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HARVARD INDEPENDENT

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THE STUDENT WEEKLY SINCE 1969

Head of the Charles

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About

As Harvard College’s weekly undergraduate newsmagazine, 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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NEWS

What Do You Want to Be When You Grow Up?

Harvard sophomores confront fears for the future of AI and the job market as they declare their concentrations.

By COURTNEY HINES '28

On Oct. 9, the Class of 2029 gathered on the steps of Widener Library to celebrate their concentration declarations. Their decisions come at a pivotal time, as critics fear artificial intelligence will erode the first rung of the corporate ladder and make entry into higher education more competitive. Meanwhile, the looming grade cap, set to begin in Fall 2027, has also sparked concerns and will likely affect some concentrations more than others. Students must navigate how much their fields of study will be affected by these new influences.

"For this year's sophomores, concentration declaration arrives amid significant changes to Harvard's academic environment."

Harvard offers 50 concentrations and 49 secondary fields, which students can explore through their first year before declaring in the fall of their sophomore year. In 2022, the College introduced double concentrations, which permitted students to complete the full requirements of two fields of study without having to write a senior thesis. The option has grown increasingly popular, as the number of students pursuing double concentrations rose from 525 in the 2022–23 academic year to 991 in 2024–25.

For the Class of 2026, Economics remained Harvard's most popular concentration, accounting for 16% of the graduating seniors. Computer Science ranked second. Government, Applied Mathematics, and Psychology were also popular.

For this year's sophomores, concentration declaration arrives amid significant changes to Harvard's academic environment. The College's new grading policy will generally limit A grades to 20% of a course's enrollment plus four additional students. Some courses have already begun changing their grading practices in anticipation of the cap, raising concerns about how students' academic choices might affect their GPAs.

For Yassin Mohamedy '29—who declared Psychology with a secondary in History, though he plans to switch to a concentration in Social Studies—the policy has introduced new concerns about academic exploration.

"I'm worried it will influence me not being able to take the classes I want [because] I need to care [about] my GPA for law school," Mohamedy said. "[Decisions are] definitely GPA dependent now… not as intellectually curious because you may get punished for it."

Hafsah Khan '29, who declared a double concentration in Art, Film, and Visual Studies and Economics, expressed particular concern about the cap's application to small studio courses. While Economics has drawn attention in discussions of grading reform, Khan worries that evaluating artistic work through a restrictive grading distribution could prove especially difficult.

"Most of the classes that I take are around nine to 12-person classes. So if you do the math, 20 plus four means that about half of the people will get A's in those classes, which I don't really believe is an accurate representation of the work that everyone puts in those classes," Khan said.

The question of whether students should prioritize intellectual curiosity or professional advancement is hardly new to elite universities. Harvard and other Ivy League institutions have long faced criticism for producing graduates who enter college with ambitions to pursue public service or social change, only to follow career paths in corporate, more lucrative industries: 64% of Harvard's 2024 class pursued careers in finance, technology, or consulting following graduation. This aligns with other Ivy League students, about 60% of whom went into high-paying, white-collar jobs directly after graduation.

Grace Rhee '29, a History concentrator with a secondary in Government, noted that this pattern continues. "I think Harvard students are extremely pre-professional, and I think a lot of people are pursuing Economics more as a 'means to an end' versus 'Oh, I'm actually interested in this,'" she said.

This aptitude wasn't always the case. Rhee recalled a conversation with her best friend's mother, a Harvard undergraduate in the 90s. "She told me there were a lot of Folk and Mythology concentrators, which is now a very, very small department—three people every year concentrating or secondarying in it," Rhee continued. "I think that speaks a lot to the changes in concentrations."

Khan has opted to double concentrate to balance her professional ambitions with her academic interests. "I definitely declared a double with Econ for my future career prospects, but my main academic interest does truly lie in Arts, Film, Visual Studies," Khan said.

"I do think that students in my class are approaching the decision to declare their concentrations differently," Khan added. "The combo that most people are running is one so-called practical majors, so something like Econ, Gov, Math, like something very oriented towards careers in the real world, and then one major that lies a bit more in the humanities world or in the, you know, like more niche studies," Khan noted.

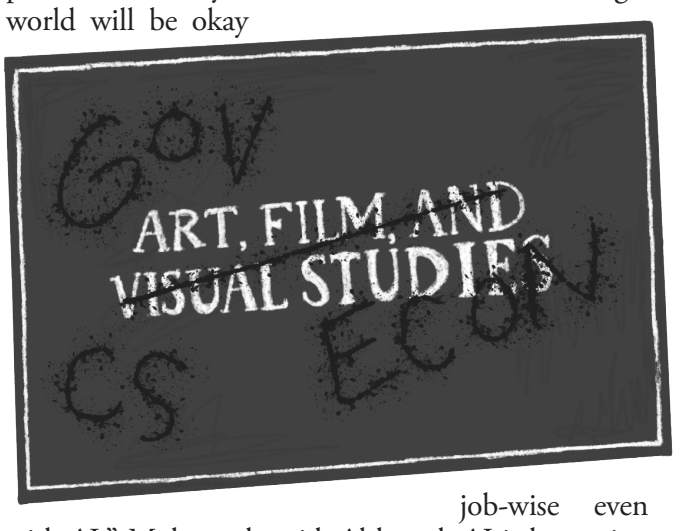
"A lot of my friends are doing Gov alongside something like South Asian studies or Near Eastern studies, or like I'm doing, [Theater, Dance, and Media] or AFVS."

Mohamedy, Khan, and Rhee are all considering law school, although Khan is also interested in pursuing a career in startups. Their shared interest in law comes at a pivotal moment, as competition for admission continues to intensify. The Law School Admission Council reported that 82,487 individuals applied to law school during the 2026 admission cycle, a 7.9% increase over 2025 and a 27.4% increase over 2024. Around 43,000 applicants eventually enrolled. LSAT testing volume also increased approximately 6% during the 2025–26 testing cycle.

However, applications for elite institutions barely grew: Harvard Law School's acceptance rate remained 9.2% from the 2025 admission cycle to 2026. This contrasts with the University's Arts and Humanities and Science divisions, which slashed graduate admissions by 60% and 75%, respectively, in 2025 due to growing financial pressures.

Beyond graduate school admissions, students face a rapidly changing employment landscape. Rapid advances in artificial intelligence have raised concerns about entry-level white-collar work, which most Harvard students enter after graduation. Traditional entry-level job postings declined 10% between 2019 and 2025, while postings demanding more advanced AI skills increased 35%.

Despite these developments, many students remain relatively optimistic about their intended professions. "Maybe it's naive, but I think the legal world will be okay



job-wise even with AI," Mohamedy said. Although AI is becoming increasingly capable of legal research and document drafting—skills firms have relied on entry-level associates to do—the profession still requires human judgment.

Rhee decided to push against using AI in her studies. "I think my philosophy in freshman year was very, 'Oh, I don't want to be behind, and so I am going to utilize AI, and I am anticipating the use of it,'" she explained. "But I think that I realized how unfulfilling that was for me."

"It's something that I kind of put on the back burner," she continued. "I hope that it won't be that important or critical in my future."

Automation does not necessarily eliminate entire professions. A 2025 International Labor Organization study estimated that 25% of global employment will fall within occupations potentially exposed to generative AI. The ILO concluded that job transformation, rather than complete replacement, is more likely.

For Harvard's sophomores, however, the uncertainty extends beyond the job market itself. "In the future, I'm not sure what career I want to pursue," Khan said. "Going to have to wait a little later in my college career to see how that plays out."

Mohamedy's own change in academic direction reflects the flexibility students retain after declaring. Harvard lets students change concentrations, and the choice made in sophomore fall does not necessarily determine their eventual degree, much less their career.

Courtney Hines '28 (courtneyhines@college.harvard.edu) writes News for the "Harvard Independent."

Graphic by Trischelle Afihene '27

After the Cornell 7: Students from Ithaca to Cambridge Demand Accountability

Cornell and Harvard students react to the "Cornell 7" case, campus culture, and a Title IX system many say is failing survivors.

By ANIKA GUPTA '30 AND SALMA GHEITH '30

On Sept. 16, 2026, a Cornell University student identified as Jane Doe filed a civil lawsuit in the New York State Supreme Court against several parties for gang rape by seven frat members. The suit sparked national backlash and resulted in broader conversations about frat culture and college policies at Ivy League universities.

The suit accuses the men of a coordinated drugging and gang rape at the fraternity house on Oct. 19, 2024, lasting more than four hours. According to the complaint, one member sent a Snapchat message inviting other fraternity members to participate in the room where the incident occurred. The suit also argues that Cornell knew, or should have known, about a ketamine-centered drug culture at the chapter.

Doe had initially reported the assault to Cornell campus police in November 2024, but the Tompkins County District Attorney declined to press charges. District Attorney Matthew Van Houten has since said that Doe's sworn statement at the time described the drug use and sexual activity as voluntary, a sharp contrast with the lawsuit's account.

Lawyers for two of the accused men have denied any participation in a sexual assault. At the same time, some of the students stated to investigators that the activity was consensual, or that they were uninvolved.

The lawsuit has revived the case and put it back in the spotlight. On Sept. 28, in response to public backlash, Van Houten announced his office would reexamine the allegations and take any charges to a grand jury, saying in a statement to ABC that "It's our intention to present the case to the Tompkins County grand jury with Jane Doe's cooperation. We want to reexamine whether there's additional evidence that we were not aware of in November of 2024, that exists now that would change our assessment of the case and would result in the grand jury finding that there was criminal conduct."

"Lawyers for two of the accused men have denied any participation in a sexual assault."

Days later, after Governor Kathy Hochul called for an outside review, Cornell agreed to an independent investigation of how it handled the case. Hochul also appointed Attorney General Letitia James as a special prosecutor.

After an internal Title IX investigation by Cornell from January to May 2025, the University expelled two of the seven students and suspended the remaining five, who also received mandatory workshops and essay assignments, the filing of the lawsuit stated. However, the university was accused of requiring only an essay explaining what they had done. Cornell has not publicly confirmed that breakdown, but it says the sanctions were serious: officials said none of the accused avoided discipline solely by writing an essay. Cornell maintains that "none of the individuals charged were offered the opportunity to write essays as a sole consequence of their involvement." The university also shut down the Chi Phi chapter in 2024 in response to the incident.

"Students absolutely, on the whole, are disgusted by the actions of the Cornell seven and have voiced their dissatisfaction with the way Cornell handled the situation."

- Stankiewicz '30

Doe's filing of the case in September 2026 triggered widespread campus demonstrations along with national media attention, with student groups criticizing the university's handling of sexual assault allegations and demanding harsher measures or the revocation of degrees. On Oct. 5, organizers estimated that roughly 1,000 students, faculty, and community members marched across campus in what one anonymous longtime professor called "the largest student protest at Cornell since Vietnam."

Two days later, students staged a "Zero Day" sit-in at a dining hall and boycotted campus spending. Beyond expulsions and degree revocations, protesters demanded independent hearings with minimum sanctions for sexual assault, an outside investigation of the administration, and mandatory prevention training; some also called for President Michael Kotlikoff to resign.

Students at Cornell have been active both on the main campus in Ithaca and at the Cornell Wolpe Center in D.C. On Oct. 5, 2026, Cornell students participated in a town hall on sexual violence, with students contributing their own experiences with sexual assault. In addition, students have organized numerous protests and sit-ins since the case was first made public.

"Students absolutely, on the whole, are disgusted by the actions of the Cornell seven and have voiced their dissatisfaction with the way Cornell handled the situation," Sam Stankiewicz '30, a student in the Brooks School of Public Policy at Cornell, said to the "Harvard Independent."

"Community at Cornell moving forward has to originate from a point of solidarity around this issue and a campus-wide recognition of the need to eradicate sexual assault."

Cornell students have demanded increased accountability from the college's administration. "In failing Jane Doe, they failed all Jane Does on campus," Cornell student Jeremy Ahn '30 explained. "They can begin by enforcing stricter standards and oversight on Greek life, unpacking and actively re-examining other complaints of sexual assault, and prioritizing the healing of survivors over reputational risk management."

Much of the anger has centered on the lack of criminal charges filed in 2024. Van Houten said Doe's sworn statement at the time described the drug use and sexual activity as voluntary and consensual, and that criminal charges therefore could not be sustained. But the case has exposed a strict distinction between voluntary and involuntary intoxication.

Under New York state law, a person can be charged with rape for having sex with someone who cannot consent because they are "mentally incapacitated." However, the law defines "mentally incapacitated" narrowly, covering only someone who was given an intoxicating substance without their consent. A victim who drank or took drugs willingly generally has to be shown to be "physically helpless," such as unconscious, a much higher bar.

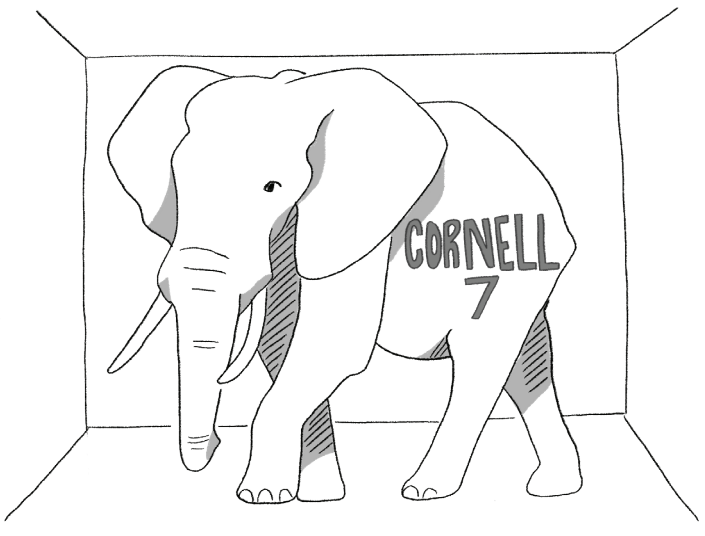
Critics call this the "voluntary intoxication loophole." New York's criminal defense lawyers dispute that label, arguing that current law already allows charges when someone is too incapacitated to consent.

However, students still believe that Cornell should have done more. "Cornell, as one of the major universities in the state of New York, can and should put pressure on the state government to amend sexual assault laws such that rapists cannot find solace in legal loopholes like 'voluntary intoxication,'" Ahn noted.

State leaders are now moving in that direction. On Oct. 2, Hochul pledged to close the loophole, saying voluntary intoxication is "not a license for sexual assault." A bill sponsored by Assembly member Jeffrey Dinowitz and State Senator Nathalia Fernandez has stalled in the Assembly for years, and Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie said it still lacks enough votes. Hochul has suggested lawmakers could take it up early in the 2027 session.

Cornell students also believe widespread social media criticism of the university stirred mixed feelings among the student body. Online, "I am Jane Doe" became a rallying cry across platforms like Instagram and TikTok.

However, some posts blamed every Cornell student, with users leaving hate comments on videos of Cornell students unrelated to the incident. "I think when you start hating on Cornell students and hating on a university as a whole, specifically its students as a whole, I think it can make them feel more distant from the sexual assault case and will make them more angry and irritated," said Sophia, a Cornell student in the class of 2030. "That energy should be focused on justice."



Students remain divided on whether or not Greek life is the root cause of incidents like the Cornell 7. "No matter the place, setting, or time, women are always at risk of being sexually assaulted or sexually harassed," Sophia continued.

However, students observed that Greek life could create the conditions to make assaults more likely. "When they're part of a Greek life, sometimes it can create this hierarchy and patriarchy, where they feel like they're more powerful," Sophia noted. The lawsuit itself sharpened that debate: it alleges the assault was advertised in a group chat to dozens of fraternity members, and as far as is publicly known, no one objected.

"Students remain divided on whether or not Greek life is the root cause of incidents like the Cornell 7."

Cornell's protests have set off a wave across the country, with more than 50 campuses holding walkouts. On Oct. 8, students and survivors joined a nationwide day of action. Rallies and walkouts took place at Philadelphia City Hall and the University of Delaware. Even high school students in Chicago participated, with several hundred students walking out of Lincoln Park High School in solidarity.

That same day, Harvard students gathered in front of the Science Center to protest and show support for Jane Doe. Several student organizations planned the event, including the Undergraduate Palestine Solidarity Committee, the Student Labor Action Movement, the Association of Black Harvard Women, Harvard-Radcliffe RAZA, and the Undergraduate Monarch Coalition.

"I was inspired by all of the people who are out on the streets, really out here demanding justice," student leader and announcer at the protest, Sa'Maia Evans '27, explained. "We all have the right to demand justice for not only Jane Doe, but for survivors everywhere."

Students at the protest noted that sexual violence at both Cornell and Harvard stems from broader cultural norms. "A lot of it has to do with people being very flippant about it," an anonymous Harvard student in the class of 2030 explained. The student described a situation that their friend, James, had told them about his friend Jonathan, saying that Jonathan and a friend of his had found two intoxicated female students in the Yard and taken advantage of the situation to lure the girls into their dorm to have intercourse with them.

"When my friend was telling me about the situation, he was speaking of it as if it were humorous, very dismissive and flippant, as if, 'Oh, my friend had an orgy,' and I was like, 'That's rape.' And he was just like, 'Oh well, I didn't think of it like that.' It's a lot of ignorance."

Students continued that college administrations everywhere had an obligation to prevent sexual violence. "It's a reflection of a problem that's existed for as long as time," Madison Cotting '27 said. "Colleges and fraternities have always been hotspots of sexual assault in America, and it is the responsibility of the institutions that are creating campus cultures to protect the people living, to protect people from sexual violence."

"Students at the protest noted that sexual violence at both Cornell and Harvard stems from broader cultural norms."

The process that sexual assault survivors have to undergo to get justice, known as the Title IX process, can also be complicated. The Title IX process is a formal grievance procedure used by federally funded educational institutions to address reports of sex-based discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and retaliation. After a formal complaint, an impartial, trained investigator handles the case, and both the accused and the accuser can review evidence and submit responses. The process takes 60 to 90 business days, though complex cases can take longer.

Recent changes have complicated this process and made it even harder for survivors to come forward. On Sept. 29, 2026, two weeks after Doe's lawsuit, the Department of Education formally reinstated its 2020 Title IX rules. These former rules restore a narrower definition of sexual harassment, a narrower scope for what schools must investigate, and live hearings where each side's advisor can cross-examine the other.

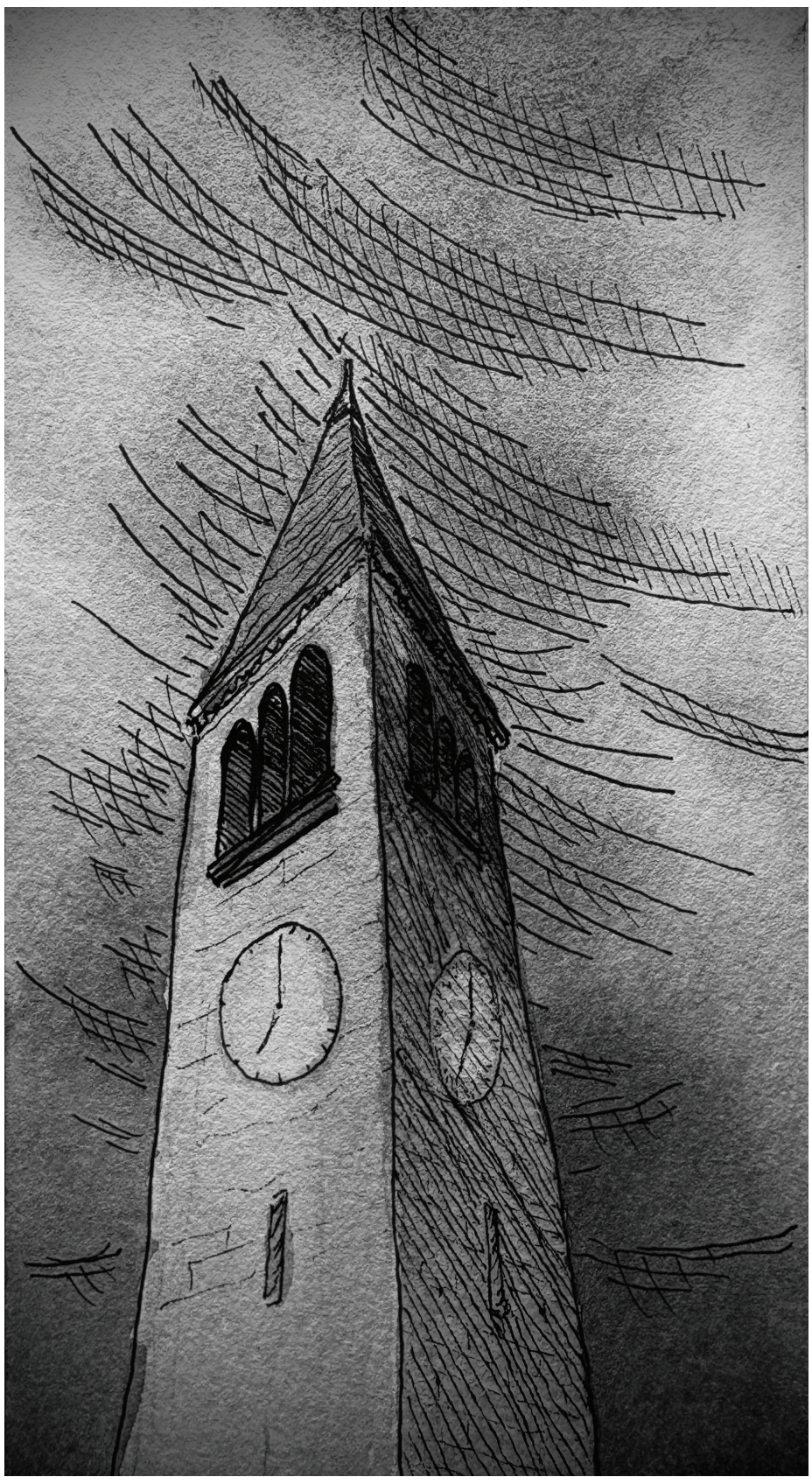
"We promote safe, confidential resources of a similar sort, and yet they are just so hard to access, and often shame victims themselves, or provide an unrealistic framework," a first-year at Harvard noted. Universities across the country have struggled to implement accessible Title IX processes.

