

December 11, 2025

HARVARD

Vol. LVII, Issue 15

INDEPENDENT

The student weekly since 1969

Bon Voyage



CONTENTS

About the *Independent*

3. Letter from the Editor: Doing the Things That Scare You

by Layla Chaaraoui '26

4. End of Semester Updates in Harvard and Cambridge

by Sara Kumar '27

5. "What Would Brooke Davis Do?"

by Layla Chaaraoui '26

6. No Place Like Home

by Noah Basden '29

7. A Sweet Escape: Reading Period Reflection

by Heidi Heffelfinger '26

8. Flying Out

by Caleb Boyce '29

10. Au Revoir: A Tale of Growing Pains

by Sidney Regelbrugge '28

11. Thoughts from New Quincy: Where the Light Thins

by Luke Wagner '26

13. An Evening at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum

by Eden Bridge-Hayes '29

14. "Radlove" for Women's Rugby

by Megan Legault '28

15. Fantasy Roundup: Week 14

by Tyler Dang '28

16. Bon Verb-age

by Fred Klein '28 and
Clara Lake '27

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.

For general or business inquiries, contact president@harvardindependent.com. Address Letters to the Editor, op-eds, or comments regarding content to editorinchief@harvardindependent.com. To subscribe to bi-weekly mailed print issues, email subscriptions@harvardindependent.com.

We belong to no one but ourselves.

MASTHEAD

EXECUTIVE BOARD

Katie Merriam '26, *President*

Layla Chaaraoui '26, *Editor-In-Chief*

Luke Wagner '26, *Managing Director*

Jonah Karafiol '26, *Managing Editor*

EDITORIAL BOARD

Sara Kumar '27, *News Editor*

Rania Jones '27, *Forum Editor*

Meena Behringer '27, *Arts Editor*

Kate Oliver '26, *Sports Editor*

Kalvin Frank '28, *Editorial Comp Director*

Caroline Stohrer '28, *Associate News Editor*

Pippa Lee '28, *Associate Forum Editor*

Raina Wang '28, *Associate Arts Editor*

Alejandro Sanchez '26, *Associate Sports Editor*

Mia Wilcox '28, *Columns Editor*

Tyler Dang '28, *Associate Editorial Comp Director*

Fred Klein '28, *Game Designer*

Courtney Hines '28, *Copy Editor*

Megan Legault '28, *Copy Editor*

Nashla Turcios '28, *Copy Editor*

BUSINESS BOARD

Mia Tavares '27, *Business Director*

Keith Hannon '27, *Operations Director*

Tomas Arroyo '27, *Advertising Director*

Frances Connors '26, *Programs Director*

Sophia Gonzalez '28, *Business Comp Director*

Anya Govil '28, *Associate Operations Director*

Whitney Ford '28, *Associate Advertising Director*

Clara Thiele '28, *Associate Marketing Director*

Caroline Bae '28, *Community Chair*

Santiago Kelly '26, *Community Chair*

MULTIMEDIA BOARD

Patrick Sliz '27, *Multimedia Director*

Daniel Rosario '27, *Website Director*

Ryan Irving '27, *Video Director*

Natalie Blanchfield '28, *Social Media Director*

Jordan Wasserberger '27, *Photo & Podcast Director*

Josie Whelan '28, *Multimedia Comp Director*

Janelle Souro '28, *Associate Website Director*

Janelle Wang '28, *Associate Video Director*

Wessal Bakry '28, *Associate Social Media Director*

John Sogutlu '28, *Associate Photo & Podcast Director*

DESIGN BOARD

Kayla Le '28, *Design Editor*

Angie Li '28, *Design Editor*

Clara Lake '27, *Covers Editor*

Amelie Lima '27, *Art Director*

Emma Crago '28, *Associate Art Director*

Neshama Ryman '28, *Design Comp Director*

Kerrie Zhu '28, *Design Comp Director*

INDEPENDENT STAFF

Adedoyin Adebayo '26, Abril Rodriguez-Diaz '26, Ilana Feder '26,

Annelise Fisher '26, Anthony Goenaga '26, Heidi Heffelfinger '26,

Santiago Kelly '26, Sachi Laumas '26, Andrew Morrissey '26,

Kayla Reifel '26, El Richards '26, Alma Russell '26, Reeve Sykes

'26, Gary Zhan '26, Trischelle Afihene '27, Triscia Afihene '27,

Isabella Andrade '27, Christie Beckley '27, Ella Bikoff '27, Breagh

Bridge '27, Riley Cullinan '27, Sophie Dauer '27,

Sophie Depaul '27, Madison Krug '27, Frida Lopez '27,

Bautista Martinez '27, Nicholas McQuilling '27,

Matthew Moore '27, Emily Pallan '27, Sophia Rascoff '27,

Brooklyn Sandridge '27, Lucie Stefanoni '27, Kelly Tung '27,

Zaid Al-Ississ '28, Britney Ampadu '28, Caroline Bae '28,

Maddie Bailey '28, Tilly Butterworth '28, Hudson Byrd '28,

Amanda Campos '28, Miranda Chao Hwang '28,

Natalie Cooper '28, Paige Cornelius '28, Cara Cronin '28,

David Daniel '28, Jocelyne Delgado '28, Lucy Duncan '28,

Ahmed Eldeeb '28, Ocean Feng '28, Eliza Glaeser '28, Tyler Hogan '28, Helen Hou '28, Ben Kaufman '28, Megan Legault '28, Olivia Lunseth '28, Lauren Mitchell '28, Alicia Moy '28, Blake O'Donnell '28, Alexandra Otto '28, Sidney Regelbrugge '28, Joshua Rodriguez Ortiz '28, Kyler Rno '28, Antonia Melina Salame '28, Malak Sannoun '28, Diana Senkivskyy '28, Anna Shao '28, Jackie Stjernfeldt '28, Ishaan Tewari '28, Clara Thiele '28, Taylor Thorne '28, Giulia Viacava '28, Joye Wingard '28, Allyson Xu '28, Jeffrey Yeo '28, Keenan Zeidan '28, Christiana Zembrowski '28, Amelie Zucker '28, Safa Ahmad '29, Philipos Alebachew '29, Seyi Amosun '29, Noah H Basden '29, Cameron Bernier '29, Julia Bouchut '29, Caleb Boyce '29, Eden Bridge-Hayes '29, Annabella Burton Boone '29, Sasha Cavell '29, Christine Choi '29, Claire Chung '29, Katherine Chung '29, Laura Cremer '29, Maya Eisner '29, Aidan Gallagher '29, Ellie Guo '29, Elle Huang '29, Hailey Kim '29, Abby Li '29, Justin Ma '29, Aviya Madar '29, Aaron Massachi '29, Katalin Mazansky '29, Nuala Mernin '29, Alex Mullen '29, Chau Nguyen '29, Uzochi Otji '29, Samuel Posten '29, Wallace Selph '29, Cloris Shi '29, Sonia Singh '29, Mia Stewart '29, Osa Unuigbo '29, Katharine Weiner '29, Rhea Werner '29, Audrey Wu '29

THE SUSTAINERS

The Sustainers are a group of Independent alumni committed to supporting our mission by funding one month of office rent each year for at least five years.

MARK SHIELDS '70

JIM VASEFF '71

DAVID SMITH '75

RANDY BUCKLIN '82

MARK PELOFSKY '84

JULIE DAM '93

WILL RECKLER '99

Letter from the Editor: Doing the Things That Scare You

My final editor's letter, reflecting on the hardest yet most rewarding year of my life.

BY LAYLA CHAARAOUI '26

Every semester, the *Harvard Independent* holds a meeting with our Graduate Board—a group of alumni from the newspaper who provide guidance, support, and help steer Indy operations. This fall marked my seventh one, and last as Editor-in-Chief. The feeling I experienced during those three hours, surrounded by the leaders who have inspired me to dedicate myself to this publication, is the very same feeling that has carried me through my final week as EIC. With the publication of this letter, my term officially concludes, and I remain deeply in awe. “*How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard,*” A.A. Milne in *The Complete Tales of Winnie-the-Pooh* wrote.

The semesterly Grad Board call represents an important moment for our publication: a chance to come together, reflect on the semester's accomplishments and challenges, and outline how we hope to grow and strengthen the Indy moving forward. In November, as we walked through our report and highlighted the incredible feats we've achieved this semester—15 issues, 236 articles and crosswords, and 51 new members—I found myself taking note of how many recent graduates were on the call, listening closely, asking thoughtful questions, and offering feedback throughout the meeting.

Former president Arsh Dhillon '23 drew me in with her extraordinary design work, which made me fall in love with the publication. Mary Julia Koch '23 and Noah Tavares '24—EIC and President of the *Independent* in 2022, when I first comped—were the ones who encouraged me to apply for an associate editor position. Marbella Marlo '24, EIC in 2023, supported me throughout our time working together, first as an associate, then section head, and later as the newly established role of Managing Editor.

Mir Zayid Alam '25, former Head of Business, collaborated with me and Frances Connors '26 to launch the *Harvard Independent* Journalism Academy. And finally, Eliza Kimball '25—my first editor, the section head to my associate position, my president, and my friend—was the person who trusted me enough to offer me the role of EIC.

My transition out of this role isn't goodbye—not really. The familiar faces on the Grad Board call proved that. Their commitment to this publication has carried on long after they graduated, just as it has with our leaders from the '70s, who have remained active members of the Grad Board and whom I've been lucky enough to meet. Every semester, alumni reach out asking to visit our space, browse our archives, or share memories from the Indy's early days in 1969. At any point of engagement with the *Independent*, the community remains strong, ever-growing, and endlessly welcoming.

I feel incredibly lucky to have been part of this publication, and I am deeply proud of what we've accomplished over my three years with the Indy. I joined by chance, yet it has become both

the most meaningful and the most challenging part of my college experience. Harvard news coverage has never been easy—the landscape is constantly shifting, the University is always in the spotlight, and student safety and representation remain at stake.

But that's what makes this work so rewarding. I've written investigative pieces discussing faults in Harvard's mental health services, the storied legacy of slavery emphasized through student dorms, and the financial and personal motivators behind controversial public demonstrations on Harvard's campus. I've profiled student artists, shows, and organizations, and I've covered politics, reports, and Harvard in the news. I've written 56 pieces for the *Independent*, and each one has mattered. For that, I am grateful.

