

# INDEPENDENT

The student weekly since 1969

## LUCKY LOTTERY (...?)



Everything is pfine



our bells ring for you



hakuna matata

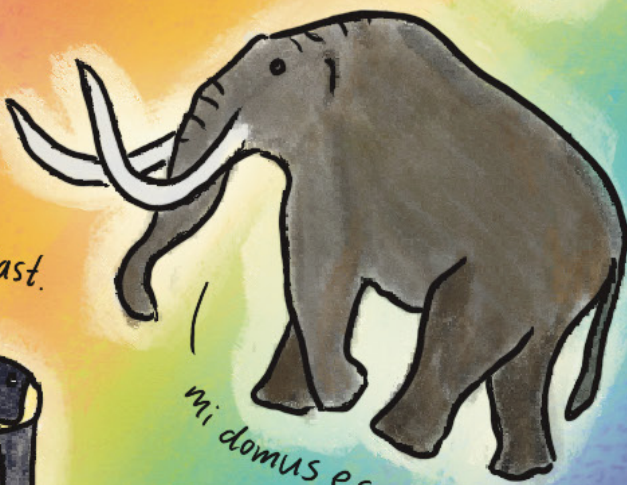
concrete jungle, what dreams are made of



Up in the treehouse!



- You belong with meese



Mi domus es su domus

the eyes of all are upon us



hot breakfast.



- like a squirrel, looking for a nut.

is it your lucky day?





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## About the *Independent*

As Harvard College's weekly undergraduate newspaper, the *Harvard Independent* provides in-depth, critical coverage of issues and events of interest to the Harvard College community. The *Independent* has no political affiliation, instead offering diverse commentary on news, arts, sports, and student life.

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**We belong to no one but ourselves.**

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# NEWS

## River Run Rampage

A look into the longstanding Housing Day Eve tradition.

BY MIA WILCOX '28

At long last, Harvard College Housing Day is here again. This annual event—sometimes touted as one of the most important days of a student's years at the College—decides which of 12 Houses will become a first-year's home for the next three years. First-years spend the months after winter break navigating blocking group formation—an often dramatic ordeal in which students scramble to form cohorts of one to eight people with whom they will enter the housing lottery. After registering with their chosen set of peers, first-years then must wait in anticipation for the Thursday before Spring Recess to discover their assignment.

Many students fear being “Quadded,” or being sorted into one of three Houses in the Radcliffe Quadrangle—Cabot, Currier, and Pforzheimer. Offering a close to five-minute walk instead of a 20-minute trek to Harvard Yard, the nine River Houses remain highly coveted by many. As students gear up for their Housing Day reveal, many consider “River Run” the ultimate tradition to kick off the highly anticipated day and manifest their River placement.

River Run is the long-anticipated Wednesday evening of cavalier and debauched drinking when first-years stumble to each River House in a superstitious, ritualistic pursuit of good fortune for the next morning. Willing participants take shots with upperclassmen friends and pray to the River Gods for luck against the dreaded Quad Houses.

Now that Housing Day has arrived, it's seemingly the perfect time to reflect upon the unsanctioned, unruly activities of bygone River Run escapades.

“River Run was one of the best nights of freshman year,” Chanden Climaco '27 reflected. “Running around with your whole class playing the college version of trick-or-treat in the rain... It was a really unique and cool bonding moment.”

“Aside from Harvard-Yale, I feel like [River Run] was one of the most iconic Harvard experiences, and it was just so much fun and chaotic,” Maya Flores '27 added.

But where does this beloved tradition originate? While the exact details remain unknown, the event supposedly began in 1996, the year after the Housing process shifted from being choice-based to a completely randomized lottery. In an effort to tilt the odds in their favor, students have embraced a variety of superstitions and rituals. Iterations of these rituals included giving ‘offerings’ to the River Gods by throwing sentimental possessions into the Charles River or burning paper boats on the river. In recent years, however, River Run has evolved into a steady rite of passage.

Recent years brought River Runners particularly specific obstacles. Two years ago, Housing Day Eve saw the Class of 2026 left without conventional ID access to all River Houses. This restriction was part of an effort by campus security and the Harvard University Police Department to curb the tradition's inherent underage drinking. However, this effort instead left students hopping fences, breaking through windows, scaling walls, splitting pants, and tearing jackets to make their way inside each dorm building.

In an anonymous statement to the *Independent*, a junior in Eliot House described their blocking group's efforts to evade heightened surveillance during their River Run. “When we were trying to get from Eliot to Kirkland, we realized there was a lot of security in and around both houses,” they explained. “The upperclassmen whose room we were in in Eliot told us that we could scale the roof from Eliot to Kirkland by going through the library window.”

“We all made it out and were army crawling across the roof when the House dean stuck her head out of the window and told us to come down, adding that she hoped to see us tomorrow,” he continued. “We ran into her at dinner...”

Last year's River Run posed its own unique challenge. Though first-years were regranted swipe access to the River Houses—which some argued detracted from the excitement of breaking and entering to secure a shot—downpouring rain seemingly complicated the experience.

However, “no one really cared,” Flores said. “Everyone just powered through, and it made it extra fun.”

However, Zion Dixon '26 was not pleased by the College's loosening of restrictions, recalling his experience as an upperclassman during last year's River Run. “Part of what made River Run so fun was that it was illegal,” Dixon explained. “Securitas was literally chasing us, that we had to climb multiple fences, multiple gates, climb through windows—it was hard to get into the houses.”

When Dixon and his roommate learned that first-years would be allowed to walk right through the gates, they decided to take matters into their own hands, determined to preserve what they saw as the true spirit of River Run. “Me and my roommate basically went to the Winthrop gate—the big gate that you walk

through to get to the river—and we closed it shut forcefully,” Dixon recalled. “We were holding it closed so that first-years just couldn't come in. And so then they started climbing over it.”

Despite Securitas intervening in their efforts, Dixon and his roommate were satisfied knowing they had made things more challenging for the first-years while staying true to the tradition: “We got to go back to our room with the satisfaction of, that's how River Run is supposed to be,” he commented.

According to Dixon, moments like these are what make River Run a cherished memory for blocking groups throughout their time at Harvard. Others share his appreciation for the sense of chaos and camaraderie that make this event a unique moment and a milestone for students who are entering the final stage of their first year at the College.

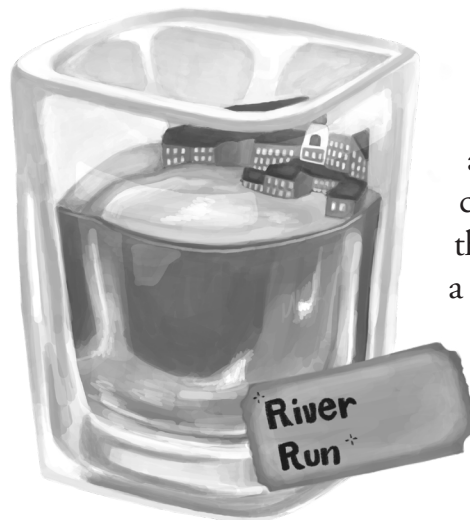
“I remember boosting [my roommates] over the Quincy fence and a proctor peeping their head out of their room and shaking their head at us,” Nate Marinaccio '27 explained, reminiscing on his blocking group's River Run festivities last year in the rainstorm. “After I boosted [them], I walked around the corner and a Securitas officer sped walk past me, and I heard on the radio, ‘They're climbing the walls on DeWolfe, we need security there now.’”

It is a common sentiment among these students that River Run and Housing Day are some of the most memorable experiences both as a first-year and an upperclassmen. They are a perfect reminder of Harvard's rich community as grades converge to celebrate the next phase for first-years. While these traditions make for unforgettable memories, they also come with a few classic pitfalls: “I remember waking up the next morning and beelining it for Gatorade from CVS,” Marinaccio recalled.

In addition to Marinaccio's advice on morning sustenance, Climaco ended with a cautionary note about a frequent mistake made during River Run: “I would be wary of not losing your phones,” he said. “We had two losses of phones on our trip, and that set us back, I would say, an hour in total, just looking for them. It's a dangerous night.”

**MIA WILCOX '28 (MWILCOX@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) HOPES EVERYONE HAD A JOYFUL RIVER RUN AND A LUCKY HOUSING DAY.**

**GRAPHIC BY KAYLA LE '28  
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# Hogwarts at Harvard

A look at what makes each of Harvard's Houses truly magical.

BY BRITNEY AMPADU '28

Every year, on the final Thursday before spring recess, Harvard first-years symbolically don the College's "Sorting Hat" as they are randomly assigned to one of the 12 undergraduate Houses, where they will live for the rest of their time at Harvard. Appropriately named Housing Day, the tradition will take place this year on March 13. Starting with the "dorm storm," upperclassmen in each house enter first-year rooms and reveal to blocking groups their anticipated assignment. The day is filled with festivities, excitement, and, most importantly, House pride. It begins with welcome events at Annenberg, followed by House dinners and celebrations that continue late into the night.

The nine River Houses lining the Charles River and the three Quad Houses located in the Radcliffe Quadrangle each boast a unique environment and culture. In the spirit of this fateful day, the Independent sat down with residents of many of the Houses to hear a variety of perspectives and opinions on what makes their House a home.

## RIVER EAST

### Dunster House

Situated between Leverett and Mather, Dunster is one of the nine River Houses and is beloved by its residents—including Rhiannon Steward '26.

"It's got the No. 1 grill, it's got the No. 1 location, and No. 1 people, most importantly," she said. "I think anyone who gets Dunster House should be super excited and feel super lucky."

According to Stewart, Dunster's defining trait is its House pride. She and her fellow Dunster residents have a high appreciation of its features—from its architecture, being one of the more recently renovated Houses, to its staff and her fellow residents. Stewart most appreciates Dunster's dining hall hours, being the only house that extends to 8:30 p.m. for dinner. "8:30 is just what you need, especially as an athlete," she continued. "It's so good."

As for traditions, Stewart said Faculty Dean study breaks are popular within the Dunster community as well as the annual Goat Roast celebration. "They have goat-themed things and a bouncy castle," she explained. "It's wholesome and brings the House together."

### Mather House

"Con-crete. Crete. Crete. Crete. Con-crete."

This opening, featured in Mather's 2024 Housing Day Video, embraces this River House's brutalist architecture and

infamous dormitory tower. Apart from its distinct architecture, Mather, the furthest River House from Harvard Yard, features a large courtyard and a multitude of common spaces home to many events, from lounges and common rooms to a pottery studio.

Mather's most well-known tradition is Mather Lather. With music blasting and the dining hall filled with soap and foam, this bash occurs each spring, attracting over 1,000 students for a night of glee. Other Mather traditions include Happy Hours, Faculty Dean Open Houses, and watch parties for screenings from the Super Bowl to the Oscars.

### Leverett House

Next up on the River, adjacent to Winthrop House, is Leverett, one of the two College Houses featuring dormitory towers. With its main McKinlock Hall and two additional buildings (Towers G and F), Leverett is the largest upperclassmen House both by size and population—but Leverett resident Erin Keita '27 assures any incoming first-years that this is a positive thing. "You can meet a lot of people," she said. "I met so many of my friends in Leverett."

Keita also is quite fond of the devoted House's faculty and staff. According to her, the Faculty Deans frequently participate in food drops and provide home-cooked meals and snacks to residents. She also appreciates the recurrent seasonal community dinners hosted by Leverett.

Alongside these feasts, the House is home to several other traditions, such as the annual River East formal, which Leverett hosts with its neighbors Mather and Dunster. Although Keita did concede that Leverett is a bit distant from Harvard Yard, she pointed out that several other River Houses are just as far or even farther.

## RIVER CENTRAL

### Adams House

The River House located closest to Harvard Yard, Adams House is distinguished by its marble floors and mahogany wood accents. As this House is still being renovated, it does not yet have an in-House dining hall, but these renovations are set to be complete in time for the next academic year. Currently, Adams residents primarily dine at the Inn, a renovated hotel that also houses overflow students when construction is underway. Nonetheless, frequent community events allow for resident bonding.

Annual traditions such as Faculty Dean's Teas, the black-tie reading of Winnie the Pooh at the annual Winter Feast, House Formals, and the Chocoholica Valentine's

Day fest are key features of life in Adams. Adams also hosts the weekly Carpe Noctem on Thursdays in the Lower Common Room, where students socialize over drinks, music, and pizza. A more popular tradition is Drag Night, which was first organized in 1980 in response to a hate crime against an Adams resident who identified as gay; it is a testament to Adams' place in queer history.

"This isn't what you would imagine when you imagine Harvard," 2017 Adams Drag emcee, Joel E. Kwartler '18 commented in an interview with the Harvard Crimson on this highly-anticipated event. "And I think that's a good thing for the spirit of the House."

### Lowell House

The most recently renovated and conveniently located house, Lowell is arguably the House coveted by most first-years. Featuring two central courtyards, spacious dorms, and its trademark bell tower, architecture is a hallmark of Lowell.

Behruz Mahmudov '26, co-chair of the Lowell House Committee, characterized life in Lowell as vibrant. "We have so many things going on and everyone in the house is super invested in it, which makes it a really nice space," he said. He believes what defines the House is its abundance of traditions: Lowell speeches, the Lowell Opera, formal senior-faculty dinners called High Tables, Thursday Teas, Coffeehouse, Trivia Night, Steins, and annual parties from Glowell to Bacchanalia, to name a few.

According to Mahmudov, the only true downside of Lowell lies in its infamy. Because of Lowell's frequent recognition as the "best" house, Lowellians must know when it is appropriate to disclose their residence to those in other Houses, for fear of incurring jealousy or envy.

### Quincy House

"For as long as I've been here, I've never felt like there has not been a place [in Quincy] that I would be welcome at any moment," said Jacqueline Metzger '27, a passionate resident of Quincy House.

Adjacent to Lowell and conveniently close to other River Houses, Quincy is comprised of two buildings: Stone Hall and New Quincy.

Enthusiastic about the plethora of features Quincy boasts, Metzger called attention to the House's highly active emailing list Q-Open, the Quinski Après-themed party, and weekly social gatherings called Festa. From the ping-pong table right at the entrance of New Quincy to the House's expansive dining hall, Metzger views Quincy as a particularly collaborative and open environment.



However, above all, she emphasized that it is truly the people who keep Quincy alive. The only House to serve hot breakfast daily, Quincy possesses a tight-knit community of residents constantly enriched by students from other Houses, River, and Quad alike.

The only true con, in Metzger's eyes, is the fact that migrating between Stone Hall and New Quincy requires leaving the house.

## RIVER WEST

### Kirkland House

Kirkland, affectionately known as "Kirk," is one of the College's smallest Houses. Nevertheless, its size only deepens the level of connection Kirkland residents experience with each other, according to Kirkland resident Aslaug Gunnlaugsdottir '25. She treasures its customs—including community nights, food drops, study breaks, the Choosening, and routinely updated decorations for holidays and cultural celebrations.

As an athlete, Gunnlaugsdottir also appreciates the House's proximity to Harvard's sports facilities. Moreover, similar to Eliot, Kirkland's dining hall experiences a flux of residents from other Houses. She emphasized this as one of the House's best traits, as it has allowed her to form strong connections not only with staff and fellow residents but also with unexpected visitors.

"If you get Kirkland on your envelope, it's a good thing," Gunnlaugsdottir said.

### Eliot House

Another one of the College's River Houses, Eliot is home to numerous beloved amenities. For instance, Gunnhildur F. Hallgrímsdóttir '25 was extremely fond of the dining hall—the center of the House's community—dubbing it "the Dining Hall of the People." With few inter-House restrictions (thus making it a frequent destination for many Quad students), welcoming staff, and beautiful architecture, it is Eliot's crown jewel in Hallgrímsdóttir's eyes.

She has also found that Eliot's residents and faculty are committed to cultivating a dynamic community atmosphere through recurring House gatherings. These include Fête, an annual formal celebration in the first week of May, and enhanced Thursday community dinners with performances and speeches by faculty and students alike. Other Eliot traditions include Stein—a biweekly social event with beer, sangria, and pizza—community nights, and intramural sports.

The only downside to Eliot, according to Hallgrímsdóttir, is the fact that the House is set for renovations from the fall of 2025 to the fall of 2027, which is a bit of an inconvenience for those who are forced into overflow housing at its expense.

