



ACCENTS

The Student Literary Magazine of San Jacinto College

ACCENTS

2023

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Accents: The Student Literary Magazine of San Jacinto College exists to recognize the artistic talent and creative expression from students at the college. It represents the collaborative efforts of faculty across the college and reflects the diverse voices of our students.

For information about the magazine, including a digital version and information about how to submit work for future issues, visit sanjac.edu/accents.

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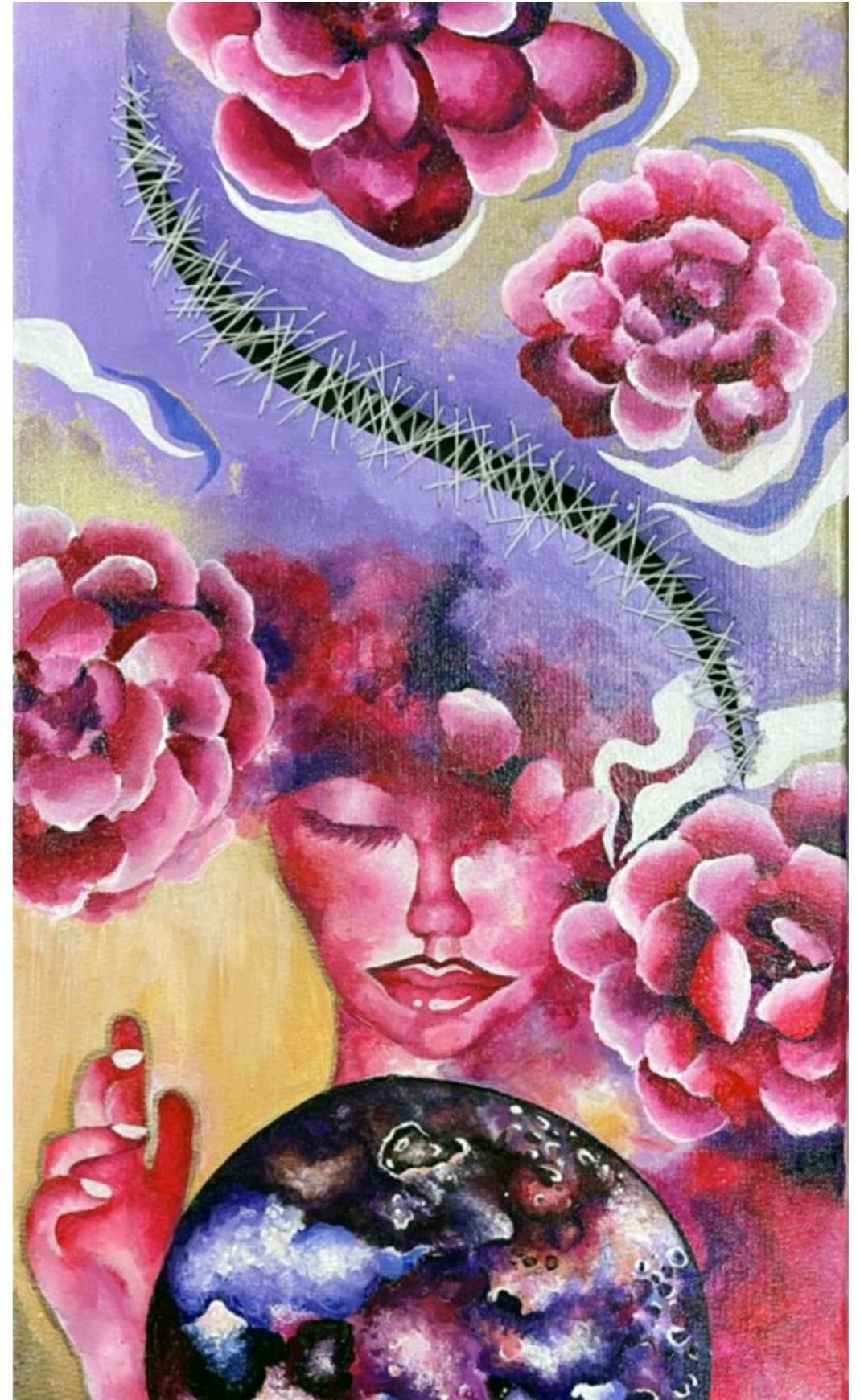
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Solace
Sainsha Bakshi



Cinquain Contest

A cinquain is a five-line poem developed by the American poet Adelaide Crapsey (1878 - 1914). Although similar to the Japanese tanka form, the American cinquain includes five lines with a specific number of syllables.

College
Valeria Hernandez
College
Anxious, success
Working, writing, thinking
Only form of validation.
Complex

Grown
Abriana Morales
Fleeting,
foretold to hold.
You delusional child.
Your youth protects you against me,
so leave.

The Media
Allison Flores
Young teens
Can't keep eyes off
From sunrise to sunset
Eyes glued to their screens at all times
New norm

Blinded
Belinda Lopez
Blocked out
She misses sight
It deteriorates
Living life as a description
Blinded

Hurricane
Bryan Ibarra

And pour!
Your rapid gales
against my home spawn fright.
The streets swell with your angry tears,
our plight.

A Changed Woman
Marissa Ramos

Hateful ...
I have always
Hated. You made me stop,
But you broke my heart, and now I
Hate you.

Constructive Criticism
Leslie Rojo Flores

Vanish
Into thin air
To hide my emotions
From all the painful criticism
I bear

Mutinous Mimic
Shelby Robbins

Could I,
For a moment
Suspended in malice,
Echo back the response you seek?
Doubtful.

Checkmate
Carolina Vargas

Same goal
From pawn to rook.
Queen rules, defend the king.
Every game, different outcome.
Checkmate.

One Two Three

Jacob White

Little microbes live in my hair
Inhabiting it like the deer
in the forest
By my house and across the fence
And by that big ol
pothole
In the road
you would know
If you bothered to swing by
my home

And I know what you'll say
Many excuses come to mind
But I am only comforted
By counting these microbes of mine



Bonana
Carol Guevara

The Guinea Pig Without a Name

Jeremy Andrade

Wisdom is the knowledge people accumulate with experience as they age, however, I would not say this means that the person in question is old. This story begins with my parents taking my siblings and me to a bird show for my grandpa, an avid chicken lover wanting to offer his current chickens more friends in his backyard against my grandma's best wishes. Although there were many fantastic birds like the small finches huddled in numbers singing in the insides of their cages, chickens booking it from one side of their pen to the other side as if missing out on an amazing sight, and the colorful lory bird that could put any rainbow to shame, yet small eight-year-old me was invested in none of these birds; instead I had found interest in a man's large clear tote off the side of the venue, filled with small guinea pigs.

My eyes were stuck and the squabbling cockatoos across the walkway mimicking the sounds interested children had taught them as their sellers groomed their grandiose hair could not pry my eyes from the little waddling furballs. My grandpa had noticed this, "Hey, check this out!" He beckoned to my dad waving an arm towards my direction, "Your boy likes 'em!" My dad came over and took note of my interest, asking me a simple question after seeing the "twenty dollars each" slip of paper on the side of the tote, "You want one?" To which I let out the quickest, "Yes please" I possibly could. My dad had let me pick, and I had decided to pick the biggest one in the tote, and when I say big, I mean big. This absolute unit was about the size of my current adult hand in length and width, making him a pretty chunky boy.

Leaving the bird show, now arriving home and placing him in a spare fish tank we had,

my mom had decided to ask me an easy question for a young boy and his new pet, "What are you going to name it?" This was the issue though, being a small toddler and never having any responsibility for another creature in my life, I gave her the most pure and guttural response I could offer her, "I dunno." My mom gave me that look she always gave that made me questioned my intentions when deciding something, "Well, you have to figure out something so that you can properly take care of it." Not understanding what she meant by this, I quietly nodded my head and went to hang out with my new buddy.

My mom's question continued to rattle my mind, how would not naming a guinea pig stop me from caring for it? So, being the small child I was, I came up with the smartest names I could for a chubby guinea pig, like Lieutenant Big Boy, Sergeant Chonk, Sir Fullbody, and so on. I never stuck with any of the names though, with none of them really sticking I just kept rotating different ideas for names. However, I didn't realize there would be a time limit on having a name for Operative Colossus.