I am grateful for the support systems in my personal life and my home at 12 Arrow St., who encouraged me to keep going when things were difficult. I am grateful to Jonah Karafiol '26, Katie Merriam '26, and Luke Wagner '26, my incredible executive team, who stood firmly by my side this past year in leading this paper together. I am grateful to those who picked up extra work during Tuesday night copy editing in our space, who stayed up with me on Wednesday nights reviewing our layout, and who grabbed a fresh copy of the *Independent* every Thursday morning. Your engagement and excitement constantly reminded me of why I did this work, no matter how hard it became. Each time I walked through my dining hall after a long night of writing, editing, and production and spotted that week's issue on the table, I felt a wave of relief and pride. Another one down; again, that *feeling*.

Had I given up, had I stopped challenging myself or pushing forward, I would never have felt the fulfillment I experience each Thursday, at every Grad Board meeting, and as I write today. Giving everything you have to something is vulnerable and scary, but it also holds you to the highest standard of work and effort. The lessons of resilience, dedication, and leadership that I've learned here have carried into every other student organization, class, and personal endeavor I am a part of, inspiring me to exceed beyond what I once believed were my limitations. I'm not afraid of the work; I welcome it, because I've seen the successes and achievements that come when I give something my all.

Letting go is scary—but it is even scarier to not have anything worth letting go of.

So do the things that

scare you, the unknowns you hesitate to pursue, because you can't know the good that might come from them until you try. The feeling I have now is indescribable, and I hope everyone gets to experience a moment like this someday—the moment of releasing something that has defined you, changed you for the better, and that you've helped make better in return. I see the legacy I'm leaving in the remarkable writers and editors who will continue to grow and shape this paper. In the years to come, I see the *Independent* continuing to push the boundaries of our publication, calling attention to undercovered stories on campus, and starting new initiatives to uplift campus creativity and community. For that, I am excited.

Throughout my time in the Indy, I have grown as a writer, editor, reader, and leader, and I have been able to think more critically, engage more creatively, and move more courageously. I have given my all to the *Independent*, yet it has given back so much more to me in return. It has been the honor of my life to have been your Editor-in-Chief, and it is the greatest thing I have ever done.

Today is Thursday, Harvard—and my final Thursday at the helm. For that, I am whole.

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

**GRAPHIC BY ANNELISE FISHER
'26**



End of Semester Updates in Harvard and Cambridge

A breakdown of some of fall 2025's most noteworthy events.

BY SARA KUMAR '27

As of Dec. 9, President Donald Trump has signed 218 executive orders, issued 112 proclamations, and declared 55 memoranda throughout his second term in the White House. 14 executive orders have explicitly related to American education, and six of these focused on the post-secondary landscape—targeting elite institutions including Harvard University. On campus, this political upheaval has been paired with academic awards, athletic commitments, fiscal appropriations, and more during the fall 2025 semester. Below are some of the most recent—and most notable—news updates of the past five months.

Four Harvard Seniors Were Announced as 2026 Marshall Scholars

The Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission announced its 2026 cohort of Marshall Scholars on Dec. 9. Among the winners were four Harvard College seniors—Kashish Bastola '26, Hannah Duane '26, Tenzin Gund-Morrow '26, and Ashwin Sivakumar '26—as well as College alumna Tomi Siyanbade '24.

The Marshall Scholarship was founded in 1953 in honor of former United States Secretary of State George C. Marshall. The initiative finances young Americans deemed as “of high ability” to pursue a graduate-level degree at an accredited United Kingdom institution in any field of study. Each year, up to fifty scholars are selected.

“I got the sweetest call on the walk from my class in Wasserstein Hall to my dorm in Kirkland—all seven of the interview panelists [were] on the line!!! They said they had one last question for me, and it was if I accept the Marshall,” Gund-Morrow wrote in a statement to the *Independent*. “A really hectic mixture of laughter, disbelief, tears of joy, and gratitude ensued. I just plopped down right there in the grass after the call ended... Then, of course, I called my parents.”

Though enduring academic excellence is the prevailing purpose of the program, the Marshall Scholarship is unique in its focus on strengthening relationships between the British and American peoples, governments, and national institutions. Marshall Scholars are not only expected to exhibit profound personal growth after completing the program, but they also should directly engage with Britain to become a community of Anglo-American ambassadors.

“I got really lucky to have a family and community that made this possible,” Gund-Morrow continued. “This was a weird fall for me. I lost my grandmother and one of the mentors at Harvard who poured into me over the past four years, Setti Warren—he actually wrote my Marshall recommendation. So, even more than usual, it didn't feel like I was winning anything alone.”

Chosen by eight regional committees and out of over 1,000 applicants, Harvard had the most Marshall Scholars out of the 31 representing universities across 43 student winners this year. This announcement arrives around three weeks after eight different Harvard seniors were honored as 2026 Rhodes Scholars.

“I'm excited to explore the UK far and wide. I'm planning to study public safety policy and urban planning, so I really want to make great cities,” Gund-Morrow concluded.

Upcoming Changes to the Institute of Politics Executive Board

The end of the semester is also characterized by leadership turnover for many Harvard College student

organizations. On Nov. 10, the IOP announced its 2026 Executive Board. Incoming President Lorenzo Ruiz '27 and Vice President Will Smialek '27 are eager to make potential structural adjustments to the organization's head operations.

“One of the changes that we are going to be pushing for is to make our leadership more equal and more accessible,” Smialek shared with the *Independent* in November. “The establishment of co-presidents [is a part] of our platform.”

“This is one platform point of many that we will be bringing to [SAC] for them to vote on and pass democratically,” Ruiz added.

The IOP's Student Advisory Committee and Executive Team are in charge of making any constitutional changes to the organization and thus approving this shift. As of right now, nothing has been confirmed, though Smialek and Ruiz are looking to re-evaluate the feasibility of their platform during the early days of their upcoming term.

Funding Cuts to the Department of Housing and Urban Development Continuum of Care Program Hit Massachusetts Hard

Internal affairs are not the only matters potentially affecting the Harvard community, as the institution holds deep ties with Massachusetts land and realty.

On Nov. 13, the DHUD announced significant funding cuts for permanent housing programs for unhoused individuals. More than half of the 2026 fiscal appropriations for the Continuum of Care program that partners with local anti-homelessness nonprofits will be lost. Money will be moved to transitional housing assistance, stipulated by work or service requirements.

Under the Trump administration's funding reforms, Massachusetts is at risk of losing around \$77 million, equivalent to 4,822 beds. Impacts extend beyond Massachusetts, with Connecticut potentially losing approximately \$57 million or 3,739 beds, Maine \$14 million or 1,131 beds, Rhode Island \$9.6 million or 831 beds, New Hampshire \$6.5 million or 406 beds, and Vermont \$3.9 million or 317 beds.

Harvard undergraduates operate two shelters for unhoused individuals—Harvard Square Homeless Shelter and Y2Y. “We started from HSHS staff members who saw a unique need for a shelter for young adults. And we provide everything from overnight shelter to dinner...and case management services,” Y2Y Administrative Director Necati Unsal '26 told the *Independent*.

However, Unsal expressed relief that this funding shift will likely not trickle down to these organizations. “Honestly, [there are] no direct effects as far as I can see. There may be some guests experiencing more downstream effects of this stuff.”

Harvard Baseball Players Heading to the MLB Next Semester

For two players on the Harvard Baseball team, 2025 dramatically altered their higher education trajectory after both were drafted to the MLB this July.

Deciding to continue at Harvard while also accepting the professional athletic opportunity, Truman Pauley '27 plans to finish his last three semesters at the College by Fall 2028.

“Education has always been important to my family, and I, and Harvard is an incredible school and place to be. I was given this incredible opportunity to follow my dream and play professional baseball, but I'm finishing my degree,” Pauley wrote to the *Independent*. “The MLB actually encourages their players to finish school, as they have a program that compensates tuition. Now, I can only go back to school in the Fall, as the spring is the baseball season. But I've been taking extra courses so I'll finish my degree just a semester behind my class.”

Pauley was offered a spot on the Mets Minor League, Single-A affiliate, the St. Lucie Mets, located in Florida. “I was lucky and was given the opportunity to finish the summer with the Single A team in Florida, so I kinda know what it's like. But of course I'm nervous, you'd be crazy if you weren't,” Pauley continued.

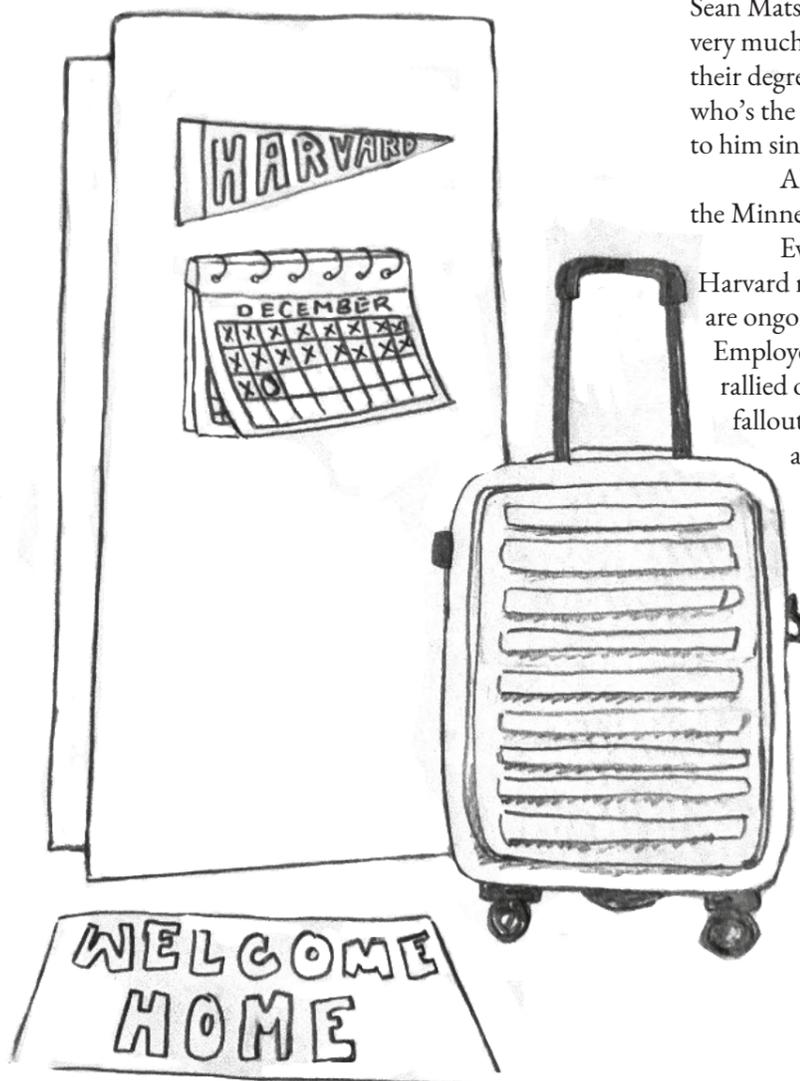
Harvard baseball has sent a little under two dozen players to the MLB throughout the team's historic tenure. Most recently, Tanner Smith '25 and Sean Matson '25 joined the MLB in 2023. “I looked very much up to those guys. They all came back to finish their degrees. Harvard has a pitcher, Hunter Bigge, who's the big league closer for the Rays. I really look up to him since he also studied Physics,” Pauley said.