### Winthrop House

Located right on the Charles River next to Leverett, Winthrop is the last River House on this list. "Winthrop is kind of the ideally renovated house. All of the spaces are really good," resident Ben Fortuin '27 said. He finds great appeal in Winthrop's signature facilities, such as the House library, various rooming options, Grille, music practice rooms, dining hall, and main courtyard.

Fortuin does admit that there is a minor recurring problem with sewage smells seeping into the House; however, attempts to eliminate it are actively being made. "It's there, but it's not our fault," he explained.

In contrast, Fortuin recognized several social aspects of Winthrop that are popular among the residential community—Steins, intramurals, and community nights. He also finds the House faculty to be highly accepting of students' unique ideas. "My friend actually started the Winthrop crossword," he noted.



## THE QUAD

### Cabot House

Sitting at just under a mile from the river, Cabot House is one of the three Quad Houses. Although "quadded" students are often pitied by their River House peers due to their Houses' distance from Harvard Yard, many Quad students find that the benefits of life in these Houses trump the negative stereotypes—including Connor Buchheit '25.

As a proud Cabot resident, Buchheit commends the House's dorm quality, with essentially guaranteed spacious singles and superior dining hall food. In addition, he believes the Cabot community, filled with beautiful friendships and cherished traditions, is unmatched. A favorite Cabot custom of his is Festivus. "We get a veritable feast of Thai food, Indian food, Chinese food, and more, we have feats of strength (a push-up contest), people sing, we laugh, and we write down and burn our grievances in a bonfire," he said. Buchheit also enjoys the annual Quad Formal, a joint tradition with the other two Quad houses.

He did, nevertheless, bring to attention one drawback all Quad Houses are well-known for: their distance from Harvard Square. But other than on Sundays, he finds the shuttle service to be generally reliable.

### Currier House

Currier is often recognized as the "best" Quad House by many Harvard undergraduates. Similar to Cabot, most residents are offered roomy singles. Currier's trademark is its dining hall, with fish tanks and a central fountain: Currier's 2024 Housing Day Video tells you to "take a look at this dining hall, it's a life of blessings, can't just stare."

Additionally, like the other Houses, Currier is home to a tight-knit and lively community. Traditions and events in Currier are plentiful, including House outings regularly scheduled by Tutors, the Heaven and Hell Halloween Party, Game Nights, Currier Coffee House (open mic nights), Spring and Winter Formals, and bi-weekly Open House socials open to all Harvard students.

### Pforzheimer House

The final Quad and undergraduate House is Pforzheimer, informally known as "Pfoho" by undergraduates. Pforzheimer is divided into Halls based on location: Comstock Hall, Holmes Hall, The Jordans, Moors Hall, and Wolbach. Each is composed of almost entirely singles. However, this living situation is not the only thing appreciated by residents.

"The community is actually unmatched compared to any other House, and there's a real sense of home and community that I think is unique to Pfoho," Sylvie Wurmser '27 said.

Another resident, Idalis McZeal '27, echoed this sentiment. "I've made a lot of friends who are also in Pfoho and it's been really awesome getting close to people I didn't know well before," she said. McZeal also enjoys bonding with her fellow peers at House events, such as the recent Mardi Gras-themed dinner, and even has a special place in her heart for the scenic (but long) walks to and from the Quad.

Both residents acknowledged the negative stigma of being "quadded," but asserted that this placed no damper on their love for Pforzheimer.

### The Big Day

With Housing Day finally here, both the exhilaration of nearing House life and the fear of being sorted into a "bad" House consume the first-year population. However, upon speaking with House residents, one characteristic was of high importance in every House, River, or Quad: community. Ultimately, no matter the House into which a Harvard first-year is sorted, the general consensus is that it is the people who make it a place to call home.

**BRITNEY AMPADU '28  
(BRITNEYAMPADU@COLLEGE.  
HARVARD.EDU) ANXIOUSLY  
AWAITS HER HOUSING DAY  
PLACEMENT.**

**GRAPHIC BY NESHAMA RYMAN  
'28**



# Engaging With The HGHI

A profile of the Harvard Global Health Institute and how to get involved in its global movement.

BY OLIVIA LUNSETH '28

The Harvard Global Health Institute considers itself a hub for connecting students with international global health and policy internships, fellowships, speaker events, and research showcases. As U.S. healthcare policies shift under the new presidential administration, Harvard students are turning to the HGHI for opportunities to not only educate themselves but also gain real-world experience in the field.

Recognizing the overwhelming breadth of programs at the HGHI, the *Independent* sat down with both student ambassadors and applicants at Institute programs to better understand its opportunities.

The Institute prides itself on giving Harvard students and affiliates the chance to explore initiatives across six areas of focus: infectious diseases; digital transformation; global health security; climate, environment, and health; global mental health; and health justice. By working with the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Harvard Medical School, and the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, the HGHI encourages collaboration between experts and students across fields.

“Since Harvard doesn’t have a formal Global Health concentration and GHHP requirements are spread across various departments, I saw this as an opportunity to engage with global health outside the classroom,” Izumi Vázquez '25, co-president of the HGHI Student Advisory Committee, shared.

Since joining in her sophomore year, Vázquez continues to deepen her involvement with student and professional affiliates of the institute. “I worked closely with HGHI leadership to connect undergraduates with global health professionals, helping showcase the many ways students can get involved,” she said.

“This has taken shape through a variety of programming, including small-group faculty dinners, hands-on workshops, and a big sib/little sib mentorship program,” she continued.

The four options to fulfill the “foundational course” requirement for students pursuing a Global Health and Health Policy (GHHP) secondary were either not offered or canceled this academic year. Passionate about ensuring students had access to global health opportunities, Vázquez and fellow ambassadors spearheaded a litany of events.

Over Wintersession, the Institute hosted a variety of speakers, including Dr. Neal Baer, a producer, physician, author, public health advocate, and lecturer at Harvard Medical School.

Another speaker was

Richard Preston, a *New York Times* best-selling author and writer for *The New Yorker*.

“We also took students on a site visit to the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and ran an HGHI Internship cover letter workshop in partnership with the Mignone Center for Career Success,” Vázquez said. “We are hoping this becomes an annual thing.”

Aside from that event, the Institute’s programming has been successful, attracting students to join. “I was really excited by all of the interesting speaker events that they host and by the opportunity to engage with a group of people as passionate about global health as I was,” an anonymous first-year student shared in an interview with the *Independent*.

Furthermore, in pursuit of its mission to “advance excellence and equity in global health,” the HGHI also offers a range of fellowships and internships that focus on pressing health issues, such as pandemic response, climate change, and health justice.

“HGHI summer internships are a great way to gain hands-on experience—no prior experience needed,” Vázquez said.

One on-campus opportunity she recommends for underclassmen is the Summer Undergraduate Research in Global Health (SURGH) program, offered as a component of the Harvard Summer Undergraduate Research Village. The HGHI also offers fellowships targeted towards upperclassmen.

“The Joey Hanzich Memorial Fellowship and Cordeiro Summer Research Fellowship are especially great opportunities to look into,” Vázquez shared. “HGHI also offers conference funding to help offset travel costs for academic conferences.”

The Joey Hanzich Fellowship is for rising juniors and seniors who find their own summer opportunities, either domestically or abroad and need funding. The Cordeiro Fellowship gives students the chance to get a head start on thesis research in GHHP or related fields the summer before their graduation year.

The HGHI is also a popular way for students to gain experience while studying abroad either over the summer semester or term-time. The HGHI Summer Research and Internships Program is a 10-week initiative that offers returning students paid research opportunities or internships around the world.

The HGHI application process is fairly consistent across these series of programs. “To apply, I submitted a cover letter, a transcript, and a resume,” the anonymous student said. “I also filled out a reference form with recommenders who would be contacted if I were selected as a finalist.”

Due to high demand, the HGHI has implemented a cap of three applications per student across its internships and research programs.

Regardless of these limitations, this applicant encouraged their peers to consider

getting involved at the HGHI. “I would absolutely recommend applying for these internships,” they said. “They offer amazing opportunities to conduct research and impact policy-making across the world.”

Beyond internships, the HGHI advises Harvard students on which courses to take to earn credit for the Secondary Field in Global Health and Health Policy. Many of these courses, such as GHHP 99: “Research in Global Health and Health Policy,” include hands-on research opportunities.

Excited about these academic options, Vázquez explored several of these courses. “Some of my personal favorites include PSY 1845: ‘Stigma, Discrimination, and Health’ and GHHP 50: ‘The Quality of Health Care in America,’” she shared.

“I would love to participate in some of the global health courses offered at HSPH and HMS,” the anonymous student added. “As someone who is particularly interested in the economic analysis of healthcare policy, I will definitely be attending future workshops in that area as well.”

While Vázquez expressed that students should browse the course opportunities on their own, she also encouraged them to connect with peers. “I think the best advice comes from students who’ve been there, done that. I would definitely recommend reaching out to the Student Advisory Committee,” she specified.

For students who are interested in conducting further work on research projects they have already done, the HGHI offers funding for independent research initiatives. Students can receive sponsorship for projects that are internship-, volunteer-, or research-based. The application is also available to students who need funding for a thesis project related to global health.

Additionally, to highlight the research done by students at HGHI, the organization is offering a student research showcase at its upcoming annual symposium on April 10--11.

This year’s symposium theme, “Delivering on the Promise of Health Equity,” invites students to apply to present their work by submitting an abstract. This event will bring together speakers, policymakers, and students from across the world to discuss pressing global health issues through panels and discussions. The keynote speaker will be Rhonda Sealey-Thomas, assistant director of the U.N. Pan-American Health Organization.

With a range of opportunities and a growing network, the HGHI serves as a vital resource for students to engage with and discover global health interests. “[HGHI] introduced me to so many topics in global health that I had barely considered before,” the anonymous interviewee shared. “I am excited to explore this field further.”

**OLIVIA LUNSETH '28 (OLIVIALUNSETH@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) RECOMMENDS READERS CHECK OUT THE HGHI WEBSITE IF THEY ARE INTERESTED IN PUBLIC HEALTH OR EXPLORING OTHER OPPORTUNITIES IN THE FIELD.**

**GRAPHIC BY ANNELISE FISHER '26**





## Not So Unlucky: In Defense of the Quad

A few reasons why the dreaded phrase “You got quadded?” might actually be a good thing.

BY CAROLINE STOHRER '28

**W**e’ve all seen the videos of Housing Day—the chaos, the revelry, and most of all, the excitement for the future. Housing Day is one of the most iconic Harvard experiences, no matter whether you’re a freshman or a senior. It’s the culmination of weeks of speculation, strategizing, the chaos of blocking, and the Housing Lottery. On March 13, each freshman will finally learn which of the twelve residential Houses they will join, inducting them into communities with longstanding traditions, pride, and life-long friendships.

When asked about their dream housing assignment, most freshmen name the same few favorites: Adams House, with its sleek wood interior and newly renovated facilities; Dunster House, with its picturesque views of the Charles and late d-hall hours; or maybe Lowell House or Leverett House. All of these Houses are either near Harvard Square or the Charles River, and are collectively known as River Houses.

But there’s another neighborhood that most Harvard students shake and shudder to mention, lest they manifest themselves landing there: the Radcliffe Quadrangle, otherwise known as “the Quad,” home to Currier, Cabot, and Pforzheimer House.

I’ve always found the fear surrounding the Quad a little exaggerated, particularly because the chances of getting quadded are higher than we think. A majority of rooms in the Quad are currently being occupied by the Class of 2025, which naturally means a lot of spots will open up for rising sophomores. Many of my friends are in blocking groups of eight, and a 2017 analysis speculated that these groups could be twice as likely to be “quadded” than put in a River House. With odds like that, many first-years will end up in the Quad regardless of any superstitions. To dispel some anxiety and fear about being quadded this Housing Day, I’ve compiled a few reasons why you might be lucky to live in the Quad.

### It’s Been Renovated

House community is an essential part of social life at Harvard. With the Housing Renewal Project underway, hundreds of students have had to live in temporary overflow housing, which removes them from their Houses and all of the social benefits and amenities provided. While renovations will uproot all of Eliot House next year, the Quad already had its own makeover in the 2000s. Concerns that still plague the River Houses—overcrowding, lack

of accessibility, or aging infrastructure—were addressed in a three-year project that began in 2001. For the next few years, you can rest assured that your space in the Quad won’t be subject to major unexpected construction disruptions.

For some students, the prospect of living in an “ugly” House or hall is a genuine concern. The majority of the buildings in the Quad, though, sport that classic Harvard red-brick, Neo-Georgian aesthetic that many admire in the River Houses. Even better, all three Houses have considerably cool living perks because of their previous renovations. The Spring 2023 Peer Advising Fellow guide to the Houses raved about the Quad’s living spaces: Cabot boasts “HUGE suites and lots of singles,” Currier promises that “almost everyone has an en-suite bathroom,” and Pforzheimer provides a wide array of rooms, from 200-ft singles to duplexes or apartment-style suites. After spending freshman year squeezed into a tiny, cramped Weld room, that sounds like a pretty good deal to me!

### A Better Work-Life Balance

One of the biggest complaints about the Quad is its distance from the Square. Let’s be real—it’s a 15-minute walk (or 20 minutes if you take your time). In any other stage of life, that would be a dream commute. It’s also not that much different from the farther River Houses.

On Google Maps, the walk from the Science Center to Mather House is the same distance. Is the Quad *really* that far, or are we just blowing it out of proportion?

This distance between home life and classes can be a blessing in disguise. Harvard can often feel overwhelming—academic stress, burnout, and social tensions are just some of the daily burdens that weigh down on students’ minds. But where can you escape to when your classes, friends, and extracurriculars are all within a five-minute radius? We are literally “at work” all the time, so it’s no wonder we can’t take a break.

Having a physical boundary between work and personal life has been shown to reduce stress-induced health problems and burnout while improving engagement with our work. This is the beauty of the Quad’s separation. “It is its own community [or] neighborhood where it feels like I can come back to a home from a long day of classes or sports. It allows me to separate school and life,” Quad resident Hannah Nguyen ’26 told the *Independent*.

Instead of lamenting the walk, perhaps we should embrace the little things it brings to our day: the chance to enjoy a peaceful stroll

through a beautiful Cambridge neighborhood, time to decompress between late-night Saturday events, or even just the opportunity to get some steps in.

### A Haven from Harvard

I can’t be the only one who’s ever been irritated by the constant swarms of tourists wandering through the Yard and Square. While it’s sweet to see families and students snapping pictures of the John Harvard statue or Memorial Church, it’s less charming when visitors start knocking on dorm windows, harassing students, or obstructing paths to your class in the Science Center. The foot traffic omnipresent throughout the Square and around some of the Houses adjacent to the Square is virtually nonexistent in the Quad.

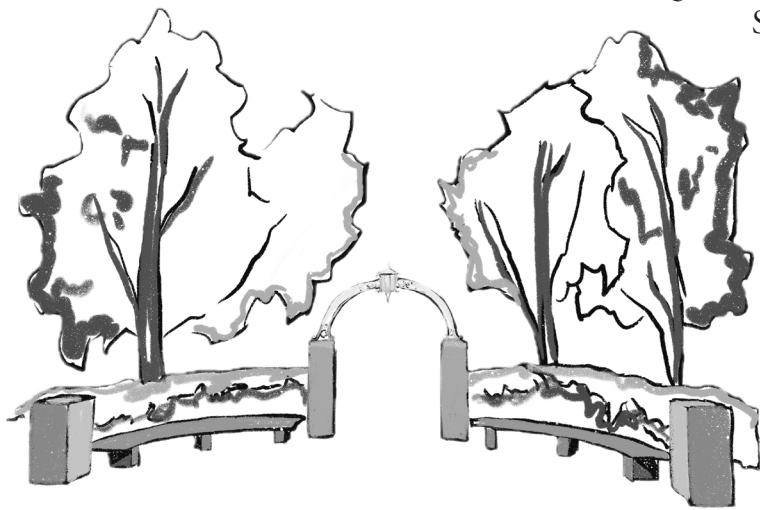
The Quad lies just off Massachusetts Ave and Porter Square, home to a variety of unique cafes, restaurants, and stores. It offers a distinctly local, suburban vibe that’s a welcome change from the constant bustle of the Yard. Unlike the other Houses, the Quad is special in that it unites three Houses in the shared spaces of the Quad Lawn, the Quad Recreational Athletic Center, and the Student Organization Center at Hilles. Not only do Quad residents have easy access to these amenities, but there are also Quad-exclusive events that build community between the three Houses such as Quad Formal or #Quadded, a party with an “Ice Bar on the Moors Terrace, pfood, pfire pits and lots of pfun” as a past Pforzheimer House review declared. In Observatory Hill—where the Quad is located—you can find a tight-knit, idyllic neighborhood with something for everyone.

