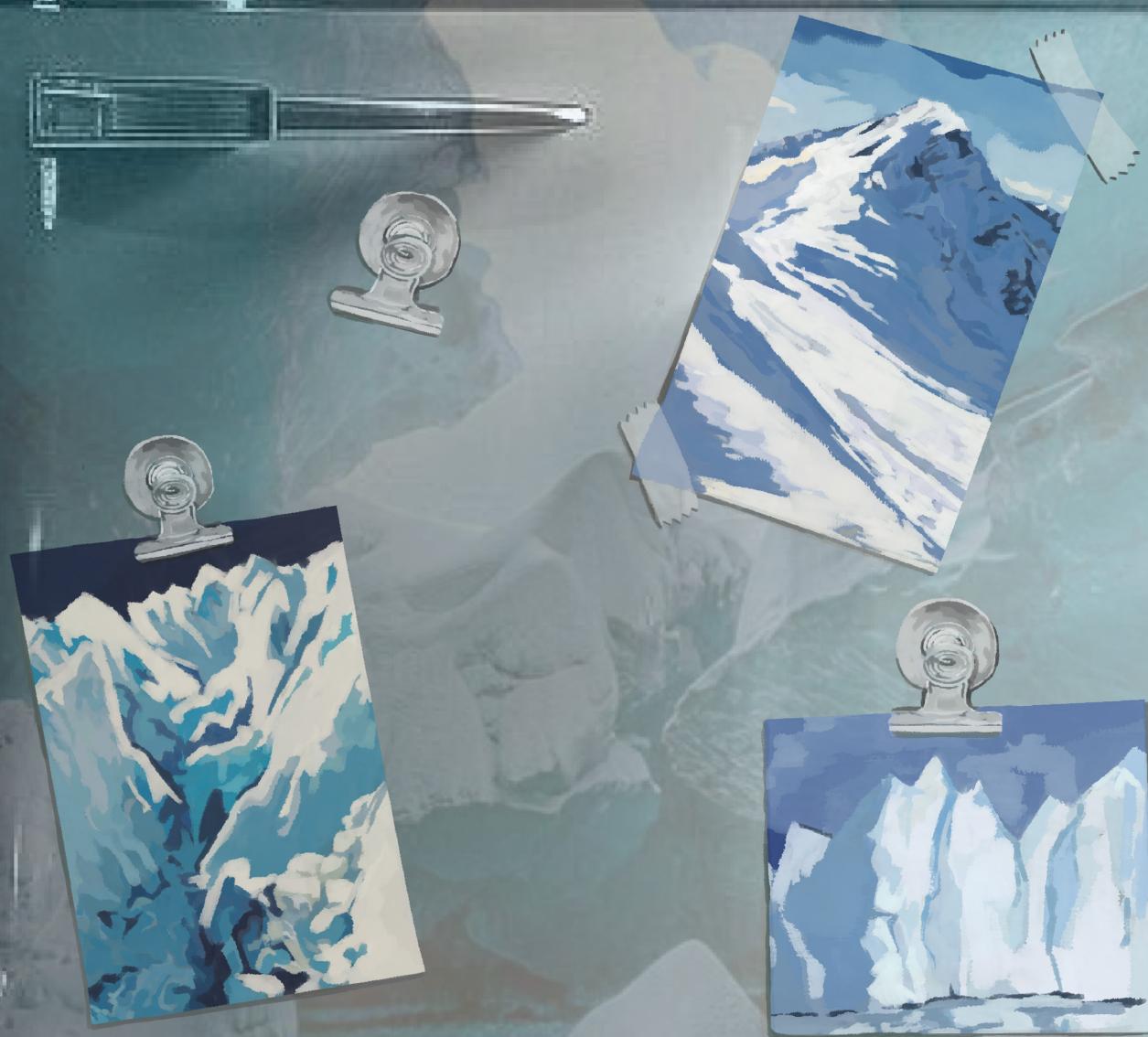


The Nass is thawing  
out after a long,  
cryotherapeutic winter  
hibernation.

# The Nassau Weekly<sup>50</sup>

## SUBZERO



February 19, 2026

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# SUBZERO

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Dear friends,

Around the North and South poles, glaciers have formed over thousands of years of snow fall accumulation, each year's fresh snow compressing past layers to create glacial ice. Researchers drill over a mile deep into these glaciers to retrieve what are called ice cores, cylindrical relics of the deep past. Ice, in capturing air and dust particles, can create records of the atmospheres of bygone geological periods. Memory subzero.

This week in the *Nass*, we remember. Nostalgia is a feeling of incapability and inculpability, lamenting the plain-and-simple impossibility of returning to the past in the act of remembering it. In obsolescence, our pasts remain fragmented in our ice cores as trapped particles and particulars of the now-unknowable totality of another age; as photographs and letters and dialogues which, once spoken, remain spoken for ever, in vivid though erroneous Technicolor.

These twenty pages, an ice core.

Stay warm,  
**Sasha Rotko, EIC**

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**This Week:**

	<b>Fri</b>	<b>8:00p Wallace Theatre, Lewis Arts</b> Manual for a Desperate Crossing	<b>2:00-4:00p 185 Nassau St, Room 309</b> Nass Headshots Session x New Photographer Training	<b>Mon</b>	<b>6:00p-7:30p Princeton Public Library</b> Book Talk: "The Labors of Resurrection" with Reena Goldthree and Shatema Threadcraft	<b>5:00p-6:30p McCosh 50</b> A Conversation with Kimberlé Crenshaw and Eddie S. Glaude, Jr.
	<b>Sat</b>	<b>7:30p Hamilton Murray Theatre</b> Theatre Intime and The Princeton University Players Present: Company	<b>7:00p McCarter Theatre, Berlind Theatre</b> How to Be Not Alone: A Princeton Playhouse Ensembles Concert	<b>Tues</b>	<b>5:00p-6:30p Princeton University Art Museum, Grand Hall, Ground Level</b> Echoes from the Borderlands	<b>6:00p Labyrinth Books</b> Reading by Jordan Salama '19 and Creative Writing Seniors
	<b>Sun</b>	<b>3:00p-6:00p Arts Council of Princeton</b> Rays of Hope: Living Museum (An Homage to Black History Month, past, present, and future)	<b>3:00p Richardson Auditorium, Alexander Hall</b> Joyce DiDonato, Mezzo-soprano: Time for Three	<b>Wed</b>	<b>7:00p-9:00p Arts Council of Princeton Jersey Art Meetup</b>	<b>9:00a Hagan Gallery, first floor</b> 2026 VIS Book & Poster Show
				<b>Thurs</b>	<b>10:00a-8:00p Hurley Gallery, Lewis Arts Complex</b> Exhibition by Dane Utley '26 & Alvaro Machado Basso '26 (open until March 6th)	

**Verbatims:****Overheard in Frist Package Lockers**

*Righteous Young Woman:* "I went to public school. Yeah. Uh-huh."

**Overheard on Frist Lawn**

*Confused Citizen:* "La Migra is immigration police? I thought it was like a little margarita."

**Overheard in Bloomberg 044**

*Curious Observer:* "Oh, are you reading through the Epstein Files?"

*Intrepid Citizen-Journalist:* "Always."

**Overheard in Yeh Dining Hall**

*Possible Lesbian:* "I had some lesbian sleepovers. We looked into each other's b-holes."

**Overheard in Cap Bicker Session**

*Member:* "Where would you guys go to study abroad?"

*Tired Sophomore:* "I would study abroad in Egypt but I'd go see the pyramids and then just go home."

**Overheard Skiing**

*NYC Finance Bro:* "BlackStone has done so

much good for America, just think of all the housing they've created."

**Overheard in Whitman Dining Hall**

*Club Basketball Player:* "My three lesbian daughters are going to dominate me."

**Overheard at Graduate Hotel**

*Woman mid argument with her (ex?)boyfriend:* "Well, I have never sued anyone and still had sex with them."

**Overheard on Fizz**

*Anonymous poster:* "Bicker is like thinking the stripper likes you."

**Overheard by SPIA Fountain**

*Honest proletarian:* "Accounting is less clout, but it's honest work."

**Submit to Verbatims**

Email [thenassauweekly@gmail.com](mailto: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](mailto: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!

## Fiction

# One Last Kiwi Summer

“Today I am a disposable torso, a hipbone, a back: drained of your attraction.”

