



THE INDICATOR

REVERENCE

VOLUME LI ISSUE 2



REVERENCE

The Indicator

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Cover Design by Megan Huang '25

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EDITOR'S NOTES

Mel Arthur, Gabrielle Avena, and Sarah Wu

Mel Arthur:

I advocated for this theme within small circles of conversation partly because I know what it is like to feel reverence so profoundly, it becomes part of everyday existence. In reverence lies the essence of awe, of wonder, and as the dictionary adds, of respect. But existing within reverence to me means-meant cradling every laugh that scraped past my ribs to escape out a sometimes an unwilling mouth; gnawing on every delicious lie; breathing in and exhaling in a way that reaches beyond; and of course, touch. Touching a wound, an ache, a soft blue, on and on. The reverence that I hold-held so dearly, sits in what Toni Morrison writes as a “secondhand lonely,” handed to me by someone else, alongside “circles and circles and circles of sorrow.” My reverence, mad envious, does-did not allow me to seek any other to color its definition. Not till Sarah, once again the person who inspired me with *Bridges*, spoke about what lies behind reverence. She asked, in much simpler terms, about what lurks at the edges of its intensive force and what builds reverence’s borders. I thought about that for some time and attempted to fall in a way that prioritized a gentle witnessing into what else it could possibly mean. Here I say; I revere the lily Ross Gay wrote about as a delight because of the way it reached out of the page and kissed-kisses at my fingertips. I revere the way I cannot escape writing about the body in space, sometimes in blue, and always in the ache. I revere the way my piece feels scary to me with all its semi-circularity-terrifying in a way I can’t explain except to chokingly gasp at the please, and this is all I can write-ness of it all. I revere insufferable-delicate conversations that never reach the point about where softness lies. I awe at, I aw at my wondrous friends. I revere-, I revere the touch that shows I am living, that I remember. I revere mourning as an act of rebirth. I revere healing that is improper. And. I and I sit at this crossroads, an in-between of forward motions and backward descending. I and I, to you, to me somewhere here nor there, onwards.

Gabrielle Avena:

My Latin coursework compels me to state that the word reverence, meaning deep respect, derives from the prefix *re-*, expressing “intensive force,” in conjunction with the infinitive *vereri*, meaning “to fear.” Reverence, then, can be read as a fear felt with such intensive force that it sublimates into a kind of admiration. It recalls the words of Donna Tartt, who wrote that “whatever we call beautiful, we quiver before it.” Reverence to

me balances upon this razor's edge between beauty and terror—it expresses the boundlessness of both; it is the gnawing awe of annihilation; it is not unlike the sublime, the splendid which stupefies the mind. It is the kind of love that costs. It is spoken best through trembling.

It thus feels more appropriate to say that one can be in “reverence of” or have “reverence for” an object than to say that an object can hold “reverence in” it. I like to imagine reverence as a slippery kind of substance, like air, always seeping out of slits. What a task, then, to ask people to write to this theme, to ask them to try to contain the uncontainable in a less than 1,000 word piece. Perhaps that is why more pieces this semester used the genre of poetry, to “give name to the nameless so that it can be thought,” in the words of Audre Lorde. There is a way in which, like the word reverence itself, these pieces gesture towards something we cannot ever fully hold.

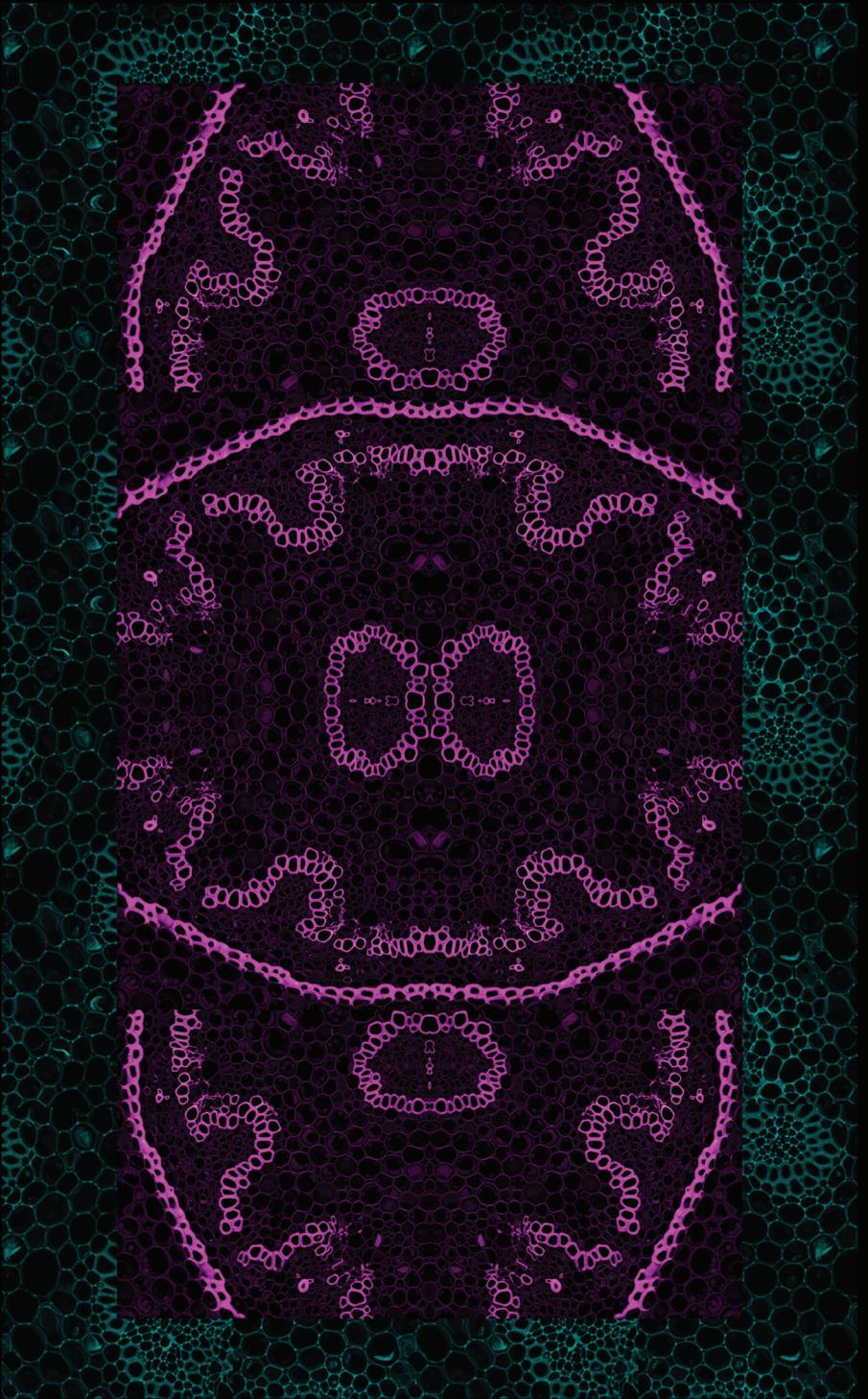
Between these pages, I hope you catch a glimpse of it—the way reverence blurs in the shutter's eye, how it tranfixes us like art in a gallery, how it resounds in the warning rap of a parent's knuckles, how it breathes in a soft sigh. This issue of *The Indicator* does not demand your reverence—in that it does not require you to venerate its every tale. But it does demand that you become reverent—in that it places you within the sea of that unspeakable emotion, trembling.

Sarah Wu:

Hold a small fire in the process of burning. Gently do so, cup it in your palms. Feel it breathe against your skin. It whispers dry secrets and promises, and you cradle it with such softness that a wick jumps to life. It glows with an intensity found nowhere else, tiny and quiet and, so, so hungry. Burn, fire, burn. It tickles against your fingertips, nipping and biting. Burnt flesh sings against your nose. You clutch the fire close to your heart—you, the owner, so reverent—as your willing flesh smolders and decays to the ever-so-bright insides of the flame.

Reverent is a fire that burns without any visible tinder. Only remnants of promises and care seep out to fuel your desires. You revere your parents; your parents have raised you for so long that they have become an imprint into your soul // you revere your God; your God has borne your existence and allowed you to live // you revere your lover; your lover ignites something that makes you believe you can do anything for them. Reverence is derived from a love that is softly intense, often meshed with existence and meaning, and religious conviction.

But what does faith mean in a world that emphasizes the importance of rational logic and reasoning? I think, especially in the age of rational reason, the concept of reverence holds a lot of doubt—fear even. How can one measure a type of love that often implies irrationality, impracticality, insanity? The loss of control to an emotional reverence brings upon a curious sense of twisted anxiety. This is what would like you to focus on. Religion, family, and desire: all easily manipulated, burnt, and set in flames. I would like you to lean into this fear, this instinctual feeling of anxiety that comes with the thought of blind trust. I would like to ask you to write a story of lovely, fearful, burning flesh.



Art by Anna Ortiz '24

AWAKENING OF REVERENCE

Mel Arthur | marthur25@amherst.edu

to you, for Carmen Maria Machado, after Lisbeth White

I, rev.er.ence

/'revərəns/

noun: reverence; plural noun; reverences

to know what fear tastes like when eyes glance upon similarity
“the blue shine buckled jeans allowed me to show reverence
for loss”

Similar to: form, ache, fingertips, incomplete, beauty, mouthfuls
of daisies, beginnings, unkindness, choice, precarious, motion,
mud, is, were, and, are....

TRANSCRIPTION OF A VIRTUE INSCRIBED

Jihyun Paik | jpaik24@amherst.edu

Please indicate
your title.

Mr.
Mrs.
Ms.
Miss.
Mx.

S'il
vous plaît.

if
you please
if
you would be so kind

please and
thank you

부탁드립니다.
bu tak deu rip ni da.

감사드립니다.
gam sa deu rip ni da.

드립니다.
deu rip ni da.

give
to
you
vous
당신

this language.

OBSERVATIONS AT THE GALLERY

Jackeline Fernandes | jfernandes24@amherst.edu

I experienced the soft colliding of bodies as more of a pleasure and less of an annoyance. In the crowded gallery, I immediately made out the sound of the bass, the piano, the drums, and the saxophone. I saw flashes of brass in the gaps between bodies.

I said hello to a few people I knew as my limbs softly bumped into theirs, and I sensed Daniel trailing behind me as I made my way over to Eden to congratulate her on her photography exhibition. Daniel explained that he had spotted a jealous ex to our right and that he had to go say hello, alone, to avoid any interrogation involving his association with me. He promised to search for me afterwards.

“At the hands of a unilateral desire for sharpness in photography,” Eden started, “I’m witnessing the dying of, what should be, a creative industry.” She elaborated, with a hint of exasperation: everyone, nowadays, is so intent on snapping twenty sharp photos per second of their golden retrievers mid-jump on a sunny day. “I’m just hoping I can change that. There’s a certain truth in the blur, in capturing real movement.”

She led me towards the drinks, where we passed by Daniel and the jealous ex. They were standing in front of a photograph. “The fields,” he kept saying, “look like glass”—it sounded as though he was underwater, the sound waves of his voice reaching me from far away, making it harder for me to detect where he was in the current even though I could see him to my left in my peripheral vision. Eden handed me a glass of wine and she continued, this time updating me on her own golden retriever until her eyes widened. She had spotted Alex across the gallery. I didn’t register that it was him until he looked my way, and I was overcome with the compulsion to feign nonchalance, to pretend that I didn’t care that he was back from Seattle for the holidays or that he had once locked eyes with me as we biked around our old college campus, tears streaming down my face as I told him about my entrapment in an endless cycle of literary labor, or that we had once lived in the same Upper West Side brownstone, learning to breathe each other’s air. I lifted my hand to wave but he didn’t wave back, so *that’s what that feels like*, I thought, and to recover from this momentary humiliation I raised my wine glass to him from across the room, lifted it to my lips, missed my lips, and looked down to see my brown boots stained red. I excused myself and congratulated Eden once more before I made my way across the gallery.

I joined Alex to his left. He was looking at one of Eden's photographs, to which I also directed my gaze. "You didn't wave back, just a couple of minutes ago," I said.

"I did. It was just a low wave." In the corner of my eye, I saw him demonstrate with his hand. "It must have been too crowded to see."

In the photograph, streaks of ruby intermingled with white streaks of light from passing cars, though it seemed like these streaks had no source, that their sole purpose was to blur the foreground and the legs of the girl standing in the center so that her upper body was in the present moment while her lower half was in another temporality. Her gaze was fixed to the left and her arm lifted to her ear, as if she was listening to someone on the other line, but there was no phone in hand. A clock tower was blurred out of focus behind her, casting a shadow over her, and I wasn't sure if she was feeling the presence of the past or the absence of it, but regardless, I felt as though she was relaying a message backwards in time, something urgent.

I kept my gaze directed forward, towards the photograph, and I sensed Alex's unwavering gaze towards the photograph as well. There was a palpable tension in our silence and in the shared direction of our gazes—we were, once more, in the same space with the same role, the role of the spectator, looking at the same thing, perceiving this photograph and the way in which it captures a moment, a moment that will only happen once, mechanically reproducing it for infinity.

"I'm reminded of watercolors," he said.

"Hm?"

"The blurriness. It reverts the photo back to its bare bones, of sorts: color and light. And the colors and the light, they're all bleeding together. Like watercolors."

I was overcome with a sadness that was as sudden as it was total, and I sensed my legs dissolving into that other temporality. The introduction of dynamic movement in an image, the rejection of hard lines, the capturing of the in-betweens; it all caused me to somehow become stricken by the ineffability of life as blurred moments came rushing back to me, the saxophone blaring in the background, rising to a crescendo: here was love, here was hurt, here was art, here was time.

I imagined Eden behind us with her hands encased around the bottom of her camera, one eye squinted and one eye widened, the latter fixedly looking through the little hole to limit, to frame, and I wondered what she saw milliseconds before pressing down on the shutter button—was she struck by an artistic vision? I listened to Alex as he told me about his promotion at Microsoft, about his brief marriage, about his mother's financial troubles in Kenya, and I listened to myself as I talked about my deadlines, my parents' divorce, my reconnection with an old college professor. I saw myself with Alex through the keyhole in Eden's camera, I saw him awkwardly rest his head on my shoulder despite him being a half a foot taller than me, I saw the joint experience of the observed subject and that of the subject observing, and I longed to press the shutter button, to be the observer before too much time had passed, but the moment soon blurred and was gone.



Art by Anna Ortiz '24



Art by Erxi Lu '24

ILLUSIONED

Pauline Bissell | pbissell25@amherst.edu

Sometimes I wake up and wonder if I have left my eyes behind in my sleep. I twist my rings round and round my fingers. I try to see clearly.

Look:

I once believed my blood ran blue in my body, just because my veins told me so. We keep telling ourselves little lies. We're not supposed to believe them, but I do.

Look:

Tonight the moon is a sliver, a fingernail clipping. I decide that I want to make everything tiny and keep the world in my pocket.

