

This week, we remember the good, the bad, and the ugly.

The Nassau Weekly⁵⁰

May 22, 2026

In Print since 1979 | Online at nassauweekly.com

Volume 50, Number 9

THIS STREET

THAT MAN

THIS LIFE





THIS STREET, THAT MAN, THIS LIFE

4 **Where We Came From,
Where We're Headed**
By Jonathan Dolce

6 **The Fugitive Bird**
By Ellen Kramer
Art by Ellen Kramer

8 **The Fraud**
By Sofia Cipriano
Art by Raven Reid

14 **What I don't understand is
the beauty**
By Ziyi Yan
Art by Sara Shen

15 **Grandmother's Wish**
By Jordan Angel
Art by Eden Reinfurt

17 **Ghazal for March**
By Emma Cinocca
Art by Nina Obidairo-
Danielsen

18 **Acquire and Read**
By Michael Grasso

Dear friends,

Change is in the air. All stones are unturned. Feeling a certain itching to explore. Fixtures seem like illusions now, walls seem eerily thin. Doors are deceptive, words are viscous. Oratory was invented for dubious matters, but we try our best not to lie in this magazine.

*This street holds its secrets like a cobra holds its kill
This street minds its business like a jailer minds his jail
That house there is haunted, that door's a portal to hell
This street holds its secrets very well*

Change is in the air. Feeling like Calvino's Marco Polo, relaying infinite invisible cities. Look at everywhere we've been, all the tales we've told. How pretty are these twenty pages? I am the luckiest traveler.

With love and gratitude,
Sasha Rotko, EIC

Masthead

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This Week:

REUNIONS MIXER

THE NASSAU WEEKLY

FEATURING A SPECIAL REUNIONS ISSUE!

Celebrating Volume

50

**FRIDAY
MAY 22ND
@ 5PM**

THE NASS ROOM (044 BLOOMBERG)

Verbatims:

Overheard in Firestone
Latino man hunched in a cubicle: "Call me fair trade the way i'm ethically sourced and highly sought after."

Overheard in Coffee Club
Barista: "Where is Caracas? My brother is going to work there next week."

Overheard in Murray Dodge
Much reviled truth-teller: "Orange Key selects for white evil."

Overheard on Cannon Green
Jewish man: "Why did it take Eisgruber 60 years to figure out that he was Jewish? Did he never look in a mirror?"

Overheard in Whitman Dining Hall
Public School Go-er: "My elementary school teacher gave us all hood names, I think mine was Niquisha"

Overheard in Choi Dining Hall
Tired Researcher: "Everytime I log into Slack it's like wow I'm just a wage chud aren't I."

Overheard in Small World
Statistic: "My parent's car got robbed by a gang called the Kia Boyz."

Overheard in Yeh
Gossiper: "She tried coke at the Puerto Rico princeternship and now thinks the startup life's for her."

Overheard at Late Meal
Flirt: "I kinda assumed you had a star wars phase because of your dad's charming neurodivergence."

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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 Monday. Include your name, netid, word count, and title. We hope to see you soon!

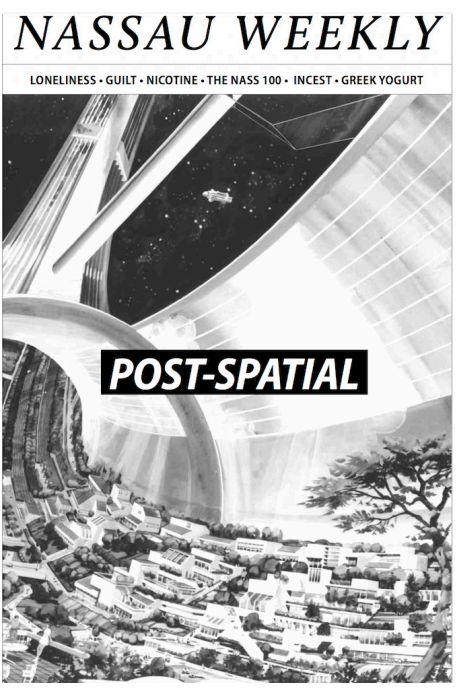
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Join us: We meet on Mondays and Thursdays at 5 p.m. in Bloomberg 044!

Where We Came From,

A brief history of our dearly beloved *Nassau Weekly*.

BY JONATHAN DOLCE

In my freshman year, I took on the long-delayed responsibility of digitizing the *Nassau Weekly's* archive, without realizing exactly how much work the task would demand. I had recently been awarded the role of Nass Historian, and I wanted to make an impression. This was my shot. In the corner of the *Nass* room sit a few filing cabinets containing decades of previous issues, dating all the way back to the magazine's inception in 1979. The issues had accumulated over the years and there was little intention to organization: issues were misfiled, some had crumbled and ripped pages, and others were even missing entirely. The older the issue, the more yellow and brittle it was. One motion and the pages would rip. Undeterred, I got to work. I flipped through every file of every cabinet, carefully cataloging exactly what we had in storage and subsequently organized them onto a massive datasheet. I often spent hours a session cataloging those



issues before emerging from the *Nass* chamber with ink on my fingertips due to the oxidized newsprint. That pile of magazines was both deferred paper and deferred responsibility, and newsprint does not age gracefully enough to be deferred forever.

It would take a year for me to catalog every issue in our storage and another to arrange their official digitization through the Princeton University Library. Soon, around 11,000 pages of *Nass* history will be available to everyone through the public domain. Within my time as Historian, and eventually Co-Managing Editor, I have sifted through more of the *Nass* past than perhaps anyone currently on staff. What that process made clear is that the history of the *Nass* is not simply a record of issues printed and distributed. It is the story of an institution that survived when it probably should not have, rebuilt every few years by people who had never managed a publication before. This is that story, set down here for the *Nass* alum and the curious reader who has not yet found their place on campus to write.

The *Nass* was not produced out of some vacuum: there was a single-issue publication that preceded it. It was called *Friday*. Launched in the spring

of 1979 by a group of University Press Club writers—among them Marc Fisher '80, Steve Reiss '79, and Sue Krones '79. *Friday* spawned out of a growing thirst for bold journalism. It was an ambitious project with longform profiles, arts criticism, and strong reviews. Unfortunately, the project was perhaps too ambitious and they could only scrape up enough money for its one issue. But their journey did not conclude there.

In the following summer, the founding members of *Friday* met again with a clearer sense of direction. Fisher recruited two entrepreneurial business managers, David Bookbinder '82 and Andrew Carnegie Rose '82 to manage the financial side of their new paper, something which was overlooked in the one prior. Plus, Rose had a car. Fisher also expanded his team to Robert Faggen '82. David Remnick '81, and Alex Wolff '79. This team, including many others not named here, found the journalism scene at Princeton to be stilted; neither *The Daily Princetonian* nor the Press Club offered what they were looking for. They wanted to write about life beyond the Orange Bubble, to critically engage with arts, culture, and the sciences in ways campus journal-

The Nassau Weekly

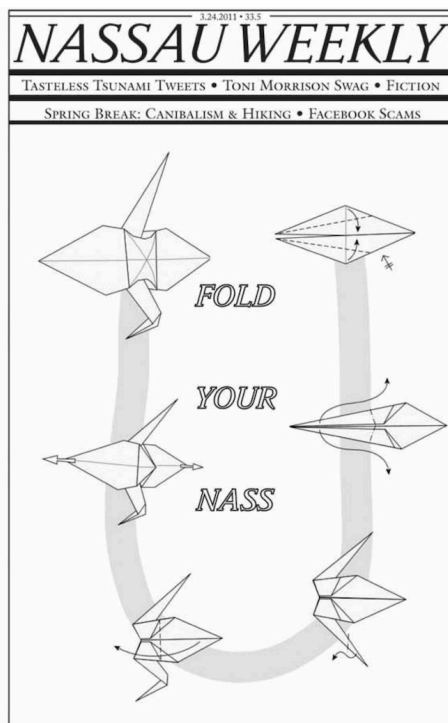


ism had never attempted; they wanted to bring the texture of the wider world into conversation with campus life

Where We're Headed

rather than shutting it out. And so they made another paper and settled on the name “Nassau,” surprised that no other on-campus publication had claimed the title first. The *Nassau Weekly* would have its debut issue the following fall.

That first issue was produced under conditions that would be unrecognizable to any current *Nass* staffer. The team had to lease a typesetting machine, an expensive behemoth that occupied half a room, onto which writers would type their copy directly, column by column, with no margin for error. A single typo meant reprinting the entire piece, cutting it out, and gluing it back down onto the layout page. Every night before printing, the members would often pull all-nighters in order to put the paper to bed, the room heavy with the smell of adhesive and pressure of a deadline in equal measure. It was, by all



rights, an absurd way to put out a newspaper. But issue after issue, somehow, it worked.

That was until one problem grew too

big to ignore: the publication was broke. Printing costs, typesetting fees, and an accumulated phone bill the staff hadn't known existed pushed the paper to the edge of collapse. By the early 1980s, the debt had grown to roughly \$35,000, the equivalent of nearly \$100,000 today. It was Sharon Lowe '85, the paper's first female publisher, who pulled the *Nass* back from the brink. In early 1985, she walked into Nassau Hall and convinced the Dean of Students to forgive a significant portion of the debt and, in a stroke of unlikely good fortune, to furnish the *Nass* room with a set of the newly released Apple Macintosh computers.