If none of this has been enough to assuage any trepidation about being quadded, remember that nearly all students are happy with their Houses, regardless of where they live. And if you genuinely don’t like where you live, you have plenty of options: transferring to a different House, moving into a co-op, or even securing off-campus housing. The Houses have a lot to offer students, especially the Quad, which stands out for all the reasons I’ve mentioned—and then some.

At the Quad, you will be able to thrive unconfined by the Harvard bubble and find a dynamic community that’s just as distinguished as the River Houses (just look at all these (p) famous alumni!). And so, I leave you with a quote from *The Hunger Games* that I feel describes the situation we freshmen are in: “May the odds be ever in your favor!”

**CAROLINE STOHRER '28 (CAROLINESTOHRER@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS AT PEACE WITH WHATEVER HOUSE THE HOUSING LOTTERY ASSIGNS HER (BUT STILL IS HOLDING OUT HOPE FOR SOMEWHERE AESTHETIC).**

GRAPHIC BY ANNA SHAO '28





# Fractured Faith

Grappling with the prospects of luck in the face of loss.

BY RANIA JONES '27

**A**

**August 2022:**

My mother is smiling to herself while old

Bollywood music quietly plays off my Baba's new computer. As my Nannos hum Hindi lyrics, I scratch away at a lottery ticket with a dulling quarter.

"I won five dollars," I say.

My aunt calls from across the dining table, "Hey, I knew today would be our *lucky* day."

Twelve lottery tickets later and never breaking even, eleven family members and I sat and pretended like 15 dollars in cash—all we were able to acquire from the tickets—could make up for the debt of death.

As I sit beside my Nanno, she whispers, "I'm scared, Rania." Incessantly fiddling with her purple acrylic glasses, she tells me a story from the Quran and assures me that miracles do happen. I want to grab her brown tongue with my seventeen-year-old hands and scream *THINGS AREN'T GOING TO CHANGE*, but I don't because deep down I still believe they will too.

I inch closer to my Nanno as she wipes my tears with a paper towel. Together, we are unconditionally afraid of our reality. Nearly a year after my mother's re-diagnosis, it had never occurred to me that she wouldn't survive. I only became attuned to this reality two weeks before she passed away.

After her death, I found myself still wondering what I believed in. I didn't know, and I still don't know, how to disentangle her tragic passing from the faith I had been raised with. My family lived by luck and signs—evil eyes watching from the walls, verses from the Quran above doorways, the scent of burnt sage lingering in the air. We believed in omens, in luck, in the possibility that something greater was always at work. So when my mother got sick, we doubled down.

We convinced ourselves that in the face of so much bad luck, maybe we could usher in some good. I clung to every ritual, every whispered prayer, convinced that the story of our family—the story of *her*—was not going to end. I was inextricably blinded by hope—but hope for what? A miracle? I still don't know.

**January 2024:**

I'm sitting in a restaurant in Palm Beach with three close friends. The air is balmy and humid, and I feel heat sticking to my skin as we take turns pressing pieces of bread into a plate of olive oil. Behind us, a table of older women roars with laughter. Their presence is warm and comforting, a reminder that the kind of happiness and love shared between friends can be everlasting. I smile as I imagine my friends and I growing old together.

The seemingly oldest woman at the table approaches us. Her stature is grand, and the crinkles drawn upon her glassy skin speak stories of a life lived in chaos and love. I immediately want to be her. Staring at her from head to toe, I can't help but notice that she is draped in a complete Dolce & Gabbana cheetah print ensemble. I find myself longing to be her even more. We make eye contact, and she singles me out of our group.

"Young lady, you will be *so gorgeous* one day."

I melt. Her words ricocheted through me, shaking every nerve as they traveled. When she left, my friends and I laughed as we dubbed her 'cheetah grandmother.' And yet some nameless anxiety colored the emotional charges between me and the older woman standing across from me. I immediately text my aunt and say, *I saw my mom tonight, with gray hair and dressed head to toe in cheetah print.*

Many religions, including

Christianity and Islam, believe in some sort of afterlife and that communication with the deceased is possible. Since my mother's passing, I've been reluctant to abrasively declare things as 'signs' that her presence still lingers. I often thought I would never be lucky enough to feel her comforting soul again. But the cheetah grandmother, as absurd as she and the moment that followed was, was the first time that I felt like I could once again grasp the energy of the spectacular, beautiful, eclectic thunderstorm that was my mother.

**April 2024:**

As Ella and I enter, the bell above the tarot card reader's door chimes a flat, tinny note. On our ascent to the third floor of the Chicago walk-up, the scent of incense hangs heavy in the air—a cloying sweetness that clings to the back of my throat like cheap perfume. The incense's tendrils of smoke lazily curl upwards. The walls are crammed with dusty tapestries and framed photographs of long-dead celebrities. Overhead, the bulb casts the room in a sticky yellow glow, bringing to life the peeling paint on the walls and the chipped porcelain figurines of the Buddha.

The woman behind the velvet-draped table doesn't look up immediately. Her mane of silver hair is pulled back in a tight, slick bun, and her hands, weathered by time and touched by magic, rearrange a deck of worn cards.

She finally lifts her head. Her face is a road map of wrinkles, each line etched with a story I suspect I wouldn't understand. Her eyes are a startling blue, like chips of ice under the single bare bulb hanging overhead. Red lipstick overlies her lips and tiny flakes of dried mascara reside underneath her eyes.

"Girls, welcome. My name is Patty," the woman rasps, her voice



like the rustling of dry leaves. She gestures to the chairs across from her, their red velvet worn thin in patches. Introducing ourselves, we sit side by side in what look to be her dining room chairs.

Patty shuffles the cards, a practiced movement that spoke of countless visitors seeking answers in her hands' worn imagery. She spreads them out on the table face down, a mosaic of faded colors and cryptic symbols. They look more like relics from a forgotten game than instruments of divination.

"Rania, pick three cards. Face down. With your left hand."

I reach out to select my cards. The room holds its breath; the anticipation palpable in stillness. As she reads the cards, I scour my surroundings. The art on the wall still has a *HomeGoods* price tag in the corner. I consider how this is probably all supposed to make me feel uneasy. We ended up here on a spur of the moment impulse.

She begins to flip the cards over one by one. *The Hanged Man*, *the Tower*, *the Lovers*—a jumble of pronouncements that seem both specific and utterly meaningless.

Patty tells me everything I want to hear: "Success, love, children, fulfillment." And I am happy. She tells Ella that she loves like she's in a fairytale, and she tells me that I love like a rock star. I convince myself it's because I'm wearing a blue metallic jacket.

"You stand at the threshold of transformation," she intones, her words hanging in the air.

"The path before you is veiled in uncertainty, but within the darkness lies the light of revelation." Looking at me, she asks, "Tell me, child, what troubles you?"

Suddenly, I feel absurdly young and lost in this cluttered room.

Patty smiles, a thin, knowing smile. "Ah, the future I suspect. The most perilous of forces. What provokes your anxieties?" she adds.

"Will I be healthy for my whole life?" I mutter. My discomfort is apparent. I watch her smile slowly

fade. I think of my aunt and little cousins who are haunted by similar anxiety, wondering if they will outlive 50, my mother's forever age.

Her eyes, so blue and so earnest, meet mine. "Dear, you are going to live through your 90s. I promise."

Leaving the shop later, with the scent of incense clinging to my clothes like a bad memory, I'm not sure what to believe. Patty's outrageous promises rattle in my head, a tangled mess of possibilities and seeming hope.

Faith promises something, but Patty, a self-trained tarot card reader with a 3.8-star Yelp rating, surely can't promise me that. And yet, wasn't it luck that made her flip the exact card I wanted to see? Maybe tarot readings were never about the truth—only about timing, about the slim probability that the universe might, for once, say or do the right thing.

Perhaps—I think as I step out into the muted Chicago night light, making my way home—the only truth in a tarot reader was the act of seeking in the first place. The muted hope that, by some stroke of luck, the answers we're searching for might find their way to us.

I think that this kind of belief—whether in tarot, in luck, or in the small rituals that make uncertainty feel bearable—is less about finding or understanding concrete answers and more about embracing the desperate hope that the future, even an uncertain one, holds something better. And this version of spirituality—the faith in possibility, in chance, in the idea that something greater might be at play—is an institution that people can and

do believe in.

My mother made a point of punctuating our lives with good luck charms—like evil eyes—from the plates we ate off of, the pillows we sat on, to even the wallpaper we looked at. I think she really did believe that symbols like these would save us, that fate could be swayed with enough faith.

I don't know what I believe in. I don't know whether it's luck, energy, a figure, or a symbol. But maybe belief isn't about certainty—it's about the act of seeking, about reaching for something greater even when we don't know what that is. Slowly but surely, I am learning to exist in that uncertainty. I'll find purpose in what it means to believe in bigger

forces, even after that faith has been shattered and reshaped time and time again.

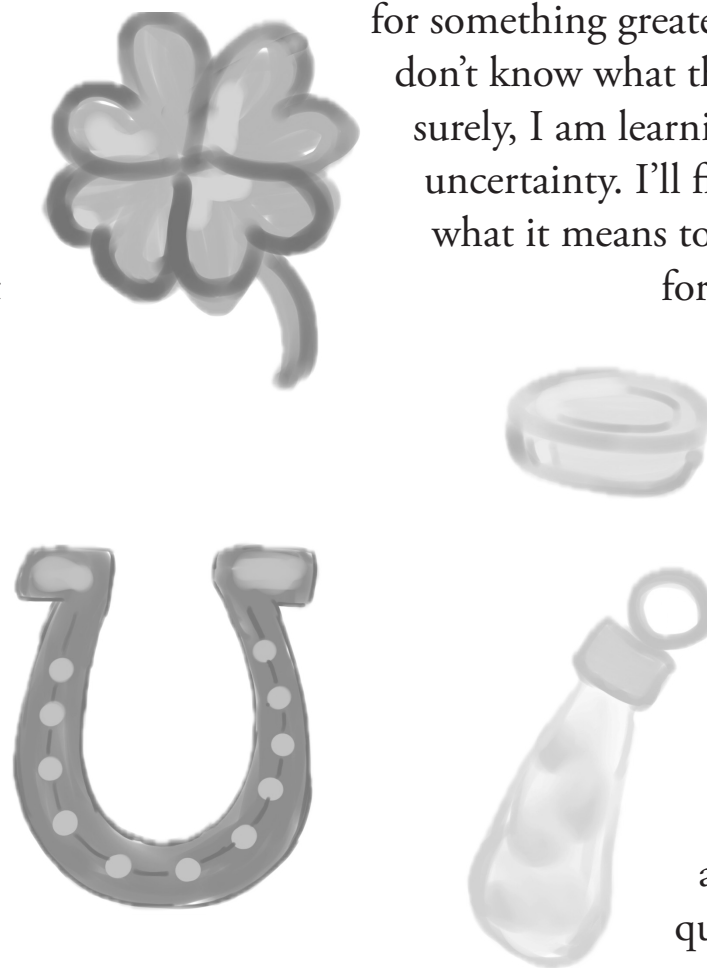
It's in moments like these—with cheetah grandmothers and dull quarters and tarot cards—where I feel

something stirring. A stubborn ember of hope still flickers within me, holding onto all the versions of me—past, present, and meant-to-be. It's a quieter, more tenacious kind of hope—a sense that things will unfold as they're meant to and that acceptance holds a strange kind of power.

Because the best thing about luck is that it can *always* change. And maybe, just maybe, that's enough to keep believing in.

**RANIA JONES '27 (RJONES@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) GOES NOWHERE WITHOUT AT LEAST ONE EVIL EYE.**

**GRAPHIC BY KELLY TUNG '27**





# House of Cards: How Harvard's Housing System Was Rebuilt

How Harvard's housing system evolved from social stratification to a randomized tradition.

BY DAVID DANIEL '28

As Housing Day approaches, anticipation, excitement, and fear of the Quad fills the air in Harvard Yard. Freshmen across campus grapple with the intricacies of blocking groups, house culture, 8-minute-long housing videos, and the annual River Run tradition, where Harvard freshmen visit each River House the night before Housing Day to avoid being placed in the Quad. Amidst this storm of suspense and speculation, one question remains: Why does Harvard assign housing this way?

The origins of Harvard's housing system date back to the late 1800s, when dormitories in Harvard Yard lacked the most basic comforts—no indoor plumbing, heating, or electricity. In search of better living conditions, the wealthier students on campus commissioned private and luxurious homes reserved for affluent Harvard men known as the Gold Coast dorms, reserved for Harvard's elite. In 1913, the President of Harvard Abbott Lawrence Lowell '1877 sought to address the exclusivity of the Gold Coast Dorms by spearheading a project to construct dormitories along the Charles River and renovate Harvard Yard itself. This initiative aimed to create a more inclusive living experience for students on campus, eventually leading to a formalized house system that became a hallmark of student life in the 1930s.

In the early ages of the housing system, students had to apply for admission into specific houses. Similar to current comping processes on campus, students would often undergo an intense interview cycle to be accepted. Despite these efforts to democratize housing, this system did not eliminate social or economic stratification on campus. House Masters (now Faculty Deans) often favored students from elite prep schools or influential families, reinforcing the concentration of privilege in houses like Adams and Eliot.

Over time in the early and mid-20th century, each house developed its own distinct identity. Kirkland became synonymous with athletes, Quincy was known for its significant Asian population, and Adams was known for its large queer community. These evolving identities gave each house a unique character. Rather than praying to the River Gods, students had clear preferences for certain living spaces according to their personality and involvement on campus.

By the 1970s, Harvard sought to reduce inequity in student life. The “great experiment” swapped 50 men from the all-male Winthrop House with 50 women from the all-female Pforzheimer House in the 1969-70 school year. The experiment marked the beginning of Harvard's transition to fully co-ed housing, creating the modern intellectual landscape we have today and paving the way for an official merger of the Harvard and Radcliffe Colleges in 1999.

The next major initiative looked to eliminate the influence of House Master favoritism in the housing process. To make the system more equitable, the administration introduced a ranked-choice system in housing. This removed the application process, but a variety of house identities remained intact, as students with similar backgrounds and interests would still often rank the same houses first.

Later in the decade, Harvard further reformed the system by reducing the number of rank choices the students received, from 12 to four. This marked the first step toward randomization in the housing process. As a result, not all blocking groups receive one of their top four choices, causing the less desirable houses—often the Quad—to become more diverse.

In 1990, the administration took another step toward reducing homogeneity in the houses by shifting to a non-ranked choice system, where students ranked their top four houses in no order. This change led to a higher percentage of students being put in one of their top four houses, but it also helped limit those top houses being tied exclusively to one ethnicity, religion, or social class.

Despite these efforts, self-segregation continued to shape the housing system. For example, Black first-years showed a stronger preference for the Quad Houses over the River Houses. For many, this decision was not only a response to their dissatisfaction with the college but also a statement of being at Harvard while feeling disconnected from its history and actions.

Housing at Harvard took a significant turn in 1995 when the College implemented full housing randomization to counteract social divisions and ensure diverse residential communities. Under the new policy, blocking groups were assigned to Houses without consideration of preference. The decision was met with strong opposition, with an overwhelming 82% of students opposing the policy, claiming it disrespected the agency and maturity of the student body.

Despite the opposition, Former Dean of the College Harry Lewis defended randomization as a measure to prevent houses from continuing to become increasingly homogeneous. Over time, house reputations evolved as previously self-selected communities gave way to more inclusive identities. The randomized housing system has remained in place, and Housing Day continues to be one of the most spirited traditions at Harvard. Freshmen eagerly await their assignments, as upperclassmen storm dorms clad in House gear, chanting and celebrating new members. What began as an attempt to dismantle exclusivity gave rise to new traditions for future classes.