Alongside Pauley, Callan Fang '27 was drafted to the Minnesota Twins this past summer.

Even as students head home for winter break, Harvard remains in a state of flux. Wage negotiations are ongoing between Harvard and the 32BJ Service Employees International Union, who most recently rallied outside of University Hall on Dec. 8; the fallout has continued for Professor Larry Summers after his further ties to Jeffrey Epstein were revealed; and there have been persistent funding cuts and layoffs at the Harvard School of Engineering and Applied Sciences.

SARA KUMAR '27 (SJKUMAR@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS SAD TO WRITE THAT THIS IS HER LAST ARTICLE AS NEWS EDITOR OF THE HARVARD INDEPENDENT.

GRAPHIC BY NUALA MERNIN '29



“What Would Brooke Davis Do?”

The JFK Jr. Forum’s final conversation of the semester discussed activism and artistry with Sophia Bush.

BY LAYLA CHAARAOUI '26

On Dec. 3, American actress, activist, and podcast host Sophia Bush took the John F. Kennedy Jr. Forum stage for the final panel of the year. Titled “Activism and Entertainment,” the talk was moderated by JFK Jr. Forum Director Aaron Goldman.

Bush is known for her starring roles on television and film, including Brooke Davis on the 2003-2013 teen drama series “One Tree Hill,” Erin Lindsay on the police drama series “Chicago P.D.,” and Dr. Cass Beckman on the medical drama series “Grey’s Anatomy” since season 21. These roles have allowed her to represent women authentically and in conventionally male-dominated fields.

“When I’m going to play someone in a role like that, where I know women are underrepresented, one of my favorite things is the prep is going to meet with women who do those jobs, hearing their stories, hearing how they balance their time, hearing about the microaggressions they experience, hearing about their success, hearing about what their track into their career looked like,” Bush explained.

Bush selects her acting jobs carefully and, despite initial scripts, will often instill her own values into the characters she plays. For example, in OTH, Bush had Davis boast a strong entrepreneurial spirit, social confidence, and personal worth.

All JFK Forums include opportunities for audience questions. “What did you learn from playing Brooke, and what lessons were you able to take from that character into either your personal life or your career?” I asked.

“There was a boldness about her,” Bush reflected. “She’s a very unapologetic person. There is something about really stepping into your power as an exercise that I’ve reflected on more recently.”

“Some of our writers on that show were like... ‘fine, [Brooke Davis is] going to fix it. She’s going to organize for union wages like at Carl’s.’ And I was like, ‘Yes, we have to do that,’” Bush added. “Maybe that was because of me influencing her, but I know she influenced me as well. Certainly, when I go on a rant occasionally on the Internet, I’m like, ‘she would be proud.’”

Beyond the acting profession, Bush has extensive experience in community activism and philanthropic work. So far, her efforts have centered on LGBTQ+ rights, abortion rights, environmental awareness, and presidential elections, among other causes. Bush has also been a fierce advocate for Democratic presidential candidates, campaigning for Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012, Hillary Clinton in 2016, Joe Biden in 2020, and Kamala Harris in 2024. She was a founding member of “Time’s Up” and a vocal supporter of the “Me Too” movement, citing her own experiences on a podcast episode of Monica Lewinsky’s “Reclaiming.” She is also involved with organizations such as I Am A Voter and Human Rights Campaign. This work and the topics she cares about have always been a part of who she is, she said.

“The profound responsibility of

representing people’s stories, helping to bring their life experiences to screen, maybe create empathy or curiosity—and I’m just a news junkie. It was the right balance for me,” she explained, describing her transition from studying theater to studying journalism at the University of Southern California to act upon her activist instincts.

Bush continues to elevate these conversations on her podcast “Work in Progress,” which was another focal point of the discussion. She has hosted prominent guests, including Michelle Obama, Malala Yousafzai, and Ava DuVernay, as well as Lewinsky and Harris, using the platform to delve into some of today’s most urgent political and social issues.

“A real source of joy for me is to give people a space where they can really be heard and they can really be themselves, and they can expound on their ideas or laugh or remind you they’re human or that they’re growing where they’re offered space to change their mind or talk about their own evolution,” she said.

Bush has been especially outspoken about women’s rights and gender equality in entertainment, advocating for equal pay and fair compensation.

“My two new favorite words for women are counter-offer. It’s so incredibly important for you, for all of us to negotiate for ourselves,” Bush said.



She also affirmed the power of both genders working together to level the playing field: “Equal pay can’t just be women talking to each other, men have to get involved in the conversation... When I found out that 20 years into my career, I was still being offered 50% of what the guy they hired to play my dad was getting offered, I was like, ‘Well, thanks for telling me, but this is unacceptable,’” Bush explained.

“But I needed that allyship from him also to even know to fight for myself the way that I did. So, it’s an individual project certainly, but it’s also kind of a group project, and I expect everyone to sign up for a role.”

Bush stressed the vital duty artists can fulfill when they use their platforms to champion change. “I look a lot at what art was able to do in terms of social movement,” she said. She described the positive effect the television sitcom

“Will & Grace” had on shifting public opinion of gay marriage, photographs that came out of the freedom riders, and imagery from the AIDS crisis as examples in which art brought public change.

“If it’s writing, if it’s photography, if it’s painting, if it’s performance, if it’s a sitcom, if it’s something you can give to your family—what is it you can do that makes someone or their circumstance seen instead of that circumstance being something that continues to be ignored,” she explained.

“I believe that we have to use our relative platforms and voices to remind each other that we’re neighbors, whether we live next door to each other or halfway around the world... We’ve got to be connected, and I think art does that in a way that a lot of other things don’t.”

...

Bush ended with a pointed reminder of the power of speaking up, urging the audience to raise their voices and advocate for change. “When good people stay quiet, bad behavior feels like it has the space to grow,” she said, an apt reflection of her enduring commitment to advocacy and creative work. This sentiment also echoed a broader theme of the Forum this semester: conversations that reached across the political aisle, pushed the boundaries of debate, and engaged students from across Harvard’s schools.

Goldman closed the event by thanking Bush and the many staff members who work each semester tirelessly to bring Forum discussions to life—including the media services team, facilities staff, student workers, and JFK Jr. Forum Coordinator Dejanee Miller.

For co-chairs Anjali Krishnamurti ’27 and Bahar Moradi ’27, the event was “bittersweet” as it also concluded their leadership term. Forum members Cynthia Garcia ’27 and Tucker Coombs ’28 will take over beginning in the spring.

“We’re so grateful to our audience members for continuing to contribute to this truly magical space for discourse and for challenging our committee to push ourselves to design conversations that inspire and engage the future world leaders at Harvard,” Krishnamurti said before the discussion began.

Goldman also recognized former Institute of Politics Director Setti Warren, a steadfast presence in the Forum who passed away suddenly on Nov. 2 at the age of 55. “A very, very big thank you to Setti for setting the standard for us, for smiling down on us tonight and every night,” Goldman said.

As student leaders gathered with Bush for a final photo, an image of Warren appeared on the screen above, smiling with them.

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

PHOTO COURTESY OF MARTHA STEWART

FORUM

No Place Like Home

I might not have liked “Wicked,” but it made me think.

BY NOAH BASDEN '29

“Why do I love this place / That’s never loved me?”

These are the opening lines from “No Place Like Home,” a song written by composer Stephen Schwartz for the box-office triumph: “Wicked: For Good.” For many, it was just another song in the movie, but for me, it resonated on a much deeper level.

It is clear that the song serves as an allegorical reflection on the current state of the nation and speaks to what America, our own “Oz,” should be. As the song goes, it’s more “than just a place / It’s a promise, an idea.” With next year marking the 250th Anniversary of the United States, I found myself reflecting on why people continue to love the U.S. despite the wrongdoings it has committed against so many communities over the course of its history.

It is in this vein that I think of my mother’s godmother, Mimi Jones. This name will be unfamiliar to the vast majority of you, but many of you know her face. At 17 years old, my Aunt Mimi chose, as an act of protest, to go swimming in the Monson Motor Lodge swimming pool in St. Augustine, Florida. Did I forget to mention that the year was 1964 and this particular pool had a ‘whites only’ policy?

You can imagine that when a Black teenage girl’s nappy afro broke the water’s surface, trouble was sure to follow. What you might not expect is that the hotel manager, James Brock, then ran to the poolside and poured muriatic acid into the water, trying to burn the protesters alive—my Aunt Mimi included. Cruel and barbaric acts marked the Civil Rights Era, so perhaps this shouldn’t have been a surprise to me when I first heard the story as a child. Nevertheless, instead of being sent to the hospital after the traumatic event that left her struggling to breathe, she was arrested and charged with “malicious trespassing,” among other offenses.