Look:

In the mornings, every green thing hangs heavy with sweat. I wipe the dew from the grass. I tell it to stand up straight. Imagine that-

Look:

Everything can be a polished stone if you want it. No lines no sharp edges. Someday I will iron out all the crevices and creases in the fiddle-leaf fig leaves, in the palms of your hands, in the microscopic mountain ranges that make up tree bark, so I can run my finger over everything so smooth, so that nothing splinters anymore.

Look:

I try to track where the steam goes as it rises. I want to watch it arrive.
I reboil the same water over and over until it creeps down to a pale shadow huddled in the bottom of the pot.
I cannot even recognize my own footprints in a bank of snow.
I just move
to move
to move
unseen.

MY ACHILLES HEEL: INTRO

Carolyn Thomas | cthomas23@amhesrt.edu

I lay in bed with my eyes shut as the prison alarm assaults my ears. Nothing serious is happening. The warden just wants us to know that it's 6 a.m. and time for us to stop laying on our asses and start doing our jobs. But I ignore the alarm because I don't want to open my eyes. I love laying in bed with closed eyes and not really sleeping. I feel I get the most peace and quiet this way. When I close my eyes, I can go back to when I was free. Like magic, I'm living in the new Harlem apartment my parents fought so hard to get. I can hear my mother sing as she mixes a chili on the stovetop. Her voice clashes with my little brother as his tiny fingers clang the piano keys in the living room. My father is in his study, practicing the saxophone, and the tune fills the entire house. I can almost feel myself turning the metal doorknob and opening the door, so I can talk to him. But I can't because that life is long gone. I practice this memory every morning because I know it'll slip away if I don't. The only contact I have with the outside world is through memory.

The alarm stops. I take a deep breath and muster enough strength to open my eyes. At first, I cannot see anything as my eyes adjust to the harsh bright lighting. Pain radiates from my chest as I prop myself up on my side. I think the pain emerges from my aching soul. I've been alive for too long. I see my roommate Lorenzo across the room. He's already dressed and motions for me to hurry up as he staggers out of the room. I still can't believe that tomorrow it will be his turn again. Will he survive? Will I wake up the next morning without a roommate? We've been mates for so long, and I don't want to lose him. I do not see how I can continue on without him here. What if I can't handle it and lose control? Every time I think about tomorrow, I feel a peculiar chilling darkness wash over my body, and my chest hurts a little bit more.

I still can't get up. I really do not want to go to work, and I hate that everyday I wake up and they force me to do terrible things. This is no ordinary prison. They save Accrington International prison for criminals too dangerous to house with the regular thugs. I admit we are a little different, and by different, I mean we have special abilities. Mine is that I am basically invincible, and no matter how hard they try to execute me, they always fail. When they tried to hang me, my neck wouldn't break. When they put me in the electric chair hurt, it hurt like shit, and they left it on for five days, but my soul simply refused to leave. The lethal injection gave me a stomach ache, but that was all. If they ever found something that worked, I would gladly go. I don't

think they understand that I am probably more irked than they are. Then there is that other part of me, but I don't dare speak of that part of myself. If I do, I fear I might awaken it. I tried to leave behind the practices that got me locked up here in the first place.

I yank the covers off my body and swing my legs off my bed. I slide into my 10-year-old standard-issue prison boots. The cracks on the bottoms of the soles feel like pins and needles in the balls of my feet. I wish I could get new ones, but the warden says they are too expensive. I pull on my faded red jumpsuit and make my way out of the door. I wash my face and brush my teeth in the bathroom before heading to breakfast. As usual, the cafeteria is packed and filled with noisy people. The "unofficial" Accrington social ladder is divided into factions by special ability, and each group sits at their own respective table. Community is absolutely essential for survival; without it, you have no protection leaving you vulnerable to violence from inmates, the guards, or yourself. I grab a breakfast tray from the conveyor belt.



Art by Fran Abdo '24

GIRLHOOD: BLK EDITION

Awa Diop | adiop26@amherst.edu

shades of brown

My makeup bag is full of shades of brown. Before me lay my brushes sprawled out and richly coated with its palette. My foundations of ebony, espresso, deep mahogany. My concealers of mocha, chestnut, dark cocoa. I sit in front of my little mirror patting the colors on my face with my beauty blender. Meanwhile, my best friend stands in front of the big mirror brushing another one, two, three coats till her lashes are as long and voluminous as the mascara promises. Another friend is asking us to choose between two shirts for the party we *should* attend in about an hour and a half. There are rules for picking the right shirt: it has to be danceable and appropriately cute (not too nice, but it has to look like we put effort). We pick the brown one on the right to go with her flared leggings. We always opt to put on our battered sneakers to complete our cute little outfits, whether it matches or not. We will probably only take mirror pictures with our feet cropped out anyways. And it is never a good idea to dirty a good pair of sneakers.

bonus sisters

In middle school, my celebrities were YouTube makeup influencers. Jackie Aina. MelaChild. Patricia Bright. If you can name them, I know them. I did not wear makeup then, nor had I intended to. But I watched these videos religiously- before school, after school, after homework, on weekends. These women became my sisters. We share no blood, stories or histories. But they gave me more than makeup advice. They gave me storytimes, life advice and affirmations. It felt oddly intimate, but incredibly beautiful seeing Black women loud and joyous and taking up space on my little iPhone 5S.

built-in besties

My sisters are my built-in best friends. I am lucky to have lived side by side with the most supportive cheerleaders. From playing with dolls, cooking with leaves, competing on monkey bars, painting each other's hand, fighting over clothes, ignoring each other for a day, offering food to make peace, braiding each other's hair and checking that eyebrows match, my sisters have seen me through all my stages of life. We share an admirable amount of pure love and deep respect for one another. We aren't perfect, and we don't expect perfection from each other. We understand each other's in-and-outs, ticks and small joys, mood changes and attitudes. They understand me so intimately and precisely in a way no one else can. I regard them as if they

exist as a part of my body. I truly believe that no matter what transpires between us, our love will never cease to exist.

i love ur hair

I tell Black girls that I love their hair. Cornrows, locs, short cut, box braids, buss down jet black wig. Whatever it may be, I tell Black girls I love their hair because I know how such a compliment can transform someone's day or life. My very first day with my natural hair out, around the age of 12, it was raining and I didn't have an umbrella on my walk to the train. As I sat on the train, I had my phone open to keep plucking up my hair, praying it hadn't shrunk too much. A man, on his way off the train, told me that he loved my hair. The simple compliment encouraged me to wear my hair for years after that, up to this point. Some days, my hair is still anxiety-producing (wash days on campus, rain shrinkage, party shrinkage, failed twist outs, undried styles). It took a lot of time and patience for me to love my hair and I understand how that journey goes for a lot Black girls. So, I make it a priority to compliment a Black girl's hair.

a black girl's golden secret power

Making eye contact with another Black girl is a golden secret power. One glance will say more than words ever can. It's something about catching the side-eyes. The hands over mouths to stifle laughter and hide expressions. The eyebrow quirks that are always in sync. It reminds me that I'm not alone in a room. That someone else caught on to the absurdity that seemed to have been widely accepted. That someone else acknowledges my anxiety and shares my discomfort. There's a kind of art to processing our discomfort with musical melodies of laughter, when we don't have space to express ourselves otherwise.

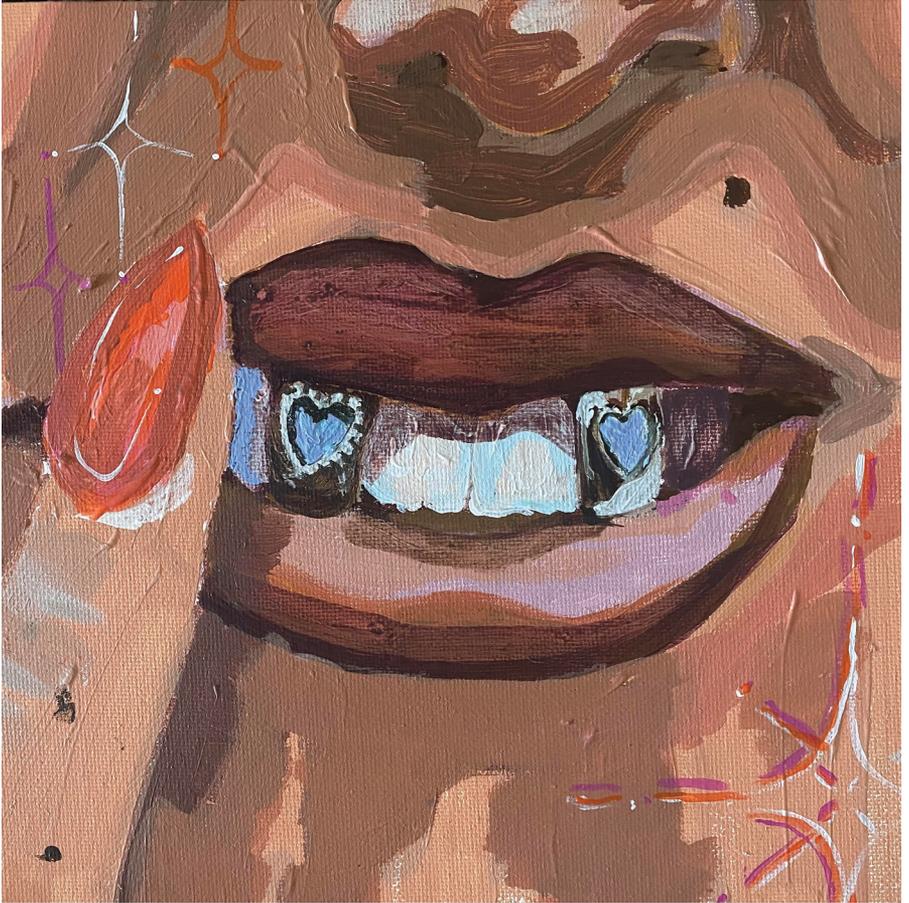
beautifully crafted womb

At some point in my life, I concluded that I was beautiful. Admittedly, it really helped being told I looked like my mom, who is the world's most beautiful person to me. Aside from her vivacious spirit and humbling soul, my mom is so beautifully crafted. Her skin is the most beautiful deep, dark brown. Her eyes are perfectly placed and just slightly slanted down. Her slightly chipped front tooth makes her tender smile light up the world. One day it clicked that to have come from her, and to look like her, meant that my beauty was lush. Unfathomable. Being that my mom is my beauty standard, then I have no choice but to know I'm beautiful.

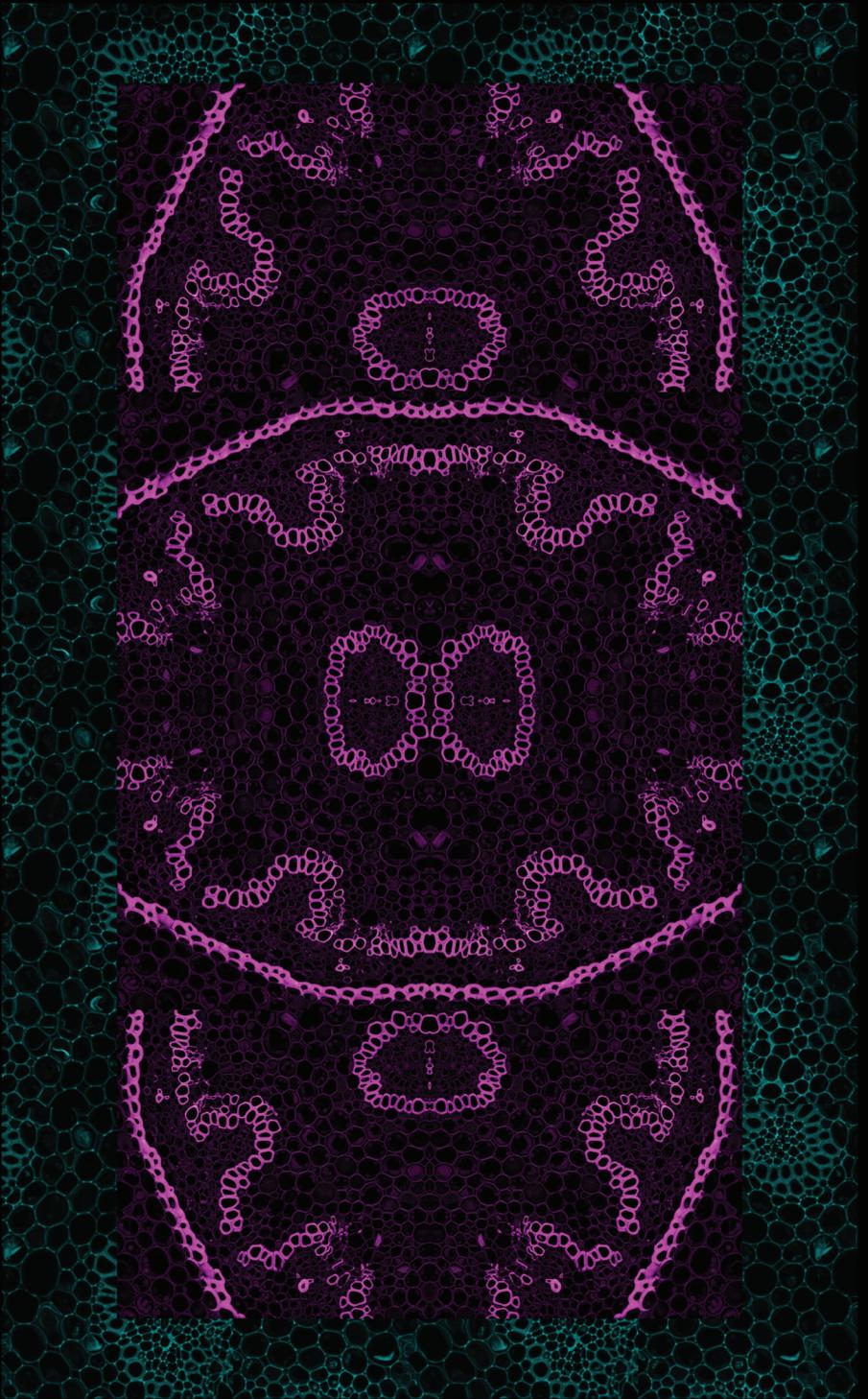
luxury

To grow up a Black girl is my biggest blessing. It's a luxury to lay edges together, have someone rub lotion on your back, have your mom tie your waxy wrap skirt, have your sisters send you money when you're broke in college, have girlfriend dates, laugh uncontrollably until stomachs ache, extend a joke for hours, have girl chats, do each others hair, have dance parties, wipe each others tears, clean each others faces, put on each other's heel buckle. To be a Black girl is to be loved and cared for and nurtured by a magical community. It's to be complimented from across the street, have big and little sisters at school, have someone to sing Flo Milli with.

To be a Black girl means other Black girls made sure I'd never have to be Black girl alone.



