
WONDER OF
ILLUSIONS
EUROPE

Calliope Literary and Art Magazine
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Production
This magazine is produced through the collaboration of *Calliope* club members and the student body of Mahwah High School. All students are invited and enxouraged to contribute original art and writing for publication. *Calliope* reserves the right to edit any and all submissions to the magazine.

"Wonder of Illusions"
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Calliope Staff Biographies



Jami Bergold
President

Jami Bergold is a senior at MHS who has been a member of *Calliope* for the past two years. Previously the Treasurer, she is now President of *Calliope* as well as a swimmer for the MHS swim team. Outside of classes and extracurricular activities she enjoys reading, writing, photography and discovering new music artists to listen to. In the fall she will be attending University of Arizona as a Creative Writing Major.



Jessica Xing
Vice President and Layout Editor

Jessica Xing is a senior at MHS who has been the Layout Editor for Calliope for three years. This year she is also the Vice President of *Calliope*, Senior Editor of the *Tom-Tom*, and President of the Design Collective Club. Jessica is also a member of the Varsity Bowling team and enjoys reading, art, and playing with her dog. In the fall, she will be majoring in Design and minoring in Journalism at Northeastern University.



Namita Gulur
Co-Editor-in-Chief and Secretary

Namita Gulur is a junior at Mahwah High School and is both the Secretary and Co-Editor-in-Chief of *Calliope*. This is her second year in *Calliope*. During the time when she's not editing or working on layout, she enjoys reading, writing, and immersing herself in the world of books.



Jessica Rodriguez
Co-Editor-in-Chief and Treasurer

Jessica Rodriguez is a junior at Mahwah High School and has participated in *Calliope* since freshman year. She is the Treasurer and a Co-Editor-in-Chief for *Calliope*. She is an artist and writer who has been featured in *Calliope* multiple times. You can also see her work by attending a school production by the MHS Drama Club as she works on costumes and sets for each production. Jessica will be pursuing a career in the arts.



Sam Chuck
Layout Editor

Sam Chuck is a junior at MHS and has a passion for creative writing and filmmaking. He is thrilled and excited to be a part of *Calliope* this year, and plans on continuing his journey with *Calliope* in his senior year. You can find Sam hanging with friends, eating sushi, or making short films. He hopes you enjoy the magazine!



Mia Salzman
Layout Editor

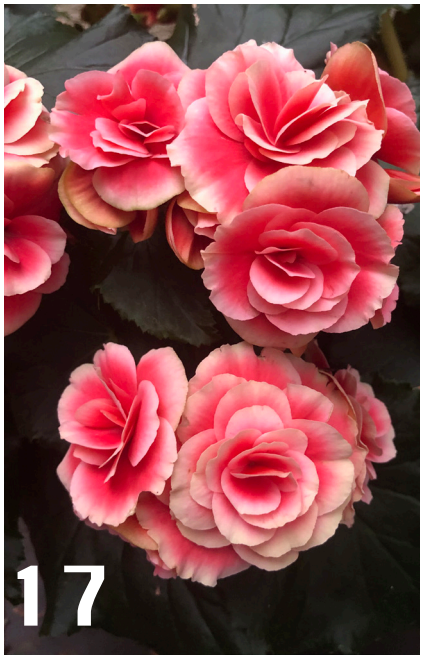
Mia Salzman is in 10th grade, and this is her first year as a member of *Calliope* literary magazine. She is also a layout editor and journalist for the *Tom-Tom*, as well as a member of Design Collective. She enjoys art, reading, playing flute, and digital design, and has enjoyed working on *Calliope* this year.



Alexandra Henriques

Alexandra Henriques is a sophomore at Mahwah High School who just joined *Calliope* this year. She writes both poetry and stories, and dreams of becoming a published author one day.

