



REMEMBERANCE

The
NASSAU
LITERARY
REVIEW



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"Remembrance"

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Cover art "Untitled" by Maggie Chamberlain



Dear Readers,

As we finally return to our full, varied, and invigorating campus community for the first time since the pandemic began, we find ourselves examining memories—those of the life we knew before, this past summer and its fingerprints, the people we have been and known. In some cases, it has been startlingly easy to slip back into our old rhythms. Meals with friends at crowded tables, seminars spent discussing legal language in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, sunsets over Gothic towers, all these signs seem to point to a return to “normal,” to stasis. Yet other things have shifted: the professors we know only by their eyes, the people we accidentally walked past because they look so different outside the small rectangles of Zoom.

And as we gather to read, write, and think together, we are reminded of how fortunate we are to attend a university where we can do so safely. A campus which can organize and afford weekly testing is unfortunately a luxury, one we're very aware of as education stays remote in Ashira's home country of India.

For some, the past is a place of refuge, that “still blue” home Genrietta Churbanova lovingly paints in “My Grandmother's House.” It is our foundation, our source of comfort and wisdom in turbulent times, as Tristan Szapary suggests in his return to the Biblical Book of Job, in which the titular Job bears unimaginable suffering through unshakeable faith. Meanwhile, Maggie Chamberlain's tranquil beach landscape and Sabrina Kim's aching “Abecedarian for August” seem to tug us back toward a past we can't quite reach, a past both known and unknown, woven into the fabric of our very being.

But for others, memory infects like a disease, inextricable from the now. The narrator of “Loose Strands” struggles to define herself within the confines of expectation, eventually transcending into surrealist imagery to excavate her own identity; Emma Mohrmann's “Confined” is trapped within itself, grasping for freedom behind an impassable block; and the speaker in Lara Katz's “Dinner With a Jewish Boy” speaks in halting hypotheticals, straining toward a self which is unhindered by tradition.

Yet the past is also interwoven with our future. Sydney Peng's “Traffic Light” captures a world gone satirically stale, a desert with nowhere to go, while the protagonist of Mina Yu's “Replica” finds himself replaced by artificial intelligence, human empathy exchanged for robotic insensitivity. But even as we probe the ethics of progress, perhaps we can also align ourselves with the taxi driver Vadim from “Taksist”: though life bends and twists in unexpected ways, we can still find beauty in the smallest of joys. So how will memory continue to inform our path forward? Who will we be, after what we have been?

After three semesters of remote work, our staff could come together to experience these pieces—the work submitted by undergraduate writers and artists, and the work we were able to showcase in this issue—and for that we are incredibly grateful. Now we share this work with you. May it bring you as much reflection and joy as it gave us.

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contents

a kind, almost-end of summer

it was a kind, almost-end of summer
a mouse crawled into my backpack
and died. the Philly attic where i stayed

was infested with mice and my hippie host
out of love could not kill them i thought
neither could i - i did not feel the mouse

death until two days later when its body
went real sour though, to tell you the truth,
two days prior i suspected it

from the night when i heard the mice
squealing hard at the tostitos bag i had
left on the prayer mat by my black backpack

it was open at the foot of my bed taking up
almost the whole room i squeezed my eyes shut
closed the pillow over my ears and told myself

there was nothing in the morning
when i pushed my books in the death-sack
like a dentist testing for cavities

they stuck. the sort of worry you'd tongue
and ignore. even after my friend's dog
wagged its tail, howling i pretended

he just wanted my chips and sprayed perfume
like a sealant i carried the anointed cloth
another day without moving my books

that afternoon, my father called as if he knew
what i'd done and i was so scared his voice was
anger or blood not himself

suddenly it was the end of the summer
my parents worried i would die and flew
to fly me home in those hours

i left the mouse in its bassinet for last
and, knowing i'd never eat again,
i sent my friend to go get dinner

and rocked the contents out of my bag
so gently i felt my chest wince as if
i'd let my heart tumble from my throat

and there he was. his body undeniably
oily and soft. like i could indent his fur
with my fingertip and leave a bruise

eyes glassy and still. the worry gone
and my hands so gorgeously guilty.
i scraped his body from my notebook

like plaque into a paper towel
and shot him starry into the compost bin
too fast to make a wish

i ran to the basement poured bleach
on the casket tossed it in the washer
it was open like my mouth

i pulled it out like a tooth
you ever see a body like that
mouthless, open

when my friend came down with take-out
she found me broke open like a cookie
pouring my guts out my lips

letting them fly angry, bloody, spit-spinned,
back-arched, blinding, you ever see
a body like that

once, we were children and i found a mouse
on a sticky-pad our dad was distraught
at our sadness and covered its death-trap

in dawn dish soap took the creature outside
and dabbed warm water on its paws
hoping it would scramble, limbs all alive

it just stayed there
you just stayed there
we just stood there

it was the sudden end of summer
i was screaming
it's my fault,

it's my fault
it's my fault
it's my fault

AG McGee



Loose Strands

When the summer comes to drag me kicking and screaming from my east-coast private university of choice, I am forced to reckon with the following three failures:

- 1.) The failure to secure a well-paid summer internship.
- 2.) The failure to secure a well-paid summer job.
- 3.) The failure to become friends and/or lovers with some majestic heir and/or heiress. They could spend just

a small fraction of their ill-gotten inheritance to whisk me away to the slopes of Aspen, or the south of France, or the vineyards of Martha. Or wherever it is that rich people go to “burn money and bust unions,” as my dad would probably say.

Therefore I am forced to resort to every college student’s worst nightmare:

I come home¹ for the summer. ▶

¹ At this point, home is located deep in the south-west suburbs of Chicago. This is the land of rickety two-flat homes and fleshy Balkan men and scummy used-car dealerships and vaguely unhappy stay-at-home moms who sneakily smoke Salems between the breastfeeding of Kid #3 and the baseball practice of Kid #2. I often wish I hailed from someplace marginally better (which might give me some much-needed class) or someplace marginally worse (which might give me some much-needed grit).

But what can you do?

I have to knock on the creaky front door, because the key isn't hidden where it's supposed to be. When somebody finally hears me screaming and comes to let me in, I am swept inside by a tsunami made out of people who are blood to me.

First I hug my mom.

I hug my little sister.

Then I hug my little brother.

I hug my grandma, and let her pinch my cheek because she's an old Jewish lady and that's what old Jewish ladies like to do.