BY GABBY STYRIS

## I: Definite Articles

Bare feet tangled under the covers, the familiar warmth of your arch pressed to my calf.

“Can I be sappy for a second?” you ask casually, thumb traipsing my clavicle as you wait for my nod. “I saw this thing online. A man referring to his partner as the woman he loves. Isn’t that so powerful?”

And it was, your rare offering of certainty amidst the chaos. I smile up at you, nuzzling my chin into the crook of your shoulder. “I like that.”

## II: Life Study

“Can you turn your head to the right?” you murmur, twisting the mechanical pencil as you shift the notebook on your knees. I oblige. “Perfect.”

Your firm gaze alternates between the bare-bones sketch in your fingers and the uncovered body before you. You’ve never looked at me quite like that, like one of your life drawing models. Today I am a disposable torso, a hipbone, a back: drained of your attraction. I’m con-

scious of the

cold air on my shoulder and try not to fidget, impatient.

But then you sigh in satisfaction, and the page is begrudgingly flipped my way, oozing with a softness you rarely offer me. Attentive lines pouring with three years of your cautious hand on my thigh, kisses on the cheek, muffled fumbling of our blanket. My body, romanticized by your gaze.

“Your drawings always make me look prettier than I am,” I laugh, bashfully eyeing your tender pencil marks. And you just quietly shake your head, insisting that the outline needs to be retraced in pen.

## III: Chinese Satellite

A few weeks later, a camping trip with high school friends to a beachy part of our hometown we’ve never seen. Another reminder that we’re fake Kiwis, both of us buried in overseas college applications as we begin to confront the dissolution of our shared life.

It’s a few days of chaos as ten teenagers fight to wrangle their tents, barbecue vegetarian-appropriate dinners, and drink mildly corrosive soju. But somewhere amidst the trail walks and half-cooked tofu, we find time for a night walk. Alone. Finally. I’m overcome by the curvature of the sand dunes beneath our bare feet, my constant cold muffled by the hoodie you begrudgingly ceded an hour or two ago.

“Honestly, this is probably my favorite song,” I say, repositioning my earbud as I turn my phone screen towards you, aglow with Phoebe Bridgers’ apocalyptic cover art. I can still picture your sigh, the groan as you prepare for another four minutes of the “whining” you’ve always hated.

“I mean, you have to admit...it’s kind of a slog,” you retort,

gazing into the dark abyss in front of us. I turn my back, a petulant attempt to avoid the argument we clearly sense.

“For God’s sake,” I mutter.

## IV: New Year’s Eve

Your phone’s gentle glow from your side of our twin-bed, sleeping bag twisted around your waist as you fidget on your back. It’s long past midnight now, an hour or two after I stopped shaking from the year’s unknown.

“Shit, sorry,” I whisper in the dark, adjusting the hoodie in my arms as it brushes against your shoulder. “I’ve developed this terrible habit of falling asleep with something in my hands.”

And there’s a rustling as your lips move to my ear, something of an attempt to avoid waking the three friends lying in sleep around us.

“Well, I’m here,” you mutter, quietly placing your phone on the bedside table. “Just hold my arm.”

I fight the blush, wriggling deeper into my sleeping bag.

## V: Portugal the Man

You’re drunk. Or headed that way, at least.

A too well-lit house party, shitty beer in plastic cups purchased by one of our freshly minted adults. This is the implicitly understood last gathering, the final post-graduation act before accepting the inevitable “transition to adulthood” or whatever. We ran out of cranberry juice three hours ago; my throat is parched.

I’m draped across your lap, feigning embarrassment as you fumble for my inner thigh and tease my hair into a bun. Humiliatingly partial to your drunken tenderness, as always.

And soon enough, I’m driving you home, my glitchy car speakers butchering the garblings of whichever indie white man you’ve decided matches tonight’s vibe. You reach for my hand as I





pull onto your street, lips grazing mine with a surprising caution.

“Two days until the roadtrip, right?” you ask, raising your eyebrows with your typical uncertainty. Probably the last night where I was endeared by your poor memory, too high on your unexpected affection to take offense.

“Three days,” I chuckle, gently patting your hand. “I’ll pick you up at nine.”

#### VI: Daybreak

My shirt reaches my knees as I stand out of bed, bleary eyes squinting at your silhouette against the sky. It’s surprisingly cold for January, and I curse your insistence on a sunrise wake-up as I clutch a sweater to my chest and stumble outside.

“Look at that!” you point, smiling as you identify the way the horizon presses into the island’s rolling hills. And I nod for your benefit, making a poor show of feigning excitement by yawning at your

shoulder. Never quite as entranced as you’d like, I think cynically, as I ignore the familiar dread rising in my gut.

“I think I’m going back to sleep,” I mutter, leaving you alone to watch the sun ascend on what I knew even then would be our last anniversary.

#### VII: Maungawhau

A season or two later, Auckland was splayed below us as the clouds threaten to explode above. My hand clutches a chilled drink from the store you’ve worked at since March, legs dangling over a city that from this angle feels more limitless than it has since I learned to drive. This short walk up the volcano has become my ritual this year, and today it offers a necessary break from trying to squeeze winter coats and duvets into a few squashed suitcases. The coats are so heavy — I’m still struggling to believe that winters in the Northeast are cold enough to warrant so much gear.

Beside me, you mindlessly nod along to the garblings in your earbuds and take in the view. Between you finishing up at work and me soaking up my new relationship, we haven’t seen each other in a while, but life’s been impressively normal as we posture as the adults we thought we’d be by now. I can already feel us shifting gears, gradually disposing of the idealism we could only really cling onto at seventeen.

I often think about how no adult ever quite gets that feeling back. That tension from the precipice as the world slowly opens up to you, leaving you with no choice but to trust yourself and finally surrender that lingering summer.

---

*Gabby Styris is freezing in this Northeast winter.*

## Essays

## La La Land: A Retrospective One Decade Later

Revisiting Damien Chazelle's *La La Land* as a eulogy for lost dreams of Technicolor.

BY DARENA GARRAWAY

EXT. LOS ANGELES — DAY

SEBASTIAN, 32, L.A. native. A prickly jazz pianist who dreams of saving the dying genre with his own old-school club.

MIA, 27, Nevada-raised. An aspiring but failing actress. Currently, a barista on the Warner Bros. lot.

*La La Land* traces a familiar arc: two aspiring artists tap dance into love as they chase their dreams. Google classifies the film as a "Musical/Romance," a somewhat spurious characterization given the eventual breakup of the central relationship. With deeper inspection, the expiration of romance suggests that love may hold the same obsolescence as our cinematic past: it can be staged, replayed, and longed for, but perhaps no longer lived.

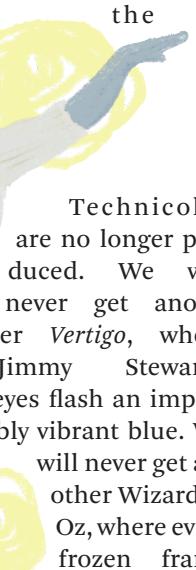
*La La Land* arranges its romance by seasons, legible in flashing title cards at the onset of each act and reading like romantic shorthand: winter hardship, spring renewal, summer abundance, fall decay. By the final act, as Mia and Sebastian reach their respective paths of professional prosperity, their emotional bond thins, culminating in the breakup. The epilogue fashions the ultimate *what could have been* sequence. The audience glimpses the archetypal life expected to conclude a movie-musical: the protagonists seize their dreams and keep their love. Yet, it is a mere simulacrum of the coveted Hollywood ending. The perfect dream ends for Mia and Sebastian, and it ends for us, too. When they share a final smile, it is a salute across a chasm; they return to their separate lives as separate people.

The conclusion may feel like a betrayal of the genre's formula because the director, Damien Chazelle, spent the previous two hours simulating the past and seducing us with the cinematic language of a bygone era. When Mia and Sebastian visit the Griffith

Observatory, a nod to the 1955 classic *Rebel Without a Cause* that the couple watched moments before, Chazelle's direction ignores the limitations of logic. In a fantastical scene, the protagonists quite literally fly up to the stars, dancing among them.

The imitation of Old Hollywood is anchored in the striking use of color. We see it in Mia's wardrobe—the dandelion yellow during "A Lovely Night" or the opulent blue when Sebastian's piano medley first flirts with her heart. When the couple sings the reprise of "City of Stars" in Sebastian's apartment, Mia stands before curtains in a purple dress, drowned in a rich green light from above. In Chazelle's own words, the purple-green contrast aims to deliberately reference a scene from Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958). Chazelle, a professed fan of Old Hollywood movie-musicals, feigns the beauty of Hitchcock-era Technicolor throughout the whole film.