Over time, the paper evolved. The reporting that was prominent in the early days of the *Nass* eventually gave way to something looser and stranger: essays, criticism, humor, the quintessential verbatims and a brand of irreverence that became the *Nass*' signature. What had begun as an alternative newspaper became something harder to categorize. The physical paper itself changed over the years as well. The old newsprint was changed into the modern magazine-style print we distribute today, and just last year we expanded its page size to accommodate even more writing. Our basecamp moved from Holder tower to the basement of Bloomberg. We moved on from the Macintosh computers as well, which can still be found in the *Nass* room. Today, our Audiovisual department is as large and serious as ever, and we have revamped our editing process to ensure more credible and rigorous writing. The *Nass*, as it turns out, does not only move forward. Sometimes it reaches back. In 2024, former EICs Alex Norbrook '26 and Frankie Salinsky-Duryea '26 launched the debut issue of *Second Look*, our dedicated journalistic section that appears in almost every issue to date, returning to the journalistic spirit out of which the *Nass* was born.

Now 46 years in, there is no projecting how long any of this will last. The *Nass*

The *Nass* is thawing out after a long, cryotherapeutic winter hibernation.

The Nassau Weekly⁵⁰



February 18, 2026

In Print since 1979 | Online at nassauweekly.com

Volume 50, Number 1

has known moments of genuine precarity, years when it was not at all clear whether another issue would follow the last. But here we are. Those 11,000 pages, once yellowing in the corner of a basement room, will soon be readable by anyone in the world, and that feels like proof enough that something worth preserving has been happening here for a long time. This account is only a piece of the full history and is only able to hold so many names, so many stories, and the ones left out are no less a part of what the *Nass* was or is. The *Nass* will keep happening, I think. Maybe out of defiance of its death, maybe out of that restless desire to write which brought the whole thing into existence in the first place.

Former Managing Editor Jonathan Dolce is currently studying abroad. He now knows her very well.

The Fugitive Bird

“I could see its lonely gray body clearly now; it was a heron. We stared at one another for a long time.”

BY ELLEN KRAMER

When I was 17, I would ride my bike to the edge of the neighborhood at dusk. It was usually foggy, and droplets of water would hit my calves and spring up from the pavement. The slick road under my tires made a sound somewhere between the dry peeling of painter's tape and the scrape of a cat's tongue when it mistakes a human hand for fur.

Most times there was a gloomy gray hue in the sky, and I would see the last of it go down over the mountain ridge right when I'd reach the train tracks. The street came over a hill, where the last of the houses trailed off, then terminated at a dead end, the kind with a little circular nub of a road that is overgrown at the edges, dry in the summertime and muddy when it rains. Around that nub was a dense and shadowed forest, and parallel to the dead end were the train tracks. Further down, a rusty chain-link fence emerged in a confident line from the trees, dividing the dead end from a hollowed sewage pit beyond. It was a pit like the inside of a rectangular take-out container, a geometric indentation in the earth, carpeted in wild grasses and the last three feet filled with sludge. A few tires, cans, and one old car, rusting and half submerged in wastewater.

I'd been biking at dusk like this for a few weeks when I first saw the bird. Coasting down the street, growing somewhat bored with the dead end, I saw something slender and stick-like standing on the tracks. It did not move as I approached, and instead of using

my brakes, I dropped my feet rhythmically to the street and slowed gently. I could see its lonely gray body clearly now; it was a heron. We stared at one another for a long time. In the gloomy light, I felt too reverent to disrupt his dusk with words. There would have been something condescending in speaking to it like one might



to any other animal. After a few minutes, it gave me a look and disinterestedly pumped its broad wings in the air. I biked home.

I did not see the heron for another week. The second time, I came over the hill, the houses breaking off at my sides and turning into chain-link fences and dry shrubs, and coasted to the tracks. I was sitting between the curb and grass, picking at gravel, when it stepped from the woods. Unbirdlike, it walked to the tracks like a nimble acrobat. It ducked its head and rustled its feathers, preening, making me remember it was an animal, then it settled into its imposing stance and dignified stare. I looked down at the orange rubber bracelet

around my wrist. It was from summer camp, last year. At the town lake there was a swimming section, marked by a rope line of buoys and accompanied by a rectangle of imported sand. I was a lifeguard that summer but felt like a phony in the chair because my certification was nearly expired. I didn't really want to earn it back, though, it would just be another week-long course of learning how to heimlich a baby or zap a person back to life with electricity, and I'd never needed to use those skills anyway. Sometimes I would sit, watching a kid play in the sand. The kid would dig too deep and get to real dirt, churning up mud. I'd look up over the horizon line, and see the twin spires of the asylum. It was very small in the distance. When it was foggy, it was obscured. My dad worked there, as a teen. He said it wasn't actually that bad.

It was a few weeks later that the bird started bringing me things. There was no other way to explain it. One night, in that gray dim dusk, the only bright thing was an iridescent flower, placed on the ground before the tracks. The bird stood a few steps back, surrendering ownership. I dutifully took the flower and thanked the bird. There was an alien texture to the petals, like they were made of interwoven, leafy flesh, purple and bright aquamarine, pink and glowing yellow. The flowers trembled in my hands and I couldn't tell if it was because I was shaking, or if they had some life of their own, pulsing within their petals. I imagined that the bird could see the flower's reflection in my eyes.

The bird brought me many flowers. There was something attractive and appetizing about them. I thought of lotus eaters, but didn't get up the nerve to actually eat a flower myself. I tasted one, with my tongue on a petal once, and its chilly, velvet flatness startled me. I

never tried it again. The bird grew comfortable. It would stay close to me, and I would see the same interwoven iridescence in its feathers, too. In its pupils, I saw my own reflection, gray and dull.

Long ago, they shut the asylum down. Sometime after my dad stopped working there, the place was abandoned, its inhabitants moved, locked up and forgotten. The two gray spires like great tree trunks rose into the sky with no branches, dark against the horizon. They hid behind the fog, and I preferred not to look at them when they were visible.

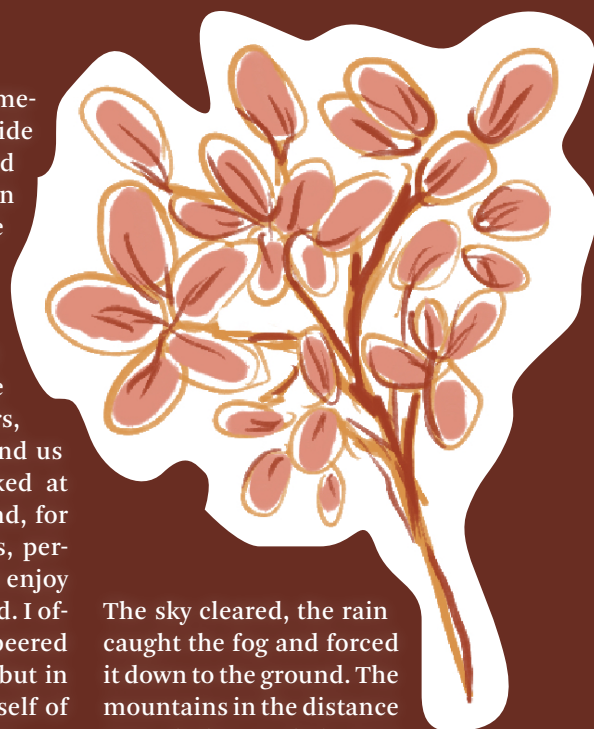
The bird began to prepare for something. It ruffled its feathers and preened more frequently, stood taller and brought me more flowers. Different kinds: like marigolds, with rows of spiraling, tight petals. Glowing roses, daisies, and lupines. Instead of being the natural marigold and daisy color, they were all blue, aquamarine, glowing from sinuous veins inside the petals, brilliant under velvet leafy skin. The lupines were my favorite, they formed columns of luminous purple and teal, grapelike buds nestled against one another, spirally decreasing in size. The bird urged me to eat them. It dropped them from its beak into my lap, then, when I didn't eat, snatched them up one by one, and tossed them into the air, catching and dramatically swallowing them, implicating me to follow suit. I did not. The bird never made a sound, but it would paw the ground with one leathery foot, duck its head and cock it to the side, staring with one brilliant eye. I blinked like a human. It would fly, frustrated, and leave me with its glowing tokens. I did not take these flowers home; I dropped the petals one by one into the wind behind me, and by the next day they would be gone, but they always left a spot of radiance in the street, a residual glow in the shape of the petals, pummeled and pressed into the pavement. Soon, the whole street was covered in the paste. It glittered, but only at dusk, and I glided nightly on the glowing trail.

I arrived one night and the bird was on its side, with bugs swarming its legs.

It had a faint smell to it, like something old and stale. I sat by its side on the edge of the curb and picked at the gravel in the crease between road and concrete, checking the bird for movement intermittently. Its feathers did not glitter as much as usual, and as the night wore on, the gloom of the world at dusk time seemed to overtake the bird. It had brought flowers, and they lay on the ground around us and glowed, but dyingly. I looked at the bird and hated it, for a second, for appearing and giving me useless, permanent flowers. I wished I could enjoy my dusktime rides again. I felt bad. I offered a flower to the bird, and it peered from the corner of one wild eye, but in trying to jerk itself up, sapped itself of energy and lay still. It did not move.

The bird closed its eyes, and for the first time I touched one of its feathers. It shifted aside and revealed individual iridescent fibers beneath like downy feathers, only each was a different color and magnetic, metallic. It was like a bird made of glittering metal; he was a mechanical creature, but more natural than myself. I saw my pale white arms before me as I made contact with his feathers, and pulled back, repulsed at my greyness. The bird was still breathing but shakily, and I could not sleep. I stared at the sky until it turned white and divided into blinding fractals within my eyes, and somewhere in the morning hours, I fell asleep.