Described as a “milestone” moment by Gayle Phillips, director of the Lincolnville Museum and Cultural Center, the St Augustine protests highlighted the reality of the Civil Rights Movement on the national and international stage. Some even go so far as to suggest that the images coming out of St. Augustine led to the end of the 83-day Senate filibuster on the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Though my Aunt Mimi has since passed away, and though I never thought to ask her this, I often wonder: Why would she, of all people, love a place that historically never loved her or people that looked like her? After the protest, she spent the rest of her life in service to others through volunteering, aiding the poor, and helping immigrants enjoy the freedoms for which she literally put her body on the line. Her commitment to bettering her community and preparing the next generation of “unloved” Americans is commendable, but her story is far from unique. Thousands of people across the country, thousands of “Mimi Joneses,” have given back and continue to do so, even though

the nation has not always loved them as it should. We may never fully know why this phenomenon persists, but perhaps it is as the song goes: for all its faults, “There’s no place like home.”

Home is an abstract concept, existing in a multitude of different places for every individual. What is similar, though, in the idea of home is the sense of safety and security. It is a place where you feel comfortable in your own skin and free to express your identity without fear. Many people however have never found such a home, or they have had it taken from them. It is that belief in safety, security, and prosperity that has inspired millions of immigrants throughout history to leave the only home they knew in search of the American Dream.



So what is the promise of America? Inscribed on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty is the “*New Colossus*,” Emma Lazarus’s sonnet, which names the statue as the “Mother of Exiles.” It reads: “Give me your tired, your poor, / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, / The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. / Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, / I lift my lamp beside the golden door!” This is the promise of America that inspired and continues to inspire the tired, poor, and displaced to come and try to build a home here. The idea that you can be seen for what you are and not for what you were, a place where doors open wherever you turn, and the sky’s the limit.

As we approach the 250th anniversary of the United States and the first anniversary of President Donald Trump’s second presidential term, it is worth reflecting on how we are living up to that promise. On Dec. 2, Trump, in what many have labeled a racist tirade, described Somali immigrants, of which most are U.S. citizens, as “garbage.” This comment does not exist in a vacuum; it is endemic to a longstanding pattern of anti-immigrant rhetoric that has become a staple of

Trump’s political lexicon.

This language, and the sentiment it fuels, is more than just offensive; it dehumanizes entire communities and fundamentally undermines the core values this nation was built upon. The promise inscribed at the base of the Statue of Liberty is not just poetic idealism—it is a moral compass that should guide how we treat those fleeing hardship in search of a better life in a nation that likes to believe, at least, that liberty comes first.

This tension between promise and practice is what makes stories like my Aunt Mimi’s so important as we reflect on 250 years of the U.S. Her story, like so many others, reminds us that the pursuit of liberty, equality, and justice often demands courage and unwavering commitment in the face of hardship. America’s greatness has always depended on those who tirelessly rose to challenge its failures while striving toward its ideals.

For many marginalized groups in this country, there is no other choice but to stay and fight. Their histories began in this country, quite literally shaping the nation—and continue to do so. The option to leave was not always a possibility, and even when it was, staying was a form of resistance to inequality and oppression in its own way. In staying, they asserted not only their presence but also a sense of a continued fight, never relenting in the belief that the America of tomorrow will grant future generations the life that was denied to them in the America of yesterday and, in some cases, the America of today.

To uphold what it means to be American, and to preserve America itself, we must stand against rhetoric that seeks to demonize the “huddled masses yearning to breathe free.” We must embrace our diverse culture as a strength, place human dignity above all else, and maintain our values beyond ideals engraved in stone. These values are not theoretical; they call on each of us to reflect on the kind of country we want to leave future generations.

As the semester comes to a close and we all leave campus for our own homes, spare a thought for what you want your broader home—your country—to look like over the next 250 years. Even in the face of uncertainty, there is reason for hope. America has weathered rougher storms and emerged stronger, guided by the courage and resilience of communities who refused to be silenced and by enduring ideals that continue to light the path forward.

NOAH BASDEN '29 (NHBASDEN@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) SHOULD HAVE STAYED AWAKE FOR THE WHOLE MOVIE.

PHOTO COURTESY OF NOAH BASDEN '29

A Sweet Escape: Reading Period Reflection

How to serve up reading period right...because you're definitely doing it wrong.

BY HEIDI HEFFELFINGER '26

Full from Thanksgiving's feast, Harvard students return to campus in early December ready for a palate cleanser. Only three days of classes stand between us and reading period, which arrives just in time for relaxation, preparation for finals, and a moment of pause from the academic feast we've consumed. But what if reading period were more than a descent into academic purgatory? What if, instead of cleansing our palates, we treated it as an opportunity to devour new experiences?

We're all familiar with the ritualized procrastination that resembles something not quite work, but not quite break, a spinning wheel of vague academic guilt. Reading period becomes a holding pattern, a limbo where we are technically free but mentally trapped by finals looming just within striking distance. Some of them may even fall during reading period. Books rarely make for an enjoyable palate cleanser—far too wordy. And if we don't reimagine reading period, we risk surrendering a precious window of opportunity for wandering to the same old grind that already claims the other twelve weeks of the semester.

Here's the secret most don't talk about: thanks to Harvard's wonderfully disjointed academic calendar, many students have up to two full weeks between their last class and first final. In the real world, a two-week unclaimed block of time is considered a vacation, so why aren't we treating it as such? Most students see this stretch of time as a dangerous indulgence rather than a gift. Reading period may be designed for reading, but who's to say that reading has to happen from campus? Why not instead satisfy our cravings elsewhere?

As someone from California, Europe usually feels a world away from home. But once at school, the flight to Europe is barely longer than the trip I take just to get there.

During my sophomore winter reading period, I booked round-trip flights to Paris for \$450. Junior year, I made it to Madrid, Edinburgh, and back to Boston for \$550 total plane fare. This year: Dublin and back for \$350. All of that to say if you book early enough, Europe is only a relatively cheap flight away until you're having croissants in Paris, tapas in Madrid, sausage rolls in Edinburgh, or Guinness in Dublin. Yes, Europe is certainly the main course of a reading period adventure. But who doesn't love a good appetizer?

While Europe is delicious, there are countless other adventures to satisfy your hunger for exploration. Maine, Vermont, and Rhode Island are all just a short bus ride away—significantly shorter (and cheaper) than even the shortest flights abroad. One train ride and suddenly you're surrounded by trees instead of problem sets. These little appetizers can be as simple as a day trip or easily garnished with an overnight stay to turn a day trip into a full weekend getaway. Fall reading period is an especially perfect time to catch some of that classic New England foliage. And if crossing state lines is too far for you, free museums in Boston, like the Isabella Stewart Gardner, or going thrifting in Davis Square are closer and cheaper.

Yes, yes. You may be asking: *Heidi, how is any of this practical? I'm a broke college student who can barely afford laundry, and I genuinely do have p-sets to finish.* I recognize that I have been incredibly privileged to have the disposable income (and Europe-based friends) that make these escapades possible. But I firmly believe that a reading period adventure is possible for everyone. You can take a simple day trip somewhere new, walk the long way into Boston, or split travel costs with friends. You can plan around exam dates, leave after a morning study session, or bring your backpack and study on the road. The point isn't distance or price; it's

stepping off campus during this vacation we call reading period—at least for a day.

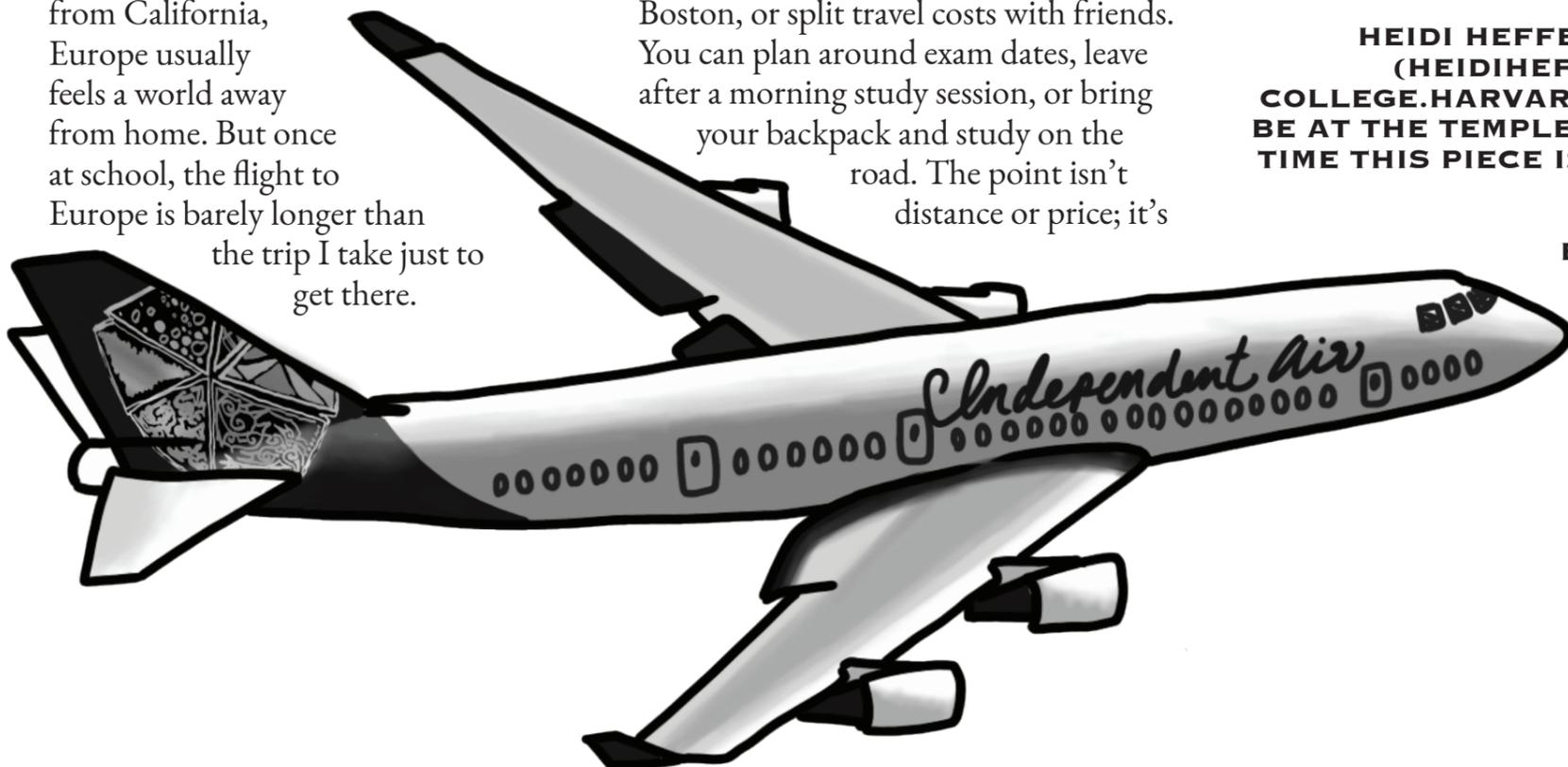
The deeper issue is cultural, as usual. Rest is treated like dessert at Harvard, something indulgent, guilty, earned only after suffering. We don't just glorify burnout; we expect it. Students brag about 10-hour Lamont marathons, color-coded Google Calendars booked up every minute of the day, and productive all-nighters as proof of belonging. We treat exhaustion as proof of ambition, and any sign of ease is evidence that you're not taking things seriously enough. But belonging isn't staying in the library until your spine is as bent as some of the books in there. Belonging is knowing when stepping away will make you stronger.