"I'm a victim of the Title IX process," another anonymous Harvard graduate student said. The student had difficulties with Title IX at another undergraduate institution. "I had no idea what I was getting into until it happened, and I was just blindsided."

"Imagine you're trying to be a student, stay afloat, and deal with a difficult course load. That's already a job in and of itself," the graduate student explained. "So imagine doing that congruent with going through statements, having to write them, having to go to meetings, having to be constantly retraumatized when this thing is being held over you, all while being on campus dreading running into this person." Under the reinstated rules, that process can now include facing questions from the other side's advisor at a live hearing.

Students across the country are looking towards a future where incidents like the Cornell 7 become a thing of the past. "We don't want a world in which women are sexually abused, in which there's gender violence," Evans said. "We know the truth, and we know what kind of society we want."

The article uses pseudonyms throughout.



Anika Gupta '30 (anikagupta@college.harvard.edu) and Salma Gheith '30 (salmagheith@college.harvard.edu) are comping the "Harvard Independent."

Graphics by Cameron Bernier '29 & Caleb Boyce '29

FORUM

At Last, and Too Soon

Why must the beautiful children pay for what we have done?

By NOAH BASDEN '29

I recently read an article in the "Washington Post" that covered the war in Ukraine. It detailed the devastating reality of war and the depth of the collective grief and suffering in Pryluky, Ukraine, following the killing of the civilian Ivanchenko family. Oleksandr Ivanchenko, his wife Yuliia, and their two young children, Iryna and Maksym, died on Wednesday, Oct. 7. They died in their sleep, and now, in their eternal sleep, I can only pray they find the peace nearly five years of invasion robbed from them.

The senseless attack that took the lives of the Ivanchenko family also killed dozens more, including five children. All death in war is a tragedy, but it is the children I intend to focus on. Yulia Holoma, a colleague of Oleksandr, spoke powerfully, as detailed in the "Post" article, on the loss of Iryna and Maksym, stating that "[Russian aggression] took two children who never had the chance to know life."

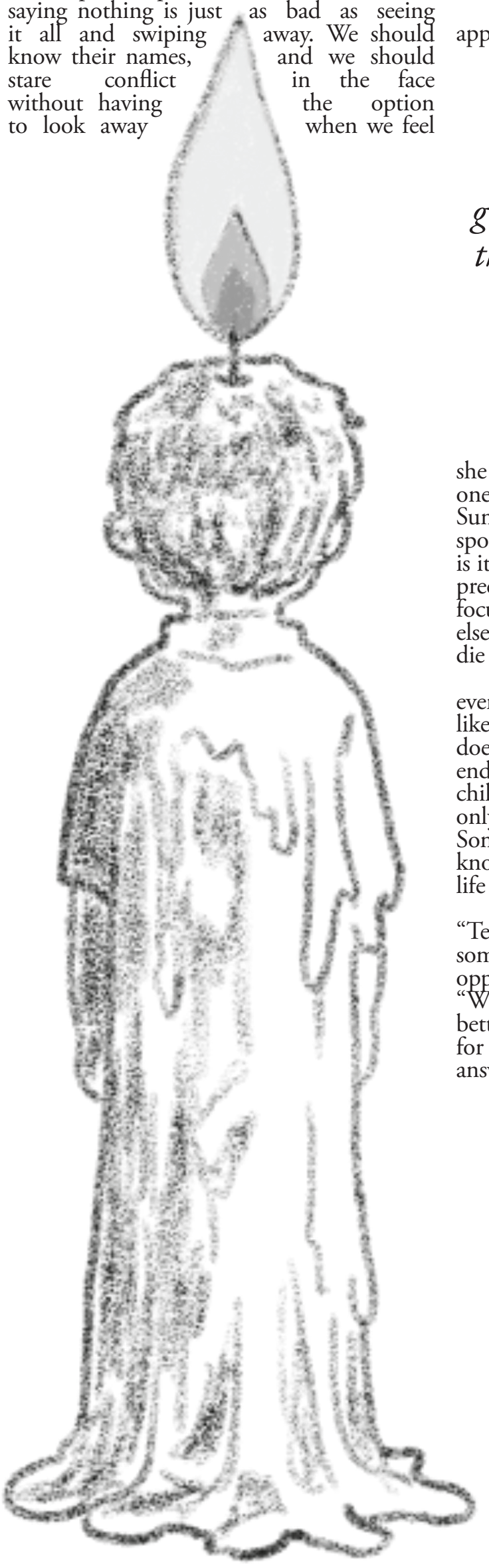
Sitting with that statement, I wonder to myself what it is like to "know life." I'm sure these are questions that philosophers have and will continue to argue for centuries. However, it is clear to me what life should not be. Life should not be cut short at 13, in Iryna's case, and 8, in Maksym's, simply because they were born in a country another nation mistakenly thinks it has the right to take. Of course children die all the time; illness and accidents take countless beautiful children before they get to know life, but there is nothing natural or accidental about a Russian cruise missile striking a residential building while its residents slept.

"I can only pray they find the peace nearly five years of invasion robbed from them."

Iryna and Maksym were two of five children who lost their lives in that attack. The Ivanchenkos were one of three families killed, and Pryluky was another city brought to its knees in this conflict that has seen thousands of child casualties and innocent Ukrainian civilians victimized by the war. Numbers often detach us from the devastating reality of war, which is why I focus on Holoma's words.

At times, peace seems a hopeless endeavor in a world ruled by conflict. War, death, and violence, for better or for worse, are so easily accessible in the modern day. We can open Instagram Reels and, with a click, be transported to the war zone of our choice to watch intensely graphic footage. Then we swipe off and on to some AI slop, thinking nothing more of the father, son, mother, aunt, sister, or whomever we just watched lose their lives.

Do I have a solution for this? Of course I don't, just as I wouldn't know where to start on the path to peace. However, I do believe saying nothing is just as bad as seeing it all and swiping away. We should know their names, and we should stare conflict in the face without having the option to look away when we feel uncomfortable. War, though I have never known it myself, is terrifying. It is one of those rare things with little to no beauty. Amongst the rubble and shattered family photos strewn across empty streets that were once so full of life, despair and hope for better days lie, but rarely any beauty.



I often think of Mary Oliver when I approach topics of intense emotion because she balances grief and wonder without letting one cancel out the other. I referred to "The Summer Day" in a previous article, where I spoke on the poem's last line: "Tell me, what is it you plan to do / with your one wild and precious life?" This time, however, I want to focus on the two lines before it: "Tell me, what else should I have done? / Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?"

"Some children didn't grow old enough to know their parents' real names, let alone what life was like."

Oliver, in her own way, admits that every life ends, often sooner than we would like. While this is true, the reply's truth doesn't really matter. Knowing that every life ends doesn't explain why so many innocent children, many of whom knew their parents only as "mama" and "papa," leave so soon. Some children didn't grow old enough to know their parents' real names, let alone what life was like. It's depressing, and it should be.

I often think about Oliver's question, "Tell me, what else should I have done?" as something I would ask God if I ever got the opportunity to. Reflecting now, however, "What have we become?" is probably a much better question to ask, since it isn't a question for God but for humanity to reckon with and answer ourselves.

Noah Basden '29 (nhbasden@college.harvard.edu) has no funny words for this one.

Graphic by Ella Cohen '29

What Harvard Owes Its Students After the Cornell 7

Why Harvard should not comment on the Cornell 7.

By ZOË MACKLOWE '30

Sexual violence is no longer the unspoken elephant in the room. Attributing this increased dialogue solely to the #MeToo movement leaves out a large part of the story. We must recognize the systems that fail to correct themselves when sexual violence happens, enabling these cycles of harm to continue.

On Sept. 16, a former student of Cornell under the pseudonym of Jane Doe filed a lawsuit against the seven members of Cornell Chi Phi fraternity who allegedly sexually assaulted her in October 2024. Referred to in the media as the "Cornell 7," this case is reviving conversations of sexual violence across college campuses.

Campus assault cases are not new, so why has the Cornell 7 gained so much traction? One reason is the scale of the alleged assault: Doe was allegedly assaulted by seven members of the Cornell Chi Phi fraternity on October 19, 2024. The men forced themselves onto Doe for hours.

Another is the role of social media exploitation and substance abuse. According to Doe's testimony, two of the men offered her ketamine and alcohol, and five other fraternity members were informed of her incapacitated state through "Chi Phi Actives" on Snapchat.

The biggest reason, though, is the gap between the scale of the assault and the university's response. In early November 2024, Doe took the incident to the Cornell police. Cornell waited nearly three weeks to issue a statement, and the formal investigation began in January under Cornell's Title IX office, with hearings in May 2025. At the end of the investigation, the university expelled only two of the accused and suspended two others. The rest of the men received minor punishments, such as bystander intervention training.

Reflecting on Doe's case—particularly the university's slow and unsatisfactory response—raises questions about how other colleges ought to respond. How should Harvard address the Cornell 7?

Harvard should not state the Cornell 7, but instead allocate greater resources and attention to sexual assault prevention on campus. A statement from Harvard would carry weight, but such commentary can put the administration in a difficult position and undermine follow-through.

Originally, I thought yes. Of course Harvard should speak out. I was practically waiting for an email.

Whenever a consequential event occurred at schools near Chapin, my high school, the administration offered remarks to both students and parents. Chapin enrolls 810 students. By contrast, Harvard has over 24,000 students across its schools and is consistently recognized as one of the world's best universities. As a leading voice for academic institutions globally, Harvard must respond to issues that undermine students' well-being.

Harvard's 2024 Report on Institutional Voice in the University states that "the university has a responsibility to speak out to protect and promote its core function." If fostering a safe environment, free of sexual assault, is included under the university's "core function," then Harvard must speak out.

However, after reading more of the report and considering the implications of such a statement, my stance has shifted.

While the report supports addressing matters that directly target Harvard, it advises against Harvard speaking on public events that do not take place on campus. "If the university and its leaders become accustomed to issuing official statements about matters beyond the core function of the university, they will inevitably come under intense pressure to do so from multiple, competing sides on nearly every imaginable issue of the day," the institution reasons.

Opening this door to administration-level social advocacy puts the school in a conundrum. If Harvard engages with one matter, it must do the same for the next, and the cycle becomes inescapable. When these messages become too consistent, they lose their gravity. I can attest to this from my own high school experience: while Chapin's frequent messaging was sometimes comforting, it also felt redundant and routine.

Such communications can also become a cop-out, letting Harvard offer token sympathy to an affected individual or group without responding systemically. If the school makes a statement, surely that is enough. Administrators can offer empty words and still get away with the public image of meeting due diligence, avoiding the need to address the issue directly. Furthermore, speaking on events in which Harvard has no direct role can seem presumptuous, centering the institution, rather than those most impacted.

Instead of statements, the report declares that Harvard "must dedicate resources to training staff most directly in contact with affected members. These concrete actions should prove, in the end, more effective and meaningful." The administration should react to the Cornell 7 by actively expanding resources aimed at preventing sexual assault on campus.

One in eight students experiences sexual violence during college, but prevention helps reduce this number. Prevention assumes the form of promoting consent, bystander intervention, and attitudes that condemn sexual violence.

Harvard begins prevention freshman fall through an online anti-sexual violence training module and on-campus workshop series. Having just completed these training sessions, I can attest that these resources are hardly enough. The modules were easy to speed through at 2x, and the lectures were beyond unengaging.

Although the entryway meeting on Harvard's Title IX policy and bystander intervention was more robust, the dialogue around the content ended when we left the room. Instead, many students focused on complaining about how many required meetings remained.

We had checked the box of sexual violence awareness. In theory, I could now provide a friend with proper direction and resources if something happened to them, or intervene if I saw someone in trouble. Nevertheless, one week of prevention at the start of first year isn't enough.

Harvard's resources for survivors and individuals who may have caused harm are extensive. Sexual Harassment/Assault Resources and Education has everything from coping skills workshops to survivor yoga groups and private counseling.

By contrast, Harvard's Prevention Team offers limited resources. They attended a summit back in 2024, and their primary current project, beyond first-year orientation week programming, is analyzing data from the Higher Education Sexual Misconduct and Awareness (HESMA) survey. Beyond these objectives, the Prevention Team could use additional direction and resources to strengthen their agenda.

A Johns Hopkins University study applied the Haddon Matrix, an injury prevention framework, to preventing sexual violence. The Matrix considers how the physical and social environment induces injuries. To prevent sexual violence, the study proposes that universities focus on the "3Es": engineering, enforcement, and education.

I propose that Harvard expands its educational prevention requirements beyond first year.

Engineering the physical environment to reduce harm and enforcing policies regarding sexual violence have not proven successful in mitigating harm yet. Still, education has a 60% success rate—teaching students not to victimize survivors and to intervene as trained bystanders. Education may have even helped prevent perpetration, with 25% of individuals reporting behavioral changes.

During the first weeks of school, every undergraduate should be required to attend a sexual violence prevention panel, encompassing bystander intervention, substance use awareness, and social media behavior.

Next, Harvard should bring in sexual violence survivors and bystanders who can share their stories. Stories work better than rules. One fond memory of a high school keynote involved a direct demonstration. A speaker had students come on the stage to complete the Human Chair Challenge, emphasizing how supporting each other is crucial to success.

Third, the University should also send periodic email reminders throughout the school year about Title IX and available resources. An ideal time to send one of these emails would have been during the resurgence of the Cornell 7, reminding students of available resources.

Actions speak louder than words. Harvard replying to the Cornell 7 by reinforcing prevention resources is more powerful than issuing a potentially detached statement. Students should be the voice of the institution, protesting these issues, and Harvard should respond to their needs by acknowledging concerns through concrete changes to cultivate a safe, responsible campus environment.

Zoë Macklowe '30 (zmacklowe@college.harvard.edu) should adhere more closely to the original Haddon Matrix, as she keeps getting injured.

Harvard's Hardened Heart

Instances of violence on and around campus raise questions about institutional responsibility for student safety at Harvard.

By SADIE GUGLIOTTA '30

In the weeks before my first year at Harvard, I got my annual back-to-school haircut. I await this tradition with excitement, for it physically marks the changes ahead: it shears away the dead weight of split ends and existential anxieties for the coming year, and implicitly prepares me for, and embraces, the growth that awaits. Shaking my hair out more easily than before, I smiled up at my reflection in the salon mirror before heading to the door. As I rose, my hairdresser turned me toward her soberly. "Have so much fun your first year of college! But remember to be careful, and watch out for yourself," she said, hands on my shoulders.

In so few words, this passing acknowledgment addressed the risks that college life poses for young women, a stark reminder that powerful institutions are not impervious to sexual and physical violence. They may even breed a culture that perpetuates it as commonplace. The Harvard University Police Department's annual security report shows an increase in total incidents of rape and stalking from 2023 to 2025, along with 12 recorded hate crimes this past year alone.

Conversations about sexual violence on college campuses are seemingly inescapable in light of the Cornell Seven Case. However, questions of administrative accountability are not new to the dialogue about punitive actions and survivor protection at Harvard and peer institutions. Harvard's administration must provide students with tangible resources to cope with and reduce violent acts on campus to ensure everyone can access the quality of life and education it promises.

Entering college, I had no illusions that Harvard's institutional bubble would shield me from the evils of the broader world. Many of us who were socialized as women hear the same cautionary tales and receive the same sage wisdom: don't trust anyone at a random party to handle your drink; travel in groups; make sure your friends end the night somewhere safe. I felt these things were relatively within the scope of my control. However, I did not expect my control to be challenged so immediately or consistently as it has been in my first few months here.

A Sept. 1 email, notifying students of a machete-armed man who evaded police in the Mt. Auburn Street area, bolstered by a WhatsApp warning from my proctors, compelled me to seek shelter in Annenberg. An hour later, police detained the suspect, and I never received a follow-up.

Less than a month later, on Sept. 28, both Memorial Hall and Memorial Church were closed off and searched as a result of a bomb threat. Though students were cautioned to shelter in place, I know of many classes that were not canceled and students who were forced to resume their daily schedule despite looming danger.

I count myself among those who initially dismissed the bomb threat's severity. Aside from a few texts from loved ones checking in on my whereabouts, the situation did not feel like anything other than an inconvenience to the regular course of my day, which only illustrates how distant these threats of violence feel. HUPD's own email described the evacuation of Memorial Hall and Memorial Church as an "abundance of caution," potentially an attempt to curb the panic of students and their families. While I agree these messages should not be designed to fearmonger, I think it can be equally dangerous to prematurely quell safety concerns for the sake of ease or appearance.

The lack of institutional recognition of the severity of these events only normalizes and desensitizes students to these violent occurrences. A 2017 Harvard Business School study suggests that repeated exposure to violent crime can desensitize people to it. As these violent acts go unaddressed by university faculty, their shock value is diminished, and so is student response.

The Clery Act requires universities that participate in federal financial aid programs to disclose campus crime rates and make campus safety procedures transparent. It is not enough to merely report these crimes, and I am hard-pressed to believe that the summer education modules incoming Harvard students complete for Title IX and safety training substantially curb the perpetration of violence against vulnerable students.

As details emerge that five of the seven men accused in the alleged gang rape at Cornell, dubbed the "Cornell Seven," were assigned essays and made to attend workshops as punishment, the efficacy of such harm reduction techniques comes into question. If those found responsible get away with a slap on the wrist, they receive the message that these powerful institutions favor their interests and futures over victims'.

Though workshops and educational modules effectively introduce the concept of misconduct and how to address it for both survivors and potential perpetrators, they do not end Harvard's institutional responsibility to ensure student safety. Harvard must actively amplify survivors' voices. In the wake of a violent event on campus, students should be connected with mental health resources and made aware of opportunities to create a personalized safety plan in the event of an emergency. And I believe it goes without saying that class attendance should not be mandated in the aftermath of a bomb threat, or any incident of similar magnitude. We must recognize the gravity of these situations and respond accordingly.

The student rally held outside of Zimmer Hall on Oct. 9 in protest of Harvard's own Title IX policies is an indication that students are tired of living amidst casual violence. At a university that accepted over $9 million from Jeffrey Epstein and whose former president, along with various faculty members, were closely associated with the convicted sex offender, students should be outraged at its lack of demonstrated accountability and support for survivors. It seems that Harvard's loyalty lies where its money is concentrated. And harm mitigation is not a booming business. But students should not have to reckon with the aftermath of administrative missteps.

Our safety is not secondary to Harvard's institutional interests. Harvard is a remarkable college with invaluable opportunities. Still, its promised "culture of inclusive excellence" rings hollow as it sustains procedures that devalue marginalized students as its status quo.

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Graphic by Tess Harris '30



The Original Sin

A discussion on filial responsibility.

By ELLIOT CHUNG '29

To be born is to be indebted. The moment we are expelled from the Garden of Eden, or our mother's womb, we are signed into a life of serfdom. It seems like a favorable contract—for over a decade we are fed, clothed, bathed, and educated at no cost to us—but we never choose to sign it. What are one's responsibilities in this contract, this thing we call unconditional love?

For a long time, a child's piety comes unquestioned—one faithfully obeys the words of their patron. As long as this holds, the parent-child relationship continues without a hitch. At some point, however, the illusion of parental omniscience and benevolence is shattered, and one begins to question their commandments. The fine print of the parent-child contract comes into question, and neither side fully understands it.

"When a child is born, they are forced into debt, but parents are also forced to invest."

To the teenager, agency feels like an unalienable right. The freedom to make one's own choices seems central to human existence. To the parent, freedom exists proportional to their child's capabilities. Until they have proven they can think critically and live on their own, it is a parent's job to guide them. When these two mandates conflict, a tenuous undercurrent of ownership exists in the subtext of every deliberation. Both sides start by trying to ignore the obvious power imbalance and engage each other with reason.

However, when locked in an intractable stalemate, the parent avails themselves of their trump card, invoking that unconsensual contract signed in blood and amniotic fluid. For some, it takes little to force their hand; for others, it is a last resort; but in all cases, a parent can truthfully tell their child, "I own you."

The child recoils, as if struck, at such a declaration. Their cheeks flush with vulnerability, and heat pulsates in their face. It feels like the greatest betrayal for a parent to strip away the illusion of unconditionality and demand a payment on one's debt. To some extent, the child has no grounds upon which to take a stand. What can one say in the face of their creator and livelihood?

Most readers will relate more to the child, since they have no children of their own. However, I want to show the parent's side through the lens of evolutionary biology. On average, humans do not produce as many calories as they consume until their late teens. By comparison, chimpanzees reach self-sufficiency at age five. Most humans will not have the means to repay the value of their parents' investment in them, and the few who can often do not. Granted, parental care is a spectrum, and investment levels can differ greatly, but your existence fundamentally depends on others' altruism.

