

The background of the entire page is a light beige color with a fine, vertical-line texture. Overlaid on this background are several large, rounded rectangular shapes in three colors: a deep red, a muted teal, and a warm mustard yellow. These shapes are arranged in a grid-like pattern, with some overlapping. In the top-left red shape, the text 'VOX MAGAZINE' is written in a bold, white, sans-serif font. Directly below it, still within the red shape, the years '2024-2025' are written in the same font style. The overall aesthetic is modern and minimalist.

# **VOX MAGAZINE**

## **2024-2025**



The background of the cover features a textured, light beige surface. Overlaid on this are several large, rounded rectangular and circular shapes in three colors: deep red, muted teal, and mustard yellow. The shapes are arranged in a grid-like pattern, with some overlapping. The text 'VOX MAGAZINE' and '2024-2025' is printed in white, bold, sans-serif font, centered in the upper half of the cover.

# **VOX MAGAZINE**

## **2024-2025**







# **VOX Magazine**

## **2024-2025**

San Francisco University High School



# VOX Staff


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**Editors in Chief**    Cove Johnson Rabidoux '25  
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                                 Claire Leung '26  
                                 Cleo Serra '26  
                                 Lucia Haskins '26  
                                 Louise Morrissey '26  
                                 Nina Tashjian '26  
                                 Katarina Fieser '27

Thank you to all who contributed their work! Keep  
being creative!





"We don't make mistakes, just  
happy little accidents."

Bob Ross





**The Shower**  
Rachel Flynn '27





**Protect the Flowers**  
Cove Johnson Rabidoux '25





**Artificial Distortion**

Mia Shan '27





## Consumption

Mia Shan '27



## **Limitations of Plastic Dreams**

Lucia Haskins '26

*after Victoria Chang*

Barbie is too easily maneuvered her hands are ice cold  
she folds and unfolds laundry for no one

Barbie keeps dental impressions just for the  
reassurance that she can create something

uproots her left carotid artery tries to stop thinking  
hides thorns in palms & bleeds

Barbie cannot be a mother because  
they don't want her looking pregnant on the shelves

at first glance she is too young  
Barbie wonders when she will begin to age

she cannot put on weight feels full all  
the time thinks she might explode inside her body

skin swaddles her bones so tight they suffocate  
saran-wrapped over and over

her heart is in need of a dusting  
but she cannot reach

up on her tippy toes (the soles of her feet have never  
touched the ground, oh how she yearns to dirty them)



Barbie has thin thighs thin wrists thin biceps you can  
wrap your fingers around them twice

and there is no one around to worry Barbie only asks for  
forgiveness what every man wants

she looks at the juncture between her knee and  
her thigh & ponders liminal space

the mirror tells her she is perfect perfect perfect  
maybe too much so

Barbie takes whatever plastic is left and  
carves it into a bird



## **Perfectionism**

Anabel Hamill '27

An ice cream cone is flawless in its shape,  
a Perfect form, a promise, you perceived.  
But while you thought it offered your escape,  
between your hopes and dreams, I intervened.

I'm strong as sand that seeps through your fingers,  
my sticky drops run down your arms like sweat.  
On top, the cherry no longer lingers,  
submerging like a wrecked ship, fate is set.

Or here is where you change your destiny,  
when you have tried what you forgot to taste.  
Belief in me is innocent, naïve;  
reality is nothing you have faced.

The choice is yours to break away my chains,  
or rot in wait within the cone's remains.





**Figure drawing, live model**  
Rachel Flynn '27



**in praise of that microphone**

caitlin kroeker '27

i gaze at you from afar  
wondering how i got here  
how could i be so lucky  
to meet you  
you've changed my life  
forever

you're not just a bundle of darkness  
no  
you're much more than that  
you're not just a handful of noise  
no  
you're much more than that  
you're not just a mouthful of words  
no  
you're much more than that  
you have a big reputation  
and i think that's why  
i fear you

i fear you  
but i tell myself that i  
am not afraid  
when it's time for me  
to come onstage



you welcome me  
with your arms wide open,  
ready to receive, ready to give  
ready to push me to my limits,  
test my capacity

can i do it?  
can i perform for you? for me?  
can i?  
can we?