Two weeks after getting Colonel Cheddar he passed away. And although I didn't have him long, I did get attached to him to the point of me crying for a day. However, I now realize the fear that by never committing to a name we were never able to create that bond between pet and pet owner. Seeing what my mom's warning means, that by never establishing that connection he'll never see the gratitude I have for him. But it's thanks to him that over the years I think about the strange circumstances that led to me getting him. Like why were there guinea pigs at a bird show? Why was the man off to the side

of the event? Why was the price relatively low? And so on. With time comes wisdom, and over time I've realized that the reason General Tons was most likely chubby and died two weeks later is most likely because he was supposed to be bird food, making me pretty happy I was able to extend his life, even by a little bit. I'll always remember you, and I'm sorry I could never give you a name, Major Blubbs.

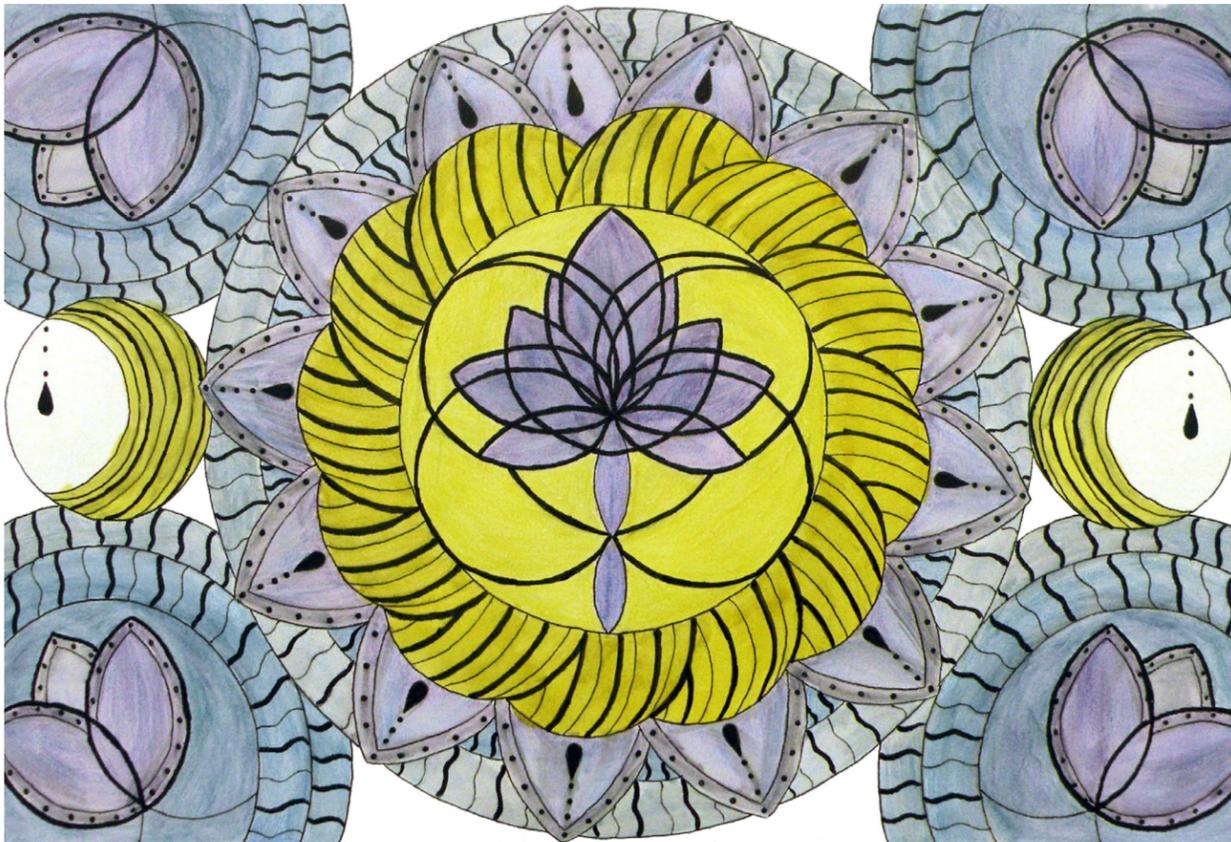
Interracial

Jacob White

Tension and aubergines
You don't really love me
I saw those magazines
White with eyes like the sea

My skin is a deep brown
And my eyes ain't that hue
My race and I are bound
So no more love for you

I need me a black love
Passion on luster silk
To lift me up above
White love, curdled milk



Lotus

Yunae Roberson

Wanderlust

Ruth Quarto

You've always loved adventure
finding somewhere new
You've always hated limits,
all the things you cannot do
"Is it time to part our ways?"
I wonder as I watch you pack
I cannot imagine a life without you,
but it seems we cannot steal any time back

I watch you roll your sleeping bag,
grab your pack, your lantern, your tent
You're off to find the life you used to have
though you're not quite sure where it went
We're much older now
less naive, less afraid
I'll miss you every day,
and remember you always

I hope those mountains teach you,
you are stronger than you think
And I hope those flowers teach you,
you can always come back from the brink
I hope the bees teach you
this life is worth the trouble
And I hope those trees teach you
to stand tall despite life's struggles

I hope the clouds teach you
as you wander on your way,
that it always had to rain
to make you who you are today
And as the night falls,
that your fire's burning strong,
and your family's all around you,
like the melody to your song

I hope the stars remind you
that there is light and beauty in the dark,
and that fire reminds you
all you need to start is a little spark
And while you're on this journey
no matter how far you roam,
I hope you will remember
you are always welcome home

The Four Sisters

Reid Carter

Eldest of her kin bearing a sharp tongue
Indwelling solitary and permafrost
Contact wishes gooseflesh
A crystal crown asserts knowledge
Her temper a burning ice when untamed
Vapored glass comes with each breath
Fierce doubt shadows a warm heart
Yet no such haste for kin alike
Her bleak masquerade shrouds a freezing glare
Yearning for warmth beneath icicle bars
Flaws would shatter the perfect façade
Her name, frozen, a time of love and sacrifice

Second, foil to the first
Greeted with her flow of prismatic shades
Soft at heart and sweet to the touch
She blossoms in her crown of roses and lilies
Her smile, warm as freshly picked fruit
Mother Nature is an unlikely kin
Domes of green and sea-sky hues
Sunshine kisses awake fauna and nature alike
Tranquil tears bring brilliant showers
The spirit of life through dusk and gloom
Activity and fun where she is sure to bloom
Her name revives a new world foretold

The third, born flame
Black scars left with each step
Undaunting and a drop of salt for every mile
A crown of rays blinds the uncharted
Dry waves form her cape
Surrendering is ignorance, and rivals never sully
Vitality sizzles through bones and flesh
From morning to snapping nights
Her flames brim
But the burning soul never dims
Harsh wisdom, yet warmth knows no bounds
Her name is unyielded strength

Despite youth, maturity outstands majority
Collecting harmonious emotions
Her silks sheathed of Hamlin's and Safron's
She bears no crown, for a title she never yearned

Succumbing a garland of earthy stars hung aback
Meandering winds and ensuing leaves
Fluently bounding posture
Emotions and prayers whisper a hearth
A beacon of two similar ideas
Blessing gifted to every feast
Never desiring praise, freedom is her peace
Her name is of one mind, but two whispers alike



Goddess of the Moon
Britnee Janowski

One More Charade

Belynn Sosa

In the dim hours of the morning, you woke before the sun to admire the moon. It was “un pedazo de paz,” your small piece of peace, the only constant that seemed to alleviate the cacophony of thoughts living in your head. As much as I wanted to stand next to you and see the stars reflected in your eyes, I couldn’t. Not because of my habit of sleeping in, which I’m infamous for, but because those eyes were like ventanas tan prístinas; I could see everything I wish I hadn’t. Instead, I waited for you to ease me out of bed so we could walk in silence to your favorite cafe. By then, the sun would slowly illuminate the strip of shops and diminish your peace simultaneously. Eyes once clear now revealed shadows that made you seem far away even though you were right next to me. But you were deft at extinguishing my worries, noting instantly whenever one watched you for too long. “Me encanta este clima,” you would smile and look down at your cup, “makes the coffee taste riquísimo, sí?”

I realize now those reassurances you gave me, that easily convinced me you were having a good time, were all pretend. A faltering charade that went on for too long. I was young, the age when things began to make more sense, but ignorance was softer to hold than harsh realities. Alas, it only led me to face a far crueler one: you’re gone.

You are not reading this memoir, pero es para ti. I still look for you like a forgotten child waiting to be picked up from school, and if I could watch you pretend how much the weather makes you happy, I wouldn’t.

I would quiet your candied lies and hold you.
Because you were warm,
warmer than the scent of coffee.