As students continue to embrace the randomness of the lottery, they carry forward a legacy that maintains the spirit of the housing system, transforming a once-elitist system into a unifying practice for Harvard freshmen. But no matter how many upperclassmen reassure freshmen that “the Quad is a great community,” the anxiety over scooter costs and the unreliable shuttle system remains impossible to ease. The history of the Harvard housing system reshaped not only house culture, but the way students experience Harvard itself.

**DAVID DANIEL '28 (DAVID\_DANIEL@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WANTS ALAN GARBER '76 TO PUT HIM IN LOWELL IF HE SEES THIS.**





# The Universal Law of Luck

The elevator ride I'll never forget.

BY NATALIE COOPER '28

If you think you can escape the infamous “Harvard Bubble,” take it from me—you can’t. Growing up in Cambridge, I’ve had my fair share of run-ins with Harvard affiliates. From crossing paths with undergraduates as they oscillated between Harvard’s libraries on a typical Tuesday to finding myself behind Michael Sandel in line for coffee last spring, I thought I’d seen it all.

Nothing, however, could have prepared me for what happened this past winter recess when I visited my roommate in California.

When I boarded the plane at Logan International Airport, I wore my beloved Harvard sweatshirt—a necessary layer against the biting Boston cold. But when I landed, it was a dazzlingly warm, sunny day in December—an oxymoron offensive to my New England instincts. This was California, where winter apparently meant rolling down the windows, letting the ocean breeze whip through your hair, and pretending seasons don’t exist.

My roommate, an L.A. native, had promised me the full California tour, which she delivered—long drives down the Pacific Coast Highway, In-N-Out burgers in the front seat, and an obligatory pilgrimage to Universal Studios.

We did it all. We strolled through the Wizarding World of Harry Potter, butterbeer in hand, as fake snow sparkled under the very real 75-degree sun. We screamed our way through simulated disasters—dinosaurs lunging, menacing mummies chasing us.

No matter what, I lugged my Harvard sweatshirt around, even though it was ridiculously hot. My roommate’s mother had insisted I’d be cold later.

Then, at one point, we found ourselves standing in the middle of a set designed to look like Boston—brick buildings and cobblestone streets. For a brief, fleeting moment, I thought I was home. Part of me felt like if I kept walking through the brick streets, I would reach the comforts of my dorm room. Of course, no one was power-walking aggressively to class, and there was a

distinct lack of overpriced Sweetgreen salads, but still. The illusion held.

By the time we reached the parking garage, exhaustion had settled deep in our bones. The sun had set, and a chill had crept in—the kind that makes you wish you’d bought an extra layer. We stepped into the crowded elevator, the doors sliding shut quietly. My roommate sighed, shivering slightly, and mumbled, “I should have brought my Harvard sweatshirt too.”

That was when we heard it.

“Wait—do you two go to Harvard?”

We turned. A young couple stood beside us, dressed casually. He wore a Patagonia fleece; she wore a sundress and sandals. But their faces caught my attention: that familiar mix of shock, curiosity, and amusement that all Harvard alums seem to wear when the universe throws an unexpected connection their way.

We nodded. “Yeah, we do—we’re freshmen.”

Their faces lit up. “No way! I lived in Thayer,” the man said.

My roommate and I exchanged glances. “We live in Thayer.”

A pause. Then, the slow realization

dawned on all of us at once. My roommate and I said in unison:

“What room?”

They said the number. Our number.

The elevator hummed, and the air buzzed with absurdity. The other park-goers looked confused, not understanding why living in the same Thayer dorm room, years apart, felt like an unreal stroke of luck.

“No way,” my roommate breathed.

The doors began to slide open. Then we stepped out, still grinning, still stunned. And just as the elevator doors started to close, the man displayed his true Harvard colors when he yelled,

“Connect with me on LinkedIn! My name is Joel!”

And then—just like that—they were gone.

Of all the elevators in all the parking garages in all of Los Angeles, we had stepped into this one. Out of the 3.8 million people living in the Los Angeles area, we met the person who had once occupied the tiny, questionably ventilated dorm room we now call home.

As I stood there, processing the sheer absurdity of it, I thought about the couple. Harvard had brought them together, too, just like it did with me and my roommate. They may have met in the dining hall, debating the merits of HUDS. Maybe they sat next to each other in Lamont, both desperately trying to ignore the fact that they hadn’t started their papers yet. And now, here they were, casually chatting about Thayer. They’d found each other out of luck, and now, they were bound by the same thread that tied us all to Thayer.

It was one of those ‘small world’ stories you hear and immediately dismiss—*that’ll never happen to me*. But there we were, stuck in an elevator with them—Harvard alumni who had managed to find each other, and us, in the most random place.

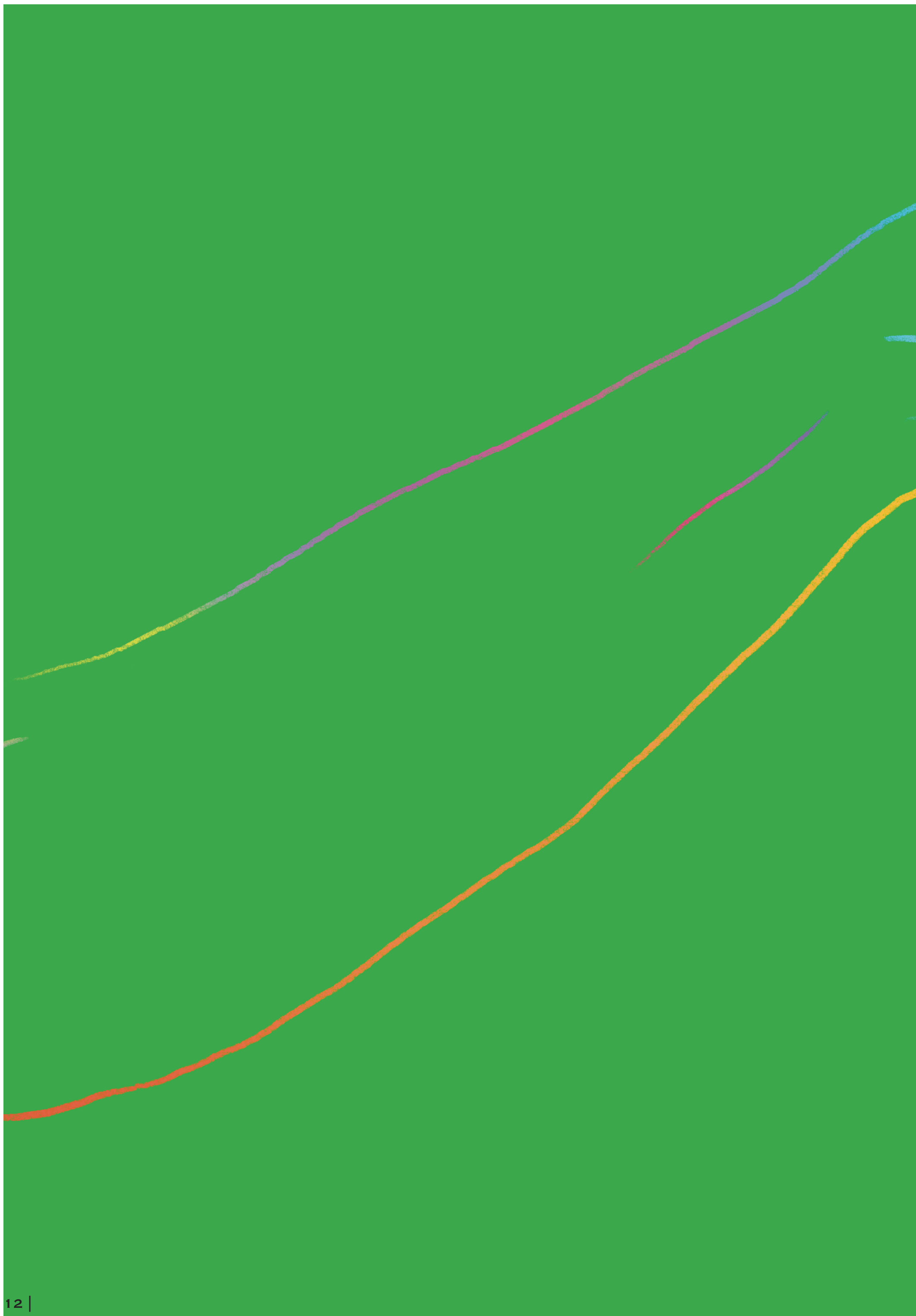
It was luck—plain, ridiculous, one-in-a-million luck. Or maybe it was just the Harvard network doing what it does best. Carrying a piece of yourself—my well-worn Harvard crewneck, in my case—can lead to the most unexpected connections. If there’s one thing I’ve learned, you don’t have to chase after the moments that shape your world. Sometimes, they find you. Sometimes, they happen, like a random elevator ride turning into a bizarre mini-reunion. It’s about being in the right place at the right time—and listening to mothers when they tell you to bring an extra layer.



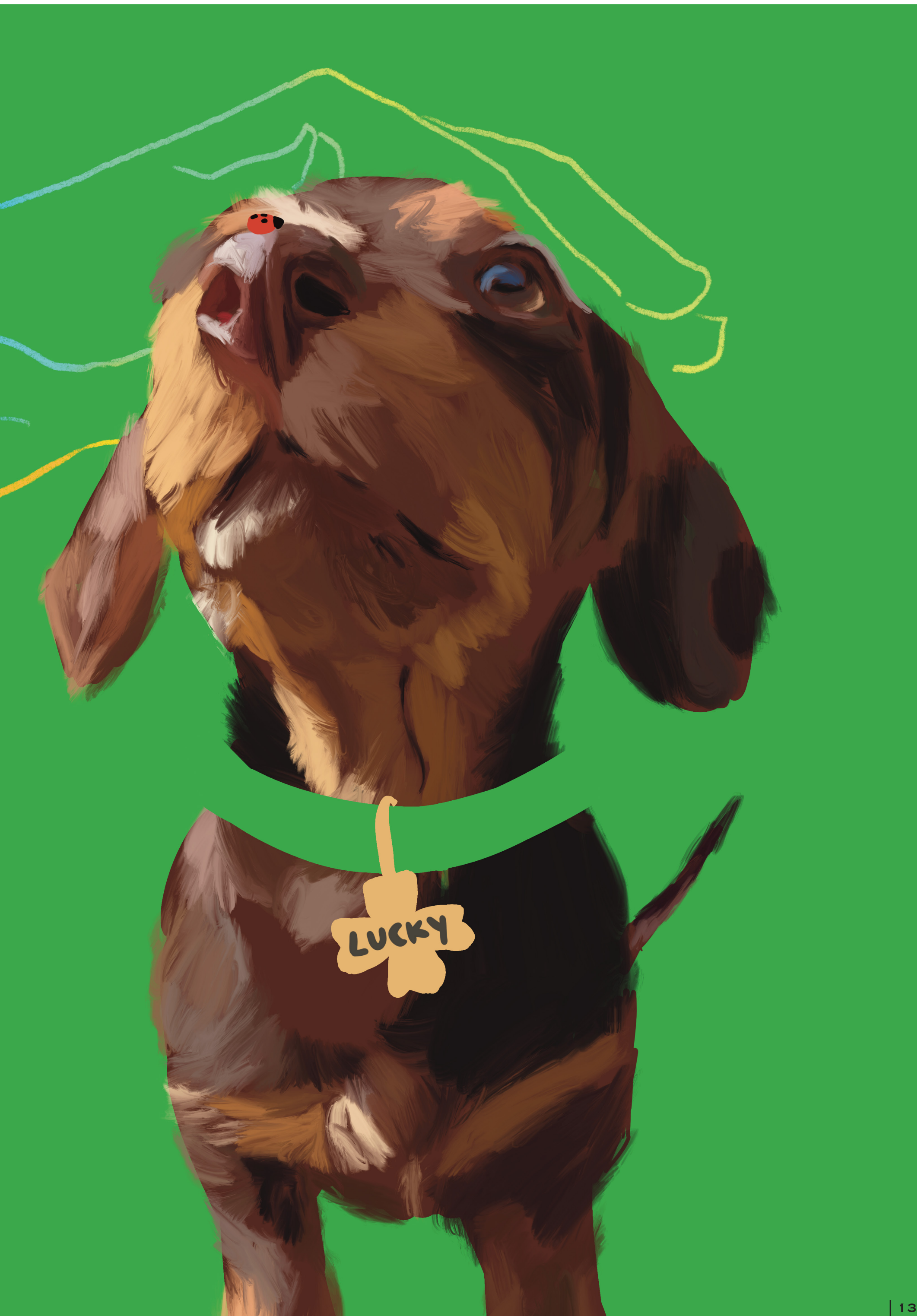
**NATALIE COOPER '28 (NCOOPER@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS STILL GLAD SHE BROUGHT HER HARVARD SWEATER ON THAT HOT DAY.**

**GRAPHIC BY AMELIE LIMA '27**











# A Broad, Abroad: Turning 21 in Europe

How I found meaning in America's biggest birthday in a place where it held no significance.

BY FRANCES CONNORS '26

If you had asked me four years ago to envision my ideal 21st birthday party, I would have described a glamorous soiree like the one Rory's grandparents threw for her in *Gilmore Girls*—my favorite show at the time. Two years ago, I might have dreamed of a birthday bash at Bar Enza. Two months ago, I envisioned a weekend ski trip in the Alps. So, when the time finally came, I did exactly that.

As I turned 21 while carving on the slopes of the Austrian Alps, I thought a lot about what it meant to celebrate a milestone birthday in a culture that doesn't treat it as one.

Aside from a few childhood ski trips to Colorado, most of my memories of skiing come from the mountains of Northeast Ohio and New York (though I'm not sure the former are technically even mountains). With Ohio as a reference point, the panoramic views of the snow-covered Alps from the top of the Kitzsteinhorn Glacier nearly brought tears to my eyes. I had never seen such spectacular views in all my life. Throughout the weekend, I frequently got those moments *irréels*, and the environment added to the birthday excitement.

The day of my actual birthday, Sunday, Feb 23, was perfect. Like all good birthdays, it started with a 5:45 a.m. wake-up in Austria. My friend and I had to get a bright and early start to the day!

On the train to the mountain, I enjoyed overnight chocolate oats and sipped on instant coffee from a thermos—a far cry from the birthday pancakes my mom used to make for me and the free Starbucks drink I used to claim back home, but delicious nonetheless. I spent the morning traversing two mountains in the Schladming region, challenging myself with black diamond slopes and soaking in the views on blue catwalks. By early afternoon I was satisfied with skiing, and it was time for a part of European ski culture that does not exist in Cleveland, Ohio: *après-ski*.

I never thought that the soundtrack to my 21st birthday would be *Auffe aufn Berg* and other German *après-ski* hits, but until you're dancing on benches in ski boots with new Austrian friends, don't knock it 'til you try it! Although unexpected, the music made for a fun vibe, and I was happy to be dancing away on my birthday and finding new favorite songs. In the mountaintop bar, the fact that I was turning 21 barely registered—it just didn't matter here. In a country where people start drinking at 16, turning 21 is just another birthday.

It wasn't until one of my new Austrian friends convinced the DJ to play *Happy Birthday* for me that I wondered, fleetingly, if the moment would've felt bigger back home. That being said, I did feel special to have an entire bar of people sing to me on my birthday.

I knew when choosing to study abroad in the spring that I would be celebrating one of American culture's most important milestones away from home. What I hadn't realized was that culture and its traditions aren't defined by a place—they're a mindset. To the Europeans in that bar, I was just celebrating another birthday, but to me and my American friend, it was so much more than that. Thousands of miles away from the U.S., we were still bringing the excitement and energy we would have had at a 21st birthday party in Cambridge.

In a country where turning 21 holds no particular weight, I discovered that I had the freedom to define my own meaning on this special day. It didn't just have to be about drinking (there was no way I was drinking 21 beers on a mountain). It could be about whatever I wanted it to be. For me, the day felt like a celebration of the person that I've become and all the amazing things that lie ahead.