in the end  
what matters most  
is just that: we

the connection  
between the two of us  
when the crowd claps politely,  
and i tell you,  
*that was terrible*  
*it wasn't how i practiced*  
you whisper  
*i can't believe we did it*

so i want to thank you  
for all of the times  
you've cheered me on



i want to thank you for pushing me beyond what i'd thought  
imaginable,  
for saying  
*get up there*  
*and sing for them*  
even when they don't even know  
my name

perfection, that's what i want  
you? you just want me to be heard  
to put myself out there  
why hide yourself from the world,  
you ask me,  
when you have the opportunity to shine?

you are my greatest supporter  
you strengthen my confidence  
you amplify my opinions  
you validate my voice

and with my voice, stronger now  
with your mind, steady now  
with your confidence, striking now  
with my trust, safe now

you and i  
we  
are unstoppable





**Morning Walk**  
Kadie Kitsuda '27



## **Fishhook**

Lucia Haskins '26

the cavernous open field that is my stomach  
stretches to tell me it fears the intrusion of the moth  
crawling towards the light on feeble legs  
missing only the disaster of the sun  
and finding it in the lamp on my nightstand.  
the quarter of the moon  
like a pie slice  
fills me if only to seep through the cracks at my ankles  
where the cat's tail curves,  
like an imitation of my own  
the taste of the firefly is like guilt,  
like a kiss only broken by the severance of fork and knife  
the grating of metal on porcelain.





**Coalescence**  
Jasper Lim '28





**Measuring Day**  
Kadie Kitsuda '27





**Get Up and Present**

Kadie Kitsuda '27



### **Someday I'll Love Lucia Haskins**

Lucia Haskins '26

*after Ocean Vuong's "Someday I'll Love Ocean Vuong"*

Lucia, listen. you are an unknown, the  
x to solve for but this does not  
mean you are un-understood.  
Maybe you are not the discoverer. Maybe  
you are the map & everyone else is  
the explorer and that is okay.  
I know your eyes feel like clocks, and  
your hands like needles. I know there is  
construction going on in the thick white  
wall of your glabella. What a funny name for  
the space between your eyebrows.  
Lucia, don't be afraid.  
The darkness cannot hurt you,  
but the light does. you look back to  
see your childhood in the distance,  
a doorframe. When I miss you,  
I call the pharmacy. They tell me  
"Your call is important to us."  
None of our representatives are available  
to take your call at the moment. Please hold."  
I see your thoughts float to the surface like



or drowning. They dissipate.  
The sound of your heartbeat in time with  
my footsteps. Tonight I will press  
a washcloth to your forehead and paint  
the lines of your face with my fingers  
until you fall asleep. Lucia,  
you know me like a dead man  
knows his casket. Like a spider  
knows its eight legs. Like a fireplace  
knows its brick. Teeth erupt  
from your skin, but inside your frame,  
you are soft and colorful.  
& your blood-red heart reaches out  
to me with its own two hands.

The most beautiful parts of your body  
are the scars on your knees.  
& remember, someday  
you will love her too.





**American Lessons in English**

Mia Shan '27





**Your Body My Choice**  
Mia Shan '27



## **The City's Breath in My Words**

Cove Johnson Rabidoux '25

Words drift from my mouth like rolling fog,  
Bleeding onto stained sidewalks like spilled ink,  
Soaking the air with the briny breath of the Bay.  
The loud screech of gulls, the clatter of cable cars—  
Echo in my syllables.

My breath is the city's thick concrete,  
Laced with the bloom of Golden Gate flowers,  
Both heavy and sweet.

The electric buzz of the packed streets hums through my veins.  
San Francisco embraces me in a strange CPR,  
Exhaling words, syllables, and smog into my open mouth.  
*Come in close*

The air thick with exhaust, salt, and coffee wraps around me.  
The secrets of the city are whispered in my ears,  
Curling my vowels like Lombard Street.