The picture is complicated, though, when the author of the contract we speak of is revealed. Parental investment itself is a product of natural selection. Genes that prompt an organism to care for its offspring, who carry copies of those same genes, are passed on more successfully than genes that do not. Over countless generations, care becomes part of a species' design. How much care evolves, however, depends on what the young need to survive.

At the opposite extreme, cod release millions of eggs and abandon them. A human produces a handful of children and raises each for nearly two decades. Our place at this extreme traces largely to the brain. A human newborn's head barely fits through the birth canal, and a mother's body can sustain the energy demands of pregnancy for only so long, so infants are born with brains roughly a quarter to a third of their adult size, compared with nearly 40% in chimpanzees. Most of that growth happens after birth, and the skills a large brain makes possible take years more to acquire: in studies of foraging societies, children do not produce more food than they consume until their late teens. Under these conditions, parents inclined to invest heavily had more surviving descendants than those who were not. In evolutionary terms, the devotion we experience as love secures investment.

If parental care is no more than an evolutionary inclination to pass on one's genes, the contract's power dynamics seem less daunting. Before this discovery, the child came to the table as a creature who didn't intend to exist, buttressed solely by their creator's kind heart and altruistic nature. Pulling back the curtain of unconditional love, we see that parents also seem to be victims of deterministic cause and effect. Their altruism isn't self-serving, yet it isn't free will either. When a child is born, they are forced into debt, but parents are also forced to invest.

Unfortunately, I have no answers. I will not delude myself into claiming I know the right balance between independence and filial piety, or the right level of unquestioning devotion one owes their parents. Much to the disappointment of my binary-biased mind, the answer is probably not absolute devotion or absolute freedom. Still, even though the solution is out of reach, I discuss the subject because I believe it is worth considering what you owe the people who gave you everything.

"What are one's responsibilities in this contract, this thing we call unconditional love?"

I also acknowledge that I have painted a dark and twisted picture of the relationship between parent and child. In practice, it isn't always that way.

Parents love their children "unconditionally," unaware of the evolutionary forces underlying their actions, and children rebel against their parents, ignoring the terrible weight of ownership their parents have over them. Perhaps this illusion isn't meant to be broken.

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Graphic by Taylor Bierwerth '29



Why Does Harvard Hate the Homeless?

Harvard is restricting the Smith Center Plaza at night, displacing unhoused residents who have gathered at the building for years.

By ABIGAIL MCKOY '30

When the Smith Campus Center was renovated in 2018, the team in charge claimed the renovation was part of a wider, ongoing "Common Space" initiative by the University to support the wider community. They stated that the Smith Center was intended to create a "360,000-square-foot open door" for Harvard. However, while Harvard provides many different spaces throughout Cambridge, the unhoused often get overlooked in their processes.

Recently, Harvard has been taping off the plaza outside the Smith Center every night after the building closes at 10 p.m. and tying together tables and chairs. These moves displaced unhoused residents who have used the Smith Center as a gathering place for years. The timing of this decision collides with a seasonal shelter gap, as Harvard's two student-run homeless shelters, Y2Y Harvard Square and Harvard Square Homeless Shelter, will not open until Oct. 15, 2026.

"By barring homeless people from using a certain area, it not only displaces but also criminalizes them."

Actions taken against the Cambridge homeless community are not new. In 2021, the city council asked the MBTA to redesign the benches at the Cambridge T stops to include bars that prevent people from sleeping there. Critics have called this design "hostile architecture" and pointed out how the bars make it harder for people experiencing homelessness to escape crowds.

In light of these changes, questions arise about whether establishments should be allowed to deter people experiencing homelessness by restricting public spaces, and whether Harvard, specifically, should be responsible for creating a safe space for the unhoused community around the Square.

In response to the latter question, Harvard should allocate more funds to student-led shelters so they can expand beyond their current capacity and allow unhoused individuals to stay longer.

In response to the former, establishments should not be allowed to deter people experiencing homelessness intentionally. They are responsible for everyone in their community. It is stated on our website that "The University is committed to collaborations that build upon this shared vision of community and that enhance the lives of Cambridge residents." I guess this message of camaraderie doesn't extend to unhoused individuals. Places that are made for the local area and its people should be open to everyone in the local area. By barring homeless people from using a certain area, it not only displaces but also criminalizes them.

Moreover, Harvard restricting the Smith Center allows for more targeted police activity towards the homeless. New nighttime regulations at Smith Plaza allow Harvard University Police Department officers to remove people who stay after hours; those who refuse can be arrested for trespassing.

The Smith Center has already been an unwelcome space for the unhoused, even before the tables and chairs in the plaza were tied together. According to the Boston Institution for Nonprofit Journalism, "Many unhoused people who have spent time at the Smith Center report hostility from HUPD and Securitas, Harvard's private security firm."

When I first came to Harvard, I was incredibly surprised by how many unhoused people were on the streets. Given Harvard's funding and the number of wealthy individuals who visit campus, I expected the school to spare funding for the unhoused. However, after my first few months here, I have seen a pattern of Harvard neglecting the less privileged.

Harvard is the wealthiest higher-education institution globally, with an endowment of $56.9 billion and total net assets of $68.7 billion. For the approximately 160 unhoused people in the Cambridge area, Harvard could buy a $600,000 condo for each, and it would cost only 1.7% of its total endowment.

However, the institution is not always generous with its money. This stinginess is also evident in the recent rallies supporting Harvard University Dining Services workers. Harvard has refused to meet the workers' demands to raise pay to a living wage, raising the possibility of future strikes.

Some people may think that Harvard is already helping enough through its two student-led homeless shelters. However, those shelters can host only about 45 people at a time, and their limited capacity can leave those without a spot in danger during extreme weather. According to the Harvard Gazette, the HUHS shelter "houses 20 beds for men and four beds for women and is full most every night, with requests often outnumbering available beds." During the Jan. Winter Storm known as Fern and the Jan. 2014 blizzard, Y2Y had to expand hours and overnight capacity to house individuals.

Harvard's shelters reach capacity constraints because Harvard undergraduates staff and manage them and therefore rely entirely on student volunteers. The shelter also operates on limited funding, relying mainly on contributions and grants, with limited support from the University. If the University offered more funding, these shelters wouldn't have to turn unhoused people away during deadly weather.

Returning to the Smith Center, Harvard needs to stop deterring unhoused people in the plaza. Displacing these individuals is not only inhumane, but it also contradicts the purpose of the Smith Center's outdoor area.

The Smith Center's plaza was meant to serve the community, and unhoused people should not be excluded.

Furthermore, I believe Harvard should allocate part of its endowment to fund projects that reduce homelessness. In 2022, Georgetown University funded the H3 project, a nonprofit homeless outreach organization, to connect local unhoused residents to housing and healthcare. The H3 team spent months surveying the encampment residents about the circumstances that led them to homelessness and connecting them with resources. The team helped unhoused residents enroll in Medicaid, apply for jobs, and connect with housing programs.

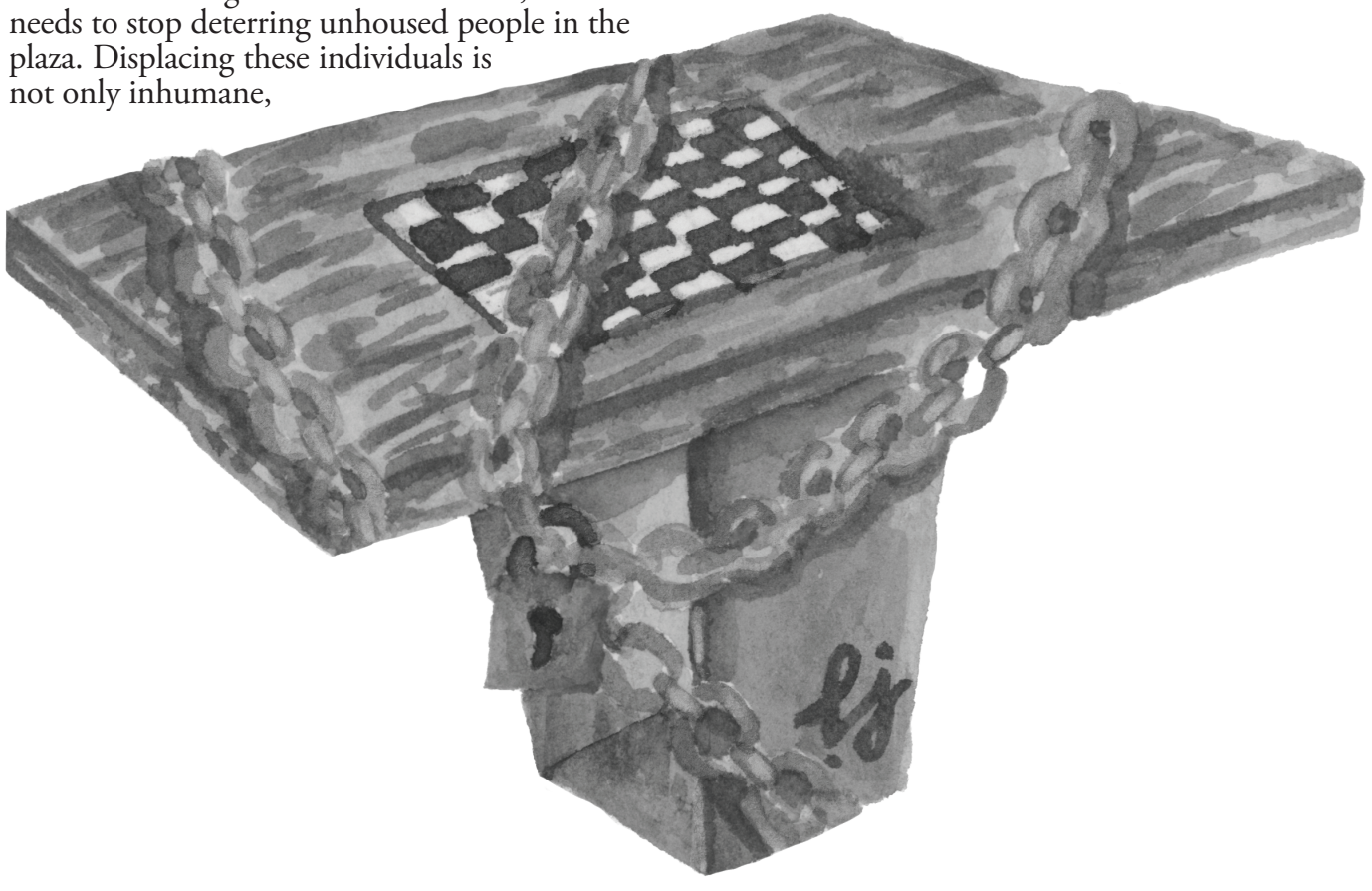
"The Smith Center's plaza was meant to serve the community, and unhoused people should not be excluded."

What Georgetown did was unique, but it doesn't have to be. More schools should focus their efforts on projects like this, starting with Harvard. As a leading institution of higher education, Harvard should take inspiration from schools like Georgetown and lead the way.

To me, cultivating a community means supporting every individual in the area, no matter where they come from or their position. At Harvard, unhoused individuals, despite their situation, are still members of our community and should therefore be treated with respect.

Abigail McKoy '30 (abimckoy@college.harvard.edu) is comping the "Harvard Independent."

Graphic by Lola Selberg '30



The Oracles in our Feeds

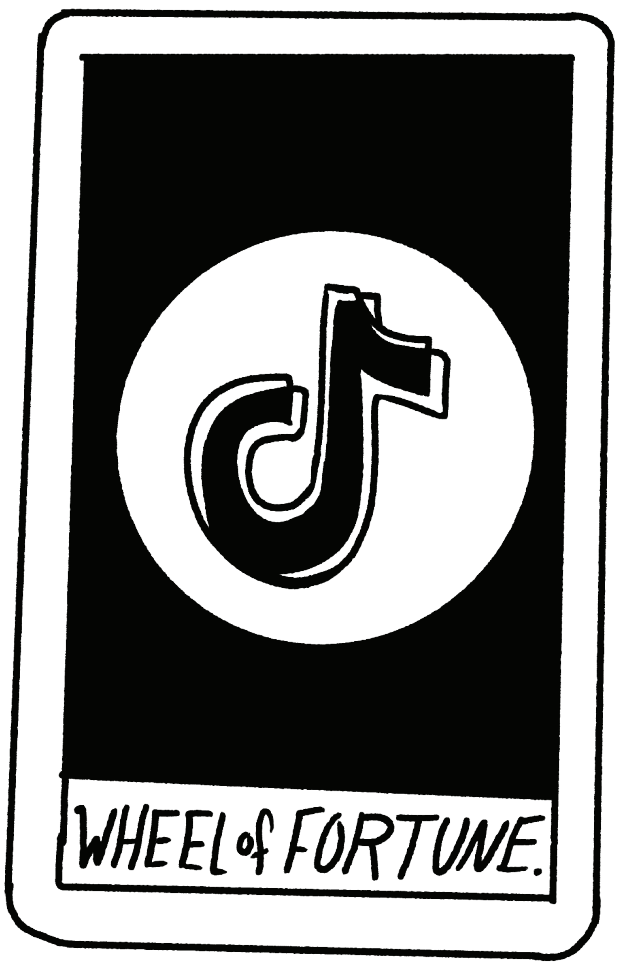
TikTok Tarot readers promise us a glimpse into our futures. But are algorithms predicting who we become or deciding it for us?

By MUJTABA RAJA '30

While scrolling TikTok on a hot summer day, I stumbled on a video engineered to stop my thumb. "This video has no tags. If it found you, it was meant for you," a tarot reader said, a jewel-bright deck fanned between her hands as a set of waiting fates. Though I knew no spirit had actually summoned the video to my screen, I found it hard to dismiss it as a coincidence.

The TikTok reader turned over a card, then another. She narrated a scenario: someone from my past was thinking of times we had spent together; thorny conversations I hadn't yet fully finished would return; a decision I had been avoiding would soon demand an answer. Her predictions left enough space for me to fill their ambiguities with names and memories from my past, and with my own internal anxieties.

Since then, my feed has delivered dozens of similar prophecies. Each announces, with a certain gravitas, that it matters. You were meant to see this! This message found you at just the right time. Whatever you do, do NOT scroll. Someone in your life whose name begins with the letter "H" is plotting your downfall (I sent this to my sister, chuckling, with a "??"). This video has no hashtags, so it was truly meant to find you today!



For most of human history, uncertainty has attracted interpreters. Ancient Greeks consulted oracles, watched birds fly, examined dreams, and read sacrificed animals for signs of what awaited them. The oracle promised that the world's chaos could still contain messages if one knew how to read them. Ordinary events were interpreted as signs of something in our foreseeable futures. A bird crossing the sky was not simply being a bird; a dream was not simply a dream.

Our recommendation systems belong to an entirely different order of knowledge. Their predictions emerge from bits and pieces of data collected from us and behavioral inference, not the supernatural. They gather small traces of our behavior—which jokes make us laugh, which strangers catch our attention, and which cultural moments or trending topics have us hooked—and use these patterns to decide what to show us next.

Spotify tells us what music era we will enter next; TikTok determines which corner of culture will appear when we swipe up; dating apps, even, reduce an impossibly large group of people to a handful of strangers presented as conceivable future partners. This question of what awaits you in the future, one that has captured our imagination and anxieties for centuries, has not disappeared. In many ways, this language of prophecy has become a language of prediction.

These algorithms increasingly help organize our futures. When TikTok notices us lingering over one particular video, it sends us three more, and soon it develops an accidental curiosity in us that may become an interest, a passion, even. What begins as a guess by TikTok about who I am can help create who I become. A familiar joke we see appearing on our social media feeds nowadays is that our algorithm "knows us better than we know ourselves" and sayings along the lines of "not my feed calling me out!" Even though these recommendation systems don't know us in any human sense, the judgments they make from traces and patterns in our digital behavior can feel uncannily intimate on the other side of the glass.

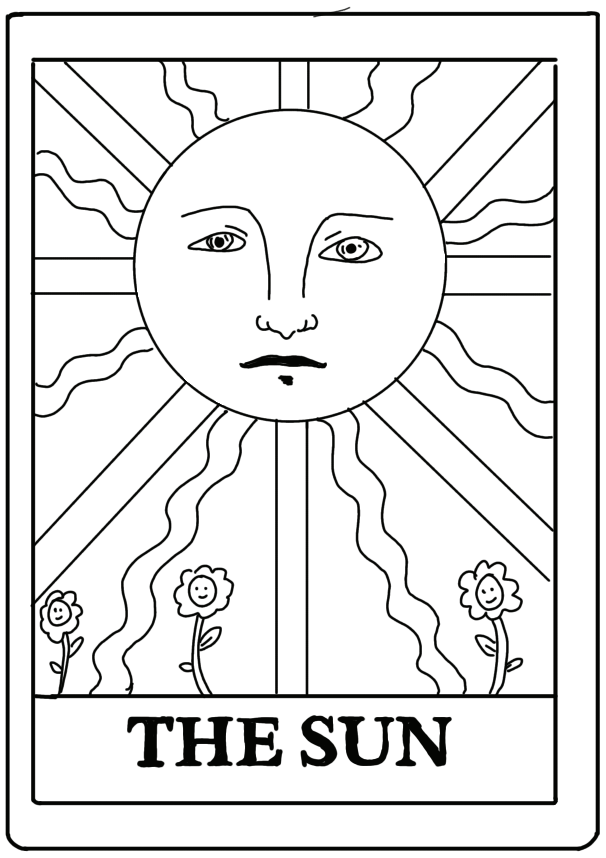
"The crystal balls of the witches in our childhood movies have taken a new shape: now just a black mirror held intimately in our palms, glowing with a stream selected just for us."

A video names a fear we haven't yet articulated, and a very specific song might arrive the night we need it. A prediction, whether from a tarot reader or a stranger who happens to share your experience, can land close enough to the bone that the algorithm's calculations begin to make us feel deeply recognized and seen in our humanity. This recognition can oddly begin to resemble what we think is perhaps fate. And even understanding this machinery doesn't necessarily break the spell, because any rational explanation we can devise for why something appears on our feeds can still sit comfortably beside this colder shiver in our minds: what if?

That may be the peculiar enchantment of the algorithmic age. Our reason has not entirely displaced superstition. We've built great, incredibly sophisticated systems of computation, only to discover their predictions can awaken impulses in humans far older than computation. The desire for signs, the fear of fate, the hope that the universe (or at least the feed) has noticed us. The crystal balls of the witches in our childhood movies have taken a new shape: now just a black mirror held intimately in our palms, glowing with a stream selected just for us.

That is why I still stop when these videos appear, and why my thumb still hesitates to skip any similar video that pops up on my feed. I know the cards don't really know the real me, and the algorithm doesn't care whether any prophecy comes true. But for a few seconds, its selection can still feel uncomfortably close to reality. Beneath the reader's card, another system is already studying whether I stay.

Scarier still is the possibility that viewers who feel recognized, feeling a part of themselves seen—and that this recognition might, to a certain extent, replace the capacity for real human connection that comes from in-person encounters. This also shows up in our growing dependence on conversing with artificial intelligence systems. A 2025 study by Common Sense Media found that roughly one-third of teenagers who had used AI companions had discussed serious matters with them instead of real people. Some have even turned to chatbots for therapeutic purposes, even though Stanford researchers warn that such systems can respond dangerously to mental-health concerns. The danger, perhaps, is that feeling understood by machines may gradually replace the experience of being understood by another person through actual human connection.



As algorithmic systems grow more capable and fluent at predicting human behavior, another question becomes harder to dismiss: at what point does prediction stop describing the future and start quietly arranging it, becoming a blueprint for who it wants us to become? If a machine learns from us while continuously deciding what we encounter next, who, exactly, is reading whom? Perhaps the greatest power of these oracles, assigned to us by our feeds, is not simply to prophesy and predict our futures, but to eventually make their own prophecies come true as they shape who we are.

Mujtaba Raja '30 (mujtabaraja@college.harvard.edu) is comping the "Harvard Independent." He would stop doom-scrolling, but his algorithm says something important is coming.

Graphics by Linden McCarl '28 & Nuala Mernin '29

ARTS

With the Current

Introspections of the Charles River.

By MEENA BEHRINGER '27

I walked along the Charles today. Toward Boston, just far enough to see the city and the Museum of Science that rests at the end. Sometimes I walk under the trees that cover the path; other times, right next to the road with the ongoing traffic. It is quietest near the finish line of the Head of the Charles, tucked away.

Today, in the slow evening moments before the sunset, before the lights on the sides of the bridges glimmered, it is peaceful. Just crisp enough for a jacket, just warm enough for a sweater. The river is in silent ripples, propelled by the occasional boat that passes through. I am 21. I walk toward the city, but there isn't enough time to go far, so I circle the bridges over and over, always within campus's reach.

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I am 17, and I am alone in Cambridge. I am walking along the river, enamored with what it must mean to be in college. It is July, so the water glistens under the sunlight. The rowers glide by, moving with a breeze under the blistering heat. I cross the Weeks Bridge, and I pause in the middle. The river echoes on endlessly, the backdrop to the old brick-red buildings that hold an invigorating promise. And I see myself. Intangibly, maybe. I see myself looking at this river a million more times.

A few months later, I am there again. From the riverbanks and bridges, the spectators cheer with a pulsating energy. It all drowns out as our blades swish through the water and the coxswain calls our times. We row through the Memorial Bridge, our legs burning. My eyes helplessly wander to the business school, then to the houses along the river that seem majestic, then to the boathouse. The blue bell tower still feels inspiring. My legs burn even more.