El Baile Del Los Muertos
Casandra Gomez



Child-Like State of Mind

Em Narvaez

I just turned twenty and am learning about what it means to be an adult.
I wake up and drink my coffee, go to college, to work, come home, study, eat a meal, and go to sleep.
Then repeat the next day and all the ones after that.
Always looking ahead and working toward the bigger picture.
Two steps forward, one step back.
I often feel
stagnant,
detached,
hollow,
alone,
and above else, overwhelmingly depressed.
I miss the, now almost foreign, feeling of happiness and satisfaction.
As a child, I would curiously soak in the vibrancy of the world
going out on a bike ride and feeling the soaring winds against my baggy clothes,
the blades of grass slipping between my messily painted toes,
the rich, warmth of the sun on my freckle-filled face,
and coming home for extra cheesy spaghetti to the gentle touch of my mother.
I found peace and contentment in those small pockets of time.
And that was enough.
I just turned twenty and am learning to return to that.
Allowing those soft, still, simplistic moments of existence to be enough for me.
Returning the golden presentness
of a child-like state of mind.



When Reality Hits

Erick J. Clarosvillalta

Zoning Out

Erick J. Clarosvillalta

You? Her? Yes, That's Me: A Personal Description

Iyana Gonzales

Who knows you best? The people who raised you? The God you believe created you? Your bestie? Your secret journal? Well, perhaps it's no one but yourself. You have been with your mind, body, and spirit the longest. I mean, there is even a place in your brain where information is held that you don't even realize that you know. Psychologists say we have little voices and different personalities in our mind, which is hard to imagine. How can so many ideas, reasons, and physical attributes build one, singular person? I hear those words, and a tingle arises from the surface layer of my skin, and it's as if my ears draw the words to the tip of my auditory canal and spit them out like someone eating a spoon of salt.

But isn't it true? You don't have to look at a mirror every day to know where everything is or how it works. You know all of you, from the top of your head to the heel of your foot. As I know the eyelid quiver that happens when I'm in an awkward situation and the slanted lips I get when my smile is real. I will forever be the only person to know the way my heart races when I see an attractive boy, and the only one who knows what it feels like for my tears to dry in-between a slight crease that sits on the edge of my cheek bone and flap of my lower eyelid. No one will ever see the moon and think back to a time of my younger self sitting upon the lap of my grandfather and feeling the grief of his loss. This is what I think of when someone asks me to tell them about me because these are things only I know.

People may see a young girl with big, curly, dark-brown hair. Skin that is a perfect mixture of a pink, olive, and tan. Some may see the small eyes that are usually hidden behind the cheeks of a full ten-teeth smile. Or maybe

they use their eyes to sculpt an outline of my body; more specifically, they may see the half an inch that my right leg stretches longer than my left. These may be things they see from me, but what do they hear? My obnoxious laugh that usually ends with a snort, or the unamused sigh when someone starts talking of a topic I'm unamused by such as math or football. Maybe they hear the crack of a Redbull that I start my morning with or the jingles of the absurd amount of jewelry I put on. Do I have a specific, recognizable scent? Is it the coconut oil I put in my hair before bed, or the cherry lip balm I forcefully apply every morning, so I will stop biting my lips? How about the toxically unhealthy mixture of body spray and perfume because I can't make a decision as to how I want to smell as I walk by? Could they smell my allergy nasal spritz I spray every morning into my nose? I hope not because it smells like moth balls. What do they feel and taste around me? When they hug me, is it the untamed hair that is thrown on them as I give a hug? Do they taste the strong scent of mint oozing out of my mouth every time I say a word because I can't go five seconds without at least three pieces of gum? Maybe they can taste their grandmas' cookies when I walk by with my sugar crumble scented oils. Or maybe they catch on to none of these things ...

There are many different probabilities to the attention-snatching details that could be what others remember of us. We will never know the exact features, smells, or feelings those around us notice; in the opposite way, we are aware of all the possibilities that they may take in from our many, small, arranging details. You have been with your mind, body, and spirit the longest. You know the things the eyes and minds of others don't. For myself, I know the way my thoughts work

and how I try to project ideas and morals I hold precious. I know the way my hair flows and the way my hips dip. I know the slanted smile and unorganized scents that linger on me through the day. Like so, we all know every little and large detail of our self, but, based on the eyes, circumstances, and values of others, we become different people. So now the question is, who are you?



Rose Portrait
Virginia Estes



Seasons of Perspective

Belynn Sosa

I look into the
sky, and I see
blue.
I peek up at the
trees, and I see
green.
I take a glance at your
pictures, and I see
landscapes.
I stopped watching sunsets
weave into starry,
velvet blankets.
I no longer notice empty
branches as seasons melt
together, becoming one.
And I fail to find the beautiful
shots in photos of yours
I once eagerly examined.
I used to hear your
name and nothing else
after.
Now,
it is like a word I walk over
without bothering to
pronounce.

Pearls of Power
Sainsha Bakshi

The Day I Knew About Them

Melissa Wells

I look into your eyes
Gazing into the blue
Drifting off into the ocean
Being carried away by the waves
To a place, shrouded in solitude

Underneath the grey skies
As I float endlessly through the ripples
I think of you, and sigh tenderly
As I am lured into the depths of your seas
Enchanted by the voices of sirens
Entranced, suffocated
Succumbing to the depths of your oceans
Eternal bliss met

As my vision starts to fade
The image of you goes too
Under the guidance of Poseidon and his disciples
And the seraphim of the sea
I am transported back to Earth
Horrified, saddened, wishful
I cannot have you
In my desperation
I look back
To drown myself in the blue tinted windows of your soul
Longing endlessly for you



Mycelia's Warped Reality
Isaac Espinoza

Stethoscopes and Sacrifices

Taha Siddiqui

The fondest memories I have of childhood took place in the break room of a hospital in Saudi Arabia. My little brother and I would pretend he was a dying patient, and I, his doctor. Stethoscopes and gauze were toys to us. My mother, a widowed doctor, raised us alone after the passing of my father. The hardships of being raised by a single mother in a foreign country, though perilous, were undoubtedly the most beautiful years of my life. We had moved to Saudi Arabia from Pakistan. We knew not a single soul nor had the faintest knowledge of Arabic. However, our family of four kept each other company. That was until it was only the three of us. I was seven and my brother was four when our father passed away. At the age of seven, I knew no words for selflessness, but I would learn quickly.

Daycare practice was non-existent in Saudi Arabia, and this left us two boys at the mercy of our mother's demanding work schedule. A single department call would take her warmth away from us for over sixteen hours. My little brother and I would only have the empty, lonesome air of the house and the TV for company. I remember we would turn the TV on even if we weren't watching it because the sounds of people talking would bring the house to life. We would even sleep with the TV on because it made us feel we weren't alone.

My mother once told me the story of the first day she went to work after the death of my dad. My mom was in her room slipping on her navy-blue crocs and zipping up her bag when she heard my brother and me rush to the door. She walked out and there we were on our knees, begging her to stay. We had never been alone before. She kept telling us she'd be back before we knew it, but our tears

would not stop. I remember her voice weaken in response to our pleas. She persisted and walked past us even as we grabbed her leg to make her stay, but she opened the door and gave us one last look saying goodbye and told us that we were braver than we thought. I remember her locking the door while my brother pounded the wood with his toddler hands saying, "Mama pweeease" with tears flowing down his red cheeks. That day, she said, there were three tearful faces. This went on for about a week, and it would get harder and harder each day.

The hardest part about staying alone was going to school. We were given a flip phone to make it easy for her to check up on us. Every morning at around 6 am, Mom would call us on the flip phone to wake us up for school and she would not stop calling until I picked up. I would say hello, assure her I was awake, and wake up my little brother. She would then call us every ten minutes to make sure we were on track and ready for the bus. One cloudy fall evening she told us that she was taking us to a picnic, and ever since then the hospital had become our playground. She packed our bags and took us with her to work. The joy of that day was something to behold. My brother and I had our backpacks on, and Mother held our hands as we walked through the hospital corridors. She secretly snuck us into the break room. Two single beds and a small desk in the corner next to a mini fridge is all that the room offered. That evening we even brought a change of clothes for the night. My mom instructed us to never leave the room. I never asked why but growing up I realized she could have lost her job had someone caught us.

That place became a haven for my imagination to run wilder than ever. "You have gotten

very sick, Sir. I prescribe you M&M's," I would say earnestly to my brother while wearing one of mom's extra coats with her stethoscope around my neck. I would shine my flashlight keychain into my brother's ear and tell him that his ears had broken.

That day we felt safe being so close to Mom, and I am sure she was at great ease being able to check on us every few minutes. Soon after the sun had set, Mom came into the room and told us to go to bed. We had school tomorrow and here we thought that we wouldn't have to go to school because this was like a picnic. She asked our bus driver if he could pick us up from the hospital. He understood our situation. He planned our stop first so no one would know.