Today, the secret alchemy of Technicolor has fallen under the floorboards of history. Technical limitations and lack of training have made it largely hopeless to replicate. Digital film technology moved forward, leaving the old tools forgotten; the tools for



Technicolor are no longer produced. We will never get another *Vertigo*, where Jimmy Stewart's eyes flash an impossibly vibrant blue. We will never get another *Wizard of Oz*, where every frozen frame beams with the decadence of a radiant painting. Technicolor, for us, is little more than a vanished dream.

This cinematic extinction mirrors the loss of love between the two main characters, and Mia and Sebastian's narrative is a collage of Old Hollywood phantasms. The very first title card

states the CinemaScope aspect ratio, an invention of 1953. The primary-colored attire of guests at a house party shines like an embossed '50s advertisement. In simulated Technicolor, their relationship shares the same quality: an idealized dream lost to time and other passions. Just as the three-strip process of Technicolor required a precise physical convergence to produce its beauty, Mia and Sebastian briefly aligned in vivid synchronicity that the friction of reality could not sustain.

*La La Land* presaged the promised fantasies and equal betrayals of our post-imaginative world. In the decade that has passed since *La La Land*'s release, the studios that once honed artistry are being perverted for the sake of mass-consumption. Netflix is negotiating for Warner Bros. MGM was long ago abducted by Amazon. Both in front of and behind the camera, cinema's beating hearts are being replaced by artificial digitalizations. Spike Lee struggles to find studios to produce his films; executives are unwilling to take a gamble on the visions of the field's best artists. The need for editors to manually search footage for an imperfectly brilliant take is dwindling; AI can scrub away the sublime abstractions of humanity to forge a stilted scene of technical perfection. Studios optimize production, using analytics to shave off the rough edges of art until it is acceptable for passive consumption, a product with no capacity to echo through the membranes of a real human soul.

The dream seems lost. We fashion our mental fantasies in Technicolor as we escape this hyper-technologized, convenience-crazed reality—pallid and callous in comparison. We ponder the *what could have been* or the *what used to be* not because we believe in fantasy, but because we mourn its impossibility. Chazelle offers a film that functions like a dying star, most brilliant before it goes cold. As we watch Hollywood and art and love being irreparably swallowed by digitalization and algorithms, *La La Land* is illustrated like a dream haunted by its own decay. Even in this fictionalization, the *what could have been* never comes to be.

*Technicolor and sublime abstraction have really been on Darena Garraway's mind lately.*

## Fiction



BY EV WELLMON

1. When I was five, I stole five dollars from your bedside table, but I felt too guilty to spend it.

2. When we went through the house, I took your favorite wallet and put the five dollars in it.

3. I went to the bank to get pennies because you always had pennies in your wallet.

4. Having pennies is entirely useless, as it turns out. I can't buy anything with them, and I am too embarrassed to tip with a few dollars' worth of pennies.

5. I wore an A-line dress to the funeral.

6. I wore the same A-line dress to my concert because I grew out of my concert black.

7. When I sent out the link to buy tickets for the concert, I included you out of habit.

8. Someone else has your number now. He blocked me.

9. We played a Chopin piece that you would have liked.

10. I messed up a lot, but no one said anything.

11. People have been very nice to me lately.

12. James just got a promotion. We went out for a nice dinner to celebrate.

13. He took a phone call after, and I overheard him say that he wanted to break up with me but that he planned to wait because I was "too unstable" at

the moment.

14. When he came back in, I was crying. I imagine he attributed the tears to my general instability.

15. I think I want to go abroad.

16. Maybe to somewhere warm with a beach where I don't need to learn a new language.

17. A family friend, someone you've never met, told me that if I learn a much different language, with a different grammatical structure and syntax, I will be able to forget you.

18. I assume he was referring to my grief, that I would stop grieving, but I didn't take it well.

19. I haven't been home since you died. I flew straight from school to you.

20. I'm not sure if Mom is doing well.

21. She started working out and tracking her meals.

22. Dad tells me that she is "fine," though she calls me less than normal.

23. She's probably not doing well, but Dad is in his own world as always.

24. The leaves are turning on campus. I know that they will fall soon.

25. When I don't feel like doing anything, I put on workout clothes and one of James' sweatshirts and run until I can't breathe. Then I sit on the dock and watch the water until I can breathe again.

26. I miss you a lot.

27. Every night before I sleep, I look

through my camera roll to find pictures of you.

28. I don't have enough.

29. I came home for a week to help Mom and Dad consolidate our belongings.

30. Soon we will live in a house that you have never seen.

31. I broke up with James a few weeks after I wrote to you.

32. I also stopped running and stayed in bed.

33. I never went abroad or learned a new language.

34. At the time, I forgave myself because I was in mourning.

35. I'm still mourning, and everyone seems to have forgotten.

36. On a particularly bad night, I deleted every photo we had together, and it makes me hate myself.

37. Mom is still doing "fine" and Dad doesn't like to talk about you.

38. When I come home, I wait until they are asleep and pull down the photo albums to look at you.

39. Mom is as old as you were when you died.

40. You are both so beautiful.

*Lists are a language for Ev Wellmon.*

# A Good Night's Sleep

**"The man wandering through Chinatown called his pregnant wife and told her he'd found a new tenant for the second floor of their brownstone. The tenant's name was Mary."**

BY ELLEN KRAMER

**“...nights where the Nuye cry are dreadful...”**

鵠

\*\*\*\*\*

A short woman stood at the podium. Her small size, graying hair, and lipless grin were not yet menacing to the audience. She began to speak.

\*\*\*\*\*

Somewhere in ancient Japan, a limp pheasant floated in a bamboo box down a river. In the dappled light which filtered through the branches above, the glittering green body appeared to twitch.

\*\*\*\*\*

There was an old brownstone, grudgingly passed from mother to daughter, to daughter again. Bernadette's grandmother had been one to knit nightly, rocking by the hearth and turning her work while red embers crumbled. Mom would be wedged into a soft corner seat, flipping through the pages of an almanac, while baby Bernadette sat on her lap, tugging the corners of the waxed pages to her gums.

\*\*\*\*\*

It was raining. The man wandering through Chinatown called his pregnant wife and told her he'd found a new tenant for the second floor of their brownstone.

The tenant's name was Mary. He ducked under a red awning and decided to wait out the rain, wondering what might be for dinner.

\*\*\*\*\*

The woman at the podium spoke in an unexpectedly nasal voice. The room went hot when she declared: “OUR STORY BEGINS...”

\*\*\*\*\*

Light fell on the bamboo box and urged the carcass: sleeping night-bird, wake. The bird did not wake. A tail like an emerald serpent lay between its soft feathers.

\*\*\*\*\*

As a child, Bernadette had spent many nights with wooden beads arrayed spirally around her. Flat on her tummy she'd grasp one and take peery-eyed difficulty in threading it onto thin florist wire. Her hands were still clumsy, then, and her balled-up fists too imprecise to work with the materials. She would kick her heels up behind her and rhythmically bounce her feet. The rug would fail to dampen the hollow sound of her toes colliding with the floor and Mom would call from upstairs – stop that.

\*\*\*\*\*

The man looked up from his book and spoke loudly to his pregnant wife, who was in the kitchen. He was approaching the precarious subject of her mom's contribution to their current domestic state. As he fiddled with the seam of the chair cushion in the living room of their brownstone, she rounded the corner. He dropped his book over a knee, keeping it propped open and leaning toward her.

“I'm working as hard as I can everyday, and unless we wanna start selling our shit, I just don't know how –”

She noticed a shadow over the crystal glass pane framing the front door. Her brow scrunched, and she walked forward, resting a hand on his shoulder as he spoke behind her.

She interrupted, “Babe, the tenant is coming... today?”

\*\*\*\*\*

It was raining. The man crossing through Chinatown called his pregnant wife and told her he'd bought the avocados she liked from the grocery. His pace was determined. It would be warm inside when he got home.

\*\*\*\*\*

“OUR STORY BEGINS...” the woman said again. The red curtain behind her swung open, and out sprang a cast of players, each wearing an intricate mask and robed in velvety, layerful couture. The audience leaned forward with an intake of unanimous breath.