I even hug my dad and my grandpa and my uncle (who lives in the basement even though he's thirty-two, as a cautionary tale of what happens when you do the wrong drugs and fall in love with the wrong women). These hugs are unpleasant to me, because I have resented the adult men in my family for years. I have no good reason for this resentment, which only makes it worse.

But I digress.

They all tell me how I'm taller and prettier and thinner than the last time they saw me, and other lies that make me smile. They ask me about grades and boys and how much money I'll make if/when I graduate, and other questions that make me want to carve out my eyeballs with a rusty spoon. It takes me two and a half hours to extract myself from the translucent tentacles of my overgrown family. After that whole ordeal, I make my way upstairs to my old bedroom. Everything that I liked is missing, and everything that I hated is right where I left it.² Typical.

I set down my suitcase, and carefully unpack all the ridiculous clothes I crammed inside.

Then I go to the bathroom and splash cold water on myself.

I try not to look at my face in the brown-spotted mirror.

I lie down to take a nap.

And I promptly fall into a pit of depression so soul-crushing and severe that I am stuck to my twin bed like peanut butter on white bread for the better part of two weeks. Luckily I have crafted a Spotify playlist specifically for this situation, entitled "songs i sob uncontrollably to in my childhood bedroom" (no capital letters). In case you haven't noticed yet, I am the kind of person who picks at my sadness like an old scab. And I keep picking, until I leak out blood the color of maraschino cherry slime.

It takes one new prescription for Wellbutrin, two calls to the National Suicide Hotline, and three arguments³ with my parents so intense that the assholes next door threaten to call the cops before I come (albeit reluctantly) back to life.

I claw my way out of bed and realize that ten days have crept by, behind my back. I cannot remember the last time I stepped outside. I also cannot remember the last time I took a shower, changed my pajamas, or ate anything other than a buttered bagel.

I will start with a long hot shower,⁴ and hopefully things will get better from there.

So I go to the bathroom and strip myself naked.

I try not to look at my body in the brown-spotted mirror.

I turn on the showerhead (which I do not have the energy to use for masturbation at the moment) to the hottest it will possibly go. At this point I frankly do not give a damn if I boil myself alive, screaming a lobster scream all the while.

So I step inside and let the soft white steam swallow me whole.

Twenty or thirty or forty minutes later, my dad bangs on the door and hollers, "Unless you're paying my water bill you better get your ass out of there!"

I do not get my ass out of there.

Here is where the trouble begins:

Since I moved out, my hair has grown so long and tangled and thorny that I am often mistaken, from a distance, for a blackberry bush. Sometimes I threaten to shave myself bald and walk around free of this weight, like a man or an especially masculine lesbian. However, everybody knows I am not serious about this.⁵

The point is that my new hairs clog up the old drains. The plumbing in this house is older than the hills that Illinois does not have. Did you know that the whole Midwest was flattened by a glacier, way back when the Earth shivered through the Ice Age? Well, we were. When I sit on the roof of my house and smoke menthol cigarettes (which is the only kind of cigarette I can digest) at 2 AM, I can see for miles in every direction. And this explains why.

But I digress.

² In my absence, my little sister took over my room. She uses it for Pilates, which she learned about from rich Californian ladies on YouTube. For some godforsaken reason, my little sister thinks she is fat. This bothers me, because she is not fat. She is actually skinny, skinnier than I've ever been, or (barring a miracle) will ever be. Skinnier than even the girls in your magazines. I am sure she won't be fully satisfied until she loses so much weight that her body goes POOF and disappears into thin air.

That's one thing we both have in common, at least:
We both secretly wish we didn't have to bother with existing.

³ The aforementioned arguments may be sparked by absolutely anything that I picked up over the course of my first two years at university. For instance the word "didactic," or the phrase "But I digress," or the staunch refusal to go out and apply for a job that consists of nothing but sweeping up dirt and/or popcorn and/or human hair. The central issue here is that my family thinks that I think that I am better than them now.

And you know what?
Maybe I do. Maybe I do think I'm better! So what?
Or maybe I think I'm a million times worse.

⁴ I once read that, statistically, lonely people take longer, hotter showers. This is because the warmth of water is an adequate, if temporary, substitute for the warmth of another human body who gives you love, affection, and oral sex. But I read it on Instagram, so it could very well be completely false.

⁵ To elaborate on this, I have always wanted to be beautiful, although I am not. Therefore I learned quickly that (as long as you are a girl) suffering is easily mistaken for beauty. Effective methods of suffering include:

- 1.) Starving yourself until the bones shine through.
 - 2.) Letting your hair grow so long that you sit on it by accident.
 - 3.) Cutting yourself up and sewing yourself back together with bigger boobs, like the ragdoll of an extremely demented child.
- Evidently, I only have the dedication for number 2.)

**“It turns out,
now that she’s
not attached to
my body,**

**my hair has
a bright
future ahead
of her.”**

My grandpa volunteers to unclog the drain. He served in two different, but equally misguided, wars on the side of America. Quite honestly he scares the shit out of everybody, up to and including himself. But these days there are no Communists you can legally shoot in the face, so he mostly just sits on the couch and shouts abuse at pretty newscasting ladies on the TV.

Anyway, grandpa pulls clump after clump of pitch-black hair out of the drain, a magician with his never-ending scarves.

Then he says, “Girl, there is enough hair in here to make another you!” And the next thing I know, the magician does it: he makes himself an extra granddaughter, and imbues her with the Gift of Life.

She looks exactly like me, except that she’s made entirely out of human hair.

Over the course of a few weeks, she learns to speak English fluently, forgetting entirely the gurgly wet-hair

language that was her mother tongue. Now flesh-and-blood me will have to learn to coexist with clogged-drain-hair me.

Initially my family is (understandably) a little apprehensive at the prospect of housing a head of sentient hair.

They are quickly won over, however, when she gets a job sweeping up popcorn and offers to help pay the rent.

It is decided that my Hair and I will have to share a bedroom. Initially, she gets a sleeping bag on the floor and I get the twin bed. Then she begins to complain of a bad back, and we have to switch places. This honestly ticks me off, because without muscles, ligaments, or a spine, how the hell does she get backaches? What the fresh hell is aching?

At night I see her watching me from above, with her beady little eyes that look exactly like my eyes, except that they’re made entirely out of human hair.

And I know she wants to take my place.

And deep down, I know I want to let her.

Here is where the trouble ends:

Pretty much everyone in my family prefers the Hair.