We met many kind people during those times. Despite my mother's 16-hour shifts and the merciless responsibilities of the white coat she wore, her heartfelt generosity taught me many words for selflessness.



Portrait of My Nani
Aleezah Saeed

Like Only a Mother Can

Emme Rainey

I begged you once to tell me you were proud. It started off as some other conversation, maybe small talk. Things were building up, rage trying its best not to seep from my pores. You must have asked me for the third time that week if I was working that day. Then it erupted and I began sobbing uncontrollably. I am never that vulnerable, not with anyone. But there I was, in the middle of our living room, the same one cartoons were watched in as I grew up. The one where we celebrated Rocky and I's joint birthdays even though we're separated by four years and a week and a lot of testosterone. The same living room that had been put on display when we almost sold the house when you asked dad for a divorce. This somewhat sacred room was now flooded with my voice when it had so often been caved in by yours. You swam against the tidal wave of my breakdown, tried to backstroke, and stammered on your words. Every excuse possible coming from your mouth just to avoid that word—Proud. Now, in retrospect you were proud. So very full of pride that it had nowhere else to go but straight to your head and swim around like a trapped fish.

There stood me, gripping the back of the couch as you sit on the opposite side, your body facing me, but eyes looking to dad. And like a soldier he stood, so silent, so resilient against confrontation. How long I've wished to have his stone-faced neutrality that he can bring to even the most intense conversations. With no hope left, I started listing the things I had accomplished on my own, all in vain, to try to get anything but contempt from you—My mother. The one who gave me this life, the one who waited for me after cheer practice to watch Lifetime movies. The one who called me Cindy-Lou Migoo and held my hand through every doctor's

appointment. But when I looked for her in you now, she was absent. My face grew red and hot as I tried to force you to see me for the good. Just for a moment I wanted you to cradle me again. To embrace me like only a mother can. To just say you are proud. To tell me that I can do the things I strive to do. Even if you don't think it's true. I wanted you to lie like only a mother can lie.

Musician of the Past

Valerie Phonxayalinkham

A prickly, hunchback elder with a black leather coat
filled with empty pockets and
tattered adornments clickety-clacked passed.

An old soul. What is his story like?
Is it one within a humid atmosphere down a narrow city road?
Or one with wheat and farms in the countryside?

The story is behind a shut door
in an empty, organized neighborhood.
Lifeless days began all over again...

until a hum floats by.
Tapping his feet and a smile on his face,
he was a musician of the past!

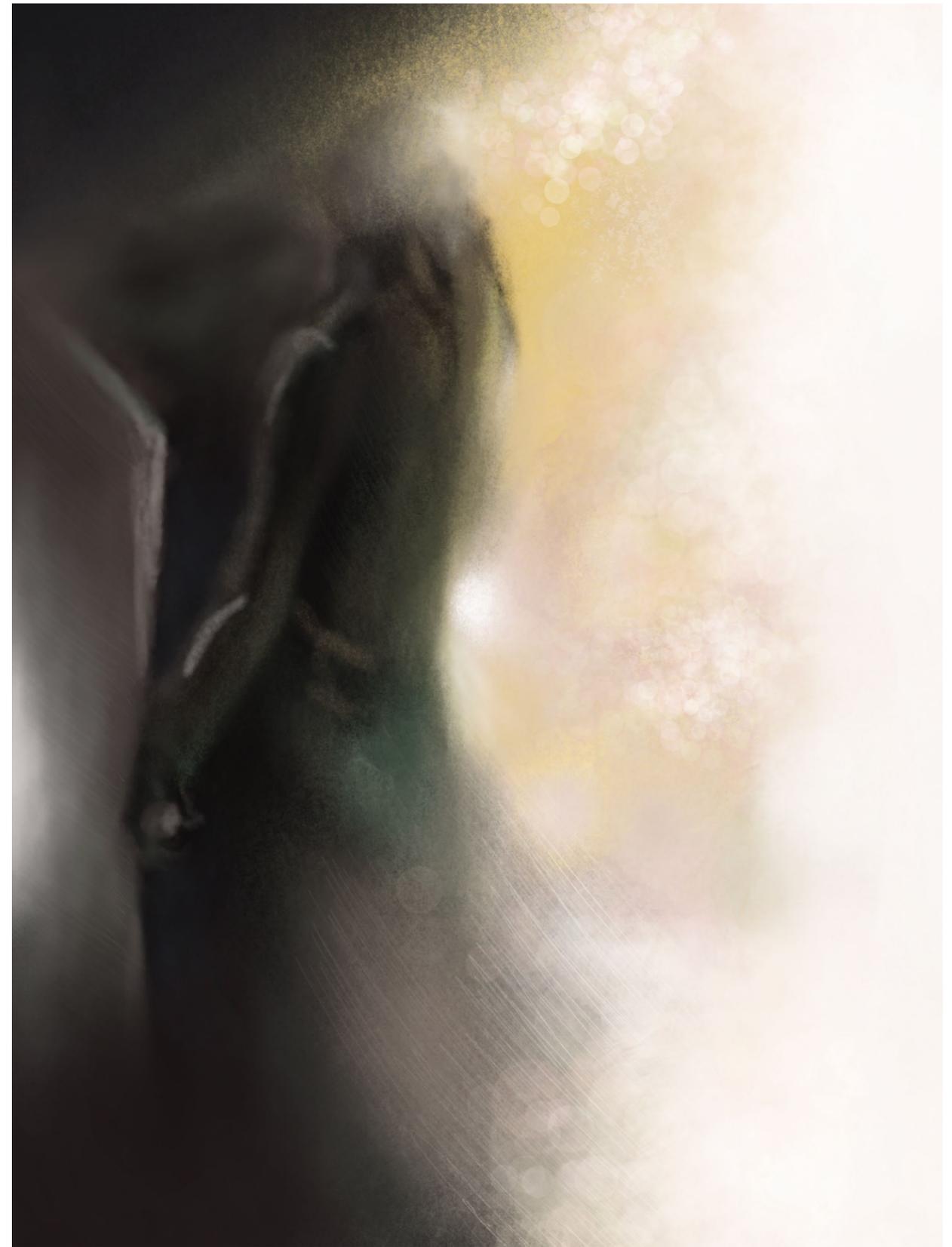
He recognized her fast,
his pitter-patting pacemaker called it,
and his burdens temporarily shaken.

With not much in his voice,
he still carried on
with a howl.

His ears, they twitch and flutter.
For music was his best friend,
and he was clearly fond of her.

Oh, he was awakened by lost memories,
with human-like eyes of missing expressions
and exploration in his veins.

She whispered, “it’s in his nature,” and I understood her.



Not Looking Back
Polina Saksonova

The Portrait

Noelle Church

The old house. It's been so long since I last walked these halls, so long since I've felt the wood paneling on the wall beneath my fingertips. It's not until I feel my feet sink into the old shag rug that I realize I've taken my shoes off out of habit. We were so young, so innocent. We didn't know any better.

She has to be here.

"Alicia?" I call out, pointing the beam of my flashlight towards the landing at the top of the mahogany double staircase. There's no response; I don't know what I'm expecting. I'm not even sure if she's here. I just have a feeling. I need to find her.

As I make my way down the East hallway, I remember how much I hated these paintings. Mom always had a thing for collecting those realistic portraits, the ones you see in horror movies of beady-eyed children and women in gaudy, luxurious dresses. They never seemed to bother me much as a kid—I always dismissed them as Mom's weird hobby—but now I can't shake the feeling that they're watching. The feeling that their eyes wander often, and have seen more than they tell.

But that's ridiculous, they're just stupid old paintings.

I keep walking until I reach Alicia's old bedroom. The sound of the door creaking open echoes throughout the house. All of the furniture is covered in dusty white cloth or plastic. It's entirely unrecognizable and yet I can see it so clearly. The frilly pink canopy that was above her bed, the dollhouse in the corner, the little star ornaments we made together that used to hang from the ceiling. I almost forget what I'm here for, entranced

by nostalgic childhood memories—until I hear it.

"Matthew."

The whisper is barely noticeable, but it snaps me right out of my reverie.

"Matthew," she beckons.

I ran out of the room. She's here. She's close. She has to be.

"Alicia?!"

I keep running towards the sound, "Matthew... Matthew... Matthew..." A quiet murmur of my name. She's here. My sister is here, and she's calling me.

I was right.

Did the hallways always used to be this long?

My knees ache and my feet beg for me to stop but I can't. I won't. The hallway becomes an endless tunnel with seemingly no light at the end, but I can't stop. Every twist and turn, every stumble, every ghoulish painting passes me by, and I swear they're looking at me. Painted, watchful eyes taking in my every move; every heave of my chest and every ill-footed step I take. I can't tell if they're warning me or urging me to keep going.