The bird was gone when I woke up. I found one feather wedged under a piece of gravel the next morning, but it didn't look like the glittering metal that had shone brightly the night before. The day that followed was tentative. I decided not to bike that night, I did not want to know if the bird would return. Instead, I walked to the lake and sat in the lifeguard chair, high up on the peeling white-painted wood. It began to rain, the ripples on the lake widened. I knew the sand below me was not turning to mud, but as it dampened, it grew dark and muddled and it looked as though the beach had become a patch of ugly sand and puddles.



The sky cleared, the rain caught the fog and forced it down to the ground. The mountains in the distance grew darker as their trees caught rain and dampened, and I looked out and up, toward the sky and the horizon and the mountain's ridge.

Far away, the twin spires of the asylum were glowing. Slowly, a cloud of iridescence spread over the sky, floated and expanded overhead and coated the heavens from every corner. I saw the glitter land on the world around and coat everything in a layer of my bird's flower petals. I saw the petals land on my own gray skin and melt into it, then I rotated my arm and watched the line of shimmer shift along it with the failing light. I knew the flowers would all be dissolved by the morning, only ever visible again in the blue light of dusk, and only I would know to look for them on everything. I did not miss the great big iridescent bird, I saw him spread his wings over the world and scrape through the gloom with long legs dragging heavy across the sky, raining lavender and gold and shifting metallic light over all of it.

Ellen Kramer is a staff fiction writer for the Nassau Weekly.

THE FRAUD

On May 13, 2026, Princeton alumnus Ford Graham '86 was sentenced to 33 months in federal prison for orchestrating three investment schemes. His criminal charges only scratch the surface.

BY SOFIA CIPRIANO

I. DKTIGER61

On the morning of August 29, 2018, David Kahn '94—who lives minutes away from Princeton University, his alma mater—learned, to his horror, that he owed \$29,742 to the payment platform Square.

Kahn, who did not have a Square account, stared in disbelief at the letter he had just opened. It was a mistake; it had to be. When Kahn called Square to flag the transaction, he learned that it was authorized by an email address he did not recognize: *dktiger61@gmail.com*. Immediately, something clicked.

“Son of a bitch,” Kahn remembered thinking, “I bet it’s Ford.” That is, Ford Graham, Kahn’s neighbor, fellow Princeton alum, and former business partner. Kahn had heard rumours that Graham conned multiple people in town, but he hadn’t fully believed it. Now, Kahn thought, it made sense: only Ford Graham, who proudly bleeds orange and black, would steal money using the alias “dktiger.”

Eventually, Kahn would learn that Graham’s web of deceit spun even wider.

Since graduating Princeton in 1986, Ford Graham has repeatedly been sued over allegations that he failed to deliver promised payments—and, more recently, Graham was sentenced in Federal District Court for orchestrating three criminal schemes between 2012 and 2018, when he resided in the Princeton area: a Ponzi-like investment scheme, in which he siphoned at least \$2.6 million from unsuspecting investors; a payment processing scheme, in which he transacted with stolen credit cards using false credentials, including Kahn’s; and a business email compromise scam, in which he attempted to defraud investors of close to \$6 million dollars, according to numerous court records and interviews with over a dozen of his former classmates and acquaintances.

Graham was charged with 29 counts of fraud in a 2024 federal indictment. His charges were ultimately reduced: in August 2025, he pled guilty to 14 counts of wire fraud, one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud, and one count of securities fraud; his counts of aggravated identity theft and money laundering were dismissed. In total, he was held responsible for stealing around \$2.5 million from investors.

On May 13, 2026, nearly eight years after Kahn opened the Square letter—and nearly twelve years after two other victims began their legal battles—



FORD GRAHAM

Today as Princeton goes to elect its student government, the question arises, will it be filled with “student politicians” or students interested in politics? I claim to be one of the latter, thus I won’t make the promises many others have made; i.e. “more communications, organizations, and involvement . . .” I will, however, promise to be a fair, honest, open-minded and responsible member of the USG. To do that I need your vote. Thanks.

Graham was sentenced by Judge Robert Kirsch to 33 months in prison in Federal District Court in Trenton, New Jersey.

Ford Graham declined comment for this article.

II. A PREPPY PRINCETONIAN

Ford F. Graham arrived at Princeton in the fall of 1981 from Covington, Louisiana, with a southern drawl, a trove of cable-knit sweaters, and a family reputation to uphold. Graham’s father, John J. Graham ‘61, had been a

member of the Cannon Club and a class delegate; he later made a fortune in the oil industry.

At Princeton, Graham was on the swim team and dabbled in DJ-ing on old reel-to-reel tapes, according to a former roommate. In October of his freshman year, Graham ran for class delegate of USG. He lost the election, receiving three votes despite having five roommates, as another former classmate told me.

I spoke with dozens of Graham’s classmates, all of whom were shocked by the extent of his criminal record. One told me that Graham was “perhaps clueless, but not evil.” Another said he was a “gregarious, outgoing guy, easy to get along with,” adding, “if he could help you out, he would—he was a decent guy.” His classmates remember him, by and large, as a type: a preppy southerner. Many described him as charismatic; others said “charming” or “slick.”

Several told me that Graham, who initially pursued an engineering degree, struggled with his heavy math and science courseload. After sophomore fall, the University suggested he take some time off, according to the former roommate. That spring, he interned in Washington, D.C., for then Vice President George H.W. Bush.

He came back to campus as a Geosciences major and joined the eating club Colonial.

Graham’s father seemed to loom large over his Princeton experience. In October 1985, Graham was involved in an ultimately unsuccessful fight to revive Cannon. (The club closed its doors in 1973 and only reopened in its original building in 2011, as Cannon Dial Elm.) Graham’s thesis, entitled “The Caddo-Pine Island ‘oil mine’ project: an economic, geologic, and technical review of the venture,” suggested his interest in his father’s industry of choice.

In his yearbook photo Graham smiles wide, displaying the blindingly white, square teeth that his classmates remembered; he’s handsome, with

dark hair and plain features. In addition to Colonial and swim, he's listed as a member of band and a USG delegate. His yearbook quote is taken from Luke 12:48: "Where man has been given much, much will be expected of him."

III. LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

Many of Graham's former acquaintances and coworkers told me that Graham's unscrupulous business habits echoed those of his father. John Graham was connected to the Prudential securities scandal of the 1980s, in which over 300,000 investors were defrauded out of \$8 billion tied to risky oil-and-gas investments sold by Prudential's brokerage arm.

According to Kurt Eichenwald's 1995 book *Serpent on the Rock*, Graham Resources—a Louisiana-based resources fund run by John Graham—invested more than \$1 billion raised through Prudential-Bache partnerships. Eichenwald reported that John Graham consistently misrepresented information to investors and misappropriated funds.

The Prudential-Bache scandal resulted in sweeping civil litigation and criminal investigations, culminating in major settlements in the 1990s. John Graham was never criminally charged. He "continue[s] to insist that nothing improper ever occurred," according to Eichenwald.

John Graham is still alive and resides in Louisiana. He did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

Ford Graham navigated his first few post-college years just as *Serpent* hit shelves. He worked as a financial analyst in Texas before going to law school at Tulane, where he met his wife, Katherine. Over the next few years, he worked at a number of companies. In 1994, he and Katherine moved into their home on Prospect Avenue in Princeton. In 1997, Graham founded Vulcan Capital Management, a private equity firm specializing in energy and natural resources investments, with another Princeton alum. (Graham's Vulcan Capital Management and its subsidiaries are in no way related to Paul Allen's Vulcan Capital.)

In October, I first spoke with Robert Lane '94, one of the other Princeton alumni who worked at Vulcan. During the time he was at the company—from

1998 to 2002—Lane described the two as "very close." Lane was an occasional guest at the Grahams' house in Princeton.

When Lane worked at Vulcan, the company mostly invested in energy projects in Wyoming. But they would continue to grow. The company's website, likely last updated two-ish decades ago, boasts that Vulcan completed over 35 transactions world-wide—spanning Nigeria, Iraq, and Bangladesh—worth over \$800 million. Vulcan employed dozens of people over the years. Ford was ever the professional: he showed up every day freshly shaven wearing a suit and tie and braces. He looked the part of a successful businessman.

"Ford had sound business ideas at the time, and he felt that as long as he could bring them to fruition, everybody would make a lot of money," Lane told me.

"I didn't see the behavior that he's being accused of right now when I was working for him," he said, "but I saw him starting to go down a path." Lane occasionally felt that Graham obscured information from his team. In one deal, for instance, with the private market investment firm Siguler Guff, Lane said that Graham hid that the capital he presented as equity was actually puttable debt—money that could be demanded back. And when it was, the investment blew up, according to Lane.

Graham "felt they took the investment away from him unjustly," Lane said, even though the deal collapsed because Graham had misrepresented funds.

Graham, he recalled, always felt like others were preventing him from succeeding. "When people feel they get screwed over, again and again, there's certainly the temptation to say, 'Well, I guess this is how the game is played, and I'm going to play the game this way.' Everything that he had been accused of doing afterwards—it almost felt like, to me, that they were some of the things he felt had been done to him," Lane said.