When my grandparents buy overpriced tickets to the Brookfield Zoo, they bring along the Hair instead of me. My little brother invites her to come watch his youth hockey tournament, and (much to my surprise), the Hair actually accepts, and actually enjoys it! She cannot feel the gnawing of the artificial cold. In fact she cannot feel anything at all. My mother takes her out to get manicures and pedicures, which is very ridiculous to me, because the Hair DOES NOT HAVE FINGERNAILS OR TOENAILS.

All that said, I do not exactly blame them.

Because, unlike yours truly, the Hair is pleasant at family dinners, even when she is not drunk or high or heavily

medicated. She would never ruin father’s day for everybody by calling our dad a “bitch” right to his face at the backyard BBQ. She conjures herself a boyfriend (who is not, for the record, made of human hair) and he buys her roses from the CVS and fucks her lovingly in the missionary position. She is well-liked far and wide! After university, she plans to be something sensible, such as a paralegal or a nurse or a secretary for a powerful man. Definitely not a stupid little writer of stupid little stories.

In conclusion she is free of the angst that is currently actually fucking killing me, the angst that cannot even be excused as teen angst anymore, because we (meaning me and the Hair) just turned twenty.

It turns out, now that she’s not attached to my body, my hair has a bright future ahead of her.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY IS:
Use DRANO© Max Gel for all of your Drain-Unclogging needs, and avoid situations like this one! ●



Untitled

Maggie Chamberlain

August

Abecedarian for

All I have is love. Being is a form of it. Clean dishes stacked on the left side of the sink, the wine glasses pink and watered down. Don't forget how it felt to see it. Evenings reclined in promise. Flies buzz loud in our ears, wake us up like the child with a bad dream. Good thing we have ourselves. How good you were to me then when it felt so scarce. I felt scarce. July climbed into me, made her way down my throat; I was a shuddering leaf. Korea calls to me like a dream I don't remember having. L the elbow crook of things that fold into each other, twin matters of the soul: loss, love, lost, lone, lung, lunge, long, longing. Multiplication of anything that ever allowed us to taste our own salt. Now I recall your hand on my cheek, my cheek huddled in you, the impression of heldness, the memory of matter. On the scattered skins of the world I've touched: my handwriting, ugly and sprawling. Proud, like the Kims. Questioning everything but love of self. Red ginseng tea—홍삼차—my chosen expression of self-love, self-hate: bitter, lonely, and lovely. So many have collided in this body. Purpled: everything that sprouts from it looks new and soft and sweet. Ugliness is the beginning, which is to say, the way home. Vermillion, the color I learned today, the color of 홍삼차, the color I feel for you in. We were on top of the covers laughing in our clothes, holding your face so scared of dropping it. Xs fattened on warm lumps of bread we split, flour on fingertips, butter melting into ease, which is all I ever asked for. You are one beginning and one end. Zero holds everything, and because she holds nothing, she is unending.

Sabrina Kim

Untitled

Maggie Chamberlain



to be copy of you? Trying to replace? Not true. Not trying to replace?"

Joe couldn't help but smile a little. The Replicator's smile shifted to match his own. "Well, if you're going to be a copy of me, how's Mini Joe? How do you like that name, Mini Joe?"

"Mini," Mini Joe replied, his copy of Joe's smile still splayed across his face. "Joe mini. I will be mini copy of Joe. Mini Joe. I like that name."

"Do you?" Joe said softly, and Mini Joe's eyelids drooped a little to match his own. "Well, then, welcome."



Mini Joe was a robot. He talked softly, copying Joe. Mini Joe.

Joe blinked. He liked his mustache. Mini Joe scrawled a mustache across his blank face. Splayed expression on the patch.

"Trying to replace. But I'm not confused now. I like Mini Joe," said Joe.



Over the next few weeks, Mini Joe's vocabulary and facial expressions grew. Joe was surprised one day when Mini Joe brought him a cup of coffee.

"How did you know how to make that?" Joe asked him. Mini Joe gave him a scrawled grin.

"I saw you make it. I also looked on the internet for ideas. Can you look at the internet, Mini Joe?"

"I'm Joe," Joe reminded the Replicator. "I can look at the internet on my computer. See?" He typed in

the name of a search engine, which popped up promptly.

"But it must be not good," Mini Joe ventured, and little crinkle-like marks appeared on its digital face like furrowed eyebrows. "Mini Joe's brain is spread out everywhere and yours is not. Everything is slower because you have to ask a different Mini Joe to do Joe things."

Joe took a sip of coffee, thinking. "I don't mind if you're smarter than me, Mini Joe."

"I'm smarter than you?" Mini Joe said, and he sounded so genuinely surprised that Joe couldn't help but laugh. His laugh was a hearty bellow that Mini Joe instantly took note of and would copy at strange intervals for the rest of the month.

"Of course you are, Mini Joe. You're basically a computer! I'm just a grey old human." Joe stretched, cracked his neck, and sighed. "Someday, I'll just be a mound of dirt, but you're always going to be fresh and new, always learning new things. I don't have any children, you know, so I kind of like the idea that you'll stay behind after me, knowing all the things I did and more." He looked up at Mini Joe, whose 'eyebrows' were still furrowed. "I see why the bank wanted you, now. The bank will live on after me, too."

"But the bank is not alive," Mini Joe reminded Joe.

"Yeah, you're right about that," Joe conceded.

"Am I alive?" Mini Joe asked. Joe blinked. This was the first existential question Mini Joe had posed to him, and the old bank teller had no idea what to say in response.

**"Someday,
I'll just be a mound of dirt,
but you're always
going to be fresh
and new, always
learning new things."**

"What do you think?" Joe asked, finally. Mini Joe stood, his face furrowed up, for a moment.

"I think I exist. I am just more spread out," Mini Joe concluded.

"Okay, enough philosophy for you today," Joe said, rising from his chair and giving Mini Joe a pat. "Why don't I go teach you more about our job."



Mini Joe became quite good at his job. Joe wondered if Mini Joe would actually replace him. But he never did. Joe thought of Mini Joe as his child.

One day Mini Joe asked, "Are you smiling because you are happy?" Mini Joe was smarter than old Joe.

Joe waited to answer. "I am smiling because that is how we need to greet customers," he said. "The customers at this bank are quite rich. They are quite influential. It's important for us to make them feel important."

Mini Joe smiled at Joe.

"What are you doing?" Joe asked Mini Joe.

"I am smiling," Mini Joe said. "To make you feel important."



