



DO YOU
OWN YOUR
BODY?

the f-word

Illustration by Felicity Wong

Opening Statement

“As women, we have come to distrust that power [the erotic] which rises from our deepest and non-rational knowledge. We have been warned against it all our lives by the male world, which values this depth of feeling enough to keep women around in order to exercise it in the service of men, but which fears this same depth too much to examine the possibility of it within themselves. So women are maintained at a distant/inferior position to be psychically milked, much the same way ants maintain colonies of aphids to provide a life-giving substance for their masters.”

—Audre Lorde, *The Uses of the Erotic*

From the instant the obstetrician-gynecologist designates a biological sex and race to a newborn, the baby is immediately placed within the bounds of societal stereotypes. We witness the existence of gender binaries when the doctor swaddles a biologically female infant in a pink blanket or a biologically male infant in blue. It is in these practices—whether it is advising a young girl to sit with her legs crossed or forcing an adult woman to cover her legs with clothing—that the ideologies of patriarchy limit an individual’s freedom of expression. As a person’s gender expression is restricted by socially sanctioned behaviors, they are conditioned to distrust any understanding of gender that deviates from the dominant binary framework. When society sings its gendered expectations into one’s ears—sometimes with praise, other times with criticism—the chorus becomes overwhelming. In that tangled harmony of conflicting voices, it becomes easy to lose one’s sense of identity and the power to define oneself. Feminist author Audre Lorde argues in her essay “The Uses of the Erotic” that patriarchy can only sustain itself by corrupting or distorting the inherent power within oppressed cultures—the power that emerges when the oppressed recognize and reclaim their own autonomy.

In light of recent American legislation on women’s reproductive rights, the growing rates of domestic and sexual violence in both private and institutional spaces, and the pervasive misogyny across social media, *The F-Word* could not turn a blind eye to the escalating threats against women’s bodily autonomy when selecting this year’s publication theme.

In 2022, the Supreme Court overruled *Roe v. Wade*, which declared that abortions are not a health right protected by the Constitution. Following this decision, there was a cascade of legislative attacks against women's access to reproductive healthcare and rights, ranging from defunding Planned Parenthood to incarcerating women who have experienced natural miscarriages. Ironically, as women became more sexualized and fetishized in social media culture, they were also harshly judged and shamed for expressing their sensuality. Rhetoric dismisses sexual assault victims from having a "acceptable" reason to purchase contraceptives or seek abortions.

The patriarchy, both politically and socially, continues to block women from having absolute agency over themselves. The erotic, as Audrey Lorde defines it, is a measure "between the beginnings of [a woman's] sense of self and the chaos of [her] strongest feelings," unbounded by societal expectations. One's erotic is evident in the way they unapologetically dance on the Kellner stage, express their ethnic culture through their hairstyle, or laugh vociferously in the student center. It's reflected in how someone presents themselves online, shows love for their partner in public, embraces their unshaven body, or sits with her legs confidently spread on a chair. It is when we embrace the power of the erotic within ourselves, allowing it to define our lifestyle, that we finally begin to be responsible for ourselves in the most profound sense.

This year, the *F-Word* urges you to question: Do women own their bodies? In what ways do your daily habits, snarky comments, or biases perpetuate ideologies that confine individuals to the behaviors of strict gender binaries? How can you, as an individual, challenge the normalization of sexual harassment in boarding schools or the fetishization of women of color on Instagram? The goal of this issue is not to blame men for the existence of patriarchy and its deep-rooted control over women's bodily autonomy, but rather to shed light on the quotidian behaviors, normalized patterns, and systemic powers that continue to uphold and reinforce patriarchal power over women. The reclamation of our erotic power is our most powerful collective path toward bodily autonomy in a world that continues to restrict, regulate, and silence women's bodies.

-Gabriella Brown

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Ready for Consumption

Angela Xu '27



I Am Hungry for More Than You

Anonymous

in darkness, i starve until my stomach swells–:

a peach without a pit,

a puckered pea

he feeds me tumescent oranges, porous

tucked into his flower bed–:

skin atrophies my lips–:

seed for dissection

writhes against my bite until

grunting soaks in.

his hands blend into silk–mirrored night–:

he smears tangerine until pulp coagu

my land-locked neck

lates,

witnesses metal bars–: prodding,

pulses in my bleeding throat

scything

post-mortem pulp–:

he peels a strip of my skin, gnaws the circuit
of my epicarp–:

the sheets did not ask me–:

the night did not digest my face.

songs a heave,

the stars did not bruise my body.

and the carnal chorus buzzes.

i want–:

from rib to flank, my body flakes

against his enamel–:

the last words,

famine's beat convulses,

my fruit smear back–: a regurgitation

of nothing–:

shudders citric acid into my ribs–:

no-thing

craves

his tongue thrashes for something sweet–:

what it can't be given.

come morning, the bathroom smells–:

of a freshly opened ginger ale–:

marred bovine hide

his endless, vying squeeze–:

mourns a mal(e)content night.