Even my yeses and nos tangle in the city's rhythm:

"No, yeah" means yes,

"Yeah, no" means no.

I clip the "t" in Monterey,

And swallow it in Santa Cruz.

The sweaty mist and the toppling skyline are part of me,  
sharing the same heartbeat and cadence of speech.

This place I call home breathes life into my language.

The melody of 767,968 resounds in every sentence I  
speak.



## **The Cinnamon Roll**

Anabel Hamill '27

The child is summoned to the front door every afternoon when the sounds of the old garage, squeaking from the years of rust and dirt lining its wheels, can be heard all the way from the second story of the brick house. The thump of the child landing at the bottom of the stairs is accompanied by the closing of the car door; the running feet greet the jangling of keys in the lock. When the door swings open, the mother stands there, her figure a dark silhouette against the bright light of the outdoors. She is welcomed with hungry eyes and hungry hands, prying open her purse to find the treat she brings home every time.

After work, every day, the mother stops by the same bakery, always coming out with a cinnamon roll, fresh and warm, in her purse. And every day when she gets home, the child is waiting for her by the door, obedient like a dog but eager like a small child, hands open for what she has to give.

Like every other day, mother and child sit at the kitchen table; the child devours the treat while the mother watches, smiling, her bright lipstick reflecting off the surrounding light. It is



silent. The sounds of the black and white clock, ticking as it marks each second past, and the low hum of the refrigerator are audible only in quiet moments like these.

To the child, the weight of the roll is a promise, an anticipation, of something delicious and material. There is a comforting sureness of knowing that every day, her mother will come home with the same cinnamon roll in her purse. The child happily peels away each layer of hearty bread, unraveling the precise work of the baker and exposing the frangible interior of the pastry. The crumbly bread tears and gives out, leaving trails of cinnamon sugar on the plate, her fingers, and her lips.

The following day, the mother returns as usual from the bakery, this time carrying a new purse from which she pulls out the anticipated cinnamon roll. But its warm smell is overcome by the subtle aroma of a rosy perfume, a scent which stubbornly remains in the child's nose and mouth. At the table, it is the child this time observing her mother as she chews the rose-hinted roll, averting her eyes before her mother can notice. Even after the cinnamon roll has been consumed, the child still smells the rose perfume in her nose. It is subtle enough to almost disappear, but strong enough to



make her pull a stick of gum from her pocket, carefully unfold the shiny silver lining, and pop it into her mouth when her mother's back is turned.

Every day, for the next week, the greeting of the mother and the consuming of the cinnamon roll become moments of dry tongue and slick fingers. The sounds of the garage door, the car's engine, and the jangling keys have all lost the magic that had once intrigued her down the stairs. It is now routine, and she dreads. The cinnamon rolls are the same, but everything is wrong. No matter how hard she tries to preserve their taste, the rolls have become nothing but ordinary. And the mother sees nothing.

On a particularly hot Saturday, the type of heat that hangs heavy in the air and presses down on you, the mother arrives precisely at the same time she always does. But the child is late. By the time the door swings open, she is only halfway down the stairs.

That day, the cinnamon roll feels extra dry, extra plain, and her parched throat begs for something wetter, something new. Yet, under the mother's gaze, she feels herself tear at the edges of the cinnamon roll, forcing fistful after fistful into her



mouth. *What if she didn't have to eat it? What if she said something?* Her mouth fills with the sweet bread, the raisins, choking her. So full, so full. But still, she stiffens her back, suppresses her disgust, and keeps stuffing until her cheeks are bulging. Then, with one huge breath, her sweaty hands gripping the underside of the table, she forces the whole thing down into her stomach. The room tilts on its side, her pulse rings in her ears, her breath seems to hold itself back. Then, as fast as it comes, everything rightens itself, all emotions recede, and the only thing she sees is her mother's face smiling down at her, seemingly unaware of everything that just happened.

The child turns and runs up the stairs. Throwing open the door to the bathroom she empties her stomach into the toilet. And although she feels emptier, lighter, the taste of the cinnamon roll lingers in her mouth, the smell intoxicating her nose. The only relief is the cold of the handle of the toilet. And, pulling it, she watches as her words swirl together and disappear down the drain.





