

A black and white photograph of a small bird, possibly a junco or dark-eyed junco, perched on a bare, snow-laden branch. The branch is part of a larger plant with many other branches, some of which are also covered in snow. The background is a soft-focus, light-colored sky.

the spyglass



winter issue
twenty twenty-three



table of contents

ABSTRACT	1
FOMO: THE NEW PANDEMIC SWEEPING YOUR SCREENS	2
SPYGLASS WRAPPED: OUR TOP SONGS OF 2022	3
THE ROAD BACK HOME.	4
THE LITTLE THINGS	6
CHRISTMAS CARNIVAL	7
HOLIDAY SERENADE	8
ON CLOUDS	10
PHILOSOPHY	11
LEGO	12
POSSESSION	13
HOW TO PULL YOUR LIFE TOGETHER	14
I'M HUMAN, TOO	15
WARM	16

When I was younger, I used to watch my father splash colours upon colours on white canvases in our basement, dedicating all of his free time to the craft. I would often join him in his process of painting, since he used to buy me sketchbooks from the art supplies store and encourage me to paint whatever I wanted to. While my paintings were usually of typical kindergarten subjects, such as houses and my own family, my father's paintings were most often impressionistic lines and shapes.

After noticing this pattern in my father's art, I had one question: why? I knew that my father was perfectly capable of drawing realistic figures, as his lifelike sculptures and oil paintings of humans were scattered around the house, prompting all guests and family friends to instantly inquire about them. So, why was my father pursuing an art style that is often considered to be "less impressive" and "not real art"? What had prompted him to drift away from the blackened sketches on rough paper and explore the seemingly hollow world of abstract art?

When I finally decided to ask my father my question, I was honest with him. I brought up to my father that it is argued by many

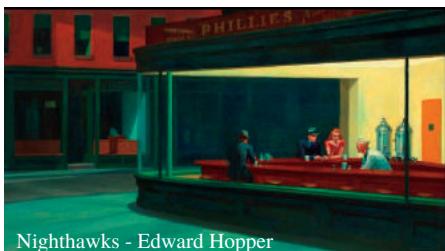
different art critics and enjoyers that abstract art can be created by any and all people, which reduces its value and emotional meaning as an art form. The vibrant canvases that decorate the otherwise blank walls of my home used to provoke that same feeling within

me. So how had he determined that creating abstract art was what he wanted to do, when he was clearly capable of so much more? He responded the way I expected him to: simply and confidently. However, the substance of his answer was what shocked me: he didn't defend his choice.



The Gate - Hans Hofmann

He simply told me that all art is abstract. Thus, abstract art is not that different from the impressionism or expressionism that we are all used to. I didn't really understand what he meant by that at first, but after pondering his answer, I began to realize its validity. Every single piece of artwork is abstract, not because of how it is portrayed, but because of the story that it tells. Art shouldn't be boxed into categories that are ranked on a hierarchy, but it should rather be appreciated for what it is.



Nighthawks - Edward Hopper

abstract

Even the art that seems the most literal has a history that amplifies and develops with the humans that see it and the time that passes. When you walk into a museum and see a canvas that is painted nothing but black, it may resonate with you because of how it represents the darkness in the world. On the other hand, the exact same composition might symbolize the beauty of the night sky to me. Similarly, Edward Hopper's 'Nighthawks' represents loneliness within hustle and bustle when I look at it, but it might just characterize rest after a long day's work for you. The stories behind seemingly "non-interpretive" designs that fit into the "acceptable" art styles are extremely complex and construed differently from person-to-person; therefore, the thought-provoking and absorbing effect that is associated with the highest-quality art is only emphasized when applied to the ambiguous and ingenious abstract art style, perhaps making it the most expressive of all.

FOMO

The New Pandemic Sweeping Your Screens

FOMO - the fear of missing out - seems to plague adolescents like gossip in the RHHS cafeteria. Whether it's missing out on last night's basketball game (that everyone went to) or not attending Justin's sweet sixteen; we all feel it. What's worse; you can't go by a single Instagram story without seeing Justin doing a backflip from his shed into his pool. Why do we feel so much anxiety thinking about where we're not? And what can be done?

The history of FOMO can be traced back to the dawn of civilization. Humans have always wanted to feel a part of a community. Once, that meant fitting in with the tribe. Now, it means doing the latest TikTok dance. Social media only amplifies this fear. On average, internet users spend 2 hours and 29 minutes every day on various social media platforms worldwide. As a result, people are more than aware of how others are spending their time. Every party, concert, and dinner seems to be documented for the whole world to see. For most (if not all), this never-ending stream of content causes a "social hunger"; an inconsolable anxiety and envy about what you could be doing, but aren't.

Funny enough, the word "FOMO" came about in 2004; the same year Facebook launched.

This article might have reminded you of all the times that you have missed out on an event and felt terrible about it.

Hell, maybe you're even doing that right now. So, how do we prevent this issue?

The easy answer would be to simply cut out social media from your life. Yes, it's hard; yes, it's boring; but it really is effective. Not only does it prevent you from seeing what others are boasting about, it also forces you to detach from your screen and live a little; "touch some grass", if you will. Give it a try; you might find yourself thinking less about the things you want and appreciating the things you already have.

However, deleting Instagram is not a full solution; we still feel FOMO in dozens of other social situations - not understanding an inside joke, not being invited to the party, It almost feels as if FOMO can happen anywhere and everywhere. What then? The answer is simple: you have to remind yourself that there is no fun to be had without you actually being there. Allow yourself to live in the present and enjoy the things you are doing right now - don't bother worrying what went down at Justin's place last Saturday; it probably wasn't all that fun without you anyway.

Next time you find yourself obsessing over the oh-so-perfect lives and events promoted on your feed, keep one thing in mind:

It's your own life you're missing out on.

Die For You - Joji

"Kinda relatable in a sadish way." - Anson Lai, Photographer

You're On Your Own, Kid - Taylor Swift

"I love Taylor Swift LOL, and it was so fun to listen to. The bridge is also so good, yay." - Fiona Xu, Designer

GOODBYE - BROCKHAMPTON

"The last song on the group's final album. It was bittersweet to see the members go their separate ways – makes me think of my own graduation." - Andrew Yang, Copywriter

Every Summertime - NIKI

"I played this 547 times and counting this past year & I had millions of other songs that I couldn't choose from because they're explicit." - Rianna Zhu, Copywriter

Bridges - Kensington

"This song is very energetic and is also one of my top songs this year." - Viktor Ostapchuk, Photographer

Snow on the Beach - Taylor Swift

"I really like the dreamy and majestic vibes. Also because Dylan O'Brien is the drummer LOL." - Hannah Truong, Designer

You'll Be Back - Jonathan Groff, Original Broadway Cast of Hamilton

"The music is fantastic, the singing voice is pretty good, and I love the way King George acts like a salty ex – it's so strangely accurate while it's also so far from the truth." - Anna Pan, Copywriter

He Travels in a Suit - Kittyhawk

"I love the vibes, and the lyrics are very interesting. Supporting small artists is cool." - Karen Zhou, Copy Editor

moon and back - JVKE

"It's very vibey, and the one chorus line just hits sooo hard with the descending melody phrase and bass line." - Elaine Wang, Associate Editor

Equation (French Version) - Hans Zimmer, Camille

"I like the subtleness of the message and the beautiful way it's conveyed." - Jillian Feng, Designer

Doughnut - Twice

"A classic that is stuck in my brain 24/7 especially when Christmas season comes." - Annie Chen, Photographer

Fly - Lael

"A chill song for chill days. It makes me feel like I'm floating." - Elina Lai, Designer

spyglass wrapped <3 our top songs-spyglass winter 2023 ver.