As a senior in high school, I gave a speech about adventure walks. It was my senior voice, the parting words I wanted to share with my school, symbolic of how I grew up. That was what I called them at the time. Walks of reflection and thought, walks to escape and imagine. Walks with no direction or purpose or time limit—an adventure of the surroundings around me. At home, I would walk along the sound's coast. The water was grounding. But now the coast turned into the river, and the streets turned into paths. The water is, still, grounding.

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I am 19, and it is April. I wake up early before class to walk, a rare birthday gift to myself. The sun has just risen, and few cars or people are around. It feels like I have the river all to myself, the pockets of the loops I do around the bridges. I am young, and I do not yet understand how it stretches and bends. I think I do. It is morning, so it is a breath of fresh air, and it is all just beginning. But still, the river is ethereal, the water whispering as it flows. I am content.

I do not know if I can call these walks by the same phrase anymore. I have let myself wander and wonder in both directions. At what point is it an adventure? At what point is it known?

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I sit on a bench. I am 20, and college is halfway done. It is May, and the river watches my tears fall. I am not present, and my mind is vacant, and everything feels meaningless. The exams, the essays, the work before we go home. So all I can do is stare at the water, the current washing the river anew as it quietly caresses the banks. The water flows onward, moved by a current that it cannot control. I let it carry me too. For then, it was all I could manage. But the river washes anew; it freezes and thaws, and I did too.

On Sundays, a part of Memorial Drive is closed to cars. The street fills in other ways, with runners, strollers, and cyclists. They move onward with the river. On those days, I would run for miles. Farther than I ever thought I could, past the Boston University Bridge, to the path by Storrow, through the Mass Ave Bridge. Guided and distracted by the landmarks. There is nothing else to do but run, think, and follow the river.

Fall on the river feels like home. It reminds me of the Connecticut autumns I grew up with, the air as crisp as the water.

It is October again, and it is the afternoon, and I am still 20. I skip my class to go for a run, down to the Cambridge Parkway. I had never done that before, run there or that far. I pass by a handful of others. They casually stroll or train for the half marathon. Lately, I have noticed there is rarely an in-between. I want to keep running, but my shins hurt, and I am focused on this evening, so I tell myself tomorrow.

That night, I wear my brand-new green jacket. We have no direction as we walk along the bridge in the darkness. I had never done that before, in the dark. We talk about your weekend, my brothers, and where we want to go. Your shoulder faintly brushes mine. It feels like the familiarity of the river all over again.

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Soon, the Charles will no longer be in my backyard. For now, it will listen; it will take my hand before I drop it. And the boats will beat on.

Meena Behringer '27 (meenabehringer@college.harvard.edu) writes Arts for the "Harvard Independent."

Graphic by Linden McCarl '28



Hometown Series: Cambridge, MA Has the Same Architecture as My Grief

Remembering the Harvard Square I grew up in and navigating loss.

By AADIT SHRIVASTAVA '30

The red brick walkways in Harvard Square have always been uneven. They catch the toes of my sneakers the same way they did ten years ago. The T station still smells like stale peanuts and damp concrete. Now, though, slick glass facades and minimalist pastry shops have slid into the spaces where distinctly musty bookstores and family-owned cafes once sat. It is the modern heartbreak of any hometown: watching lived-in corners of your childhood get sanded down into the same curated backdrops.

I walked the streets of Cambridge as a toddler before moving to New York when I was seven. Even after all this time, sun-bleached memories remain. Those years were defined by the rhythmic clatter of bicycle spokes against curb cuts, or the vast green expanse of Cambridge Common, where the grass always smelled of fresh-mown stems. I remember New England's dramatic shifts: partly cloudy days that bled into honeyed evenings, kaleidoscopes of red and yellow leaves carpeting the sidewalks, and snow tunnels dug with friends after a blizzard.

"A hometown is ultimately defined by what it leaves in your bones."

Harvard Square, in particular, had a messy charm, one that felt tailored to a child's eye. I'd look into window displays cluttered with vintage postcards and hand-painted signs. I'd press my face against the Curious George store's glass, mesmerized by shelves of books and toys. Every weekend, I'd smell the buttery scent of pastries at Crema Café as my parents ordered their usual coffees. And, of course, I remember the assortment of independent bookstores and magazine stalls scattered across the Square.

Just a month ago, I saw my old neighborhood for the first time in a decade. While singing 2010s anthems with my FOP-mates on a school bus, we drove past the SOCH park, the one I used to go to after school. I looked out the smeared window and saw dry dirt where woodchips once covered the ground, excavators parked where slides and swings used to be. As we rolled past the playground's skeleton, the noise of orientation-week chatter faded. My mind went straight to Lula.

Lula was the beating heart of my childhood. She was selfless, strong, and tender, the same age as my grandma. She raised me for nine years, moving me across seven houses from the day I was born. Every day, when I went to pre-school in Cambridge, she walked with me as I zoomed down the pavement on my red plastic scooter. She cooked the same adobo and pancit that she used to make for the rest of her family back in Tacloban, Philippines. She pronounced her "V"s as "B"s and her "F"s as "P"s when she sang lullabies to me before bedtime.

Lula also loved walking to Harvard Square every day, and on weekends or holidays when I didn't have school, we'd go together. She walked me down the aisles of the Curious George store, reading picture books to me until I learned to sound out the words myself. She bought me my favorite black-and-white cookies from Crema Café, which were always far too big for me to finish. She took me to small bookstores where we flipped through cookbooks, and if I liked a recipe, she'd make it for me. To me, Cambridge is Lula.

Those neighborhood routines are all the harder to let go of now that she is gone. When I lost the person who anchored my earliest understanding of safety, the world didn't end. It carried on with an ordinary, insulting persistence. Yet in grief, we spend so much time mourning the specific texture of what life once was, chained to the people or places we lose.

I look at El Jefe's replacing my favorite cupcake shop, or the empty glass kiosk that was once Out of Town News, and I feel a subtle emptiness in my stomach. Meanwhile, the diabolical three-street intersection still jams up traffic, the T station still hosts the street artists, and the red brick pavement is still uneven. The city's architecture is too familiar, too haunting.

Eventually, the haunting gives way to a strange kind of grace. Yes, grief is stubborn—it's a heavy stone in my chest, and it's a sweet nectar that fills my heart. It's also the weight of loving something enough to let it change you, even years after it stopped being yours. The people we miss and the places we used to call home are integral to our internal architecture, even if we can't experience them anymore.

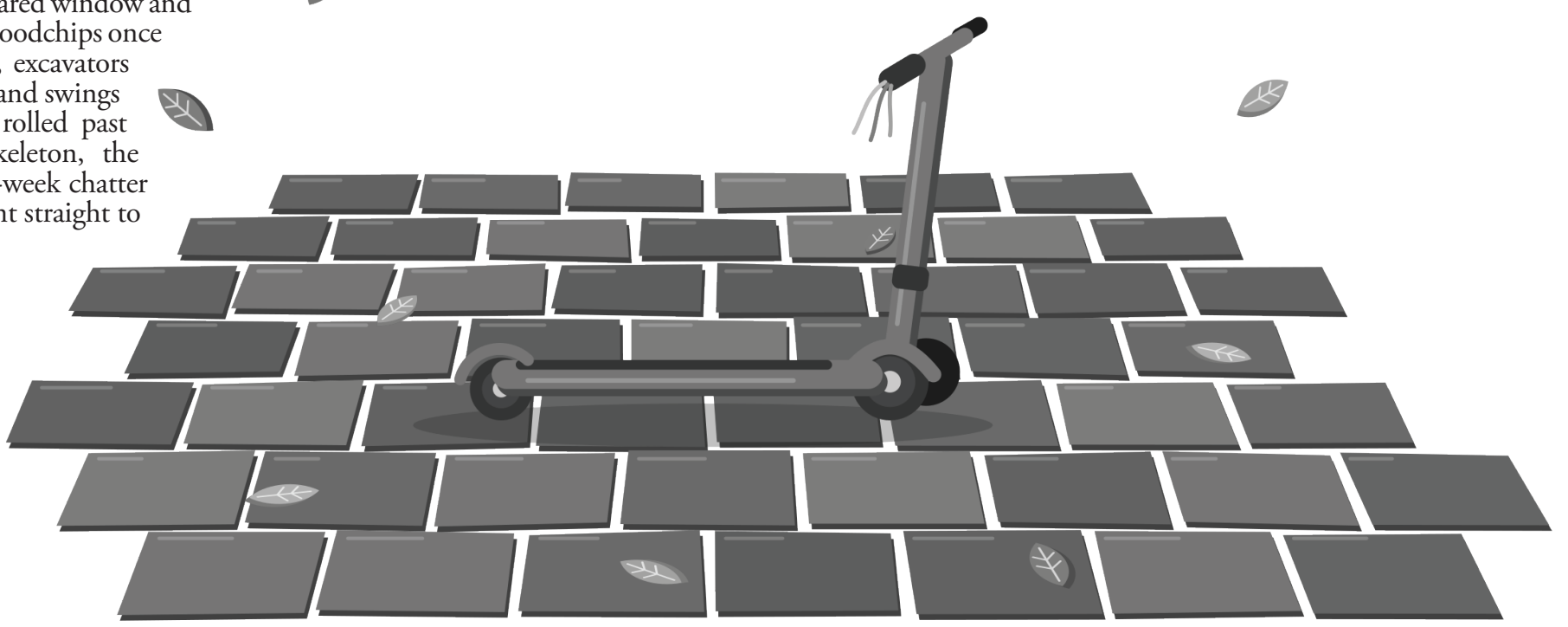
A hometown is ultimately defined by what it leaves in your bones. Whether or not it is losing its charm, Cambridge remains the canvas where my world was first drawn. Walking the same sidewalks today as a college student gives me a hollow ache. I feel fundamentally altered, much like my childhood playground. But now, I am learning how to build new storefronts in the architecture Lula left behind for me.

"The city's architecture is too familiar, too haunting."

I have faith that Cambridge will do the same for the people who love it dearly. Because building new storefronts isn't about accepting corporate polish or losing our old landmarks; it's a defiant act: making new memories in bruised soil, in a place where everyone who has ever loved and lost can find their footing again.

Aadit Shrivastava '30 (aaditshrivastava@college.harvard.edu) is filing a petition to bring back the Curious George store.

Graphic by Isra Khan '30





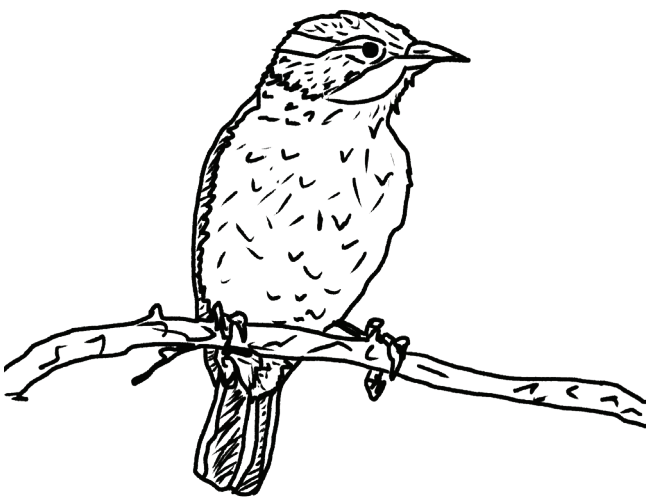
By the Seine or the Kitchen Table: "All of a Sudden" and "On Healing Lands, Birds Perch" in Cambridge

From a Parisian nursing home to a Vietnam War photograph, two films ask what it takes to understand a stranger truly.

By WREN HORNE-SARKEES '29

Just yards from the heart of Harvard Square, the Brattle Theatre remains Cambridge's cinematic centerpiece. This month, Independent Film Festival Boston, New England's largest film festival, is hosting its annual Fall Focus exclusively at the Brattle. The program includes top works from over a dozen countries, including "All of a Sudden," which won Best Actress at Cannes and screened last Saturday as Japan's entry for Best International Feature Film at the 99th Academy Awards. Meanwhile, last Friday at CGIS South, the Harvard Vietnamese Association screened "On Healing Lands, Birds Perch," an Oscar-shortlisted documentary by Harvard Business School alumna Naja Phạm Lockwood, followed by a Q&A with the director.

A co-production of France, Japan, Belgium, and Germany, "All of a Sudden" marks "Drive My Car" director Ryusuke Hamaguchi's foray into French-language film alongside co-



writer Léa Le Dimna. Hamaguchi was a Visiting Artist in Residence at Harvard's Edwin O. Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies for the 2016–17 academic year, and this screening marks the latest return of his work to Cambridge.

Here Hamaguchi trades the rhythms of a Hiroshima-set road drama for a quieter, more interior study. Based loosely on the non-fiction book "You and I—The Illness Suddenly Get Worse" by Makiko Miyano and Maho Isono, the film follows Marie-Lou Fontaine, a nursing home director in the Parisian suburbs who attempts to pioneer a more humane approach to elder care called "Humanitude"; she soon meets Mari Morisaki, a terminally ill Japanese playwright.

One of the film's most compelling aspects is its French-Japanese pairing. Marie-Lou and Mari initially connect largely because of Marie-Lou's knowledge of Japanese. Early on, Marie-Lou's use of Japanese instead of French during a post-show Q&A creates intimacy between them in a crowded theatre. As their relationship develops, French and Japanese become equally weighted in their dynamic, and both characters shift into the other's native tongue in moments of closeness.

Despite their differing backgrounds, the characters are intimately connected by language, down to the fact that—as one character remarks—they share nearly the same first name. In a world centered on a character fighting dehumanizing medical practices, "All of a Sudden" shows that translation is truly an empathetic art, one in which all communication is mediated through the effort to turn inner experience into outward speech and back again.

The film's use of color is equally deliberate. Reminiscent of the use of orange and yellow winter clothing against a muted environment in his preceding film "Evil Does Not Exist," "All of a Sudden" uses the interaction between dress colors and their surroundings to great effect. Goldenrod, teal, and hospital-gown blue dominate, while shades of ruby later signal change. Teal outfits often blend into the walls behind them, directing the viewer's gaze toward the figure's hands and face. Characters' outfits notably converge in hue during scenes of connection. By the time Mari emerges in ruby, the audience has learned the film's palette, making her contrast all the more noticeable as she pairs only with the outward-facing curtains in a room of cool-colored people.

Though somewhat didactic at times, its naturalistic depiction of humanity and leisurely pace ground the film's more overt messaging, creating a truly beautiful portrait of what it means not only to be human, but to be humanized.

If "All of a Sudden" asks what intimacy looks like across languages, "On Healing Lands, Birds Perch" asks what remembrance and forgiveness look like across a war. The documentary short centers on the families of the figures featured in Eddie Adams' 1969 Pulitzer Prize-winning photo, "Saigon Execution," in which South Vietnamese General Nguyạn Ngạc Loan is featured holding a pistol to the head of Viạt Cạng Captain Nguyạn Văn Lém moments before his execution, following an alleged killing of a South Vietnamese officer and his family. Lockwood interviews Captain Lém's children in Vietnam and, in the United States, the families of General Loan and Rear Admiral Huạn, the surviving child of the South Vietnamese family.

In captioning the film, the audience becomes especially relevant, as the film avoids conventional captions; the filmmaker chose linguistically dynamic captions, showing English during Vietnamese dialogue and Vietnamese during English dialogue, refusing to privilege one over the other. Similarly, "On Healing Lands, Birds Perch" aimed to balance the perspectives of both North and South Vietnam and largely succeeded. Made with the Vietnamese government's clearance, the film premiered in the U.S. at Martha's Vineyard in March 2025 before quickly spreading internationally.

Ultimately, the viewer encounters a story that transcends borders. In a post-screening conversation with Lockwood, she discussed what she was most proud of about the film. "This is the first film that shows the perspective of both sides of the Vietnam War, if you can believe that. After fifty years, this is the first film that really talks from the perspective of the Vietnamese," Lockwood commented.

At one point Lockwood considered featuring Jane Fonda in the film. "Maybe I would have won the Oscars for that, but in any case, I chose really—because it's a short and you really have to be focused—I chose to really focus on the Vietnamese side, on all sides, on both sides of the Vietnamese war," she stated.

After the Q&A, I approached Lockwood to ask about her decision to focus the film on the Vietnamese perspective. We quickly realized that, despite having homelands on opposite sides of the world—Iraq and Vietnam—we shared a hometown in Worcester, Massachusetts. During the Q&A, guests fielded questions in both Vietnamese and English. While speaking with her and so many others at the screening, I stumbled over a few sentences of broken Vietnamese, and I was struck by how easily the conversation turned into a sense of community among the friends gathered around us. Perhaps in a way, it was a small echo of the film's call for reconciliation and reconnection half a century out.

More broadly, independent and international films bring otherwise unseen perspectives to the forefront. Watching a film that may not have the largest budget or may be in a language outside the viewer's comprehension can spur the viewer to truly begin to grasp a distinct,



yet universal life outside one's own. Whether in the Humanitude of Marie-Lou or in Lockwood's desire to show the painful, long-lasting impacts of war regardless of side, it is no coincidence that so much independent and international film calls on the audience to find sympathy with, and humanity in, their "out-group." And sometimes, in hoping to understand someone halfway across the world, you discover a neighbor all along.

For students and community members interested in independent film, the second half of the 12th Annual Fall Focus will be screening from Thursday, Oct. 29 to Wednesday, Nov. 4. Featured films include Cannes Jury Prize winner and Bulgarian Oscar entry "The Dreamed Adventure," as well as Belgian Oscar entry "Coward."

In kind, the Boston Asian American Film Festival premieres today alongside the Boston Palestine Film Festival premiering tomorrow, both running until Oct. 25. At the former, audiences interested in film of the Vietnamese diaspora may view the centerpiece "Y Vân: The Lost Sounds of Saigon" alongside several other new and highly acclaimed films, including fellow headliners "Isle Child," "Jersey Boy," and "Montreal, My Beautiful."

Wren Horne-Sarkees '29 (wrenhorne@college.harvard.edu) hopes you find a film to hold close.

Graphic by Linden McCarl '28 & Annabella Burton-Boone '29

Songs of Fall 2026

All the shades of autumn.

By HAFEEZAT GHAFFAR '29

Nothing like a change in weather to jump-start a new era in life. I start my fall mood-boarding at the end of July, long before the birds begin their migration and the bears start to hibernate. Fall promises excitement with Halloween around the corner, growing piles of leaves lining the streets, and decadent sweets to punctuate a tiresome day. If you haven't started your mood board yet, no fear! Here are some songs to play in the background as your autumn endeavors (and mid-semester academics) kick into gear.

Fleetwood Mac, "Landslide"

If this new school year already has you questioning yourself and your future, you'll find comfort in knowing that Stevie Nicks felt the same way decades ago. You'll also find solace in the fact that this track is one of the band's most enduring and beloved by fans. People everywhere share the same feelings.

Fleetwood Mac, "As Long As You Follow"

Another Fleetwood Mac classic. This time, a reminder that you are not meant to wallow in your feelings alone. So text your friends for late-night Tasty Burger—or a cry session; either works.

Wallows, "Drunk on Halloween"

For some, Halloween is an excuse to try alcoholic combinations unbeknownst to hepatologists. For others, it is a night to reminisce and contemplate the true horrors of everyday life. At the "Harvard Independent," we like to accommodate both. This song gives you an emotional outlet for all of those pent-up feelings, right around fall's most anticipated night.

Lana Del Rey, "How To Disappear"

Another ode to mixed emotions and conflicting feelings. Find solace in this contemplative track. And better yet, this is the perfect sound for your late teens/early twenties.

Lana Del Rey, "Let The Light In"

On a more hopeful note, maybe your situationship is on the cusp of becoming official. This song sounds like the melodic cacophony of a convoluted relationship. The falling leaves are almost confetti.

Philip Glass, "Etude No. 2"

Like the hypnotic trance of walking through New England's maple and marigold canopies, this piece soothes you with a gentle lullaby of pure feeling. Snuggle up with a steaming mug of hot chocolate and let the piano's swells and lulls wash over you.

The Beatles, "In My Life"

If you're a freshman growing into life at Harvard or a senior thinking about life after graduation, this song is for you. Make memories as you reminisce. Ensure you always have a well of love to draw from. Seasons change and so do people.

The Beatles, "Don't Let Me Down"

Don't let summer's departure sour you on the unique beauty of this time of year. Autumn brings its own treasures, like the first home game when everyone pretends to have school spirit. Definitely don't let the team down.

The Strokes, "Call It Fate, Call It Karma"

Some days deserve slow, intentional, yet natural attention. This song is for the in-between classes, 15-minute, life-pondering moments that make you stop and wonder.

Men I Trust, "Numb"

Maybe you ended your relationship too early for that pumpkin-patch photo dump. No worries! Listen to this track when the heaviness of your regret needs an extra hand (or bridge).

Mazzy Star, "Fade Into You"

Deep longing and slow melodies. If love isn't treating you right, try fading into the next best thing: HUDS banana pudding. Yum.

The Smiths, "Back to the Old House"

As The Smiths say, "Here began all my dreams." This is your sign to always have audacity: you can go to club meetings just for the food.

The Smiths, "There Is a Light That Never Goes Out"

Another heartfelt song. Be like Summer. Love The Smiths.

Mitski, "My Love Mine All Mine"

Like the moon, I hope my successors in Straus A-42 can feel my lingering presence, guiding them to my name carved into the wall.