**North of Bute Street, Kowloon**

Emilia Zhang '26





**Powerless Fan**  
Elie Calderon '28





**Untitled**

Amiya Seetharam '26





**Untitled**  
Amiya Seetharam '26



## **Promotion Day**

Jasper Lim '28

I woke up to the smell of the salty ocean air. On the 682 floor, it was rare that you could smell the ocean far below.

As my sleep pod collapsed around me, I slowly walked over to my table. A fresh cup of coffee arrived in my room through the delivery chute.

I raised the cup to my mouth before a voice rang in my head.

*I would advise that I don't consume the coffee immediately, as the temperature is greater than 160°F.*

I paused as I slowly moved the cup down. It had been 4 years since I received my AI NueroChip, yet I still got startled when thoughts that weren't my own sprang into my brain. It was a weird sensation. A thought not conceived by me, but artificially compelled into my brain.

I took a seat in my chair and looked outside. The smoke from factories blocked the view of the ocean, but I could tell it was there. You could smell its distinct smell, hear the waves crashing in at an uneven tempo, and somehow feel it, inside of me. Sitting there, I did something I hadn't in a while. I smiled.

I must go to work early to prepare for promotion day.



My legs moved, and my arms swung without a second thought. I left the room before I could even remember to drink my coffee.

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I stepped into the elevator and quickly descended to the 575 floor. The elevator was a very cramped metal cylinder with fake windows. They displayed vast corn fields with promoted workers having a good time. They had wide smiles showing their pure white teeth. On top of the display was a slogan.

“THE FUTURE OF HUMANITY IS HERE”

It felt weird knowing that was going to be me after 3 years of hard work.

But I still had reservations. Do I really want th- I feel excited that the day is finally here for my promotion.

Out of nowhere, a rush of excitement entered my body. When I stepped out of the elevator, I happily walked to the main lobby to check in. Nobody was awake at this time, so the bare beige walls seemed to follow me everywhere I went. The only discrepancy was the icy blue wallpaper in the bathroom.

I sat down at my desk and began to work. The QuadraScreen immersed me from all directions. I am a moderator, meaning I approve or disapprove of different ideas from the new regime. I recently approved the implementation of AI police drones.



I usually don't really focus on the question. Once the approval gets to me, I know the new regime's AI algorithm has already approved it.

My mind usually wanders to other things. I think about my parents. How are they doing? The last time I saw them was 19 years ago. They were being tracked down by the police. Ostensibly, they were plotting against the government in the early days of the new regime. I never particularly liked them anyway.

The only thing I remember about my parents was my mom's blue eyes. "They're the color of the sky and ocean," she would recite to me.

She always looked at me with so much joy. Before bed, she would read me stories. She told me about her adventures. Her description of the world was so warm. Forests, Mountains, Art. Everything seemed like it was out of a fantasy world.

*I can't look to the past. My future will be greater than any story from my parents.*

After a few hours of working, a break finally came. Almost everyone in the office ordered lunch through LunchExpress. It delivers straight to your desk through a chute. I would usually follow suit, but today I had special plans.



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This time, the fake windows in the elevator possessed a different message. It depicted a person split into 2 by a white line. On one side of the line, there was a middle-aged man with a run-down t-shirt that was clearly too cramped for him. On the other side was another form of the same person. A promoted person. Like a knight in shining armor. His metal body glistened in the sun. He had a perfectly symmetrical face with a slight smirk.

When I got to the 223 floor, I observed that all of the shops were closed. My eyes dotted around until they finally found 'Le Petit Café'. The only other person in the mall was a bodyguard snoozing in his chair. His frame was indistinguishable from a lifeless shell left by a hermit crab at the bottom of the ocean. Slowly dragging through the water with the tides of the ocean.

I opened the door, and in the back corner, Sage waved at me. She was an expressionist artist who worked all the way down on the 102 floor. In some ways--*I don't want to be associated with her*. But her family took me in when I was 6, and my parents ran away. She had sent me a cryptic message about needing to meet so, I went to sit down in the cushy red booth.