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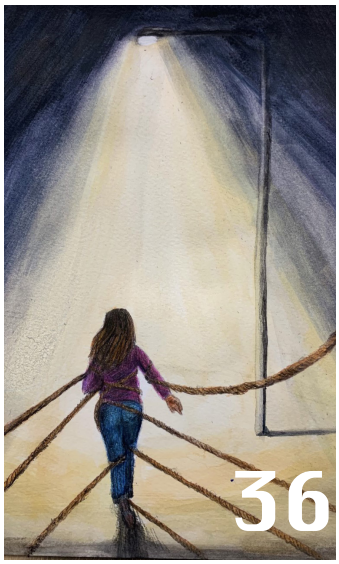
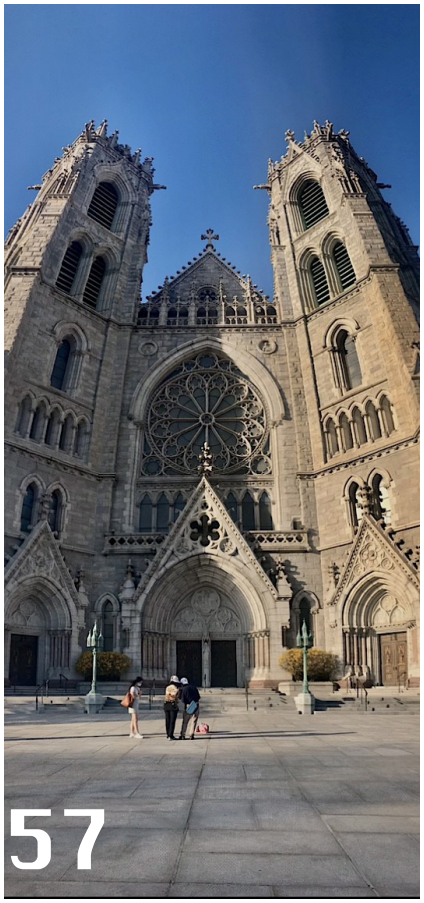






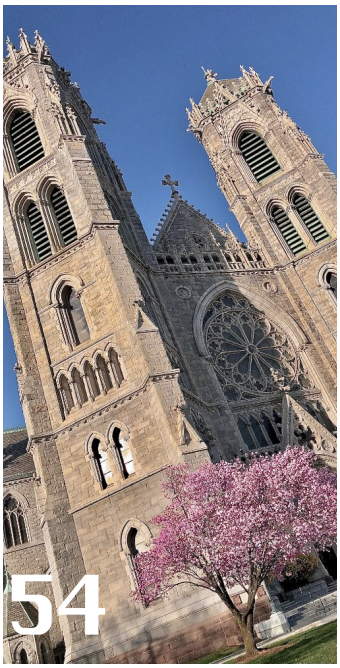


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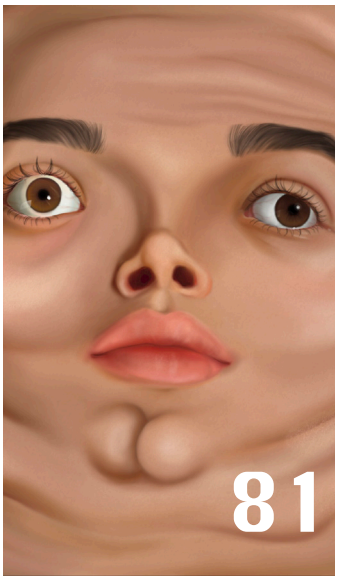