Hamid El Shaeri, "Ouda"

You didn't take Expos for no reason. Let this song inspire a more poetic late-night hookup post next time. Signed, an avid Sidechat reader.

Beach House, "Wildflower"

Organic and beautiful. It's the perfect way to describe the light reflecting off the Charles as the sun sets this time of year, or this song.

Pearl Jam, "Soldier of Love"

Make love, not war. Wear two layers, not one. Attend all office hours, not none.

Crowded House, "Don't Dream It's Over"

This song is about resilience and companionship. Take comfort in knowing that it is never really over (at least until the grade cap goes into effect).

Simon and Garfunkel, "America"

Simon and Garfunkel remind us that hope and endurance go hand in hand. Like bad HUDS chicken, this too shall pass.

Vashti Bunyan, "I'd Like to Walk Around In Your Mind"

To know yourself, other people, and the world deeply and earnestly: perhaps that is the true meaning of a Harvard education. Tell someone you love them today, that you care about their presence.

Aretha Franklin, "Call Me"

Tender hoping in the earliest stages of what is just beginning. "Call Me" captures the breathless nature of young love and the dear parting of summer.

Sufjan Stevens, "Futile Devices"

He's like a friend who I worry about. Check up on your friends.

Yoko Ono, "I Have A Woman Inside My Soul"

It's easy to feel detached from the world as you sink into academic demands or the dark thoughts that come with lonesome nights. Ono sings about the desire to get back to our true selves and the importance of that above all else.

Frank and Nancy Sinatra, "Something Stupid"

Everyone! Spontaneously declare your infatuation with me, now!

The Beach Boys, "God Only Knows"

Love can take many forms, like the absolute clarity of finding your place in life. If you haven't found it yet, this song might reassure you that it will come.

Cass Elliot, "Didn't Want To Have to Do It"

Sometimes, the things we cherish most have to end. Relationships must also run their course.

Daughters of Eve, "Hey Lover"

Here's to the people who remind us to stay true to ourselves and not allow others to change us. True love and understanding are the trick for both hard classes and navigating other people.

Oasis, "Wonderwall"

Noel Gallagher may not have intended it this way, but maybe you're the one who'll save yourself. Make that 7 a.m. gym session you've been delaying since spring semester.

Sade, "Kiss of Life"

Red, orange, amethyst, azure. These are the shades of the sky and the colors of love—or new Berryline flavors. Whichever works best for you.

Bon Iver and St. Vincent, "Roslyn"

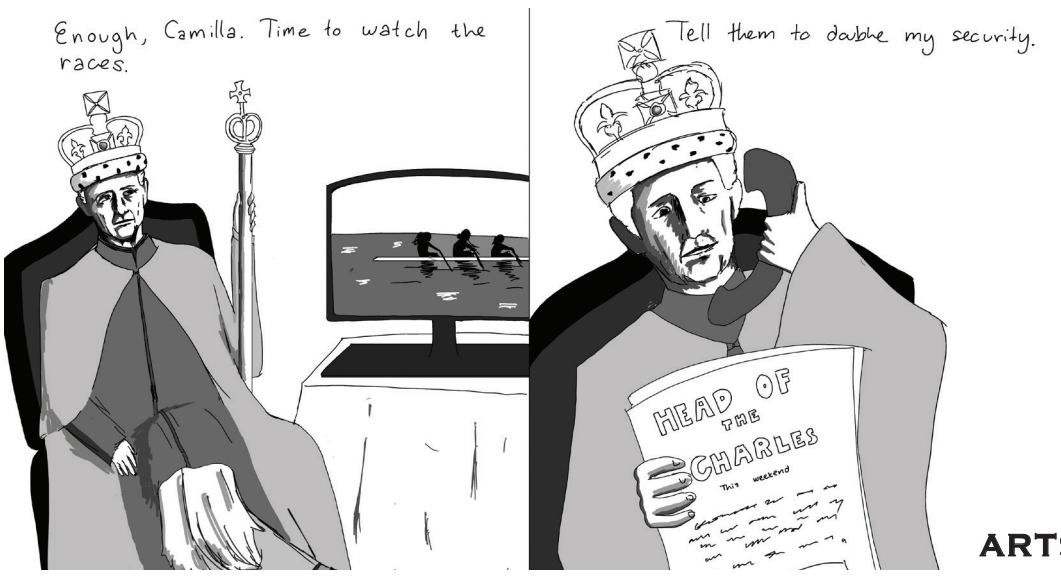
If you aren't watching "Twilight" this autumn, what are you doing? Devotion is a beautiful thing to behold, as this song conveys through confessional lyrics and lingering vocals.

More than just words, music gives these stanzas life—bringing newfound meaning to human experiences, challenges, and reflections across time. Whether you're walking home from Lamont on a moonlit night or sharing a sweet treat between classes with friends, music reminds you of the range of emotions that come with finding yourself in your youth.

Hafeezat Ghaffar '29 (hghaffar@college.harvard.edu) made this list into a Spotify Playlist.

"We asked two Brits to draw what they thought 'Head of the Charles' meant"

By Anonymous



The Hypocrisy of Salem

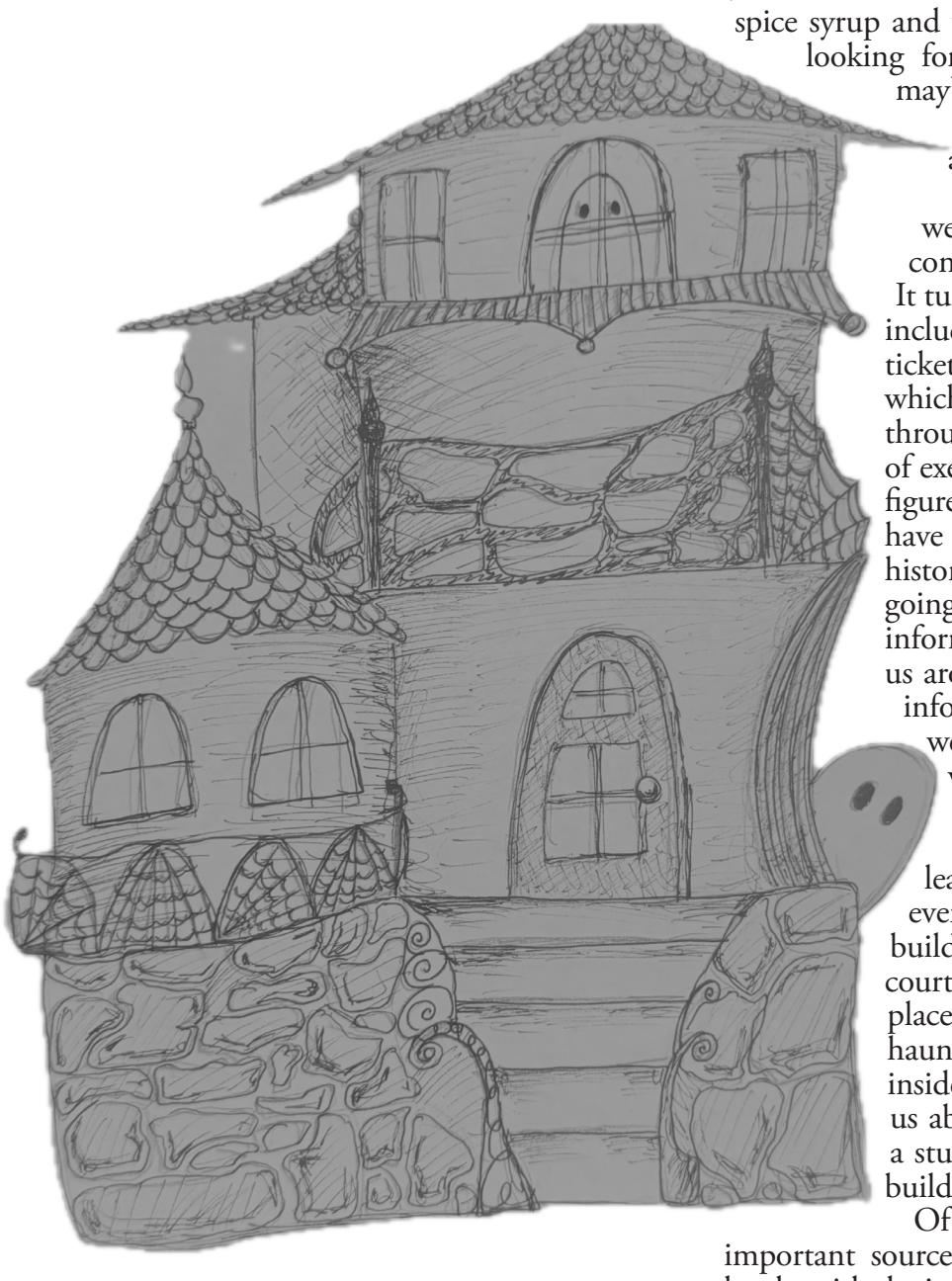
How did the town famous for its witchy lore turn into something so unrecognizable?

By NAOMI BEINART '30 & DELFIN URUNDUL '30

The coastal city of Salem, the setting for the notorious 17th-century witch trials, offers visitors a unique and vibrant experience. The gothic stores, whimsical streets, and eerie homes might make it seem like the city is doing its history justice—but is that really the case?

People have practiced witchcraft since prehistoric times. Where people lived, witches followed. For a while, people valued them as healers, concocting potions and medicine from herbs. People often thought their curses caused bad luck, like crops not growing and disease running rampant. Prosecutions of such practices are estimated to have begun in Europe in the 1400s, as they were seen as an affront to Christianity. However, secular law also made it illegal. These bans were codified, especially in Central Europe, making it easier to imprison and execute alleged witches. However, European witch trials are not as widely known as the American ones—Salem is the most famous.

"As witchcraft is based on intention and energy, it is disorienting to see Salem become a hub for capitalist, commodified history."



As witchcraft is based on intention and energy, it is disorienting to see Salem become a hub for capitalist, commodified history. Specifically, modern witchcraft and neopaganism revolve around faith. This makes the practice accessible and welcoming, no matter where you are in your witchcraft journey. Spirituality, as the name suggests, is concerned with the divine, not so much the material world. Witchcraft is also strongly connected to nature. Many practitioners are in tune with the changing seasons and organize their activities and rituals around the moon's cycle. They utilize water, plants, stones, and crystals. The point isn't to do anything fancy or extravagant, but to make do with what nature and one's surroundings offer.

"It was ostentatious. It turns out you can buy everything, including history."

In a picturesque New England town about 30 minutes from Harvard, you can step onto a Hallmark movie set. For a price, of course. On every corner, something beckons your wallet. For $35, you can buy an oversized black shirt that reads, "Witch, please," in big white letters. The Black Veil, a small boutique, offers candles that smell like different potions. You can buy wax that smells like burnt musk for the chance to befriend the angel of death.

Suppose you bought the wand-shaped corkscrews and magenta witch hats and you began to feel a bit peckish. Fret not! May I offer you a $9 iced latte called the Black Bat, with pumpkin spice syrup and whipped cream? Or, if you are looking for something more substantial, maybe wait 30 minutes for soggy pancakes or grab a $2 sandwich at Trade House.

When we went to Salem, we saw how much it had been commodified. It was ostentatious. It turns out you can buy everything, including history. We paid $15 for tickets to the Museum of Torture, which took only a 15-minute walk through. We saw gory illustrations of execution methods and pale, wax-figure corpses. However, there would have been no way to learn about the history of torture in Salem without going to this museum. There was no informative audio guide that guided us around town, nor were there any information plaques about the land we were standing on. The only way to access the history was through payment.

The commodification of learning history seems present even in old, formerly public buildings. The witch houses and courthouses where the trials took place encapsulate the infamous, haunting tales. However, going inside the houses and museums costs us about $12 per person, even with a student discount. The line for the building was about 10 minutes long.

Of course, tourism is quite an important source of income for Salem and its locals, with the industry making over $99 million per year. On the other hand, the commodification of Salem's history goes against the core beliefs of witchcraft itself, which are rooted in unbridled accessibility.

The victims of the trials were a total of 17 women and seven men. The first woman executed in the trials was financially independent and outspoken. Bridget Bishop ran her own tavern, married three times, and wore clothing that was considered inappropriate in Puritan society. Similarly, Abigail Hobbs was a rebellious adolescent who refused to go to church.

Most of the victims were women, many of them independent and spiritual. They did not conform to Puritanism, a belief system with much ingrained prejudice against women. Women were even deemed as naturally more sinful than men. This part of Salem's history shouldn't go unnoticed.

So what is the legacy of Salem? Has it really become all caramel apples and merchandise shops? Where did the legacies go? Only an estimated 25 people died as a result of the witch hunts, yet the story has remained one of the most prevalent horror tales in American history. Most schools teach it. Countless academic fields are devoted to the era of witch hunts. Of course, some places still honor the history in a meaningful way—including the Salem Witch Museum, the Witch House, and the Peabody Essex Museum.

"So what is the legacy of Salem? Has it really become all caramel apples and merchandise shops? Where did the legacies go?"

But there is also something deeper. The history has not dissolved, nor has it disappeared. Unsolved history makes its voice known, even if muffled. The voices of the burned. The screams of the wrongly accused. The cracking of the fatal flames. Something unmistakably sinister lurks behind the strip shops of Salem. It is pungent and intoxicating, and if you listen closely, if you block out all the tacky modernization, you might just find it.

But don't take my word for it. See for yourself. It's only 30 minutes away. And a few hundred years back.

Naomi Beinart '30 (naomibeinart@college.harvard.edu) and Delfin Urundul '30 (durundul@college.harvard.edu) went to Salem together, where Delfin was intrigued by the witchy elements, and Naomi wanted to go to the Museum of Torture.

Graphic by Adriana St. Clair '29

Speaking of Heads of Charles

The sun has set on the British Empire but not on its jewelry collection.

By SALMA GHEITH '30

On May 6, 2023, Charles III was crowned at Westminster Abbey. He received St. Edward's Crown at the moment of coronation, then left the Abbey wearing the Imperial State Crown. The jewels on King Charles III's head are three things at once: religious-political symbols, masterpieces of craft, and a record of empire. You cannot admire the first two in their totality



without reckoning with the colonial history of empire.

A crown is a symbol of power, and for the British monarchy it is the symbol of power. It is why the Royal Family is still allowed to exist and use the resources of the British government. They are widely regarded as the lynchpin of English unity and identity.

So what is on King Charles's head? The obvious answer is a priceless collection of rare jewels and gold.

The real answer is a collection of trophies gathered from across the world, each marking a different chapter in the story of British imperialism.

Technically, none of this belongs to Charles himself. The monarch holds the Crown Jewels "in trust" for the nation. Because the jewels have countless competing claims, returning them raises a bigger question: to whom?

Who Claims the Jewels

The most famous jewel in the collection is not British (though few are). The Koh-i-Noor passed through Mughal emperors, Shahs of Iran, Emirs of Afghanistan, and Sikh Maharajas before Britain annexed the Punjab in 1849 and the 10-year-old Maharaja Duleep Singh surrendered it to Queen Victoria. Today, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran all claim ownership of it, and India has repeatedly asked for its return.

The Cullinan diamonds face a similar claim. They were cut from a single diamond found in 1905 at the Premier Mine in the Transvaal. Afterward, the British colony, now South Africa, "gifted" it to Edward VII in 1907. When Elizabeth II died in 2022, thousands of South Africans signed a petition calling for the return of the largest stone.

Some stones predate the empire's colonial ventures. King Pedro I of Castile seized the Black Prince's Ruby, a 170-carat red spinel mined in Badakhshan, Central Asia, in 1362. In 1367, he gave it to Edward of Woodstock, the "Black Prince," as payment for England's help in the Castilian Civil War

Where the Jewels Fall

St. Edward's Crown, the crown that gives Charles his legitimacy, is solid gold, made by royal goldsmith Robert Vyner for Charles II, to replace the medieval crown destroyed in 1649. It weighs 4.9 pounds and holds 444 mostly semi-precious stones: aquamarines, white topazes, tourmalines, sapphires, amethysts, and a handful of rubies. For centuries, it was set with rented stones for each coronation, then imitations for display. Its permanent stones date only from 1911. It has no documented colonial stones—ironically, the crown that legally makes Charles the King of England has the least imperial history.

The Imperial State Crown, made by Garrard for George VI based on Victoria's 1838 crown, is the one Charles wore out of the Abbey, and the one the public sees most, at every State Opening of Parliament. It holds 2,868 diamonds, 17 sapphires, 11 emeralds, and 269 pearls. Its closed arches, a 15th-century design, signaled that England answered to no other earthly power. During Victoria's reign, contrary to modern connotations, "imperial" also meant a literal empire spanning the globe.

Cullinan II sits at the front of its band, with the Black Prince's Ruby just above. The back of the band holds the Stuart Sapphire, a 104-carat Stuart heirloom mined in Sri Lanka. However, it seems to have been acquired through trade rather than conquest. The Sapphire is said to come from an old piece of noble jewelry, Edward the Confessor's ring, and sits in the cross at the top of the crown. The four pearls that accompany the jewel are widely referred to as Queen Elizabeth's earrings and are rumored to have once belonged to Catherine de' Medici and Elizabeth I.

The arrangement tells its own story. The Stuart Sapphire sat at the front until 1909, when they moved it back to make room for Cullinan II. A stone representing the monarchy's early days was displaced by one acquired through conquest. The new colonial order shines brightly at the top of the crown.

The rest of the Cullinan is spread across the regalia. Cullinan I, the largest stone, tops the Sovereign's Scepter with Cross, which was altered around 1910 to hold it. The scepter represents the sovereign's temporal power. In 1820, George IV added an enameled rose, thistle, and shamrock to the scepter as emblems of England, Scotland, and Ireland after Ireland joined the United Kingdom. The Sovereign's Orb, a gold globe topped by a jeweled cross, has bands which divide the Orb into three, reflecting the three continents known in medieval times. At his coronation, Charles held the world and an African diamond at once. Cullinan III, IV, and V were set in Camilla's Queen Mary's Crown.

The Koh-i-Noor was absent entirely. It sits on display in the Queen Mother's 1937 crown at the Tower of London.

Keep Them or Give Them Back?

In 1851, the Koh-i-Noor starred at London's Great Exhibition, seen by about six million visitors. Indian writers today read the display as presenting the diamond as a trophy of conquest, and Britain the proud conqueror. Ironically, crowds found it dull, because its Mughal-style cut prized weight over sparkle. So in 1852, they recut it to European taste, with the Duke of Wellington ceremonially making one of the first cuts. After Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India in 1877, the jewels became tools of empire. When George V attended the 1911 Delhi Durbar, the Crown Jewels could not legally leave England, so they commissioned a separate Imperial Crown of India, set with 6,100 diamonds. The jewels, symbols of conquest, were too precious to be in the presence of the conquered.

Britain's defenders have a multitude of excuses. They argue the Koh-i-Noor was legally transferred under the 1849 treaty, and the Cullinan was a gift. The jewels belong to the Crown as an institution, so Charles could not hand them

> *"The monarch holds the Crown Jewels "in trust" for the nation. Because the jewels have countless competing claims, returning them raises a bigger question: to whom?"*

back on his own. With four countries claiming the Koh-i-Noor, returning it is controversial. In 2010, Prime Minister David Cameron warned that returning it to one country would leave the British Museum empty.

These arguments are easily disputed. A treaty forced on a 10-year-old after military defeat does not reflect the spirit of gift-giving, and a "gift" from a colonial government back to its sovereign raises the question of who is giving.

Cameron's warning was less a defense of the Koh-i-Noor than an admission that Britain acquired much of its collection the same way. Britain's own institutions seem to know it. In 2023, the palace crowned Camilla with a revoked Queen Mary's Crown rather than the Koh-i-Noor, citing "sustainability." Weeks later, the Tower of London began presenting the diamond as a "symbol of conquest."

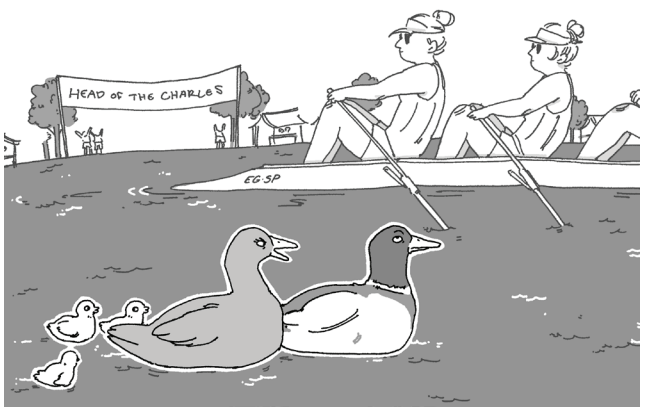
Competing claims over different precious stones are more than just part of conversations about return. Whoever the true owners of the diamond are may be debated, but the current "owners" can almost certainly be ruled out. Although the sun has set on the British Empire, the crown jewels remain a painful reminder of what it left behind.

Salma Gheith '30 (salmagheith@college.harard.edu) is comping the "Harvard Independent."

Graphic by Sophia Jo '29

Getting Your Ducks In a Row

By ELLIE GUO '29 & SAM PARK '29



"George, I told you the traffic on the Charles was going to be bad today."

Purple is the New Crimson

A lookbook of purple items.