Out Of The Woods- Taylor Swift

"One of my favourite songs from my favourite album, and it brings back a lot of good memories!" - Jolly Yan, Photographer

U.F.O - haruno, A.G.O

"I like how the song calms me down." - Ellie Liang, Design Editor

White Ferrari - Frank Ocean

"Listening to a nostalgic Summer song to make it through Winter." Jason Wu, Copywriter

Buzzcut Season - Lorde

"I used to listen to this song with my friends during the summer, so it reminds me of all the great memories that we made during that time." - Kate Shahidi, Copywriter

ANGEL - keshi

"This song was the definition of the right time and right place for me. I love the guitar and the beautiful lyrics that make my heart melt every time." - Samantha Lee, Co-Editor-in-Chief

West Coast - Lana Del Rey

"Firstly, no, I am not a local! I've liked this song for years because of the background instrumentals, the build up to the chorus, and of course - the bridge. any bridge by lana is a 10/10." - Imaan Ahmadi, Copywriter

Wicked Games - The Weeknd

"Been revisiting his old and darker music since winter is around the corner and it's been a great listen" - Shashank Singh, Photographer

One Out of Two - Breakbot (ft. Irfane)

"Electric, rhythmic, and rich; this song will give you that 80's nostalgic feel with a modern twist." - Sophie Druta, Copywriter

Los Angeles - Seulgi

"I love the mysterious and dark vibes and how it gives late-night drive feels." - Lynn He, Design Editor

Feliz Navidad - Why Don't We

"It's really funny, and I like their extra lines throughout the song – very fitting for Christmas time." - Melanie Ong, Designer

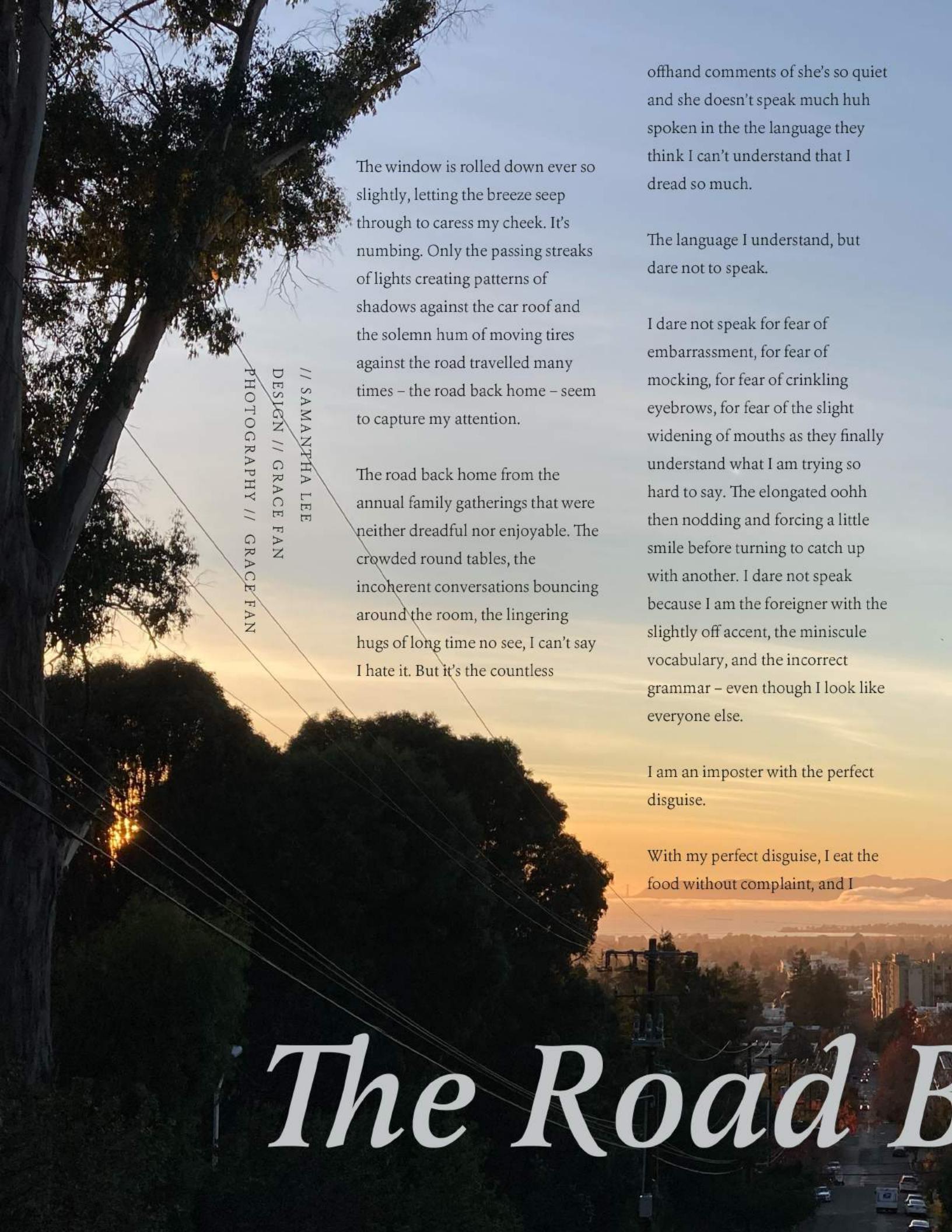
For playlist
Scan here!



2:53



4:49

A photograph of a road at sunset. The sky is a warm orange and yellow. In the foreground, there are dark silhouettes of trees and power lines. In the background, a city skyline is visible under a hazy sky.

offhand comments of she's so quiet
and she doesn't speak much huh
spoken in the the language they
think I can't understand that I
dread so much.

The language I understand, but
dare not to speak.

I dare not speak for fear of
embarrassment, for fear of
mocking, for fear of crinkling
eyebrows, for fear of the slight
widening of mouths as they finally
understand what I am trying so
hard to say. The elongated ooh
then nodding and forcing a little
smile before turning to catch up
with another. I dare not speak
because I am the foreigner with the
slightly off accent, the minuscule
vocabulary, and the incorrect
grammar – even though I look like
everyone else.

I am an imposter with the perfect
disguise.