Art by Jacinta Smith '25



Art by Anna Ortiz '24

AWAKENING OF REVERENCE

Mel Arthur | marthur25@amherst.edu

Abstract:

...the researcher nibbles at [murmurs] and learns what it means for hands to enfold in one, too, tree steps. Tensions that are touched upon include affliction, transformation, the lily that decimates, unforgiveness, and more. Overall, what this research finds is that to glance at what lies behind means to know more than a body and its accompanying grief, knowing lips that rest gentle on a nape can enact a wound, to know breaking oneself into fragments means- knowing the rot that starves, to know want is an unheard condition experienced only by you, knowing desire lops at demise, to knowing.....



Art by Fran Abdo '24

CYCLE

Annika Bajaj | abajaj25@amherst.edu

I've realized now that fear is the worst pain, but I didn't always know.

I used to think wondering was the bottom of the barrel. Swinging my legs in technicolor, fourth-grade, all-purpose classrooms with history on one side and "World Weather Map" on the other, I stared down the boy sitting across from me with eyes filled with a longing beneath and beyond my years. The boy had curly dark hair and always beat me at push-ups in our karate classes, and I kept thinking if I stared long enough, he would finally see me. They say you can feel people's eyes on you. I wondered if it was true. I wondered: Did he feel the ravenous, passionate heat of my glossy orbs (I'd already read far too much fanfiction) on the side of his cheek? Did he know that when he returned the pencil he'd borrowed for the math quiz yesterday, I kept it in a special pocket of my backpack so the essence of Him could be preserved? Did he do the same to my hair tie when he stole it to tie his Pokemon cards together?

Wondering kept me entertained for the next few years. In eighth grade I overcame my obsession with the boy with the curly dark hair. But I guess Einstein said that energy cannot be created nor destroyed, so my wondering stares wandered to the next-best thing: my mom's best friend's son. For the next few years I wondered if he knew that when he climbed into the storage bin behind the gym with his friend, I bit my nails until the white was gone, praying he wouldn't get caught. I wondered if he realized that my LOLs sent surreptitiously from the bathroom didn't mean that I was impressed, when he bragged to me about how he'd shoplifted \$1,000 worth of stuff from our local CVS. When he first started ignoring my texts, I found that the wondering deflated a little bit. Lost a little fun. The waiting no longer tantalizing, when what you're waiting for is a train so delayed that you might as well walk.

And when we finally ended things, I thought I knew what it was to break. I practiced my violin at night and felt a little gap between my heart and my ribs that I couldn't fill no matter how much I breathed *in, hold, out*. In went books, every night, I devoured them like ice cream in a rom-com. I held onto my friend's arm as we passed the hall praying I would see him. Out with the old, in with the new, but there was no new. What was I supposed to occupy myself with if not wondering?

Soon the wondering returned, but it tasted different, metallic and sharp and hard to chew, and there was no dark-haired boy or family friend-shoplifter or old park bench for it to cling to. To walk away from and forget about. The wondering lay awake next to me as my mom and brother screamed at each other downstairs and my stomach tore itself into little shreds that floated down the school steps like feathers of a plucked bird.

One feather grew its own wings and alighted onto my shoulder, whispering into my ear so close it sounded like distant thunder.

One day I wondered if it would be better to attach the wondering to someone who wasn't a boy. That day the wondering circled around my head and cackled as I opened my eyes again and stared past it to a friend that I wished I could call something else. I wondered if it was the answer, this thing inside me, hitherto untapped, a fresh, raw sapling I could nurture. The feather heckled me as I walked home every day. My body tangled in on itself and stuck like spaghetti left too long in the pot without sauce, drying out on the stove, a little bit less salvageable every day. I was a solid block of noodles by the time I knocked on the door to my mom's office room and said, *I think I might be bisexual?* She plopped my block of noodles into a Tupperware and stuck it in the back of the fridge. *Don't label yourself.* I wondered if she was homophobic, or if she loved me, or if there was an option C. I wondered if my mom had ever seen a friend and daydreamed about kissing her, held her hand in music theory class as *a friend* because it channeled the wondering through another body. I wondered if she wondered.

After the passion died, not labeling myself seemed significantly easier than battling whatever inner demons my mom was trying to load off onto me. The wondering's new iron flavor — bloody, stark — filled my taste buds. I never did like red meat. I went to school with a mouthful of wondering that no longer felt so youthful and simple. We learned about vectors in AP Calculus and I anti-labeled the wondering as a non-vector. No direction to this feeling in my gaping chest, no point at which it began and no arrow-headed purpose to it. The wondering started to sink into my belly, digested further each time I said bye to my friends after school and split off for the walk home, curdling slowly in my stomach acid into something else.

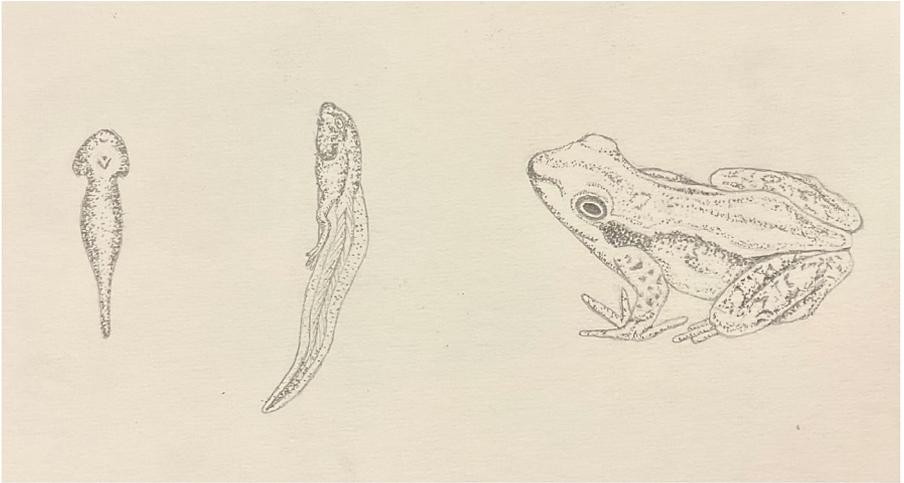
One day, I wondered if there had ever been any arrowhead, any direction to my wondering. My brother had just finished telling me that my mother wasn't a good person, and my mother had earlier that day detailed all the ways in which my brother had derailed his own life, how he was trying to blame it on her. The

gap between my ribs had two dimensions now, inside and outside, and the wondering crept into the cracks. Wondering is all we can do and wondering is all I became. The wondering hurt, then, the wondering without an answer. If only one boy with curly hair could look at me and say, *I feel it too*, or maybe if my mother could hug me tight and tell me *it's part of growing up*. The wondering settled between my ribs and in there it ignored my mother – relabeled itself as it stretched my spine into a bent-over hunch-backed question mark.

I've realized now that fear is the worst pain, but I didn't always know.



Art by Fran Abdo '24



Art by Caroline Wu '26

REMEMBERING INFINITY (MAYBE)

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1.

This past January, I spent a lot of time reading children's books – *Pete the Cat*, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, *Goosebumps*, *Blueberries for Sal*. Turning through their brightly illustrated pages of blueberry bushes, ghosts and monsters, and the hungry caterpillar's array of food, I remembered doing the same thing as a child, entranced by words which stuck together in new combinations and brought me to worlds and adventures I had never before imagined.

I loved these books, but I think I was really reading them because I wanted to remember one: a special, elusive book that I thought could remind me who I am.

The book is called *Rosie's Hat*. When I was 6, I looked through the pages of this story over and over: a girl named (spoiler alert) Rosie loses her hat and it blows on the wind across the ocean, moving over the entire globe, passed between hands of people in France, China, and Chile until it finally returns to Rosie again.

I most clearly remember a page close to the end of the book, where Rosie stands on the edge of a grassy green cliff looking out at the ocean and imagining all the places her hat has gone. The text read something like "all the places to see in the world..."

Sometimes when I got bored as a kid, I tried to imagine what infinity looked like. I would imagine the biggest number I could think of, and then tell myself I could double it, triple it, quadruple it, even multiply it by 1,000. The possibilities were endless. This was the way I found to imagine something unimaginably large, and it always brought Rosie to mind.

Gazing out at the world from her vantage point on a green hill and considering the vastness of the ocean she had lost her hat to, I thought that maybe she felt dizzy like I did when I thought about numbers. At that point in time, the book was the best way I could help myself wrap around the largeness of a universe I only knew pieces of.

2.

I hadn't thought of *Rosie's Hat* in years until one day last January. I imagined it might still be in our house, stuffed towards the back of my 8-year-old sister's bookshelf, sitting there for

me to turn through its pages and feel the same staggering awe I once did. If I could read it, I thought, I might be able to feel that wonder again. I might be able to remember what I cared about in the core of me when I learned to love that book.

When I got home, I asked my mom if we still had *Rosie's Hat*. She asked if I meant that one cute book about a girl's hat that gets lost and travels all around a neighborhood.

"A neighborhood?" I asked.

"Yeah, like her town or something," my mom said. "It moves around a few houses or locations until she finds it again as an adult."

"The hat doesn't travel across the world?" I asked, realizing, as it always seems in situations like these, how startlingly quickly you shift from feeling incredulous to very, very dumb.

My mom laughed. "I think it was just through one neighborhood."

I started to feel dizzy — but now, maybe for different reason. I had thought that the little me sitting in the back of the minivan trying to wrap her head around the whole world was, indeed, reading a book that spoke about the entire world. About hundreds of thousands of miles of geographic distance.

But *Rosie's Hat*, after all, is only about a girl's lost hat traveling around one neighborhood in a small East Coast town.

4.

The morning I turned eleven years old, my mom made me toast and cereal and pulled up Sandra Cisneros' short story, "Eleven" on the computer. She told me to go read it; I sat at the office computer, stacks of my dad's work papers falling across the keyboard, staring at a bright screen. There, I found what I would later see as words for an idea that would stay with me my whole life.

Sandra Cisneros tells us that when you are eleven, "you're also ten, and nine, and eight, and seven, and six, and five, and four, and three, and two, and one." And that the way you grow old "is kind of like an onion," or a nesting doll or a tin band aid box full of pennies, every year inside you, always, no matter how old or mature you might feel.

What happens when the thing that you thought was a penny rattling in the bandaid box turns out to have been a nickel the whole time? Who does that make you?

With me now, I feel two types of time, two universes: one where Rosie's hat spans the world, and another where it spans two blocks. Maybe they are both part of me.



Art by Caroline Wu '26

THE WATER'S NOT WAITING

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His home sits on the edge of a cliffside. It had once sat a few feet further from it, but the sandstone has eroded in his lifetime. He rests on a rocking chair, the ocean view unobstructed in front of him. A cup of coffee in one hand, eyes softly closed in relaxation.

Only the waves break the silence.

He wishes to pull a paintbrush and canvas out of the dusty crate in his attic, but as his fingers shake against the coffee cup, he dismisses the thought. His chest tightens as he's reminded of the feeling of the thin wood pressed against his palm—the repetitive strokes filling the canvas with blue-green hues. For many years, he would wake up and stroll out onto the porch, no need for coffee to stir him awake.

What a time it was.

Mimi has been gone for a while. But she comes into the picture he's brushed delicately into his mind. A bright smile extending into her eyes, unmatched enthusiasm for the days spent by the water. She would swing open the door and join him on the porch, settling in the very rocking chair he occupied at the moment. She would open her book—something of Agatha Christie's—and sit silently in his company for hours.

On one of those days, her voice broke the sounds of the waves crashing to propose a walk down to the beach. He put away his paints and retreated indoors to fetch bread and cheese for their excursion. Mimi remained seated, entranced by a pair of butterflies darting around a dandelion at her feet. He waited a few moments before placing his hand gently on her shoulder, shifting her focus back to their beach outing.

They followed the winding dirt path to the water's edge. Even at 70, she removed her sandals hurriedly, and dashed towards the water, beckoning him to come with as he dropped their things on the sand. "The water's not waiting!" she shouted with giddy impatience. With no regard for her outfit, she splashed up to her knees and reached for his hand. She gasped and laughed with each wave, and flung water in his direction. He reciprocated until they were soaked head to toe.

When they returned to shore, they settled on a blanket in the sand. Mimi reached for her book while he propped up his easel

and mixed paints on his palette. She leaned back against him and it took a few moments before he had the heart to admit her position was not conducive to his painting. She adjusted accordingly and he outlined her figure, framed by the cliffside beside them.

The image of Mimi dissolves as he opens his eyes. It's been too long since he's been down to the beach and he knows this. In the months, and now years, that have followed her passing, his visits have become far less frequent. He sees her in the waves, resting on the sand, and crouched by the butterflies. Now there's a bitterness to the salty air, and the sand and waves take on a dull gray hue. But she would hate to hear him say so, and he promises to visit the beach tomorrow.

With one last glance to the waves, he pushes himself up from the chair and retreats indoors. In the living room, rows of canvases line the walls. Mimi insisted his paintings be used as decor—all but those which featured herself. He reaches for a crate tucked under the side table, eases off its lid, and takes out the first canvas.

She's facing away from him, her ashen hair blowing in the wind, arms wrapped around her knees which support that week's read: *And Then There Were None*.

He pauses. As he lifts his fingers to trace her form, his eyes mist over. He shuts them in search of a memory.

VENERATION

Emily Wykoff | ewykoff26@amherst.edu

I've loved and lost and respected you
Things I never thought I'd say
I never wanted to love you
Nonetheless, the adoration found a way

They say that love is a choice
But, for you, it felt like falling
Faster than ever before
For a writer, a muse is enthralling

The problem is your work
I can't shake it
I can't live without it
Love stories I never thought I'd hear
(Our imagined future I thought was so clear)

I lay this verse as a veneration
Praying at the altar below your feet
Begging you to continue your prose and verse
Revering a monument I can't yet reach

I don't know if I still love you
Maybe I never want to see you again
Still, I have to know that your words are spoken
That they've gotten past the break of a pen

I have to know it exists
I don't care about things left unsaid
I care about your work
Your words demand to be read

Maybe I am upset at losing you
This loss of a would be love
I only ask that you keep writing
For me, that would be enough

A SECRET DOOR

Kaela Liu | kliu26@amherst.edu

“There’s a secret door behind that fence.”

“No there isn’t!” I answered, rolling my eyes. Last week it was the hidden door in the park restroom.

We crossed the corner into an unfamiliar cul-de-sac. I had long since lost track of where we were walking, preferring instead to mindlessly track the rhythm of my pace with respect to my brother’s, his stride longer and faster than mine.

“There is-” He smiled, “And behind that door, there’s a staircase that leads straight to a secret bunker-”

“Seriously, a secret bunker?” I groaned.

“I’m not kidding! There’s a secret bunker with a plane that takes you directly to Greenland.”

“There’s no plane!” I giggled. Sometimes I wondered whether these stories were for his amusement or mine.

“Show me...!” I said playfully, “If it’s real, I want to see this place.”

“Well, the thing is,” he replied with a grin, “the plane only flies on days starting with a ‘T.’”

“So, Tuesday and Thursday?”

“Yep.”

It was currently a Friday.

“Well then we should go on Tuesday!”

“We could, but we have to get the key first.”