a fermentation of virginity

a drain watching me scrape myself

left out for flat.

off my tongue–:

my lining sheds into the toilet bowel–:

myself = you because our bodies

are bars, and the immovable blank–:

i relish my insides, grumbling,

well, i wish it would binge me–:

finally, i hunger for the emptiness of

ano-sex-ic.

you

i wish my body could pill dead cells–:

trickle my wounds down

the rubbing alcohol

of my skin.

i emulsify in girl–:

a casualty of *hit*,

smashed,

get with that.

after my skin dries up, my baby oil

smells like the rim

Pink

Davey Glazer '28

I wake each morning, step inside,
And face the closet where I hide.
What would a “real man” think or say,
If he saw the clothes I wear each day?
Pink surrounds me, bright and bold,
A color more than what I’m told.
It lets me breathe, it lets me be,
A vibrant truth that sets me free.
As I walk, the stares begin,
Their silent judgment wears me thin.
Pink sweaters stitched with leaves and lace,
Yet shame is stitched upon their face.
Even my mother, eyes cast low,
A silent ache she won’t let show.
The world insists on strict confines,
Be a man—ignore the signs.
From blazers sharp to dresses bright,
They say there’s only black and white.
But no—I stand, I break the mold,
The world must change, the truth be told.
So when they ask why pink I choose,
I smile, for there’s so much to lose.
To be myself, to shift the view,
To break the standards, build anew.

Let the old world crack and fall,
Let pink rise up and paint it all.
A sky reborn, no lines, no ties,
A pink-touched heaven where freedom flies

Dysmorphia





God's Image

Anonymous

We're all made in God's image:
The boy hollering, hanging out the window of
the car,
pushing through the open air like a flag in the
wind;
Man leering, man peering, still God's image.
Man who licks his lips when her hips shift.
That's God's motherfucking image.

Ok, but this guy didn't vote for Trump.
Saint of laughing-along and taking-a-joke,
Saint Meek who inherits the earth.
You watched CNN when your buddies stum-
bled,
wayward, to the clinic,
new age apostles with signs promising
eternal life to the atheist unborn.
Shepherded them through the subway,
tremulously righteous and watching the wom-
en walk
with your head bowed. If you were a woman,
well, you'd know better.

I know enough to roll my eyes at girls

who want to know what's between god's legs.
God of porn and climate change tells her
to get on her knees,
to lift her skirt up and be glad.
God who kills her and she thanks him for it.

I rewrote the Bible for modern attention
spans.
I think you got confused so it's one sentence
now:
Thou shalt not hate, yes, even fat girls and
sluts.
Still, you hate not the sin so much as the tell-
ing of it.
In the modern age of immaculate rejection
acceptance denies heaven while denial accepts
hell.

Walking on water with the apostates and the
lepers,
it looks like the second coming:
A girl whose sentences curve into questions,
Girl who wraps the bricks she throws through
windows in newspaper,

Girl, too girl-like, punctuating her sermons
with girl like girl
Girl, you really should've seen it.

Who's going to tell the prophets about idolatry?

When's the last time you saw the Lord's word
out of an Instagram bio?

Do you worship divinity or the reflection of it,
fragile porcelain light off the First Lady's veneers?

Holy men who never held the book in their
hands,

tell me what they told you in the desert.

At this point, you're like, what is this bitch on
about?

You're sure that you get the point.

You're sure you heard somewhere anger is a
contagion.

Let me start from the beginning and see
where I lost you.

I'm sorry I didn't find the time to talk about
love.

I'm sorry that I am angry. I'm sorry that I
have forgiven.

When Sunday school was going in one ear
something got stuck
before it went out the other.

Because once, the land was wilderness but we
called it garden.

Once, you held these truths to be self-evident.

Once, you said let there be light and there was
light.

Beauty Skin Deep

Davey Glazer '28

As I walk, the scents surround me near,
Bright lights shine down, the shelves are clear.
I think back to that very day,
When Sephora first led me astray.
Its name, a whisper, sleek and grand,
Yet built upon a harsh demand.
They sell more than just a cream or gloss,
But discontent, and self-worth's loss.
Beauty, they claim, is shaped outside,
But true allure comes from inside.
Now I walk in, I know the cost,
Not just in dollars, but what I've lost.
Though I'm a man, I cleanse my skin,
Why should that be seen as sin?
Is it too much for some to see,

A man wear makeup, proud and free?
For all, the standards twist and bind,
A flawless face, the perfect kind.
Too dark, too light, too thin, too wide,
No shape or shade can truly hide.
Sephora's more than just a store,
It changes you—it craves for more.
Obsessed with flaws, with fitting in,
With chasing dreams too thin to win.
Obsessed with standards, high and steep,
Obsessed with beauty—skin-deep.