With my perfect disguise, I eat the
food without complaint, and I

The window is rolled down ever so slightly, letting the breeze seep through to caress my cheek. It's numbing. Only the passing streaks of lights creating patterns of shadows against the car roof and the solemn hum of moving tires against the road travelled many times – the road back home – seem to capture my attention.

The road back home from the annual family gatherings that were neither dreadful nor enjoyable. The crowded round tables, the incoherent conversations bouncing around the room, the lingering hugs of long time no see, I can't say I hate it. But it's the countless

// SAMANTHA LEE
DESIGN // GRACE FAN
PHOTOGRAPHY // GRACE FAN

The Road

enthusiastically hold out my cup for more tea, but still, I dare not speak. As they recount the good old days, I can't help but reminisce on the times I wasn't paralyzed with fear. What ever happened to the little girl with pin straight bangs and an obsession with princesses who had not a care in the world about what others thought? The words used to come out so naturally – a phenomenon I can only imagine in my head and couldn't hope to recreate aloud no matter how hard I try now. I mumble to myself on the road back home.

Perhaps it's too late for me.

Perhaps it was too late to say the things I've always wanted to say in the language so familiar yet so distant. How do I express these feelings that seem to get caught in my throat?

How do I tell you thank you for taking care of me, I love your warmth and your evergreen kindness? How do I tell you before it's too late?

As I close my eyes, a thin tear trickles down my face. I lean forward, forehead grazing the shoulder of the passenger seat, and I silently wrap my trembling arms around nothing. I embrace the cold air streaming in through the car window, but I feel warm – as if I'd been tucked into bed with the

steam from a freshly brewed cup full of my favourite tea caressing my face when I let out a sigh of both relief and fatigue.

The car comes to a gentle stop. I open the door slowly. I'm greeted with a gust of chilly winter wind, signalling the coming of a new year.

I welcome it with my open arms – a language that transcends all borders.

Back Home.



The Little Things

Sometimes when you stop in your tracks, you realize how long it's been since you've smelt the roses. Everything seems to be tainted with the side effects of growing up. Nevertheless, we get up and we keep going and we find joy in the narrowest corners and motivation in the deepest drawers. Take this as you wish; a list to go through, a collection to store away, or an example to reflect on.

These are, my little things in life:

Sleeping in and waking up to sunlight gently streaking through the windowsill. I used to hate Sundays. I still kind of do. It's because I feel loneliest on Sundays, even though it's the only day I get to sleep in. I think that when you get too used to the storm, the calm becomes an oddity.

Going downstairs at 2AM to refill tea. Some days get tough. Some nights become longer. What keeps me up at night is also what wakes me up in the morning. My chrysanthemum tea is mixed in with the tears I cry on these nights. At least I know that when I go down to get tea, I'll still be coming back up to you.

Turning the last page of a good book finished in one sitting. I swallow cherries before I taste their sourness. I finish chapters before realizing how fast they flew by. As I'm still learning how to put down your book, I believe that life will unfold in miraculous new prologues.

Snowing when the sun is out. It's like a contradiction the heavens bring about as if the sky knows that we're

just trying our best to make sense of it all. It is a welcoming reminder to not be afraid of the unexpected.

Noticing two strangers, clearly in love but too nervous to confess it. When I see this, I smile. My heart swells a little as I dwell on my regrets. Would I have forgotten you sooner if I didn't mention you in everything I wrote? It's funny how we're always scared of the things we love the most.

Saying "goodbye" instead of "bye" or "see you". Sometimes I think "bye" doesn't do enough justice. If I could turn back time, I would've whispered "goodbye" to you under my breath. I would've taken a last glance over my shoulder before walking away from the memory of you.

Being told "I'm proud of you." Like all others, I have a guilty craving for validation. And when nothing feels right, and yet nothing feels wrong, I need something to hang on to. These simple words are my anchor and my revival.

Just as this Winter season hitches in snowfalls and stills, notice the little things. Notice when your mom closes the window so the wind doesn't blow in. Notice the frail specks of green grass trying their hardest to peek out through the snowbed. Notice the warmth in your heart prevailing over the icy breeze as you share hot cocoa with your friends.

I hope you spend every day finding new "little things" in life.

CHRISTMAS Carnival

The wind navigates into the crevices of my padded winter jacket; breezing over every part of my body and provoking a shiver. You stroll onward and zip up my coat, which I usually don't bother to do. The snow clinging onto my pants starts to melt, soaking my legs and socks, and the frigid breeze devastates my body, which has never dealt with the cold well. Still, your face, worn and blushed, thaws this blizzard with those eyes preserving your distinct exuberance, and the cold was never a match for your company.

Finally, after I catch my escaping breath, we reach the summit of our snowy hill and sit on the wooden bench, looking down at the carnival from where we came. Among winter's dusk, the darkness was unfathomably dark, and the light unbelievably bright. The effervescent rays shine through in blotches of red, green, white, and blue, like a star buried deep under a glacier or a ceaseless firework, grounded forever. Blanketed in the cold, I almost felt warm.

Like in previous years, the carnival is occupied by our loved ones; childhood friends, distant cousins and long lost best friends who, every year, chatter about how we've grown up, although truthfully, we've only grown apart. They manage and enjoy the booths, concession stands, rides, and performances. The Ferris wheel, the pride of the carnival, beacons above everything; endlessly spinning riders to the peak, embracing its arbitrariness and insanity like an old lighthouse, long out of commission.

It was still early when we started our venture, but now it's late, and the time has passed. To you, I've run out of words to say years ago, so I tilt my head towards the sky, an infinite canvas oversaturated by a gradient of messy blue emulsion. There are stars out tonight. They're so loud and alive that every twinkle seems to hold its own carnival, along with a version of you that I'll thankfully never meet, or a version of me, which occasionally, I desperately longed to be, and it dreadfully tires me.

I've been told that the darkness encircling us is astonishing. One day, as a leap of faith, we'll all blindly run, in different directions, through the void with unwavering excitement, tearing through the shrubbery and leaving an impression on the land.

I've heard, however conceptually implausible, that one day, you'll be gone from this land, out of reach like the stars above, though in a past life, we sat adjacent on this hill. But every year, I see you less and less, and every year, I need you less and less.

Still, I hope that every Christmas, under the glimmer of millions of stars, we'll follow the footprints we made during the year until we're close enough to feel each other's warmth amidst the endless winter, or see the Ferris wheel, our personal time capsule, and look on with youthful eyes and more exhilaration than the collective spirit of humanity during the age of exploration.

// JASON WU
PHOTOGRAPHY // SAMANTHA LEE
DESIGN // SAMANTHA LEE

Holiday Serenade

// KAREN ZHOU
PHOTOGRAPHY // JOLLY YAN
AND ELAINE WANG
DESIGN // HANNAH TRUONG

On cold winter nights, it's easy to feel alone. The familiar feeling has been a defining factor of these last few years. But this December 14th, the Richmond Hill Centre for the Performing Arts was filled with community, warmth, and holiday spirit. For the first time since 2019, RHHS's music department got the chance to perform at the RCPA, marking the return of the annual Holiday Serenade.