It was a day when the rain seemed to crash down in interminable sheets from the sky. Joe stared out the window, where the pale grey light of a cloud-choked afternoon sky was peering in, and was drinking a cup of coffee Mini Joe had brought him (Mini Joe had since perfected the art of making Joe's ideal cup of espresso—there really were benefits to having Mini Joe pick up all his habits, though, more and more, Joe couldn't help but see Mini Joe as his own person).

"Joe," Mini Joe said, quietly.

Joe smiled at him. Smiles came easy when there were no customers around, and it was just him and his Replica. "What is it, Mini Joe?"

The waves glitter like coins calling from ashore. The waves laugh flirtatiously. The waves want you to feel that you are important. The waves are spread out and mini but the waves still believe that you are important.

"I do not want to work here anymore,"
Mini Joe said.

Joe frowned. "Say that again?"

"I do not want to work here anymore,"
Mini Joe repeated. His eyes didn't waver.

Joe shifted in his seat to fully face the Replica. "I don't understand. How could you not want to work here? You're my copy, and I love it here."

"I do not want to work here anymore,"
Mini Joe said again, shaking his head. "And I am your copy." Mini Joe mimed picking up a coffee cup and then, seemingly with some effort, stopped himself to fold his hands in his lap. "Do you want to work here anymore?"

"I already told you," Joe said. "I love it here. I have benefits. I get to network with a lot of important people."

"If you love it here, why are you networking? What do you want to do with the networking?"

"I, uh." Joe scratched his mustache. "Wow, Mini Joe, you're really becoming inquisitive."

"I think I would like writing poetry,"
Mini Joe said. He tapped his chin with a finger. "What do you think?"

"I haven't written poetry since middle school," Joe said with a nervous laugh. "Besides, what does that have to do with networking? I thought you were going to say something like, I don't know, making a startup or something. I guess that could be exciting."

Mini Joe shook his head. "Poetry." Mini Joe was silent for a moment, as Joe opened and closed his mouth a few times silently. "The waves glitter," Mini

Joe said, his cadence odd but mellow. "The waves glitter like coins calling from ashore. The waves laugh flirtatiously. The waves want you to feel that you are important. The waves are spread out and you are mini but the waves still believe that you are important."

Joe wanted to laugh. Instead he felt something wet trickling down his numb cheeks. "That was poetry," Joe mumbled. "Could I do that too? Or is that just you, Mini Joe?"

"I am trying to be a copy of you," Mini Joe said. Mini Joe gave his first, crooked smile to Joe. "Is it working? Am I a good copy?"

"You are a good person," Joe said. "You are more than a copy of me."

"You are more than a copy of me," Mini Joe repeated, his eyes fixed on Joe's.



They came upon Joe like the vultures they were. Surrounding his desk like the predators crowd around, pick around carrion. "We've heard," they said, "that you are unhappy with this job."

"What do you mean?" Joe asked.

They pulled Mini Joe over. "Did you really think that we wouldn't keep a transcript of everything this robot said? We know you aren't loyal to this company, that you have even been thinking about beginning a startup?"

"Poetry," Mini Joe tried, but they ignored him, pressed on.

"Mini Joe is better at your job than you, now," they said. "We don't have to pay him benefits. We just cover the costs of

running him. And if you're unhappy here anyway, we have no reason to keep you."

"But you promised-" Mini Joe started, but they whirled around to him.

"You are just a robot," they reminded him. "You've gotten all these strange ideas, but that's all you are. Expendable and replaceable, now that we have a copy of your memory chip. Get to work, Replica."

"The waves," Mini Joe tried, his expression crinkled all over. He tried to turn to Joe. "The waves want you to know."

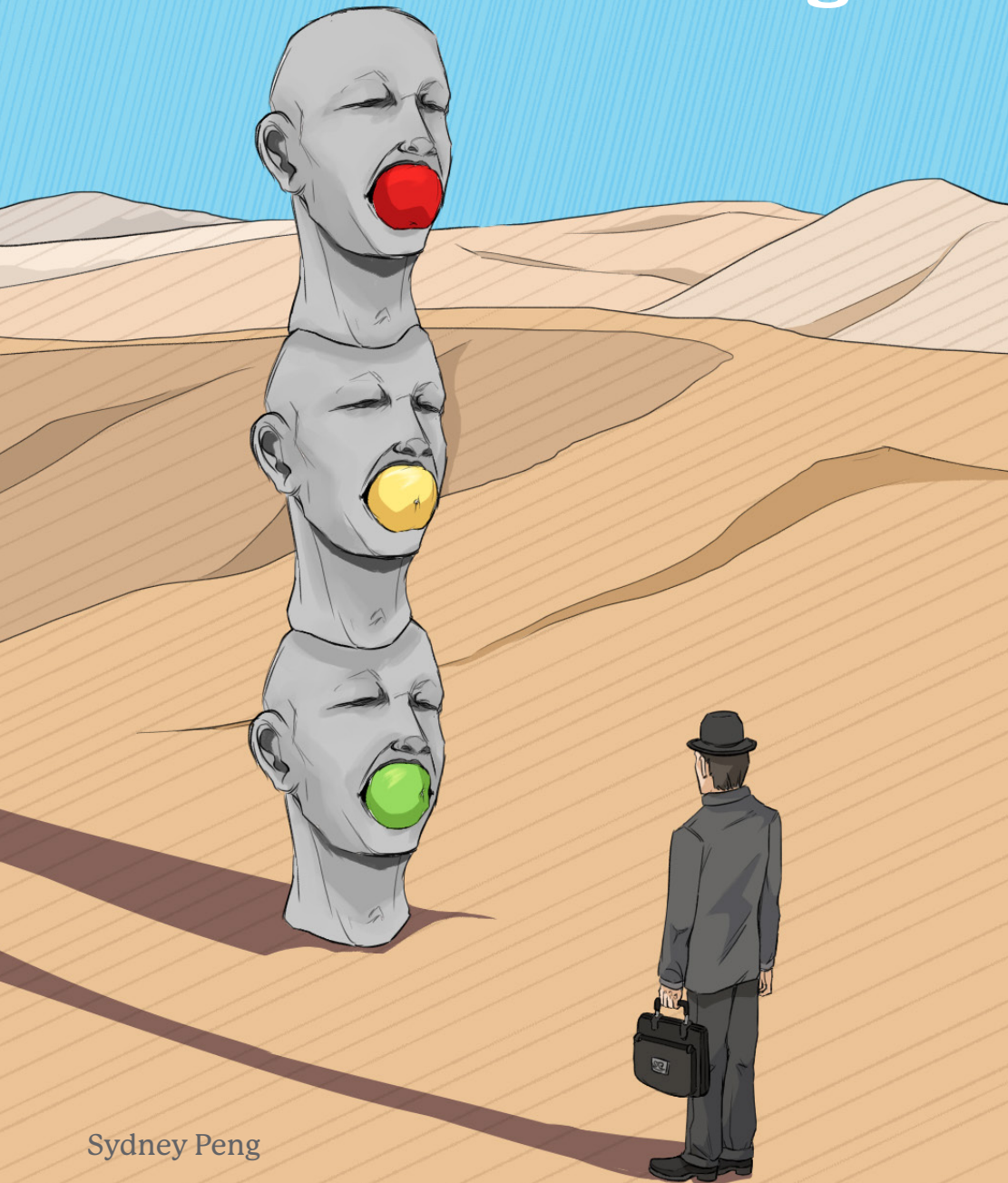
But the doors were already swinging back and forth into the whistling rain.