Maybe the best way to prepare for finals is to physically remove ourselves from the place where academic stress pulses strongest. The Harvard bubble is great for many things: intellectual inspiration, brain break, imposter syndrome—but focus isn't always one of them. Once you're outside those distinguished academic gates, the pressure to perform productivity fades. No one in Paris, or Maine, or even Somerville cares about your Canvas deadline. Almost exactly one year ago in Edinburgh, I wrote a final paper in one sitting at the pub, mostly because I was finally focused on my own work rather than the anguish of surrounding struggling students. Subtract the performative studying of campus, and you might actually concentrate better.

Start planning your trip for spring reading period and get ready to devour an experience instead of a textbook. Reading Period is a delicious pause in the semester, so we might as well savor it!

**HEIDI HEFFELFINGER '26
(HEIDIHEFFELFINGER@
COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WILL
BE AT THE TEMPLE BAR BY THE
TIME THIS PIECE IS RELEASED.**

**GRAPHIC BY
EMMA CRAGO
'28**







Au Revoir: A Tale of Growing Pains

A documented list of my intentions.

BY SIDNEY REGELBRUGGE '28

As November swiftly passes and December takes her place, the coming of the new year awaits me. Every year, I vow to make one significant change in my life, with promises like cutting out sugar, exercising daily, stopping myself from procrastinating on assignments until four hours before they are due, and, finally, addressing the wounds of my past year. Yet every year, I joyfully demolish the cookies at Hillel, promise to get on the treadmill but never do, pull all-nighters, and continue to pick at the scabs of my internal and external blemishes.

Still, I believe writing this piece serves as a kind of accountability, both to myself and to those who read it. Maybe this time I will not consistently break my New Year's resolutions, but instead commit myself to a constant state of attempted improvement. This is a journey I have chosen to embark on after a particularly challenging past year. There were so many moments when I felt my irritability rising, or my anxious thoughts keeping me up at night. I have been given so many gifts in my life, and my time at Harvard is one of them. Attending this institution is a privilege that I am constantly aware of. The people I have met in college have been some of the most wonderful people I have ever encountered, and the more time I spend around them, the greater the need to better myself is. Being the best version of Sidney not only makes me a better friend and daughter, but it also fulfills me. I owe it to myself and to all of the people in my life to be the optimal version of myself, or at least try to be.

Gossiping and jealousy—which I've combined because one rarely exists without the other. No gossip of mine occurs without a basis of envy. The impulse to speak ill of others, especially of those who hold something I desire, is a sickly feeling that leaves me feeling no better than before I opened my mouth. I've realized I don't even need another person beside me to fuel my jealousy; instead, it simmers quietly on its own. My wish to be better disguises itself as something green-eyed, and it makes me feel as ugly as the words I let escape. There is a reason envy is one of the Seven Deadly Sins. Britannica defines it as "resentment or sadness at another's good fortune or excellence, with an often insatiable desire to have it for oneself." I carry my resentment hand in hand with my grief, wishing to feel unburdened by my desire to mirror others and what they possess. I don't intend to carry this weight upon my back, but to ease the burden of my words, on myself and on those who hear them.

Adhering to Diet Culture—an ever-present thought in my mind, calorie counting, and watching what those around me eat. TikToks showing "fat-burning" tricks or perfectly healthy bodies are marketed as "less than ideal." My algorithm toggles between recipes and tutorials on how to fit into smaller jeans. I've learned to label foods as "good" or "bad," but what does it matter? Is feeding your body not as simple as fueling yourself? By giving power to certain foods and labeling them as treats or rewards, we start withholding ourselves from sustenance and

from joy. What I didn't realize was how deeply this began shaping my own habits. Sometimes, meals were spent second-guessing every bite and wondering if I was eating "clean enough," or gauging how many calories I had just consumed. Within, my self-confidence started to slip, and most meals spent with my friends became a game of comparing my eating habits to theirs.

On many nights, instead of sleeping, I stared at social media, wishing desperately that I looked like the people around me and on my Instagram. Slowly, desserts became a treat, and the hours spent scrutinizing my body in the mirror increased. With each bit of diet culture I consumed, I made more and more judgments on my physique and dietary habits. Slowly, toxic diet culture phrases looped in my mind as I chose my meals. With every casual and hurtful word haphazardly thrown, I move farther from being aware of my peers and friends and being kind to myself. I move away from the harmonious eating I grew up with.



At my childhood dining room table, food was served plentifully, and the bounty from our garden, farm, and labor was celebrated, not shamed. I refuse to bear the weight of diet culture, or let its rules poison my body, my mind, or the words I speak to others. I intend to be proud of my body and its strengths; I must remember how far these legs have carried me and how much weight my shoulders have supported.

Obsessing over academic perfection—a trait I thought I had retired in high school. Instead, it has returned in the form of self-ranking and debating the worth of my GPA. "Comparison is the thief of joy," Theodore Roosevelt said, and it holds true. At career fairs or summer internship events, I measure myself against my peers. My GPA, not lackluster but far from earning me John Harvard scholar, is still something to be proud of.

When did I lose joy in the process of learning? In falling short and trying again? When did we begin calling Bs failures rather than signs of struggling and succeeding to grasp material? If we all began at perfection, we would have nothing to learn. Wrestling with content means we are at the threshold of understanding, not far from mastery but approaching it. I intend to find peace in my improvement and to offer grace to my own academic journey.

Postponing calling my family—a task that sits on my to-do list nearly every week. My grandfather's voice has not echoed through my phone since early October, when he spoke to me quietly, telling me how proud he was of me.

Even the gravel in his voice, from thousands of miles away, could not hide the emotion and love he so clearly has for me. My mother rarely sees my face except for in photos; I call her only on brisk walks to class. I rarely call my father unless I'm overwhelmed or need help falling asleep. What if they have begun to forget the curvature of my face? Have I hidden myself away to avoid their questions?

I am aware that my papa is in his 80s. When I hugged him this November, his strong frame shook more than usual. I am aware that my parents' wrinkles have set in, and the grey in their hair is slowly turning to white. While I have been absent, their faces have been ever-present, on my desk, on my phone screen. Their names and memories carry me through exams, reminding me of one reason I am here: to make them proud. It takes so little to pick up the phone, to let their soft, worn expressions fill my screen. I know that one day I will wish for a few more minutes with them. I intend not to let time or tiredness widen the gap between us.

These are the parts of my life that I am saying a tender farewell to as 2026 approaches. Already at this point in December, I have begun to make the subtle change of accepting my flaws. I believe that before reformation, forgiveness and acceptance must come. Forgiveness for the moments I have acted out of turn, and acceptance for the path I am embarking on. I do not expect mastery, but these are tasks I can try to complete. I know the strength of my words and that they need not spill out haphazardly. I know jealousy is a part of me, but it does not need to impact my relationships. I do not need a drastic change or a rapid transformation; this might be a steady, difficult climb. I will stumble and scrape myself along the way.

And so I step into the new year with patience, tolerance, and care, keeping what serves me and releasing what does not. I fear that if I do not engage in this journey, when ten years have passed, I will have wished I did. I do not want to watch my life slip by me, idling in anxiety, jealousy, and self-doubt. I want to be an active participant in my life and in others'. In order to show real love to those around me, I have to value myself enough to take on these difficult changes. Even then, with every out-of-step growing pain, I am moving closer to who I hope to be and who the people I love see in me.

**SIDNEY REGELBRUGGE '28
(SIDNEYREGELBRUGGE@
COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU)
KNOWS SHE HAS SOME WORK
TO DO AND IS GRATEFUL FOR
THE JOURNEY.**

**GRAPHIC BY SOPHIA
RASCOFF '27**

Thoughts from New Quincy: Where the Light Thins

Lumenford's account of the man who slipped out of sight.

BY LUKE WAGNER '26

It is a matter of some debate in Lumenford—though “debate” is too energetic a word for that languid settlement—whether Elias Noct ever truly lived among its residents. Some claim he passed through the dormitory halls the way a shadow crosses a wall: distinct enough to register, yet curiously unattached to any source. What is undeniable is the residue attributed to him. A chair left askew in an otherwise orderly study room; a thin ledger of notes found in a communal drawer; the faint scent of paper and winter coats that seemed to cling to certain corners long after the season had passed. Whether these traces belonged to Elias or were merely assigned to him after the fact has never been settled.

Those who claim to remember him (fewer than one might expect) struggle to agree on the simplest facts. His height, his walk, the cadence of his voice—no two accounts align. A custodial worker maintains he addressed her only with clipped formalities, as if quoting from a misremembered text. A graduate student insists he never spoke at all, that his silence had a kind of density to it, like a weight placed deliberately in one's hand. In Lumenford, such contradictions rarely demand resolution; the details are absorbed into the air until the figure they describe resembles a person only in outline.

The fragments collected here—pages, marginalia, a single half-burned letter—form the closest thing we possess to a record of his final Thursday in Lumenford many weeks ago. I call it Thursday because the documents insist upon it; it was the only day he ever bothered to name. Whether Thursday held any private meaning for him or simply offered the quiet he required is impossible to determine. The records note only that it

was the one day he bothered to name. The townspeople, uninterested in the finer points of his habits, have reduced his fate to three competing rumors.

Some say it was a disappearance. Some say it was a death. Some say he merely walked away when the world stopped asking him to stay.