"Hey, how's it going?" she said with a grin.



"It's good, I mean, I've just been working hard. Are you doing well?"

"Hmmm," she took a deep breath.

"I just don't know what I'm doing with my life anymore. Do you remember when I promised you I was going to succeed as an independent artist? That I was going to support my mother. That all went down the drain. I just... I don't know."

She placed her hands on her face and pulled down as if to take off a mask and reveal her true identity. But she remained unaltered, gaze glued to the ceiling.

The waiter placed 2 cappuccinos on our table.

She looked down at me, "If I'm being honest with you, I can't keep doing this. This place is hell. This life I have to suffer through."

"That's your fault. You had the chance to have a better job."

Her voice raised, "Can't you see that we're stuck here. We aren't meant to be stupid little fish endlessly swimming around in a tiny tank". The few people in the cafe turned their attention towards us. She stopped and took a breath, "I'm sorry, I just.."



I interrupted, "Just what?"

"I don't know. Do you... remember when your mother would come over to my house after her job and tell us about what the world was like? I want that. I want to go hiking up a mountain and pick apples from the trees. Rip the bright red apple off of its growing port. I'm not going to get that here. I know you think you have a great life here, but just consider it, okay? Some of us are meeting here tomorrow at 7. "

I didn't want to remember my mother. She was so obsessed with the past. But I didn't want to lose another person to nature.

"My mother was a crazy lady. What if it's nothing like that out there?" I uttered.

"Nothing will be worse than living a fake life, not even death." She looked at me with a deep gaze.

I hesitated. I had everything I needed. Right? But I did wonder what it could be like out there. "I guess there are some things that could be..."

Suddenly, my mind was rinsed clean. *What was I talking about? Of course, I have everything I need here. I have a nice place and I'm getting a promotion soon.*



*"I'm reporting you to the authorities. Clearly, you miscalculated my opinion on this subject."*

*I stood up and didn't look back. In the elevator up I call the New AI Taskforce. I couldn't let someone so insubordinate roam freely. She would soon be forced to reboot.*

---

*I headed back to my office and resumed work. After a few hours of working in the QuadraScreen interface, my superior subsequently walked toward me.*

*He looked at me with his black pupils, "Are you ready? It's time for your promotion. And we have a special new update that you will be one of the first to experience. A memory reboot to perfect you. Wiping you clean of your imperfections."*

*I was completely unaware of such an update.*

*"Yes, I believe that my form is ready for such enhancements. It is time for a promotion."*

*"Alright, come with me."*

*I followed him through the lobby to the elevator. He brought me to the 999th floor. It contained a large, beautiful steel door that was labeled "PROMOTION VICINITY."*



“From this point on, I am going to have to temporarily turn off your NeuroChip before redownloading it on your new body.”

“Alright.” *He pressed a button on his remote, and suddenly, I gained control back.* I opened my eyes and looked at the door. For the first time in years, my mind felt clear. No voice whispering to me. My boss brought me inside.

There were rows and rows of white cubes vertically and horizontally. They were giant rounded boxes with sliding doors. The horizontal elavatore moved vigorously. Inside the shadows of different people preparing for their promotion faintly appeared.

Suddenly, I saw Sage, she was now in a shiny silver body separated by dark black joints. The life in her was gone. The green eyes she was named after--gone. How could they do this to her?

“Sage, are you okay? What happened to your plans?”

“Do I know you?” She looked at me with a blank expression.

My boss took my arm and dragged me away. I was still in disbelief. This can't be the only way to do this. Getting a new body is one thing, but wiping past memories is stripping everything that makes you who you are.



I finally arrived at the cubicle to be promoted. I put my hand on the doorknob. I looked back at my supervisor.

“Go ahead”, he said encouragingly. His stern expression showed no emotion, but he clutched my shoulder with his hand. He seemed to empathize with me. Scared of what the future could hold.