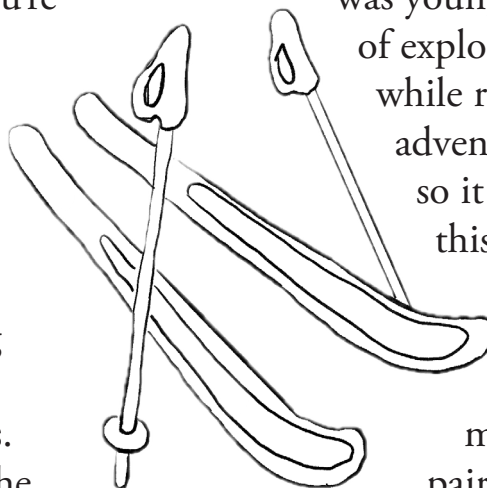
In a happy coincidence, Austria happened to be the 21st country I've visited—a fitting testament to how

I've become someone who prioritizes traveling and enjoys exploring new places in the past few years. When I was younger, I used to dream of exploring far-off lands while reading about the adventures of travel writers, so it was satisfying to hit this milestone on my 21st (and also realize I've become a bit of a travel writer myself). That milestone, paired with the beautiful landscapes around me, served as a powerful reminder: the world is wide, and I can spend the rest of my life uncovering its beauty. A rather invigorating thought to have at 21.

My 21st birthday was my best one yet. The setting was unbeatable, and it's hard to complain when your special day consists of skiing and sipping on spritzes. Yet even without the tangibles, what made the day truly perfect was my mindset. The weekend reinforced a lesson I've been learning throughout my time in Paris: the way we frame an experience is just as important as the experience itself.

I've found this through the creation of my "Paris Bucket List." Something as simple as eating a croissant in a park becomes a monumental affair when it allows you to finally visit that famous boulangerie and have your first picnic in Paris. It's a reminder that life is a collection of moments, big and small, and that their significance comes from the meaning we give them.

Some milestones, like turning 21, are culturally ascribed as big moments. But when you're in a new culture, their significance can change. It's in those moments that we have the opportunity to assign our own meaning to the events of our lives, and in doing so, we make our own milestones.



**FRANCES CONNORS '26  
(MARYFRANCESCONNORS@  
COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) HOPES  
TO VISIT 100 COUNTRIES BY  
HER 100TH BIRTHDAY.**

**GRAPHIC BY CHRISTIE  
BECKLEY '27**



# Abreast on Abroad: Letter Two, “Scarebnb”

The Red Light and an upstairs rager: Sadie Kargman’s unsettling Amsterdam accommodation.

BY SADIE KARGMAN '26

Hey Shitstains,  
How’s the weather in Cambridge? “Spring,” am I right? Anyway, welcome to this week’s edition of “Abreast on Abroad.” In my last letter, I discussed how my decision to “cross the pond” ultimately hinged on the ability to wander the world. What can I say? I dreamed of becoming the next insta-travel-baddie and street-cart-chocolate-mousse-connoisseur (so worth the hype, by the way).

Now, with two months down and three more to go, I’ve been hopping across borders, meeting new people, and trying enough food to eventually roll myself off this continent. But I digress.

This week’s letter is all about travel smarts—specifically, why choosing the right place to stay can make or break a trip, inspired by one magical experience I’ve had thus far.

Picture this: you’re studying abroad in Paris. It’s a dream. It’s worldly, it’s cultured, it’s French. But while France is great, you’re in Europe...so you kind of have to plan a fun vacation every weekend. As a student, it’s less expensive thanks to generous discounts, and springtime generally means it’s off-season for tourists. Ryanair and Easyjet exist. Instagram is alive and well. But where do you stay?

On the one hand, you’re exploring a new destination in your free time, turning every weekend into a mini vacation. On the other hand, you’re twenty years old, so who do you think you are? Life is all about finding that delicate balance—a beautifully, delusional balance, at that. So, what’s the sweet spot? Airbnbs.

For those unfamiliar, Airbnb is arguably the greatest app on earth (Hey, Harvard grad and Airbnb co-founder Nathan Blecharczyk ’05—I’m a huge fan. #Veritas #HarvardStudentDiscount?). And for those who haven’t read the Airbnb Harvard Business School case study—Little Miss Takes One Entrepreneurship Class and Thinks She Knows Everything—here’s the gist: the app allows you to rent houses, apartments, and rooms directly from verified hosts.

This business model cuts out a physical middleman and allows guests to book directly with home-owners. I’ve found this one-on-one communication creates a more personal (and often safer) experience—especially when a host is renting out their own home for short-term stays.

Overall, I love the app for a fun splurge weekend. Generally, Airbnbs are more affordable than a hotel and have higher quality accommodations than other similar options, or as I like to call it: #MoreBangForYourBuck.

All in all, it’s perfect for a student traveling on a budget, who doesn’t want a hostel, but who prioritizes safety and privacy—plus I love cosplaying as a local.

Note: The way some people swipe on dating apps is the way I scroll through Airbnb

and Zillow. I am a glorified real-estate stalker and love to play “House” with real houses. Highly recommend.

Now that we’ve established that, one of the main requirements for using the app is basic literacy, aka being able to read the fine print. Upon reflection, my boyfriend—Sam—and I, seem to have trouble with that.

Sam is also studying in Europe, so it’s easy to meet up over certain weekends. It’s important to mention this up front because a big part of what I am about to share is my—cough, cough Sam’s—fault.

We wanted to go to Amsterdam—canals, waffles, bicycles, oh my! A short train ride away from Paris, I was told the city is a must-do trip in your twenties. However, our egregiously wholesome weekend took a real turn when we rolled our suitcases right into the city’s Red Light District (crack a book or ask Siri, because #NotMyJobToExplain) and right up to the steps of our Airbnb. Sweet.

Now, because I love you guys, I won’t exaggerate—we were at least a street or two over from the heart of the neighborhood. But let’s just say, you could definitely still sense her presence. As a native New Yorker, very few things scare me—including The Red Light (#feminism). What did shake me, however, was opening my Airbnb window and locking eyes with another house’s Peloton.

Imagine climbing the steep, side-entrance steps of an idyllic, Dutch-style house, excited to check into what was described as an “Urban Oasis Studio,” only to realize that: a) the microscopic room, tucked off a random hallway, looked nothing like the “studio” listed—major difference coming from a New Yorker, and b) someone could stare directly into said room while some chick named Jacki (spelled just like that) welcomed them on their “ride to the soul.”

I know what you’re thinking: Just suck it up and close the blinds. It’s safe, it’s cheap, it’s quiet, you already paid, and you can’t get a refund. Wrong, to the safe and quiet part—but we stayed.

After a lovely night at incredible local spots—planned, researched and executed to perfection (you’re welcome Sam!)—we decided to rest our heads before our next travel day.

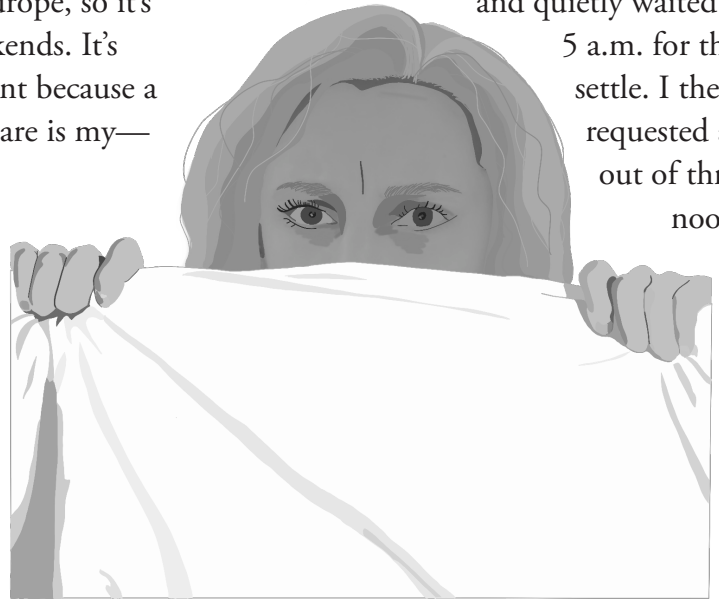
That was the plan, at least.

As soon as we returned, I could tell our Airbnb host was having a little gathering. Good for them, #YouGoGlenCoco. That is, until the party abruptly ended, followed by hysterical screams in Dutch, glass shattering, and frantic running up and down the stairs, located directly above our room—charming.

While Sam remained calm, I started panicking, convinced something was wrong or someone was in danger. Desperate for answers,

I immediately grabbed my phone and translated the shouts. While I don’t know Dutch, I could ultimately deduce enough from “bastard,” “whore,” and my personal favorite, “buffoon”—quite possibly one of the most underrated words in the human language.

What were we supposed to do? We’ve all been there. So, we threw on “Despicable Me” and quietly waited until a ripe 5 a.m. for the dust to settle. I then kindly requested a late check-out of three versus noon due to the “neighbor’s noise”



(#GirlsGirl), and before we knew it, we were on our merry way back to Paris and Fife.

Was this a fluke accident? Yes. Is it a reflection of Airbnb? No. Is it wildly hilarious in hindsight? Absolutely. This is all to say this tale is more of a share than a cautionary one—but what can we learn?

One, always check the neighborhood or location of where you are going to stay. As brokers preach, the three most important things in real estate are “location, location, location.” Two, read the reviews; they are there for a REASON (If you scrolled past the three, five-star reviews on top, you would find a million others reflecting on the violating view. #thanksNathanB). Three, and this is the most important one, if you are traveling with another person, and you have a talent for planning, you use that talent and plan everything yourself (love you, Sam).

Overall, I think this one stay provided me with enough horror-story travel content for my time abroad, so on your next journey, make sure to stay smart, do your research, but remember “it’s all for the mems.”

Thank you for reading about my “ScareBnb” story, and check out next week’s column, “Kim K. Cosplay: The Full American-in-Paris Experience.”

Xo,  
Sadie

**SADIE KARGMAN '26  
(SADIEKARGMAN@COLLEGE.  
HARVARD.EDU) IS CURRENTLY  
STARRING AS YOUR FAVORITE  
SHITSTAIN IN PARIS.**

GRAPHIC BY EL RICHARDS '26



# Lucky Charms: More than Just a Cereal

The key to passing all your midterms could be one charm away.

BY OLIVIA LUNSETH '28

When most people hear “Lucky Charms,” they probably picture the cereal in the dining hall—a favorite between-class snack, a nostalgic breakfast, and a last-minute meal before a late-night study session in Lamont. But lucky charms—beyond the colorful marshmallows—have existed in cultures worldwide for centuries. From four-leaf clovers to rabbit’s feet, people have long sought symbols of luck to help them through life’s challenges. And as college students amid midterm season, who’s to say a little extra luck wouldn’t help?

Whether it’s facing a tough exam or getting through an all-nighter, midterms bring a level of stress that makes students eager for any advantage—even if it’s just a superstition. That’s why many turn to their own lucky charms, clinging to objects that bring them comfort.

We all know someone who is obsessed with a good luck charm: a childhood stuffed animal, a stained baggy sweatshirt, or the gum wrapper your friend has carried around every day since they won their 6th-grade spelling bee with it in their pocket. Regardless of the sentimental value of a crumpled-up gum wrapper, I’ll admit there’s something oddly impressive about the commitment. These objects can be hard to part with, especially when they remind us of a moment of past success or comfort.

Personally, my good luck charm is a necklace my sister gave me. If I don’t have it, I’m 99% sure disaster will strike—I’ll submit my draft instead of my final essay, sleep through a midterm, or Andrew Berry will throw the microphone cube at me during an LS1B lecture. Is there any actual logic behind this? Absolutely not. But in a place where juggling ten extracurriculars, midterms, and two papers in a week is considered normal, I’ll take all the luck I can get.

And I know I’m not

alone. Harvard students could be a case study in superstition. Have you seen the way people swerve to avoid the main entrance of Johnston Gate? Even though we pretend not to believe in the “fail-your-exams” curse from walking under the famous archway, few are willing to take the chance. And with Housing Day coming up, we all know people who have turned to lucky socks and last-minute prayers desperately hoping to secure a spot in the River Houses rather than the Quad.

Even tourists seek a bit of Harvard luck, lining up to rub John Harvard’s foot, blissfully unaware of what else has touched it.

Many people swear by their ride-or-die good luck charms and superstitions, but most of us don’t believe they’re the real reason we ace our classes. If that were the case, Harvard students wouldn’t spend their weekends cramming for tests and writing papers.

So if we don’t believe they’re the reason why we’re passing our classes, why do we keep them around? The answer is simple—it’s all in our heads.

Good luck charms give us a sense of control in high-stakes situations, like

midterms, by helping our brains feel more stable. For thousands of years, people have trusted that good luck tokens protect them from evil, misfortune, and sickness.

For college students, our biggest threats may not be curses or plagues—unless you consider math problem sets a form of evil. Instead, many of us rely on lucky charms to help us survive our academic lives at Harvard.

Believing you have some luck on your side going into a test makes you less likely to panic, second-guess yourself, or spiral into the kind of test anxiety that turns multiple-choice questions into an out-of-body experience. So while your friend’s

“lucky” gum wrapper probably isn’t whispering the answers to them, the psychological power it provides just might be the reason they breeze through their exam—while the rest of us break into a cold sweat over question two.

Good luck charms tend to have a placebo effect—the psychological event where something works simply because you believe it will. Researchers at the University of Cologne investigated this relationship and found that when participants were given a “lucky golf ball” while putting on a green, they sank 35% more of their shots than those who were told nothing about their ball.

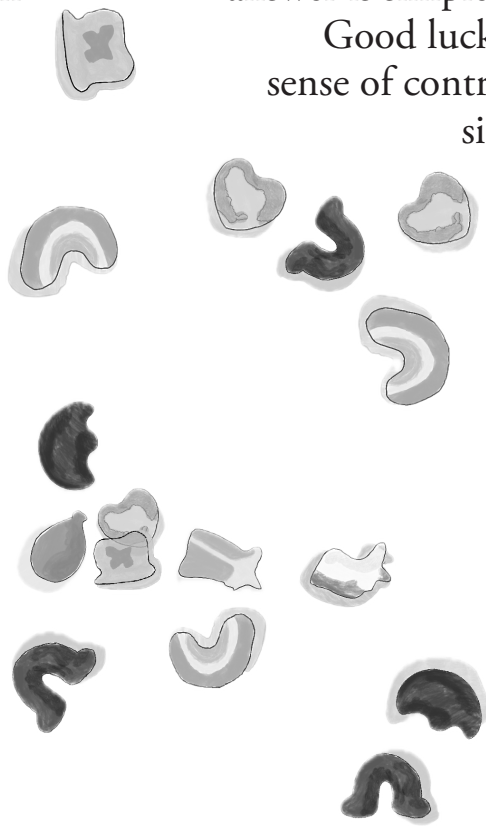
That stained sweatshirt your friend insists will help them ace their physics exam? It’s probably not the sweatshirt that’s helping them—it’s their confidence (or maybe delusion) fueled by the belief that their lucky charm has their back.

So if lucky charms are so helpful, don’t be embarrassed to have one. Walk into your midterm clutching the stuffed animal you’ve had for the last 18 years. Write your final paper while wearing the pair of socks you had on when your high school soccer team won states. Do whatever you need to do (except borrow your roommate’s lucky underwear—it won’t go over well). We’re all just trying to make it through the semester without accidentally submitting the wrong draft or getting pelted by a rogue microphone cube during lecture. If your lucky charm saves you from having a full-on midterm meltdown, embrace it.

Whether you consider it superstition or you’re a true believer in good luck charms, we can all agree on one thing: when it comes to Harvard, a little extra luck, magically delicious or not, never hurts.

**OLIVIA LUNSETH '28  
(OLIVIALUNSETH@COLLEGE.  
HARVARD.EDU) HAS  
ACCIDENTALLY WALKED  
THROUGH JOHNSTON GATE TWICE  
THIS YEAR.**

**GRAPHIC BY JOYE WINGARD '28**





# Point/Counterpoint: Is a College Degree Worth It?

A discussion on whether attending college is truly essential for advancing career opportunities.