Their theories carry a certain tenderness; despite all their distance from him in life, they dislike the idea that someone could vanish without leaving a story behind. They attempt to ascribe meaning to what was, by all accounts, a very quiet departure. But I resist the provincial urge to settle on a single explanation. In my professional estimation (forgive this reflexive vanity; the historian in me refuses to die), Elias Noct left Lumenford exactly as he lived in it: slipping between the visible and the invisible, as if reality itself were a garment he could shrug off.

The reader will notice a certain instability in his papers. His handwriting sharpens and dissolves, as though some inner weather were drifting across the page. The tone veers—clinical, now devotional, now amused at his own careful despair. This inconsistency, I believe, is the key. Elias was a man who distrusted permanence. He arranged his thoughts in pencil because he respected the world's right to forget.

In one margin, he writes, “There is nothing so arrogant as a sentence that survives its own moment.”

In another, scribbled sideways as though it was an afterthought: “If I vanish, may it be without the nuisance of interpretation.”

The following pages, therefore, do not claim to offer truth—only a reconstruction of an evening whose truth remains unsettled. But I will offer a sole suggestion, tentatively:

in Lumenford, nothing ever departs without leaving behind a sort of glow. A dim, residual shimmer. A soft persistence in the air. If Elias Noct is gone, then his departure was not an exit so much as a thinning, the kind of vanishing act the dusk performs daily without applause.

Let this account stand, then, as a lantern held firmly to counteract said dimming.

Among his papers lies one page I have never been able to interpret. A circle drawn in the upper left corner, faint but insistent; beneath it, the beginning of a sentence that trails off into a wandering line. The ink wavers there, as if his hand hesitated before surrendering the thought altogether. I keep the page near me when I write. It is the closest thing to a conversation we ever shared.

...

On his final evening in Lumenford, Elias Noct was seen walking down the narrow corridor with a composure several witnesses later struggled to describe. One called it “unhurried,” another “as though he'd already gone somewhere else.” The building, with its soft, persistent thrum, seemed to swallow his footsteps.

A few doors stood ajar, casting thin slivers of yellow light across the floor. Someone had peeled an orange badly in the communal kitchen, leaving the rind in bright, mutilated crescents on the counter. Several residents remembered this detail; no one remembered seeing Elias touch the fruit, but one person swore they saw him pause near it, as if recognizing something just briefly, like recalling a thought he had already let go of.

He was also observed lingering by the window at the end of the hall, where the glass had already begun its obscuring fog. The last light was thinning along the rooftops, softening their outlines into a charcoal blur. A student passed him and offered a distracted nod. In his later account, the student could not remember Elias's expression—only that the nod was returned a fraction too late, as though the reflection in the clouded pane had responded before the man himself. Whether this slight misalignment belonged to the glass or to the witness's retrospective unease cannot be determined.

Some accounts mention a particular quiet around him that evening—not quite silence, exactly, but a hollow that seemed to form wherever he stood. I cannot verify this. It may be the mind's tendency that wants to feel significant.

Before reaching the stairwell, Elias appeared to have stepped into the old study room. The custodial log for that night notes that one of the chairs—the second from the left—was slightly pulled out. On the table, someone had abandoned a sheet of paper bearing a penciled line in handwriting not his own: “Do not wait to be missed.”

Whether Elias read it or even noticed it cannot be known. A witness passing the doorway claimed to see him smile, though others note that the room, dim at that hour, often conspires with its uneven lighting to invent expressions where none can be reliably seen.

As he left the study room, he reportedly glanced at a desk where he had once left a note to himself—“Thursday, as always.” The words, still faintly visible months later, had blurred at the edges, as though time had been quietly unthreading them.

At the stairwell, he placed a hand on the railing. This detail appears in three separate accounts, all noting the same thing: that he paused there, not hesitating, merely acknowledging.

Lumenford has never dramatized departures; its walls remain unchanged no matter who vanishes from them. Perhaps that is why the gesture stayed with those who saw it. When Elias opened the door to

the night, someone on the lower landing glimpsed him only as a darkening outline against the courtyard. They remember that the air “took him in,” though the phrasing may say more about the witness than the moment itself. The night was spacious, mild, unremarkable.

No one saw him look back.

Those who later tried to reconstruct his final steps agree on only one thing: that his leaving lacked any sense of finale. It resembled instead a kind of yielding, the way dusk withdraws from a street—incrementally, without spectacle, without insisting on attention.

By the time the door clicked shut behind him, whatever remained of Elias Noct in Lumenford had already thinned beyond certainty.



...

In the days that followed, Lumenford returned to its ordinary cycles. The stairwells emptied and filled with the predictable movements of the day, the windows blurred at dusk, and the townspeople referred to Elias Noct only when pressed. Their comments were brief, almost procedural. Nothing in the town was altered on his account.

Yet there were moments, easily missed, when his former presence seemed to press faintly against the edges of the ordinary. A coat folded differently than anyone recalled. A corridor draft that felt, inexplicably, like the turning of a page. A Thursday evening that arrived with a softness no one could fully account for. These were not signs, of course; Lumenford

is not a place given to hauntings. But departures, when performed with sufficient subtlety, tend to leave behind their own weather.

I have searched, in the course of my reconstruction, for some final gesture or sentence that might illuminate his last intentions. None exists. Elias Noct resisted the vanity of conclusion. He believed, I think, that endings should resemble their owners, and he was a man who prized ambiguity the way others prize clarity. To leave without spectacle was his last fidelity to himself.

And so the record ends here. There is more I might infer or adorn, yet he declined to furnish the world with anything further. The night received him; Lumenford did not object; the rest is a silence that declines to explain itself.

I have never known whether he meant for anyone to follow the traces he left. Sometimes I think they were meant only for himself—little assurances that he had once been visible.

If I pass the window at the end of that corridor now, I sometimes imagine a shadow of a figure there regarding the dimming rooftops the way one looks at a life already loosening its hold. This is only the mind's reflex, a habit of softening the outline of those who have already disappeared.

When that image lingers, I take out the page with the circle in its corner. The ink begins in a neat, deliberate hand—three words only, before it wanders off into the white: “Let the account...” The line stutters there, mid-thought, and skids into blankness. I do not know what he meant to write next. Perhaps he changed his mind; perhaps he trusted the unwritten part to finish itself.

Let the account close, then, where his sentence falters: at the edge of those three words and the quiet space that follows them.

**LUKE WAGNER '26
(LUKEWAGNER@COLLEGE.
HARVARD.EDU) WAS THE
MANAGING DIRECTOR OF THE
HARVARD INDEPENDENT.**

GRAPHIC BY RILEY CULLINAN '27

An Evening at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum

A museum curated with true love and appreciation for all forms of art.

BY EDEN BRIDGE-HAYES '29

When I entered the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum through a heavy glass revolving door, I could only think of one word to describe it: pristine. The large, elegant lobby narrows into a hallway that is flanked by a gift shop on the left and a coat check area to the right. At the end of the hallway, you are given two options: go to the second floor or embark down another long, glass hallway. I opted for the first.

Isabella Stewart Gardner first gained an appreciation for the arts while travelling through Europe and Asia with her husband, John “Jack” Gardner. Soon after, she began taking art history classes at the Harvard Annex, later known as the Harvard Radcliffe Institute, where acclaimed Renaissance art historian Bernard Berenson '87 was her advisor. In the 1890s, Berenson aided the Gardners in curating an extensive art collection ranging from the Renaissance to art of the late 1800s. The two dreamed of opening their own art museum, so when her husband died in 1898, Gardner naturally set out to fulfill their dream.

After two years of construction (1899-1901) and two years of installation (1901-1903), Gardner's museum, Fenway Court, was open to the public. When Isabella passed away in 1924, she left behind explicit instructions that the museum should be open to the public forever. The museum's popularity skyrocketed in 1990 following a heist that stole 13 art pieces, valued \$500 million at the time and making the robbery the largest property crime in U.S. history. Today, the museum displays the empty frames of the pieces to serve as a reminder of what was lost.

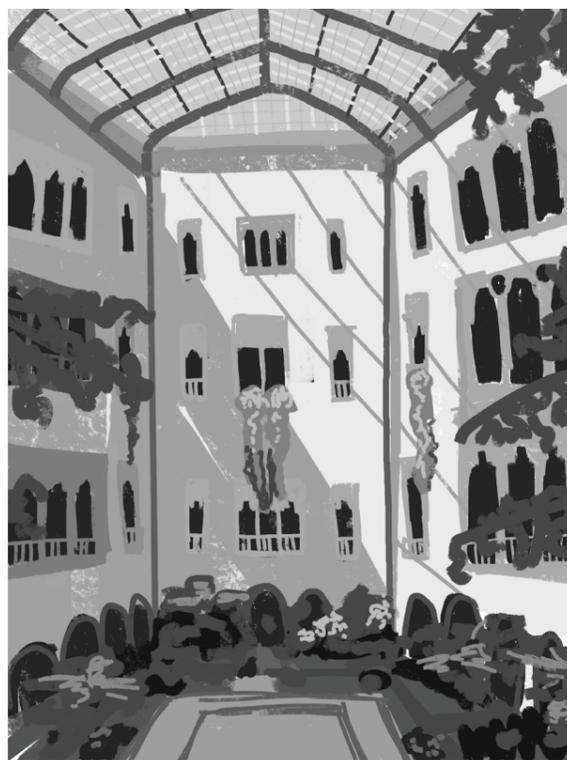
On Dec. 4, the Isabella Stuart Gardner Museum had its “First Free Thursday” event, in which the museum is open later than usual and offers free entry to all patrons on the first Thursday of every month. Throughout the year, the museum also offers discounts and free admission to students/faculty from nearby colleges using a school-specific promo code. Harvard students can gain free admission using their Harvard ID, but they may need to contact the Dean of Students' office to access a promo code when booking tickets.

The museum has two main buildings. One, the “New Wing,” features limited-time, contemporary exhibitions; the other, called “the Palace,” was modelled on the Renaissance palaces of Venice and features a courtyard area flanked by galleries of art that Gardner curated during her lifetime.

When Gardner died in 1924, she left clear instructions that no permanent changes should be made to the museum displays. To keep her legacy alive, the museum's board of trustees decided to construct an adjacent building, the “New Wing,” to use for special exhibitions, concerts, and other events. The “New Wing” is attached to “the Palace” by a glass corridor.