An Ode to Molly Malone

Caroline Blake '25

TERRE DES FEMMES, a German women's rights charity, embarked on a project to highlight the widespread groping of female statues' breasts, exhibited by evident discoloration from being touched and rubbed daily. Using digital animations of three prominent statues of women in German cities (Munich, Berlin, and Bremen, this organization depicts the harrowing effects of normalization and trivialization of sexual harassment.

Circling Dublin's streets and quays,
wheeling her wheelbarrow, basket-full
I first set my eyes on sweet Molly Malone.

Corseted, ribboned
balloon sleeve dress, low-cut
Irish curls swept up her neck.

Made her way down Eustace, turned at Temple Bar
where early-morning drinkers lurk, holler
"The tart with the cart!" "The flirt in the skirt!"

Entertaining serves better than ignoring their taunts
when their whiskey grows stronger and
her day later, darker. She flounces, crying
"Cockles and mussels, alive, alive, oh!"
Down Crow and through Fownes,
gracing the square among hawkers and hucksters,

charming married men, some fathers, with wit,

making sales by day, *"Cockles and mussels!"*

She sold
herself, by night.

Promoted from Grafton to Suffolk,
outside Trinity, and skirting Luas tracks
passing Temple where tourists roam, Molly stiffens
in city rain and cold, her face tipped
downward, eyes vacant, cheekbones cramped,
lips pursed into dull patina bronze.

Boys, flushed, rush to the frill of her neckline,
clawing toward the bare bosom, no longer hers
and from Temple, gleaming golden.

Now her ghost wheels her barrow,
bearing her bargain, immortalized,
And no one will save us, I see
Even from the grave,
she lies *Alive, alive, oh.*

**Italicized are the lyrics to Molly Malone by The Dubliners*

Fingerprints

Anonymous



Dawn

Nic Lau '28

When it dawns on you, it is a soft, subtle realization

Just as the silt slowly settles out of the murky water onto the riverbed

The murky, mucky mess of scattered thoughts collecting in

The back of your brain momentarily shift into place until suddenly

There's a click

And now, you understand and see the truth of what you could not see before

And it is not good, but it is right, and perhaps one day, that will be enough

The memories are splintered, so they come in bits and pieces

They're fuzzy and distant so you cannot remember much of them,

Of the sights and sounds

But what you can remember most is what you felt

You can remember the encroaching reach of hands

Of body and flesh invading and

Being and touching where they should not

The snickering laughter

Then the cold rage twisting their face

Once you tried to scream

And the hand

Silencing your screams

So you cannot move

So that you hurt

And so you will learn to keep quiet

You can remember the mustard yellow thread

Of almost childish dread

Still caught in the tangled spool of purple, yellow, orange, blue and green and red

When you were told not to move

As if you were waiting for an unrelenting guardian

To sit you down and have you do your homework

Just before the premiere of the newest episode

Of your favorite after school special

The still-burning, coiled orange thread of defiance

And stubborn determination

You can remember the feeling

Of the angry hand moving around

Of your head being forced against the

Wall (solid brick of deep red)

And the hollow burning painful pressure

Of not being able to breathe

So that you do not move.

So you keep still.

And keep quiet.

You can remember the deep, dark purplish-blue
of the sky

And paralyzing fear creeping down your spine

And the ghost of his touch

The bruises scattered across you

That you can't wash and wipe away

As you stand in the shower.

And look at yourself

Look at what you have now become.

You can remember the burnt orange of fearful
resistance then giving way to

The yellow-green bile of panicked fear

At being forced and held

You can remember screaming and thrashing
around

Beneath the heavy, stronger hands pressing down
on you

To no avail

You remember when you pushed him away, once
it was over

And the fear giving way to a singing, stinging,
roaring hot red

The type of rage that builds up and once it crescendos

Swallows you whole and makes you feel like you
Will never feel anything but it.

That is, until it simmers down and you are left
with the all-encompassing muting gray of
Numbness blanketing everything you feel and
hear and see and think

And seeping into every nook and cranny of your
mind

Until every color

Every shade of red, yellow, orange, green, blue, and
purple

Is calmly collected and stored away
Into your 64-count box of Crayola crayons

You sit in the tentative light of dawn
And watch the inky black-purple-blue
Melt into a golden red-orange-yellow-pink
And think that perhaps though
You are splintered and littered
With gaps and nicks
That bleed and leak
Spurts of red and orange and green and blue and
purple

You may color them in with the resonant gold of
restoration
And that although at times you feel as if your pain
Is altogether inescapable
That it will forever define you
Within you, and every other like you
There lies the strength to
Drown out the noise of self-loathing
And drift back from the brink of dissociation
To temper the desperation and hopelessness
And bit by bit, quiet as it might be,
Learn to listen to the soft, subtle voice

Still singing (always singing) beneath the
sound

Of roaring thunder

And know

One day, that will be enough.