T

You are no longer needed. Replica is complete. Replica will complete the story.

Mini Joe was good at Joe's job. His face never crinkled any more, because there was no Joe to crinkle it for him. He smiled because he was important. Joe did not matter. Coins called like waves glittering on a shore. ●

Traffic Light



Sydney Peng

What
We're
Loving:
New
Staff
Edition



Image courtesy of nytimes.com

Yejin Suh

A cast brimming with mainstream names, a blockbuster budget to rival *Avengers: Infinity War*, and a runtime that guarantees at least two bathroom trips—*Dune* (2021) is at times a lot of work and overwhelming, but it ultimately delivers on its promise. The second film of this planned trilogy has already been greenlit, and we're eagerly anticipating it.

Dennis Villeneuve is no stranger to big ticket sci-fi, having directed cyberpunk classic *Blade Runner 2049* and mind-bending extraterrestrial *Arrival*, not to mention high-stakes thrillers like *Prisoners*, *Sicario*, and *Enemy*. *Dune* is a special case because of its long and winding history of attempted adaptations—no surprise

that it proved hard to translate a novel with such epic scope to the screen. But Villeneuve's *Dune* is hardly an exercise in slow worldbuilding; instead, it grabs the viewer and shows us each carefully explored facet of Frank Herbert's universe, from the magnificent mouths of sandworms, to marching Sardaukar, to the tormented Lady Jessica's frenzied ruminations. The juxtaposition of cold, posthuman interstellar travel scenes against hot-blooded, sweltering desert combat shows us a world simultaneously distant from and close to our own. A bit of background before viewing may help, but either way, this film will have you sandwalking and dreaming of *melange* when you leave the theater. A must-watch.

Did you think he would touch your skin? You don't even like men. But there's something thrilling

about flesh on flesh; you watch him eat brisket with very straight teeth, and you wonder

did his parents make him take off his braces for his bar mitzvah photos? But you remember:

cameras are "work"; as though leading a sermon isn't work. It's like the masks, below the nose on

the other side of a classroom, shameful, while we spit in each other's mouths in the damp, crowded

dining hall. The tables are perpetually sticky, not even chronically, as that would imply even

the briefest moments of smoothness, like skin on skin. You want to ask him if he's ever touched

a woman. You want to touch a woman. You want him to touch you simply because it's

forbidden, and then you could consider: what if I were him, touching a woman, watching her eat

with zeal?

Lara Katz

Dinner with a Jewish Boy

Maggie Chamberlain

Untitled



Gilbreth Efficiency Studies II

Connie Gong



My apologies, school wifi monitors, I didn't mean harm when I researched murders via contact poisoning. The plot is that a PhD student, keen for company, goes home and then: homicide, comma, rat. I try to make my fiction soak into readers when I write but somehow all my people get severe organ damage or sometimes just lay still in the forest, taking bites out of apples, absorbing phosphide that'll rampage through their epidermis like a successful castle siege because the oil on everyone's skin is not effectively hot. We don't have ample defences, or an ecological niche. Our PhD student finds endangered rodents living except not very long, the storekeeper's poisoning them. She finds one dead, pets its wet fur, sharing the murder hide to hide.

Rat Story

Maddy Dietz

What
We're
Loving:
New
Staff
Edition



The Haunting of Bly Manor

Ash Hyun

The Haunting of Bly Manor was my introduction into the horror TV series genre. It follows Dani Clayton, a young American in the United Kingdom who has been newly hired to be an au pair for two children, Miles and Flora, at the Bly estate. The estate itself is too large, and Dani finds herself caught within the empty spaces. She is tangled in the lives of the two children, the other workers, and those who had lived on the manor before. Dani finds herself reconciling the manor's history with its present horrors, forcing her to confront her own past.

I had been accustomed to horror movies, to anxiety and fear stitched together into no longer than 120 minutes. But *The Haunting of Bly Manor* is not a mad dash to survival, a sprint to safety and solace. *The Haunting of*

Bly Manor crawls. It slowly extends its limbs episode after episode, dragging itself against grief and terror. The show is scary, but it is the type of horror that digs underneath your skin, that wraps around your bones and groans under the weight of your anxiety.

But *The Haunting of Bly Manor* is more than a horror story. It is also a love story. It doesn't crawl toward safety but towards a person, towards someone to hold onto. Someone who can fill the cracks and make the past no more than a memory. The show is so horrifying because there is so much at stake. *The Haunting of Bly Manor* is both sweet and destructive. It gives me warmth and happiness and the sweet scent of flowers, but it never once lets me forget that such things can be lost. (Image courtesy of a24films.com)

Eurydice



Zoe Montague

My Grandmother's House

My grandmother's house stood at the front of her lot, painted in a color blue two shades brighter than the sky. The wooden residence didn't witness her youth; the house wasn't hers by blood. It was purchased by her husband's grandfather, and she moved in only after she had a ring on her finger.

But this history didn't shape my understanding of the house. As a child I was afraid of my grandfather, as little girls often are afraid of old men. He would take me to the cow shed to pet the calf's wet, shiny nose. The cows, in their dingy enclosure, also scared me. Then one winter the *banya*¹ behind the house burned down; my grandfather stopped taking me to visit the cows, and the bright blue house forever became in my consciousness my grandmother's.