With a sold-out house, the performance hall was packed—the large audience consisting of supportive families, students, and illustrious music teachers.

First up were the grade 10 Symphonic Winds. From the balcony seats, the performers' faces were small and shining under the stage lights. "Fanfare of the Bells" marked the beginning of a night full of music. Sax ensemble received rounds of applause following their impressive performance, led by star soloist Jason Sun.

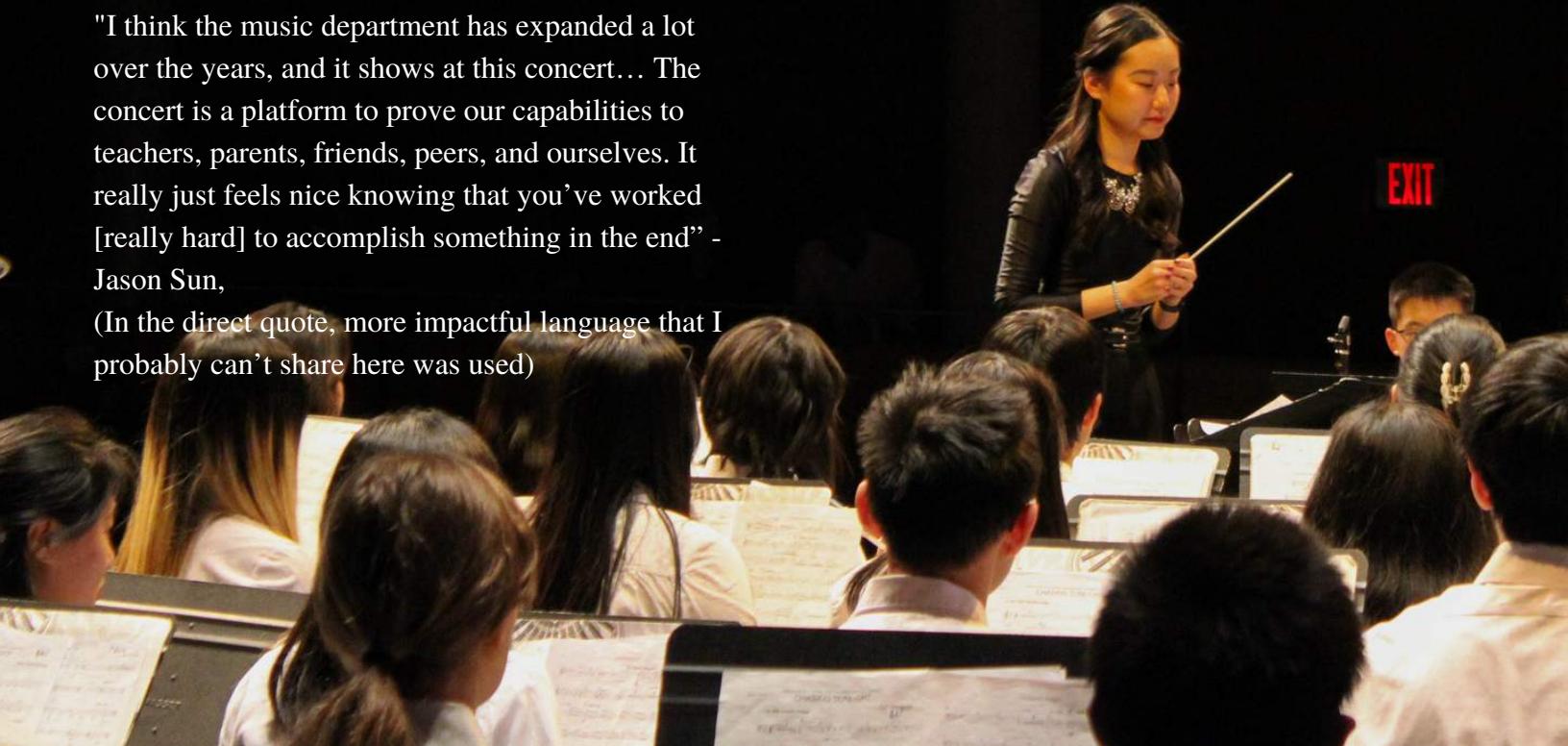
"I think the music department has expanded a lot over the years, and it shows at this concert... The concert is a platform to prove our capabilities to teachers, parents, friends, peers, and ourselves. It really just feels nice knowing that you've worked [really hard] to accomplish something in the end" - Jason Sun,

(In the direct quote, more impactful language that I probably can't share here was used)

Grade 9 Concert Band was up next, playing three ambitious pieces for their first performance with RHHS. Expectedly, many parents were recording the performances. Evident were their desires to capture the proud moments of achievement in their children's blossoming lives.

Flute Ensemble, led by Marcus Wen, transported the room into a Studio Ghibli film. The flutes shone iridescently, colours bold and fleeting—just like notes in the piece. Next, Brass Ensemble, led by Joshua Oblijubek-Thomas, played an incredible cover of "The Incredibles". They were followed by Vocal Fusion, who had amazing stage presence, filling the hall with contagious energy and enthusiasm.

During the intermission, I encountered a few friends performing that night. The lobby was filled with excited chatter—nervous excitement and pride were palpable.



"Being back in the RCPA as a senior for holiday serenade really brought back all the right memories of my grade 9 year, and I'm so glad that moving forward, RHHS music students (as long as the world doesn't go into shambles) will be able to make countless memories on stage again." - Katherine Liu, Musco President

I then bought some overpriced snacks and went back up to the balcony.

Gold Fever did not fail to impress in "Let it Snow! Let it Snow! Let it Snow!", accompanying Lia Dogadin's powerful vocals. With a piece from the opposite season, percussion ensemble, led by Emma Au and Linxi Wang, played "Under the Sea". The stage filled with sand and invisible crabs and a smile lit up my face. RHHS chorus really brought the holiday back into the Holiday Serenade, singing three Christmas songs. String ensemble, led by Anson Lai, took the room back in time with "Love Theme".



With hard work from Ms. Geng, Mr. Rawlins, Ms. Christopoulos, Music Council, the students of the music department, admin, teacher volunteers, RCPA staff, and RHHS tech crew, the night was a huge success. Large donations were received, allowing the music department to purchase more instruments for future students.

And as the curtains parted a final time, the audience gasped. Gold Band, with over one hundred performers, filled the stage. I smiled and waved at my friends on stage, but I doubt the blinding lights allowed for much visibility.



"The lights were shining on us and our breaths were held as Mr. Rawlins raised his baton. It felt like we were the only ones in the entire world. To see the effort that our team had laboured on endlessly for weeks come to life - and to stand on that stage again - I wanted to hold on to that feeling forever." - Elaine Wang, Musco Vice President

Finally, "The Hounds of Spring" brought to mind imagery of a chase. The rhythm and beautifully crafted sense of urgency further vitalized my love for art. The symbolism in the final song, of spring soon to rush in and continue the cycle of seasons, made the piece a beautiful ending to the successful night.