The hallway comes to an abrupt halt. I've reached the end. There's a portrait on the wall I don't recognize at first: a familiar young woman with pale, freckled skin and ginger waves similar to my own. Her eyes are a striking green, and so full of life; her

eyes are filled with sadness, with pain. It's not like the others, it's almost like she wants to speak.

And then it clicks.

"...Alicia?"



Beyond the Canvas
Delilah Flores

Evening News Report

Jennifer Vo

[Scene 1]

It is March 13th, 1997, at around 9:00 pm. The scene opens in a dark newsroom. In the center, we see the silhouette of two people seated at a large, shared desk. The lights slowly come on while a short jingle plays to signify the beginning of the evening newscast.

Announcer: “Today is Thursday, March 13th, and this is ABC KPR10 Phoenix where the news is hot, and the weather is hotter.”

[The two anchors’ faces are gradually illuminated.]

Chet Grimsley (Anchor One): “Good evening, this is Chet Grimsley.”

[Chet looks down at papers in hand, then looks back up to audience. His face is stoic.] “Police have received multiple reports of strange lights in the sky. The first report came in at around 7:00 pm. The caller, a retired police officer, reported a string of about five lights in a V formation above Paulden, Arizona. Since then, multiple people have reported seeing these strange lights moving as far south as Prescott.”

Diane Santana (Anchor Two): [Shocked face] “Wow!”

[She looks over at Chet, whose face remains stoic. Diane’s face returns to expressionlessness, and she uses a monotone voice.] “In other news some viewers may find out-of-this world, the Maricopa County Lawn & Garden Show will be held this weekend at the Arizona State Fairgrounds in Phoenix.

The show will feature at least 850 vendor booths as well as local lawn and garden experts for attendees to seek advice and inspiration. The Maricopa County Lawn & Garden Show is expected to go on rain or

shine, but let’s hope for shine. Now to Bill Blaise for the weather and your five-day forecast.”

We pan over to a man in a navy-blue suit standing directly in front of a weather board. We see what looks like 93s, 95s, and even an 87 randomly placed upon a multi-colored map of Arizona with certain regions colored in red, orange, and yellow.

Bill Blaise (Weatherman): [Holding his hands towards the map] “There doesn’t seem to be any rain in the forecast until Monday when we have a forty percent chance of precipitation.”

Bill Blaise: [Bill walks up to the map and places an angry-faced rain cloud on top of the area of the map where Phoenix is.] “The weather looks great this weekend, especially if you plan to attend the Lawn & Garden show. Maybe if our extraterrestrial friends stick around a few days, they can attend the show this weekend.” [Laughing after his attempted joke]

Diane Santana: [Looking towards Bill, she softly giggles at his joke.]

Chet Grimsley: [Looking at both Bill and Diane] “I believe that is why they are heading towards Phoenix tonight.” [Starts imitating a robotic alien voice] “Take me to your weeder!”

[Chet, Diane, and Bill laugh loudly for about thirty seconds]

[Laughter stops, and Chet touches two fingers to his right ear focusing on an earpiece.]

Chet Grimsley: “This just in. I’m now hearing that there are reports that the lights

have appeared above Phoenix, Arizona. We have Brenna Brown on scene reporting.”

[Scene 2]

The scene opens to an outdoor space. A cameraman can be seen pointing a shoulder-mounted camera at a young woman holding a microphone. A group of people surround her. Some can be seen huddling together in the brisk night. Others are making faces at the camera. The rest seem to be either looking up or pointing at the sky.

Brenna Brown (Reporter): [Looking at the camera man and speaking directly into the microphone] “We are currently here at Margaret T. Hance Park where people are gathered to view what some are calling ‘The Phoenix Lights’.”

[Nine spotlights shine down around Brenna and the crowd]

“Looking up, I can see what appears to be a cluster of nine red-orange lights arranged in a V-shape.”

[Reaching out to a stranger walking by]

“Excuse me, sir! What do you think is going on?”

Young Man: [In a surfer voice] “It’s aliens, man! It’s like Independence Day. You know, with Will Smith.”

[Older woman walks up to the microphone.]

Older Woman: “I was just sitting in my pool when this large shape appeared over me. I just started to pray.”

[Brenna walks over to an older man pointing the mic at him]

Older Man: “It’s the government. I just came down to see the new military weapon before they send it over to Iraq!”

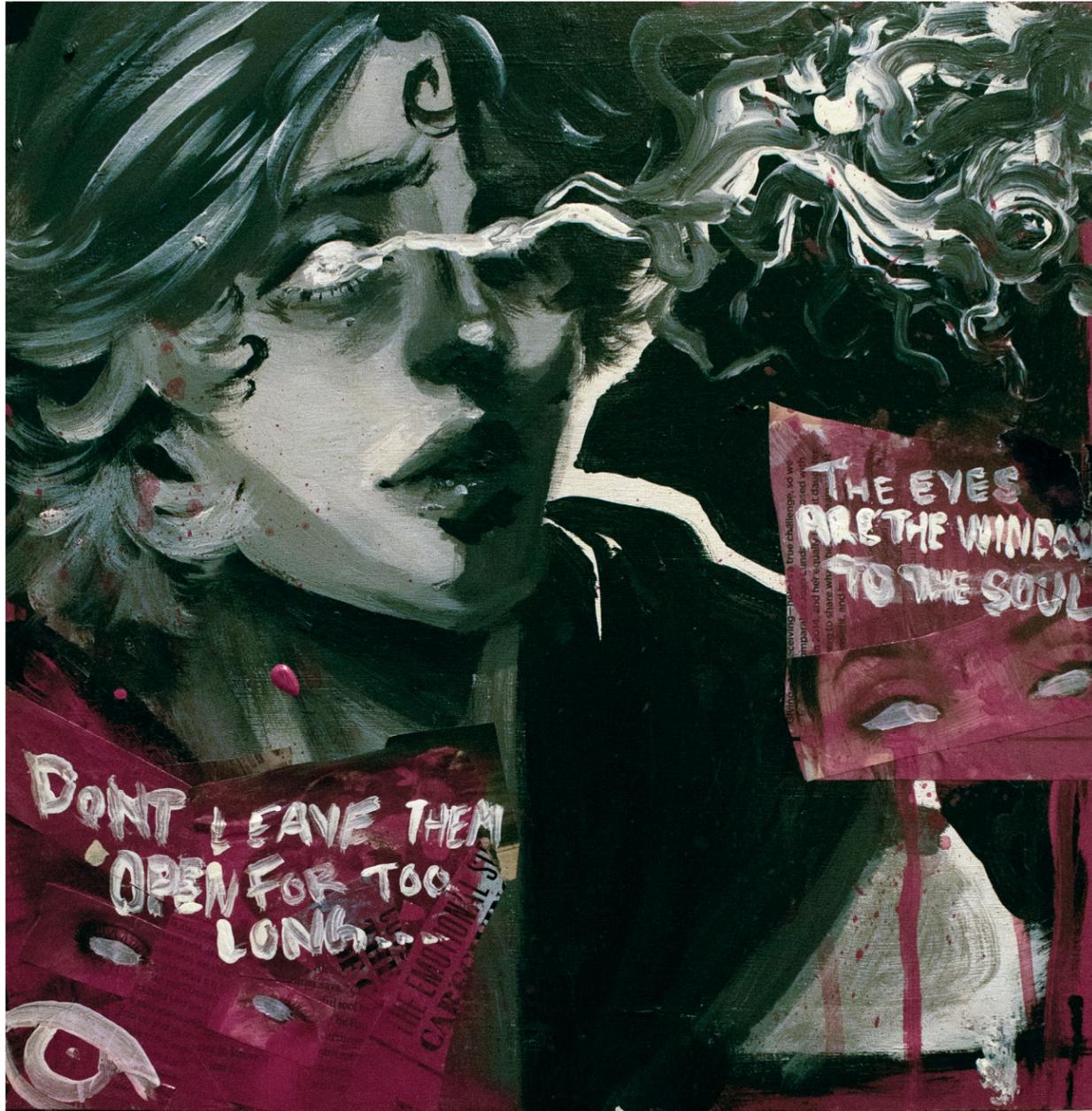
Brenna Brown: “There you have it. This is Brenna Brown reporting on scene at Margaret T. Hance Park.”

Scene 3

Back in the newsroom

Diane Santana: [Holding back laughter] “When we return from the break: bananas. Are they still a great source of potassium? A couple of Harvard scientists using space-aged computers have done some new experiments to try to find out. The results may surprise you.”