By ANIKA GUPTA '30

Purple made a splash at several notable 2026 fall-winter fashion shows worldwide, including Victoria Beckham, Valentino, and Tory Burch. At New York Fashion Week, purple dominated the catwalk, rocking shades ranging from violet to aubergine. Last year, however, kids and adults alike raced to the stores to grab the last red sweater or pair of ballet flats in their size. But this trend seems to have fallen flat, and purple seems to be the new crimson.

This shift is not new or surprising. Purple made a quiet entrance in 2025, with shades of lilac and lavender first appearing across collections. Fall 2025 brought jewel tones from brands such as Miu Miu, Gucci, and Nina Ricci. Purple has slowly overtaken crimson, a key color in fall 2025, which now seems to be on the decline.

Now, the purple trend seems to be hitting its peak, and as the signature color of the "Harvard Independent," we at 12 Arrow Street have never been prouder. So, fashion-forward readers, here is a list of purple items you should get your hands on this fall!

"Now, the purple trend seems to be hitting its peak, and as the signature color of the 'Harvard Independent,' we at 12 Arrow Street have never been prouder."

Alexander Julian Colors Sweater

This vintage Alexander Julian sweater is the perfect statement piece to throw on as Cambridge temperatures dip. The pattern features royal purple, violet, and lighter magenta shades.
You will have to buy it secondhand, but it is worth it—the sweater is 100% cotton, with a textured, heavy-weight knit that adds intrigue to any outfit.

Brandy Melville Amara Top

The Purple Amara Top is a familiar sight for any die-hard Brandy Melville fan. This long-sleeve with a scalloped V-neck comes in a beautiful shade of plum, and like most Brandy items, it is 96% cotton. The Amara Top pairs well with flare jeans or wide-leg sweatpants for a casual fall outfit.



L'Oréal Mascara

Colorful mascara has been in for 2026. Its striking pop makes it an easy way to add color to any initially drab look. Running late to class and still rocking the groutfit you slept in? No worries! The L'Oréal Mascara in Deep Violet should be the first item you grab as you head out the door. It is colorful but not too bright, and it brings out your eyes without overwhelming them. L'Oréal's volume-focused formula helps your lashes look thicker while preventing clumping. And before you ask, no, I am not being paid for this endorsement—though I would not oppose commission if any L'Oréal executives are reading this.

Kiko Milano 3D Hydra Lip Gloss

Kiko Milano's 3D Hydra Lip Gloss went viral on social media for its hydrating effect, thanks to Bidens pilosa extract, cottonseed oil, and linseed oil. I haven't tested this in the wind with my hair down (if you know, you know), but the gloss is said to make your lips shine without that wet, sticky effect. The shade Deep Purple is a warm mulberry, and works well with everything from a dark lip liner to a solo moment.

Tower 28 BeachPlease Cream Blush

Tower 28 is a personal favorite! Cream products are popular for their easy application and buildable formula, letting you create a softer, more glowy look. Tower 28's BeachPlease Cream Blush is vegan, silicone-free, and super blendable, resulting in a shinier finish. You can use it on both cheeks and lips, creating a more cohesive overall look. Though I know I am not alone in turning away from the darker purples on Sephora shelves, their shade Party Hour, described as "sun-kissed lavender pink," could be your solution to another dateless weekend. Bonus points: it comes in a compact for easy portability!

BDG Karlie Lock Shoulder Bag

The BDG Karlie Lock Shoulder Bag from Urban Outfitters—specifically in the shade Grape—is everything. It is the perfect addition to any outfit, letting you carry all your other purple items (obviously). Made of faux leather with retro-looking hardware and a lock charm, it has a unique look that jazzes up any outfit. With interior pockets and zipper closure, it is stylish and practical. What could be better?

Lush Sleepy Body Lotion

While this might be pushing the bounds of what counts as purple "fashion," Lush's Sleepy Body Lotion is too good to leave off this list. It blends lavender oil, ylang-ylang oil, benzoin resinoid, and cocoa butter into a soft, lilac-colored cream. The comforting scent and the moisturizing effect are certainly relaxing, and users have even claimed that the lotion cures insomnia. Admittedly, lavender has been shown to help relieve stress and anxiety, and god knows we all could use that.

Garage Sleek Scoop Cami Top

Garage is popular for its trendy basics. It does not, however, get enough credit for its consistent releases of new colors. They recently released their Wild Berry Maroon shade—a hybrid magenta-purple tone—that is a perfect, more muted option for fall and winter. Their Sleek Scoop Cami Top is a fan favorite for its soft texture and its flattering, supportive cut. You can easily dress it up or down, with its minimalist design making it a great foundational piece for any wardrobe. Though, as a California native myself, I have been warned: Cambridge gets cold. Do not go sporting the slim-fit tank top in December with a puffer and think you will beat frostbite.

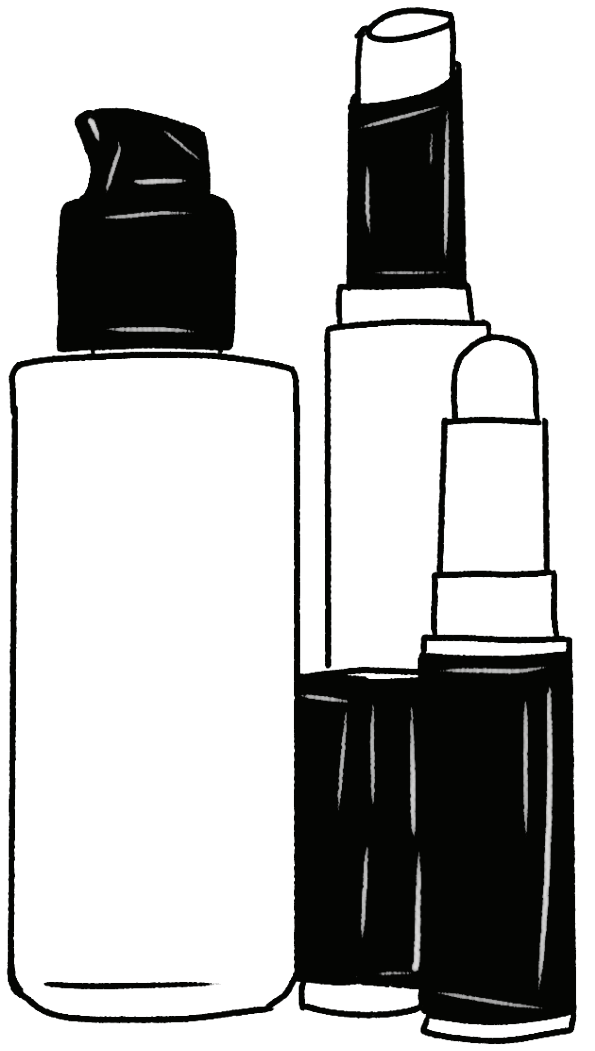
Ralph Lauren Mesh Polo Shirt

The Ralph Lauren Mesh Polo Shirt is an iconic classic: 100% cotton, short-sleeved, with its signature polo player embroidered on the left chest. These shirts pair with almost anything and come in a veritable cornucopia of purple shades, including lilacs, lavenders, and royal purples.

For the especially bougie, anything Purple Label would also do.

True Religion Super Qt Boxy Zip Hoodie

This hoodie is great for layering, with a fleece lining and a looser, boxier fit. The white high-contrast stitching, along with the text and graphics, gives it a distinctive look. True Religion offers you a statement piece that is still comfortable and easy to style. Their shade Magma is a deep, bluish purple that nicely complements the copper hardware.



Aritzia Cozy Sweatfleece Mega Flutter Sweatpants

These high-rise sweatpants are made of Aritzia's signature Cozy Sweatfleece—a midweight fleece blend that customers love. The pants feature an adjustable drawcord waistband, wide legs, and a finished hem for a put-together look that is still cozy. Their shade options include Geode Purple, a lighter lavender, and Gala Plum, a deeper, reddish tone. Wear them for lounging, late-night studying, or class.

Hopefully, you found something on this list that you like, but there are so many cute purple options out there. So give it a try: whether you prefer a soft lavender or a bold violet, purple is the perfect choice for the fall semester—crimson is so last season. Happy styling!

Anika Gupta '30 (anikagupta@college.harvard.edu) loves that the Indy gives her an excuse to wear purple!

Graphics by Linden McCarl '28 & Sarahluna Sassine '29

The Puzzle of Rainy Day Fashion: How to Be Cute and Comfortable

A style guide, history, and reflection on rain-day attire.

By KATHLEEN SHOVLIN '29

Sitting in my dorm, staring out the window at the rain pouring down and the trees swaying back and forth, I grieved my wasted weekend. I would spend it locked inside, avoiding the torrential nor'easter. In that kind of weather, nothing would keep me dry. Sideways rain could soak even the best umbrella or raincoat. If last year's Cambridge weather were any indication, this would be the first of many rainouts. I had to find a solution: What is the perfect rainy day outfit?

As I biked through the rain in my flip-flops and leggings, I thought there had to be a better option. My leggings were soaked through and clinging to my skin. Water sprayed my toes as my front tires splashed through puddles. I thought back to my wardrobe conundrum that morning. Already late to class, I had torn through my drawers, disturbing the neatly folded tank tops and cardigans. Eventually I settled on my outfit and rushed out of the dorm, leaving my room littered with clothes.

Realizing this choice was impractical, I decided to find a way to balance staying dry, warm, and cute. It is easy to dress for two out of the three, but all three at once is a tall task.

Staying dry and warm is easy with a heavy, waterproof jacket, but it has its flaws. In my experience, they are often bulky, leaving my now-boxy figure looking like I am ready for an impending blizzard. Sure, it is easy to find an adorable gray wool peacoat for fall or a purple puffer for winter, but few outer layers have the added benefit of water resistance. I have tried the tried-and-true Patagonia raincoat, but I still end up shivering on my way to my 9 a.m. lecture, even though I'm dry.

This isn't to discourage anyone tempted to sacrifice dryness for a good outfit day—I know I am, especially on a university campus. College is like an everyday fashion show, and Harvard is no exception. We typically reserve sweatpants for desperate mid-term days; some students dress more professionally than their instructor, and upper-level students often ditch backpacks for more stylish totes. Moreover, on days you especially don't want to go to class, showing up well-dressed and confident can make all the difference. Matt Yan, a writer for the "New York Times," described this as the "college catwalk."



After struggling long enough, I've developed a rainy-day outfit formula built on four components: footwear, hairstyle, clothing, and outerwear.

Footwear

Rainy-day footwear is arguably the most controversial, yet most vital, of the four categories. Two polar-opposite options exist: rubber flip-flops or rubber rain boots. Some readers may be surprised that flip-flops are even on the table, but in many ways they are similar to rain boots: they don't absorb water, and they dry quickly.

Misaki Imai '29 strongly supports flip-flops. Her credentials? Daily treks from Currier House—the unfortunate result of habitually missing the Quad shuttle.

According to Imai, flip-flops have few drawbacks in a downpour. She remembers regretting thong shoes only once, after squelching her foot in mud on the way to section. The damage was so bad she needed to make a pit stop in the bathroom to clean off her feet. But this debacle didn't deter her, and I can still count on seeing her toes out every time it rains.

From Imai's experience, everyone should try flip-flops in the rain once. Who knows? You might be converted—though you will not be covered.

"We're a minority here, but great people," Imai said.

Hairstyle

The best strategy for keeping hair manageable in the rain depends on your hair texture and humidity.

I will use myself as an example. With wavy or curly hair, I've found it best to keep my locks tightly secured on wet days to stop strands from forming a collective poof. Whether I leave my hair natural or flatiron it, moisture can turn anything from shiny and orderly to frizzy and undefined.

For a closer breakdown, depending on the day's humidity, you can use two strategies to keep your hair looking its best through a full day of meetings and classes.

On cold, dry, rainy days, the water itself is naturally the biggest challenge. In this situation, covering your hair entirely is your best bet. You can even get away with heat styling and wearing it down, as long as it stays dry.

Warm and sticky rain days are more challenging. Humidity will get into your hair no matter what precautions you take. On these days, I prefer styles that contain as much of it as possible. Good options include slick-backs, French braids, or a tight claw clip. Barrettes and bobby pins can help control flyaways.

Clothing

With the right outerwear, rain shouldn't change your core outfit much. The one exception is pants. The worst thing to sport on a rainy day is dragging fabric. No raincoat or umbrella can protect you if your pants soak up rain from every puddle you step in—an unavoidable experience on Cambridge's patchwork sidewalks.

And let us look on the bright side. Cool, rainy days are the perfect chance to lean into the fall spirit. Get cozy in oversized sweaters, your favorite leggings, and a hot latte. In Currier, rainy days make the house feel so cozy I never want to leave. The best way to enjoy a rainy day is to embrace it.

Outerwear

With outerwear and raincoat accessories, you have two paths: raincoat or umbrella. Each has pros and cons. Raincoats offer more versatility and style options, but umbrellas let you wear more cute, non-waterproof coats.

"At Harvard, impostor syndrome is already rampant from the classroom to extracurricular activities. What happens when social spaces are no longer an escape from a culture of expectations? "

Blake Lively, who played the iconic Serena van der Woodsen in the CW's "Gossip Girl," used umbrellas to make any outfit waterproof. One of my favorite looks of hers was a sparkly sweater dress and blazer paired with dark tights and UGG boots. Her bubble umbrella kept her dry even in her not-so-rainproof outfit.

Umbrellas merely accompany an outfit, while raincoats play a foundational role. In this way, raincoats also reveal who is most dedicated to their personal "look." You might like ballet flats and a classy merino wool coat, but can you keep that up in pouring rain? The nor'easter revealed that yes, some people can.

Celebrities do a good job of using the rain as a chance to show off. Bella Hadid's 2019 look was unique and eye-catching, featuring a matching Chrome Hearts raincoat and waterproof bucket hat. This set reminds us that rainwear can be exciting, unique, and daring.

Rain lends itself to Gorp Core, or the granola aesthetic. The first raincoat that comes to mind is probably from some outerwear brand like Patagonia or Arc'teryx. But if that is not your style, more options are out there.

You can find iconic raincoats similar in style to the original Mackintosh at any price point. Lands' End and J. Crew offer mid-priced coats, while luxury brands like Burberry offer pricey but beautiful options.

Eddie Bauer, Helly Hansen, and more sell classic raincoats, like the bright yellow one featured in the novel "It" by Stephen King.

If this feels overwhelming, you are not alone. Throughout history, people worldwide have tried to waterproof their clothes, from stitching together panels of whale intestine in the Arctic to using straw and grass to make semi-waterproof capes in ancient China. With countless rainy days ahead, don't be afraid to experiment with your outfits and find what works best. Future you will be drier and grateful for it.

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Graphic by Emma Crago '28

SPORTS

Ahead of the Head of Charles

A preview of the Head of Charles Regatta competition.

By ANNA GUNKO '30

With the Head of the Charles Regatta fast approaching, campus is full of anticipation. While fans prepare to enjoy the festivities and cheer on their school, rowers have a different focus: with less than a week until the competition, they are immersed in practice.

Several members of the Cambridge Boat Club founded the Head of the Charles Regatta in 1965, following the suggestion of Harvard's sculling instructor. First held on Oct. 16, 1965, the race modeled itself on regattas held on England's rivers. Each year, participants start about 10 seconds apart and race a 5-kilometer course along the Charles River. The winner earns the honorary title "The Head of the Charles." This is an important competition for elite rowers, as it is a rare time when crew takes center stage in the national athletic scene.

"It's always a magical place to be at our boathouse, but I think especially during Head of the Charles, it feels really special to have support just overflowing."

- Farden '27

While many focus on the collegiate teams competing in the race, all types of competitors are involved. Some rowers are local high school students with the opportunity to compete on the Charles. Others are alums or senior rowers trying to stay active and relish the thrill of competition. The regatta even has a parent/child doubles race. Everyone is just buzzing to get on the water.

Though the regatta is in October, the teams have been preparing months in advance, as this fated race kicks off the fall season. "We've been on the water since just about late August," Ryan Brewington '28, a lightweight rower, said in an interview with the "Harvard Independent."

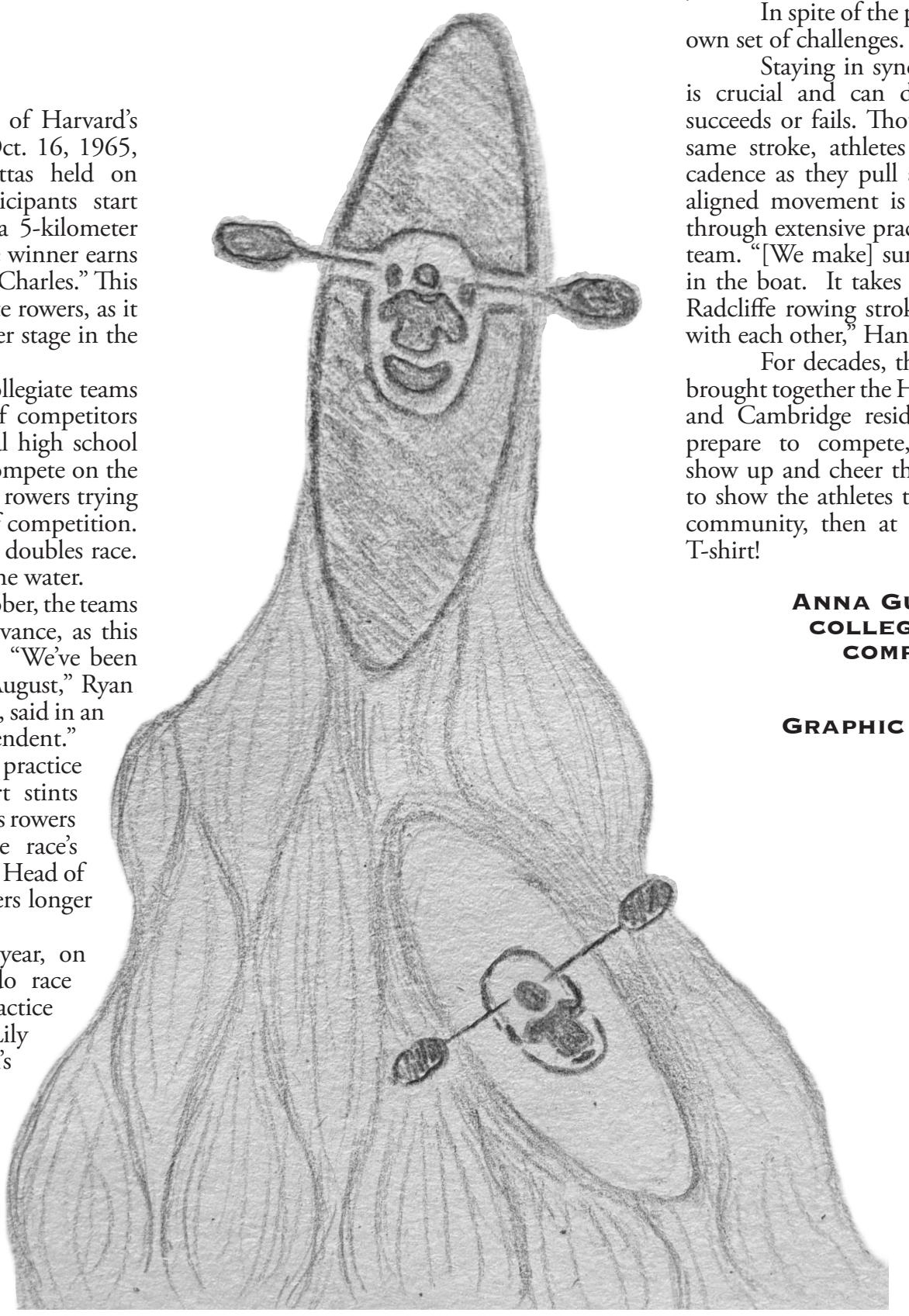
As Oct. 17 approaches, practice structure shifts. Rather than short stints around Cambridge waters, Harvard's rowers begin intense preparation for the race's extensive five-kilometer course. The Head of the Charles course is three kilometers longer than typical regattas.

"In the beginning of the year, on Wednesdays and Saturdays, we do race pieces to prepare, where we'll practice different portions of the course," Lily Farden '27, a captain of the women's heavyweight team, shared. On Wednesdays, they practice the first half of the course, while on Saturdays they do the longer distance to build endurance and simulate the difficulty of the mid-October competition. Each week, they spend more time on the water and row longer and longer distances. Their most recent practice included two or three 2,000-meter pieces.

The Head of the Charles Regatta attracts particular attention, and for good reason—the course is a formidable opponent even for the best athletes. "I think the most challenging part of the race is just the course itself. It's very windy. There's a lot of bridges on the Charles," Brewington said.

Some rowers call the regatta the "coxswain's race," since coxswains steer the boat as efficiently as possible. More practice on the Charles' twists and turns, as offered to Crimson rowers, creates opportunities to save seconds here and there—critical in tight races.

Beyond familiarity with the course, being close to fans gives team morale a huge boost. "It's just a home course for us in sort of an energetic sense," Farden said. "Our boathouse will be so full of the best energy and ruckus: fans and family and friends. It's always a magical place to be at our boathouse, but I think especially during Head of the Charles, it feels really special to have support just overflowing."



Despite heavy crowds and fans, this "home court" feeling softens the day's weight. "We're always put under pressure in a way," said Erin Hanrahan '27, also a women's heavyweight captain. "We always have to perform, and we always strive to give our best every single practice."

"It literally feels like you're on cloud nine because there are so many spectators cheering for you."

-Hanrahan '27

In fact, fans' presence bolsters the usual scene. "It literally feels like you're on cloud nine because there are so many spectators cheering for you," Hanrahan added.