Lane left the company in 2002 and moved from New York to Texas, where he currently resides. In late 2003, Lane sued Vulcan Capital Management in a Texas District Court for breach of contract. The suit, which was acquired by the *Nass*, alleges that Vulcan ceased



paying Lane on August 1, 2002, without actually terminating his employment. The case was settled between the two parties.

In retrospect, Lane said that Graham did things that were "less than professional"—including denying him payment—although he never noticed anything outright criminal.

Lane also mentioned that Graham frequently recorded his phone conversations with people. While technically legal—New York is a one-party consent state for recording—it left a bad taste in Lane's mouth: Graham seemed to be constantly preparing himself for litigation.

And litigation came.

IV. FORD'S TOY

In 2003, shortly after Lane parted ways with Vulcan, President George W. Bush promised to turn the lights on in Iraq. To modernize the Iraqi power system, the U.S. government contracted with several companies—including Washington Group International (WGI). Vulcan AMPS—a subsidiary of Vulcan Capital Management—enlisted a saleswoman named Susan Flannigan to sell two mobile electric generators to the government, through WGI, for a total of \$22 million dollars.

But Vulcan did not have two mobile electric generators—they had one, and it was incomplete. The generator didn't work when it got to Baghdad, where it was ultimately blown up by an insurgent bomb just after being repaired, according to Marc Stadtmauer, Flannigan's lawyer.

Vulcan "did not tell the government



or Susan that the generator was not complete and that they did not have the technical ability to build the additional generators,” said Stadtmauer. Vulcan was also unable to fulfill a related sale of eight gas turbines, which were meant to be paired with the generators as mobile power plants. A Defense Contract Audit Agency’s audit report of WGI found over \$11 million in questioned costs related to the sale of the turbines, meaning that Vulcan billed the government for more than their products were worth.

Not only did Vulcan allegedly misrepresent the project—Flannigan never received her commission, valued at around \$4 million, for her work as a negotiator, according to numerous court documents. “They had the money. They just refused to pay,” said Stadtmauer, who Flannigan began working with in the aftermath of her initial suit back in the early 2000s. A federal jury in the Southern District of New York ruled in her favor in 2014, a judgement that was reaffirmed in appeals. She has yet to receive the money she was promised.

Flannigan was in and out of Vulcan’s New York office while she was working on the deal. There, she crossed paths with David Kahn. Kahn, who was introduced to Graham by his good friend from Princeton, Robert Lane, collaborated with Graham on a company called Princeton Technology Partners starting in 2002. The company shared an office with Vulcan.

Throughout my reporting, I kept learning of individuals who—like Robert Lane and Susan Flannigan—allege that Graham simply did not pay them, in violation of contractual agreements. One of these individuals, who asked to remain anonymous out of fear of retaliation from Graham, also told me that Graham often moved money around without alerting bookkeepers. “The bookkeepers would call in payroll, and he would empty the account

because he wanted to do something else with the money,” they said.

Two other individuals who worked at Vulcan similarly described the company’s culture. One said, “I think he lied a lot about money. It seemed like he was always making excuses about paying one person, waiting for money from another.”

After 2006, Vulcan hired someone to streamline finances, and after that point Graham had less control of the books, according to the other anonymous source, who ceased contact with the company in 2008. “Vulcan was actually a good [private equity] company,” they told me, but “Ford used it as his own toy. He made some questionable decisions.”

“If there was ever an example brought before me on a witness stand to typify what I believe Wall Street and the general business community do not want to put forward as how business should be run, Ford F. Graham has played that role,” wrote Judge Samuel Fredman in his decision in *Norwest v. Vulcan Capital Management* in 2007. Fredman ruled that Vulcan failed to pay Norwest funds connected to an investment in Bangladesh—one of the many instances in which the company was accused of failing to make promised payments.

Again and again, Graham found himself in court. Beginning in 2004, Graham and his co-founder were sued by Vulcan board members Michael R. Stewart and Daniel J. O’Hare, who alleged that the defendants improperly controlled the company and denied them their decision making rights, according to a November 2011 decision in the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. The parties entered a settlement, but Stewart and O’Hare alleged that they did not receive all of the money they were promised, according to the document. They argued that Graham used a number of unsavory tactics to avoid payment, including creating new corporate subsidiaries to shield funds and putting other subsidiaries in bankruptcy to delay litigation.

A jury trial ruled in the plaintiffs favor; they were awarded almost \$8 million in total damages. The judgement was later reduced but the decision reaffirmed, according to the 2011 document.

In 2010, a Vulcan executive testified as a part of the O’Hare and Stewart trial that the company was essentially out of business. Vulcan was evicted from their office due to outstanding rent payments, according to a July 2011 deposition of Graham.

Although Vulcan was defunct, Graham’s investment days were far from over.

V. THE SCHEME

If you were part of the Princeton country-club scene in the 2010s, you may have known Ford Graham. He lived about a mile down from Princeton’s eating clubs. He golfed at Bedens Brook, attended Princeton University football games, and hosted frequent cocktail parties. At P-Rades, he went all out in orange and black, pulling a cart with his son, Jackson, behind him. One photo of him, taken during reunions not long before his arrest, pictures him smiling alongside his wife, an ‘86 emblazoned on his shirt.

Around 2012, Graham began making investments on behalf of his acquaintances in the Princeton area. According to Graham’s federal indictment, he ran a Ponzi scheme, shuffling Victim-1’s money to Victim-2 and so on. Graham would approach an investor with an offer, cajole them into pledging their money—often by falsely telling them that he, too, was investing in a given asset—and later provide fake documentation to justify delayed payments, according to the indictment.

According to the 2019 civil complaint—filed against both of the Grahams by the New Jersey Attorney General on behalf of the New Jersey Bureau of Securities—Katherine collaborated with Ford by acting as a “cheerleader” for his investment projects, and, in at least one instance, made misleading statements to investors. Katherine is also referred to as a co-conspirator, but not a co-defendant, in Ford Graham’s 2024 federal indictment. She is not currently facing any charges. Katherine did not respond to requests for comment.

Sometimes, the investments that Graham orchestrated yielded profits for investors. But other times, returns never came through, according to the federal indictment, which states that Graham raised millions of dollars from

high-net-worth investors, “including, but not limited to Victim-1 and Victim-2,” and demonstrated a pattern of fraud.

John Pecora—“Victim-1” in case files—told me that he thought “there were many other people in Princeton that were burned, but they were more worried about their social status than justice,” deterring them from legally pursuing Graham.

“I was not,” he added.

Pecora first met Graham around 2008; both men’s sons played in the same Pop Warner Football league. He told me that Graham presented himself as a successful oil and gas investor. In late 2009, Pecora invested in a company that Graham introduced him to called Miller Petroleum—a massively profitable endeavor for Pecora, but not Graham. This, Pecora told me, infuriated Graham. “That’s why he kept chasing me,” he said—to recover money that he viewed as his.

According to Graham’s federal indictment, in 2013, Graham induced Pecora into investing \$1.5 million in Speciality Fuels Bunkering (SFB), an oil business in Alabama. But the money went straight into Graham’s pockets. Graham eventually extracted hundreds of thousands more by soliciting legal fees purportedly related to SFB, according to the same document.

Pecora started pursuing Graham legally in 2014.

“I laid the civil case in their lap,” he said. He had sent an abundance of evidence to the IRS and FBI; he felt as though “they fumbled for years.” In the meantime, Graham continued to defraud others.

Pecora won almost \$2.8 million in his civil suit against Graham, according to the final judgment of the case, filed in 2017. He has yet to receive the money he was promised.

Unbeknownst to Pecora at the time, Graham was using his money to make payments to the individual referred to in *USA v. Ford Graham* as Victim-2, portraying those payments as investment returns, according to the indictment.

I met Victim-2—whom I’ll call Bob—at the Nassau Club for lunch in December. In the lobby of the Club, which requires membership or a direct invitation to enter, he told me about his

family’s legacy in the town of Princeton.

Bob recounted his history with Graham—they’ve known each other for over two decades. Their now adult children were in the same baby group; they frequented the same social circle.

Given their history, when Graham came to Bob and proposed an investment in an oil and gas company, he was inclined to trust him. His investment prospectus seemed legitimate. And Graham was persuasive. “He definitely had a silver tongue, almost too silver. And his father was polished the same way,” Bob told me.

In two deals with Graham, he made over \$100,000. Eventually, though, around 2014, Graham stopped providing returns at all—and Bob realized the money was never going to come.

“He bullshitted like crazy,” said



Bob. For a year and half, he remembered Graham insisting, “Oh, it’s coming. Don’t worry, everybody’s gonna do well.”

Bob assumed that the company Graham had bought into was simply a losing proposition—he had messed up. “I think he didn’t really know what he was doing, and he lost money on that [investment], which cascaded and escalated to his fraudulent deals,” he told me.

Eventually Bob began to confront Graham. He recalls telling him, on one occasion, “You’re not getting away with this. Pay me back, and we won’t have any problem. But if you don’t pay me back, I’ll take you down.”

Soon after this conversation, Bob was watching his son swim in the pool at the Bedens Brook club when Graham approached him.

“Guys smarter than you have tried to take me down,” said Graham, leaning over Bob, who was sitting on a lounge

chair.

The latter remembers responding: “They went after you civilly, and I’m not doing that, Ford—I’m going after you criminally.” Bob went to the FBI and IRS around 2014.

“I was shocked that anybody would do anything like this in this community. Especially being a Princeton grad—and a very active Princeton grad,” said Bob, who described Graham as very “rah rah rah” about Princeton.