BY KALVIN FRANK '28 AND ALEXANDRA ELISABETH OTTO '28

As tuition fees soar and the job market evolves, the true value of a college degree has sparked intense debate. Proponents argue that a degree offers a necessary ticket to entry for many high-paying jobs and that college serves as a period for exploration and personal growth. On the other hand, critics point to the staggering financial burden and availability of alternative paths to success, raising the question: Are college degrees still worth it?

**Alexandra:** First and foremost, attending college is a significant privilege that remains out of reach for many. While many aspire to pursue higher education, some lack the financial literacy needed to navigate the complexities of applying for financial aid. Some schools have generous need-blind financial aid programs that consider college applications without the applicant's financial situation; however, this is not the case for every institution.

Proponents argue that if given the opportunity, attending college is invaluable, as it unlocks access to a wide array of career opportunities and long-term success. According to the Burning Glass Institute, nearly half of the jobs in the U.S. require at least a bachelor's degree. Pursuing higher education not only provides students with an extensive choice of jobs after graduation but also makes it easier to transition between careers. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that the unemployment rate of college graduates was approximately 2%, while those without a degree was more than double that at 4.5%.

Not only does attending college provide more job opportunities, the acquired jobs also, on average, pay a higher salary. The U.S. Social Security Administration states that men and women with a college degree earn \$900,000 on average and \$630,000 more in lifetime earnings, respectively, than high school graduates. In 2024, the median income for college graduates was 50% higher than that of those only holding a high school diploma.

Moreover, college is an excellent time for developing personal interests outside of the professional world. Earning a college degree allows students to explore their interests, engage in intellectual discussions, and exchange ideas with peers and professors. Having the opportunity to directly engage with professors who are experts in their fields provides a unique chance to participate in innovative research and gain a deeper understanding of the world.

Liberal arts studies, in particular, offer a holistic perspective by exposing students to various departments and disciplines by engaging students from varying backgrounds, viewpoints, and experiences. Through this academic breadth, students can develop invaluable qualities such as personal growth and increased self-esteem. Colleges often encourage students to explore fields they may not have considered if they had entered the workforce immediately after high school. While these courses may not directly align with immediate career goals, the additional knowledge gained can lead to unexpected career opportunities and expand one's perspectives.

Apart from academics, the different extracurriculars on campus contribute significantly to the college experience. It gives students the

ability to engage with their peers, thrive creatively, try out new hobbies, and explore their interests. Pre-professional clubs can also be extremely beneficial to gain experience and foster skills for their desired career.

In addition, college also provides students with a wide range of networking possibilities. Career fairs, alumni connections, and personal relationships to faculty can all contribute to finding jobs and having a more successful career. Having contacts in an industry allows one not only to learn more about the company itself, get advice, and have a mentor, but also to know which jobs are available.

Pursuing higher education can be profoundly transformative, offering the invaluable opportunity to explore passions, discover a fulfilling career, and, most importantly, grow into a more capable and confident individual.

**Kalvin:** To set things straight, I believe a college degree is valuable for some people; if I genuinely thought it wasn't beneficial, I wouldn't attend college. I also concur that college can be an excellent opportunity for people to gain wealth and build social networks. However, I believe there are many equally, if not better, alternatives to a traditional college degree, and more people should consider these options.

Proponents of college degrees are quick to point out the median income of college graduates compared to high school graduates—\$77,636 versus \$46,748, respectively—which reflects a broad range of industries and jobs. However, trades jobs—an alternative that is often overlooked—can be very high-paying and require no degree. Electricians, plumbers, and carpenters earn median salaries of \$61,590, \$61,550, and \$56,000, respectively. Yes, these are all below the median salary of bachelor's degrees, but this doesn't include the benefits many of these unionized jobs get (often higher than their non-union counterparts). Not to mention, they have \$0 in college debt to pay back.

Many students at Harvard receive sizable aid packages due to its generous financial aid program. However, Harvard is an outlier; many students rely on federal student loans, with the Education Data Initiative stating that 48.2% of undergraduates accept federal loans. The situation is even more challenging for middle-class families who earn above the federal aid threshold but still cannot afford the steep costs of college, often leading them to take out high-interest private loans to cover the expenses. With student loan debt hitting \$1.7 trillion in 2024 and growing yearly, more and more people may decide that \$0 in college debt for tradespeople, service members, and other well-paid non-college-educated jobs is an enticing route.

It's also important to note that not all college degrees are equally lucrative. While I don't fault anyone for pursuing a college degree they

are passionate about, considering only median income, plenty of degrees offer far lower salaries than expected. For example, liberal arts graduates typically earn a median salary of just \$38,000 within their first five years. CNBC lists 16 majors making \$40,000 or less in their first five years, including elementary education, history, and theology. College should be about studying what

you are passionate about, regardless of the income, but why doesn't this open-mindedness extend to people who choose not to pursue college degrees? Not all people are passionate about continued education, which doesn't necessarily mean they will have a lower quality of life, even if they can expect lower pay.

It's worth mentioning that many Americans regret their time in

college. According to USA Today, 33% of college graduates say they wish they had pursued a different education path. Pew Research Center also found that nearly half of Americans (47%) believe college is only worth it if you don't have to take out loans, and a further 29% say it's not worth it even without loans. This widespread disillusionment makes sense when you consider the skyrocketing costs of college—currently averaging \$38,270 per year, or over \$153,080 across a four-year degree.

As the shortage of skilled trade professionals grows, demand and pay will only increase. Whether it's skilled trades, the military, cosmetology, entrepreneurship, or another field, thousands of great jobs don't require a degree. While college can offer an invaluable experience for many, it's not the only path to success, and for some, choosing a different route can lead to just as much—if not more—personal and professional fulfillment.

**Alexandra:** College can open doors to greater job opportunities, financial stability, and intellectual growth.

**Kalvin:** But success isn't one-size-fits-all—many fulfilling, well-paying careers don't require an undergraduate degree.

**Kalvin and Alexandra:** In the end, the most important thing is to make an informed choice. Whether you pursue higher education or forge your own path, the key is to invest in a future that aligns with your goals, skills, and values.

**ALEXANDRA OTTO '28 (ALEXANDRAOTTO@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) LOVES EXPLORING DIFFERENT FIELDS OF STUDY. KALVIN FRANK '28 (KFRANK@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WAS A CAR MECHANIC IN A DIFFERENT LIFE.**

GRAPHIC BY KERRIE ZHU '28





# The Story of a Symphony

A review of the Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra's third concert of the season.

BY ISHAAN TEWARI '28

**M** At Sanders Theatre, performers dressed in concert black are ordered in rows upon the stage, their bows moving in unison. As the strings swell into a racing melody, conductor Federico Cortese's audible and emotional breaths guide the orchestra forward, cueing the dramatic crash of the cymbals, the militaristic drum of the timpani, and the brass whose sound cuts deep into the upper balcony.

On March 8, 2025, the Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra (HRO) performed the third concert of its 217th season under the eyes of conductor Cortese and assistant conductor Enoch Li '26. The program consisted of three pieces, all written by Russian composers: Symphonic Poem No. 2 by Galina Ustvolskaya, Suite on Verses of Michelangelo Buonarroti by Dmitri Shostakovich, and Symphony No. 11, also by Shostakovich. HRO consists of over 100 orchestra and student board members, led by President Veronica Li '26 and Vice President Brendon Lau '26.

At first glance, the most apparent connection between the three pieces seems to be their common Russian origin. However, Moshi Tang '27, a violinist, assistant concertmaster, and tour committee member for the orchestra, explained that there is a deeper thread linking the programmed pieces.

"You might also say there's a theme of war and somewhat something violent about at least the Ustvolskaya [poem] and the Shostakovich symphony," Tang remarked. "It's a brutal program."

Brutal is a perfect word to describe the opening symphonic poem. Composed by Galina Ustvolskaya—a student of Shostakovich—the piece is characterized by unsettling soundscapes, dissonant interjections, and boiling tension.

The poem opened with the tranquil melody of woodwinds and the delicate pizzicato of strings. Suddenly, this hauntingly beautiful peace was shattered by a piercing cry from the brass. Though the poem ultimately morphed into a soft murmur, the ending felt off-putting rather than resolute in light of the earlier chaos.

The next piece, Suite on Verses of Michelangelo Buonarroti by Shostakovich, featured professional baritone singer Junhan Choi. The orchestra performed three songs from the suite, entitled "Night," "Death," and "Immortality." As the suite continued, its tone morphed from eerie to powerful to bright, with Choi's chilling vocals overlaid upon the hum of the orchestra throughout.

The Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra evoked powerful

emotions—notably, a strong feeling of unease—through their concert. But while the performance of the poem and suite were certainly impressive alone, they also served as the perfect prelude to what was undoubtedly the showstopper of the evening: Symphony No. 11 by Shostakovich.

Shostakovich's symphony is a masterpiece in storytelling, depicting the events of the 1905 Revolution in Russia. The symphony begins with the first movement, "The Palace Square," portraying the ominous silence preceding the Winter Palace—the home of the Russian royal family—on Jan. 22, 1905.

Then, as Russian protesters rally in front of the palace, the symphony moves to its second movement. Imperial troops attempt to suppress the uprising and open fire on Russian protesters—a day remembered in history as "Bloody Sunday." The third and fourth movements, "In Memoriam" and "The Tocsin," tell the stories of the dead souls, the outraged response of the people, and the continuing oppression of the royal regime.

The magic of the concert was not just in the symphony's story itself, though. It was also in how the Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra communicated the story—particularly in the piece's second movement. The segment began with the drone of low strings and flutes occasionally chirping a quiet melody above. As tensions rose, other woodwinds joined the orchestra.

Suddenly, with the swell of the timpani, the strings morphed into a rapid, fluttering triplet pattern while the brass sent piercing notes soaring through the theater. After successive crashes from the cymbals, the orchestra retreated into its initial state—low strings with a delicate overlay of woodwinds.

Everyone in Sanders Theatre discerned Shostakovich's foreshadowing of the Bloody Sunday atrocity. His masterful use of timbre to represent different characters and feelings, combined with the orchestra's portrayal of these details, left a powerful impression that lingers with me even as I write this article.

The symphony's storytelling went a layer deeper through the use of motifs. "[The] music of that first movement comes back in different forms throughout the rest of the piece," added Tang. "For example,

at the end of the second movement... after the violence of the Bloody Sunday... [Shostakovich] returns to the extremely still music of the first movement, and it takes on a new meaning."

However, the credit for an incredible performance does not just go to Shostakovich. The Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra's portrayal of the symphony's details evoked emotions inscribed deep inside the score, truly bringing the story of the 1905 Revolution to life.

Violist Graham Lee '28 explained that the orchestra's choice to perform the symphony as they did was not trivial. "In classical music, I feel like there's a debate on whether you should take music as it is... versus look at it from a historical perspective," Lee said. "I think [for] this piece, you definitely want to do the latter because it's directly based off of a historical event."

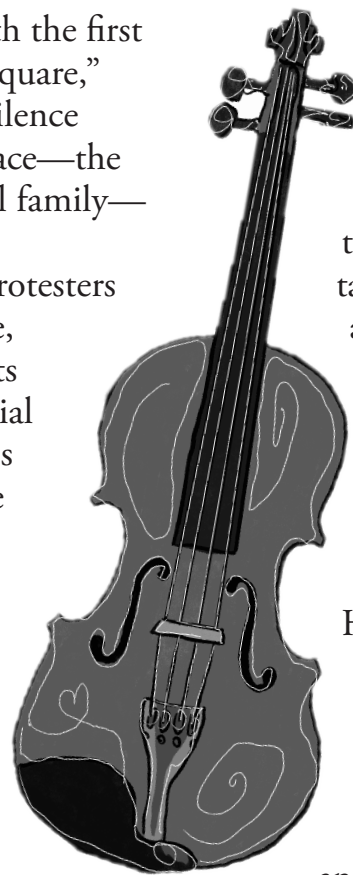
This approach of looking beyond the score was instrumental in the Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra's success. The symphony was performed in a way such that any audience member—even one knowing nothing about Russian history—felt the discomfort of each silence, the bangs of gunshots, and the anger of the Russian protestors deeply. The orchestra played each note not just in the context of the adjacent measures but of the surrounding history, too.

It is important to note that the predominantly American audience of Sanders Theatre could not resonate with the symphony like a Russian one would. "In the writing of the symphony, Shostakovich relied on many Russian folk songs and folk tunes," remarked violinist Cal Alexander '27. "So there is this national or cultural connection embedded in the music, which I think makes it especially powerful for the Russian audience, which will make our reception of the music of as students at Harvard or people in Cambridge very, very different because we're not familiar with these folk tunes."

However, despite the audience's lack of cultural context, the Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra's performance was met with roaring applause and a standing ovation. The orchestra's ability to worldlessly retell a story—the story of a symphony—was nothing short of incredible.

**ISHAAN TEWARI '28 (ITEWARI@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) NOW LISTENS TO SHOSTAKOVICH AND TRAVIS SCOTT BACK-TO-BACK.**

**GRAPHIC BY CHRISTIE BECKLEY '27**





# River Runnin'

Complete the river run and I'll tell you what upperclassmen house you actually belong in.

BY MEGAN LEGAULT '28

After what seems to be a never ending first half of the spring semester, it is finally the long awaited week before spring break here at Harvard. If you're a first-year student, you have likely already come to face many battles this far in your Harvard journey. After claiming that you were going to stage the academic comeback of the century over winter break, you've probably come back to campus, failed to "lock in," and experienced your fair share of crashouts by this point in the semester.

As first-years, we are all bonded by the valiant attempt to conquer the monster that is the expository writing requirement. There is nothing more taxing than spending countless hours completing readings that you simply can't convince yourself are entertaining (if you even attempted them) just to receive a tragic A- on your paper. For my fellow Life Sciences 1B students ("LS1B-ers") who were utterly humbled by the first PIE, a Periodic Individual Evaluations (not the sweet treat), let's hope the second one goes better this week. But, let's face it, poor PIE grades are a canon event in this weed-out class.

Surpassing even the most insufferably miserable pre-meds, perhaps none have it worse than Government concentrators at the moment. I sincerely hope that this BuzzFeed-esque news article is a lighthearted relief from the host of Apple News articles you read first thing every morning that are slowly extinguishing your hope for the future. Maybe the only students doing well at the moment are those preparing for their 30 question multiple choice midterm exam in Economics 10a (sorry, not sorry).

Academics aside, in the past month, most first-years can unanimously agree that the biggest battle we have all come to face is the infamously messy setup of the sophomore housing lottery: blocking groups. If your fall semester friend group survived this obstacle, congrats—you've won the social lottery! Others...have not been quite so fortunate. We are slowly creeping up on Housing Day, one of the few occasions we have to claim that we have social lives as undergraduates of a socially dead liberal arts college. As a customary tradition of the Harvard College experience, there is one last "challenge" which stands between us and unlocking sophomore life: the River Run.

Here's the objective of this chaotic superstition. It is widely believed that if you take a shot at each of the nine upperclassmen river houses the night before Housing Day, you will be spared

the tragedy of ending up in the Quad—gasp! It is important to note here that the Quad consists of a set of suburban mansions whose biggest flaw is that they are an inconvenient 15-minute walk from Harvard Square (cough...cough...first world problem). Regardless, we Harvard students have to find fun where we can. In the spirit of this tradition and intellectual vitality, I have created the following flowchart to tell you which house you actually belong in. The very serious conditions of said flowchart are the following:

Answer the questions honestly. Don't try to convince yourself you belong in a river house if you clearly belong in the Quad. After all, our school motto is "Veritas," so it is essentially part of your student contract with John Harvard himself to remain truthful. Once you get your results, read the hyper-specific descriptions below.

P.S. respective Hogwarts House affiliations are included for those who find it amusing.

**"The Life of The Party"** Houses: Adams, Quincy, Lowell aka Gryffindor.

According to your answers, I think you lowkey wish you went to a state school for the social scene but you are making the best with what you've got. Your social self belongs in the heart of campus—enjoy!

**Work Hard, Play Harder** Houses: Kirkland, Dunster, Mather aka Ravenclaw.

I'm proud of you for prioritizing being a real person, but you are definitely a Harvard student first. Respectfully, you've got your shit together. You should be in a house where you have separation between academics, social life, and maintaining a somewhat reasonable sleep schedule so you can keep up with your five class schedule and 20 on-campus commitments.