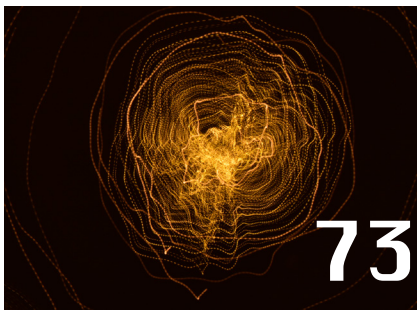
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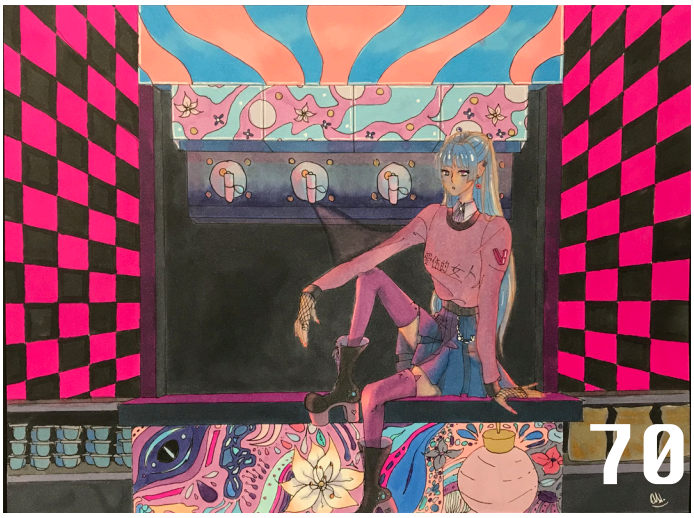
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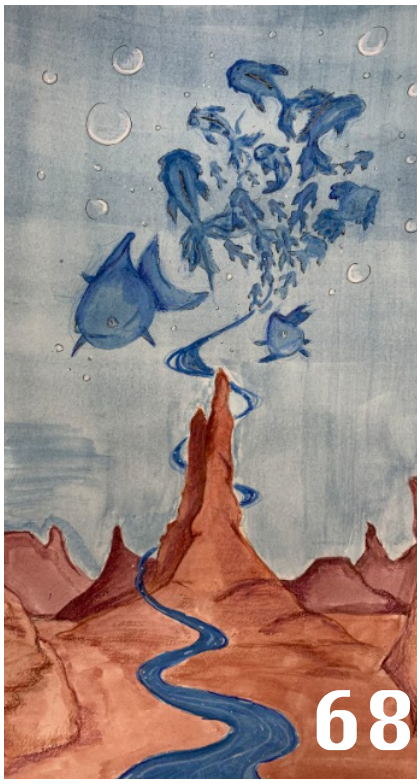
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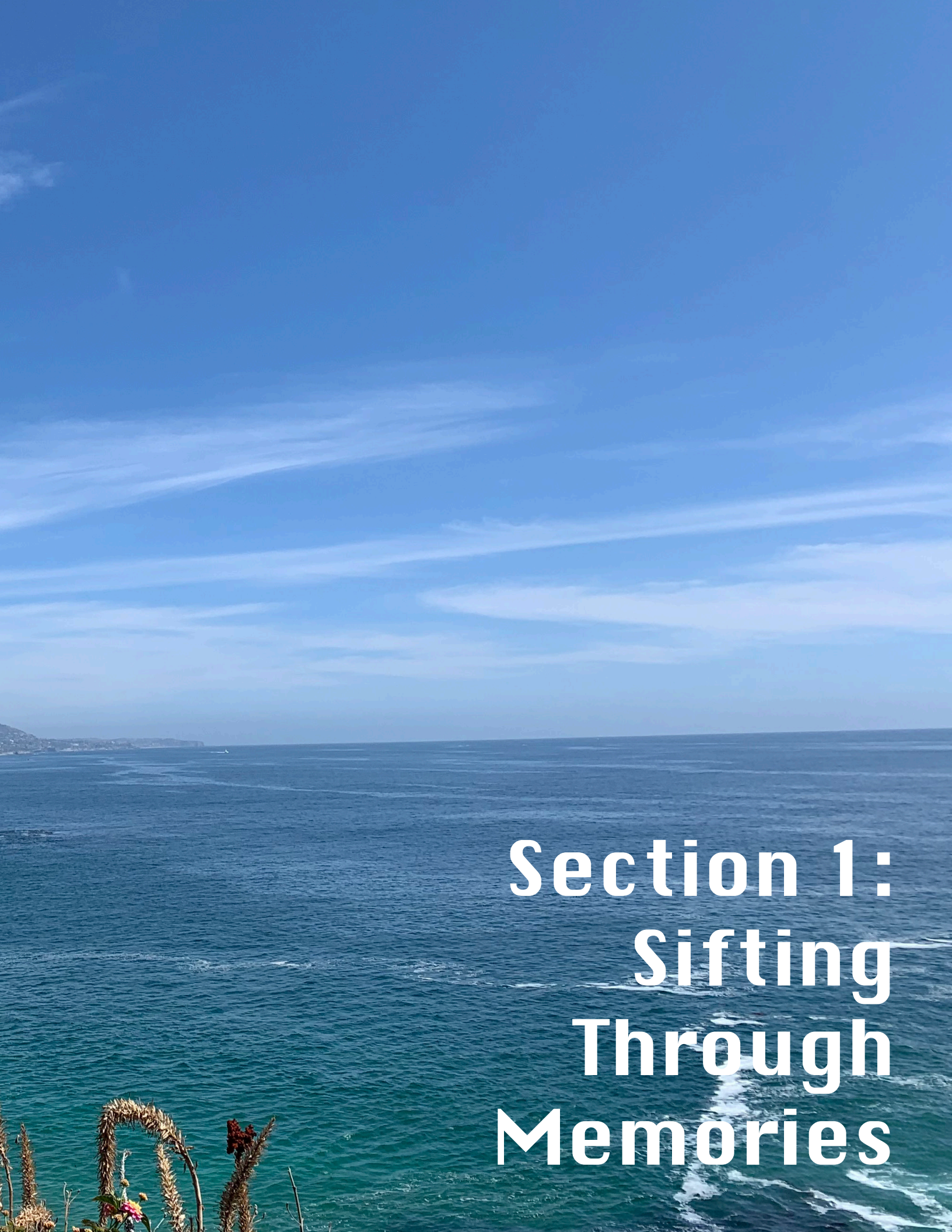