In spite of the pressure, each race brings its own set of challenges.

Staying in sync with the rest of the team is crucial and can determine whether a boat succeeds or fails. Though every boat follows the same stroke, athletes naturally have their own cadence as they pull and push the oars. Steady, aligned movement is critical—a skill cultivated through extensive practice and time together as a team. "[We make] sure we all physically sync up in the boat. It takes a second to relearn … the Radcliffe rowing stroke and relearn how to row with each other," Hanrahan said.

For decades, the Head of the Charles has brought together the Harvard community, rowers, and Cambridge residents. As Harvard athletes prepare to compete, the community should show up and cheer them on Oct. 16–18. If not to show the athletes the support of the Harvard community, then at least for the free Dunkin' T-shirt!

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Graphic by James Foss '29

Extra-Oar-dinary: Harvard-Radcliffe Heavyweight Rowing's Kathryn Serra Named USRowing U23 Athlete of the Year

A Harvard-Radcliffe heavyweight rowing senior star's journey to a fabled national accolade.

By ANNELISE PACZESNY '29

Harvard-Radcliffe Heavyweight Rowing's Kathryn Serra '27 is making waves this semester: just three weeks into the school year, USRowing named her U23 Athlete of the Year. This prestigious award marks Serra's final year rowing at Harvard. It opens a new chapter as she continues with the national team, hoping to earn a spot on the Senior National team after graduation.

Serra has competed for the U.S. National Team since 2024, earning two silver medals and even a gold this past summer in the quadruple sculls. This robust career began years ago. "I started in high school, just because my best friends were on the team. But my first year of rowing the whole year was [at Harvard]," Serra said in an interview with the "Harvard Independent."

A Miami native, Serra also ran cross country and played basketball throughout high school. She finished her first half-marathon alongside her father at just 12. Then, despite being raised in the warmth of Florida, Northeast schools caught her attention during recruitment. Sure, those schools had four seasons, but more importantly for Serra, they offered prime waters for rowing training.

"Rowing on the Charles is incredible," Serra shared. "Seeing all the different universities on the river is amazing. I feel like in a lot of places, there [aren't] that many other teams on the water, but just getting to represent Radcliffe and all the history behind it is pretty incredible."

Even in the boathouse, Serra is always putting on a show. She has broken the boathouse ergometer records for the 6k and 2k, with an astounding 6:37 for the 2k. This speed isn't the only thing that drew USRowing's attention—she believes her bravery in trying a completely new event was important to her nomination.

Usually a sweep rower, Serra rows starboard in the middle four—often called the 'engine room' of an eight. However, she recently took a shot at sculling: instead of using one oar, as in sweep rowing, sculling uses two oars—one in each hand—to propel the boat forward. Sculling is typically used in smaller boats, such as singles, doubles, or quads.

"I tried sculling this summer when I usually sweep, and it's like the quad—the U.S. hasn't always podiumed in the quad. We usually don't, honestly. And so, it was kind of a scary challenge to do that after I'd been in the eight and gotten silver two years in a row," Serra noted. "We kind of … just took a chance and decided to try sculling in my final year, and it ended up working out."

Despite being on the U.S. U23 National Team for three years, receiving the award still came as a surprise. "I guess I was just so shocked when I saw that I was nominated for that because just knowing who else has won that award in the past, they're people that I have always looked up to in rowing," Serra remarked. "I'm very honored to receive the same award."

Serra's selection for the U.S. U23 National Team was no easy feat. Interested rowers must submit an application with their ergometer scores for the 6K, 2K, 100m sprint, and one-minute times, which is only the first benchmark. These tests often require highly competitive scores, with a sub-7-minute 2K score common among the U23 National Team.

Afterward, selected athletes are invited to selection camps, which include intense, elite-level training (such as seat racing or time trials) for five weeks, to test athletes on their speed, endurance, and teamwork skills. The team then selects athletes based on these metrics to compete.

Another momentous event in her rowing career actually occurred at home. Although their permanent training location is the Weld Boathouse on the Charles, the team often travels for big tournaments, and she had the opportunity to compete in her home state. "We went to Florida [for] the Big Ten Invite. We raced a lot of other really fast schools, and we did really well there. We walked through a lot of programs that we were unsure we would beat," Serra said. "It was pretty cool to have my family be there too."

Serra's biggest support comes from her family, particularly her dad, who has been foundational in her rowing career. "My dad didn't row, but he definitely has always pushed me in these sports. When I was 10 years old, he had me running up and down 27 floors in my building before I could hang out with my friends," Serra said. She shared that her dad has always been an active participant in her rowing career, and even completes his own 2K tests on his ergometer in Miami and sends Serra his score.

"My dad escaped Cuba when he was in his early 30s, and just hearing his stories and how much he had to persevere in his childhood—I'll think about that a lot when I'm doing hard workouts, and I'm in a lot of pain and doubting if I can finish [the workout] and achieve the split that I want," Serra continued. "I'll think, 'This is nothing compared to what my dad went through in Cuba. I can get through this if my dad can go on a raft for 90 miles.'"

Serra noted that one of her pre-race rituals is calling her parents to calm down and get her mind off it, along with listening to music. "I start off with more peaceful music, like my Christian music, and then as the race is getting closer, maybe I'll shift to my Cuban, more hype music and just have fun with my friends."

Serra also shared how important her faith is to her success and motivation. "My faith is always also pretty important to me: Trusting that God is working everything together for my good, and even through the setbacks or injuries, I know there's a greater plan, and I don't have to spiral," she said.

Even in her advice to young rowers just starting, Serra highlighted how important her friends are to her love of the sport. "My favorite part about rowing is how mentally tough you have to be, and digging in the pain cave, and doing it alongside my best friends. Enjoy all those sessions with your best friends right beside each other, fighting and giving it all you have with them and for them, because that will take you far," she shared.

Serra is one of three Harvard-Radcliffe rowers who competed in the 2026 U23 World Championships: Viktoria Ekstrand '29 and Jacqueline Stjernfeldt '28 competed as a pair, rowing the 2- for Sweden. But she is the first Harvard-Radcliffe athlete to receive USRowing's Female U23 Athlete of the Year, and she continues her accomplished rowing career with high hopes.

Annelise Paczesny '29 (akpaczesny@college.harvard.edu) is comping the "Harvard Independent" and enjoys watching the women's rowing teams cruise down the Charles from her Winthrop dorm window.

Graphic by Sarahluna Sassine '29



The Hail Mary

Hail Mary, Mother of [Harvard].

By MEGAN LEGAULT '28

Hail, Mary, full of grace,
the Lord is with thee.
Blessed art thou among women
and blessed is the fruit of thy
womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
pray for us, sinners,
now and at the hour of our death.

Unless you have been living under a rock, I'm pretty sure we've all seen Harvard football's highlight-reel "Hail Mary" against Colgate on Oct. 3 by now.

The play: fourth quarter, four seconds on the clock, Harvard down by three. The snap: quarterback Charlie Smith '29, scrambling from defenders, suddenly hurls the ball from midfield. The pass: a 36-yard Hail Mary completed to sophomore tight end Teigan Pelletier '29, who lands practically sandwiched between two defensive backs. The miracle: a lateral pass, something you would expect on the Mignone Rugby Field, not the turf of Harvard Stadium, to a first-year. The finish: wide receiver Nathaniel Bailey '30 takes down the players and the pylon in his path to secure Harvard's 20-17 victory over Colgate.

"But across these cases, one thing is clear: the miracles did not happen by chance alone."

"Oh my God, he's gonna score," Smith said to "The New York Times." For Harvard football, both the players on the field and the fans in the thick gray cement stands had their prayers answered—Amen.

However, the seemingly preordained "Hail Mary" play didn't stand out to me as much. Now, don't get me wrong. Anytime Crimson athletics gets the degree of national media attention it did in the last week and a half, it's a pretty good indicator we did something noteworthy. The play was historic; there's no doubt. Within minutes of the game's end, outlets ran headlines like "Harvard's Hail Mary." The publicity spectacle, which seemed to pivot on the term "Hail Mary," grabbed my attention more than the play itself. After all, what is a "Hail Mary?" And, maybe most importantly, how did they become more associated with American football than the Catholic Church?

Most people think the Hail Mary prayer has its roots in religion. The Hail Mary comes from two passages in the Bible: the Annunciation, when the Archangel Gabriel greets the Virgin Mary (Luke 1:28), and the Visitation, when Mary visits Elizabeth (Luke 1:42).

The prayer is part of a larger practice of Marian devotion towards Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ. By sacrificing her only "begotten son," Mary stands as a significant figure in Christianity, inspiring devotion to faith. The Hail Mary prayer is notable because many believe it is divine, a heaven-sent message. Today, Catholics widely regard it as one of the most recited prayers.

So, how exactly did the term "Hail Mary" make its way into football?

Regular American football fans know that displays of faith are no stranger to the game. After taking the field, many players head straight to the end zone, take a knee, bow their heads, remove their helmets, and offer a prayer before kickoff. At all levels, even in the NFL, it is not wholly uncommon to see players form a huddle and pray in a circle along the field. Since the sport's beginning, football and faith have been tied: football as America's sport, faith as America's values.

The Hail Mary prayer first appeared on the field in 1922; however, its legacy wasn't cemented until 1932. The story of football's first "Hail Mary" was told at the American Football Association Banquet by one of Notre Dame Football's legendary "Four Horsemen," Jim Crowley. Ironic, given that Notre Dame is a private Catholic university; even more so because the nickname "Four Horsemen" references the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" from the New Testament. Sports journalist Grantland Rice, in a team-written piece, bestowed the nickname on four members of the Fighting Irish football team: "Outlined against a blue, gray October sky the Four Horsemen rode again."

Crowley tells how the Hail Mary happened during a game between Georgia Tech and the Fighting Irish. After two Georgia Tech fumbles, a trailing Notre Dame struggled to move the ball downfield. In a moment of desperation, a senior linebacker who was Presbyterian suggested that the team say a Hail Mary prayer before a fourth-down play. "Boys, let's say a 'Hail Mary,'" recalled Crowley. And just like Harvard's, their prayer was answered: Notre Dame scored not once, but twice, securing their comeback victory and, with it, a place in football legend.

In the century since Notre Dame's historic first, the Hail Mary has been repeated and fully integrated into American football lingo.

While a long-range pass when all hope seems lost may be the first thing that comes to mind when we hear the term "Hail Mary," in popular culture, it has become a colloquial shorthand for a last resort.

A student at the Berklee College of Music was diagnosed with an acoustic neuroma that threatened his ability to hear. Surgeons elected for a high-risk suboccipital approach; the patient walked away from the surgery entirely cured. A medical "Hail Mary." After months of failed attempts to force Iraq from occupied Kuwait during Operation Desert Storm, Schwarzkopf's strategy, the guise of a false attack led to Iraq's removal by United States forces. A military "Hail Mary." And perhaps most famously popularized by Hollywood, the fictional journey of Dr. Ryland Grace, played by Ryan Gosling, to save Earth proclaims itself as one in its very title: Project Hail Mary.

But across these cases, one thing is clear: the miracles did not happen by chance alone. The surgeons had decades of experience and carefully considered every step of that miraculous operation. Schwarzkopf's military strategy reflected 35 years of service in the army and, undoubtedly, the collaboration of many tactically trained minds. Even the fictional Dr. Grace only makes it home through extensive scientific research and the support of a superiorly intelligent, benevolent alien.

Harvard football is no different. Our Hail Mary was the product of hours of practice in mock high-stakes situations Coach Andrew Aurich constructs every day. Players spent valuable time in what the "Wall Street Journal" fittingly called Harvard Football's "practice laboratory." As the clock wound down against Colgate, the situation which it presented had already been accounted for in the team's preparation.

Then, should we consider the "Hail Mary" a calculated, planned maneuver rather than a miraculous twist of faith? I think not. While planning and preparation are certainly a crucial ingredient in the recipe for a well-baked "Hail Mary," they are not all that matters in overcoming these implausible situations.

Whether at the hands of a visiting angel, a praying pope, a hopeful neurosurgeon, a desperate soldier, a stranded middle school science teacher, or a well-prepared college football player, the belief that the Hail Mary could work against all odds is what keeps it alive.

"I had confidence; we were going to execute," Aurich said to the "Wall Street Journal." In other words, he believed in his players.

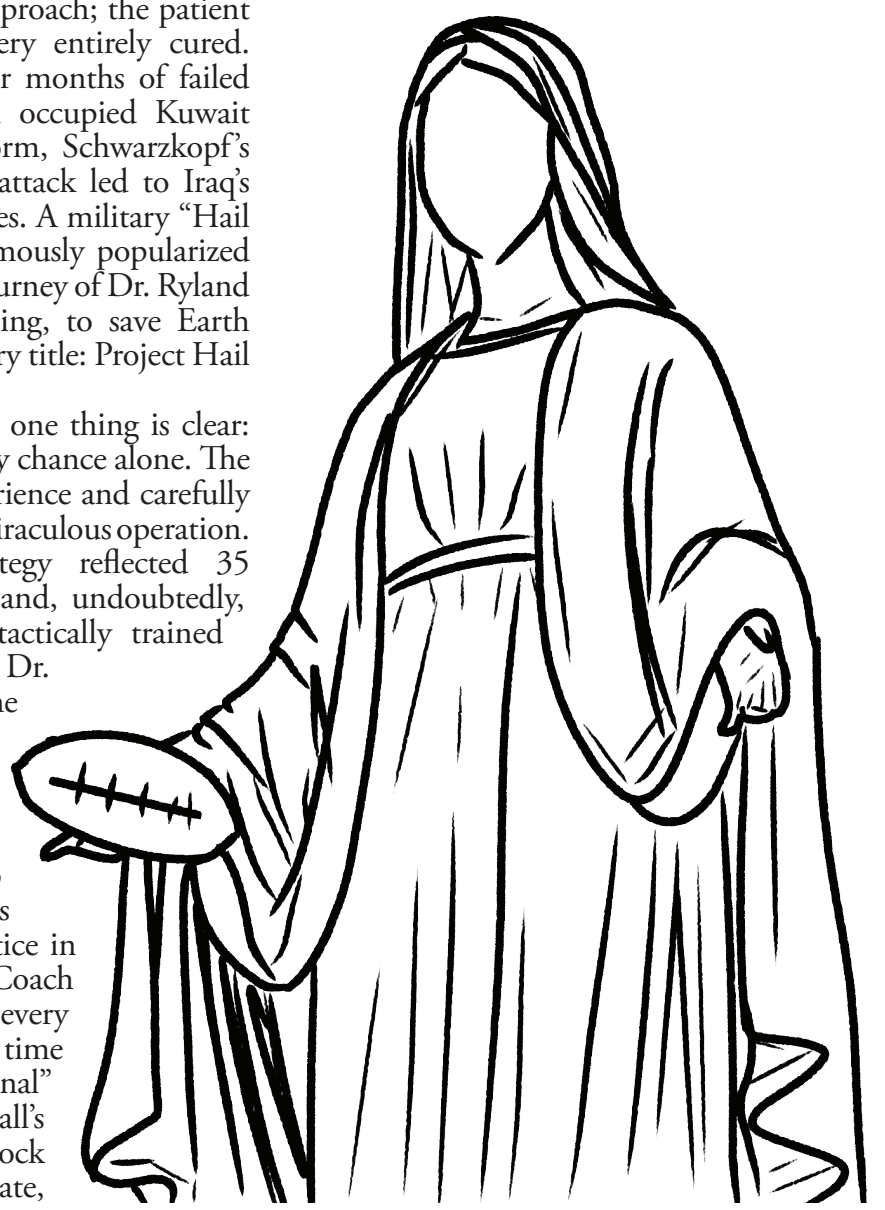
"Now, we get a chance to win instead of tie it," Smith continued to the "New York Times."

Bailey, who admitted to the "New York Times" to rewatching the play ad nauseam following the game, realized only after the fact that there appeared to be a distinct moment on the field. Perhaps on his ninety-ninth watch, Bailey noticed his eyes, like Pelletier's, widen with hope—the possibility of what they were about to do. "My eyes got super big, his eyes got big, and we knew we had the chance to make a play," Bailey said.

Taken together, Coach Aurich, Smith, and Bailey's interviews share a similar sentiment—faith. Faith in their preparation. Faith in their team. And the faith that they could execute whatever was necessary, be it a "Hail Mary" to defeat Colgate.

Megan Legault '28 (mlegault@college.harvard.edu) hopes her midterm Hail Marys are answered.

Graphic by Linden McCarl '28



Portland Trail Blazers Fire New Announcer Over Social Media Posts

The Portland Trail Blazers fire new announcer eight hours after hiring him over teenage tweets.

By ABIGAIL MCKOY '30

Just after noon on Oct. 1, the Portland Trail Blazers announced that they had hired 29-year-old Braiden Bell as their new play-by-play broadcaster. Only eight hours later, the Blazers fired him after old, bigoted social media posts resurfaced. This decision has left fans questioning how thorough the team's background checks were, the ethics of the journalists who found the posts, and the reasoning behind Bell's termination.

"Instead of crediting hard work and talent, fans and rivals find disturbing justifications to explain their distaste for someone else's success."

The Blazers initially hired Bell to replace longtime broadcaster Kevin Calabro, the team's voice for 16 years. However, Calabro's contract expired in June 2026, and his rejection of a new deal left the Blazers searching for a new announcer.

Bell, who had previously worked for the Phoenix Mercury, was expected to replace Calabro. However, racist and misogynistic posts on his existing social media account led to his immediate removal.

"The Portland Trail Blazers have zero tolerance for racist, sexist, or harmful comments. Social media posts made by our recently announced play-by-play broadcaster are in clear violation of team and league policies, as well as our values and expectations," a Blazers statement released on X a day after Bell's dismissal read. "Therefore, we will not be moving forward with this broadcaster."

"KGW" reporter Devon Haskins discovered the online commentary and shared it with the Blazers after hearing of Bell's hiring. Haskins proceeded to publish a story about the 2012 and 2013 posts, which included comments like "Asian people piss me off" and referred to women as "wh*ores."

This situation now sits in the national spotlight, calling into question journalistic ethics and the extent of background checks before hiring. Moreover, should commentary from over a decade ago affect a man's livelihood today?

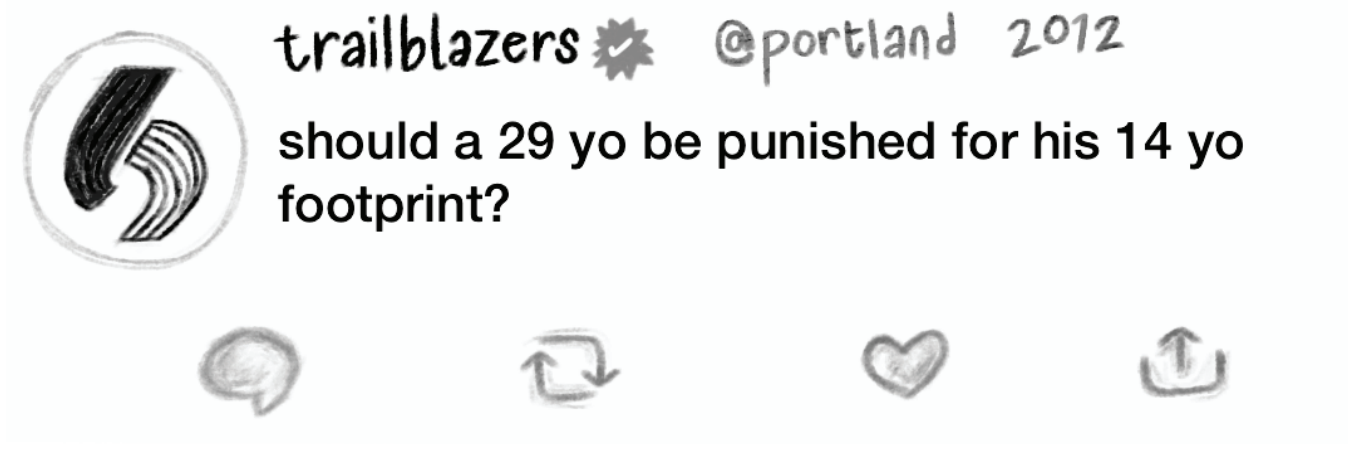
The journalists who first broke the news have since received significant criticism. Many upset social media users unearthed comments by Haskins and John Tierney that resembled Bell's teenage tweets. Although "Tegna," "KGW"'s parent company, is conducting an internal review, neither journalist is expected to face repercussions.

The Portland Trail Blazers have also faced criticism for failing to uncover Bell's offensive social media posts before they hired him. In a statement confirming the decision, the Blazers acknowledged this mistake. "We did not meet our own bar in this process, and for that we apologize to Blazers fans and to Rip City," the posting read. "We believe strongly that everyone who is a part of Rip City should feel welcome and safe, and we will make sure that our new broadcaster reflects these values. We will do better."

This isn't the first time sports figures have faced serious consequences for inappropriate social media posts. In 2009, Larry Johnson was suspended and later cut from the Kansas City Chiefs after releasing homophobic comments on Twitter. Similarly, Jermaine Whitehead was released from the Cleveland Browns after he posted an inappropriate tweet with profanity, threats to former NFL players, and a derogatory racial term. In 2022, Kyrie Irving posted a link on Twitter to an antisemitic film. The NBA faced severe backlash, and Irving was suspended for eight games.