Keys

M. Naia Yu '26

Where I am most awake
The large white strips of
 shadow seep through
The layers upon
 layers of whiteness covers
The small box sheds
 white through
Stars collide
Moon peeks out
Silence is loud
I am most awake
Ambitions may cloud over
To let loose to lose to gain

Control

Where I am most asleep
Brightness shines all around
I think pitch black
Colors collide
Words peek out
World peeks out
Then I may close the door to
 where the loudness is silent
Mumble and mumbles all around

An orange tumbles down the wood
 against the grain
Sourness combats peace
My pencil whispers across its walls
Type and wait and hesitate
Tapping
 keys
 feet

In unison she may play
keys
 feet
Pattern can alternate
White black white black white white black
white black white black white
Start at C
End at G
Return to A

A Tangerine's Flesh

Anonymous

her hands
move like water
steady, deft in the rhythm of routine
the scent of tangerine peel
remnants lingering in the air

in the kitchen,
she peels,
the tangerine's skin slipping away —
her skin sliding away
crawling desperately towards him

as she lets each tear of tangerine fall
in sullen, sunken spirals
each turn of the fruit becomes
a silent prayer

her body,
claimed the way the fruit is shared —
in pieces,
each sliver for him

but he swallows her whole,
and she tastes of bursting golden citrus,

a fleeting sweetness
succumbing too easily

her fingers, stained with rind,
wonder if they're meant to hold
herself up, head held high
or him in her arms

she doesn't remember the exact moment
she gave the fruit away
it slipped from her palms
soft and easy,
like a promise that's now rotting

the rind dries on the windowsill
wilting
what's left of her
when he's gone?

Sun-kissed Celibacy

Neve Burton '27

What made us the way we are?

Was it your father?

They say it was

Your father's fault.

My thoughts

lie with you

Whatever drives him to sweep

Even if that be

under the rug

He is my most welcomed guest.

Did she ever lie

Or cut you open

To declare your insides

Ugly and unwanted?

Cast you aside

A sense of isolation

Derived from your ill-witted use

of hideous acronyms.

Me. Did I cause that casualty to her?

That moment she will hold inside her eyes,
her teeth.

the guilt. the isolation.

Was it me?

She's holding herself to blame

loathing, despair, and self-reproach

Yours is a breeding ground--a wide-mouthed
breeding ground.

Killing me to think of our similarities married
to you.

You of all others

God's gift

Lose what you think is yours

You knew.

You try to forget

but your jokes fall flat, your presence--irides-
cent

And all that is left is

what?

An apology written in longing looks, and
flushed cheeks

Stained with your petty indifference.

Lilies swaying
to the strokes of the wind,
thousands snug wearing the sun's
soft skin, silk-soft grass
nuzzling at their stems.

Lilies getting pummeled
as hail after hail is vomited
out of a roaring sky
that has swigged from
too many bottles
of darkness.

Lilies catching
the eye of a florist who
rips out and tosses aside
the ones bearing
storm-scarred faces
and uses two hands
to lift out, slowly,
the unblemished ones.

Lilies locked
in walk-in coolers,

shivering, wondering
how long will pass
before they feel
the breeze brushing
their faces again.

Lilies squeezed into
bouquets to be sold
into unknown hands
that admire them for
three days; then the vase
is never refilled with water

again. Lilies shriveling up
and stiffening. Crushed
into the very bottom of a
trash bag by a hand
that smells of
fresh lilies.

so on a quiet january morning she will find the trembling courage to peel away our layers, pick away at our scabs and scars and all the marks they've left on us, lather soft skin in mild sunlight until she will stand back in a full length mirror and peer quietly at the marvel she's always been but never seen, at the particular individuality behind the plurality of what her identity has always been — because how could she possibly take on a singular pronoun, when her body is the product the expense of those before or above her —

but on this morning that will wash away in a flush of days and years she will still think her body a collective possession: of the snobbish man who designed the heels that cut into her slim ankles, the women she knows she can only aspire to be with feebly masked jealousy, the hundreds or maybe thousands more who had unknowingly decided who she would become.