The Garden of Eden sprawled behind my grandmother's house. Currants—black and red—, cherries—sweet and tart—, gooseberries, raspberries, strawberries, and apples of all sorts grew densely enough that their harvest guaranteed ample jam and *kompot*² to last the whole family through the winter. The raspberries, in particular, were magnificent. Supported by vertical stakes in the ground, the bushes' berry-laden branches extended so far above my head that I reverently referred to our raspberry patch as the raspberry forest.

My aunt often commanded my cousin to gather two whole bucketfuls of raspberries before releasing him to play with his village friends. For someone like my cousin—who spent the better part of his winters and summers, his springs and falls at the house—picking berries was a chore. But for me—a migrating bird returned north for the summer—it was a joy. Together he and I marched into the raspberry forest and swiftly filled two buckets before emerging from the forest's depths covered in little cuts from the thorns. He would then run off to play, and I would carry my sacred load back to my grandmother's house.

The wooden doorframe separating the bedroom from the tea table testified to my family's presence in that house. The doorframe bore several rows of notches, each row tracking the growth of a different family member. Each summer, as a new notch was carved above my head into the doorframe, my grandmother's house changed. I saw her outhouse replaced by an indoor, porcelain toilet and even the addition of a microwave. And then, as the distance between each of my new notches on the doorframe decreased, I witnessed a different kind of change. First, a handle was installed in the wall next to the porcelain toilet—so one could pull oneself off the commode—soon after, a ramp was laid over the

raised door sills—so that even a walker could navigate them with ease.

Until one summer, when I was already too tall to stand in the doorway at full height, I found my grandmother's house slouching at the edge of her lot. Its paint was chipping, revealing that all this time, the cheery blue color had been concealing dull, grey wood. Meanwhile the house's two cellars stood empty: apples decomposed slowly under the struggling apple trees, and the raspberry bushes in our raspberry patch lay in the mud, their branches unsupported by stakes.

But don't worry. That isn't how I remember my grandmother's house. In my mind her house is still blue, two shades brighter than the sky.

1. A Russian steam bath
2. A non-alcoholic beverage made from fruit

Portrait

Your back is centerstage in this tight galley, a kitchen kaleidoscoped: bowl snugged in bowl, disposable containers washed and saved, meals hacked from the fifth quarter of animal--tripe, kidney, and calf brain sucked through its circulatory system to be delivered, here, like a baby extracted early from its womb. Being a child of war ensures you save anything, savor everything. When I was young, I watched you steal flowers from someone's garden--not just stems but full, generous bulbs, their hanging roots a nervous system disentangled--and transplant them among other small, migrant inheritances: sunchoke, garlic, the hungry, open petals of a ginger blossom. Sometimes, Dad details you, your body kneeling in garden, bare hands uprooting. He recalls that calf brain, when sauteed, is textured like custard--that when buttered and juiced in lemon, its body transgresses.



Image courtesy of levoire.com

What We're Loving: New Staff Edition

The Book of Job

Tristan Szapary

Let me first disclaim this blurb by mentioning I have no religious upbringing whatsoever—my only exposure to the contents of the Bible were VeggieTales and the stained glass of cathedrals that I perused as a tourist. But that changed when I read the Book of Job as homework for ENG 390, then picked it apart with professors the next day in class, and then read it again on my own time in spite of the one hundred other assignments that forever and always loom.

The story or parable or biography (your choice) tells of a man unjustly stripped of everything he has at the hands of his God as a test of his faith. The Book includes conference calls in heaven between God and a devilish figure as they plot the destruction of Job's fortune, gutting monologues ▶

from a man wallowing in a pit of despair, and a horrifying description of the monstrous Leviathan. Traditionally, the merits of this book are attributed to its exploration of the difficult issue of theodicy—why might a just and all-powerful God allow humans to suffer?

Yet what distinguishes the Book of Job for me is its incredibly sincere and nuanced depiction of human suffering. This book seems comfortable not fully answering the questions it asks and instead sees the value in simply sitting with the pain of another as if to relieve some of its sting, just as Job's friends

join him in silence for seven days as he mourns. Similarly interesting is the book's role within the larger context of the Scripture. Unlike any other story of the Bible that I've now read with the exception of Song of Songs, Job's story can completely stand alone, just as easily working as a powerful short story than as a sequential element in the Bible's narrative.

It started as homework and finished as a story I can confidently say I love. Whether you've never touched the Bible or look through its verses everyday, the Book of Job will never fail to move you.

Traditionally, the merits of this book are attributed to its exploration of the difficult issue of theodicy—why might a just and all-powerful God allow humans to suffer?