I looked at the doorknob and thought about the ocean. I tried to imagine the smell, but I couldn’t smell anything. I felt the vivid descriptions of the world my mother told me slipping away. I tried to picture them in my head, and I only saw blue eyes. But then a scene enveloped me. It was the last thing my parents said to me.

My mother squeezed my hands and crouched down to my level. She said, “Me and your dad are going away for a while. I know it’s selfish. Maybe one day we will regret not just staying with you. But just know that we both love you more than anything. If you ever need us, look for the ocean. The same color as my eyes. That’s where you can find us. Goodbye.”

I can’t go through with this.

Thoughts were rushing through my head before I could process them. Without thinking, I ran over to the elevator. Got out on the closest cafeteria floor. In the left



corner, there was a station with plastic utensils. I grabbed a spoon and looked at the shiny white weapon in my hand. My hands were shaking. The chip was attached to my left forehead.. I applied pressure under the chip to pry it off. Finally, the stainless steel case of the chip fell to the floor. I pulled the spoon out of my head and dropped it to the ground. A pit grew in my stomach. Did I just commit a crime? Am I really doing this?

Now I had to escape the building. I went to the first floor and looked around. It seemed like a test level. There were tall glass walls with labels for different experiments. There were new NeuroChips and advanced droids. There was a door marked maintenance only. Surely this was the way out. The door led to a dark hallway with small rectangular glass sheets high on the wall.

Windows. I broke the panel with a mop on the floor. The light engrossed the inside of the hall. I stepped onto a bucket and jumped out.

Once I was outside, it felt imperative to take a breath. My eyes blurred before closing as I strung the air into my lungs. My body felt as though it filled up like a balloon and flew away over the corresponding building. Freed from the constraints of the ground, the wind blew me in all different directions.



Pop. I snapped back to the ground and opened my eyes. In the distance, I could hear the sound of the waves. I followed the only connection I had to my parents. Finally, on the horizon, I saw a beach. The beautiful yellow sand my mother had described so long ago was coated in black soot.

But when I looked up, I finally saw the idyllic ocean. I stood in awe of this force that seemed so much greater than me. A vigorous eminence that bursts into a mountainous cliff before pounding into the ground and sending an explosion of white fragments in every direction. At the climax, right below the peak, a turquoise color purer than a child's belief in Santa materializes before disappearing right after.

I broke free of the mesmerizing pulse of the sea when I heard the sirens of police drones right behind me. The drones had a matte black finish with the new regime's logo plastered front and center. Abruptly, the back door swung open. A broad figure with a full black suit came out.

“The ocean is truly beautiful. I hope you get to enjoy it. You know, I understand why you’re angry. But the problem with humans is our struggle with change. We can’t deal with change. We waste days mourning over people who had no use to the world. The world is changing, and there is nothing anyone can do about it. The only thing you can do is comply.”



“Whoever you are, I didn’t ask for a lecture. I just need to find my parents. They're somewhere out there.”

“I didn’t want to have to tell you this, but your parents are dead. If it’s any consolation, they escaped 6 miles out before they were caught by the coast guards and disposed of.”

My parents were dead. My shoulders suddenly slumped down, and I froze up. The world I was living in was fake. Manufactured to make me fit in. I was alone. No one was going to support me. I looked into the eyes of this black-suited person. Everything that he stood for made me clench my fist. I don’t want to live in that concrete shit hole.

I did the one thing that I knew how to do without help. Run. I ran into the ocean until the bitter water immersed me with an icy hug. I slammed into the white spray of water from the wave before it dragged me into the compacted sand under me.

I grasped for air above me. I moved my arms and legs in unison to propel myself forward. Every few seconds, the small bulge of water forming into a wave would drench my head in water. My eyes felt salty and red. The air that filled my lungs minutes ago seemed to be slipping away. Water came as a replacement. I began to choke on the briny water rushing through my body.



I realized that I wasn't going to make it anywhere further. The ocean was too vast. So I relaxed my body and let the tide take me wherever it wanted. I was glad that I was going to return to the place where life was cultivated. Just like my parents. In the nature that Sage wanted to experience. Slowly, the water collapsed around me. My numb body sunk into the comforting pillowy water and I did something I didn't usually do. I smiled.