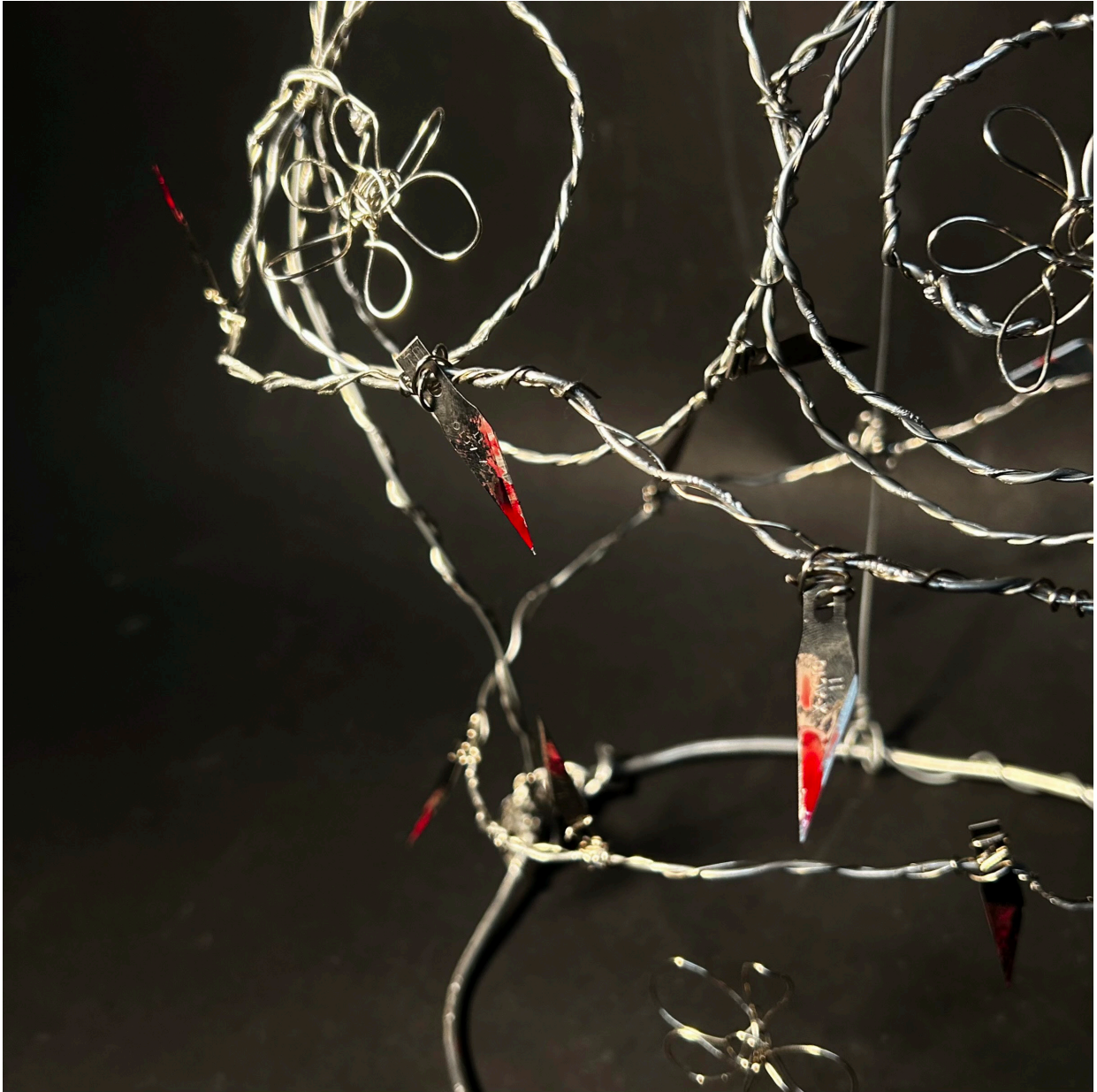
even so, none of them are without fault. even so, she cannot be seen for who she is as much as who these others have been-

but still she will cross her arms over her chest and stand a tidal wave of light, reflected off all the women in her life who are so brave so strong who will put their hands on her shoulders and press into them so she can stand, stand tall in the face of oppression deep-rooted but not yet insurmountable, not yet.

remember where she is; she's leaving for the future now.

APHRODITE





“Where flowers bloom, so does hope.”

– Lady Bird Johnson



Soundsuits, by Nick Cave.

Flipping through the thin pages of *Citizen*, by Claudia Rankine, the pain and anguish from the horrific microaggressions and racist encounters shot towards me like sharp darts. I was engulfed by intense anger and heartbreak. Yet, as I skimmed through the uncanny photographs, suddenly, vibrant colors burst into the page: a person in an all-black bodysuit, bending down, was covered with golden daffodils and bright tulips that peered out from a crowd of daisies and marigolds. A light of beauty and hope emerged, absorbing some of the darkness that once overwhelmed.

As I brainstormed how I would craft this think piece, I was set on investigating how Ellison portrayed women, especially black women, in *Invisible Man*. However, soon, I realized that there were barely any female characters: the only two were Mary Rambo and Lottie from Chapter 25. Having just read Kimberle Crenshaw's "On Intersectionality," my more rational, overgeneralizing tendencies took control, desperately wanting to fit the only two black, female characters into boxes. I tried to categorize the characters into the degrees of which they fell victim to intersectionality, with the pregnant Lottie's female and black identity as the root of her plight, while Mary's as a powerful tool she uses to connect and comfort others. So it was difficult for me to realize that these characters might not have fit into the

the rigid boundaries I created for them. Perhaps even Mary, under Ellison, was representative of oppression and discrimination.