“It’s a shame that it took so long,” he said, lamenting that law enforcement didn’t “nip this in the bud sooner.” He reflected how humiliating it was to know that Graham was essentially living off of stolen money, including his own, for years. According to the 2019 civil complaint, Graham spent investors’ funds on expensive vacations, his country club membership, and his daughter’s Lawrenceville tuition.

Reading over Graham’s legal files, I am reminded of the portrait Eichenwald paints of his father in *Serpent on the Rock*. A lifestyle full of languid hunting days and luxurious dinners was “a lifestyle Graham craved,” Eichenwald writes, describing how John Graham hosted Prudential-Bache executives at a club called Longleaf and funded their lavish vacations—all the while billing his unsuspecting investors.

Chasing Graham for over a decade was “nauseating,” Bob said. “I just want to know if he thought it was worth it.”

By 2017, the Grahams were effectively socially exiled in Princeton due to swirling rumours about Graham’s investment activities, as Graham noted when given the chance to speak during his sentencing. That year, they moved to Nellysford, Virginia, to care for Katherine’s ailing mother. The family kept their Princeton home until 2019.

VI. GOOD FENCES MAKE GOOD NEIGHBORS

David Kahn is a standup neighbor. Clean-cut, with cropped white hair, Kahn lived a few houses down from Graham for over a dozen years. Kahn took Graham’s son under his wing, even teaching him Krav Maga. When the Grahams travelled, he watered their flowers, shoveled their driveway, and brought in their mail.

Professionally, Kahn specializes in “defensive tactics training and hand-to-hand combat training,” consulting with law enforcement and military and running classes for civilians along with writing patents and developing technology projects. Around 2016, he began writing a patent creating a blockchain technology to help people vet others—with the goal of preventing fraud and identity theft.

Graham “thought it was a great idea,” Kahn said laughing. At one point, he told me that Ford even pledged financial support to the project, but never delivered.

Kahn formally parted ways from Graham professionally in 2008, after Princeton Technology Partners closed. “I did not leave him on bad terms. I did not suspect anything was off,” Kahn said.

They remained neighbors. According to Kahn, around 2012, he began sporadically supporting Graham’s kids financially, contributing to costs like food and basic necessities. Despite the family’s appearance of obvious wealth, Kahn did not think much of these requests. Graham always said he was “asset rich and cash poor,” Kahn recalled. “I didn’t want [his kids] to feel the financial pressures that Graham was facing.” He lent Graham around \$30,000 over the years, none of which was repaid, he said.

At one point, Kahn, like many others, made a successful investment through Graham—a profit of \$5,000 for investing in an oil company in Alabama.

Before the fraudulent Square transactions, Kahn was Graham’s occasional defender. Around 2016 and 2017, “People were hurling accusations at him—I said I can’t see him doing that. I wanted to believe in the better of him,” he said, on a phone call with me in October. Bob told me that when he first met Kahn, he warned him about Graham—and Kahn stuck up for him.

“Everything’s black and white to him,” Robert Lane said of Kahn, whom he affectionately calls Davey. Whereas Graham, he said, “played the game,” operating in an ambiguous legal and moral zone, Kahn is a straight-shooter. After learning about the fraud, Kahn sent the FBI 183 color-coded files to support their investigation.

Kahn did not lose money as a result of Graham’s identity theft, but he said that the investigation into fraudulent

Square transactions conducted in his name cost him an FBI contract before he cleared himself.

“The damage goes beyond money,” he said at Graham’s sentencing—Graham undercut Kahn’s reputation and shattered his trust.

Soon after receiving the Square notification, Kahn confronted Graham in the latter’s living room. The two sat chatting, Graham “in his typical jovial bullshitting mood,” Kahn told me. The mood of the conversation soon shifted.

“I received a bill from Square for almost 30,000,” Kahn recalls telling Graham. He accused him of being the force behind `dktiger61@gmail.com`, which Graham denied.

When recounting the story, Kahn, who emphasized that he’s trained to read body language, said that Graham “gave every kinesthetic indicator that he was the fraudster.”

“You better make things right with everybody,” Kahn told him before walking out.

The two exchanged a series of emails over the subsequent years; Graham consistently denied any wrongdoing. “Your words of anger are misplaced and your facts are simply wrong,” Graham wrote to Kahn over email in 2021.

“It’s great to see that this day has come,” Kahn also said when given a chance to speak at the sentencing. “I hope there is a reckoning for Ford and family.”

VII. WHERE’S THE DELOREAN?

On November 21, 2019, Ford and Katherine Graham appeared in Judge Loretta Preska’s courthouse in the Southern District of New York to fight a subpoena request in the Susan Flannigan case. For years, the Grahams maintained that they were unable to pay her commission and consistently avoided financial disclosure. Unbeknownst to them, Judge Preska had ordered the Graham’s arrest that day for their failure to comply with discovery requirements. When they entered the courthouse, U.S. Court Marshals arrested them.

“I remember his face. He was speechless,” said Stadtmauer, who was present as Flannigan’s lawyer.

The Grahams served a short stint in the Metropolitan Correctional Center, placing them in the distinguished

company of former MCC inmates Bernie Madoff and Jeffrey Epstein. During this time, Graham filed for bankruptcy. On the very day he filed, a DeLorean—the silver, spaceship-like car associated with “Back to the Future”—worth almost \$100,000 sat in the garage of his house on Prospect Avenue, according to a deposition of Katherine Graham from January 2020.

Graham’s bankruptcy paperwork reveals dozens of LLCs associated with his name. What is lacking is also revealing: Kahn, Bob, and others told me that Graham bragged about having money in offshore bank accounts, which does not appear in his bankruptcy tallies. (At the sentencing, Saverio Viggiano, Graham’s attorney, stated that during the federal authorities’ investigation of Graham, subpoenas were sent to foreign companies, but no word was heard back.)

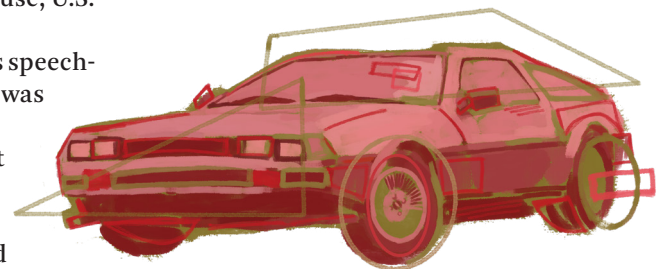
Absent also is the DeLorean—which Kahn told me he has a particular interest in, as it was promised to him as collateral for his loaned money and then later as restitution, through a civil lawsuit Kahn filed.

“I thought putting him in jail would make him do the right thing and provide financial disclosure, but it didn’t. He’s one stubborn guy,” said Stadtmauer. Graham’s bankruptcy filing was ultimately unsuccessful since he was not transparent about his assets, as Judge Kathryn C. Ferguson decided in 2023.

Katherine Graham was released from MCC shortly after her arrest, on November 27, 2019. Graham was released two months after, in late January.

Christopher Olsen, Graham’s attorney at the time—he and Graham have not spoken in several years—told me that, despite all his preppiness, Graham fit in well enough in jail.

“Ford can get along with just about everybody. When he was in jail for the Flannigan case, he got put in jail for contempt of court, which is extraordinarily rare. When he was there he got along with



hardened criminals,” said Olsen.

After MCC, Graham went home to Virginia, where he was later arrested again—this time, on criminal fraud charges—in March 2021. He has been on pre-trial release since April of that year.

VIII. THE SENTENCING

Almost a year after he pled guilty to 16 counts of fraud, Ford Graham was sentenced by Judge Robert Kirsch in Trenton, New Jersey.

Graham was brought into the courtroom in a wheelchair pushed by a slim young man with a mustache—his son, Jackson—alongside Katherine, who wore a dark skirt and animal skin-patterned shawl.

Present in the courtroom as well were Kahn and Bob. Outside the courtroom, we met with John Pecora. Pecora’s disgust towards Graham was palpable. He stormed off before the official proceedings began, after the prosecutor privately told the victims that he was recommending a 33 month sentence for Graham. When I later spoke to him on the phone, he described Ford’s lenient sentence as a “travesty,” pointing out that each of Graham’s wire fraud charges carry a maximum of 20 years in prison.

He said that “this is a double travesty” since Katherine was not charged. Ford Graham continues to deny her involvement in his criminal actions.

Throughout the proceedings, Judge Kirsch emphasized the sophisticated nature of Graham’s crime. At one point, he pulled out a piece of paper with a visual representation of Graham’s fraud scheme: criss-crossed lines mapping money transfers from account to account, through U.S. institutions and international ones, and through various LLCs and shell companies that Graham set up throughout the years.

He declared it “Court Exhibit 1,” saying that the diagram “demonstrates the complex, intricate web spun by Mr. Graham—and presumably his co-conspirators—better than any prose could.”

At one point during the proceedings, Viggiano, Ford’s attorney, suggested that one may or may not believe that Graham is a fraudster. The judge interrupted him. “The facts are the facts,” he said: Graham committed fraud.

Both Viggiano and the prosecutor

present in the courtroom, Richard Shephard, declined to comment for this article.

When given the opportunity to speak, Graham apologized to his victims. He told the court that he was “deeply shamed and humbled by my mistakes.”

“I apologize most of all to my wife and family, who had no knowledge of my criminal actions,” he said. He expressed a desire to focus on a life of service.