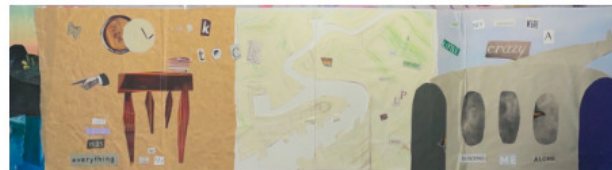




**Strawberry**  
Elie Calderon '28



**Metamorphosis**  
Anabel Hamill '27





## **Curb Barn**

Nina Tashjian '26

Curb once asked his mom who his dad was and she told him he was a plastic bag. Curb asked no more questions.

Curb was born on a very rainy day many years ago. His mom was outside walking around the neighborhood when she went into labor. She didn't want to draw any attention to herself or bother the neighbors, so she just sat down on the edge of the sidewalk and gave birth to him in the gutter. She told him once that the rain water was flowing so hard through the gutter that Curb got washed away and she had to chase after him. She only caught up to him after he had turned the corner and was about to go down the drain. Curb's mom had no idea what to name him when he was born, so she went with Curb because it was the first thing she saw.

Curb didn't have many friends growing up because his mom didn't let him play at the park. He was only allowed to play in the woods behind their house that the rest of the kids were afraid of. He spent hours tying knots in the grass and climbing the branches until he could see the roofs of every single home in the neighborhood. Some of his only friends were the bees he captured in his hands and forced to play with him, that is until he was stung. But after being stung at least once a day for a couple years, his mom tired of having to bandage up his hand and onstead made him play with the rocks. Curb only liked one rock, though, and he despised all of the others.



Curb's mom died when he was nineteen. He was sitting in a tree when he saw her walking back to the house. But when she crossed the street, she got hit by a car. No one came to help her, Curb just sat in the tree and watched her die. A couple days later, her body was moved to the backside of a hill so no one had to look at it. There, it decomposed quickly. Curb went to visit once, but all that remained of her was the little red watch she wore everyday of Curb's life. Curb left the watch in the dirt because there was a crack in the face. He never went back to the hill.

After her death, Curb didn't know what to do with himself. He didn't know how to cook a meal or repair a grandfather clock. So he found himself sitting in the trees a lot, watching other people. If he saw them eating or playing, he could pretend he was doing the same. Curb spent more and more time up in the trees until eventually five years had passed.

It was only then that Curb decided he needed to get down from the trees and do something with his life. So with his pet rock, he began to reenact every single thing he had seen one of his neighbors do while he was up in the trees. It began with small things like going on a walk and mowing the lawn. Curb enjoyed pretending to do these things because they made him feel real. He eventually moved into more challenging actions like cooking a meal or driving a car. To do this, Curb went into the driveway, acted as though he was entering a non-existent car, and continued to walk in a squat down the street. This



really made Curb feel alive. He liked the wind blowing through his hair.

But after Curb had imitated everything he could think of, he didn't know what to do. He had no one to pretend to be. So Curb turned to the only person still in his life, his pet rock. From day one, all his rock had done was sit in silence by his side. So Curb decided to do the same. He sat down right next to his rock on the curb outside of his house (naturally, this was his pet rock's favorite place). So Curb lived out the rest of his days pretending to be his pet rock, sitting in silence for eternity.



**Untitled**

Nina Tashjian '26









## **Fester**

Nina Tashjian '26

I spent every summer at the house by the lake. Every year on the day after school ended, we pack up the car and head out. My dad drives with the windows down, my mom letting her hair be blown by the wind. My sister and I love to look out over the forest and around the hills until we see the bright blue lake peeking out from between the divots in the earth.

Our dad liked to tell us the same story every year during the drive up. An old myth about a man who spent his whole life at the lake all alone. People say that in his old age, his body was so accustomed to the lake that it started to decompose. Slowly at first with just a toe or finger falling off, but eventually he lost his limbs and his ears, and even his stomach. His body crumbled into pieces until it eventually became a part of the land.