**Old Money** Houses: Winthrop, Eliot, Leverett aka Slytherin.

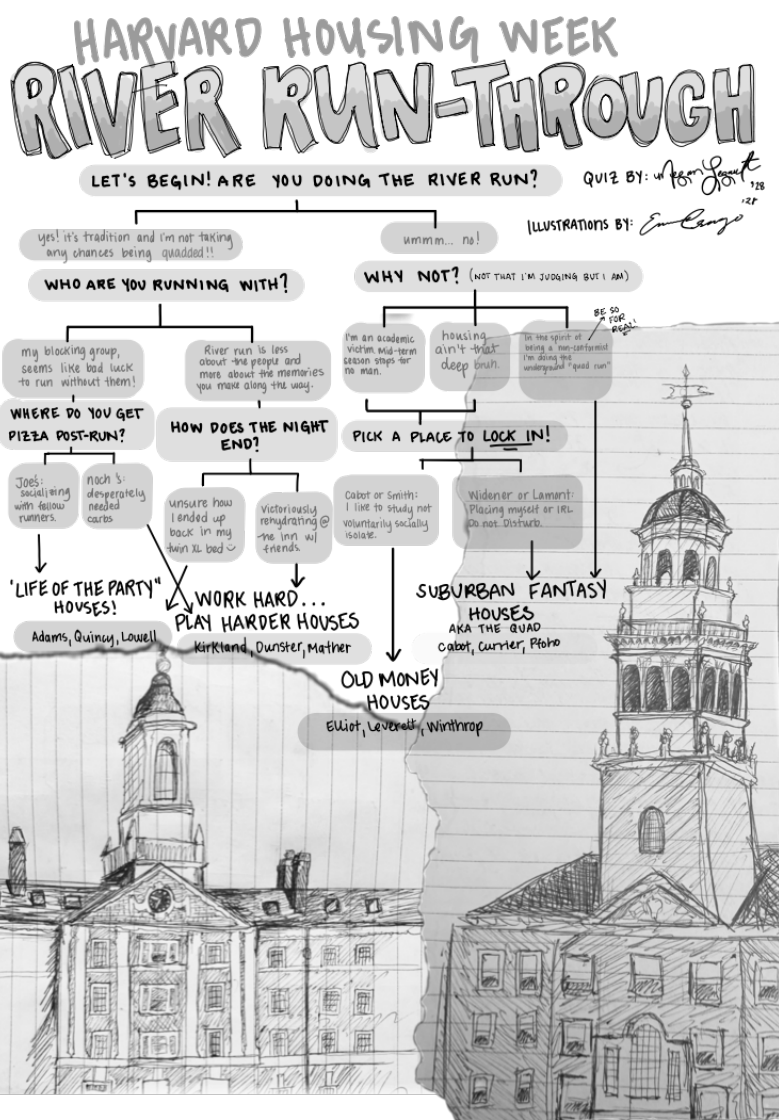
You exist to romanticize your liberal arts college experience and I am here for it! You worked hard to get here, but your creatively written Common App essay worked harder. Keep rocking that trench coat and drinking your \$8 coffee from Blue Bottle, you dark academia queens.

**Suburban Fantasy** Houses: Cabot, Currier, Pforzheimer aka Hufflepuff.

You may be a homebody and shamelessly spend your Friday nights in Lamont Cafe until it closes at ten, but there is absolutely nothing wrong with that! You have an old soul fit for the grandmotherly house vibes of the quad. A haven of endless quintessential small businesses and adorable families away from the hustle culture of the College awaits.

**MEGAN LEGAULT '28 (MLEGAULT@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU), BUZZFEED OBSESSED PRE-TEEN TURNED WRITER FOR THE HARVARD INDEPENDENT STATES CLEARLY, FOR LEGAL REASONS, THAT THIS QUIZ IS BASED SOLELY ON HER (COMPLETELY CORRECT) OPINIONS OF THE HOUSES SHE FORMULATED FROM REDDIT THREADS.**

**GRAPHIC BY EMMA CARGO '28 AND MEGAN LEGAULT '28**



## Thoughts from New Quincy: A New Home

A story of finding my way back to belonging.

BY LUKE WAGNER '26

I wandered too long,  
a stranger in my own life,  
watching laughter through glass,  
close enough to see, too far to touch.

I lived at the edge of things,  
where streets stretched into silence,  
where each step away felt like exile,  
where the night ended not in sleep,  
but in the long breath before loneliness.

It was waiting—always waiting—  
for the thaw, for the bus  
for the distance to shrink between myself and  
the life  
that was unfolding without me.  
It was missing out,  
a shadow at the door,  
a name forgotten when the next round poured.

I thought I'd always be waiting—  
a demon waiting for the sun,  
a shadow longing for substance—  
But then, I found you.

No more roads to cross,  
no more wind carving through my ribs,  
no more slipping out before the story's final  
line.

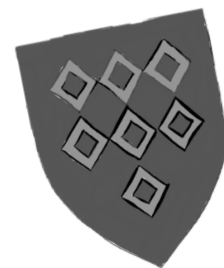
You—your golden glow,  
your river's hush, your open doors.  
You, where laughter lives close,  
where my friends are not echoes,  
but voices in the room.

No more waiting, no more watching  
as life unfolded from too many blocks away.

You pulled me back—

to laughter within  
reach,  
to footsteps that end  
at home,  
to a world I no  
longer watch from  
the window.

And when I leave,  
you will linger—  
not as a memory,  
but as a pulse  
beneath my skin,  
a warmth dispelling shadows.



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**GRAPHIC BY EMILY PALLAN '27**

# Somewhere Between Performance and Reality: A Review of “be cozy”

An original play that successfully subverts reality.

BY COURTNEY HINES '28

The real world is never as stable as we think—especially when a story dares to break it right before our eyes. From March 6-9, Harvard students sold out the original play “be cozy,” which distilled a whole world into a living room—a living room where the lines between performance and reality blurred with unsettling ease. Staged at the Loeb Experimental Theater, this play captivated me with its psychological depth and immersive staging, drawing me in not merely as a spectator but as a silent participant in the characters’ lives unraveling before me.

“be cozy,” an original play written and directed by Zach Halberstam '25, follows rising horror film actress Emily (Maibritt Henkel '25), who grows anxious from the pressure of her current role to the point of insomnia and increasingly alarming outbursts. Her developing mania strains her relationship with her compulsively hygienic boyfriend Robert (Isaac Newman '25), who is struggling to find employment after dropping out of medical school. Witnessing the two’s deteriorating relationship is Emily’s younger brother Andrew (Benjamin Walter '26), who lives indefinitely with the couple and spends all of his time studying flashcards in preparation for a game show he will soon be on.

On the periphery is Steve (Matine Khalighi '25), Emily’s co-star and the play’s narrator. He embodies both the antagonist in her film and an omnipotent force in the show, weaving through the characters’ lives. At times, he serves as the narrator, while at others, he directly engages in the scenes, manipulating and influencing the action.

Steve’s character is “Something in between [Emily’s] co-star and the actual monster. Her co-star, the monster in the movie, [is] the monster in real life. He’s meant to feel in control,” Halberstam said. “I intended [Steve] to be in control of the narrative, and when [Emily] feels trapped, she feels trapped in a lot of ways. I wanted there to be a person who is doing a lot of the trapping.”

I observed the evidence of Halberstam’s intentions for Steve in the play, yet I found that my interpretation of the character differed. In tense scenes, Steve was always visibly roaming a balcony behind the living room in the dark, as though his presence in Emily’s was constantly underlying. While an inventive, powerful detail to include, I found that the subtlety to having Steve in the background made him a symbol for Emily’s struggle with reality rather than an active controlling agent. My attention gravitated more to the core of other characters’ stories.

Similar to Halberstam’s unique implementation of Steve’s character, the production team also leveraged stage innovations. Lighting designer Raul Bodrogean '25 meticulously inserted flashes of red and blue into scenes with predominantly natural lighting, emphasizing cracks in the characters’ realities.

Set designer Kyler Hoogendoorn-Ecker '27 succeeded in adding to this construction of a world

on the verge of collapse. The modest furniture in the living room was deliberately fashioned to make the audience uncomfortable, with the couch, the dining table, and an aged rug set unnaturally far apart. The distance between the furniture contributed to each actor’s performance, as they could be in the same room but feel like they were each in their own world.

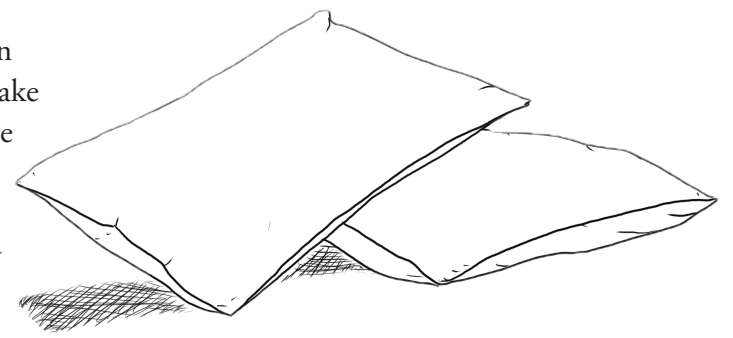
My favorite aspect of the set was its fully functioning sink and how it developed Robert’s character. Right at the front of the stage, the sink was immediately the center of the audience’s attention because of Robert’s compulsion to wash his hands with the same routine: wetting them, covering them in soap, rubbing each finger clean, drying them with a towel, and smoothing the towel over on the counter. Halberstam credited this practical detail to Robert’s actor, Newman, who thought the habit fit his character.

Halberstam’s writing granted the audience a strange comfort even in what seemed like the most impossible circumstances. Every aspect of the show cultivated intimacy, from its minimal set where the audience sat at eye-level to each scene, to the human dialogue heard not through microphones but through the perfectly projected voices of the actors. While there was an obvious wall of separation between the audience and the actors, we were still positioned as close spectators to each character’s most vulnerable moments, inches away from their tension-filled dinners, able to see their stressed expressions when they hid their faces from the other figures.

At certain moments, I had the urge to stand up from my seat and walk up to the production’s characters to closely examine them. I felt like I was a ghost in Emily, Andrew, and Robert’s home. These characters did not seem to be performing for us but rather living through seemingly solitary, real moments in time, and because of this, are comfortable enough to express their fears in the same way we all do when we roam our living rooms alone. This vulnerability left spectators free to invade their lives, which we did unhesitatingly.

Halberstam subverted my previous impression of monologues by masterfully depicting Emily’s anxieties and breakdowns in a believable format. Towards the beginning of the play, she rehearses her scenes out loud, talking herself through the lines that she forgot, before she eventually began to spiral, at one point screaming her fears of the future. That scene was particularly powerful and lingering, thanks to Henkel’s moving performance and Halberstam’s compelling writing. Her words are less so a confession to the audience but a desperate attempt to regain control over her unraveling thoughts, exposing her internal chaos without filter.

Speaking with Newman about Robert’s character after viewing “be cozy” revealed the power of intimacy between the audience and characters. Newman explained his understanding of the collapse of Emily and Robert’s relationship from the perspective of Robert—when Robert left.



“Emily stayed in the same place, and time kept going. She got stuck in this loop. She’s in this cycle that she imposed on herself. Everything’s already happened before. Everything’s gonna happen again.”

Every night Emily spends awake, her sleep deprivation triggers a spiral where she loses control of her reality. “That’s where she is, and she needs to figure out how to get out of that cycle. And Robert has gotten too far away, and she’s staying there,” Newman said.

However, in contrast to Newman’s perspective, the audience’s holistic viewing of Emily and Robert’s experiences develop a different conception of Emily’s struggles that stretched beyond the cycle Robert identified. In this dissonance, spectators became the bridge between these disconnected individuals, underscoring the power of intimacy between the audience and the characters in “be cozy” and reaching realizations about the characters that often surpassed what they thought of one another.

I left the Loeb Ex with both judgment and pity for each of Halberstam’s characters, a reaction that at first troubled me. All of us have sleepless, anxiety-riddled nights like Emily, a fear of imperfection like Robert, and moments of overbearing dependence like Andrew. I felt it unreasonable to resent any character for these faults, as these were attributes we could assign to ourselves at different points in our lives. But to harbor such strong feelings towards fiction is proof of compelling writing. In a way, my own reality was blurred; I felt so submerged in the living room set that I momentarily forgot I was merely an observer, reacting to their struggles as if they were my own.

Halberstam masterfully portrayed mental illness without making a spectacle of it. His decision to not label any of his characters with a diagnosis allowed the audience to relate to Halberstam’s scenes willingly. We believed for a moment that what we saw was real, and through this, our line between perception and reality was blurred. “be cozy” ultimately leaves us wondering; are the boundaries of sanity and illusion so clear-cut?

COURTNEY HINES '28

(COURTNEYHINES@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS QUESTIONING HER CURRENT FURNITURE POSITIONINGS WITH THE *INDEPENDENT*.

GRAPHIC BY CLARA LAKE '27



# SPORTS

## Women's Water Polo Makes Waves

Harvard women's water polo is on an exciting winning streak as they strive for the conference championship.

BY LAYLA CHAARAOUI '26



The Harvard women's water polo team is riding high, showing no signs of slowing down. This past weekend's dominant 16-9 win over Brown pushed their streak to an impressive 14 games while also marking a significant milestone for head coach Ted Minnis—his 250th career victory.

This remarkable run is record-breaking. Ranked No. 8 in the nation, the Crimson holds an exceptional 16-1 record; their standout wins include ones against competitive programs like Princeton, University of California San Diego, and the University of Michigan. This is the team's best start to a season since 1989 and marks the longest active winning streak among the top-10-ranked women's water polo teams. With every victory, Harvard is strengthening its position in the collegiate water polo scene, steadily rising in the rankings.

Standout goalie Orli Cooper '28 has won Defensive Player of the Week four times this season—every gameweek. Her performance has also recently earned her Harvard's Student-Athlete of the Week. For Cooper, it does not feel real. "Each week, I expected to lose the streak, but then I was pleasantly surprised when I saw the results," she said. "Even though it's my name on the page, I wouldn't be able to make any saves without the support from my team." Cooper's team spirit is inspiring, as she proves to be a force to be reckoned with. In addition to earning Player of the Week honors, she plays for the USA Youth National Team and secured fourth place in the U18 World Championships in Chengdu, China, this past September.

"We all share a common goal of pushing ourselves to succeed in our sport while also prioritizing academics and supporting each other as individuals. This balance has created strong and lasting friendships outside of the pool," said attacker Lucy Berkman '27. This sense of team chemistry was a universal theme among the women's water polo players interviewed by the Independent. "The team has given me a sense of community, and the unwavering support from my teammates extends beyond the sport we play. We have built a culture rooted in trust, encouragement, and genuine care for one another," she added.

A sport like water polo needs teamwork and communication for a group to succeed. With players constantly in motion, carrying out quick decisions under pressure, and continuously coordinating offensive and defensive strategies, effectively working together is essential. As the Harvard women's water polo team has demonstrated this season, their success stems from a deep sense of trust and cohesion. Each player on this year's team has confidence in one another, demonstrated by the fact that every field player has scored at least once this season. They rely on their teammates for guidance and play execution while in the water.

The supportive, hard-working, and welcoming environment that the team has cultivated has been integral for new teammates. Defender Niki Piován's '28 transition from

Greece to the United States has been difficult, both in terms of academics and adjusting to a new environment. "However, the team has made this process so much easier by creating such a welcoming and encouraging atmosphere. I have been part of many teams, both in my club and with the national team, but none have been quite like this one. The sense of unity, trust, and commitment among my teammates here is truly special, and it has made my experience all the more meaningful," she said.

Like Cooper, Piován competed in the U18 World Championships but with the Greek National Team, which secured second place. She further showcased her talent at the U19 European Championship in Croatia, helping Greece earn a third-place finish. "Being able to represent Harvard while also bringing my own background and experience from Greece to the game has been an incredible opportunity," she said, reflecting the pride she takes in these experiences.

Co-captain and attacker Erin Kim '25 highlighted that the team's growth stems from each member's unwavering commitment and dedication to the sport. "We always push each other to be better every day. While talent is a big contributor to our success, I believe our mindset matters even more. Our goal every game is to play together and play for each other—something that is only possible because of the trust and love we share," she said.