Around two dozen character letters were submitted on Graham’s behalf before the sentencing. Nicolas Tétrault, a former Montréal politician, also attended the trial as a family friend. He told me over the phone that Graham saved his son’s life after a 2025 drowning incident. Canadian doctors scheduled a date to unplug him from life support—but the Tétraults had been told by experts in the United States that he could be saved. Tétrault reached out to a litany of people for help—and he was led to Ford Graham, who used his Louisiana connections to help the Tétraults move their son to a different hospital. He recovered in a Louisiana clinic.

“I heard everything in court, but there’s always two sides to the story, and I know this person has a lot of good in him as well, a lot of generosity,” Tétrault said.

Graham and his attorney asked for leniency given Graham’s medical conditions; his mobility was severely impaired following a tractor injury he sustained in September. He said that his doctors gave him a 60 percent chance of never being able to walk again. He described it as already the worst punishment he could face.

“I watched how handicapped people at MCC were treated,” Graham said, claiming that he will have no chance of recovery in jail. He and his lawyer requested home incarceration, prompting Judge Kirsch to ask a court attendant to find Graham’s mother-in-law’s “palatial estate,” which he resides in, on Zillow: a 6,300 square foot home worth over \$1 million. Judge Kirsch was sympathetic but firm: he said that prison time seemed necessary to deter Graham from further criminal acts.

He also noted that Graham’s sentencing was initially scheduled for December 2025, and has been delayed multiple times. “I will not entertain an application to delay [Graham’s jail

time] for additional orthopedic surgery,” he said, “if there is any plan afoot to do so.”

“If he’s not stopped, he will continue. There’s no doubt in my mind,” said Bob when the judge gave victims the opportunity to speak.

Judge Kirsch described Graham’s crime as one of privilege. He repeatedly underscored that Graham is not only a Princeton graduate, but also holds a JD and MBA, both from Tulane. Someone with his credentials is “too clever, in common parlance, for a ‘straight rip,’” he said; Graham traded on his relationships and affiliations to defraud those closest to him.

After the sentencing, Jackson Graham sent me a statement on behalf of his family. “We are thankful and deeply humbled for the outpouring of support from close friends and family. Their prayers and unfailing kindness through these dark days have sustained us. We will forever remember and cherish their love and compassion. We look forward to the day when we can thank each of them in person. In the meantime we respectfully ask for our privacy,” he wrote.

Judge Kirsch, for his part, reflected that sentencing is the most difficult part of his job. He’s sentenced thousands of people, but he would characterize few as truly evil. “I’ve seen it a handful of times,” he said. “You’re not in that category for sure,” he told Graham, “But you created a labyrinth of fraud that did cause harm.”

Judge Kirsch sentenced Graham to 33 months for the 16 fraud charges he pled guilty to, with supervisory release for three years after his time in jail. He was given 90 days to voluntarily surrender to the Bureau of Prisons. Victim compensation has yet to be determined, as of May 17.

When leaving the courtroom, Kahn and Bob looked glum.

Bob lamented wasting his day—and 12 dollars on parking—to attend the sentencing, just to find out that, according to him, Graham “got off easy.” Yesterday, he said, Graham caused him yet another sleepless night. It added insult to injury: more stolen money and more stolen time.

Sofia Cipriano is a contributing writer and co-section head for Second Look.

What I don't understand is the beauty

BY ZIYI YAN

From here the mountain looks like moss,
but there are worse things that could look like moss.

Bodies, for one. The first time passing most things,
I did not know they could be looked at. God,

I was so proud. I thought I was pure movement.
Like I could prove the world's ugliness by grafting it

into me. My retort to vapid gardens was rolling in dirt.
I refused sunscreen. Do you think we are outside?

Instead of this painting I see air, tugging itself apart
with beauty. I used to say things like this,

my body petrified with all the wind I swallowed
and kept. When asked what I was, I refused want,

and it got me closer to everywhere. I don't know
what changed between this and the other way

of unmaking. I just sat at the beginning of the ocean
until the air around me was no longer a meeting point.

I saw old friends at the beach and bit new color
into my arm. My life, ripe and fat with color,

was not gifted so much as thrown at them. Another retort.
See this peace, staked so carefully in the body

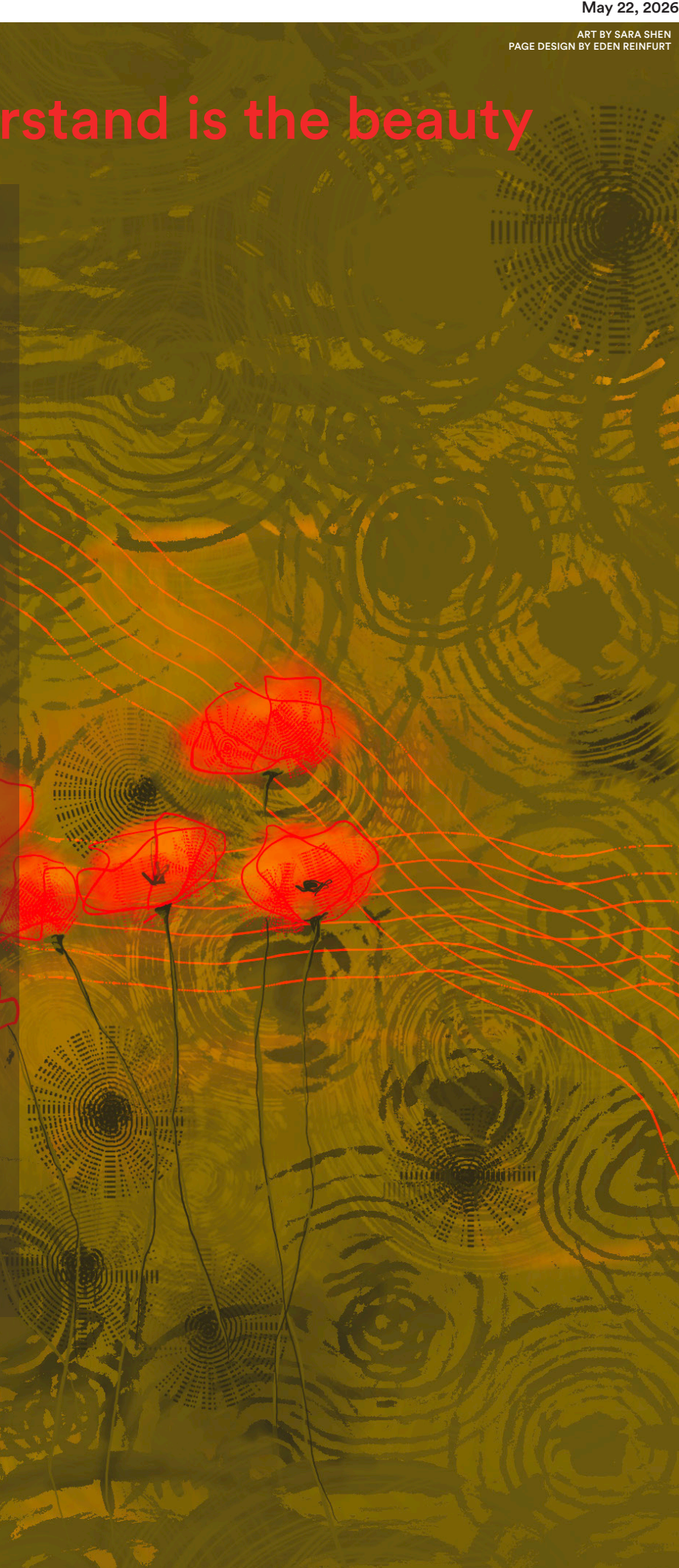
that there was no first time it entered? I don't tell you
to nudge myself back into the world. Here, I won't look

for anything, but there will be a solid field of red
or a wound full of poppies. Habit says to fold my legs

before it and wait for a pulse, but I am no statement
anymore. While we spoke, the landscape balled up

with too much staring. By now, I could peel away
this painting and not the wall. You hold me

not from wanting, maybe something else?
This time tomorrow, we will barely need to look.



GRANDMOTHER'S WISH

"Mira giggled without looking at Grandmother in the face. She looked like a child angel, her face haloed by the light that shone through the open front door."

BY JORDAN ANGEL

Mira's shrill hello sparked through the sick-and-sanitized smell of Grandmother's house as she skipped over to give Grandmother's hand a squeeze. The old woman winced. She stretched out a thin arm, papery skin sagging, to caress the girl's soft cheek and shifted in response to a shiver of pain that shadowed her movement.

"You're sure you can take care of Mira, Mom? Your pain meds won't make you too sleepy?" Mira's mother asked, one hand on the doorknob.

Grandmother looked up from her easy chair as she ran her fingers through Mira's hair. It fell in small waves just like her mother's and grandmother's own. Mira seemed visibly older, maybe taller, since Grandmother had come back from the hospital, although it had only been a few months, and the girl's eyes had a flicker of shyness when she looked at Grandmother now. Mira picked at the thread of a faded embroidered rose on Grandmother's armrest.

"Don't you worry," Grandmother smiled. "I don't think I'll be needing my meds today."

"Call me if anything changes, okay? You know I hate to give her to you last minute—"

Grandmother shooed her, rings glistening in the half-shadowed room. "These things happen, honey." Then she turned towards Mira and gently took her hand away from the armrest embroidery. "Besides, I always feel

better when my Mira is here. She helps me out, doesn't she?"

Mira giggled without looking at Grandmother in the face. She looked like a child angel, her face haloed by the light that shone through the open front door.

"Listen to your grandmother, Mira. Okay?" Mira's mother raised her eyebrows and looked at Mira until she nodded. Grandmother smiled affectionately.