\*\*\*\*\*

The bamboo box seemed divine. It was unbothered by branches, eddys, or the shore, simply floating. And still, the light above coaxed the night bird: wake, wake, wake.

\*\*\*\*\*

Tired from straining her eyes, Bernadette would roll to her side, tiny wooden beads becoming wedged under her armpit and ribs, and the fireplace, rotated in this way, would look right at her, with the last of the embers fading and the heat burning her nose and cheeks. She'd roll onto her back and close her eyes to see its gaping black afterimage. The rain would fall on the roof and she would cry – stop that.

\*\*\*\*\*

The cast of players leapt and rolled on the stage, while the audience gripped the edges of their armrests, spines arched forward. A bacchic urge rippled through the roused mob.

\*\*\*\*\*

Wake, night bird, wake. Something shivered within the night bird's feathery breast. It was certainly a wicked pheasant.

\*\*\*\*\*

After inheriting the brownstone, Bernadette cleaned the chipping red bricks of the fireplace and found that some had come loose. Instead of replacing the structure fully, she bought mortar and filled in the gaps, listening to The Chicks while she worked. It took all day, and she liked it; the little temporary table set up in the middle of the room, the rug rolled back halfway exposing a lighter-brown wood floor, and the dust of dried mortar filling the grooves in her fingerprints.

When she turned off the music and the job was done, however, there still seemed to be something terrible seeping from the hearth.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Our tenant, I think she's here," the pregnant wife said.

She walked to the front door and opened it. A short woman with gloomy brown eyes stared up at them. Her mouth seemed wide, but closed; it formed a long pale curve. She looked to be in her late thirties. "Hello, Mary?"

The tenant's mouth opened and closed. They could see her tongue for a quick second, then she spoke, "Yes. Hello, I am your tenant."

The wife blinked for a second, then nodded eagerly. She pushed herself past her husband and thrust out her hand. Mary took it, and they shook twice. The

woman's colorless smile lifted, curving upward on its edges and widening in the middle. For a second, Shelley felt a flash of the Cheshire cat.

\*\*\*\*\*

The man looked up from his book to see his pregnant wife approach. She set two coffee mugs down on the low table, then in this half-bent position, put her hands on his shoulders. They looked at

He hugged her closer and sighed.

\*\*\*\*\*

The audience sighed while agile dancers swayed and formed forceful shapes with their figures. They arranged themselves into bursts of bodies and velvet robes, one dancer planting himself and the others following, like a school of fish; choreographically they established the basic core of their forms, then arms and legs followed and fractaled from the center of the shape; hands and feet burst from the structure explosively. One dancer leapt from the stage to the aisle, floating atop the audience. Then, hot and wanted by hundreds of groping hands, was pulled into a sinkhole of bodies and mouths.

\*\*\*\*\*

Yes, YES, wicked night-bird - wake! The bamboo box began to move more swiftly, eagerly floating toward the river delta. The night-bird's closed eyes twitched in anticipation. Perhaps it was only dreaming.

\*\*\*\*\*

Bernadette had begun to hate the fireplace. The inspector had said it must be filled in, and it was an unfortunate thing—but only if Bernadette was feeling selfless. Only grandmother, and Mom, would have still wanted it in the house, anyway. It would cost a fortune to seal-over, so Bernadette decided to take on a tenant.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Come in," the pregnant wife offered, and stepped back to let Mary pass through the door. She carried no bags.

"Did you come here by taxi? Bus? Do you have anything we can help you bring in?"

Mary did not respond because she had gone upstairs.



each other. She tilted her head from side to side, he chuckled and then she sat on his lap. Their arms lined up and he slid a thumb back and forth over the back of her neck while she rested her head and blinked against his chest.

"I almost have to go, love," he whispered.

"I know."

"Did you eat something?"

"I will."

\*\*\*\*\*

"OUR STORY BEGINS—" but where exactly did it begin? Somewhere in ancient Japan in a buoyant bamboo box under dappled light, in a hereditary brownstone with a cursed hearth, on the street in the rain under the awning of a grocery store? The audience looked frustrated; the small smiling woman's question had collectively dispelled the trance and broke for a moment the mob from its fervor and illusions. She continued, "IT DOES NOT MATTER, YOU SEE..." and the audience sighed again.

\*\*\*\*\*

The bamboo box raced down the river. Paralyzed, the night-bird could only peer wildly at the widening river. It would have to awaken soon.

\*\*\*\*\*

The idea of eventually selling the brownstone tugged at Bernadette. She thought about the leftover cash there might be from taking on a tenant and decided that letting someone else into the brownstone meant freedom. And filling in the fireplace, closing that cursed mouth with a wall of brick and mortar, would be satisfying. Any tenant would do.

\*\*\*\*\*

The man and his pregnant wife followed their tenant upstairs, finding her at the window of the designated room. Eventually she turned, still smiling palely. She let out a hiss of air and her grin widened; it was a laugh or a sound of pleasure.

"Do you like it?" the man asked. She nodded and came up to him, thrusting out her hand. They shook twice. He tilted his head forward and grinned.

\*\*\*\*\*

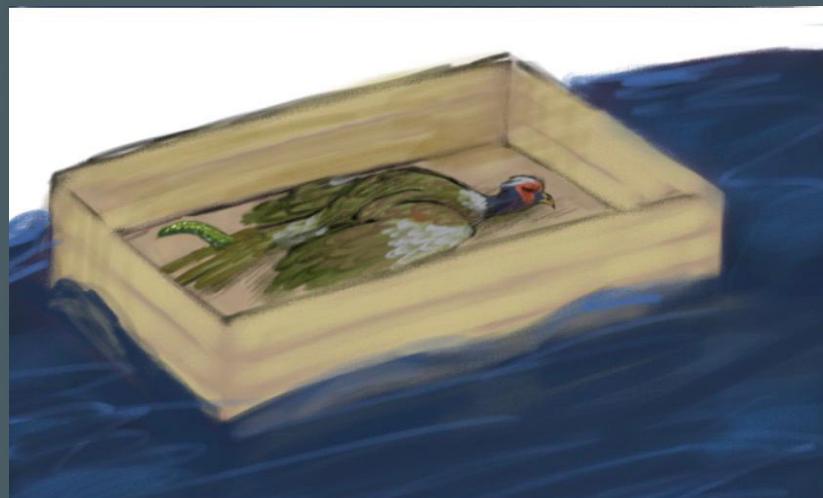
The audience chanted and dived into languorous moans, harmonizing at times and in complete discord at others; their philharmania unfathomably intense. The small woman's pale smile widened.

\*\*\*\*\*

The pheasant in the bamboo box twitched and curled its serpentine tail and little-by-little, gained control over its body.

\*\*\*\*\*

Bernadette's tenant called herself Mary. She was quiet, slightly nervous, and



clean. She worked long hours and had few possessions, and Bernadette could often hear her shuffling around in the second-floor apartment space.

The day after the fireplace was filled-in, Bernadette stayed up late in the living room, reading. With the brick wall sealing the fireplace, the room no longer felt gaping and ominous. Bernadette could settle deeply into her chair and dream about selling the place.

\*\*\*\*\*

The pregnant wife began to hear noises in the night. She would be up when the heating system would stop and the house would go quiet, and she'd hear the sound, like a low humming. She knew it

was coming from Mary's room. The first couple of times, she would just wait up for the sound then go to sleep, feeling like by hearing it she'd proven herself sane and could relax again.

"Are you ever awake and hear something in the night, baby?" she asked her husband one day.

"No. You?"

"Mhmm, I think it's Mary."

So she started to wake him up whenever she heard the sound. She'd sit up in bed and push his shoulders lightly.

"Babe – now. Wake up. Hear it?"

"Nghuh?"

"O.K. go back to sleep."

She'd exhale and lay back down, staring at the ceiling and listening to the sound.

The man came home and swung the coat off his broad shoulders.

It was warm and dim, and his pregnant wife was doing laundry; he could tell because the hall was dark except for the light emanating from the laundry room doorway. He hung his bag and returned his shoes to the rack neatly, then, grocery bag in hand, walked straight to the lit doorway. Her hair was floaty from the humidity

and the air smelled like fresh linen so he wrapped around her and they swayed. She laughed and tilted her head back and he brushed his hand along her baby bump.

"Mmmm getting kinda soon," she murmured.