[Lights dim in the newsroom until almost completely dark. The news anchors are nothing more than two silhouettes sitting at a shared desk again. Their heads move back and forth, and we assume they are quietly discussing something.]



Eyes Are the Windows
Abigail Salinas

Seven

Ruth Quarto

we're all in tears
but I cry without a sound

"You're being much cooler about this, you know.
Crying silently," she says
what I don't say is that
I have taught myself to cry silently
ever since I was little
because I didn't want anyone to notice
because ever since I was little
I taught myself I was invisible

"How are you not sobbing right now?"
I can't, I want to scream
not when sadness doesn't come in waves
rather it sits like a rock inside me
growing and growing
consuming everything around it
how can I cry
when I feel so empty?

"There have been very few times in my life when I wished I was seven again."
"Cause life was easier then?" I ask
"Cause," she whispers, "No one was leaving at seven."
and that—
that hits home
that pierces into my soul
because how many times in my life
have I thought that?
knowing life was just as much a mess then
as it is now
knowing my mind has designated that time as good
because I was so blissfully naive

no one was leaving at seven
I continue to cry silently

Dropoff

Makayla Boyer

Ahead of me was my father's house, the man who had moved an hour away from my hometown—probably out of spite for my mother. Their divorce was messy, complicated, and I was thirteen when the world ruptured open. The humid, sticky leather seats stuck to the bottom of my thighs as I rolled up the old gravel driveway. Some old, unintelligible rock song played softly through the speakers from a small-town radio station that worked in a twenty-mile radius of the city limits.

My sister, MaryCathryn, was stretching and uncurling from her fetal position like a cat who had been blissfully unaware, napping in the sun.

“Look, it's Tater,” she yawned silently while blinking the sleep out of her eyes.

“Mm. Yeah,” I breathed out awkwardly.

I didn't want to be here. The only reason I was here was because my sister wanted to be. My dad originally had visitation every other week, until I turned eighteen and ran loose. He and I had a complicated relationship. After his morning routine changed from making chocolate-chip pancakes for his girls to drinking Black Crown Royal straight out of the bottle, my disdain for him grew.

An old, wiry gray-haired dog was whooping tirelessly on the front porch. Tater-tot was our modern-day alarm system anytime some shit-box truck rolled up the drive. The property felt suspended in time. Nothing moved, nothing breathed. It just sat, waiting.

Overgrown flower pots now held tangles of weeds that crawled hopelessly out and up the wooden-planked walls. The electric fence

buzzed and sparked as horse flies flew into it. The few horses that we had on the property stood huffing quietly with their ears perked, amazed that there was company.

MaryCathryn and I hopped out into the wet heat with our things. She greeted and cooed to Tater-tot as she walked up the back steps, giggling as the old pup licked her hands eagerly begging for a treat. I pulled open the screen door and was welcomed with a mildewy, gritty smell. It came from the struggling, broken-down washer and dryer that were chugging along, tumbling whatever soggy blankets my dad had haphazardly thrown in. At least Dad started smoking his cigars outside.

The floors were thin and slanted at a harsh, downward angle. If you weren't careful, you'd fall right into the living room. Underneath the foundations and bricks of the house, Tater-tot was scrambling after whatever unfortunate critter had found shelter in the soft, cool dirt.

“Hey, girls!” The bright smile did nothing to disguise the sunken, purple bags underneath Dad's eyes. Headphones hung loosely around his neck. His monitor was spread full of different emails, insurance claims, and photos of cars that were now mangled bodies of metal. His work phone read aloud voicemails from distressed and annoying clients asking when they'd get a call back.

“Hi, Dad!”

“Hey,” I said plainly as I watched my sister excitedly make a beeline to our other dog's cage, calling out to him as he squealed in his kennel. No doubt Buster had been stuck in it all day. As the small talk began, I was already

itching for a way to end the conversation and get the hell outta Dodge. Since my dad had no clue how to pick up a phone and text a simple “How are you?”, this was one of the rare times we conversed. I took up a spot at the dinner table that was used more often by the cat than my dad.

“So, uh, how's class goin'?”

“They haven't started, Dad. They start on the 22nd.”

“Oh.” He stared blankly, as if he was pausing and reading a script in his head.

“They're set up anyways. How you been doin'?”

“Oh, y'know, just workin'.” His southern tongue cut through his words. It reminded me of when I was young and would mimic his accent. Those times were gone. The conversation drifted into the repetitive robot talk you'd have with relatives. The job, the grandkids, the deer you saw out front this morning. Shit no one really cared about.

After it got quiet, I bit the bullet and took my leave. I gathered my tote bag and walked past him to say goodbye to my sister, floorboards creaking underneath my boots. MaryCathryn had already cozied up with Buster, our blue heeler, on the bed ready for another nap.

“Hey, I'm leavin'.” A beat of silence. She turned over groggily.

“I thought you were stayin' the night?” She said solemnly, more telling than asking, awaiting my response. This was her question every time, and each time the answer was no. I think she was hoping one day I'd miraculously change my mind.

“Nah, I told you I wasn't. I didn't even bring any clothes.”

“Don't you have extra here?”

“I'm not staying.” I said harshly and re-adjusted my tote bag to my other shoulder uncomfortably. Maybe too harshly. She frowned and threw herself dramatically on her other side and slung an arm back over Buster, who breathed out heavily.

I sighed, knowing she thought badly of me. She never understood why I didn't want to stay. “Well, I'm goin', If you need me, text me. Okay?” A grunt came from the pile of blankets.

I walked back to the kitchen where my dad was still seated at his desk with his chin in his palm. I always hated this part. It was the same every time. “You don't wanna stay longer?” “Oh, I was gonna make chocolate-chip pancakes!” Each time he tried desperately to get me to stay, even a minute more. I could almost feel the heartache I felt at the table, sitting with a full plate of warm pancakes and a pound of bacon, seeing my dad's smile, knowing it would never be the same.

“Well, I think I'm gonna head out.”

“Already?”

“Yeah, I got plans.” A lie.

“Oh.”

“And I need school supplies, so...”

“Yeah.” Disappointment spread across his face. Sometimes I felt guilty for hating him. It wasn't him that I really hated, it was the alcohol. He told me he'd quit, but the black velvet drawstring bags in the laundry room said otherwise. I stepped back out into the

stiff air as he trailed behind me with his hands in his pockets. He stopped me and slipped a twenty-dollar bill for gas into his hand.

Something felt unspoken. It was scratching to get out, and I could tell he was holding it in. My truck alarm beeped and boomed as I fought with the broken key fob. I made my way to the driver's side and climbed into the front seat. A wave of ocean breeze-scented air freshener shocked my senses as I adjusted myself on the sticky humid seat. The engine roared to life as I started it up, restless to speed down the winding roads home.

Tater stiffly slunk out from under the dirt, shaking herself off. She looked at my truck, wagged her tail, and then stopped. As I reversed out of the spot, I felt hollow. Like with each leave, more and more of my childhood washed away. The windows rolled down and the silence became increasingly loud.

Dad stood on the back porch with his hands gripped firmly to the wooden railing, a dead cigar sitting between his fingers. I looked out at him and stared, waiting to hear what was bottled up. I fiddled with my shorts hem, slowly inching down the long gravel road, stalling.

“Hey,” His lips drew into a long line. “I’m proud of you.” A faint smile framed his exhausted face. His eyes even from this distance begged me to stay.

I smiled back. The windows rolled up. As I bounced in rhythm with the potholes, my chest welled with heat.

I started to cry.





Eyes are the Passageway to the Mind
Alyssia Torres

Dad's Bright Idea

Belynn Sosa

A bright light beams from the closet. The bulb my dad twisted into place glares down menacingly at me as I shield my eyes. "Is this really necessary?" I ask. My dad nods solemnly and stands with his back to me, admiring his work. For the past month, I've been waking up late for school; leaving the room light on has been the only effort to try and prevent that. Unfortunately, my sleeping pattern perseveres, so my dad took it upon himself to solve this "problem." He bought the first 100-watt bulb he could find at Home Depot to put in my closet and if I want this goddamn beacon off, I actually have to get up. But I won't. Someone has to review our new Tempur-Pedic mattresses.

A Flying Fallacy

Kenton Thai

A crow black as night
flies never understanding
its misconception.



Shattered

Ajax Nguyen

Sometimes, a story is not all about dragons and happily ever afters.

