thought of her body gently sinking intoto the bed of the river, like something lost.

**IV**

Then, by some miracle, she wrestled free from his grip and fell onto the ice. She scrambled to her feet and ran. She ran and ran, like a bullet just fired. Pumping her arms, she closed her eyes so as not to be blinded by stray branches. Still, she was scratched and tripped and marred by the forest. She ran on. She ran until she found herself in a clearing. Driven forward, she spun in place, and as she spun, she craned her head upwards towards the trees and the stars in the black sky- until. Until she finally found stillness.

She stood there, shuddering in place. She shook from the cold, from the fear, from the pain. She shook for what she had lost—something she knew could not be put back. For she now understood that Fear was not something lodged in her chest like shrapnel, but rather something that was taken away. She began to think that it was not even something the strange man had taken, but something she had lost long ago. It was already lost to her when she shivered in the car, when she looked the fox in the eyes, when the man cradled her in his arms. It was already lost when she woke from dreams — heaving, sucking in air, still crying. When she placed her hand to her breast, trying to slow down her heart. When she pressed her hand through her ribcage, past her flesh, to feel around her chest. Her fingers were caught in a tangle of arteries, searching for the bad thing stuck there. Back then, she did not know there was nothing to be found.

Now, to fill the cavity, she sucked in all the air around her. She caught her breath faster than it could escape her.

**V**

An owl flew overhead and saw the small figure standing in the clearing. The owl's eyes were glazed with pity, thinking, she will collapse, she can not go on.

The owl watched as the woman straightened her back and walked up to the door of a small log cabin. She did not hesitate before turning the handle and crossing the threshold. She sat herself down in a pew in the back. No one in the audience turned back to look at her. Had they looked, they would not have been able to make out her battered form, as the stage lights cast her pale skin intoin darkness. On stage, a boy no older than sixteen stood in full armor. He raised his wooden sword high above his head as he cried out declarations of legacy and glory. With a swift lunge forward, he impaled his opponent. The audience cheered. The opponent stiffened his body, his tongue lolling to the side.

---

*A collapse of the* Nassau Weekly *perched on the shoulders of* Scarlett Huntington.

ART BY GEORGINA DOMINGO ALSINA
PAGE DESIGN BY ARIANNA HUANG

# wash your hands

"I missed the opportunity to stay. And you missed the opportunity to ask me to stay. I am now in a foreign land. You actually have become fashionable."

BY SRINA BOSE

I miss childhood the way the mouth misses the fallen milk tooth. Bleeding grief followed by the blurred assurance of resurgence, which never quite feels the same. I miss childhood the way the part-calf misses its mother's milk. Calfhood is coming to an end and the grass must be chewed now. I miss childhood the way the grass misses dew, the way the dew misses a curious finger, and a finger misses the nail, chewed away on occasion, and the nail misses the dirt, picked out in the name of beauty.

The dirt resembles the Bournvita milk I would chug every morning before school. I miss childhood as my hair is pulled apart. Morning combing sessions. I had to look nice for you. Ma did not know that her early morning efforts were catered purely for you. Each strand. A separation from the scalp. A distanced death. I dreamt of you, you know. I dreamt of your house. For some reason, your room has a giant poster of you against the wall. You dream of only you. I miss childhood as I run away. Running from one end to another—we are on the field. We play ice and water. I wait for you to water me. Remember the time we stole chips from the grocery shop? We ran. Our jagged breaths. The synchronisation of our steps. The familiar footpaths. Our hands almost interlocked for a split second. Ma sent us back to return it. I want to return my dream to you.

I have dreamt of writing to you. I have spoken just for you to perhaps, maybe, if possible, listen. I have dreamt of your home just to visualise where you may be at rest. Your sofa, your breath, your ease. Your bicycle leaning against the lamp post. Your address. I grieve knowing each other. I miss childhood the way grief misses material, something tangible, something to hold between her fingers instead of living a childhood of imaginary friends. My first friend, before you, was the air and so is that for grief.

Pink Floyd plays as I miss childhood. Yes, Ma was pregnant with me when she heard them live. It was her first concert—free tickets! Nevertheless, it was supposedly too loud which is why she left early. Still, I have technically been to a Pink Floyd concert. I told you this! Do you remember the bookmark-making business that I started with my friends at school? You wanted a Pink Floyd bookmark even though you barely read any books. I miss childhood the way my body remembers the pink and the blood and how your favorite band was my first.

Your lips are pink from eating cotton candy at the Christmas Carnival. You are my childhood and your sticky hands touch everything. You eat it because it is easy on the mouth. Your jaw is weak. You are slightly in pain. Your smile is a maze and I want to be a part of every turn. Toothless. Less. Lesser. Least. Gone. There you are. Wash your hands please. Remember, you performed at the fashion show that night? You! And fashion! I cannot believe it. I miss childhood. Lying down on random sofas. Strange ceilings. Loud doctors. Random adults applying eye drops and ear drops. I itch my eyes too much. I pick my ear when I should not. I forget to use soap. Once, I was Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer. An infection on my nose. It was so red. You poked it so many times. It hurt. My nose still has a bump. You taught me how to iron my clothes. You burnt your finger. I laughed. The following day, my finger got stuck between the hinge of the door. You laughed. Our fingers were now blue. So blue. Blue children. I miss childhood the way the blue misses my hand, and my hand misses the door, and I miss leaving. I missed the opportunity to stay. And you missed the opportunity to ask me to stay. I am now in a foreign land. You actually have become fashionable. I miss childhood. We invented so many games. Pen-fight. Two fat pens—sorry, writing devices, to be specific—placed strategically on the table. Who can knock the other one out first? The positioning of our fingers. The brand of the writing device. The different types of shots: butterfly, attack, normal. The pace. The force. The tension. We invented childhood. I realise that before you may not have been the most fashionable, but you were always beautiful. I miss childhood the way beauty misses youth and youth misses beauty and the blues miss everything. Blue hands, blue childhood, toothless smiles, and your hands. Please wash your hands.