On Clouds

I am a meteorologist. My job is to document the clouds. I note their sizes, altitudes, and movements, just as any other meteorologist would.

But it gets lonely up here—traversing the white expanse all alone.

I've journeyed across vast altostratus plains. On gloomy winter days for those on the ground, I ride across bright cloudscapes, unencumbered. I've trailed herds of cloud bison on their migrations. I've seen a cloud elephant calf take its first steps on the great white blanket.

I've scaled cumulonimbus peaks thousands of meters taller than mount Everest, each step taken on cushions. Ascending through layers of the atmosphere, flossy pillows shift in and out of periphery. With a cool breeze, cirrocumulus clusters diffuse their scent of avocado and honey.

I've coasted down escarpments, received by tumbling asperitas blankets—plush velvet, adorned with dewdrops. Sliding down the billowing foothills, I remember when I was a child on the ground. I used to play on slides with other children.

Now, I live in the clouds.

I've sailed down stratocumulus rivers that slice the sky into rippled parallels. Translucent fish flit out and between the floating channels and open air. To my sides, rivers recurse as far as the eye can see.

I've ridden the wind on cirrus ribbons, struggling to stand on their dynamic footholds. They overlap and intertwine—musical staves yet to be filled. Standing in the bulk of their congregation, I'd almost hear a choir.

I've jumped from altocumulus islands, bouncing between trampolines four thousand metres high. Each cloud is a patch within a giant quilt, with borders of larimar blue. I'd leap, above the oceans and islands—on their firmamental reflections.

With the sunset, clouds become mirrors of fire and citrus. My day ends as the flames subside, and I lay on the softness of silk in silence and solitude.

Heavy eyelids weigh me down.

Dreaming, I am earthly, and searching for a friend.

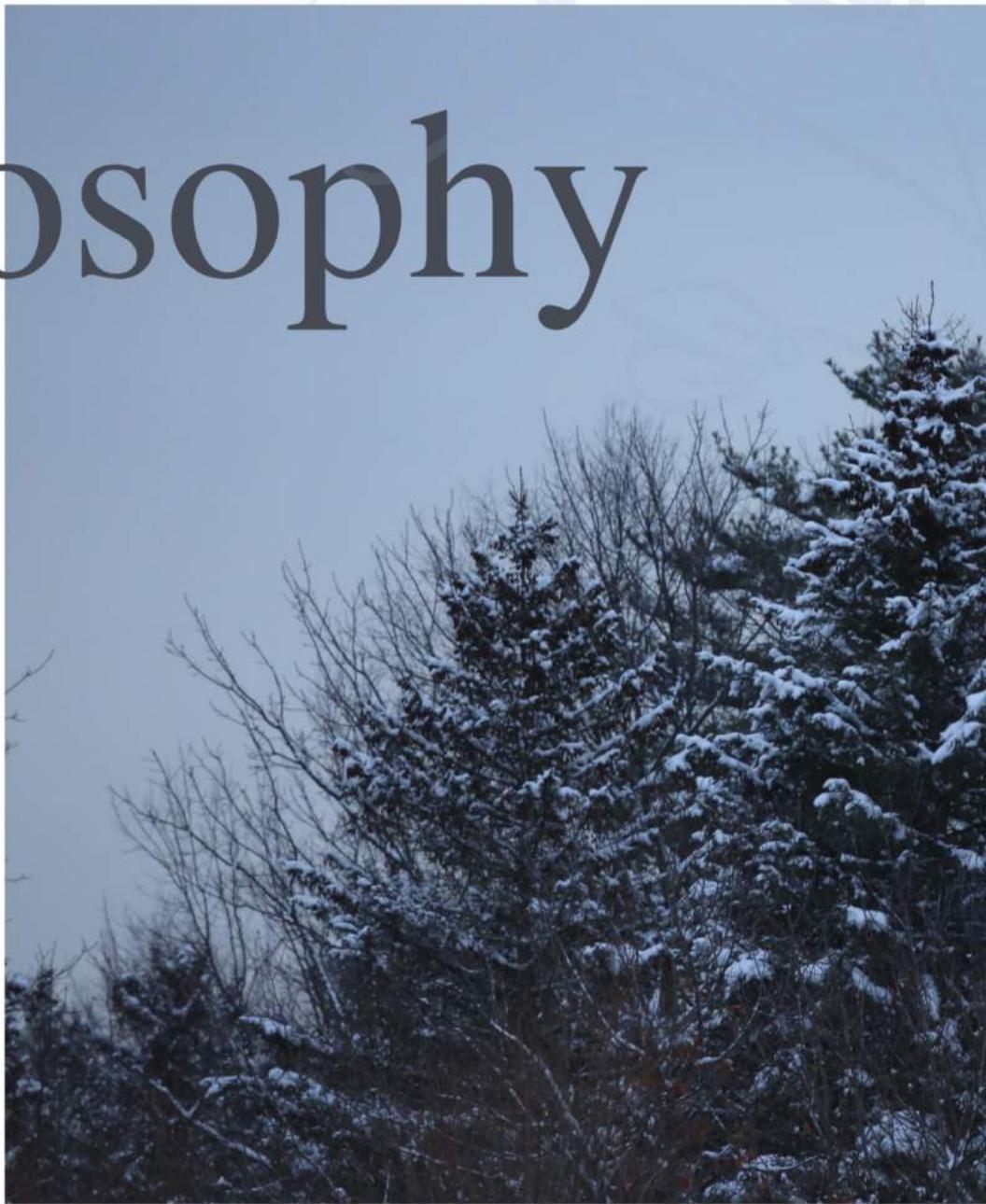
Philosophy

// YASMIN HADIZAD
PHOTOGRAPHY // SAM ABDI
DESIGN // MELANIE ONG

Human beings are wired to seek purpose,
reason for existence
For when the clever don't have a question to answer they look for anything or invent something.
A challenge, worthy of our clockwork brilliance, a burning, impossible question delicious fed to hungry mouths and thirsty souls famished for answers And then some find an answer or come up with one hold onto it tight, firm, stubbornly insistent that theirs is the right theory, the right answer They become correct or crazy And we, wanting acceptance, take the safest side But still, in our hearts, we ask How do we know?

A daunting reality, or rather, the lack of For when the clever do not have the answer, they fear, stress, twitch and fidget in the knowledge that they know nothing.

Philosophers, scientists, people,



all of us
grasping at straws
all torn, in conflict
over who's right
For when the clever
are among their own,
they each believe themselves
cleverest.

But what if what if we all
paused,
broke the pattern,
ended our search
for an answer
and broadened our vision?

We are here.
Or maybe we perceive

ourselves
to be here,
laughing,
seething,
crying,
sleeping,
excited, scared,
intrigued, in love,
hopeful, hopeless,
careful, carefree,
alive.