\* \* \*

The days were long and hot, and we filled them with the same activities. Our favorite thing to do was to bring an inflatable raft into the lake and row to the other side. After we reached the shore, we parked the raft and ran up the hill until we found the only store in town. We spent ages deciding which popsicle we wanted that day and after making our decisions we ran up to the counter and said hello to the old woman who had been there for as long as we can remember. She always greeted us with a smile and nine times out of ten, she would let us take our treats for free. It was only when her husband was in the shop

<sup>54</sup> that she made us pay.

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We used to call him “the storm” because he always ruined the fun.

This summer, my sister and I planned to do what we always did. It started off nice and calm, we spent our days swimming and playing kadima on the beach and every afternoon we took the raft out and across the lake to visit the store. The woman looked the same as always, old and wrinkly like a raisin; we wondered if she had ever been young. Yet her smile was still bright, bringing life back into her face.

\* \* \*

One afternoon, after we had spent all morning building a fortress out of sand that stood taller than me, we rowed over to the other side of the lake. We began the usual trudge up the hill to the store, walking past the tall trees and over some that had fallen because of the storms over the winter.

When we made it to the top of the hill, we could make out the small red frame of the store. It was a one story building with a triangle roof and a small porch with stairs leading up to it. There was no address on the building but painted in blue on a sign hanging out front were the words “THE STORE.”

The stairs creaked as we climbed up them and we could see the white paint chipping off to reveal rotting wood turned green by mold. When we entered, we looked to the left to say hi to the old woman at the register, but instead we saw her husband, the Storm. He seemed to be about the same age as her, yet his wrinkles somehow cut deeper and he had lines around his



mouth which were in a permanent frown. He didn't say anything, but when he lifted his head to see who had entered the store, my sister and I saw that part of his chin had fallen off. It was like his mouth was hanging open, his upper teeth visible and his lips pursed, but there was nothing below.

My sister and I didn't know how to act around him. When we walked up to the register, our eyes were glued to the place where his chin used to be. The area was red where it had detached, but there was no blood, it was as if new skin had already grown over it.

After paying for our popsicles, we ran out of the store and all the way down to the raft in silence.

\* \* \*

We were too scared to go to the store the next day. My sister and I hadn't talked about what we'd seen at all, not even to each other. There was nothing to say.

After a couple days, our parents asked us what was wrong. We didn't know what to say. Didn't know how to explain. We decided to go back to the store, so as not to raise more suspicion.

We dragged the raft out into the lake and made our way over, pulling it all the way up to the edge of the grass and slowly lumbering up the hill. When we entered the store, we again looked for the woman, but instead were greeted by the Storm, now missing his right ear and left pinky.



\* \* \*

We returned to the store everyday after that, our fear having dissipated and in its place, a sense of curiosity. We needed to see what the Storm looked like each day, which part of him would go next. It started with smaller parts like his toes and fingers. But as the summer went on, he began to lose his ankles and shins, deteriorating into a limbless body with only a head.

One day, nearing the end of the summer, his right shoulder fell off while we were in the store. My sister and I had just gone up to the counter to pay when we saw it start to slide off, the skin not even appearing to rip, just detach. It fell to the floor with a thud. Unable to control ourselves, my sister and I both leaned over the counter to see where it had landed. That was when we saw all of the other body parts that had fallen off. The fingers, shins, jaw, and ears were lying around his stool, as if they hadn't been touched since they fell off.

Each day when we returned to the store, there was less and less of the man. The woman was never there anymore. My sister and I missed her.

\* \* \*

The Storm completely fell apart three days before we left at the end of the summer. When we entered the shop, no one was sitting behind the counter. We looked through the aisles but there was no one in sight. The man's body was laying in pieces on the ground behind the counter. It wasn't bloody, just pale looking.




The woman came into the store from the front and found us standing over the pieces. Her face was expressionless. But after a moment of silent recognition, she moved back behind the counter and asked us which ice creams we wanted that day.





Scan the QR code to read the short story, "Haunted Lillies" by Niah Rangwala '28.





Thank you for reading!