"I know," he said.

\*\*\*\*\*

The small woman's words were unintelligible, and the audience was fully naked, now. Amongst their heaving bodies, performers struggled to resurface. Two people were dead on stage, but nobody in the audience knew why.

\*\*\*\*\*

The bamboo box was nearing a waterfall. The river grew dark and deep and its flow quickened while the night-bird struggled to turn itself over and crouch on its two tiger-feathered claws.

\*\*\*\*\*

The first night with the sealed-up fireplace was good. Of course it was – it was different, Bernadette thought. She knew herself enough to dread the day the fireplace no longer looked refreshing. Bernadette took up the habit of reading in front of it nightly, to reinforce its ordinary comfort. But then the noises in the night began to resound from Mary's room, and the sealed hearth grew to resemble a silenced scream.

\*\*\*\*\*

The nights grew dreadful for the pregnant wife.

It was different from morning sickness; she began to have a sudden intense illness every night, after her husband had fallen asleep. It was accompanied by awful sounds, hyoooooo hyooooo. Only, she was beginning to like the sounds, taking comfort in their consistency and numbing power. She'd close her eyes and live through them, imagining that the sounds were a large, dark bird, looming high overhead, surrounded by billowing smoke and fog, calling in a high-pitched warbling hyooooooo hyoooooooo as it rose and extended its wingspan above.

She witnessed a long serpentine tail curl through a deep black fog; it swirled the dark cloudiness like sumi ink and pulsed to new octaves of hyoooooo hyooooo. The ceiling above her became endless, its depth undeterminable in the grainy night, until it seemed the bird could be miles above or inches away, breathing madness and disease into her until paralysis. She'd clench her eyes shut but still see it, hyoooooo hyoooooooooooo. She feared for the child.

\*\*\*\*\*

The mob was thinning out. The woman

at the podium was no longer making noises, she was preparing for a final emanation. She breathed deeply and thickly, and her eyes came back to the room, fiery and golden. The remaining audience members saw her pale smile and finally shuddered.

\*\*\*\*\*

Bernadette wanted her tenant out.

For the first time in her life, she made a decision with assertion and clarity, and requested that Mary please leave the apartment; her rent would be handled for the rest of the month. Mary smiled wanly and nodded, blinking up through lashless eyelids. Bernadette felt that she'd won, for a moment, then turned inside and saw the fireplace's gagged mouth staring back at her.

\*\*\*\*\*

Between waves of rising noise, the pregnant wife saw flashing images.

The baby, like a stain of burning light, floated at the corners of her vision and squirmed while she saw in flashes the shoulders of her husband, much stronger with healthy, muscled forearms, warm in a cotton t-shirt curled around her, his hand resting on the bump and smoothing it slowly. Unconsciously, she reached for him and felt nothing, he'd rolled away.

Her eyes could have been opened or closed through these flashing dreams, perhaps they were wide, looking up into the maw of the nightbird from which she received the visions. The feeling of tilting and falling in her sleep pulled at the weight of her womb, and unconsciously she clasped her arms around her middle.

Then the sounds stopped entirely. She was released from the night-bird's tiger-feathered claws and slithery tail and crashed back down to her bed, her full belly bouncing into her and out again. She curled into a fetal position, she shivered and stared.

Dread rendered her frozen and helpless as she looked at the silhouette of Mary in the doorway.

\*\*\*\*\*

Just as the bamboo box slipped over the waterfall, the night-bird leapt into the air and pumped its ancient wings. As it flew, it heard the lustful thumping of a great mob; it saw in flashes the desires of a pregnant wife, the wreckage of the ungrateful and dissatisfied, and the call of unknown destruction. The horizon beyond looked like a thin, down-turned smile.

\*\*\*\*\*

The woman behind the podium took one last thick breath of crackling air then released it in a terrorizing hyooooooo hyooooo. It resounded through the room and clamped with immense pressure around the skulls of her remaining audience, pushing into their ear drums with a low, drilling pain.

With the sound, a dark cloud like a serpent slipped from the small woman's mouth and twisted itself through the misty atmosphere of the room, then arched down and through the crowd, slipping amongst naked arms and legs, through hair and between toes, touching and killing as it slithered, then, stretching and expanding, it settled in one massive haze and blanketed the crowd. "...AND SO OUR STORY ENDS," the woman concluded, the ancient evil performed.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Love," the man whispered into his pregnant wife's soft hair.

"Mhmm?"

"She's gonna be ours. Ours."

"Mhmm, I know"

He exhaled and rolled to his back. She propped herself up on her elbows and smiled lazily, blinking slowly, then dropped her head to kiss his temple.

"We'll get by."

"Yes."

They breathed together.

"Let's not change a thing," she sighed, and they slept.

*The night-birds are keeping Ellen Kramer from sleeping.*

## Essays

# When You Reach Me

On collecting, in the hope of meeting again.

BY JAMES SOWERBY

One of the first books I ever gave as a gift came from a “Little Free Library” kit. I found a particularly choice copy of *Anna Karenina* and was overcome with an evangelical zeal—despite my utter love for the book, I decided to pass it on to a friend who was soon moving to California. We had a shared interest in absurd history memes and a certain quirky UChicago philosophy professor, so it felt appropriate. I remember I wrote her a note somewhere deep within the text. It was something vapid, probably (“hi!” or maybe, “hope California sucks!”), but I do remember asking her to text me and tell me what she thought of the book when she saw my note.

I hoped the copy of *Anna Karenina* would be a material reminder of an intangible connection, a stimulus to jog my friend’s memory to think of me and break the emotional distance that would inevitably grow alongside the geographical. I knew I would miss her, and I yearned to connect beyond mere superficial text exchanges. I’m not a hypocrite, or if I am, I’m fully conscious of the fact—the stacks of books in my bedroom only pile up these days and they, too, could contain any number of forgotten notes, questions, interjections, exclamation marks, or requests to be contacted. If anything, my own delays convinced me to write it down—I didn’t know how long it would take her to read it.

These books are nominated: transformed from meaningless paper to pending revelation through the knowledge they made someone think of you. I think here of Marcel Duchamp, whose readymades work similarly—through an intentional selection—turning

something as banal as a urinal or a bicycle wheel into a piece of exhibition art. He never altered the objects; this transformation lay in the added signification of the artist’s intention. Curiously, he conceived of the readymade as “a rendezvous,” a material object that looks toward the future “by planning for a moment to come (on such a day, such a date, such a minute).” In other words, the piece should retain a trace of the will that chose it; hence “R. Mutt 1917” scrawled at the base of Duchamp’s urinal. He writes that a readymade can “later be looked for. (with all kinds of delays).” Between the moment of nomination and its interpretation, then, is an essential latency; its meaning arises out of an encounter that is delayed, yet always anticipated. A far more selfish variant of this academic issue has beset me lately, though, as I’ve dug through my old books, notes, and memorabilia, but also tendered early goodbyes, pondered the lonely future, and reckoned with the looming end of my time at Princeton.

I have no idea where I’ll be next year. But it’s a different uncertainty that feels far more paralyzing. I’ve wondered more about what will remain of all the friends and faces I love here, especially those with whom my ties might only be tenuous, fleeting, or inchoate. As the years charge on, I feel that even the best-intentioned promises of contact often succumb to the inevitable whirr of life’s busy and immediate issues. I’ve begun to latch onto this idea of rendezvous, that somehow the traces of our lives here might not wither but reappear and, by reanimating our shared memories, bring us back into contact in the future. I don’t wish to freeze time; I know that we’ll all be different people. We already are from the first day we set foot on campus. Duchamp insisted that a readymade must always be inscribed with the circumstances of its creation (read: our time together)

precisely because it would encounter a changed context (consider: the doldrums of middle age). At stake for me, though, is the next step—the sudden rush of fondness, good-feeling, or yearning that overcomes the inertia of everyday life and transforms the momentary nostalgia into concrete action through a phone call, a text, or a letter. What’s so daunting at the thought of leaving Princeton is not growing older but, without a trace of irony, the chance of growing older without these people I hold so dear.