Once upon a time, there was a boy, a bright yet naïve boy who grew up joyfully with his mom always there to look out for him. But when tragedy struck, she died, and the boy had nowhere to go. He was alone, confused, and scared. He had lost the most important person in his life and sought help. But when he asked for help, all he heard was rejection and disapproval of his existence. He felt resented by them, and whether it was because they were grieving or not, he could not tell. But he knew that everyone around him looked at him as a spoiled brat and that this was his punishment. That this was his fault. The realization of just how helpless he was and how others only looked down on him, it shattered him. If everyone looked at him like this, what is the point of trying to be himself? That day he found a mask. A mask to hide himself from others in hopes it would somehow help him restart.

Walking down the hallway of the school, the boy looks at the marble tiles that pass him as he moves forward. It's been three years since the day she had died, years that he found himself lying more to himself than others. The mask was necessary; he needed it to hide himself from others. When he put on the mask, he felt safe and content as if no one could hurt him again. No one could touch him again, and no one could remind him of who he was again.

Taking each step forward, he reaches the stairs and upwards he goes; the voices started to die down. The boy walked down the hallway, looking at the marble tiles that pass him as he moves forward. Reaching close to his destination, he heard his friends laughing

and cackling. Another step forward, he overheard their conversation. Giraffes, long necks, evolution? He couldn't hear it well, but the girl was loud enough that he could put the bits and pieces together. Another person joined in, laughing and commenting as the conversation continued. More of their friends joined and started talking to the group. Watching them having the time of their life, it pained him deeply.

Taking a step back, the boy opted to go a different route that day. He felt wrong for doing this since they were his friends, but just seeing them look so happy and more engaging without him, it felt horrible. It felt as if they did not want him; it felt that if he were gone no one would care. The thoughts consumed him, and the mask cracked just a bit. In the end, when the bell rang for first period, there was one question plaguing him.

Did they even notice?

Sitting next to his friends during lunch, he was chatting with them and having fun. They were enjoying themselves, and he was too. The topic had moved on from crying about some exam they had taken earlier to a birthday party that one of his friends was hosting. She talked about how great it'd be and gave out envelopes to everyone at the table, except for him. She must've forgotten, the boy thought. Right?

The next few months for the boy were normal, everything was fine. The party had happened, and everyone loved it. It was all they would talk about, except around the boy. Everyone would stop talking about the party around him, pitying him for his lack of invitation. The silence that was once absent was so eerily loud that he couldn't stand

being around it anymore. It felt like he was an embarrassment, a target for mockery.

The mask had cracked even further now, creating a beautiful yet deadly spider web on the right side of the pale white mask. Noticing the cracks, he tried to fix the mask, only to cut himself multiple times picking up the pieces and doing anything to repair the illusion. The blood he lost from his attempts stained the floors and the mask he wore. No matter what happened, the scars were there to remind him of his actions. No matter how much help he knew he needed, he refused to get it. He couldn't. One in fear of judgement, and the other in fear of the denial he would get just like last time.

So, why did he keep trying?

A new day had begun, and school went on as usual, nothing out of the ordinary. The classes went by quickly, and the boy was disinterested as ever. A girl, his friend, came by to talk to the boy next to the teacher's desk. The teacher was grading papers. The girl was excited, telling the boy about her friend. How her friend helped a person at their lowest point in life, how it was honorable and how she wished she could be like them. The boy laughed in disbelief, was this true? There were people helping those in need?

How absurd.

Everyone was always selfish; it was always about them and them only. The girl was taken aback by the laughter, questioning what the boy was laughing about. The boy just said he found it funny how he could never get the same help her friend gave, how he wishes the hotlines and adults were as useful as her friend. The girl, shocked by what he said, started to ask more personal questions. The boy evaded the questions with a smile. It's nothing, he told her. It was nothing,

anyway, his issues were miniscule compared to other's. The girl didn't believe him and continued to bombard him with doubts until the bell rang, and by then she had to leave for her next class. It was nothing, he told himself, he could handle it.

After all, it'd been five years.

Later that day, his teacher's phone rang, murmuring spreading across the classroom. The teacher told the boy to report to the dean's office. Walking to the office, the boy questioned what he was being called for. The steps were shallow. When he arrived, he was greeted by the stern dean and was asked to sit down. The dean immediately questioned if the boy knew why he was there. The boy had a slight idea about what it was, and when he asked if it was the offhanded comment, the dean nodded his head. After an hour-long discussion, the boy left the dean's office uncertain where this conversation was going, but it was going somewhere. The mask he wore was on the verge of fully cracking, and he had no spare glue or tape this time around. Repairing the mask was too exhausting and agonizing. Every time he repaired it, it felt as if a knife pierced his heart.

It was painful.

Slowly as the week progressed, more people became involved including teachers and counselors. They kept asking him what was happening, if he needed something. No, nothing. He would reply. Days passed by turning into weeks into months. But eventually the counselors tied his hands, forcing him against a wall, causing his mask to fall to the floor. What should've felt like seconds felt like an eternity. The mask shattering into thousands of pieces, the pieces he put back in place bit by bit. It broke in front of him. Everyone around him saw it happen, there was no point in hiding it. It was over

now; he was again vulnerable to the world. He dropped to the floor, panicking, collecting all the sharp shards that drew blood from his body from various areas. Tears overflowed from his eyes from the pain.

This couldn't be happening.

What are they going to do?

Leave him? Judge him?

No, he just had to play it cool, hide his scars, and act okay. That'll work.

Right?

His mind must have gone through hundreds of scenarios before someone reached out and patted his back. But what they said was the farthest things from his thoughts. They bent down and comforted him. They pleaded with him, asking them if there was anything they could do. No. That was the first thought he had, the thought he should've said out loud. He couldn't go through this again, anything but this. But his voice betrayed him, revealing a secret he had kept hidden for years. He told them about the day it had happened, the day he lost his childhood. He felt scared and embarrassed yet relieved. It'll be okay, the counselor said. Everything will be okay. We will help you, they promised.

They promised.

Sitting in his chair at his new house, the boy looks at his laptop, thinking of a topic to write about. There was a student literary magazine that just opened submissions and he wanted to take part. "Ugh, why is this so hard?!" The boy frustratedly mumbled. He decided to take a break just to clear his thoughts. Maybe a snack or two could help, he thought. Closing the laptop and standing up, he knocked over something on his way to the door.

A mask. The fragile yet still intact mask.

Staring at it, it reminded him of his perilous journey. The journey where all it took was one day, just that one day to end it all. And yet, here he was, breathing. Everything had fallen into place, the help he was promised was delivered. He had found a new family to live with, a new home to call home, and a chance at a new beginning. Setting the mask down, the boy had a surge of inspiration. He enthusiastically opened his laptop and swiftly moved his fingers across the keyboard.

"Sometimes, a story is not all about dragons and happily ever afters."

Red, White, and Black Eagle

Salma Gaballa

I am from old vintage pages,
from books old as time.
I am from chlorine and sun tans,
from paint strokes and stained hands.

I am from sand and waves,
from the warmth of love and empathy.
I am from velvety chocolate cake and mango ice cream taste.

I am from a childhood of movement and growth,
from the exhilaration of running and ball playing.
I am from tag in the sun,
from runs in the mud.

I am from bow hair and rattling of strings,
from musical notes and rings.
I am from Gyps sequence scarfs,
from the beating of the tabla.

I am from asab juice,
from sticky fingers.
I am from Egyptian roz bel laban,
From Egyptian warak enab

I am from red, white, and black,
From the Nile and its people.
I am from mahshi and Kushari,
From the Red Sea and the Arabian tea.

I am from all these faces and moments.
In memories and heart, all that I am will always be with me and
them.

The Thursday That Smelled of Rain

Emme Rainey

In my imagination, my life is being written
For a low budget film
It is an overzealous and lengthy script
And all the actors hired are C-list.
When it shows in a small theatre
On a Thursday that smells of rain,
Reviews complain about how it lacks
Cohesive story lines
They point out the absence
Of completed character arcs.
Some leave feeling understood
Feeling compelled by the plot constantly
Twisting and turning only to become
Stagnant and unchanging only to eventually
Tangle and tumble once more.
If it were true
That my life was a movie
Arguments would be had
On whether it was a comedy
Or a tragedy
And after the new blockbuster
Hit the ticket boxes
Most will forget what had flooded
The screen of that theatre
On the Thursday
That smelled of rain.

I'm in Your Walls
Alé Alonso



Yearning

Braulio Caraveo

Upon the clock's turn of midnight, Arthur left his apartment, seemingly seeking, with no direction, something he could not describe. It was his cause of yearning, longing, and thirsting, without really knowing why. Locking the door, he set out with a sense of hurry, as if driven by madness. He felt decided, more than he ever had in his entire life. Staring at the cloudy sky, electric light from the streets overwhelmed his eyes. A source of light this strong, he had not been familiar with for an indescribable time. Walking forward, he stared in every direction, and yet the stillness seemed perpetual in this quiet night. He began to sprint with a will that did not seem his, for nothing seemed more important than his unknown object of desire.