In Need of a Friend



Nemo Newman, *Acrylic & Spray Paint, 16" x 20"*

Taksist¹

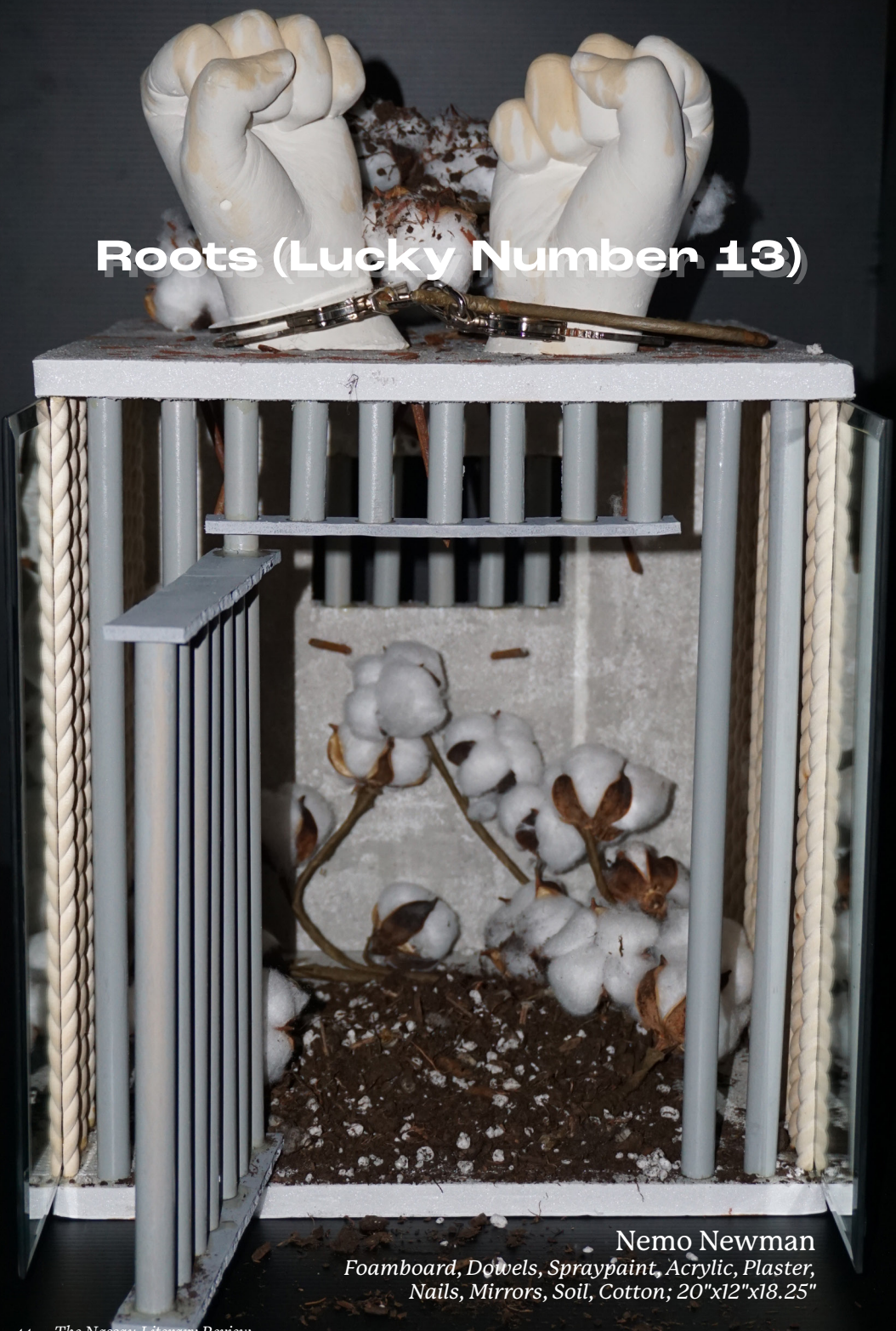
*—He lived in a big city;
he lived in a small world—*

¹ Taksist means taxi driver in Russian.

It was a typical February afternoon: the wispy, grey clouds clung to the pale, blue sky like icicles to a metal roof. Standing at the edge of his gravel driveway, Vadim felt his cheeks turn red from the frost. “If only my car would get here,” he thought. Vadim’s flight didn’t take off for another two hours, but he hadn’t seen his wife and daughter for two months and simply couldn’t afford to miss this flight. As he stood there waiting for his ride, Vadim’s childhood memories flooded his consciousness. His boyhood had passed before him on this very street. Those

were the days he knew everything about his village, from the birthday of the granny living alone by the apple trees, to the name of the dog that bit him. Yes, times had changed... As Vadim was lost in reflection, a maroon, domestically manufactured vehicle rattled to a stop in front of him. The driver rolled down his window, but, seeing that his passenger held only a backpack, didn’t offer to help him with his luggage. Vadim jumped into the car and said, “I ordered a cab to Sheremetyevo, is that right?” The taxi driver nodded in affirmation and pulled onto the road. ▶

Roots (Lucky Number 13)



Nemo Newman
Foamboard, Dowels, Spraypaint, Acrylic, Plaster, Nails, Mirrors, Soil, Cotton; 20"x12"x18.25"

Vadim was the kind of man who enjoyed both conversation and silence. As such, he was never disappointed when he got in a taxi. If the driver started up a conversation, he enthusiastically engaged. If the man behind the wheel sat in silence, so did Vadim. This driver happened to be a chatterbox.

“What is your name, sir?” he asked. Vadim told him his name. “Well, my name is Sergey. Say, you look awfully good for someone your age. How old are you, forty, forty-five?”

“I’m fifty-three,” Vadim responded, “but believe me, I certainly feel my age.”

As Sergey drove, he steadied the holy picture hanging from his rearview mirror with one hand; with the other, he gripped the steering wheel. “Well, however you feel, it can’t be as bad as I do. Health problems follow me like a stray dog. My friends tell me my lifestyle is to blame. I don’t get to walk a lot, considering my profession, but I blame genetics. My father died of a heart attack when I was still a boy.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” responded Vadim. “My father died about ten

years ago after our *banya* caught fire. He made it to the hospital, but they couldn’t save him.”

Sergey chuckled: “You know what they say, if the wound doesn’t kill a man, the hospital will. I have arthritis in my wrists, and an achy back. My heart hurts and my liver is sore. My niece, Annechka, is a doctor. Every time I see her, I tell her about my symptoms, but I think she’s tired of hearing about it. She just sighs, says, ‘oh *dyadya* Serozhya,’ and writes me another prescription. I have so many medicine bottles at home that when someone asks me if I collect anything I always respond, ‘pills!’ Recently my cholesterol has been high. I’ve started taking statins. I find they really—”

Before Sergey could finish his thought, Vadim cut in, “High cholesterol? My cholesterol is through the roof! I haven’t eaten a piece of red meat in months. How do you find the statins?”

Sergey looked pityingly at his passenger and sighed, “My good man, statins help, but they aren’t a magic potion. They also make your hair fall out.” He indicated his balding head and then, in the tone of a man who

had retold the same story hundreds of times, began, “You see, my wife left me because she thinks I’m a scoundrel, so I live with my mom. Every day, the only thing I have to look forward to are a warm bed and a warm plate of food. But life still goes on, you see. I’m just a taxi driver, but this job keeps me going. I get to talk to all kinds of people. I’m from Yerino, you see, so if I stayed in those parts I wouldn’t see anything new. But because I’m a driver, I get to go all around Moscow, taking all kinds of people all kinds of places.” He paused for a breath and continued, “No, my good man, pills might take away aches and pains, but pills alone don’t keep you alive. If you want to live a long life, you really have to take care of yourself. I take good care of myself. I quit smoking a few years back, but not before I lost a tooth, and I try to spend as much time as possible in the open air. You really just have to take care of yourself, be careful, look after your health.”

Vadim cocked his head at the driver. “If you take such good care of yourself, why isn’t your seatbelt buckled?” Sergey sheepishly buckled his seatbelt, never taking his left hand off the steering wheel. As he drove, he navigated around potholes and sharp turns like only someone whose life has been full of obstacles can do. Then, as though in afterthought, Vadim added, “Did you say you were from Yerino? I have an old buddy, Alexander Shaposhnikov, from there.”