Part 1: The Bent Black Figure

At first glance, many might just perceive the suit as radiating with joy, positivity, and diversity. Yet, when the viewer examines the image more closely, the individual's awkward, bent-down, and almost kneeling position conveys a sense of defeat and surrender. As if the weight of the flowers was weighing the person down, their dark and defeated body had succumbed to oppression. This uncomfortable contrast between the vivid flowers and the submissive body mirrors the strange and eerie way Mary has been portrayed in *Invisible Man*, where she is likened to a racist Black stereotype. Originally, I was inspired by her compassion and generosity to the Harlem community: she understands individuals both as a mother and a black person. When the Invisible Man was stranded on the streets, she was the first one to ask him, "Boy, is you all right, what's wrong" in a "husky-voiced contralto" (251), and while he stayed in her home, Mary kept telling him to "take it easy" and "you in good hands..." Miss Mary always helping somebody and you need some help cause here you black as me" (253). Her directly asking the Invisible Man if he is "all right" even though it was her first time seeing him as a stranger, her talking in the deepest, most calming, female singing voice "contralto", and her specifically calling herself in the third person as "Miss Mary" all led me to interpret Mary as a feminine, mother-figure, sharing warmth with people around her. The comparison that the narrator is "black" like her also demonstrates how she empathetically uses her blackness to soothe him so that she becomes his safe haven. Yet, as questions kept being asked, I also began to notice how Mary had a monotone cheerfulness that seemed forced and unrealistic—like a cartoon character. When the character Aunt Jemima, a racist portrayal of a happy, black



servant-slave with a hyperbolic smile was brought up, I immediately noticed the striking similarities between her and Mary: they were both illustrated as creepily cheerful, mammy-like black women. All of a sudden, I didn't know what or how to think of Mary or more to say, Ellison.

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As I grappled with Mary's obscure identity and possible purpose as a racist archetype in the story, I glanced back at the symphony of hope exuding from the blossoming flowers. It suddenly hit me that I get to decide who she is, and I refuse to limit her to a black woman who only struggles; I refuse to condense her into an offensive cartoon character. I choose hope – to see her from a place of those blossoming flowers – a place of love, triumph, and beauty.

Part 2: As the Flowers Bloom

As my conversation with my English teacher became more and more intriguing, we both started thinking about what Ellison failed to include, rather than what he did. While we already knew that Mary is generous, encouraging, and empathetic, we had no idea who she really is. Where did she come from? What did she struggle with? Who was her family? And most importantly, why and how did she decide to turn her house into a safe haven of love? While this overt absence of a back story or a continuation of her story is both disorienting and frustrating, I realized that perhaps it was a chance for us, readers, to fill Mary in as a dynamic and real character, and more importantly, to see her in such a light—like the vivid and dynamic flowers that bloomed.

Later, when I returned to the book and shifted my perspective to see Mary through her beautiful complexity, I noticed that despite her eerie cheerfulness, there was a sense of real hope that was fundamentally different from the always-happy-slave caricature. She acknowledges the challenges and horrific ordeals black people have to go through, yet she still keeps hope that is down-to-earth and realistic. The Invisible Man specifically recalls she'd say, "it's just hard times you going through...everybody worth his salt has his hard times, and when you git to be somebody you'll see these very same hard times helps you a heap" (258). By pointing out that people do go through "hard times", Mary reveals

that she has seen or has herself been through challenging situations, and hadn't just stayed happy her whole life, even highlighting a key lesson that it is these "hard times" that make people "worth [their] salt", a down-to-earth saying to indicate that someone is deserving of their accomplishments. I think the real hope "she kept alive" was what made the narrator keep "loving her" and keep wanting "to go back to Mary's" (584) in the last Chapter as he runs through a riot of chaos and dread.

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In the end, I keep wondering what would happen if Mary had put on this stunning Soundsuit throughout the novel. When the reader, the characters within the book, and even Ellison himself can't distinguish Mary based on her gender, race, appearance, and class, maybe we would've all looked at this complex character from just her beautiful flowers. Maybe she would've played a bigger role in the Invisible Man's journey. Maybe, just maybe, we would've appreciated her, understood her and hoped with her because "where flowers bloom, so does hope."

“Yeah she’s bad, I’d get on that.”

Anonymous

In the second half of my 7th grade year at South Farmington Junior High, I made a groundbreaking decision that would finally gift me the key to escape from the cage of a nerd persona I had built brick by brick for the 13 years of my existence: I joined Track and Field. As cliché as it might sound, it truly was groundbreaking. I was suddenly getting closer to the “cool kids.” Little by little, they would laugh at my jokes, say hello to me in the halls and, oh, oh my god, halfway through the season I can’t believe my eyes as I look up from the uncrustable and chocolate milk sitting on the brown carton we manage to call a plate: we’re sitting at the same table! Seated right next to me was a girl named Jenny. As I recall her now, sitting and playing with my hair on that warm May afternoon, I still feel the echo of the overwhelming admiration I had for her; she was perfect. Everyone knew she was perfect. I knew, our other girlfriends knew, Ben, her best friend (who secretly but not secretly had a crush on her) knew, Brayden, her ex-boyfriend, knew, and Jordan, her boyfriend (now) knew too. There was just something about the way she drew her eyeliner, wore tight black spandex to practice, and posted to social media in nothing but a cropped shirt and boxers to a song that all the boys knew, that made you just know. I wanted to be perfect too, so yeah maybe I did start wearing a little mascara, maybe my shorts got a little tighter and shorter, maybe I did suck in my stomach and stick out my bottom when I posed for pictures, and maybe I did promise boys silly things that I didn’t mean - things, that if I’m being honest kind of scared me- if it meant that sometimes those boys saw me, in a way. As long as I showed and told them what they wanted, they cared for me and I craved that. I craved their coming back to text me and telling their friends about how “perfect” I was. I kept flirting and smiling and posing, even when something tugged deep at my gut. This was the only way I felt perfect. Who doesn’t want to be perfect?