To believe this or that,
to find meaning
is an endless quest,
so why not cease,
acknowledge

each other,
hold
our beliefs
close to our chests,
tight, firm,
but open to those of
others?
For though the clever
feel divided,
fearful,
torn,
we know, at least,
that we are all
conscious,
here, together,
alive.

LEGO

I loved LEGO. I got my first set around the first grade and was obsessed with them my whole childhood. Every Christmas, every birthday, I would look forward to tearing off the wrapping paper to reveal a shiny new set. Even my New Year's money would go straight to the nearest toy store. To me, they were more than a simple toy or pastime. They represented good times, the holidays, the days parents wouldn't bicker over every little thing. They were a symbol of the best parts of my childhood.

Last fall, I went to the mall with some friends. I can't quite recall the purpose of the trip, but it was definitely a good time. Near the end of the trip, we decided to visit Toys "R" Us to mess around with some, well, toys, but in a cool, mature way fitting for twelfth graders. As we walked out of the store, I noticed a family of four behind us. A boy, no older than 10 walked with his little sister, accompanied by his parents. In the boy's hands was a LEGO star wars ship. On his face was the purest smile I had ever seen. Clutching the box in his hands, he fawned over it with his little sister, excited to crack it open and build the ship as soon as he got home.

I was paralyzed. It was like looking through a window into the past. I had never seen that boy before in my life. I didn't know his name, his hobbies, or personality. Despite this, I knew exactly what he was feeling.

I knew it was a rare occasion, evident from his massive smile. I knew that he asked his parents for a bigger set. I knew his parents shot him down immediately. I just knew. I was just like him, a lifetime ago. Was it his birthday, or were his parents feeling generous that day? I knew that I would never experience something like that, something that pure and innocent again. I just felt hopeless.

When I got home that day, I ran upstairs and pulled a giant plastic box from my closet. When my family moved to Richmond Hill in 2015, I was forced to break my LEGO sets apart to transport them. I hadn't touched them since. It was like visiting my childhood home, only to realize the marks of my youth had been erased. The decade-long impression I maintained of these LEGO bricks disappeared like snow in the spring. I had come to understand that I could revisit the place that held my childhood, but I would never truly be there again.

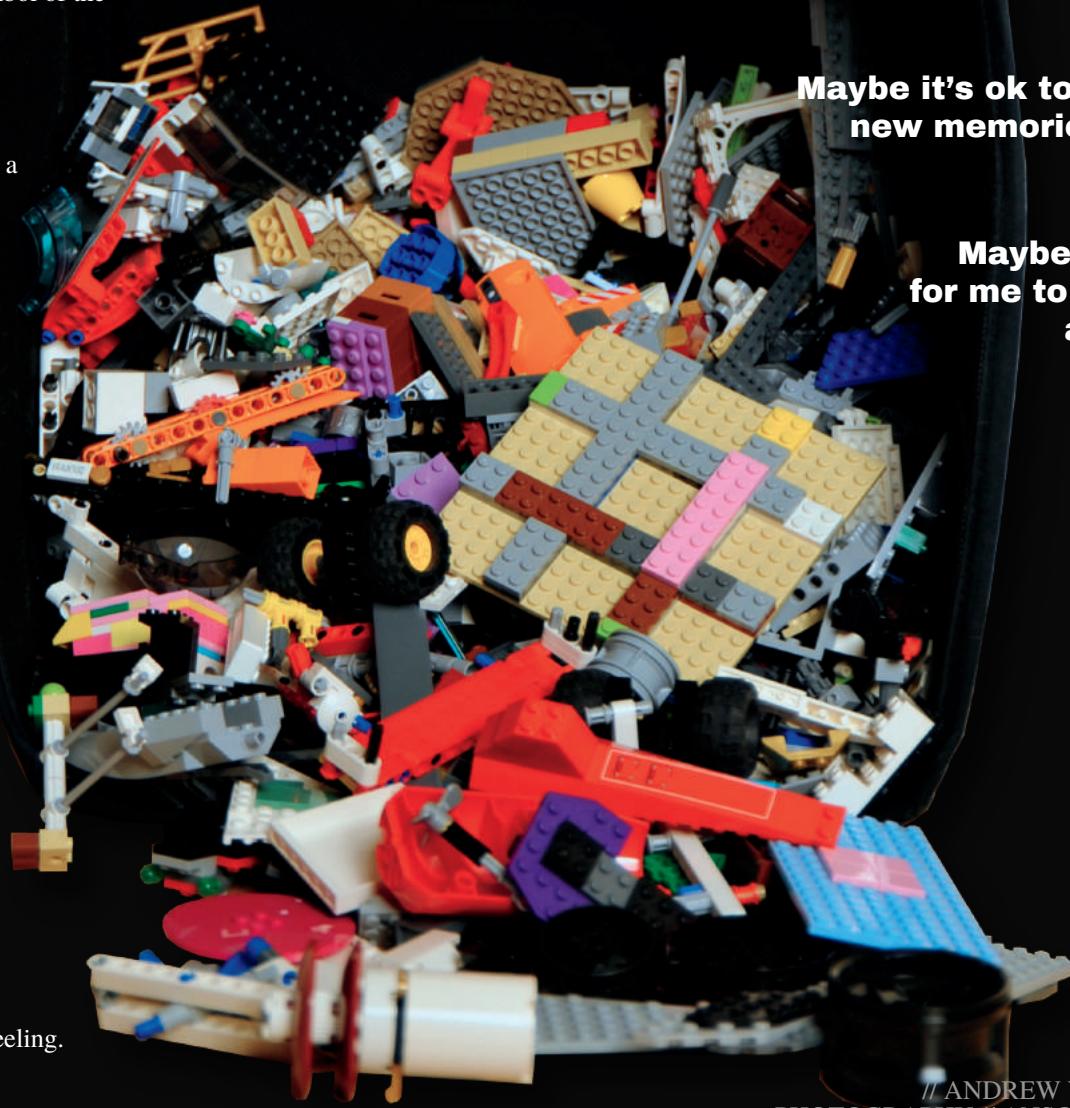
I'm not stupid. I know that I'm leaving that period of my life behind, but that encounter just completely blindsided me. Those LEGO bricks held some of my most treasured memories, one of the key features of my childhood that somehow remained untainted over the years. The more I stared into that box, the less magical the pieces became. I guess curiosity killed the cat.

I walked out of that experience with one of the most cherished parts of my childhood tarnished. I felt like I've permanently lost a piece of myself. On the bright side, it's pushed me to take my life by the reins and get my act together. Now, more than ever, I want to try new things. I want to accomplish my goals. I want to make the most out of every day and cherish the people in my life, old friends and new ones alike.

Maybe growing up isn't all bad after all.

Maybe it's ok to make new memories.

Maybe it's ok for me to dream a little.