-

A few weeks ago, I was in the basement, gingerly disinterring a cluster of banker’s boxes that contained old books from my grandmother’s family. They’re all in German, and I’m the only one who can read them now. I didn’t preserve these—my urge to collect is, importantly, an inherited trait—but they struck me as a piercing kind of rendezvous. I don’t even know which of my long-departed ancestors bought them, and yet I have this odd sense they’ve been waiting for me. Schopenhauer’s collected works, a Trotsky pamphlet printed in 1919, and classical art history encyclopedias lay dormant, cold, and yellowing for decades, only to resurface as the unwitting inheritance of a middling humanities student. But there is no rendezvous here, or if there was, I am an epigone late to it. Try as I might, with none of this branch still alive, I cannot quite reanimate their meaning to the figures behind these vestigial objects. Long the hopeless, muted sentimentalist, I’ve often asked: why bank on the dubious accuracy of future nostalgia when I could create an archive, preserving the tangible and intangible remains of life? Both in my academics and personal life, though, I’ve been forced to confront the insufficiency of

material records without the presence of others—with the retellings, revisions, and additions that flesh out the contours of a memory when recalled together in conversation.

I'm writing my thesis on *Austerlitz*, the last of W.G. Sebald's works, perhaps because of my inner frustration. I feel a strange connection to the titular character's reckoning with material objects as he attempts to reconstruct his childhood before he was evacuated from Czechia and raised as a foster child in Wales.

The book's narrator importantly also reproduces the physical media that *Austerlitz* uses to construct a surrogate memory—objects that approximate the traumatic memories from his emigration that he can no longer recall. Interpolated into its pages are real photographs, letters, maps and film stills. Of these, photographs bear the most semiotic weight here, indices of a dimension Roland Barthes called “this-has-been,” i.e. the fact that cameras testify to having received the light emanating from historical objects. He, too, finds a curious feeling of images having waited for him: the sight of a cast-iron column at one of the train stations along his deportation route seemed to have “remembered me, and...stood witness to that which I could not remember anymore.” *Austerlitz* will never find his parents again, not really, for even in

reconstructing their deportation and death, they can only ever meet him in imagination.

What can I make ready? What do I collect in these last few months to prepare for future rendezvous? It's a question I've struggled with for a long time. As a young teenager, I started keeping journals laden with emotional reflections and banal chronologies. I began to hoard letters, cards, mementos, and other ephemera in a little drawer in my room. That was also the first time I

physical record of my life gave me a pernicious license to forget, to grow distant from older friends, precisely because I thought I had outsmarted time's cruel march. What's the use of leaving my descendants with a box of sentimental junk if I don't use it myself, using the physical traces to dredge up forgotten memories through which to reconnect or reminisce with the wonderful people I've met here? I'll plant my own seeds too. I've already sent letters, given gifts, and chased the fullest memories with

those I hold dear. I'll only continue to. Maybe, like that one *Anna Karenina*, they'll disappear into the void, or maybe they'll spark a rendezvous of their own. But I see no need to wait. I'm not arrogant enough to assume everyone will look back with similar fondness, that every relationship will survive the departure, nor that I am even worth being remembered.

A dear friend of

mine recently asked me why so many of my thoughts revolved around memory. She's right—I spend so many hours enthralled in the past. This spring, though, I'm resolved: To think of you will always be to reach for you.

James Sowerby is trapped in a box of sentimental junk.



began to annotate my personal books, thinking one day I would want to return and read my first impressions. In the face of a parade of momentous life occasions—experiences that I knew I should expect to think fondly of later in life, and yet had no idea how to live out in the moment—I delayed processing my memories and I boxed up their every trace for some future version of myself to reckon with. Even now I'm late to quite a few meetings with myself.

I think I have to fight my desperate archival impulse precisely because of its purported permanence. Amassing a

# Web of Memory

BY BELLA CAPEZIO

*TW: mentions of sexual assault*

Opening the door, coming home, to who? The answer is apparent, it wraps around me as I step in, as I swing the bag off my shoulder and let it crumple at my feet, as I sit at my desk, not bothering to chuck off my boots. Placing my elbows on the desk, I push the heels of my palms into the sockets of my eyes, letting the cold sink into my head. Tangles of thoughts unravelling, the endless threads of questions and answers falling away from me, no longer saving me from myself.

In the heavy darkness beneath my hands, colors bloom around me, growing and shrinking, not knowing how much space to take up, what form to take on. Oranges and blues and browns wafting in the gloom, my only company as I sink into black nothing, bury myself into night. I draw my hands away, push my fingers into my scalp as light starts to prod back in, sunlight unwantedly infiltrating a thick forest, finding me, left there, deep within.

*A girl is sitting in the backseat with her backpack set beside her. In the front pocket, in a little red pouch, she keeps her four dollars, given to her on account of her four missing teeth.*

I realize I forgot to turn the lights off when I left that morning, and this depresses me, forgetting to turn off the lights. No one to tell me to remember

next time, to tell me not to waste electricity. The mistake curls into itself, a scrap of plastic shriveling near a flame, nowhere to go, no one to see.

*Her mom is checking the mirror, turning the wheel, winding them off the gravel road. The girl fidgets with her leggings, brown with orange and blue polka dots. She remembers his hands over top of the fabric.*

Here I am, sitting at my desk, staring at the wood, the loud secret hunched in the corner of the room, murmuring and shaking.

*Her mom says something, looking at the girl through the rearview mirror. Are you okay, my angel? Angel angel angel, she repeats the word in her head. A cacophony of wings and feathers and bright light, angel angel angel. The word usually calms her, like tea with milk and honey, but now it makes her throat dry. She crosses her legs. Words clamber around in her head, letters swirling together and apart, losing order and meaning nothing until they assemble again and change everything.*

He touched me.

*Little angel girl spun into the web. Legs splayed open, chains of thoughts breaking down in her head, she is frozen. She lets him touch her, she feels pleasure. Little insect of dull colors, her body sagging, bleeding across an infinite web of white, locked in the hold of his clammy fingers. Inside the web with no one, no one, no one to blame but herself.*

I am safe, I am okay. I whisper it to myself, to the shaking girl in the corner.

The words hang between us, a rope of reconciliation. She never takes hold, the line severs. Nobody knows, nobody holds you, little girl.

*She says she is fine, just tired. Her mom looks away, the girl wonders if there is something wrong with her. She swallows down the taste of pleasure, the confused silence, the anger with her parents. Where were they?*

I wish the lights were off. I remove my hands from my head, tendrils of hair drift to the ground. The light in the room keeps the girl in the corner, always at the walls, she flickers when I look. I want to grab her, shake her by the shoulders, wring her of his hands, throw her under the sun, let it flay her body. I want her to flake apart, to turn to dust, to go away.

*She never said the words, "Go away." She practices them now, rolls them around in her mouth. Such easy words, she thinks. They twist around and sink down into her belly, stones that did not skip, tumbling to the bottom of a lake.*

The little girl is pinned to the basin of this body. The faint flapping of wings, banging against web, his sticky fingers, the pinpoint focus, stuck stuck stuck.

Bella Capezio is a writer and junior editor for the Nassau Weekly.

BY INA NIKOLOVA

# THE HYPNO-SIS

Inspired by the strength of the Nestinari (Bulgarian fire dancers) in keeping their ancient tradition alive.

but soothed by water.  
 abused by wind, sun, and fire  
 is our skin, fire die?  
 However weak the hypnosis becomes, may we always have faith.  
 hard we wish to move, Did our feet remain on cold ground.  
 and a body fallen into there is a pulse If there is oxygen, with strength rather unconsciously, prone to movement like sunflower seeds dispersed by wind.  
 to bear

# HOWEVER BECOMES

## Essays

# The First, and Possibly Last, Cold War Musical:

A candid review of the newest iteration of *Chess* on Broadway.