And then I got into Milton! Remember, I got the key to get away from the nerd cage, and I may have dipped my toes into the outside world, but at my core I was and still am books and history. Even though I was away from my hometown, I still wanted to be perfect. So, on the first day of orientation

I did all the things I knew would make me perfect. I did it the day after that and the day after that. However, I quickly realized that a Milton Academy straight A grade report required way more energy than a North Layton Junior High one, which ultimately caused this “Jenny” inside of me to substantially shrink. The urges to act in a certain way or say certain things were still there, but my energy was wholly transferred to balancing my schoolwork and making friendships with new people at this exciting place.

Then, I met the boy. He was the boy because he plain out told me that what I thought made me perfect was stupid. I liked that and I liked him, so who would have thought my blooming relationship with a boy I liked was also a dooming symbol of death? Suddenly my friendships with boys started dropping like flies: a pandemic. Faces that had only ever greeted me with a grin became hollow as they walked past and barely muttered a “wassup.” And on the rare occasion they did look at me, they did so passively, like when you’re shopping online and kind of want to get this one thing because it looks sort of cool but when you want to click add to cart it says out of stock, so you just keep scrolling. Whatever, it’s fine, I told myself, you’re better off without them. Whether I believed it or not didn’t matter because the relationships that remained brought me joy every day and wrapped around me gently, protecting me, until one fateful biology class.

Sodium bicarbonate spilled onto my fingers. I push the syringe just a little too far up to the top, again. Damn it. Sighing I look away, tired of staring at the same lumpy green spinach leaves for the past 45 minutes. Unintentionally, my eyes fall on a laptop displaying something that is definitely not spinach leaves but if anything two big grapefruits. The image’s purposeful viewer zooms out and the pixels reveal a face. Her dark hair is curled, and she’s holding out a basketball with both of her hands. Her white jersey has Syracuse stitched across in orange. She’s smiling right at me; I think she looks beautiful.

“Yeah she’s sooo bad, I’d so get on that,” the viewer says.

Before I can even process what’s happening, his friend, a boy that used to confide in me his darkest fears before he fell prey to the pandemic, opens his mouth,

“Yes, but dude have you looked at UPenn? I get tits but she’s gotta have an ass you know?” He grabs the computer and before long I’m watching these two boys zoom in on another picture. Just for a second, I admire her strong arms, held up if she’s about to shoot the ball, before they zoom in on her bottom.

“That’s what I’m talking about.”

“Yeah, you’re rightttt. She’s perfect. So, where are you thinking about going then. You clearly have fireeee options.”

Personally, I’m starting to feel the fire in my forehead. I bring my eyes back to the spinach leaves which just seem to fuel my anger even more. I look back up at the two boys in front of me. I can’t even hear what they’re saying as they continue looking up “school” after “school” and zoom and zoom and zoom on parts that they have no right to zoom on. Why is no one saying anything? I again inspect the two fine specimens of a Milton Academy Man, part of an institution that prides itself on its teachings on the importance of diversity, equity, inclusion and justice. My hands are shaking as I press them against the lab bench. I take a deep breath. Maybe they just need a little reminder. Yes. How embarrassing to be caught doing something like this. Even if you’re a football player who has been getting D1 offers since his freshman year. After a final deep breath, I say,

“ Hey CENSORED. How’s your guys lab going?”

As they turn towards me, I’m surprised to see them completely unbothered, if anything annoyed that they’re getting interrupted.

“Yeah. Iss-done.” CENSORED replies, slurring the last two words. Maybe they misunderstood. Just one more time. I won’t miss this time. But as I throw my knife, sharp, precise, determined, I see it turn before my eyes into a speck of dust.

“I can tell,” I say loud and clear but they are already starting to turn back to the screen. Zooming and looking and zooming and talking like what’s in front of them is a toy in a store, not a human being. A human being that worked harder than they ever have to put on those jerseys and pose for that picture. A picture posted out of excitement of accomplishing something huge rather than offering

themselves up for objectification.