Corner upon corner, he turned without stopping around the lonely town, but to no avail. The streets reeked of loneliness, and a scent of death, as surreal as it was, created a brooding despair in this silent night. And yet he did not, would not, falter in the slightest, for Arthur's yearning bore a desperation to find his way.

At last, out of a brief glimpse, Arthur turned, and there an unbearable attraction pulled him closer to his sense of yearning. There stood a park, covered with dry, dead grass, and laid paths of beautiful marble twisting and turning around themselves in surrealist patterns. Trees of aged reddish leaves were exposed to the shine of a now-present crescent moon. Whether this area had an end, Arthur could not tell, as the horizon was enough to put its bounds out of sight. Standing there, he felt reassured, as if a now-distant time spoke to him with voices of joy. Undeterred, Arthur dashed in, still dazed by an unidentified desire. As he looked back,

the town squares were there no more, and the park now extended over all horizons, with a clear starry night gazing upon it.

Panting and yelping, he saw it. There a figure was moving under the dim moonshine. Someone whose mere sight brought Arthur unbridled happiness. He felt calm, as if his life's meaning was at arm's length. As if the warmth of a long-forgotten touch caressed him once again.

"Pardon me, madam," Arthur exclaimed. A lady stood there, her back turned away from him, wearing a coat finely made from black threads, and ornamented with shining silvery pearls. A wide-brimmed hat, somehow darker than her coat, rested on her head, and created a shadow dense enough to guise her nape.

"So, you finally decided to talk," said the lady with disdain and wonder on equal measures. Gracefully, she kept walking away from Arthur, her face perpetually out of sight.

"I know I bear no right to be here," said Arthur, "and yet, all I can express is a desire to be forgiven. To know you keep no hatred towards me." his voice wavered, and his yearning turned into grief. Tears ran down his face as he expressed pain, and yet he felt no right to feel.

"I would never hate you, even for a second of my life," said the lady. "I can tell you that, but an apology would do no better to you, let alone to me." Her voice trembled slightly, and yet she still refused to look him in the eye.

"Even then, I just want to be held once again. I want to be told that things will be

well, even if it is a lie." Arthur struggled to find words between his tears. "I miss you more than anything. That's something I can't deny."

The lady stayed silent as Arthur kneeled on the floor, tears dripping down his face onto the marble path as he stared down. Suddenly, he felt an embrace, calmer than an evening breeze, and warmer than a clear summer sky. He wiped off his tears, and his yearning seemed to fade. For a moment, he felt a determination that was truly his own. The one who gave him life had given it meaning once again.

She pulled away from him, and before he could see her face, the lady vanished into nothingness, as if she had become one with the night sky. Arthur stood up, and from the back of his head, a whisper came that merely said: "You can go now."

Suddenly, Arthur was now lying in a dark room, which he no longer recognized despite how much he'd come to despise it. He sat upright on a beat-up couch and pulled out his phone. He dialed a long-ignored number, and at a voice's notice, he said "Hey. I know it's been a while. Is the offer to visit still up? I would just love to talk. It's just that, well, I miss you, Dad." The voice on the other side seemed irritated, yet quite welcoming. With a genuine smile, Arthur bid farewell, his eyes still drenched in tears. He stood up, and for once in a long time, he saw a glimpse of light in the way forward.

Of the Grasses

Diego Correa

O' maiden of grass
More of a switch than an axe
Cut like a thistle
Your winds whisper and whistle

Petals sharp as thorns
Without you I'm left forlorn
Quiet in the dark
But still, to you I will hark

You, of nature green
Not envy, but your beauty's sheen
Blooming like no other
Still you think of your lover

I constantly run
Revolving you as the sun
I'll feed you my light
To see a smile blinding bright

O' flowery lass
Our time will eventually pass
I know why that is
For you are of the grasses



The Woman
Abigail Salinas

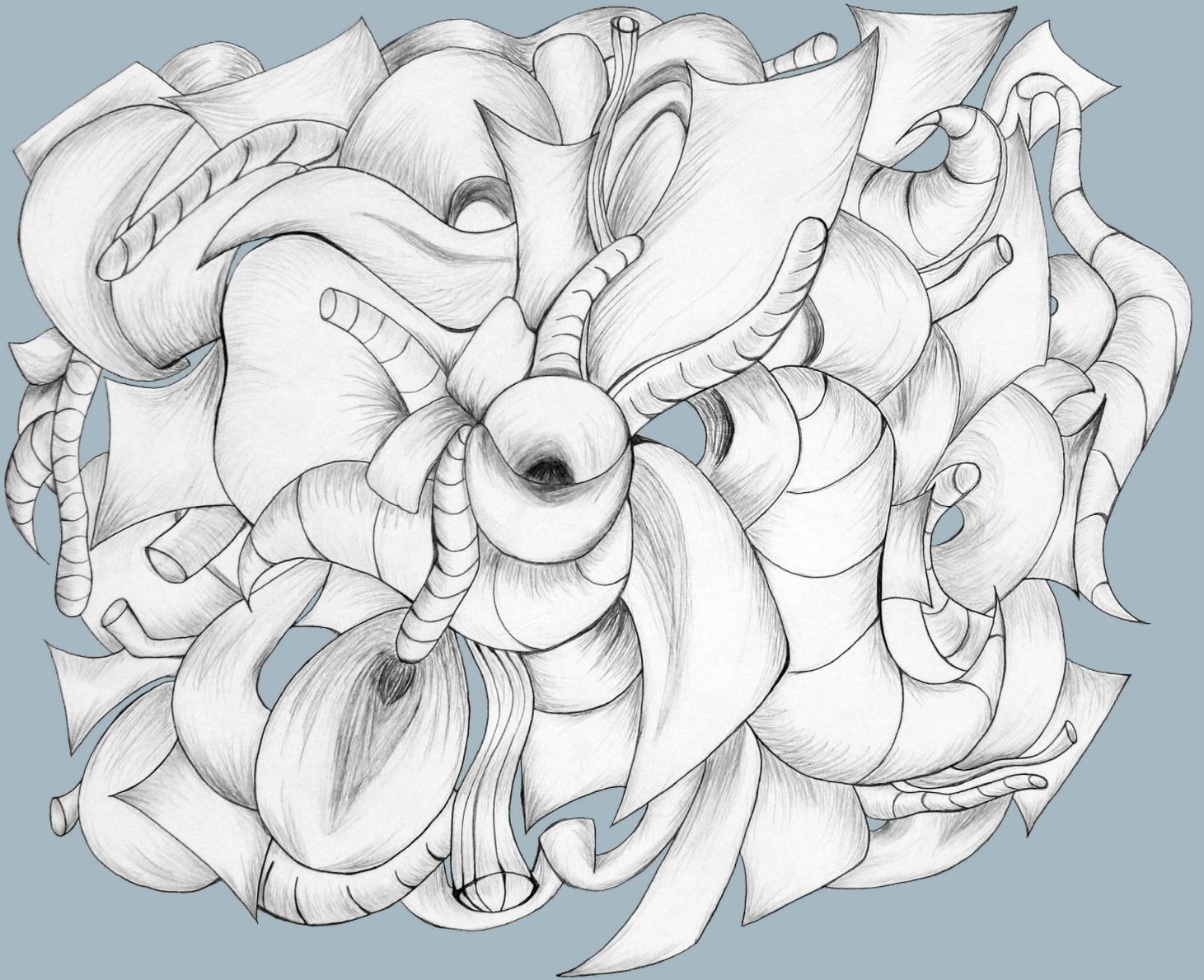
Weird Parts

Emme Rainey

Do the weird parts of me ever scare you?
The fact that I am a woman
Who has shaved her head and
Had a mullet for a while and pretty much
Shaved my head again after that.
Does it bother you?
When I struggle to speak
Those times I have stumbled
Over compliments or a simple
Spoken "I love you too"
It doesn't ever offput you?
The way I am in social situations
How sometimes I rant and ramble
And sometimes I stay quiet when I
Should really say something
Does that make you uncomfortable?
My inability to cook, my constant
Mess in my room
And how I have appeared to have
No confidence, no resilience
Does that frighten you?
Perhaps it is the way I disappear
Often into my mind
When you ask me what is wrong
And I tell you everything is fine
That doesn't make you hesitant?
If not, it must be how I can never be
Different in the good way
The same way in which every
Woman strives to be,
Different from all the others
Before her.

Piece of Cake
Abigail Salinas





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