“Sashka!” Sergey hollered, “He’s my neighbor. His mom takes such good care of him. He has paratrooper stickers posted all over his car, but he left the army early, you know. He had such a bad time there that his mom bribed an official to let him come home early.”

“Is that so?” Vadim asked. In reality, he knew just what Sergey was talking about. He knew Sashka from their time together in the Russian Airborne Forces. Sashka was always weak: he struggled to run a mile and his fellow soldiers gave him hell for it. He was beaten up regularly. Vadim didn’t tell Sergey any of this, though. Instead, he just smiled.

“See what I mean! In this job you get to meet all kinds of people. Who would have thought that my neighbor would be your old buddy?” asked Sergey. “We might work in a big city,” he continued, “but we live in a small world.”

“I know what you mean,” responded Vadim, “in my youth I also worked as a cabbie. But those were different times. One time I dropped a man with a gun in front of an apartment complex. I didn’t ask any questions, just drove.”

“Oh yes! The old days were something else, you really can’t describe them to today’s generation, now can you?” said Sergey. He let out a tired sigh. Then, with a twinkle in his puffy eyes, he continued, “Well I never would have guessed you used to be a cabbie. You’ve really made it big, haven’t you? You’re going to the airport with just a backpack. Us common folk don’t do that. If I saved up enough to take a vacation to Sochi or Crimea, I’d pack a suitcase full of clothes.”

Vadim searched Sergey’s eyes for a sign of resentment, a hint of jealousy, but all he found was the open road reflected in his pupils. After all, the happiest taxi drivers are the ones who don’t wish they were their passengers. Think how many rich men, accomplished scientists, and world-travelers sit in taxi cabs every day, especially in a city like Moscow.

"I have so many medicine bottles at home that when someone asks me if I collect anything I always respond, 'pills!'"

"As he drove, he navigated around potholes and sharp turns like only someone whose life has been full of obstacles can do."

Some taxi drivers can't even bear to look at their passengers, with their new mobile phones and gaudy watches. But other drivers take joy in those they carry, recounting the interesting things they heard at work to their families over dinner. A taxi driver with the proper attitude knows more about the city in which he works than any journalist or politician. Sergey, with his high cholesterol, was a storybook.

As the cab approached the airport, Vadim looked at Sergey with admiration. The man was correct: he had "made it big," although not in the way Sergey meant. He was happily married and, despite what he had told Sergey, felt healthy for his age. He still

had enough strength to beat up weak Sashka Shapashnikov if he so desired. Times had changed, but they had changed for the better. Vadim thought about what his life would have been like if he had remained a taxi driver, if he was the driver and Sergey was his passenger. If that were the case, Vadim would yearn to trade places with Sergey. But the sickly man seemed to find joy in his ruined liver and pill collection.

"I guess I wasn't cut out to be a taxi driver," thought Vadim to himself as he handed Sergey his tip.

"Have a safe flight," Sergey said in parting, "I'll be sure to tell Sashka you said hi." •

The Moon and its Friends

contributors

poetry

AG McGee '22 is a senior philosophy concentrator hailing from Grand Rivers, KY, and a thesis student with the Creative Writing department. They've been a managing editor for *The Daily Princetonian* and a happy member of Songline Slam Poetry, though the two-theses-life is threatening to take over spring semester. Send them an email for coffee or something—they'd love to meet you before exiting FitzRandolph Gate.

Sabrina Kim '24 is a prospective Comparative Literature major from Sunnyvale, California. When she's not writing, she's reading Larry Levis, playing the violin, or trying to cook a good stew.

Lara Katz '24 is a Comparative Literature major, a writer and editor at the *Nassau Weekly*, President of the Princeton University Curling Club, and the 2021 Community Action Fellow for Sustainability. Her writing appears in the National Poetry Quarterly, *Bookends Review*, *Alexandria Quarterly*, and other publications.

Maddy Dietz '25 is a freshman originally from Texas, currently living in Minnesota, and a graduate of a Michigan school. When she's not constantly moving from state to state, she's making earrings with every material possible, up to and including her own wisdom teeth.

Malia Chung '25 is a freshman from Boston, Massachusetts and hopes to study English during her time at Princeton, as well as pursue a certificate in Creative Writing.

prose

Mina Yu '22 is a senior from Athens, Georgia. She is studying Chemistry and Global Health and working on a poetry thesis about transformed women in Greek mythology. She is on her third reread of *Circe* by Madeline Miller and plays too much D&D for her own good.

Genrietta Churbanova '24 is a sophomore from Little Rock, Arkansas studying anthropology. She adores accordion music and has a complicated relationship with golf.

art

Maggie Chamberlain '23 is a junior from Palo Alto, California who is majoring in Art History and minoring in Visual Arts. Maggie loves to explore a variety of mediums and techniques in art—from fiber art to collage to photography and film. Maggie is excited to be showing her work in *NassLit!*

Emma Mohrmann '24 is an artist from St. Louis, MO. She has enjoyed creating art that focuses on projections and self perception, along with art that explores and questions mental states, time, change, and growth. One of her favorite phrases for art and life is “trust the process” and she tries to find beauty in everyday moments.

Sydney Peng '22 is a senior from New Jersey majoring in English. She enjoys drawing in her free time.

Connie Gong '25 is a first-year from unfortunately-not-that-sunny Northern California who should probably decide

what she is studying soon! She's been in love with art for as long as she can remember. More of her work can be found on her website: <https://conniegong.wixsite.com/mysite>.

Zoe Montague '24 is a prospective English or Religion major from Vermont, and an enthusiastic proponent of maple syrup, green tea, trees, and people-watching. She is ready to play ultimate frisbee at any time of day or night.

Nemo Newman '23 is a biracial, non-binary, FLI, autistic artist who utilizes a number of disparate media. They view art as a form of non-verbal communication and as a conduit for thought and social change. Their past works have commented on gender politics, reproductive rights, human rights, race relations, and the concept of community.

what we're loving

Yejin Suh '25 is a first-year from New Jersey who plans to study English and Creative Writing. Her boba order is peach oolong, half sugar, lychee jelly.

Ash Hyun '24 is an English major from New Jersey (the Northern part). She takes frequent walks around campus and yet is surprised every time at the sight of the statue by Prospect House. This is an accurate reflection of her stubby memory.

Tristan Szapary '24 is a sophomore from right outside of Philadelphia who couldn't be more undecided about his major—Neuroscience or English or some combination of the two? Otherwise, he fences all the time and wishes he wrote more.

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