BY NORA GLASS

Last November, I walked past the Imperial Theater on Broadway and spotted a gray marquee, with Lea Michele leering down at me. The neon pink text above her read “CHESS.” The musical *Chess*, with music by the songwriters of ABBA and lyrics by Tim Rice, is infamous for its ever-changing book, with dozens of script variations since the concept album’s release in 1984. Danny Strong has written the latest script, the first one on Broadway since 1988. How does

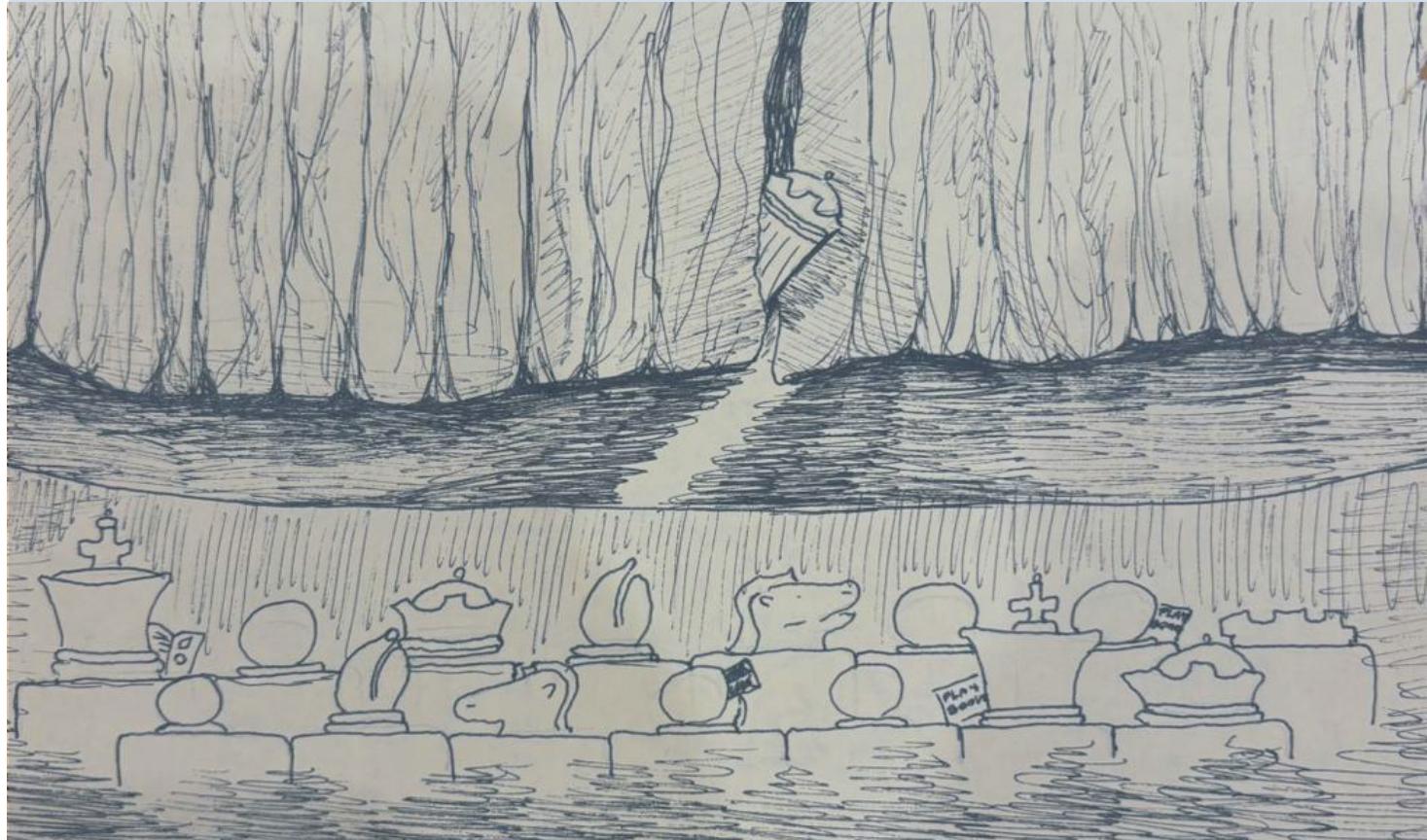
it fare? I entered the theater to see and found myself entertained, amazed, and very confused.

This revival introduces its narrator (a snarky Bryce Pinkham) first: the Arbiter. He tells us that this is the “first, and depending on how this show goes, last, cold war musical. It’s about a chess match.” He then sets the scene and its players. Enter reigning chess champion Anatoly (a Tony-deserving Nick Christopher): deadpan, depressed, and Russian. His opponent, played by a nearly too sympathetic Aaron Tveit, is Freddie: assholish, American, and surprisingly vulnerable.

Florence—headstrong, Hungarian, and with a dark past—is Freddie’s girlfriend and second, at least at the start.

Lea Michele is certainly giving her all, and if you close your eyes, she sure as hell can sing. Open them, though, and you’ll see her smile-belting through sad moments and having little chemistry with the two men she’s supposed to be in love with. Florence is ostensibly the heart of the show. Caught between the two men and the East and West (just like her country), she has the best songs and the most dynamic character. When compared to her two co-stars, however (not to mention the scene-stealing Hannah Cruz as Anatoly’s estranged wife, who enters halfway through the show), it’s clear she’s out of her depth. Still, Lea Michele is the least of the show’s problems.

For a play ostensibly about chess,



# A Review of *Chess* on Broadway

there is very little of it in *Chess*. Other than a white king that one of the players fidgets with on occasion, no physical chess pieces appear. The chess matches that the show usually centers around are blandly staged as players standing still and talking into microphones across from each other, saying their chess moves out loud. "Pawn to e5." "Knight to g5." Even the players don't focus on the game, digressing into a monologue or a song as they think about how awful their lives are. "I hate my life. I hate myself. I'm not even human." This is groanworthy, and the start of the mediocre writing.

The characters' (usually ambiguous) mental illnesses have been magnified and labeled in Danny Strong's *Chess*. Paranoid Freddie has now been given a diagnosis: bipolar disorder. In his first scene (which veers dangerously close to ableism in my opinion), he lies catatonic. Florence shakes him, desperately. "Your meds, Freddie! What did we talk about? You have to take your meds!" He takes them, and after a "ding!" effect, is completely back to normal. Subtlety is not Danny Strong's strength.

Nowhere is this clearer than the final ramp-up to the climax. Normally, *Chess* is a microcosm of the Cold War. Loosely based on the 1972 Fischer-Spassky "Match of the Century," it shows how building political tensions cause interpersonal ones, the effects of lives ruined by this conflict. And it still applies today. When Florence is threatened to be deported as part of manipulation by a CIA agent, you could hear a pin drop in the theater. It was a sobering reminder of the real people affected by politics, both then and now. It justifies this decades-old story being told today, and done subtly and in the right hands, it could be beautiful. This is neither of those things.

In the *Chess* revival, however, the fate of the world rests on this Chess match. That's no metaphor—if things don't go according to plan, the USSR will launch Nuclear Bombs and end the world. The stakes are ridiculously high and made me care little about anything I was watching, thinking, "What is all this petty drama? A bomb is about to be launched!" When the Arbiter tearily comes out at the end of the show and delivers a monologue saying that the acts of these chess players caused the Cold War to end, it's clear that the show has lost any sense of reality.

I myself was ecstatic to see *Chess* live. In August 2024, I first listened to the 2008 *Chess in Concert* recording (featuring Josh Groban and Idina Menzel) and never looked back. I've probably listened to it hundreds of times since. There's no one true *Chess*. There's the 1984 concept album, and there's the 2008 recording. There's Long Beach *Chess*, Sydney *Chess*, and Swedish *Chess*, all with their own quirks. There's the U.S. tour, which is different from U.S. *Chess*. There's even Space *Chess*. And then there's the revival, somewhere in the middle. It's not the worst, but it's certainly not the best. It may be the version that annoys me most, unfortunately.

*Chess* is a revival that is embarrassed to be itself. It takes place in the late 70s and 80s. It was written in the late 70s and 80s. Yet, the Arbiter makes jokes about RFK Jr.'s Brain Worm, and Biden's misguided attempt to run for reelection. Introducing one of our protagonists, the cocky American Freddie Trumper, he winkingly makes a Trump allusion. He even twerks during one of his songs. I was groaning in my seat. In this *Chess*, I didn't feel trusted as a viewer to care about the plot or even understand it. Everything is over-explained

by narrators, and Danny Strong's motto seems to be "tell, don't show." I left the theater thinking, "So that was *Chess*?"

There's a vindication to it. I think *Chess* is a wonderful musical because it's constantly redone. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy in the best way. Another mediocre *Chess* means another chance for *Chess* to do what *Chess* does best: be born again. It still hurts, though. To wait years for something and have it not be what you hoped. To see it done by people who you feel don't know the show like you do, don't care about it like you. Every *Chess* fan probably feels the same way. Hell, maybe I'll pain Danny Strong one day with my own adaptation.