“Seriously, a key?”

“Yep. It’s in one of those birdhouses on the Greenbelt.”

“Which one? Show me!”

“Sadly, it’s only visible for people who aren’t annoying, so you wouldn’t be able to find it.”

“Can you see it?”

“Yep!”

I groaned. “Is that why I couldn’t find the door to that room in that bathroom?”

“Well, no. That door only opens if you run fast enough around the bathroom. Remember how I went in last time?”

“No? You were literally just hiding. I didn’t hear you run.”

“That’s ‘cause I was levitating, so you couldn’t hear my feet on the ground.”

I shook my head, laughing. Last week on our walk, my brother had mysteriously disappeared for a few minutes, only to reemerge claiming that he had entered a secret room in the park’s restroom stall.

My brother’s stories would vary from ever-so-slightly plausible to absolutely ludicrous.

Yet, sometimes I wondered what it’d be like if they were actually true.

Sure, maybe a secret plane flying directly to Greenland was a bit much, but every so often in the back of my mind, I still find myself asking “what if?”

Because what if it was possible?

To step through a secret door back into a time filled with magic, innocence, and, most importantly, belief. To jump back into a fantasy land where the secret rooms appeared only upon a random act or on a random date. To return to a time where the line between fact and fiction would blurr, flicker, and fade and the stories you told one another would blossom into real life.

Back to the time when we imagined our reality.

The backyard slope, covered in pine needles – a vast ocean that we could only journey across on our pine leaf stalks that curved conveniently at the tip, allowing for a perfect makeshift boat to scoot down our slowly eroding slope.

The bushes, a vast private mansion with multiple rooms: a kitchen, bedrooms, and even a dining room. The branches roughly torn apart and shoved aside to make rooms that we could just barely sit in, our knees folded up to our chins.

The weirdly shaped bush at the park. A cave to take refuge from the cold, windy weather, with a backdoor tunnel leading

to several secret rooms under the bushes, each generously stocked with peppercorns from a nearby tree.

But there had always been a missing part: he was never there with us.

Why? Homework. Lessons. Piano.

It often felt as though my brother, only 6 years older, lived a different life than me.

It wasn't until his last year of high school with the absence of competitions and college applications that I really got to spend quality time with my brother again, which would often take the form of long and complex walks looping through the numerous neighborhoods and townhouses around our home in which Google Maps became a must.

It was then that we let our imaginations loose again. Him, spinning crazy stories for our entertainment, and me, half playing along while trying to debunk his absurd claims by demanding proof.

But the truth is, I didn't really want proof.

As time would pause, everything around us silent except for the soft thumps of our footsteps, the gentle rumble of passing cars, and the rustle of the trees against the crisp evening air. I would yearn to return to a time where I did believe. Where his word was truth, because he was my older brother, and what reason was there for a secret door to not be real?





Art by Megan Huang '25

LONE GOOSE

Ruth Zuraw | rzuraw25@amherst.edu

how lovely to be alone
to trace a winding route in
piercing white.

how lovely to crave
to yearn for wood paneling and grimy tile
that failed to grace your bulbous eyes.

how lovely to creep and crawl
with numb, gnawing talons
over cracked and creviced tar,

to gaze between two unknowns,
the speck of gentleness on my horizon
an unshapely creature, at last abandoned.

how lovely to shatter the morning sky
in search of sun-soaked kitchens
and a far-off fiddle.

HYMN

Eleanor Walsh | ewalsh25@amherst.edu

After Belief in Magic by Dean Young

And when I hear false my tongue twists G-o-d
But in street lights I see
 The moons all around me
Foxes follow me home to you
I pull the Priestess
Your lips are red
The ring I lost months ago
 Falls to the floor like
Snow
There's millions of fish
I dream of deer
My body is a wire
 You are fire
I have someone's name in my pocket
 Just because I asked
Dead leaves fly into my room
Seahorses
There's been graphite in my leg
 For 7 years
 I feel it when I kneel
I dream of the same room I'm sleeping in
Rainbows come when I ask
And I look up
Up
Up

And how could I not believe?

HEAVEN

Jacqueline Kim | jaskim23@amherst.edu

가 나 다 라 마 바 사 아 자 차 카 타 파 하 까 따 빠 싸
ga na da ra ma ba sa ah ja cha ka ta pa ha kka dda bba ssa

+

아 야 어 여 오 요 우 유 으 이 에 예 예
ah yah uh yuh oh yo oo yoo eu ee eh eh yeh yeh

+

악 안 안 알 압 압 앓 앓 앓 앓 앓 앓 앓 앓 앓 앓 앓
ak an adt arl am abp at ang at(j) at(ch) ak at ap at(h)

Anyone can learn Hangul.

Try sounding this out: 울킷

ㅇ ㅏ ㄹ ㅋ ㅈ ㅊ Oo+rl k+uh+k

Ool kuk: cry choke. Cry cough. 킷 doesn't mean anything, it's the sound you make when you choke and cough on something. Could be food. Could be your feels. *I oolkuk'ed when I remembered the cats we gave away. I still oolkuk when I think about them, so I don't.*

Saliva and an inward swell rolls upward from the bottom of my mouth over the insides of my teeth to the roof and curls backwards toward my throat, which releases the tears at the back of my eyes. The most they'll do is form a film over my eyeballs—there's not enough to spill over. That's oolkuk'ing.

I've done so much of it—and its complement, which I'm not certain there's a word for. Oolkuk isn't a bad word, but it does sound a little violent no matter what context—킷, the sound you make when you are choking

The complement is less a moment and less physical. It's sustained satisfaction, something a little quieter than delight, beaming in the pleasure of something or someone. I often catch myself thinking, and then I think about thinking, and it happens much too often for my liking, but it is then that I realize I have been beaming. My mind trails in moments of quiet when ideally I would like it to stay anchored to the one I sit across, and, conscious I am sunbathing in their presence, I hope we meet

again in our next life, maybe as sisters, next time something a little longer than parent-child, a little easier than lover-lover, a little surer than friends. Standing on my bare feet in the house I'll move out for good from later this year, everything feels like it will last forever, especially my parents' banter.

Knowing that it won't makes me require the afterlife in order to deal with the passing of their birthdays. Long ago I blindly believed in heaven, with the understanding that once people die they freely roam perpetual daylight in the same form they died in: when I was 7 I thought there was no better age to be, but at 10 I would never choose to go back to 7, and at 16 I would never choose to go back to 10, and I wanted to be a child forever. I even worried that if I were to make it out of childhood without dying and live to be an old wrinkly grandma, I would remain elderly forever in heaven, not necessarily because I had no choice, but because I would genuinely think there was no better age to be than 87, or 95, or whatever age I finally died. How would my parents recognize me if I looked 95? What if all three of us died around the same age, or I even lived to be older than they had? Would I be older than my parents in heaven?

Maybe this was part of the reason behind the then-inexplicable fear and mourning when my breasts began to develop one random day in fourth grade. I remember only shame. I was not ready to change yet, and, contrary to what a lot of pre-teen chapter book authors had to say, I was *not* excited to become a woman, anxious to have the biggest tits in the room, or proud of the fact that I needed to wear a bra. Why was that such a trope? It was one of the earliest times that I grieved for myself: something was dying right in front of my eyes, and one day in the bathroom I looked at my naked chest and oolkuk'ed maybe for the first time in my life when I was nine or ten.

Now I realize I barely even remember what it felt like to live in an 18-year-old body, and I'm only 22. I guess it wouldn't make a huge difference whether I did whatever people do in heaven in Body Year 18 or 22. Time has stopped flowing so darn fast on my skin for now, and I'm a little more okay with going through my life cycle.

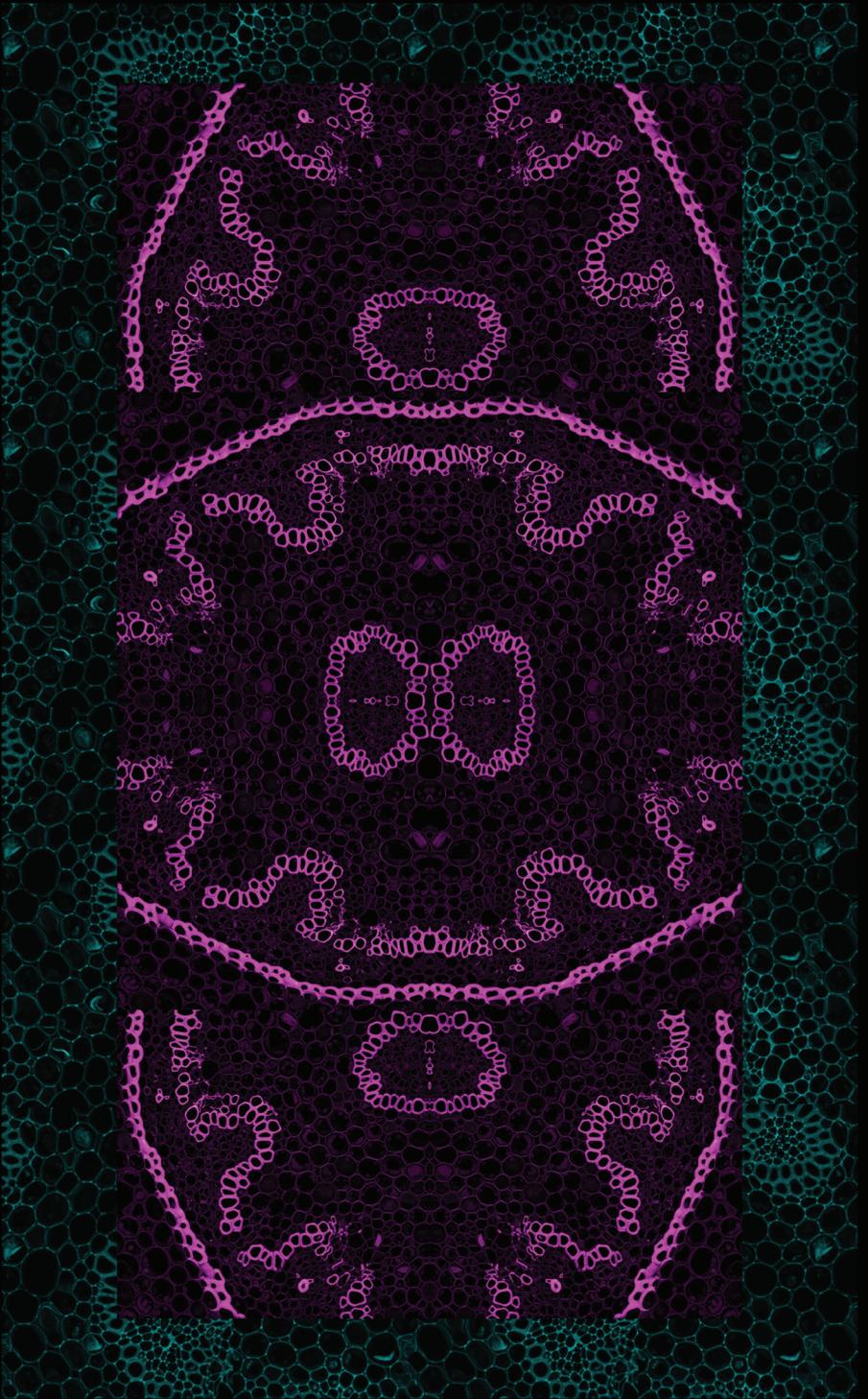
You've probably heard of the Red String Theory as a Chinese myth, but it's a Korean understanding of life cycles, too. Whatever meaningful relationships you've made in this life can be encountered again in the next, if you want. It's funny how little people choose to start completely over. A daughter always chooses to meet her mother again if she were loved and cared for; sometimes the child asks to be the mother next time, so

they can nurture and sacrifice for the one who nurtured and sacrificed for them. Brothers ask to be brothers again. It doesn't only have to be blood relations, either, though it's called the boorgeun shil (blood-red string); you can meet your friends again, too, if you had considered them your family. Everyone comes back as different people, of course, so it isn't like you'll live the same life over and over again, like one might do in heaven, living forever. I like to wonder sometimes who I was in the past life and whether I've met the one in whose presence I am now basking in before.

If I could be born again I'd like to be a girl, I'd choose to speak Korean, and I'd ask to come into the same family, all again. I think one can believe in heaven and the Red String both at the same time, despite the contradictions. In both, all we ever want is to meet our 인연 again.

Sound it out: ㅇ | ㄴ ㅇ ㅋ ㄴ ee + n yuh+n.

인 for *human*, 연 for something hard to explain in English—*connection* sounds a little lame...연 for whatever lies behind the words *connection, relationship, the thing that you can tie or cut like string*.



Art by Anna Ortiz '24

AWAKENING OF REVERENCE

Mel Arthur | marthur25@amherst.edu

Hypothesis:

an abject posture of despair
is more than feeling frenzy with grief

odd mixtures tickling at fingertips that
bend whenever it's too cold to breathe

this is the moment
This is-nt the moment you say

you say in mighty gusts that knock the wind
out my lungs, till gasping in prolonged

aw and awe
oozes bouquets of
untethered annihilation



JOY

Zoe Alarcon | zalarcon25@amherst.edu

at this time is relinquishing i
fall up my throat and pray,
to non-thoughts of non-time,
to hardly grasp

i Blaze and remember i'm
Free to remember
Free to press myself against the fire of action
gripped from behind
by the eyes
by desire
i press myself against Joy

is boundless and Bad
sat gently at the edges of catastrophe
glistening in between wistful glances
returned to its shape carved in
the small whites of unintelligible eyes
gliding slowly behind my chest an honest
ventriloquist,
lost in transit between forms

As well in solitude hung
on the walls of decades
buried in a self
reflective ceiling

i sow the seeds of confusion
refracting
through the
years in
modest
bites

SALTED

Karen Lee | kslee25@amherst.edu

Crinkled sheets and cascaded shadows
Oh sinful sun, I gobbled it whole
Rolled around my mouth, underneath my tongue
Silken days were no longer
Underneath starlit skies because back then
When my palms blossomed droplets before you

You flinched, and
I thought I would never see you again

A torn page feathering at the edges
Sizzling tongues from piping hot soups
You were gravity when the world shook
A steel embrace hissing behind my ears
Crystal caves with diamond encrusted walls
Were never a match for you

You could swallow me
As I laid in the water, scathing

Bleaker truths never escaped from your gated lips
Grains would sunder from your touch
Coddling, trembling
You tore ripples across my irises
Stratifying the lens, a telescope in your eyes
When will I see the salt of the earth, through you?



Art by Rama Balagurunath '26

SKETCHES OF THE PAST

Davis Rennella | drennella24@amherst.edu

To remember is to live again. It takes a collaboration of our powers of feeling— living in the raw sensory and emotional records imprinted on our bodies, combining them with awareness (predicated by acceptance), and at the end, our capacity to articulate and understand. It is no small feat. We must count ourselves fortunate when the emotions underlying memory see the daylight of consciousness on a regular basis. Often, however, they escape our awareness, or suddenly point inwards, colliding at the center of a great maelstrom, every member deflecting off in a violent spin, or crashing head-first into the melee, being, in the very etymological sense of the word, obliterated. Erased. The once-legible messages scrawled with chalk on the walls of the catacomb-tunnels of the mind flushed away into the great collective everything of the planet by an unseasonal flood which has become only more seasonal by the year.