From Oct. 23, 2025, to Jan. 19, 2026, the second floor of the “New Wing” will feature various pieces by Boston artist Allan Rohan Crite (1910-2007). The exhibition brings life to the gritty urban landscape of Boston, using religious and political subjects. Crite also used a wide variety of mediums, from textiles to oil painting.

For me, the most striking feature of the museum was the wall of artists who were mentored by Crite or influenced by his work. The museum also offers an opportunity for guests also inspired by Crite to draw on a piece of paper and add it to an adjacent wall of artwork. By allowing museum-goers to not only view the art but participate in it, the exhibit encourages visitors to step out of their



normal roles as audience members, and engage with and be moved by Crite's art on a deeper level.

Upon returning to the main level, I moved down towards the long glass hallway to “the Palace.” Even in the night, the garden surrounding the hallway was enchanting—a work of art in itself. The hallway opened into a courtyard, with exhibitions flanking a main botanical garden. The garden changes its display every one to two months; currently, the museum houses a holiday-themed garden with amaryllis and flowering jade trees. Jazzy, ambient music floated through the courtyard, and it smelled of fresh rain and earthly bliss. The area felt regal, and I could almost feel Gardner's presence—her soul and her devoted appreciation for the arts—in every curated piece.

The most unique aspect of “the Palace” is the way it is arranged. Rather than strictly being divided by time period or art movement, exhibits were curated based on subject or theme. One moment, you would be staring at some Ancient Greek or Roman structure; the next, a French Romantic oil painting.

One particularly striking exhibit was one based on images of the Madonna, or the Virgin Mary, which included a piece titled “Black Glass

Madonna” from the 16th century. Right on the side featured an explanation on how the glass would have been blown, and it included oversized examples of the intricate glass rods and tubes to allow viewers to feel the textures.

Other rooms were less concrete in subject, such as the Yellow Room and Blue Room. The former heralds Isabella's dedication to music, featuring paintings of ballet dancers, images of musicians, musical instruments, and paintings with musical titles, namely James Whistler's “Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville” and “Nocturne, Blue and Silver: Battersea Reach.” The latter showcased Gardner's dedication to the art of her lifetime, and it features anything from paintings, letters, and novels made by her friends and contemporaries.

A few rooms provided more insight into Gardner's life. The Macknight Room, for example, was used by Isabella as an office, and the many trinkets covering her desk demonstrated her expansive tastes: an ivory magnifying glass from 19th-century Japan lying beside an Egyptian sarcophagus from 900-300 B.C.E. Similarly, Gardner used the Spanish Chapel as a space to mourn her son, Jackie, who died when he was one. The painting in the room, “The Virgin of Mary,” shows the baby Jesus sitting on his mother's lap, showcasing her personal connection to the space as a way to express her grief. After she died, Isabella Gardner was laid in this room beside a statue of a deceased knight in accordance with her funeral instructions.

The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum is not just a collection of history—it is a preservation of Isabella's soul, her commitment to uplifting the arts in any way she could. The museum is not curated based on any one theme or aspect of art. Instead, it is specifically tailored to Isabella's aesthetic tastes, allowing patrons to feel intimately connected to Isabella. Each piece, whether that be an expansive oil painting or small household object, was carefully chosen by Isabella for a reason only she could understand, allowing us to gain an understanding of the world through her eyes.

Although I am typically not one to revisit museums multiple times, the Isabella Stuart Gardner Museum is different. Visiting the museum is an immersive experience due to the uniquely enchanting atmosphere present in each exhibition, and I find myself already longing to return.

EDEN BRIDGE-HAYES '29
(EDENBRIDGEHAYES@COLLEGE.
HARVARD.EDU) WRITES ARTS FOR
THE HARVARD INDEPENDENT.

GRAPHIC BY CAMERON BERNIER '29

“Radlove” for Women’s Rugby

A glimpse behind the scenes at the three-peat national champion Harvard women’s rugby team.

BY MEGAN LEGAULT ’28

 On Nov. 22, the Harvard women’s rugby team made history under the lights of Mignone Field. In the grand finale of their undefeated season, top-ranked Harvard defeated No. 2 Lindenwood University, claiming their third consecutive National Intercollegiate Rugby Association title. With this victory, the team also became the first collegiate women’s rugby team to claim four national championships, further cementing their legacy of excellence in the sport.

Harvard’s women’s rugby legacy began in 1983 with the creation of the Harvard-Radcliffe Women’s Rugby Football Club. Nearly 30 years—and two national titles—later, Harvard Athletics elevated women’s rugby to varsity status. Since then, the program has helped lead the surge in popularity and development of women’s collegiate rugby nationwide.

Outside of collegiate titles, the program has seen many players transition into professional careers upon graduation, representing their respective countries on the international level. Just this year, Cassidy Bargell ’22, known for bringing awareness ulcerative colitis by speaking out about her own experiences with the condition, competed for Team USA alongside three other Crimson rugby alumni—Cheta Emba ’15, Maya Learned ’18, and Erica Jarrell-Searcy ’22—at the Women’s Rugby World Cup in England.

Being a member of the Harvard women’s rugby team not only places student-athletes into a decorated athletic program, but also a community spanning three decades of female athletes. The three senior captains of this year’s squad—Tiahna Padilla ’26, Nafanua Malietoa Fitiseanu ’26, and Charlotte Gilmour ’26—shared insights into the program’s

culture and history with the *Independent*, an aspect of the team that made winning the NIRA title at home just that much more special.

“What made it truly special was inviting our alumni onto the pitch after the win and sharing that moment with previous generations,” the captains wrote in a joint statement. “It’s incredible to feel the love and support that spans decades of Harvard, formerly Radcliffe, women’s rugby players.”



As for the present members and culture of Harvard’s women’s rugby, the captains claim their success is, at least in part, attributed to the embodied mentality of “Radlove.” The team has coined the term “Radlove” to describe the unwavering care, love, and commitment they have for and to each other. “Radlove has always been a driving force in Harvard women’s rugby,” the captains wrote.

With “Radlove” as the foundation, the captains say the team has been able to hone in on a specific strength—the ability to compete: “Not just on Saturdays, but showing up to push one another, day in and day out, so we are the hardest competition we see all season. These core values working together are integral to

our success.” It is with this sentiment, and a culture of unwavering support, that players have pushed each other to the next level, sharing the accomplishment of bringing home three national titles. “It’s incredibly special for a group of 30 girls to align to a common goal, so getting to drive that is an honor,” wrote the captains.

The team’s three-peat comes at a time of unprecedented growth for the sport of rugby, especially in the women’s game. A recent analysis of audience trends revealed that more than 49% of rugby fans have joined the fandom in the last two years. Just this year, the Women’s World Cup shattered viewing records with over 12 million television viewers. This figure does not even account for the immense viewership gained from social media with icons like Ilona Maher, who boasts an impressive 8.7 million followers, bringing further recognition to the sport.

“We’re grateful for icons like Ilona Maher, who have helped bring rugby into the international spotlight. But there’s always more to strive for,” wrote the captains in response to the growth of the sport. “The culture of rugby is unlike any other sport, where on a community level, there’s camaraderie between opponents and lifelong friendships formed. While on an individual level, there’s a sense of empowerment that comes... [with] walking off the pitch after playing 80 minutes of full contact. The community is so strong and welcoming. We just hope to play a part in advancing the game.”

**MEGAN LEGAULT ’28
(MLEGAULT@COLLEGE.
HARVARD.EDU) WANTS TO
PERFORM A RUGBY LIFT (VIS-
À-VIS DIRTY DANCING) ON A
NIGHT OUT AT LEAST ONCE
BEFORE SHE DIES.**

GRAPHIC BY AMELIE LIMA ’27

Fantasy Roundup: Week 14

A recap of the notable games from the NFL this past week.

BY TYLER DANG '28

As we near the end of the semester—and the weekly issues recess—the NFL keeps going. Games will continue to be played each week as we approach the playoffs. With only a few more weeks before these games begin, it is important to check in on how each true contender is doing this season. Moreover, the fantasy teams are nearing their own playoffs. For full team rosters, see Week 0's issue.

First and Lowell (7-5) vs Bring it Dome (7-5):

114.54-177.24

Top performers: Saquon Barkley (18.2) | Josh Allen (37.84)

Underperformers: Terry McLaurin (7.1) | Ja'Marr Chase (10.2)

The Ball Currier (4-8) vs Pfirst Down (10-2):

81.3-66.7

Top performers: CeeDee Lamb (18.1) | Broncos D/ST (13.0)

Underperformers: Patrick Mahomes (6.3) | Jalen Hurts (0.4)

Kirkland Cousins (3-9) vs The Inn-Zone (5-7):

117.38-61.0

Top performers: Jahmyr Gibbs (37.0) | Nico Collins (16.1)

Underperformers: Travis Kelce (1.8) | Ashton Jeanty (5.8)

Contenders Overview:

New England Patriots:

The Patriots under Drake Maye have been surprising contenders this season, currently tied for the best record at 11-2. With a powerful defense, New England has kept their opponents under 30 points in every game. Combine that defense with a fierce offense in both passing and rushing, and it is clear that the Patriots have a strong chance at winning the Super Bowl.

Buffalo Bills:

Reigning MVP Josh Allen is hard to rate this season. He is still producing at an incredible rate with 34 touchdowns on the season, but his ten interceptions, two lost fumbles, and 31 sacks certainly stain his contention for another MVP. Sitting at 9-4, this season will be the first time the Bills do not win the AFC East since Tom Brady left New England. Furthermore, those losses stem from a very poor run defense.

Pittsburgh Steelers:

The Steelers signed Aaron Rodgers over the summer with hopes that he could propel Pittsburgh past their usual performance of just over a .500 record. While Rodgers has had a solid season, the biggest issue for Pittsburgh is that its defense consistently falters against good offensive schemes. The talent is there, but the defensive construction is too predictable.