Since I was little, I knew Barbies were seen as for girls and cars for boys. Growing up, I saw women labeled bossy while men were called assertive. I recognized injustice against women but never fully realized I was part of it—until now. At the age of sixteen I can first hand attest to the fact that misogyny is alive and thriving. The moment those boys turned towards me I experienced an overwhelming clarity: nothing I say to you right now is going to change the look of indifference you wear. I am not a respectable equal whose opinion matters. I have nothing to give you. They knew I wasn't going to stay up late texting them about all the things we MIGHT do therefore, I did not matter. And yet, I know not all would react as I did. I know girls who would, after witnessing this situation, be upset that the picture was not of them. I know because I was one of those girls. I once believed my value depended on how men spoke about me or to me—nothing could be further from the truth. It took time, but I'm glad I realized it. Even if in biology I too realized the other simultaneous truth. News flash, a lot of the world still still sees a woman's worth as defined by men, as my futile attempt at intervention shows. It's difficult to change the perspectives solidified by the system for years, but there are thousands of little boys and girls in cribs and diapers around the world. Just because I faced this doesn't mean they have to too.

Love

Davey Glazer '28

My sister stares, her head held low,
Scrolling, swiping, to and fro.
Searching for a love that fits,
A match that's more than fleeting bits.
When did love turn cold and cruel,
A game where hearts are used as fuel?
Where kindness fades, respect is lost,
And love comes at a heavy cost?
I hate how men, like toddlers, stand,
Still learning how to hear, not command.
Oh yes, he tries—but not enough,
Listening shouldn't be this tough.
The world must change, this much is clear,
Love is more than pain and fear.
Love is love—so pure, so bright,
Not power games or endless fights.
Society molds, distorts, controls,
Turns warmth to greed, makes hearts like coals.
Why can't we just live and see,
That love means truth and dignity?

Time

Ania Robinson '26

The passing of time
is the most relentless weight.
I could stay in bed forever,
crying over how nothing will ever be the
same,
how nothing seems to be changing,
and still, time would move forward.
And I, stuck in my room,
will have done absolutely nothing.
Women will still suffer
at the hands of misogyny.
Injustice will still drag people down,
bound by the chains of a system
that was never built for them.
Nothing will have been resolved.
And this moment too, this fleeting, aching
moment,
will dissolve into the past,
slipping between the cracks of history,
of our lives,
becoming something untouchable, unreach-
able,
worn thin by time.
And that thought is scary,

and, yes, one person cannot change the world
but we could all sit in our bed
and cry
And then what?
The time will pass anyway.
So isn't it better to try,
to try and push and rise and carve space for
change?
Because it's not about the conclusion.
It's about the journey.
It's about the children who will one day look
at the progress we have fought for
Because who knows
what we might do
if we chose to get up
and not watch the time simply pass

The Body, Unmastered

Rachel Pang '27

The body moves as the earth moves—
without plea, without pause,
answering only to the quiet rhythm
of breath and blood and time.

It bends to no decree,
nor does it wait to be commanded.

A thing of nature, untamed,
it ripens and withers in its own season,
heedless of law, indifferent to rule.

Yet mortals have long sought to master it,
to pen its name in ledgers not its own,
to carve their will upon its form
as if flesh were stone,
as if the river might cease its carving
at the sound of their voices.

They mistake dominion for right,
mistake their hands for the hands of gods.
They speak of order as if the wild may be
governed,
as if the wind might heed a written word.

They set their laws against the tide,
against the swelling of the belly,
against the marrow-deep knowledge
that this body was never theirs to keep.

For the body does not barter.

It answers to no tongue but its own,
no master but the quiet pulse within.

And though they may bind it in parchment,
press it beneath the weight of edicts and ex-
pectation,

still it will rise—

unmastered,

unyielding,

its liberty written in the language of breath.

Quiet Sovereignty Is All

Aleena Fu '27

Ownership feels like a strange word
when it comes to flesh
skin
was never something to control
it breathes unbidden, bruises unsolicited,
stretching beneath time's insistence. The body
propels itself, regardless —
muscles contracting, lungs expanding
a formidable & unyielding mechanism oper-
ating.
& yet the government whispers into our
bloodstreams
enacting laws over places they'll never
touch
strangers inventory us on sidewalks
their eyes incisive as
appraisers
even language betrays us —
“a woman's body”
perpetually plural, as if it's not ours alone.
But what does it mean to own?
Does ownership require control?
If so, the body remains a capricious choice
it grows weary when we want it to resist,

aches when we seek stillness
so maybe ownership isn't about control
but rather presence.
To own the body is to occupy it entirely: to
sense the way the sun lingers on our skin in
winter, to laugh from the chest instead of the
throat,
to stretch our arms until they brush the edges
of our existence.
Because ownership isn't given
it's taken back in fragments —
in a breath, a moment of elation.
Do we own our bodies?
Perhaps not in the way the world presumes
they will affix their rules upon our shoulders,
embed their fears across our thighs but my
body speaks a language only I own
shaped by my history
my irreducible struggles.
& in a world that tries so hard to impose its
narrative upon us maybe this quiet autonomy
— this personal sovereignty
is all the ownership we can claim.

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