In an apartment building somewhere above these tunnels, an artist stares out his third-story window and watches the clouds. He's been sketching their shapes as they crawl across the sky, shedding off the wispiest tendrils on one end and tapping the air around them for vapor to drink. While watching the overlap between a particular pair of clouds for a while, the artist, by a will that was not quite his own, is summoned to his feet, compelled to take a break from tracking the ever-meshing ripples of the present, and to search the past for a more solid artifact, one which he could take his time in rendering onto the canvas, in full, everlasting color and beauty.

The artist walks to the forest nearby. The canopy makes the ground a living shadow, and the light begins to play tricks on the eyes. On the now-faded footpath he spots a hunched-over man in a dark hood leaning against a tree stump wider than he is tall. There is a faraway light in this man's eyes in which the artist senses a great depth of wisdom. The artist hails him with a hello that is bright enough to convey his benevolence but steady enough to convey his respect.

The hooded man makes no point of introduction. He seems to already understand why the artist is here. He starts to recall a great faraway land, a beautiful image of evergreen trees dew-frosted in morning sun, sprouting one by one, frozen by the human eye in their twisting, branching, limb-breaking journey towards the sky and back to the earth. This sounds wonderful, the artist tells the hunched-over hooded man

leaning against the tree stump who has begun to describe this place. The artist can already imagine his finished picture, hung before spectators who find themselves lingering in its presence longer than they will for the rest of the exhibit, or merely drawn by the crowd out of curiosity for what the rows of bodies are hiding. The artist presses further. What colors were the sky that day? How was the sun oriented within the scene? What could you see faraway? The man on the stump pauses to remember. He speaks slowly- Blue. Bright. Open. He looks at the ground. The artist has taken out his sketchbook and is working furiously with the fragment of charcoal he found in his coat pocket. He keeps listening, asking, scribbling. The hooded man takes longer and longer to respond. The artist finished his latest gesture on the paper but finds himself without anything to add. He looks up and the hooded man's eyes have glazed over. He's still looking at the ground. Sir, excuse me, did you hear what I said? He didn't. The artist asks him to elaborate, make the picture more full—what the air felt like that day, the smell of flowers, bird-song. The hooded man doesn't know. He doesn't seem to care whether he knows or not. The artist proceeds with apprehension. He wants to know more, but the hooded man has turned his head away. The hooded man may be offended if the artist asks for any more details. It was a pleasure to hear your stories, sir — perhaps I will see you another day, the artist tells him. The artist starts to walk back to his apartment. He looks at his black and white sketch. Every stroke of his charcoal corresponded to a word, and from that to a memory, of that shrouded figure. It wouldn't be right to take this image and turn it into anything more permanent when the man who began to share this image couldn't bear to complete it. What a shame it was for inspiration to fail. What a pity it was, he thought, to forget.



Art by Rachel Lin '25

ORPHIC OVERTURE LXXXI

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I.

I met him the night before
In that signature diner
Where all the cars go to die
Where green stars hide inside
With the man who wears the suit.

Who has milk and cookies, and waits till
The Beatles plays on the radio
That Mr. Hasan forgot to replace
Then leaves.

Yes, he who hates his boss,
Works overtime unpaid, with eye bags, stress lines,
Strands of silver, and stays. Yes, he who cannot sleep
On subways, talks to plants, always
Drinks alone, but is always invited out, and
For kids who still think it exists,
Is consecutive winner of employee of the month –
Every month except for that October,
On the seventh, when his daughter's
Beetle was found under a bridge, by the river.

But tonight he is safe, he has his cookies, his milk, and music
But tonight he has a yellow journal.

His daughter gave it to him when
She moved away but again and again
He never bothered to open it. Tonight
His first words, he writes:

II.

Dear Daphne with the flower dress,
Daphne with the silver eyes, Dear
Daphne that asked me with bugs
In your hands, "what's grass Dada?"
That dreamer, Daphne, with the dyed
Green hair and with the marriage
I christened so soon after, Daphne that
Just found her first love, yes, that Daphne.

And I, your father, who answered to "ask
Your mother" about grass and mother asked

How you two met and your father, I, who didn't. Yet
Your father who buried mother seven days after.
Where was your fiance? Father who didn't ask
And called your new apartment and asked what the
Yelling was? "Just the movie we have on; it's about lies."
Father who just thought everyone has a bad day
When he shouted for breaking a vase and
Who thought the holidays you spent away
Were because you were tired of me, who
Spoke more than you did, and who,
Who never saw the bruise that night,
You drove home with blue embers in your eyes,
Covered in tears, "it's just me, just me."
And I, Dada, believed you.

Then there's the boy. He's
Knocking at the door and he
Smells like the subway cause you took
The car and the baby's his and here
You're gonna have your happy ending and
Here you're staying with me, and tomorrow
We'll go look for cicada shells in Central,
Identify lemongrass or pampas, and you'll
Fall like you fell into that river when the algae
Made it look like grass and Dada will pull
You up with his strong arms, and—

Sincerely,
I'm sorry.

Forgive me,
Dear Daphne.

III.

Eventually, the sun had come and played,
Blackbirds too, the garbage truck heaved by,
And Mr. Hasan had to do morning prayers,
And I joined him.

Air was richly furnished with cold, sky
Mauve, and thanked him, took a hot
Cocoa to go, drank it alone down the street.

I found it by a riverside
In the bower far from sun, and
The dates were old and faded;
Something iambic, and poetic
Had been written as an epitaph:
"Do dwindle"? "Do dwell"? "Do as I may"?

And maybe something more.
But on the bed of the grave
Was a sprout of laurel so I
Laid down my flowers and tried
To cup some water from nearby
But it all seemed to slip through
And in that reflection of shade
My fingers seemed painted into someone else. But if
You peered too deep, too long, a specter
Of shards, delineated by fate, shatters, ripples,
And calms. Then effervesces a String of smoky silk, like
The taste of a monarch. And would you, if you
Looked away, would you swallow it then go; but you stayed,
You stayed and he handed it over, threaded with crystals
Of the coolest, freshest ice found; would you laugh if
 They cut you, bled, and froze then –
 They were tears. I poured it on you.



Art by Neviah Waldron '24

PALM

M. Lawson | mlawson25@amherst.edu

The assembly line continued: the other angels carded the wool, dip-dyed it pink in the great tin pot on their table, and fed it into the spinning wheel, which they wound on a cone that F— knit into a new section on the color block scarf. The new color was only a few rows long; this incarnation had just gained consciousness. The pink sat on top of a green section (railway worker, Romania) and a hundred other colors, lives this soul had lived, lives that F— had knit for about a million years, it seemed. F— leaned over to see how much wool they had left. A mountain of fluff sat beside the first angel, and the handfuls she grabbed to spin didn't even make a dent in its size. They still probably had enough for ten more feet of the scarf. Then, they would restart, and F— would keep working.

The angels were all aware of their impact on the incarnation, of the fact that however tightly they spun the yarn or saturated the color would have a tangible impact on her life. They knew when to give her a break by spinning looser or make things a little more tedious by purling instead of knitting, but F— was the only one who knew what was happening to the incarnation as she knit. This incarnation — young girl, lower middle class, North Carolina— was learning how to ride a bike. She and her dad were in an empty Arby's parking lot, and she rode slowly, keeping one foot on the ground.

"You won't be able to get anywhere like that," he said.

"I don't wanna fall."

"If you fall, you won't get hurt, okay? You're not that far from the ground."

She looked back at him and started to ride, but tipped left onto the hot asphalt. Her hand scraped the concrete, and she lifted it, pebbles pressed into her skin, and stared straight into the cut. F— saw the girl through gaps in the yarn, the cells in her palm, the coppery blood, and for a moment the girl could see her, too. Never had one of the incarnations looked straight at her. This one, she thought, seemed to be most perfect creature to ever breathe — and she had knit her up!

Then, the girl began to cry and looked away from F—. Her father picked her up and shushed her, wiping the blood from the cut and fogging F—'s view. She clenched the yarn tighter before

realizing it was probably hurting the girl. None of the others stopped. Were they blind to understand that they had a delicate creature on their hands, and that she was in pain?

F— stopped knitting for a moment to try and recapture the girl's gaze, but it was gone and replaced with the same glazed look she had always seen from the incarnations. The angel beside her poked her, and she kept working. F— had to remind herself to keep an even tension, keep her pace so that it wouldn't throw off the rest of the scarf. How ugly would it be if the middle cinched inward? How glorious when others only noticed the brilliant pink of the girl?

A few rows passed. The girl didn't look at F— again, though F— thought if she just stared back into her palm, she could do it. The girl was older, already. Time for the incarnations was so haphazard — concentrated in one place, then a decade gone in a single stitch. They couldn't even see the cloth of their lives, except this girl probably could, if she wanted.

She was older, and she was kissing a girl and F—'s hands gripped around her needles. She took a moment and began again. The girl headed into the other girl's arms and they were wrapped together now, for life.

In her periphery the spinning angel got up with a handful of dyed wool and left the line; everyone continued working without her. F— dropped her needles, put down the scarf, and followed after her.

"What are you doing?" F— asked.

"What do you think?" From the distance, another figure was approaching them, also with a fuzzy ball in their hand. They were going to tie the wool together and give it to another assembly line to be weaved into the girl's son, another soul's reincarnation.

"Don't you think we should keep that?"

"What?"

"I mean, shouldn't we let her have a bit of extra strength? Just in case?" The idea that the pink fuzz ball wouldn't be in her grasp, but in the grubby hands of some random angel, stolen for some ungrateful child, was liable to burn her up.

The other shook her head. "We've done this a thousand times

before. What's wrong with you now?" She nodded toward the assembly line. "You're falling behind."

The angel beside her scowled when she took her seat again. The cone of yarn wasn't even that heavy, but she acted like F— had dumped a thousand souls on her knees. F— wound the yarn around her fingers again and slipped back into the easy comfort of the girl. Couldn't she take a minute to stay with her here? Couldn't she wait a bit to breathe in her presence?

F— thought she felt the absence of the wool, though of course, that wasn't the case. Once an incarnation gave birth twelve times and she had hardly noticed the yarn thinning with each childbirth. But, that was some woman, barely even the girl's predecessor. The girl might have been trying to send her a message. She would ditch her wife and child and be hers. She was going to stay beside her forever, or she would completely destroy the system, so they could all rest and watch the Earth from above without having any pressure to keep them thriving. The girl certainly could.

The yarn grew even thinner in her hand. It had only been a row, but the vision of the girl softened and greyed. Her son was gone already, and F— hadn't even gotten a chance to look into his eyes and see if he could break through, too. The chance was minuscule, of course, because the girl was extraordinary, but maybe. She wondered why the other angels had killed him off so soon, and the wife, who had died while F— was rewinding the yarn around her fingers. It was convenient, certainly, to have that wife out of the way, so F— could be alone with the girl, but her vision of the girl clouded. The foggy was normal with old age, but maybe the girl would wipe away the debris so F— could get a good look at her.

The girl sat in her EasyChair and watched *The Price is Right* for three rows. At least now, F— could imagine sitting beside the girl in some sort of domestic bliss. No wife, no son to worry about. Just the girl and F—. The girl believed that today or tomorrow she could leave the Earth. Silly girl! If she only looked down in her palm certainly she could know that she had the power to stay alive forever, if she wanted, or go up and join F—.

The angel beside her held the yarn tight and said, "New color coming."

F— dropped her yarn. The new color was a grotesque yellow, like the Sun had aged it only enough to make it unpalatable. Was the dyer even trying? "What do you mean? It's not time yet."

“Of course it is.” She pointed to the block of pink, at least six inches long now. “She’s been alive for a long time.”

“What’s she even dying of?”

“What, have you run out of ideas?”

F– thumbed the yarn and felt the slow hum of life pulse through it. She thought, again, she could see the girl blinking at her through her palm; she was so old now, and she needed to be replaced by this putrid yellow that would inevitably produce some bratty baby who wouldn’t the thick, spinning universe.

She felt the other workers staring at her, but she didn’t budge. She would rather kill this beautiful girl instead of letting her breathe through new lungs. The new incarnation would take over and destroy any resemblance to F–’s girl. There were only four inches left of pink yarn to let the girl mold into a new reincarnation. She broke the yarn in half.

STAND TO SEE

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not echoes, maybe
not even ghosts

still, they stand in
for

everything (everything)
I need most.

A girl in red curls over a bridge,
Dress trailing longer, lower—

who's falling?
when a statue clutches her sculptor

who fell?
when everyone's hugging, hugging you so tight

I look at the sky
As if it'll tell me

something (something)
I missed when I was alone

What could I think about?
the way I think about

art I haven't seen,
but could.

Would art
(be)

Like me?
Please, sit down,

I can't
stop myself from insisting

to the girl on the bridge
standing up, up, up

in time (but whose?)
it's hard to say now,

it was even harder
before I knew

people are the imitations
paintings

are too thoughtful
to be

oh darling,
you might be a ghost,

But
why?

why did you like the cold?
why did you like the cold?

Miss,
step away please

I smile, sardonically,
I did it again,

looking into the water,
Looking up at the sun

striding across your cheeks
and maybe mine, but

what do I know
about what I looked like?

Miss?
Miss?

Right,
Right

My nose is pressed,
pressed up against

the bridge
I thought I was just looking at

I apologize,
apologizing as I step back,

my boots on hardwood floor,
Echoing

I'm Looking,
Still

Oh,
I know you wanted to infer,

never comfortable
being sure, but

I know you
wonder, so:

darling,
your dress tonight?

I do
think it's stunning



Art by Samuel Nklenga '26

FAITH, FEAR, AND FINDING MY PATH

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For those who are brought up in Asian households, “reverence” is like “respect” but with a higher level of intensity. In case you are Asian but do not see the word that way, my statement merely stems from the impression of “reverence” the very first time I looked it up in an English-Vietnamese dictionary. If I could use one of my life experiences to illustrate “reverence,” it would be unhesitatingly reciting a Buddhist chant — something I do every day.

After tenth grade, I came to live with my aunt in California and continued my schooling here. Traveling to the United States, I initially had hopes about expanding my horizons through a Western-style education. Indeed, I was on track with my supposed goals. However, at such an impressionable age, I had so many questions for the world. Never would I ever imagine my seeing-life-through-a-pink-lens approach would all then be reverted by my spiritual aunt, a devout Buddhist. Outside school, whenever possible, she would show me YouTube videos and tell me stories about how people committing heinous acts would be tortured in Hell as soon as they passed away, and how we could correct our wrongdoings by doing a few things while on Earth, like reciting chants and not cursing. These stories first fascinated me, but as time went on, they felt like something on loop, repeating themselves over and over as my aunt would not relent. They slowly incorporated themselves into my mind that I needed to be careful with whatever I did, and I always recited one of the popular Buddhist chants called *Maha Karunika citta Dharani*. Not to mention, when I was alone, to prevent the devils from manipulating me, I would use the help of the *Om Mani Padme Hum* phrase. It was a lot to take in, so I was proud the moment I managed to remember all these details.