*Chess* on Broadway is, admittedly, a pretty good time. If you want to see pretty lights and hear beautiful voices, go see it! And this *Chess*, perhaps more than any other, is firmly grounded in the modern day, for better or worse. *Look how awful the world got*, it seems to be saying. *Could that happen again?* It's an important, if unsubtle, message for the modern day, and it works sometimes, if you can find it between the flashy choreography and corny jokes. I'm glad I went to see *Chess*, but I probably wouldn't again. Whenever the next version is written, though, you will find me in the front row, eager to see whatever this show will become next.

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Nora Glass is looking for a *Chess* partner (interested parties should contact [thenasauweekly@gmail.com](mailto:thenasauweekly@gmail.com)).

# The times, they are a-changin'

BY LILY WILLIAMS-AMEEN

**A**BOUT 250 PEOPLE STOOD around the School of Public and International Affairs (SPIA) Fountain of Freedom on January 30th, spilling out into the thick snow and onto the Washington Avenue sidewalk. Community members—from toddlers to high schoolers to retirees—accompanied a fierce cohort of University and Seminary students. Passers-by joined the growing crowd, which marched along Nassau Street for around two hours despite bone-chilling weather.

Colorful signs carried a unified message against increased Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) activity in the Princeton area and around the country. Twin upside-down American flags hung on a mound of snow.

Young children who couldn't see sat on their parents' shoulders, stiff from layers protecting against the 13-degree weather. People marched together, bolstered by laughter and fear; friends cried on each other's shoulders.

ICE presence in the Princeton area and nearby Trenton has increased drastically in the past month. On February 3rd, five people were arrested in the New Brunswick area, and many communities in Trenton are on high-alert for ICE raids.

"My father was taken while my sister and I were at school," said a high school volunteer with Resistencia en Acción, a New Jersey-based nonprofit which supports migrant and working class rights. Mira Ho-Chen '26 of Minnesota gave a harrowing speech on the "murder of [her] neighbors, Renee Good and Alex Pretti."



Princetonians gather outside the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs to protest ICE operations.

*Across the country, protests are increasing in intensity and organization. They make for exciting headlines and call out high-ranked leaders. They are loud, large, and difficult to ignore. In the age of new media and increased factionalism, what is the role of protest inside the campus bubble?*

Protestors and speakers carried a certain confident defiance. One unidentified speaker turned the crowd's attention to the PSafe officers observing the crowd. "Where were they when ICE went into Princeton and took parents from their families? They're not going to save us, so we will have to!"

University officers surrounding the event did not show any hostility towards protestors, and helped many safely cross the street throughout the event. They did not react to her comments.

Rowan Johnson '27, a tall, lanky Philosophy major with a gentle, welcoming smile, is the co-chair of Princeton Young Democratic Socialists of America (YDSA) and co-founder of the protest.

For Johnson, protest "has less to do with exerting pressure on the power holder, and more to do with building community, giving people a space to speak out and find other people who are of like mind, and giving them a space to connect and grieve together."

Community-building is an important part of life on a college campus where people come from a range of backgrounds. But the connection between increased political organizing—at its highest rate since the 1970s—and political polarization—also at a high—should not be taken lightly.

Protest brings people together, but it also forms a "bubble," or singular narrative, discouraging conversations with multiple perspectives. Towards the end of the protest, a young man dressed in black approached departing people with a piece



The anti-ICE protest stretched across Washington road, into Firestone plaza

of printer paper taped to his chest. It read: "I support ICE. Let's discuss." Ignored by the crowd, he left within a few minutes.

Repeated protests against the Trump administration call upon the atmosphere of Princeton's campus during the anti-Vietnam War and Apartheid campaigns. History professor Kevin Kruse notices one major change.

"Social media is a shortcut for expression; you can post on Bluesky or X or Facebook or Instagram or TikTok and see that as your contribution to a larger protest. You've got a variety of different small objections rather than the big thing," he told me.

Online, protest takes on a whole new meaning, with more accessible pathways for dialogue and reaction. Yet, Kruse says that protest culture hasn't completely changed. "This kind of expression has always been a part of university life, at least back to the 60s," he said. In the 21st century alone, Princeton has seen hundreds of people gather, and even camp overnight, for issues they care about. University debates over divestment from Israel (2024), institutional racism (2015), and environmental advocacy (2014), are ongoing today.

The January Anti-ICE protest did not reach the numbers of the protests of the Vietnam War era, but it marked

an increased interest in speaking out against the Trump administration in this academic year. Passing cars on Nassau Street honked their horns to the beat of “No ICE, no KKK, no Fascist USA” chants, and pedestrians stopped to take photos of handmade signs.

Ana Paola Pazmiño, Director of Resistencia en Acción, is always eager to bring her organization to protests, demanding a better response to the country’s immigration crisis.

“We had English classes for the last three years at Princeton, and this year the Pace Center said they could not make partnerships with outside organizations anymore. It hurt the program a lot, and broke that connection,” she said.

Pazmiño is excited about the relationships Princeton students form with the organization, but still feels a growing distance after the 2024 presidential election. “I think that the University tends to just listen to what they want to listen to.”

The University attests that the Pace Center “placed a temporary pause on new service projects... in response to the current budget environment.” They “continue to be engaged with many community partners, including Resistencia en Acción.”

Decades after the iconic protests of the ‘60s and ‘70s, even after the encampments of the late 2000s, recent protests have shifted to a more docile role, primarily offering a place to form meaningful connections.

On November 7th, 2025, Princetonians joined thousands of college students across America to condemn the Trump administration’s attacks on higher education. Most students leaving Firestone did not join the protest, glancing at the crowd before rushing by. Kristin Nagy ’27 and Mira Eashwaran ’26 walked up to the front of the crowd with a guitar, harminonica, and microphone. Eashwaran adjusted the tuning of her guitar while addressing the group: “Today, we’re going to be fighting fascism with music.”

A hundred voices united to the soundtrack of the Vietnam War and Civil Rights movement, “The Times They Are A-Changin’.”

Lily Williams-Ameen is an associate editor for the Nassau Weekly’s Second Look section.



# Flawed ways to recognize what remains of home

BY SRINA BOSE

The extremely specific black-brown spots on bananas, as though painted upon; symbols in smoke; the convenience of exploitation; the mistake of birth. Perhaps the last one is common in all lands. The uncomfortable ease of your childhood bedroom cannot be replicated. An echochamber of extremity—too cold, or too hot, with peeling walls. And the set of oddly confrontational mynas perching in the balcony outside. The drawers, which Ma has thankfully not checked, contain secret love letters. The lover knows your address. You fear the day he shows up randomly at your door. The home does not explicitly remind you of him, but you are convinced the home laughs at the thought of him. The society’s aunts bring their babies to the park. The rain shelter is a safe haven of judgement. A panopticon overlooking this gated community. The sun is good for the babies. Young couples are not. *Have some shame!* the aunties yell out. The red benches squirm under the weight of the unknown, as though toddlers aching for their mother. The park’s gates enclose further. The security guards remember. The unpainted gray wall on the balcony. The guilt of the flight ticket home hidden in the fur of your new winter boots. Your love for home should not be proportional to its ease. Convenience is not love. Your city is not a city of ease. Perhaps it is of a partly arranged and partly loved home. Crying at the airport—an airport surrounded by hills. The beauty of kindness and the ignorance of foreign lands. The body



is accustomed to the night. Unable to speak in its childlike tone. *Baba*, ever so complaining, and your *maashi* kneeling down to wipe the floors and pick up the pigeon droppings. The squirrels continue to terrorise the home. The parrots swing in entertainment. The lizards, thankfully, sleep in corners of the closet that you do not bother to check. The commode moves under the weight of your body. You have gained three kilograms. The first night home, you throw up. You wake up at 5 a.m. and sleep at 8 p.m. You hug your mother as an apology. The Sundays are the

Sundays of childhood—the distinctive call of the *kabadiwala*, the strange movement of time, the commotion of familiarity. It is strange when home is tentative. Your life in the palm of your hands—where would you go? The condom in your bag—a component

of a social experiment, of course—waits to be discovered. The different races of your friends are analyzed. You cannot dare to fall for another. Or fall at all. Difference is shame. At home, shame persists in all kinds of un-visitation. All kinds of leftovers. The expired Hershey’s syrup in the fridge. Alcohol bottles containing water. Lazy deception. Dusty corners. Stuffy drawers. You will find it. Just look.

I know the world makes no mistakes.

Srina Bose enjoys grappling with recognition in its most complicated form.

# ב"ה Moses had to Go Down the Hill Somehow



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