"I'll be back in two hours, tops," Mira's mother said. She dug in her

A grimace masked her face for a moment. "Yes, much better." But her face did not relax.

"Does it still hurt, Grandmother?" Mira asked. Her face now hovered over the elderly lady's. Grandmother would usually turn her neck when the nurses' faces floated too close, but she would allow Mira almost anything, in order to feel the comfort of her fresh youthful presence.

"My back? Oh, yes. All the time. That's why you need to be a smart girl and be careful to never, ever fall down."

"I skinned my knee two weeks ago and didn't even cry."

"Not at all? You're a brave girl, then." Grandmother chuckled, and Mira smiled back. "You get that from me, eh?"

"Well, I cried, but like, just a little."

"Oh, everyone's always a little scared," whispered Grandmother, and Mira leaned in closer to hear her. "We'd be scared of skinning our knees even if we could prepare for it. Pain's an awful thing," she chuckled bitterly, her eyes towards the ceiling now.

"When is your back going to get better, Grandmother?"

"Soon. Don't you worry about that."

"But Mommy says it's going to hurt you forever."

"Well..." said Grandmother, caught in her lie.

"Are you scared of it hurting forever, Grandmother?"

"Things are more scary when you don't know how long it'll last," Grandmother said to the ceiling. She continued to scrutinize the ceiling for a minute or so, and Mira wondered if she had forgotten she was talking to Mira in the first place.

"I want you to be like how you used to be, Grandmother," Mira ventured.

"I want that too, sweetie. You can be



purse for her car keys with one hand and fiddled on her phone with the other. "Love you both, bye!" she called, and the door closed.

"Just us now," Grandmother whispered to Mira conspiratorially, who had now crouched on the thick living room carpet and was tracing paths through the upright fibers, a figure wading through tall grasses, a boat cutting through calm waters. "Can you do me a favor, sweetie?"

Mira perked up. "Mm-hm?"

"Press that button on the side of my chair, okay? No, the other one. You can press it harder than that. There we go... so much better. Thank you." Almost horizontal now, Grandmother shifted.

a big help. I'll feel better if you're a good girl for me."

"Mommy says you need to go back to the hospital to get better and stronger."

"Oh, I've had quite enough of that."

A silence stretched, filled by Grandmother's deep sigh.

Mira sprawled on the carpet in the dappled sunlight. She picked up a used tissue by her head with the tips of her fingernails. "Gross," she said, and tossed it away from her.

"Yes, old is gross," Grandmother murmured. From where Mira lay, she could see the bottom of Grandmother's socks, propped on the raised footrest. They had rubber dots on the bottom, like Mira's.

"Your voice sounds funny. Can we play a game?"

"Not now," said Grandmother. A strain hovered on the edge of her voice. "We can talk. You can ask me questions. That's the game."

"Do you have a favorite color?" Mira reached up from the floor and slid the television remote off the small table next to her grandmother's chair, knocking down a box of tissues, Grandmother's glasses case, and a stack of paperwork.

"No, not anymore. It used to be purple, like yours. The remote's broken, give me that." Grandmother reached her arm toward Mira, then gasped and screwed her eyes shut.

"Are you okay, Grandmother?"

Grandmother sighed and said nothing.

"Did you fall asleep, Grandmother?" Mira poked one of the rubber polka dots on the bottom of Grandmother's foot.

"I wish, honey. A nice deep sleep would be just what I need to feel better."

"What else do you wish? What's your biggest wish?"

Grandmother cautiously reached up to rearrange her pillow. "Come up here where I can see you. I want to look at your pretty eyes."

Mira *hmp*ed and pushed herself tiredly off the floor. She stood next to Grandmother's reclined chair, and reached to fiddle with the chunky metal ring on Grandmother's index finger.

"What do you wish, Grandmother?" Mira asked again, louder.

"Oh, so many, many things." Grandmother laughed softly. "When I was younger, I wished to live a long time, more than anything. And now I have,

I'm old, and I'm still wishing for things. And it's too late for most of them."

"I'm going to live to 130," announced Mira proudly. "I'm going to be the oldest person ever."

Grandmother just smiled and patted Mira's hand. Grandmother searched Mira's face intently, her gaze roving. Mira could hear a fly's buzz somewhere in the room, and looked away from Grandmother listlessly.

"I'm bored," mumbled Mira.

"Your mother will be back sooner rather than later, I think." Grandmother pursed her lips. She raised her wrist to observe her watch, squinted her eyes, then let her hand drop. Mira heard her murmur a phrase she couldn't make out, in Italian, maybe. Grandmother had lived far away when she was Mira's age, and would still say prayers and exclamations aloud in words that Mira never understood. Then her voice became clear again. "You know, missy, I'm bored too. Wishing and wishing is very boring. You're always just one step from *getting* somewhere, but the waiting takes too long." She paused. "What do you wish for, Mira?"

"I want to be a dog trainer when I grow up. You should get a dog, Grandmother."

"I'm too old for that now, even if I wanted one. I used to have a dog. That must have been twenty years ago."

"What happened to her?"

"Well, she had to leave me, as all dogs do, sooner or later." Grandmother glanced toward Mira. But Mira had lost interest in the subject.

"Grandmother, I'm hungry."

"There are some crackers on the kitchen table. I wish I could stand up to get them for you."

Mira was already padding off.

"Mira?" Grandmother called. "Can you do me a favor?"

"Yeah," came the voice from the kitchen. A wrapper rustled.

"I want you to do a very special favor for me, Mira. Under the sink, there's a plastic jug with a bright green label and a pirate flag. You can't read yet, can you?"

"Uh-uh." Mira's voice came from the kitchen, through sounds of crunching. "What does jug mean?"

"Just a bottle."

Mira rummaged for a minute, then emerged from the cabinet, leaving

other containers on the floor where she had tossed them as she searched.

"Why is there a pirate flag on it?" Mira asked, as she trotted back to Grandmother.

"It's pirate water from a tropical island." Grandmother took the jug from Mira and propped herself up, grimacing. She poured the clear liquid carefully into a tall plastic glass sitting on the side table, next to an unopened protein shake.

"Can I have some pirate water, too?"

Grandmother sucked in a breath. "No, Mira. You need to promise me to not drink my pirate water. It helps me with my pain." She looked at her granddaughter forcefully. "Promise?"

"Why can you drink it and I can't?" Mira retorted.

"It would be very bad for you." Grandmother pursed her lips.

"And it's not bad for you?"

"It's not bad for me because my pain is worse. But I hope you'll never feel like I do right now, honey. Or at least that it will be a very long time, a hundred and thirty years, before you ever do."

Mira nodded pensively. "Okay. When's Mommy coming back?"

"Soon. Mira, there's one more thing I wish for, and I need your help. I want you to listen to me very carefully. Can you do that for me?"

Mira nodded eagerly.

Grandmother stretched a landline phone towards the young girl. "This is an old-fashioned phone. I put your mother's number in. I need you to leave the room, close the door, and don't come back in for any reason." She paused to suck in a breath, then continued, "There's a present for you in the hallway closet. When you're in the hallway, press the green button to call Mommy, and tell her you need to be picked up right now. Do you understand?"

Mira nodded again.

"Repeat what I just told you."

Mira did, a grin sneaking across her face during the part about the present. "Very good. When you call Mommy, tell her I love her."

Mira turned away, already distracted by her present, but Grandmother called her back. "Give me a kiss, Mira, please."

Mira stopped. "No, I won't," she said, a mischievous smirk on her face.

Grandmother slowly closed and

opened her eyes. "Come here, Mira, my love," she tried again.

"You smell funny," Mira replied.

"It's just the room, it needs airing out." Grandmother sighed and pressed on. "I'll have candy for you next time. Lots of it."

"Promise?" Mira's smirk turned into a wide smile.

"When have I ever broken a promise to you, Mira?" Grandmother smiled in return.

Mira scampered back and pressed her face against Grandmother's soft and wrinkled cheek. Grandmother seized Mira's hand hard and brought it close to her own lips. "Ouch!" yelped Mira.

Grandmother released her grip immediately. "I'm so sorry, darling! You can go now. Did I hurt you very much?"

Mira shook her head and skip-hopped towards the hallway, phone in hand, and slammed the door closed excitedly. Grandmother heard Mira's squeal of delight when she found the coloring book and new markers. "Don't forget to call Mommy! Press the green button!" the woman shouted, as loud as she could. Her throat ached.

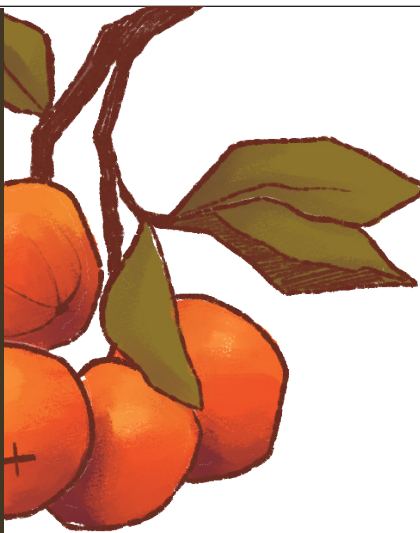
"Yeah! Sorry!" A few moments later, Mira's muffled, chattering voice came through the wall.

Grandmother sighed deeply once, twice. She clasped her glass in one hand and brought it to her lips, painted with the same shade of lipstick she had worn since she was twenty. Her fingers trembled slightly, her ring tapping against the glass, but she made sure not to spill a drop. She gulped the liquid down quickly, too fast to feel how bitter it was, but not too fast to not wonder and worry.