I attended a private Christian high school where Bible education was required. In classes, my teacher showed us Bible-inspired songs and films that would demonstrate the greatness of God and his plan. One time our entire school went to see a Christian musical performance at California Baptist University, and my eagerness to stay active with extracurriculars for college admissions at that time swayed me to volunteer for half a day at Gateway Seminary in Ontario, where many of our teachers went for post-graduate education in Bible study. The conflict started when my teachers would try to convince students to convert, hinting that “idolizing other gods” was a violation of the Ten Commandments. Meanwhile, my aunt said Christianity was

true but firmly stuck to her argument that Nirvana was higher than any other afterlife outcome such as heaven, meaning that you will be free from incarnation. For the first time in my life, I feared that a war of religions was bound to break out inside of me. It did not inflict any physical wounds, but it was worse than visible injuries that can be healed: the neurological confusions that I was left with were seemingly irreversible.

Reverence for the divine world taught me to be cautious of my actions. It made me frightened of every single thing that I did or planned to do. I said no to invites for fear that I would be led astray in one of the hangouts or parties. Little by little, I detached myself from my social circle. Those who stayed were those that truly cared about me; at the time, I interpreted these relationships as predetermined — as long as they were around, it meant our thin red thread of destiny was not at the end of its road yet.

Upon graduation from high school, I knew that I inherited invaluable knowledge from both belief systems, and I sincerely trusted both. My deep respect for the existence of these religions came with a choice of eventually committing to one. I chose Buddhism since it has always been a part of my family. Following up the conscious choice was the price of entrusting my faith into something I couldn't see but could only feel yet sometimes couldn't. My aunt tended to accomplish her goals through quick ways — through tips and tricks?— and she was great at knowing what others were scared of and using it against them. After three years living with her, I was haunted by my own existence. My self-esteem took a nosedive because whenever something bad happened to me my aunt would always say I must have done something bad in my previous life. It made sense, but it hurt me over and over. My vision for a future head hit its darkest place.

Like my aunt, I trust that life is just and that whoever is masterminding my living patterns will make sure I pay all the debts and earn all the rewards before advancing to the next chapter. But unlike my aunt, I focus on the more positive belief that we are born to suffer first so that later we will cherish the good things that happen to us. Therefore, I choose to trust the religious system. One year after high school graduation, I left for South Korea with a carry-on of intertwined relief, wistfulness, and resentment. Of course, I did not forget to bring with me my certificate of ordained Dharma name.

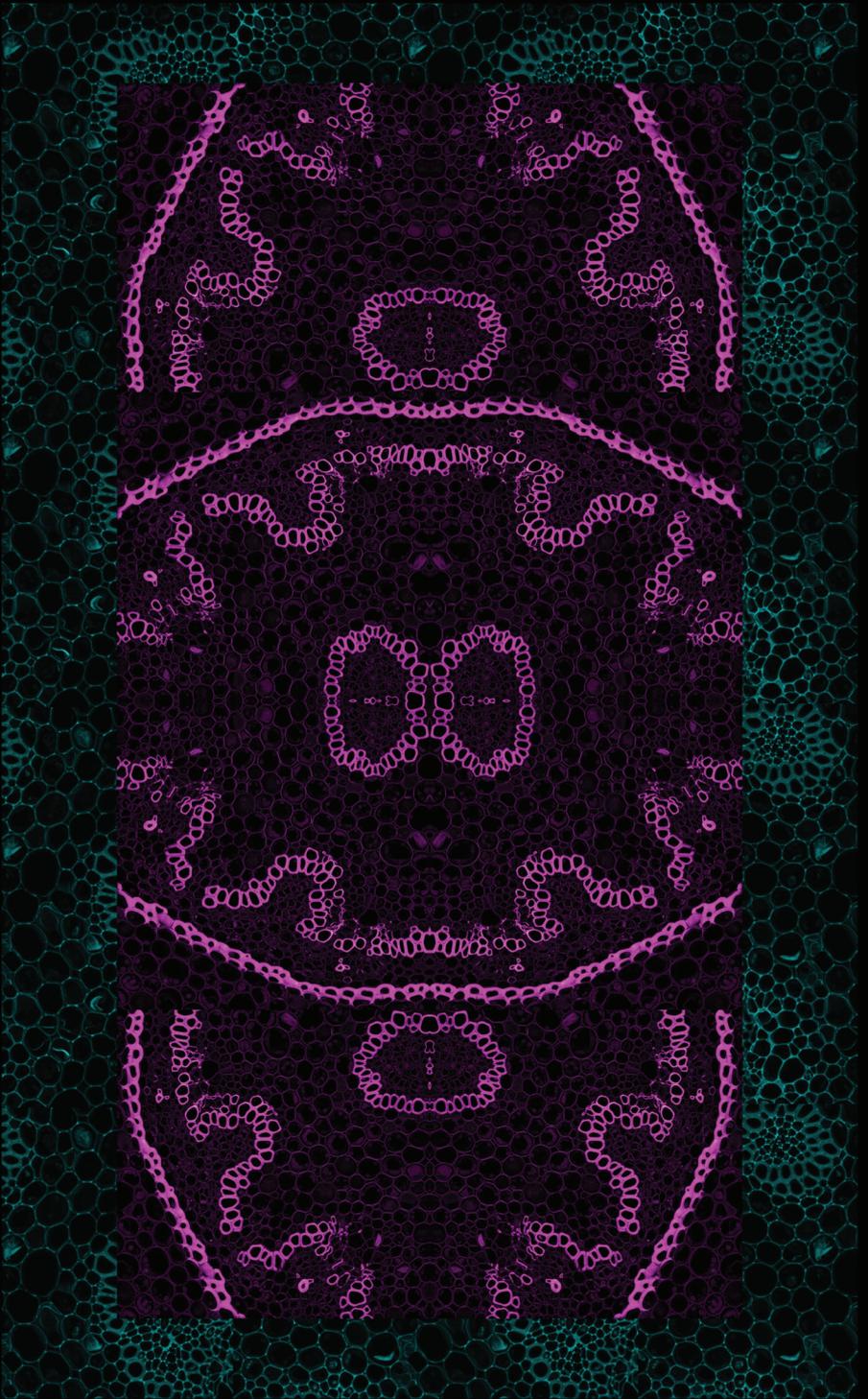
In Korea, things slowed down for my soul. The unexpected tranquility created space for me to process things that had hap-

pened and my most recent decision to leave home. I couldn't forget the incidents, but with my efforts to push through, the tragedy felt lesser day after day.

During my time at Amherst, I saw young people on campus studying, partying, enjoying themselves, and having fun. I asked myself: "What if I could just have fun for one tiny moment?" I didn't need to take it as far as drinking alcohol or doing drugs (which are not my cup of tea), but maybe I could stop fretting about consequences and break my daily cycle. It is always easier said than done. Overcoming my own trauma demanded a lot of patience, yet I knew it was part of the process.

I have a soft side for the world of souls and spirits because deep down inside me, I believe that everything that gets talked about gets talked about for a reason – maybe they are true. I would pay full attention to my mom reporting what a fortune teller said about me. I would go to tarot and palm reading sessions to hear what the spiritual readers have to say about my studies, careers, or love life. I would say yes to other similar things because somehow, I know that besides the privilege to have my free will in various aspects of my life. I can gain access to the message that the universe reserves for me. If I have the will, there is always a way.

The reverence that I have had for the unseen forces makes me feel protected. Despite not knowing what kind of superpowers "they" possess and how to address them properly, I am sure they always accompany me on my journey and miraculously save me from countless situations in reality. Still, making real-life decisions for myself sometimes feels hard just being aware of the invisible entities, especially when this world is not all in with me in this aspect. Above all, what counts is that, through this emotional path and the reverence that I have developed over the years, I learned gratitude, humility, and moral ethics. I also learned to trust what my normal eyes can't see and to trust that I don't have to change anything about the self that makes me me.



Art by Anna Ortiz '24

AWAKENING OF REVERENCE

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Methods:

I slurp in tufts of grass, I gnaw on bites of un/flesh, I wish-, I plead with the moon to caress my jaw, I detach-ment as a 2-step process; 1. learn that guilt tastes like sin. Two. refuse to show how missing licks languidly at your lips. I wish this isn't all I-, I take you away from clarity, I dunk your head into the spit-grass phlegm that wines my veins, I call this feeling [], I wish this isn't all I can-, I grasp at longing like a child does thunder, I sound at & sometimes I ghost in hollows. I wish this isn't all I can write. please. Please

Then the researcher inputs their-our-your opinion.

We allow mold to flower on your insides. We write tears into every line of every poem. then We proceed to sink into forgiveness or not. We take turns rewiring organs to produce softness. We play jubilee, say consume consume with a soft exhale and let the disassembling of your body core happen. We gouged open; throat first; so all the inky slime-gripped letters can finally spill. We spit out barbed-wire-hurt, chew on wounds sticky with terror. let We cling to your innards, holding mounds of slick cracked open flesh. let We procure slow sludge touch that barely survives.



Art by Evelyn Chi '25

DRAWING LINES IN THE SAND

Grace Escoe | gescoe26@amherst.edu

I draw a line
My finger digs deep into the sand taking out a nice long straight
line

That isn't really my own even though I made it
The line that I cannot cross
The line that keeps me from making mistakes
Doing the things that will get me burned

The sand behind the line is wet and smooth.
Keeps the bottom of my feet safe
Safe is the word I have chased after
For as long as I can remember.
When I see that word I run after it leaving
Footsteps deep in the sand

I trip up
I expose
My mouth leads me to fail
To turn words into mistakes
I step back yet again to draw another line
This line
Drawing right over my mouth

That word again
I run and run after.

The water brushes the middle of my calf
A wave of prickles up my legs
My legs are straining to keep balance
And my feet are numb
I have moved back so far
But I cannot cross
Love, Laughter, Lines

Wind, Waves, Balance
The ground
My cheek
Every piece of grimy sand
The water washes it all away
Another slip up; another line.

The waves crashing
My back

Support
Gives way

I'm drowning
I don't remember
The last time
The warmth
The burn
A breath of fresh air

There's another wave
I fight through it
But seaweed
Ropes
Lines
Dragging me down

I can't escape
I fight and fight
But the surface
Always just out of
Touch
Reach

I give up
I sink
I fight

It's too cold now
I dissolve
I become water
There is no fight
Against the tide

Left in these limbs
I can't move
I can't breathe
Darkness
I give up

Black spots jump on my eyes
Circles
Continuous cycles
No end

A shock
A small ray
Yellow

Alive with
Lines
Hanging from it

I forget for just a moment the paranoia
The smallest tide comes along
Faint like a whisper
But still enough to feel it
A will to live

I start upwards
My leg muscles strain against
Seaweed
Ropes
Lines
The more and more I fight
The more I realize they are still just lines.

I swim to the sand
Lie on the shore
I breathe in intoxicating air
Oxygen
Brain awakening
The realities of why I threw myself into the sea
I try to push it out

The next moment
It fills my lungs again
Without my consent
Bringing everything back to life
The thoughts come crashing
An avalanche
Tumble in the sand
The air breaking down
The wall
The water
Created to keep them away

I am tempted to throw myself back in
I remember the cold

My limbs going numb
Water filling lungs
Just as the air
Without consent
Leaving me
No control

So
I get up
I try to cross a line

Another burn
Another step back
The cycle
Starts all over again.

Insanity:
Doing the same thing over and over
And expecting a different outcome

But I do not know
How
To get off the beach
To stop from getting burned
To breathe salt stained air
To get sunscreen
To swim in an ocean
Constantly trying to drown me.

So I just keep drawing
Then drowning
Then swimming
Then drawing
Then drowning
Then swimming.

I wonder if I even want to leave the beach
This is all I've ever known
The sand
Running along the arches of my feet
Makes me feel safe
I run and run after
The sound of waves crashing a lullaby
I've grown fond of
The warmth of the sun on my skin
The smell of salt in the air

As I realize that this
Kept me from escape
I close my eyes
Take a deep breath

Yet this time
I let the air truly consume me
Except

Accept
The unknown
I let it
Trickle life
To this exhausted frame
And as I breathe out
I let go

Hope giving me one last chance
I get up
I draw yet another line in the sand
One that is curved
Unfolding a shape
I cannot understand

A flower forming
No blooming
My fingertips.

A new path or another loop
But a change all the same
Growth

I dig my finger deep into the sand
Satisfied as I curve it into something my own



RESURRECTION FERNS

Sonia Chajet Wides | schajetwides25@amherst.edu

waving forests carpet tree branches
trunks, Dragon scales and hair sprouting
sometimes so dense that the bark is made invisible
the tree
becomes a tower gorgeous
fractal ferns
towers of themselves, spring spirals

The day after I met them
they died
in wilt, black, dry
crumpled
into the rest of the surface, I mourned
my miraculous moment of witnessing

Then it thundered, summer thunder into vapor
Their green vibrated as if by magic
returned
And only later did I learn
they were called resurrection

In a zoomed-in photo from below a tree
the moss made of ferns
is indistinguishable from a forest;
I turn to topography
to understand this terrain as a planet,
how mountains piercing the air make this a surface
that when zoomed out is swathed, ensconced
in a smoothing
atmosphere marbleizing mountains
fractalizing the earth

When astronauts are far enough in space they can hold their
thumbs up and obscure
the whole earth
and in doing so obscure each person, plant, and thing
each mountain, cloud and piece of paper,
speck of dust
It is hard to know if those things exist
anymore beneath
the fingerprint and the thumb

What has never comforted me is
the idea of my smallness

When I witness the tumble out of a camera towards space
towards fingerprint
earth towards swirling solar systems, spirals into sudden
galaxies,
topography obscured
my stomach lurches
but I am not nothing

Because how can the small be rendered
irrelevant, how
can the largeness of the world not make me feel
the millions of ferns spring, held under my thumb

HOW TO TEACH YOUR YOUNGER BROTHER HOW TO FLY

Sarah Wu | sdwu25@amherst.edu

1. You scream the first time you fly. This is only okay if you practice in your own room. You start from the top of your dresser and jump. That way, only the walls stare at you as you bloody your knee against your floor.
2. You must learn how to fly without screaming. If you scream, then your brother will notice. Your brother cannot notice, or else he will never learn how to fly.
3. Your younger brother must trust you. This should be easy. He should already trust you.
4. The next day, your younger brother asks why you are limping. You tell him that you are trying out a new style of walking. The next day, he limps with you. He turns his left foot awkwardly, and drags it behind him. It reminds you of a tail dragging behind a rat.
5. Your brother was born in the year of the rat. When he discovers this, he comes to you wailing. I don't want to be a rat, he whimpers. You pat him sympathetically. It's okay, you say. You, of course, have no such issue with your animal. Your zodiac animal is a rooster.
6. After all, rats are just featherless roosters.
7. But when your brother snuffles, you lie. Zodiac animals are nonsense. Of course you are not a rat.
8. Bible studies has taught you that lying is bad. That you will be sent to h-e-l-l. Your teacher likes drawing out the letters in a long whisper as if the word itself is a prayer. But it is most definitely not a prayer. Prayers are things that people wish for. H-e-l-l is a place where the bad people go.
9. H-e-l-l is how you make your first friend. Her name is Katie. She is pretty. You exchange looks with Katie as your teacher drones out the word h-e-l-l again and again and giggle. Isn't the teacher silly? Katie tells you after class. You agree.
10. Katie has a nose piercing, and it fascinates you. You are not sure why she is in Bible school, but you are too intrigued