Baltimore Ravens:

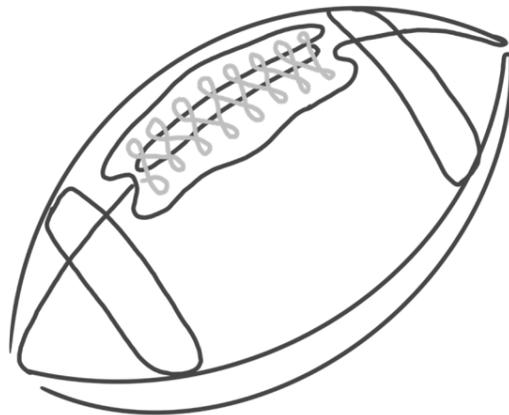
The Ravens entered this season as favorites to make a Super Bowl push; however, their performance this year has been abysmal. Even when Lamar Jackson is playing, the offense is a shell of its former self. Derrick Henry is getting older, and the receivers are not as productive as years past. Worse, Baltimore's defense has also left much to be desired. Giving up an average of 350.4 yards each game, the seventh most in the league, the Ravens' season looks dire.

Jacksonville Jaguars:

The Jaguars, under Trevor Lawrence, have always been hard to precisely rank. The 9-4 team barely leads the AFC South, and Lawrence has been the driving factor with many impressive completions. However, a somewhat easier schedule has allowed the quarterback to have these flashes of brilliance. Lawrence's ugly signal continues to flash as he has 11 interceptions to sully his 18 touchdowns. The Jaguars will surely make the playoffs, but more consistency is necessary for a deep run.

Indianapolis Colts:

At the beginning of the season, the Colts shot out as a surprising offensive powerhouse under the production of running back Jonathan Taylor. In recent weeks, however, Indianapolis has slowed down with a three-game losing streak. Taylor's outstanding performances have been put to a stop, and injuries to Daniel Jones and Sauce Gardner put the remainder of Indianapolis's season in jeopardy. With a tough schedule ahead, an 8-9 record is a threatening reality.



Denver Broncos:

The Broncos also lead the league in record, sitting at 11-2, but their status is deceptive. They have only won two games thus far by more than one score. It appears that Denver is being propped up by their incredible defense rather than elite quarterback play. While Bo Nix is not a terrible quarterback, I do believe he is just average and occasionally shows flashes of success. A playoff appearance is basically guaranteed, but a deep playoff run is contingent on the defense continuing its incredible performance.

Philadelphia Eagles:

As the reigning Super Bowl champions, the Eagles sit at 8-5, but they have had a very confusing season offensively. Trouble with A.J. Brown's targets and Saquon Barkley regressing from last year has led many to question the offensive playcalling. The only time Philadelphia has won by more than one score this season was against an injured Giants team. An appearance in postseason play is almost guaranteed, but contention for another Super Bowl will require some big offensive changes.

Green Bay Packers:

Green Bay, under head coach Matt LaFleur and quarterback Jordan Love, has made great strides as they sit at 9-3-1. The defense with newly acquired Parsons has only allowed 24 touchdowns this year, and Love has played phenomenally with 22 touchdowns with only four interceptions. The Packers' biggest weakness at times is in LaFleur's playcalling. In close situations, the coach often resorts to more conservative schemes, which often allows opponents to take the lead.

Chicago Bears:

With new head coach Ben Johnson, the Bears are second in their division at 9-4, an already great improvement from their 5-12 record last year. With a big rivalry game loss this past week against Green Bay, Chicago dropped far in the rankings. The Bears' defense is often lacking, especially in the passing defense. Opposing quarterbacks are given ample time to make plays because Chicago's pass rush is awful. If the Bears hope to make a run at the Super Bowl, their defense needs to be improved.

Tampa Bay Buccaneers:

Tampa and Baker Mayfield entered as league favorites, but their record of 7-6 may only allow them to sneak in as a Wildcard. Injuries, especially to star receiver Mike Evans, have plagued the team. Even then, the offense has stagnated from its earlier success as Mayfield has had poor production. Moreover, the defense consistently allows opponents to make explosive plays for many yards. Will Tampa Bay still make the playoffs? Probably. Will they get very far? Probably not.

Los Angeles Rams:

The Rams under Matthew Stafford have had a great year thus far, as the quarterback is making a solid campaign for NFL MVP. The offense is star-studded with Puka Nacua, Davante Adams, and Kyren Williams constantly appearing on the highlight reels. In a tough division, the Rams are tied for first at 10-3. LA's biggest weakness currently is its defense, specifically in the pass, allowing opposing receivers to make huge plays down the field. Regardless, the Rams have a great shot at a deep postseason run.

Seattle Seahawks:

Similar to the Rams, the Seahawks sit at 10-3 under Sam Darnold. The quarterback, having signed with Seattle after a stint with the Vikings, has made great use of the offensive pieces the Seahawks have. Jaxson Smith-Njigba is making a great argument for Offensive Player of the Year. The biggest drawback for this great Seattle team is the inconsistency of the running unit. Darnold has shown to be consistent throwing, but when the Seahawks are forced to run the ball, it is less than spectacular.

San Francisco 49ers:

The final contender in this stacked NFC West division is the 49ers, who lag behind at 9-4. Despite quarterback challenges throughout the season, the 49ers have been quite consistent on offense. The biggest challenge that San Francisco has and will continue to face is staying healthy. Brock Purdy has had issues staying on the field, George Kittle was out earlier in the season, and Nick Bosa has a torn ACL. With more games past these 18 weeks, staying healthy is crucial for any hope of a Super Bowl.

Conclusion:

The season so far has been full of surprising breakout stars and season-ending injuries. While there are still many games to go, fans and players alike look to the postseason to see how this season will end. The next installment will cover the playoff outlook.

**TYLER DANG '28
(TYLERDANG@COLLEGE.
HARVARD.EDU) IS
CELEBRATING THE TITANS'
SECOND WIN.**

GRAPHIC BY AMELIE LIMA '27

OPINIONS OF FORUM PIECES AND ARTISTIC
INTERPRETATIONS OF DESIGNERS BELONG ONLY TO
THE CREATOR AND DO NOT REFLECT THE VIEWS OF
THE INDEPENDENT

BON VERB-AGE

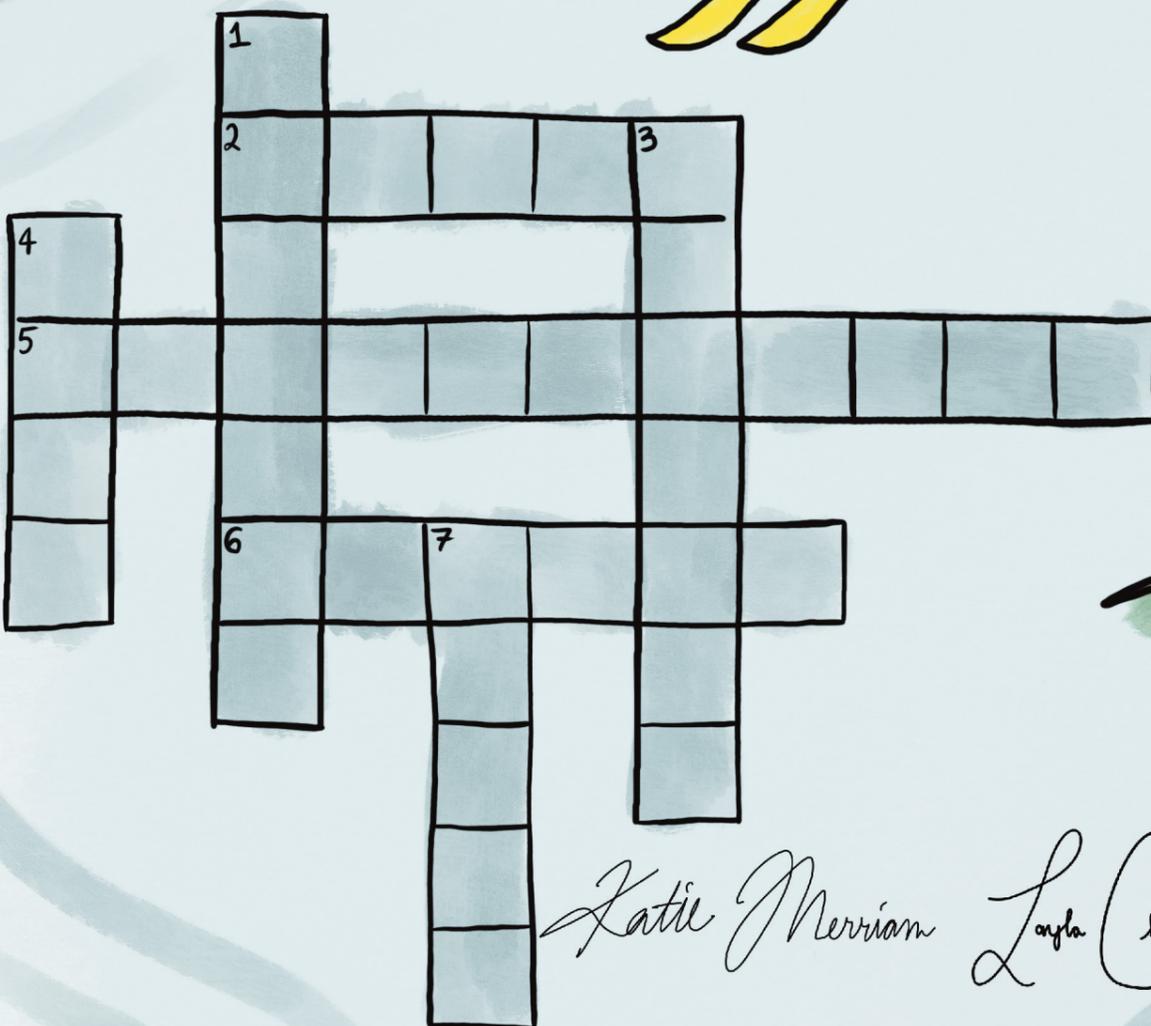
BY FRED KLEIN '28

ACROSS

- 2. SPANISH RICE
- 5. EXCITED PUNCTUATION
- 6. NOT WIDE

DOWN

- 1. BUDDING
- 3. FERVENT
- 4. PRE-EASTER PERIOD FOR CATHOLICS
- 5. PRIMED



Latie Merriam *Layla Charasovi* *Jakeygon* *Harvard*

THE HARVARD INDEPENDENT PUBLISHES EVERY
WEEK DURING THE ACADEMIC YEAR BY THE
HARVARD INDEPENDENT, INC.,
12 ARROW ST CAMBRIDGE, MA 02138

DESIGN BY
CLARA LAKE '27