The difference between these three situations and Bell's firing is that these athletes were reprimanded for tweets they posted while representing their teams. Some of these athletes weren't even fired for these offenses; Irving was suspended for only eight games, likely because of his popularity. By contrast, Bell was punished for posts he made 14 years ago. "KGW" reported that it found no offensive tweets after Bell became an adult.

Bell himself emphasized the context of the post in an apology he issued on Oct. 2. "I am deeply sorry for the language that I used on Twitter. These tweets, while wrong, were written by me 14 years ago while I was only 15 years old and have no reflection of who I am today," he wrote. "I do not take lightly any harm it causes now."



Many argue that adults should not hold teens fully responsible for their actions. Adolescents are still developing emotionally, socially, and cognitively. Teens may post inappropriate things because of peer pressure, lack of understanding of consequences, or impulsivity. Fans cite these facts when stressing that the Blazers made the wrong decision; team leadership overreacted by abruptly firing Bell over his teenage words. Fans also argue that Bell couldn't explain himself or apologize before he was let go—in other words, he wasn't given his right to a fair trial.

The debate over whether people should be punished for past posts extends beyond the NBA and into academia. This January, Harvard University removed Gregory K. Davis from his position as the Dunster House Resident Dean over controversial social media posts. Controversial far-left tweets from years earlier resurfaced, criticizing Donald Trump and law enforcement. These messages dated from 2019 and 2021, before Davis began his tenure as Harvard staff. University affiliates criticized the dismissal, arguing that individuals should not be fired based on an aging digital footprint. Many fans of Braiden Bell would agree with this perspective on weaponizing one's online history.

"Blaming a hidden 'trick' is not a clever insight; it is a projection of the ego of the loser."

On Oct. 5, Bell officially announced that he and his attorney were seeking reinstatement. He is still waiting for an official legal response from the NBA franchise.

"Should the worst words a fifteen-year-old ever wrote decide the rest of his life?" Bell's attorney Arnie Herz said in a statement provided to "Outkick."

Herz also said he sent a letter to the Trail Blazers' legal team on Oct. 4. According to him, the letter rejected any notion that Portland could revoke Bell's employment agreement. He gave a 24-hour window to respond and resolve the situation. Fifteen minutes before the 24-hour deadline, he received a call from a Portland legal staffer confirming they received the legal correspondence and that the organization would not change its mind.

Despite this setback, the attorney stressed that he remains "very confident in our legal position regardless of what they throw at us."

"We're not going away. This is not going away. It's going to stay in the news cycle," Herz added

It is unclear whether his efforts will succeed, as the Blazers have shown no intention so far of welcoming him back.

Abigail McKoy '30 (abimckoy@college.harvard.edu) is comping the "Harvard Independent."

Graphic by Sarahluna Sassine '29

Weekly Sports Preview: October 15–22

Your weekly what-to-watch for Harvard Athletics.

By LUCY DUNCAN '28

Lots are in store for Harvard Athletics fans this week! Seasoned East Coast residents may be familiar with the much-anticipated Head of the Charles Regatta. Meanwhile, team sports are concluding their regular season and gearing up for conference championship runs. With some of the most intense and anticipated challenges ahead, there's no better time than now to watch your favorite Harvard sports!

Rowing

This weekend, Cambridge will host the Head of the Charles Regatta. From Friday to Sunday, nearly 12,000 competitors and 325,000 spectators are expected to attend the world's largest two-day rowing regatta. All four of Harvard's rowing teams—men's heavyweight, women's heavyweight, men's lightweight, and women's lightweight—will race on Saturday and Sunday. Both lightweight crews enter as defending champions, with the men looking to extend their four-year reign. This is the first and biggest race of the year for all Harvard athletes, giving fans an early glimpse of their new rosters. By far the best place to watch (in my humble opinion) is right on campus at Weeks Footbridge. As the race's fifth bridge, Weeks gives spectators a perfect view of the iconic 90-degree turn—one of the most technically challenging and interesting parts of the race to watch.

"From Friday to Sunday, nearly 12,000 competitors and 325,000 spectators are expected to attend the world's largest two-day rowing regatta."

Women's Volleyball (12–2)

This weekend brings two conference home games for the Crimson. On Friday at 6 p.m., Harvard hosts defending Ivy League champions Princeton. Harvard is vying for its first Ivy League Tournament berth since 2023, so this matchup is a chance to prove it can hang with the defending champions. The Tigers have beaten Harvard in their last five meetings, but Princeton is only 3–2 in conference play and fourth in Ivy League standings this season. This game could be a season-defining Crimson win.

On Saturday at 5 p.m., the Crimson will play their second home game of the weekend against the University of Pennsylvania. This matchup carries lower stakes than the Princeton battle, pitting Harvard against a roster that failed to qualify for last year's Ivy Tournament. They remain legitimate opponents for the Crimson, especially after taking down Brown—one of the only teams to beat Harvard this season—on Oct. 9. A win here will be critical for the Crimson to solidify their position as one of the top four Ivy League teams.

At the MAC this weekend, watch the Crimson's rising first-year talent, including setter Catlin Shao '30, a team assist leader who masterfully sets up kills for her teammates, and Masina Ogbechie '30, who contributed key kills to carry the Crimson to victory against Columbia on October 9.

Cross Country

On Friday, the cross country squad heads to New York City. The men's team will compete in the Intercollegiate Association of Amateur Athletes of America Championships, and the women will race in the complementary Eastern Collegiate Athletic Conference Championships. This is the Crimson's last regular-season race ahead of the Ivy League and NCAA Championship stretch, and a final tune-up for racers. On the women's squad, first-year Aelo Curtis '30 has led the Crimson's scoring, highlighted by a 34th-place finish in her collegiate debut at the Providence Friar Invite. Meanwhile, the men's team boasts high performers, including Tam Gavenas '29, who posted the Ivy League's best time at last week's Nuttycombe Invitational, and captain Sam Burgess '27, who finished top-30 in the same race.

Sailing

This weekend splits the Crimson sailing squad between two regattas. St. Mary's City, Maryland, will host the Women's Atlantic Coast Championship Final. Earlier this month, the pairs of Zoey Ziskind '27 and Christina Chen '27, and JJ Drummond '27 and Kate Danielson '28 carried the Crimson to a first-place finish in round one of the Championship. After finishing second at last year's Championship finals, Harvard has a real shot at a title this weekend.

Meanwhile, a second squad will travel to Dartmouth to compete for the Captain Hurst Trophy. With the Open Atlantic Coast Championship Finals next weekend, this will be the Crimson's final tune-up. In the open division, Harvard's standouts include the duos of Harrison Strom '28 and Zia Zucker '30, and Jacob Posner '29 and Amelie Zucker '28, whose combined efforts at the Harry Andersen Trophy in September earned Harvard a second-place finish.

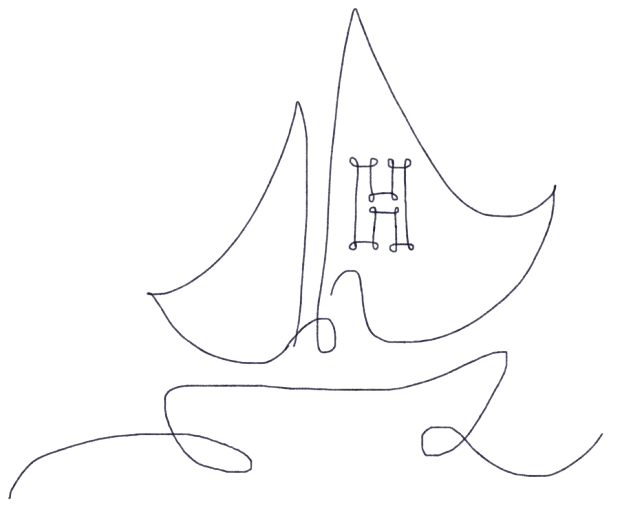
"After finishing second at last year's Championship finals, Harvard has a real shot at a title this weekend."

Women's Rugby (4–0)

Harvard's three-time defending national champions will hit the road this Saturday, traveling to St. Charles, Missouri, for a 1 p.m. game against Lindenwood. For the second year in a row, the Crimson remain undefeated and have already claimed the Ivy League champion title. Harvard has never lost a fifteen-a-side rugby game to Lindenwood, but this is the farthest the Crimson will travel in the regular season—a road game designed to test Harvard's performance under pressure after a long travel day. Heading into the championship season, keep an eye on Morgan Gibson '29, whose wing speed has made her one of the Crimson's leading try scorers this semester, and Jojo "Stiff Arm" Mignone '28, who earned her nickname for her ability to fend off defenders near the try line.

Football (4–0)

On Saturday at 1 p.m., football hosts Holy Cross at Harvard Stadium. The Crimson are current favorites to win their fourth consecutive Ivy League champion title and have won the last three matchups in this series. This should be a lower-stakes opportunity for the Crimson to solidify their systems ahead of a five-game Ivy League run. Fans should watch quarterback Charlie Smith '29, whose three passing touchdowns against Cornell were a career best and who is developing as a leader. On defense, linebacker Dorsey Benefield '28 leads the team in total tackles, while linebacker and All-Ivy League First Team Honoree Sean Line '27 stands out with sacks and tackles for loss. As their last non-conference match of the season, the game may let the Crimson experiment with new tactics and lineups.



"The Crimson are current favorites to win their fourth consecutive Ivy League champion title and have won the last three matchups in this series."

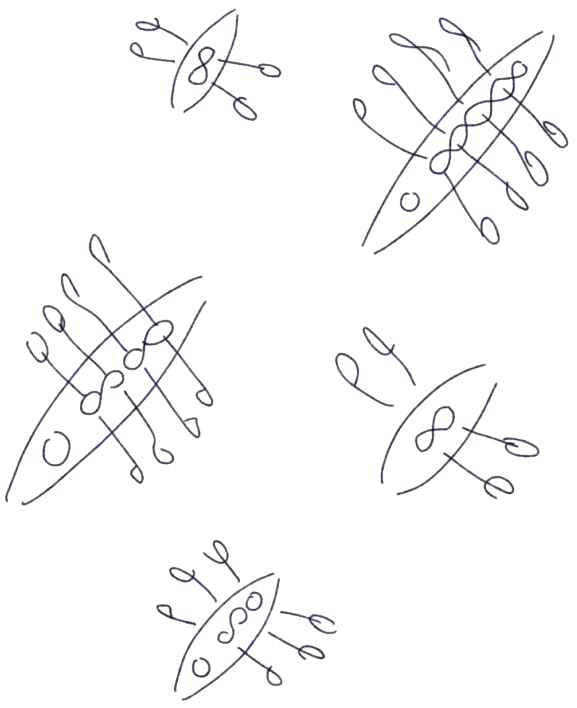
Field Hockey (10–1)

Another Harvard team with a two-game weekend, field hockey will travel to Providence on Saturday for a noon conference game against Brown. After an upset victory over then-No. 5 Wake Forest, the Crimson are ranked fourth in the nation. After last year's semi-final run, Harvard is eyeing its first NCAA national title in program history. The Bears are 1–3 in conference play, so the Crimson should win more easily.

On Sunday at 1 p.m., Harvard hosts Boston University on Berylson Field. This non-conference game against defending Patriot League champions will challenge the Crimson, but the matchup favors Harvard, which hasn't lost this series since 2015. First-year forward Evie Smith '30 is already making an impact on the pitch, leading the team in shots and shots on goal, while Sage Piekarski '27, who led the Ivy League in goals last year, is Harvard's top scoring threat this season.

Women's Soccer

On Saturday at 1 p.m., women's soccer hosts Yale for one of their last home games of the season. Harvard is one of three teams tied for second in the Ivy League standings, so every match is critical to the Crimson's bid to stay in the top four and qualify for the Ivy Tournament. Yale has yet to win a conference game this season so this match will be the final test of Harvard's strategy before next week's game against Ivy leader Brown. Watch forward captain Ólöf Kristinsdóttir '27



and first-year standout Brooke Huleatt ’30, tied for the Ivy League lead in goals this season.

Men’s Water Polo

This weekend, water polo hosts the Harvard Invitational at Blodgett Pool. Harvard has three games on the slate: Saturday against Navy at 10:30 a.m. and the University of California, Merced at 6 p.m., and Sunday against Pomona-Pitzer at 10 a.m. This non-conference slate is highlighted by the Crimson’s rematch opportunity against Navy after a close loss at the Princeton Invitational. Fans coming to watch this free home game can expect a tight, physical match. The Crimson must avoid underestimating their other opponents this weekend, including 2025 Division III runners-up Pomona-Pitzer—upsets become increasingly likely as fatigue sets in on day two of the tournament.

“Show Crimson Athletics some love this week! ”

Men’s Soccer (3–5–2)

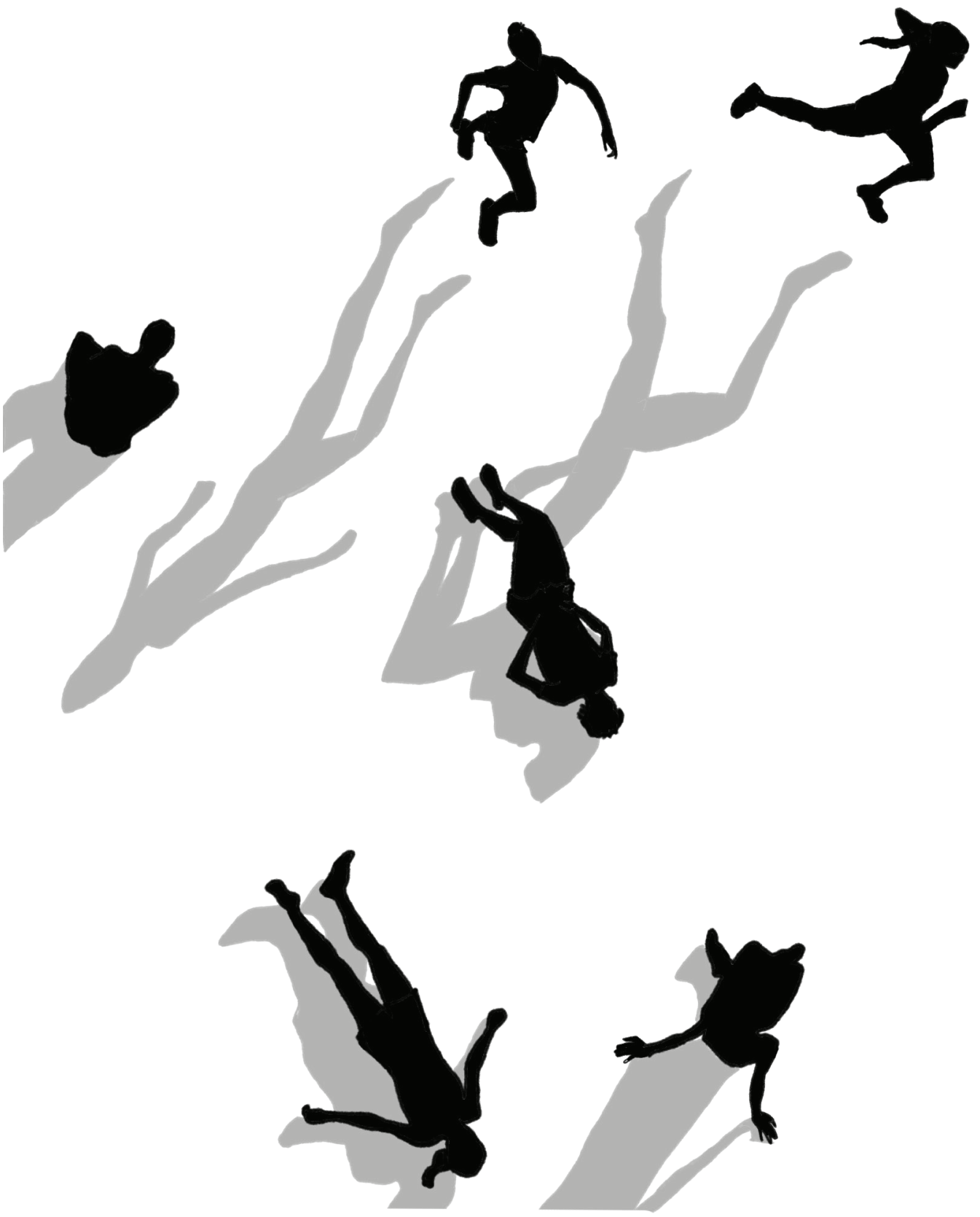
On Saturday at 7 p.m., the Crimson play at Yale. Early conference standings rank Harvard second in the Ivy League after last week’s victories over Columbia and Brown. While this is likely one of their lightest conference matchups of the season—the Bulldogs still haven’t secured a conference win—Harvard must avoid being overly hubristic. Recent results in this series have been mixed, with last year’s meeting ending in a 1–1 tie, so this is far from a sure win for the Crimson.

On Wednesday at 7 p.m., the Crimson will host Stonehill at Jordan Field. This non-conference mid-week match breaks up two Ivy League games and gives the Crimson a chance to test their tactics against a relatively unfamiliar opponent—this is only the third time the teams have met, and the series is tied 1–1. To keep winning, the Crimson will need forwards like Adam Poliakov ’29, who scored both goals in last week’s victory over Brown, and goalkeepers like Jason Broome ’29, whose three-save shutout against Columbia gave the Crimson their first conference win of the season.

As they wrap up the regular season and prepare for their biggest challenges yet, show Crimson Athletics some love this week! Order a HUDS takeaway lunch and picnic along the Charles, grab a courtside seat at the MAC, or host an ESPN watch party in your dorm—just cheer for the Crimson!

Lucy Duncan ’28 (lduncan@college.harvard.edu) writes Sports for the “Harvard Independent.”

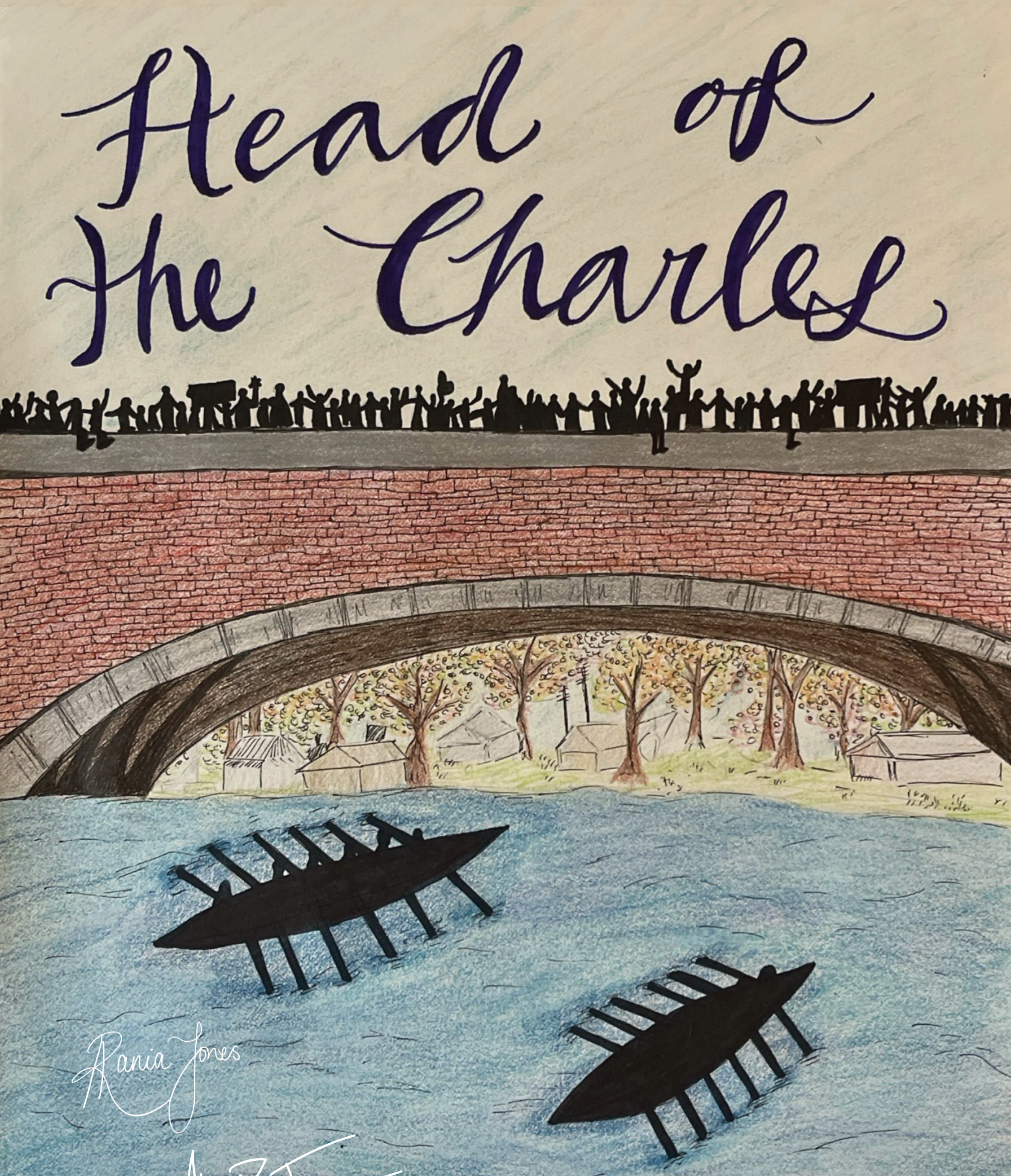
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Head of the Charles



Rania Jones

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LAYOUT BY SAM PARK '29 AND LINDEN MCCARL '28