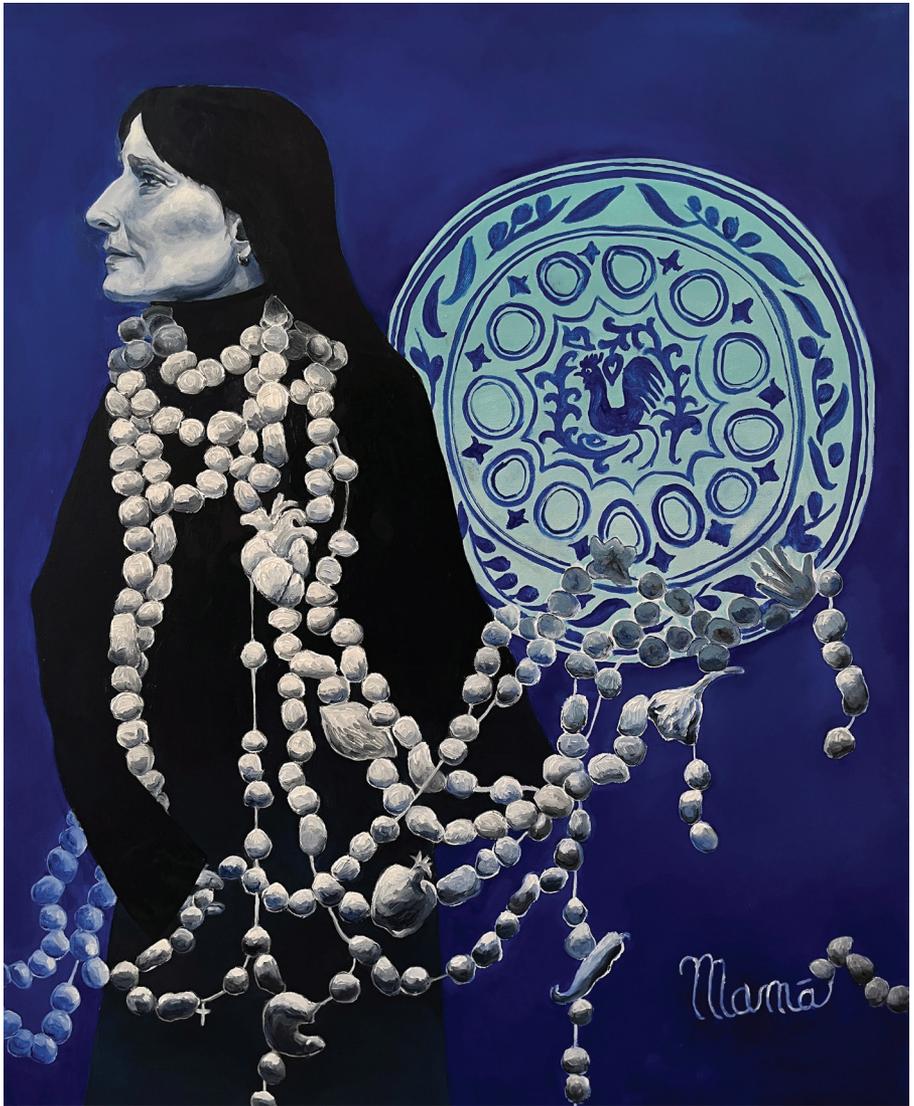
to ask. You just stare at her shiny nose stud and wonder where she had it done. I like your nose piercing, you tell her. I don't, she says. How old are you? you ask. Fifteen. She is two years older than you. She is small for fifteen.

11. After Bible studies one day, your brother comments, you talk about Katie a lot.
12. You hesitate. She is like an older sister, you finally decide to say.
13. A month later, Katie tells you that she lied. I'm thirteen. The same age as you.
14. You are relieved and hurt. Katie notices your face. You are not quite sure why her lie hurt as much as it did. Katie says, I lied because you are not supposed to pierce your nose before you are fifteen. I lied because I was scared of what you would think.
15. Is this the only way of loving? you want to ask Katie. Instead, you ask, How did you get it pierced? and she says, My older brother.
16. You did not know she had an older brother. You turn away before your lips begin to quiver.
17. You also are a person who lies. At home, your younger brother notices your face too. You tell him that it is just sweat. See? You say. You touch your finger to your wet face and let him lick it. It's salty. Like sweat, you lie.
18. Sometimes, it is fun to lie about stories. You like to make up stories about yourself. In this story, you are not your brother's real sister. But you love him too much to leave him. This is what you tell your brother: I could fly away. But look how much I love you. So much so that I am still with you today.
19. I love you too, your brother says, and you almost believe him.
20. Other days, he clings to your backpack and cries, don'tleavemedon'tleaveme in a long string of words. Those days, you think he loves you only for the sake of survival.
21. Is this the only way of loving?
22. You also like telling stories about h-e-l-l. Unlike you, your

brother is scared of h-e-l-l. Your foot will break through the dirt like thin ice, you tell your brother. He shivers. His eyes are large, and you know he is listening. You tell him, when you fall into h-e-l-l, you can never come back to earth again.

23. The next day, you hear a knock at the door. You open it. Your brother comes in. His eyes are puffy and red. I don't want to fall into h-e-l-l, he whispers. You let him crawl into the warmth of your bed. You kiss him on top of his soft head. He is warm.
24. Once again, it is important to teach your brother how to trust you. You do this by being an older sister.
25. But he comes into your room again. And again. Even a month later, when you are having your first sleepover with Katie, he opens the door over and over again. You shove him into his room and lock the door. The next morning, you and Katie wake up together and spot his small body lying against the foot of the bed.
26. Katie wonders why. You laugh and tell her how silly your younger brother is. I told him that he might fall into h-e-l-l, you say. But when you look at Katie, she doesn't laugh. She says, My older brother was cruel. He was bored with life. He told me that the piercing wouldn't hurt. He placed a needle to my nose and told me it would be fun.
27. After that day, Katie stops visiting. When you try to make eye contact with her in Bible studies, she avoids your gaze.
28. That night, you feel your brother squirm back onto the bed with you. He is not Katie. You feel a strong desire to scream. When morning rises, you promise your brother, I will teach you how to leave h-e-l-l. You lie, I will teach you how to fly.
29. You sling your backpack underneath the kitchen table like abandoning a dog. Your brother sits on your backpack and swings his feet lazily. He watches you with curiosity as you scramble up the kitchen counter. Then the stovetop. Then, you hang from the hooked lights above.
30. You can count how many dead flies are smushed across the ceiling.
31. Your younger brother is small from up here.

32. The floor is far, far away.
33. There are eight dead flies. One of them is only a dark smear.
34. This time, you do not scream. For a second, it almost feels like you are flying. You are just like a rooster. You want to laugh at God and his angels.
35. You land.
36. Your knees absorb the impact. One of them cracks. You do not scream.
37. Your younger brother doesn't notice your twisted leg. Teach me, he begs. Teach me.
38. When you don't respond, your brother begins climbing.



Art by Sofia Yadigaroglu '24



Art by Kyla Biscocho '25

প্রণাম (BLESSINGS)

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Kneel. A light touch on your temple. Rise.

Kneel: Touch your head to their feet. Your knees sting against the cold marble. Your fingers brush their toes. Seconds pass. Hours pass. You hold your breath, trying not to look at curled up toenails, worn with age. Laughter up above you. Shoulders tremble. Time to rise back up. Your mother is pleased.

Kneeling: is a blessing. to get down on your knees is ritual sacrifice of your arrogance. to touch the toes of your elders is worship of age and experience. to hold on is to feel the light of their wisdom. to feel their palm on your forehead is absolution of your sins, necessary for your survival. to get back up, feel their arms cradle your body. it's unconditional love. it's culture. it's community.

“Tapti. প্রণাম করো! I'm so sorry, my daughter has become too westernized.”

Kneeling: is a curse. an exercise in dehumanization. muscle memory forces you down. family keeps you there. respect's a fancy excuse for blindness. tradition for obstinance. what is wisdom spoken from a mad sage? reverence to a disbeliever? love is easier said than done, community easier created than kept.

Kneel: To the woman who called you fat. To the aunt who pulled you into a hug. To the uncle who stared at your chest. To the family you left behind. To those who deserve it. To those who don't. Up. Down. Rinse. Repeat.

“বড়দের আশীর্বাদ ছাড়া কিছু নেই.” (We are nothing without the blessings of our elders.)

ADDICTION

Sebastian Paredes | sparedes26@amherst.edu

He drinks coffee. He embraces the bitter liquid. He does not care that it burns the roof of his mouth. He does not care that he can see his hands trembling. He does not care that he can feel his body shaking.

He drinks, and drinks, and drinks.

He vapes. One drug is not enough for him. He needs to see his hands tremble, and he needs to feel his brain inundated with dopamine. Otherwise he cannot focus. Otherwise he is not happy. Otherwise he is not satisfied. He is not addicted though. Or at least he tells himself that.

He vapes, and vapes, and vapes.

He finishes his classes. He climbs the four flights of stairs to his room. He collapses onto his bed. He surrenders. He does not understand why he is in college. He does not understand why he is in New England. He does not understand anything. He is not swimming in his own mind, he is drowning.

He drowns, and drowns, and drowns.

Yet he does not drop out. He does not leave New England. He stays, and continues drinking coffee, and vaping, and drowning. Caffeine and nicotine are the crutches holding him upright, his life vests.

He stays, and stays, and stays.

He is a pleaser. He studies hard to please his parents. He arranges his hair every morning to please his suitors. He makes people laugh to please his friends. He talks in class to please his professors.

He pleases, and pleases, and pleases.

His parents do not care for his grades. His suitors do not look at his Instagram story. His friends do not laugh at his jokes. His professors do not remember his name.

For these reasons, he will drink coffee tomorrow. He will vape tomorrow. He will drown tomorrow. He will stay tomorrow. These things make him a better pleaser. And to him, a better person.

He will drink coffee the next day. He will vape the next day. He will drown the next day. He will stay the next day. He will please the next day.

He has become addicted to pleasing. It's his purpose and his destruction.

STUPLIMITY

Gabrielle Avena | gavena25@amherst.edu

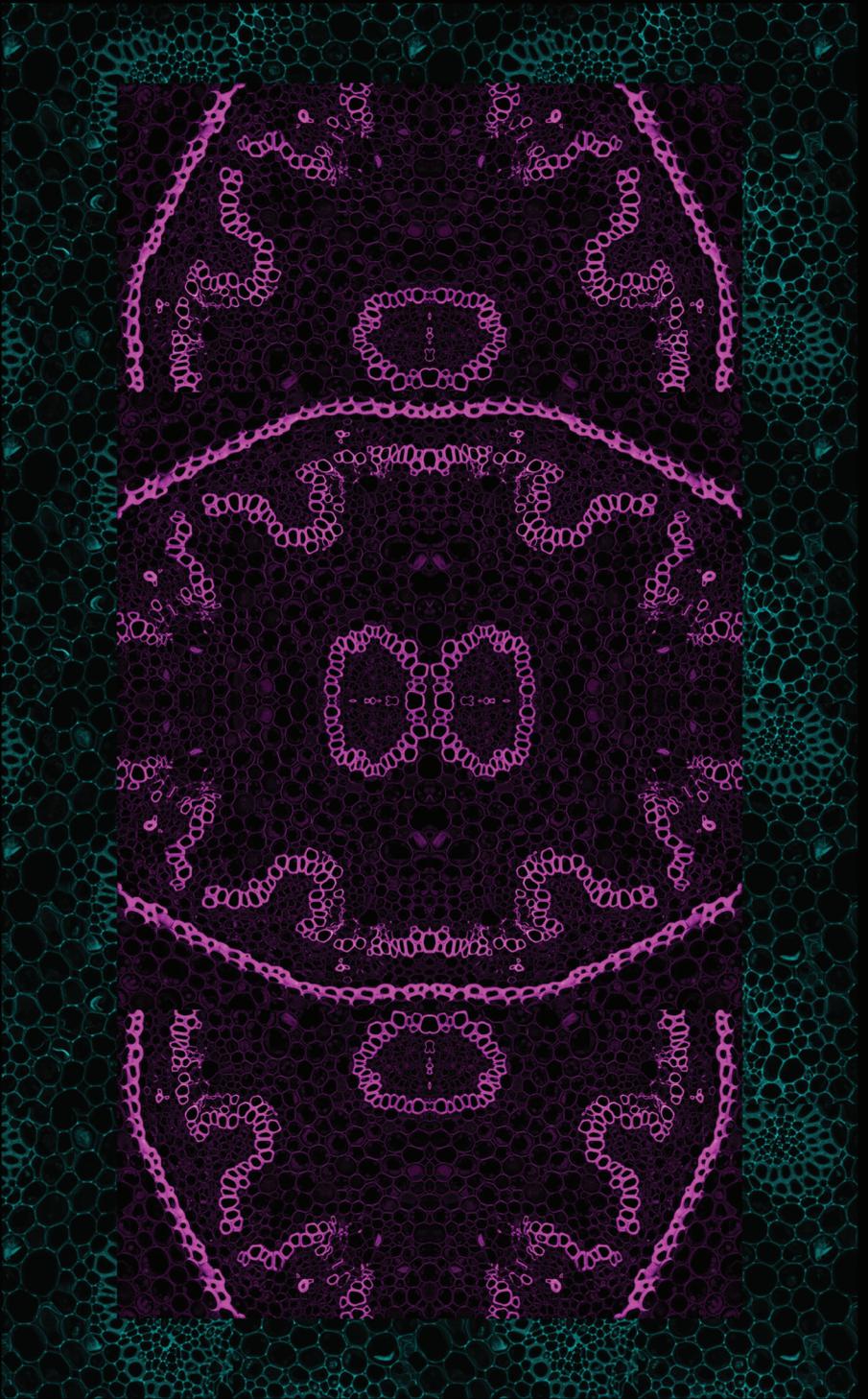
i:
the tree kneels
at the pond the tree
kneels to touch the
pond touch neither the
tree nor the pond
which the tree wants
touching your fingers
which cannot touch
the tree curl like
the tree's bowed
back arcing up to
touch the ache of
sky arcing down to
touch the ache of
pond with frond fingers
within yet without
the pond they ache
as one as wind as if
breath could do more
than touch

then breathe
then touch

ii:
close the book
for the spider's spit silhouette
startle into earth
sipping softly at skin underside
feet still stuck in shade
sloughed-off sandals
sticking out the earth
from which the spider
shivers upon you
and your book closed
for you have seen this all before



Art by Neviah Waldron '24



Art by Anna Ortiz '24

AWAKENING OF REVERENCE

Mel Arthur | marthur25@amherst.edu

Results:

all
signs
end
in
mumumusic babblebuzzmusic
even
the
part
of
yourself
that
refuses
to
learn
unlearning.