// ANDREW YANG
PHOTOGRAPHY // ANSON LAI
DESIGN // ELINA LAI

possession

//IMAAN AHMAD
PHOTOGRAPHY// JOLLY YAN
DESIGN// LYNN HE



One of the most humbling feelings known to man is staring at your pile of uncompleted work the night before a test. Just silently cursing your self destructive habits that throw you in this wayward spiral of constant procrastination while pointedly staring at the time, **12 AM.**

It's only a couple of minutes after that where you drop your pencil in defeat, and just completely gaslight yourself into believing that you fully understand the material. The thought of going to sleep rather than pulling an all-nighter sounds more pleasing anyways... *Flash forward to 2:11 PM -* you hand in your test in defeat after going through all stages of grief in just 75 minutes...

Oh well if it isn't the consequences of your actions!

It's this feeling of utter defeat that **SHOULD** motivate you to study, to avoid procrastination, but- the cycle continues. You figure that maybe listing down things to be completed would possibly motivate you, but even this is futile as you instead get sucked into the vortex that is your phone. Actually no, the funniest part of procrastination is that you will do just about **ANYTHING** if it means you're not doing actual work. For me, my personal favourite form of procrastination is aimlessly lingering downstairs! What makes humans so strange is that you know what to do to resolve an issue like flopping a class - but you just can't DO it. It's as if you're possessed by some sort of entity that quells all sense of responsibility and productivity a student should have. I don't even believe procrastination is a feeling, it's a full on **ENTITY**. There is absolutely no way something as dynamic, complicated, and ever changing as procrastination could be dumbed down to a simple word or feeling. No. I definitely believe that this is some sort of case of possession. No TED Talk could ever exercise something like this out of me. Anybody who actually has their life together would probably stare at this article in utter confusion, wondering why someone like me would exert the effort to describe the feeling of being possessed by a procrastination entity rather than finishing up my math homework. So, let it be known that I believe that this is a feeling that can only be understood by people who have experienced it first hand. And if you've experienced any symptoms or instances listed above... Let me just say, **good luck.**

You're *probably* **POSSESSED** too. • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •

HOW TO PULL YOUR LIFE TOGETHER

// RIANNA ZHU
GRAPHICS // DREAMSTIME.COM
DESIGN // FIONA XU

In the winter, it gets so cold you don't think you'll ever be warm again. But in the summer, it gets so hot you can't imagine being so cold. When you go through a breakup, you don't think you'll ever be happy again. But when you ride a high, you can't imagine ever feeling so sad. Just like how seasonal variation serves as a biyearly reminder that we will feel warm and cold again, our setbacks will remind us of our resilience. Even if it feels like the world is ending, eventually, romantic rejection in the ninth grade holds the same trivial weight as romantic rejection in the fifth grade.

But what happens when we screw up a major life checkpoint?

When Paris from Gilmore Girls was rejected from Harvard, she was forced to re-evaluate what was truly important to her: to be great, regardless of whatever Ivy she did it at. Never in her four years of high school did this dawn on her, though, as the chase for acceptance into Harvard was one of an all-consuming nature. Paris only acknowledged her true desires when she was forced to: when they stared her down in the form of a rejection letter.

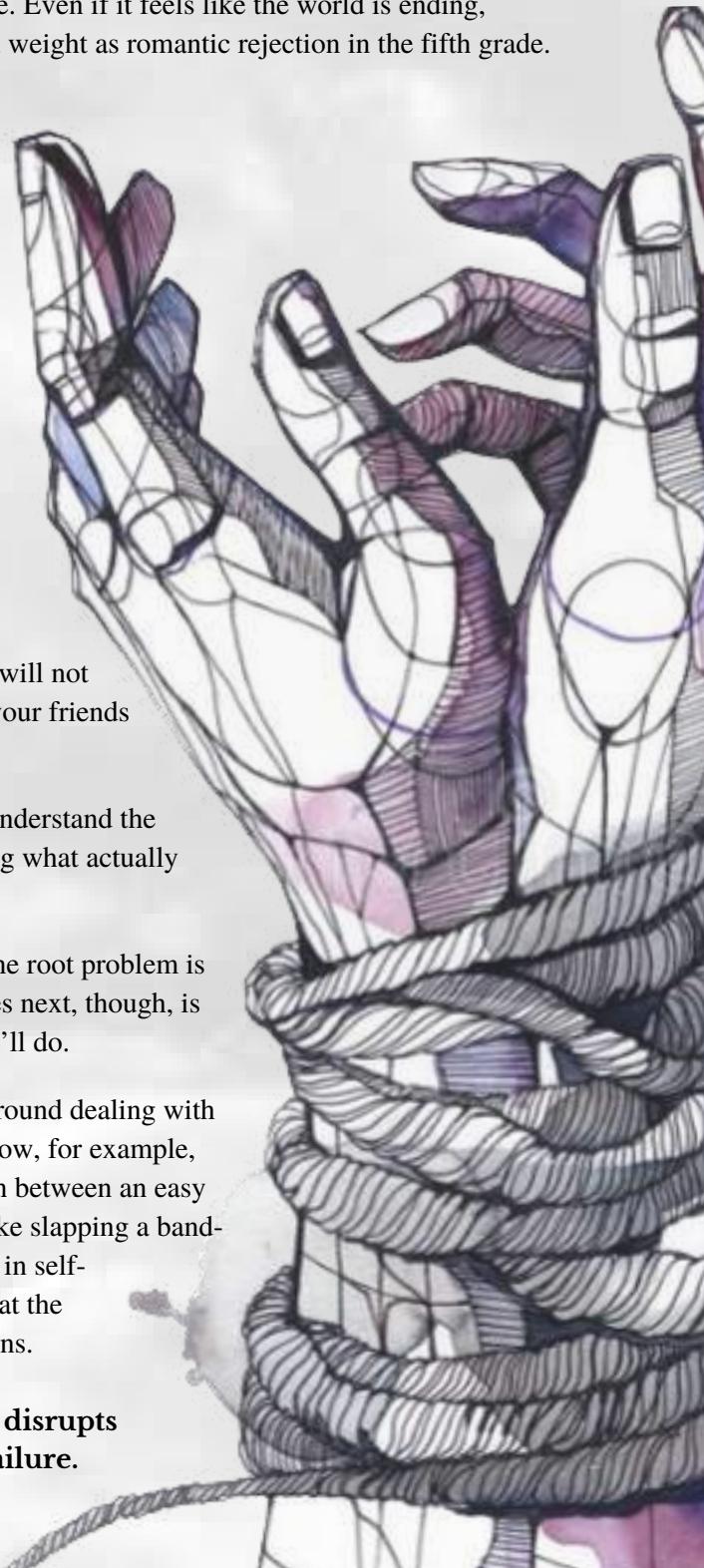
Similarly, being young entails conventionally mapping your life out as a checklist: graduate middle school, graduate high school, go to university, get a job, pass on your DNA, and retire. But as we grow older, we start to see valuable human experiences as more than checkboxes, and we start to see value in the little things. Life is not an empty void to be filled by one big accomplishment. Getting an award will not provide you with eternal happiness, but having lunch every day with your friends might.

It is only by taking a step back and gaining perspective that we fully understand the importance of the little things. Screwing up is a crucial part of realizing what actually matters to you.