Utility and co-captain Ella Schneider '26 emphasized her counterpart's sentiments: "The group this year is so special because they genuinely are my best friends, and that connection is clear in the pool. This year, we are doing things our program has never done before, and it's because we have this structure of support and positivity both inside and outside the pool," she said. "Me and the co-captain Erin have worked really hard to help cultivate a supportive, calm, and happy environment on the team. Being captain of this group is such a privilege, and there is no other group I would rather beat program records with."

Over spring break, the team will head to California to play Stanford and the University of Southern California, the nationally ranked No. 1 and No. 2 teams, respectively. They also have a second-round conference game against Michigan, and rematch games against the University of California San Diego and Indiana, the latter of which is the team's only loss of the season. "The expectation is that we bring energy, encourage one another, and contribute to a supportive environment," Berkman explained.

Their trip to the West Coast is significant: historically, water polo has long been dominated by California (twelve of fifteen members of the

Harvard women's water polo team are from the state), where the sport is immensely popular and the collegiate scene is successful. This has led to a stigma that East Coast teams are not as competitive.

However, this narrative is beginning to change. East Coast teams are making their mark, performing strongly in matches and increasing their NCAA appearances. And this year, Harvard is currently on top: out of the top 10 schools ranked in the Collegiate Water Polo Association,



Harvard is the only women's water polo team from the East. Other East Coast schools are not far behind, but this statistic is a testament to the strength and dominance of this year's Harvard women's team.

So, what is next on the team's mind? Winning the CWPA conference championship, all of the interviewees shared. Currently ranked No. 1 in their conference, they remain undefeated in the first round of conference games, and a victory would mark the team's first-ever conference championship.

"As this is my final season, I want to get the best closure possible with ending my career. Ideally, this would be in the form of our first-ever conference championship in April and our first trip to the NCAA tournament," said center Kaity Greenwald '25. "However, while these are uncertainties, I am certain that I will leave this season feeling accomplished because of the relationships I have made and the athlete this program has shaped me into."

"I confidently say our culture is the best it has been," said Greenwald, and it is one they are determined to carry forward into the future. "I'm excited to continue growing as a player within this program," said Piován. "The foundation we're setting this season will carry forward into future years, and I can't wait to see how we continue to push ourselves and elevate the team's success."

Yet now the team is focused on the upcoming games, with a potential championship on the horizon to cap off the season. "Ending a historic season with a title would be the perfect culmination of our efforts and a defining moment in our own careers, as well as school history," Berkman said.

**LAYLA CHAARAOUI '26 (LAYLACHAARAOUI@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF THE HARVARD INDEPENDENT.**

**PHOTO COURTESY OF HARVARD ATHLETICS**



# Sports Spotlight: Harvard Men's Tennis

The Harvard men's tennis team is a dominant force on the court.

BY JOCELYNE DELGADO '28

Harvard men's tennis is no stranger to these words as their legacy of excellence and ambition has led them to 33 Ivy League Championships and 29 NCAA Appearances. This year's team embodies a similar penchant for greatness, demonstrating standout performances heading into the 2025 spring season. The Crimson currently holds an overall record of 9-3, with wins against top-25 schools such as No. 22 NC State University and No. 20 Princeton. They also suffered close 3-4 losses against No. 12 Duke University, No. 13 Texas A&M University, and No. 17 University of Michigan.

Harvard currently holds a top-25 national ranking at No. 12. In the 2024 season, the team reached a program-record ranking of No. 6. For the 2025 season, player Peter Benjamin Privara '28 has high hopes for the team. "I think our team right now can actually be even better than the team before, but it's gonna be hard... I overall think that this team might rank around the top five. I would say it's definitely in our power."

A key highlight of the team's season thus far is their victory in the ECAC Tournament. Their 24th championship win solidified them as a top team in the Ivy League. "We haven't won [an] ECAC Tournament in a while. I think it's been maybe four or five years. So it's definitely a highlight of this semester so far," said player Mitchell Lee '28. "Hopefully, we can build upon it. It's always good beating our Ivy League rivals, so it was fun."

Harvard had an impressive undefeated run on the weekend of March 1 and 2, taking down Middle Tennessee 4-2 and Quinnipiac 7-0. "It's really good to have weeks like this... As the

coaches are always saying, teams which are [in the top] 10 to 50, on [a] good day, can beat us. So, those were good wins, and we can gain confidence from it," Privara explained. Now on a winning streak, the team is headed to sunny Southern California to play against No. 6 UC San Diego, UC Irvine, and San Diego State.

As the Ivy League Tournament inches closer, every point matters. Still, captain Elisha Thornton '26 spoke optimistically of the team's potential.

"I don't think the team has any limits to what we can achieve. I think we've proven that this year, as we've beaten Top 10 teams," Thornton said. "We've lost super close matches to a couple of other front-end teams. So absolutely, we have what it takes to do some great stuff."

If one thing is for certain, it is that the team could not have made it this far without Head Coach Andrew Rueb '95. Rueb, a two-time Ivy League Player of the Year and team captain for the Crimson, recently surpassed his 100th career win as the



team's head coach.

"We're all super happy for him to reach 100 wins. We see [the effort] he puts in every day, [and] how much he cares about us," said Thornton. "He really puts an emphasis on this place being like [a] family. And I think we all feel that. We all feel supported and involved and feel like we've got one [of] the best coaches in

college tennis."

"He creates really good exercises [in] the practice. And he's really nice and helpful," added Privara. "If I'm having any kind of trouble, he just tries to help me and tell me what to do, and really tries to understand me. That's what I really value about him."

Including his time as an assistant coach and associate head coach, Rueb has led the Crimson to 286 team wins.

However, beyond the camaraderie cultivated by the coach, the players themselves fuel one another's passion for the game and commitment to each other. These close ties have persisted for years: 2020 Harvard men's Tennis captain Galen Lee '20 expressed his love for the team before graduating.

"As much as it was a personal journey of introspection, HMT has always been greater than the self. I am incredibly lucky to have been surrounded by bright, talented individuals full of humility, many of whom have served as mentors to me. There's a unique meritocratic environment on HMT that promotes excellence and ownership from the first-years to the captains," he reflected.

This year, Harvard has its eyes set on claiming the Ivy League Title and making it far in the NCAA tournament. Thornton is confident for the season to come: "We know our goals. I can predict we're going to come here and work on ourselves every day, we're going to go play committed tennis every match we play, and we're going to leave this without having any regrets, leaving everything out there."

**JOCELYNE DELGADO '28  
(JIDELGADO@COLLEGE.HARVARD.  
EDU) WILL BE SITTING IN THE  
FRONT ROW AT THE IVY LEAGUE  
TOURNAMENT.**

**PHOTO COURTESY OF HARVARD  
MEN'S TENNIS TEAM**



# Indy Sportsbook: Bracket Busters & Title Chasers

A list of the key teams to know for The Big Dance.

BY TYLER DANG '28

Though it feels like the semester started yesterday, March has arrived, bringing with it erratic weather, grueling midterms, and madness. The NCAA Division I single-elimination basketball tournament, or March Madness, pits 68 college teams across the country against each other. Held annually for the past 86 years, March Madness hosts teams of different skill levels as they play with raw passion and talent. Whether you're filling out your bracket, (legally) betting, or are a basketball lover, March Madness offers the perfect excuse not to do your homework.

With 352 D-I teams in the NCAA, it may be hard to truly know which team to look out for. Here at the *Independent*, we have created a brief introduction to some of the key contenders and underdogs to keep track of. Of course, anything can happen (hence Madness), so if a supposed contender gets upset in the first round, do not be too surprised.

## MEN'S CONTENDERS

Historically, the triumvirate of college programs consists of Duke University, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the University of Kentucky. However, times have changed, and some new challengers have planted themselves at the top of the rankings.

**Duke University (+340):** With a record of 28-3, the Blue Devils secured the first seed in the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC). Despite the retirement of the legendary Coach K, Duke remains a premier program threatening to make another deep run. Freshman Cooper Flagg leads the team in all major statistics except blocks, with an astounding 19 points per game on nearly 50 percent from the field. One of the few blemishes on Duke's season is a 71-77 loss to Clemson—the conference opponents held Flagg to 35 percent shooting to give the Blue Devils their only conference loss. Regardless, Duke hopes to exceed their Elite 8 finish from last year.

**Auburn University (+380):** The Tigers (yes, there are two) are currently ranked No. 1 in the Southeastern Conference (SEC) with a record of 27-4. Despite losses against Duke and the University of Florida, the team has proved to be a formidable opponent, putting up the fourth-highest points per game with 85.4 this season. Following a loss to Auburn, Vanderbilt Head Coach Mark Byington claimed the Tigers "didn't have any weaknesses." Auburn boasts a 10-4 record against other Associated Press-ranked teams. This Tigers' line-up is led by senior Johni Broome and is filled with players who lost to Yale in the first round last year. Time will tell whether Auburn can claim the NCAA tournament title or if its 14th appearance will come to an early, disappointing end.

**University of Tennessee, Knoxville (+1600):** While falling fourth in the SEC ranking, the

Volunteers still rank with an NCAA fourth-best Basketball Power Index. Having lost to Purdue in the Elite 8 last year, Tennessee has made up for the loss of Dalton Knecht, who was drafted by the Los Angeles Lakers in 2024. While the Vols are sure to obtain a top seeding, their offensive consistency is questionable. Tennessee has breezed past non-conference opponents, but its conference record leaves much to be desired; this includes a 30-point loss to the Florida Gators. Despite Tennessee winning the rematch, many still doubt the Vols' ability to make a deep run.

## WOMEN'S CONTENDERS

Though much emphasis is placed on the triumphs and defeats in men's basketball, the women's side hosts many of the best collegiate athletes. With Caitlin Clark's dominance in Iowa and continued success for the Fever, women's basketball has seen unprecedented engagement in the last year.

### University of Texas at Austin

**(+600):** UT Austin has dominated this season with a D-I-best record of 29-2. Topping both the AP and Coaches polls, the Longhorns are second in point differential, averaging +25 points. Led by sophomore forward and SEC Player of the Year Madison Booker, Texas was awarded the second seed after a coin toss which gave the top seed to the University of South Carolina; the two are 1-1 this season. Having been bounced in the Elite Eight in 2024, Texas still needs to prove whether they can make it to their first NCAA championship since 1986.

**University of South Carolina (+290):** With a record of 27-3, the Gamecocks seek to win the championship again. Despite losing many players from last year to the WNBA draft, South Carolina has remained a dominant force in the SEC. However, South Carolina is ranked fifth on both the AP and Coaches polls, a far cry from their consistent dominance last year. South Carolina has three players averaging double-digit points, yet leading-scorer Joyce Edwards ranks 351st in points per game. With losses this season by 15 points and another by 29, questions surround the Gamecocks' ability to defend strong post players. It will be interesting to see if coach Dawn Staley can guide her team to become the first repeat champions since UConn's historic four-year reign from 2013 to 2016.

**University of Connecticut (+310):** Speaking of UConn, the Huskies, led by Paige Bueckers, finished first in the Big East. Last year, UConn advanced to the Final Four before being defeated by Caitlin Clark's Iowa. A legendary program with the most national championships

(11), UConn was defeated the last time they made it to the championship in 2022 in a low-scoring loss to the Gamecocks. For each of its three losses this season, the Huskies have kept things close, as they were tied with a little over two minutes left against USC and Tennessee. All eyes will be on Bueckers, who has reemphasized her intention to enter the draft.

## THE WILDCARDS

The tournament style enables any team to have their Cinderella story. In 2022, the 15th-seed Saint Peter's Peacocks advanced to the Final Four, defeating the seventh, second, and third seeds. Every year, major upsets shake up the tournament and disrupt many brackets. Although it's too early to predict specific upsets, especially with the teams yet to be selected, many squads will be eager to eliminate a top contender's championship hopes.

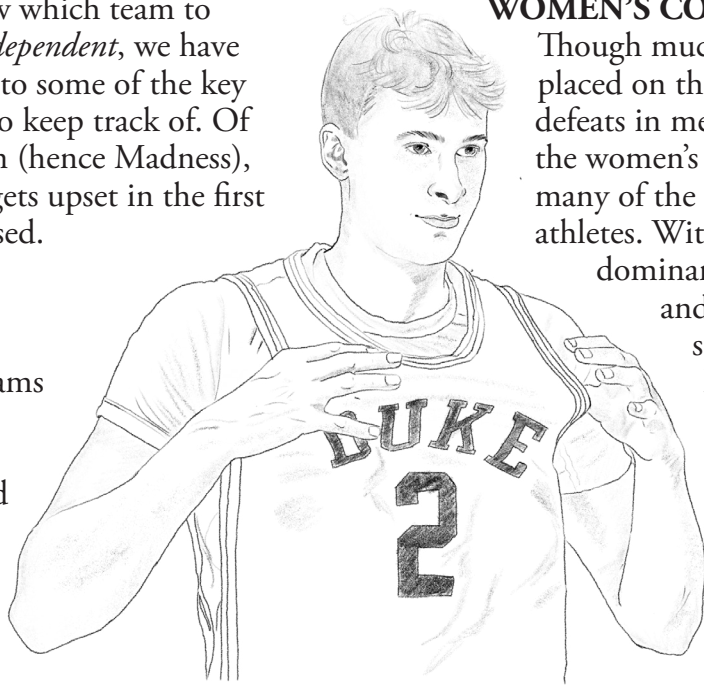
**St. John's University (Men +2200):** Topping the Big East for the first time since 1985, the Red Storm have steadily climbed the national rankings this year. They matched up twice against reigning champions UConn and emerged victorious both times. Under the coaching of Rick Pitino, the Red Storm's defense has been electric. Of their four losses, all were one-possession games. The Red Storm's victories have also been quite decisive. They sit at 16th on point differential leaders with an average victory of +12.7 points. Questions remain about their ability to compete against top teams. With only one game against a top 20 team resulting in a 2-point win over Marquette, the Red Storm will be tested.

**Texas Christian University (Women +7000):** Though the Horned Frogs have not made the tournament since 2010, TCU is a shoo-in for a spot this year. Last January, the team had to forfeit two games due to a lack of healthy players. Now led by new transfer Haley Van Lith, TCU ranks first in the Big East with a 28-3 record. Key wins against the No. 8 and No. 17 seeds show that the Horned Frogs belong among the best. However, TCU was blown out by South Carolina in a 33-point loss. In this game, the Horned Frogs shot an ugly 33 percent from the field and accumulated 20 turnovers. Yet, TCU is a robust team with the potential to throw off predictions with their three-point shooting and bench depth.

These are only a few of the teams that you should pay close attention to. Naturally, anything can happen: the first seed might be upset by the sixteenth, or they might sweep the whole tournament. Selection Sunday begins this March 16. For men, games begin March 18, culminating in the championship game on April 7. For women, games start on March 19, with the championship scheduled for April 6.

TYLER DANG '28 (TYLERDANG@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) HAS UTK WINNING IT ALL.

GRAPHIC BY MADISON KRUG '27





OPINIONS OF FORUM PIECES BELONG ONLY TO THE WRITER AND DO NOT REFLECT THE VALUES OF THE *INDEPENDENT*

1. Lucky Pair, Only Up To 12
2. Got The Short End Of It If You're Quadded
3. Makes For a Better Saying than "Luck of the Sketch"
4. Usually Lucky But They Had Some Troubles (Green)
5. Favors The Brave
6. Four Grandparents In One Bed Will Get You A Golden One
7. Starts The Issue
8. Munch Singer From Down Under, Or a Prophetic Sign

I K Y I E U I Y K T E S D K  
 O C C R S N R D V C R D E E  
 I Y D Y E C I R D C R R E I  
 R I A D H K S O N I I N D I  
 T T V N K T H A I D U I H C  
 E P I I E T K I C T L E M C  
 K U K C I T S C R D U I K H  
 C R C R E V T O R T C I W E  
 I I T E O I F A C S K C K C  
 T W C A F P V W U D D E P I  
 N I K H A R E T L D R E A P  
 D D D R A W V A U L C T E S  
 L H K H I C I A A S S D V U  
 Y E C I V R U H P D I C T A

STICK FORTUNE HARVARD  
 IRISH TICKET INDY AUSPICE  
 LUCK DRAW DICE



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