The dreadfulness
of knowing you more
than I miss you

will
rework
itself
into a new taste of
sin.

THE PERFECT MAN

Mackenzie Dunson | mdunson25@amherst.edu

A row of homes. Perfect homes, like they were pasted from the pages of a catalog. Sprawling white picket fences ran over the hills, connecting the houses in a puzzle, endlessly together. Bright green grass seemed to glow under the setting sun. I basked in its radiance, my body glowing behind the windshield of my car.

Perfect, He whispered to me, *everything looks perfect*. I felt His radiance, my cheeks curled up, crinkling at the corner of my eyes. My car pulled to a stop at the curb in front of the house. I neglected to pull into the driveway, a car already filling its slot. I briefly glanced over it, before my eyes shot back, its crimson red imprinting into my skull. My hand tightened over the steering wheel, it was *wrong*. The red among the pretty cream shades of the home were like blood, staining the image. The ticking of my watch gnawed at me. I steeled myself, gathering my bearings before stepping out of my car.

I stopped for a moment to look at the perfectly edged lawn. The shined leather of my loafers complemented the sight nicely. I took a deep inhale, as my head tilted towards the sky, as I felt His hands on my shoulder and breath on my ear, *perfect*, He said, *I know that you can make it perfect*. He uttered my name. I shuddered, embodying the praise, receiving it in my mind, my soul. His words pushed me towards the door. I kept my eyes forward, past the bright crimson that haunted me. I glanced at the sign stamped in the middle of the lawn as I passed it, my bright grin reflected back at me, gleaming white teeth along with my white skin. I looked like *Him*.

Perfect, He continued to whisper, *everything would be p-*

The Man loves us all.

I love the Man.

I see Him in the mirror.

I see Him over my shoulder, whispering in my ear. I see Him in my smile. Staring back at me when I look down at my graduation photo.

I didn't see Him in this foreigner's eyes. My own smile dropped from my face, as this new man presented his hand to me, in a flourish that couldn't be anything more than insincere. I

reached out to grab the offender's hand. His hand was rough, his callouses burning my skin. As my gaze trailed up his arm, I followed the thick cotton of his shirt, I could see his crooked teeth, his straggle tooth that poked out from his lips, the specks of gray that littered his hair, and the deep bags set into his eyes.

The Man would never look like him. He would carefully manage every aspect of his appearance. Meticulously combing his hair, dying the gray streaks that would show up, so that everything would be in pristine condition. The Man wore braces all the way through high school, suffering the judgment of his peers, so that my teeth would be in the perfect rows that they are now. The Man did what needed to be done, suffering through scorn and mockery, so that I could be perfect, so that everything would be perfect.

No matter how much this foreigner worked, he would never amount to the perfection that the Man has. I knew just from looking at him, he would never compare. He tarnished the atmosphere of the kitchen. He was like a blot of ink, splattered across the tiles, the countertop, the stainless steel refrigerator, flagrantly spreading the more you try to wipe it clean.

I hated mess.

More than anything the Man hated mess.

"It's nice to meet you," the offender's voice cut through my mental shroud, "My name is Isaac." His wedding ring glinted under the fluorescent lights in a violent show of domesticity.

The Man shakes Isaac's hand. Grinning back in response.

"It's a pleasure," His voice spirals from my throat. He releases Isaac's hand, shifting back his shoulders. A ray of sun streamed in through the glass doors leading to the porch, radiating off of the back of his head. He continued, "I'm glad that you've found your way here."

Isaac responded with equal enthusiasm, "yes, I have had my eye on this house for a while. It's a miracle we have enough for the down payment."

Yes, *a miracle indeed*. He turned and started his way through the house, allowing Isaac to follow. The Man struck up conversation as Isaac inspected the rooms.

"What made you come all the way here to this neighborhood,"

He asked, his back turned to them, as He continued walking slowly.

“Oh,” Isaac continued, “my wife wasn’t able to join me today, but we were looking for somewhere bigger, also closer to the schools in the area.” My movements slowed to a pause as His grin slid off of my face.

Isaac continued to speak, as his words echoed around my head, “We’ve both been working for quite some time to save up, and move into a better place. Somewhere for our kids to grow and become great people of the world themselves, y’know?” He laughed to himself before continuing, “so many people in this world would never give a guy like me a chance, based on where I came from, so I’m making a new path for them.”

He was planning on staying. He and this unnamed wife.

Spiraling, I thought of their children.

And their children’s children. And their children’s children’s children.

And their children’s children’s children’s childre—

Spreading like that ink blot. Spreading, spoiling, tarnishing—

“Are you okay there bud?” Isaac’s voice broke me out of my reverie. The Man’s grin stretched my face as I turned back to Isaac. I couldn’t read his face, but I could sense the apprehension of his gaze. *Good*, the Man whispered in my ear, *very good*.

“I’m fine,” I spoke through the grin, “let’s go back to the kitchen to finish discussing.” He didn’t look convinced but followed anyway.

As I led the way, tension suspended my shoulders. The Man was waiting, watching. I continued the conversation, jargon subconsciously exiting my mouth, confident, while my mind was anything but. I saw Isaac’s face, more relaxed now. Less tense.

I thought of the other residents of this neighborhood, the smiles on their faces as they signed the lease, and I gave them their keys to move in. Each and every family, *perfection*, their beautiful glowing *white* faces. How they all counted on me. To keep this place clean, to keep it *pure*. This neighborhood, the community, was not one to be stained by the presence of this man and his wretched family. With their imperfections, impurities— it was *wrong*.

“It’s unfortunate that you won’t be able to stay,” my voice cut off Isaac mid-sentence. He seemed to jerk back in surprise.

He seemed lost for words, “why?”

“Oh well,” I turned around for a moment, as the Man’s words flowed from my mouth, “you see, my job here is to not just sell houses, but to also oversee who is allowed in this neighborhood.”

Isaac spoke up again, stuttering out, “I don’t, I don’t understand.”

The Man’s mouth curled down into a frown. Mocking.

“You see, because I have to make sure everyone in this neighborhood gets along, and I don’t,” he paused for effect, “I just don’t think you’ll get along with everyone here.”

Isaac’s brows furrowed down. “You don’t just get to decide that,” Isaac said, his voice raising, “we got all the way here, it’s not—it’s not.” He floundered for words.

The Man’s face slowly shed his frown, as a smile grew. His cheeks didn’t just curl up, they tightened, like a string was pulling them into place, freezing his face in that uncanny grin. The temperature in the room seemed to drop several degrees. “It is ultimately my decision,” He said, face stuck in that grin, cheeks unnaturally upturned, “you see, if I don’t think you’ll be a good fit, or possibly, do harm to the families that live here.” His voice trailed off. The insinuation was obvious.

If possible, the Man’s grin grew larger, as He continued. “No, we can’t have that. That was the purpose of this *inspection* after all.”

Isaac stepped towards me, one hand reaching to me, the other one gripping his own shirt in bargaining. “I’ve saved enough already, I have enough for the down payment,” he explained, eyes frantic, “after everything I’ve done, everything I’ve worked for to get here, all the roads that I’ve crossed to help my family, you can’t just force me to leave!”

“It’s not enough unfortunately,” I said, shaking my head, “in this neighborhood, it will never be enough.”

Show me.

Make it perfect.

The weight of salvation caused me to move, finally revealing what the Man had stashed behind my back. Like everything else in the kitchen: glittering, shining underneath the fluorescent lights. Surprisingly, Isaac stood his ground, though his pupils seemed to shake in fear.

“You can’t stay anymore,” I said, shaking my head to him mockingly, “but you can’t leave.” Horror finally dawned on Isaac’s face.

“He said that I can’t let you leave,” resolutely, I confirmed.

All for Him.

It has to be perfect, *all for Him*.

I was swift. His cries and pleas fell deaf to my ears. I could feel his warmth, the red. Splattered over the tiles in the kitchen, on the counters, on the floor. I could see the red now, growing into a vast garden of roses, roses to be seen, felt, enjoyed by Him. By the Man, by the other residents of this neighborhood.

I didn’t mind this mess. I don’t think He did either. The maintenance crew would come by to clean it tomorrow morning anyways.

Finished with my job, I moved back, wiping my hands off on my pants, spreading the rouge down the white slacks.

When I turned back to look at the glass doors behind me, His face grinned back at me.

Perfect.

VOGUE

HAHA SIKE



THIS AMERICANA

Art by Leoni Wright '26

STARRY NIGHT

Gracie Rowland | growland25@amherst.edu

I feel cleaner, my fears farther away, after staring at the stars in
their great cosmos.
They allow me to find beauty, allow me half a moment to forget
my sorrows.

Like a great laughing tapestry above my head,
Like a poem that demands to be read,
The stars help me feel smaller, help me forget both the living
and the dead.

But the stars cannot starve me of my despair,
Cannot let me forget the rage I feel inside, that familiar red
glare.

I just need a mother, or a father, or even a god to talk to,
I just need someone to tell me it will be all right.
But I'm left with no reply from my loving sky,
So I pace all through the velvet night.

IMPROV TRAGEDY AND LAUGHS AFTERTHEFACT

Aidan Cooper | acooper26@amherst.edu

i squirrel away my hurts into peanut shells that i hide at the
root of my knurled spine,
all my snot-bubbles, all my stubbed toes,
all the times i let my teeth ferment in my spit without brushing
before bed,
the bits scabbed over by fiber, in neat pairs,
stick the nightmares next to nightmares, separate under skin,
i've never used a nutcracker,
i break my own jaw,
and dance in jerks and heaves, to amy winehouse, when i'm
ready to open for the orange moon,
it's funny though, tragically,
how everything i've ever tasted has been tasted before, we're all
slurping instrumentally
at the air between ice-cubes
in our coffees or boba teas, dripping down the aisles of a
bookstore of discarded maybes,
which are just the contortions
of letters we scrawled in the intestines of our bookmarked
body, because we're flowering up,
because time is heavy, tragically,
and i love just how little i can see with my glasses, i have to
touch the world now,
i have to "write characters" in my poems,
swim in the synapses of fingertip tips, unshell the worries, taste
the thick swirls,
trudge through the night with one,
knead laughs from laughless reality-tv with others, i find
romance in the exhales,
in the ripples after the *plunk*, tragically,
i try so hard to be funny, but my tongue spins a laugh-rhythm
like gun-armed flies,
improv tragedy slings from body, to body,
to the pork-belly, blistering in my mother's oven, and i wonder
how many hurts the pig held,
and whether it remembered the slop,
or if it could read kurt vonnegut or emily dickinson with the
same fear of shattering,
or if it ogled at the moon,
broke its own jaw to let the butcher with a dead son and a
stone-grater accent (you know it),
rip its peanut-center from the inside,
as a sort of revenge, as a sort of reverence, as a sort of chuckle,
nightmares attract nightmares,

the pork-belly tastes silent, tragically,
and the person i love is getting on a plane, so we spend the
night placed under the moon,
we crack open our jaws to each other,
and the hurt smells caramelized, like pork-belly, gun-armed
flies scrambling to consume us,
soggy-toothed, drill-tongued fruitflies,
we're swatting at them like lingerie, like two swollen halves of
an orange begging for unpeeling,
and there is no unshell, no crack, no dryness,
just the sponginess of knowing that all peanuts can get closer,
we can softly twirl into oneness,
a pig in grassblades, satisfied, watching
the whole of the moon open into our laughing pains, we're
bloodletting our mushy heart-hurts,
and when we split, one half flies away,
dandelion seeds pat against the windshield towards the cold
house i will sleep in, and i laugh,
because i know my half hates the cold of snow,
this is summertime, and the ice-cubes in my tea melt and i
laugh, i laugh, i break my jaw,
i tassel my head out of my window, and bloom in-future,
in caramelizing dread, in the gushing hysteria of maybes –
nightmare and poetry, interlinked.



Art by Shayna Klainberg '25

I TEAR OPEN THE SKY

Max Pasakorn | mpasakorn@amherst.edu

and nothing comes out. I didn't know
what I was expecting—

babies, perhaps? Ones with wings
too small to lift them back up,
cursed little things
with no-return policies.
As a child, I watched *Dumbo* and
thought that was how I arrived,
birthed from the sky, hand-delivered
by storks. In middle school, I learned
I was actually a product
of pain, that my mother wanted me
so bad she was willing
to be fucked over and over
by a man she only claimed to love,
a beggar cupping her hands, biting her lips
for hand-me-downs to start a new life.
When I arrived, I was so excited to leave
her behind, I almost tore her apart.
I couldn't believe that. I wanted only
to believe in imaginary things:
 Forces visible only to physicists.
 Handsome heroes in YA novels.
 Destiny.

The tear in the sky doesn't heal.
Tears can't, generally. I look up
and see a door with its hinges
battered to dust. In the breeze,
the ripped edges flagellate, protecting
its secrets like the makeshift umbrella
of a mother's body in rain.
Soon, I stop wishing for something
to fall into my hands. Nothing is coming.
I watch the hole grow bigger. Only then
do I realize I've done something horribly,
horribly wrong.

10th grade







ISLAND OF REVERENCE

Willow Delp | wdelp26@amherst.edu

“Reverence is nearly equivalent to veneration, but expresses something less of the same emotion. It differs from awe in that it is not akin to the feeling of fear, dread, or terror, while also implying a certain amount of love or affection. We feel reverence for a parent and for an upright magistrate, but we stand in awe of a tyrant.”

– Century Dictionary,

The dictionary is wrong. The dictionary is written by parents and upright magistrates and kings all ill-acquainted with true reverence, the reverence that makes you sob and beg and wail and grovel: I cannot do that, I cannot pay that, I cannot go to prison. I cannot spend the rest of my days bending to the will of the ocean currents. [You turn to the next page of the dictionary, and it casts a long shadow.]

The dictionary is incomplete. There is no awe without terror, no unconditional mercy. Reverence is unequivocal, needing, clinging, desperation, it gives and gives and gives, until the sacrifice becomes the last pennies, the last crumbs, the last hairs plucked from the last scalp. [The last grains of sand, burning in the Ogyian sun.]

The parent, the magistrate, the tyrant — for the child, there is no difference; the terror and awe are the same. They mix together like blood and spit and tears — they mingle in the same fleshy weakness. The parent, the magistrate, the tyrant: their skin is steel. Their blood is ichor. [You are the nymph Calypso, daughter of Atlas.] They have emigrated from the island of Reverence, resettled into the city of Revered, where everyone and no-one rules. [There is nowhere else to go.]

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