She slid the glass blindly back onto the table, set it askew on an empty medicine bottle that had tipped over, and heard the plastic's dull thud on the carpet as she laid back. She closed her eyes. She breathed in, out. She felt as if she were falling backwards. The darkness behind her eyes grew thick and heavy, filling her skull.

It occurred to her that her wish to sleep would be granted, at least, at last.

We at the Nassau Weekly wish Jordan Angel was our grandmother.



Ghazal for March

BY EMMA CINOCCA

A fawn pauses from grazing infant grass. In the distance a train
shouts, heralding not spring
but its weaker twin. I am in love with beginnings but their bliss is
not spring.

My friends see hips swing & call it funny how I dizzy & praise God
after a breakup, cut free
to silhouette my figure against sheets unobserved. I say—*Yes!*—&
miss nothing, not even spring.

I will not confess to any of my mother's accusations—I believe in
God like I believe
in her tulip beds, which is to say, *probably*. I do not explain my
lightness or why it is not spring.

Stitched into one night: slice of street, pooled moons, gold hairs
marooned everywhere, sea
appearing on dry land. My mouth against cool glass as I kiss what
is not spring.



Essays

Acquire and Read

On Princeton's exhaustive and exhausting humanities sequence.

BY MICHAEL GRASSO

“Assignment: acquire and read the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and the *Aeneid* before September.” It is May again. The month I read this demand in tiny text sprawled across my computer screen last year. I joined the HUM sequence. After all, it's the only rational way to enter college as a humanities student: *I would encounter these books anyway; I might as well read them all at once.* “Acquire and read.” My body shuddered. “Acquire and read.” What an unlawful presupposition of skill that no first-year student should be challenged with. No. I was still too intellectually averse, too indolent, too fresh for this imperative. I fought my impulses, reconfiguring my placid, melting brain. I made a schedule entitled: “Epic Reading Schedule,” which mapped out, down to each day, how much I would “have” to read.

My epigraph (and of course there was an epigraph) to the schedule was a line I plucked from a quick Google search of “motivating quotes from Homer,” which spit out: “*Be still, my heart; thou hast known worse than this... but still thou didst endure...*” supposedly from the *Odyssey* but from what translation, of what oration, I do not know, nor did I care.

Except for the reading, I had no plans because I believed that this would be my last summer of freedom—free to languish in my own desires, destroy any semblance of a routine, and never have to think about my future. “The summer passed idly by”—is a phrase someone might say if they want to skip over a part of their life they feel is unimportant. I am a part of this tradition. Yet, it

was not idle. It was assiduous. A huge change was impending. This reading schedule ended my languid intentions. I “assigned” myself... I echo Montaigne, here, falsely: “*I assay myself.*” Of fullness and nothingness all at once, my summer of well-being and pleasure was bogged down by only twenty pages of reading a day. This was to be my degree, I thought to myself. “Do I enjoy this?” The question lingers and falls flat on my own forehead—each book crashes again and again into itself.

The *Odyssey* was nostalgic, the *Iliad* mystified me, and the *Aeneid* destroyed me.

If I had to simplify the experience of reading each of these texts (listen as I just said “text,” instead of book), I would give them these attributions. I had only ever encountered the *Odyssey* before, and as it unfolds, it reminds you of just how much of a grasp this story has on storytelling itself—I think of Penelope's loom—another voice of Homer.

*You know how you can stare at a bard
in wonder—*

*Trained by the gods to sing and hold
men spellbound—*

*How you can long to sit there, listening,
all your life*

*When the man begins to sing. So he
charmed my heart*

Odyssey, Homer

And so, my heart was charmed too. The grandeur, the homecoming, the sign of Odysseus' scar. I felt all of it imprint on me.

The *Iliad* sunk me into a pit of names and violence. I could barely construct an image of such atrocities that seemed to have been extinguished the second they were enacted.

I have gone through what no other

*mortal on earth has gone
through;*

*I put my lips to the hands of the man
who has killed my
children.*

Iliad, Homer

This violence is not comparable. “Never say the word ‘relatable,’” professors would warn. I doubted, though. Is the charmed feeling not the sense of connection across time? I do not have children, but I do have hands. I am not in battle, but that does not mean nobody else is. I challenge the way we view history separately—even the fictitious kind, the mythological kind. During the first few precepts I liked to make the point that we need myths. We need something primordial that we can hold on to as a baseline. To anchor us in a story we can respond to. She has Helen's eyes. The war is not over—Priam's palace has not been sieged.

When I read the *Aeneid*, I felt like my sense of dimension was shattered. How do I show this? Like finding out, for the first time, what little it takes to make a pinhole camera. You can take a picture with an old aluminum can, some electrical tape, and photo paper. That images could be constructed, seemingly, out of dead materials. The classic tradition, what was a burnt-flame to me, could be a wildfire.

The *Aeneid* was crafted meticulously and sufferingly by one Vergil, or Virgil, or Virgilio as Dante spells it. This, I learned, was of a completely different tradition. Virgil wrote 800 years after the *Iliad* first appeared. His story was for political glorification:

*With Mars' help [Romulus] will build
Rome's*

*Walls and name the Romans for
himself.*

On them I set no boundaries of time or space:

I've granted empire without end.

Aeneid, Virgil

Rome under Augustus is not gone. I learned how stories can be, and continue to be, co-opted by/subservient to/accommodated to/commodified by/whatever political power is in place. Or, would like to be. But Virgil was not merely a propagandist. He buried, beneath his verse of never-ending rule, a critique of Augustus. If one pays attention to the language, that is. Critical Thinking. I am charmed again.

When the course began, rheumy-eyed students saw their new lives in an auditorium of the greatest minds. The first lectures dislocated my understanding of passing time “in class.” They were closer to orations than regurgitations of course topics. Precept was a little less magnificent. Yet, we still probed and questioned and set out to give our opinions. The atmosphere was competitive: each student straining to speak, raising their hands after every breath of another, so that they could give their meditation on St. Augustine’s *Confessions*. I wish we could have stayed close to the words, but it was more fashionable to speak generally—connect idiosyncratic allusions to even more obscure ones than those found in the text. We might use the word “pretentious.” We might not. I still struggle with the line between self-righteousness and intelligence. I count myself as a part of this pack of book-eaters.

Fate was the question of the first semester. We were all concerned with it. How was it decided? By who? When would it change? How swiftly, how formidable, this current that caused and resolved all the patricide and incest of the Theban plays? I did not mind the dialogue, but I did not appreciate our lingering on it. We could question fate in anything. I did not understand why everyone cared so much about it—if by chance or control, things came to pass.

We followed this thread all the way towards Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, which marked the end of the first semester. When, at the end of the last lecture, our professor told us that Dante ends each part of his *Commedia* with the word ‘stelle.’

“Look up,” he told us, “is what Dante is asking of us all”—the stars. Maybe we were in a contract with the celestial. I had no bearing on anything beyond me. Nobody tells you how incredibly independent HUM is. Most of the time is spent alone, reading. A given, due to the nature of the class, but the experience of reading isn’t mentioned except for how time-consuming it is. I loved the silent, lonesome reading the most.

First semester, gone. I spent winter break with Milton, Cervantes, and Christine de Pizan—Marco Polo too. More time in stasis, reading all night, because I could not bring myself to do so until the sun went down.

I guess I should recount a bit about the assignments, or assignment, in the singular. We were asked to complete ten close-reading analyses. Let a passage come to you, they say, one that is striking and mysterious, that requires more time to understand how it works and everything there is to wonder about. Some passages came fast. Others, I couldn’t bring myself to let go of. Once you have completed a close-reading, the passage is so translucent, it lacks the ineffability that brought you to it in the first place. So I keep those with me that I do not wish to gleam completely. They are too tender.

—in losing our fear of man we have also lost our love for him, our respect for him, our hope in him and even our will to be man. That sight of man now makes us tired—what is nihilism today if it is not that?...We are tired of humans...

On the Genealogy of Morality, Nietzsche

And I am tired, too tired to complete

all the readings, then, what is this for? I ask myself this question sometimes as I scan the pages, as my comprehension fails. At this point, I usually go to bed, and the problem is over in the morning. That’s what the HUM sequence does to you. It feels inexhaustible and then resolves itself in a single hour of lecture, to then begin again, and again.

However, this cycle of unending paper deadlines and the next book to look towards on the syllabus has stopped. The last week, if one could categorize the uncategorizable—how to condense thousands of texts of the contemporary era into a single week?—would not reject the name: *The Death of HUM*. Due, in part, to the funerary texture of the reading list: *love fail*, *Beloved*, and *Memorial*. But, this death is not a common one. Unlike the dead who accept the ground they were buried in. This passing of history becomes a specter—a haunting. The presence of these texts will echo in a misplaced step on the roads of our lives because we heard the directions whispered to us from familiar voices. So, we pass on from this course. Leaving behind the constant readings, metrical analyses, and oratorios we call a lecture. Unlike the last lines of the sequence,

*Like when god throws a star
And everyone looks up
To see that whip of sparks
And then it's gone*

Memorial, Alice Oswald

We will continue to see the irradiated dust from this shooting star until we cease to see at all. And even then, as the blind poet John Milton can confirm, we still

*...may see and tell
Of things invisible to mortal sight.*

Paradise Lost, Milton

Michael Grasso is a contributing writer and communications manager for the Nassau Weekly.



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