Okay, so in order to pull our lives together, we need to first assess if the root problem is really a problem and then deal with it head-on with if it is. What comes next, though, is easier said than done: we need to follow through with what we say we'll do.

And yet, life is full of the temptation to find easy paths. To navigate around dealing with your problem, not through it. Always pushing your workout to tomorrow, for example, adds up to a lifetime of not working out. Often, it is hard to distinguish between an easy path and the best course of action, but evading the cold hard truth is like slapping a band-aid on a stab wound. So let yourself fail and hit rock bottom – wallow in self-pity, let waves of sadness hit you at the most random times – because at the end of all that, you'll gain enough insight to properly judge your options.

Anything worth achieving requires effort, but nothing that disrupts your honourable efforts can pigeonhole you into being a failure.



I'm Humah, Too.

// GOLSHID SAYRANI
DESIGN // SAMANTHA LEE

I opened my eyes before dawn from a long restlessness, silenced my alarm, and stumbled into the living room. I stood in front of the window and took in the peacefulness of the morning. It gave me hope, a feeling that is not so prominent for a 17-year-old girl living in Iran. I put on my school uniform, a navy blue manteau paired with a black hijab. I looked at myself in the mirror, as strands of my curly hair were poking out of my head covering, wondering what life would be like if I lived in America, where curly-haired girls went to school showing off their curls rather than hiding them. I snapped out of it when my second alarm went off; I was late for the school bus.

As the bus drove through the neighbourhood, I looked out the window. Streets were empty and soulless, I could see teargas canisters, pellet bullets and burnt-out fires in every corner, and there was a peculiar tension in the air. I had never seen Tehran, a city full of life, so dreary.

“Women, Life, Freedom.”

I walk to the school yard, where all grades line up every morning for the principal’s announcements and mandatory morning prayer. The assigned person from each class checks our nails for nail polish. Today, it was Mitra, and as she walked past me, she slipped something in my pocket, but I could not check it when a teacher supervisor was near. The dreadful announcements go by, and we are finally in class, so I take the wrinkled paper out of my pocket and open it discreetly under my desk.

“Walkout against the regime at noon in the yard.”

“Zan, Zandegi, Azadi.”

I could not stop thinking about the note. Should I walk out? If I don’t go out there, then who will? I cannot keep scrolling through social media, yearning for the lives of others, without doing anything to improve my own.

Noon came sooner than I thought it would. The girls took off their hijabs and started marching out into the yard, chanting, “Women, Life, Freedom”. So I took off my hijab and walk with them. I was amazed, speechless even, looking at all these girls chanting, one massive loud voice echoing through the neighbourhood. The teachers were furious, yelling at everyone to go back inside before we got suspended, but nobody paid attention. Nobody cared.

“Women, Life, Freedom.”

Soon after that, three tear gas canisters shot into the yard. As everyone was running and screaming, a large group of militia walked in. I trembled in fear, frozen in place as if I had a virtual reality war simulation. I look around to see the girls, my classmates, being beaten with batons and dragged and taken away to the vans parked outside. Where do I go? What should I do? Who do I call?

“Zan, Zandegi, Azadi.”

I sat in the corner, scrunched up into a ball, as uncontrollable tears streamed down my face. An officer came up to me and grabbed me by my arm, dragging me to where all the other girls were. He shoved his baton into my stomach when I resisted, and for a moment, I lost my breath completely. My vision was blurry with tears, and my screaming blending into the sound of terror coming from everyone else. The same officer returned to put handcuffs on me and started escorting us to the vans. Will what happened to Mahsa Amini happen to me? I looked out the window, wondering if this was the last time in a while I was going to see my city.

I am everything the oppressive regime says I am not.

I am an Iranian woman.

wARM



At first, I didn't really notice her.

I knew her name, I knew her face, I knew her friend group. But not much more than that. She was quiet and I preferred the company of books over people. We barely exchanged a word throughout the entire year—nothing more than classmates.

The next year was mostly the same, until a group project where the groups were to be decided by the students.

Not much of a choice in partners if you don't have any friends, huh?

So I got to know her and she got to know me, and there we have the ordinary beginning of our friendship.

Friendship. A funny word, if only because the best way to define the word is to describe what it isn't. Not lovers, not family, not strangers, not acquaintances. Then, what are friends?

But then came the 'crushes', heteronormative expectations of a heteronormative society.

I picked a boy who I was already friends with. I spent time with him. Hugged him. And apparently, that was considered romantic. Me, interacting with a friend, was romantic.

Never mind that whenever I spent time with her or hugged her or even stroked her hair, we were simply very good friends.

Then, what is romance?

// ANNA PAN
PHOTOGRAPHY // ANNIE CHEN
DESIGN // ELLIE LIANG



I mentioned I like books?
Let's backtrack a bit.

Stories are full of romance. No matter the category, no matter the genre. I could pick up a horror novel and find some badly-written, heterosexual romance.

A fantasy series might yield several different love triangles—hetero, of course. If a male and a female weren't siblings, chances were that at least one of them liked the other. While I was hard-pressed to find a novel without some form of heterosexual romance or other, I had to actively search for same-sex representation.

Lovers defying friends and family for their precious love, lovers prioritizing a love interest they've known for a few weeks over lifelong friends, lovers proclaiming that close friends could never be as important as their one true love.

'Friendzoned.' 'Just a friend.'

It's almost as though they believe friends to be inferior...

So, growing up, I was very confused about what I felt—especially toward her. I wanted to hug her, all the time. I wanted to touch her hair, to hold her hand. I wanted to be near her, I felt happy around her and I thought of her all the time.

Was it romantic? I had no idea. It didn't feel like romantic love, but I'd never experienced romantic attraction before. I could never differentiate the types of love I felt, believing those categories they call 'types of love' inaccurate.

For some time, I tried to understand my feelings.

But, what was the point? I'd already renounced categorizing something as abstract as emotions, so why attempt to label what I was feeling?

I love her. It doesn't matter to me if that love is familial or platonic or romantic or none of those things.

I love her, and that is all I need to know.



Editors in Chief

Rachel Liu and Samantha Lee

Copy Editor

Karen Zhou

Associate Editor

Elaine Wang

Photography Editor

Sam Abdi

Photographers

Viktor Ostapchuk

Design Editor

Ellie Liang

Lynn He

Copywriters

Golshid Sayrani

Andrew Yang

Anna Pan

Elaine Wang

Imaan Ahmadi

Jason Wu

Karen Zhou

Kate Shahidi

Rianna Zhu

Samantha Lee

Sophie Druta

Yasmin Hadizad

Photographers

Jolly Yan

Annie Chen

Shashank Singh

Anson Lai

Sam Abdi

Designers

Fiona Xu

Grace Fan

Lynn He

Hannah Truong

Jillian Feng

Melanie Ong

Elina Lai

Ellie Liang

Samantha Lee

Rachel Liu

COVER PHOTOGRAPHY // SAM ABDI