Escape
Jessica Xing
Photography



Section 1: Sifting Through Memories

The Drowning Stage
By: Jordyn Cline

On our weekends in California my father would take me to the beach,
Not so much for the glory of the sand, but for the waves of the sapphire ocean.
I observed as he pointed out the sunsets and changes in the sky's motion, the glorious yellows, vibrant oranges, and radiant reds crashing to the water like wildfires.

He would bring me me there religiously after working longer than the sun,
I didn't know much about the differences in the office and the sea,
But I did know one made the veins on his head take the shape of sickly snakes,
While the other put a soft glow in his aging and dulling cobalt eyes.

We would put a blanket above the warm grains of earth,
But we wouldn't say a lot, the water did the most talking as it crashed into the rigid rocks.
I didn't think much about what it was saying or even mocking,
But my father always preached there was purpose to its sounds, its actions;

He would tell me every time that life is the wave we see forming in front of us,
And each stage is a different part of us, of our time on Earth,
But when the wave crashes to shore, back to what it once was,
It's still the same water from the past, just returned to its original state, returned home.

A buddhist man and the ocean is what I remember most,
The buddhist man wasn't my father, yet a different version of him, a different wave,
Because when we left that spot and returned to our silent house,
The low tide became high and I would watch him drown in his office chair.

Rotten Love
By: Righteous Allah-McCarroll

Can I say it was possible to love so much but to hate
Piscine stench in the kitchen on my least favorite day?
My heart swelled with joy but my taste buds in agony
Oh, how I have come to dread this loving day

Cousins and uncles, grandparents and friends
Would sit by the table and start to dig in
Friendly light banter, stories, and smiles
But 7 year old me stood halted the full while
Distracting myself with the love shared tonight
From the food on my plate, an overwhelming sight

The feast of the rotten, the scary, the cold
The meal filled with love lined with tiny white bones
Like sharp slivers of glass that'd get stuck in my throat
The guilt never desisted, I'd stare into their eyes
The sheer grey scaly skin, I just wanted to cry
When the hums of delight finally subside
I would slip the food down, napkin on my thigh
I have tried it with rice and with sauce and with bread
Still those tiny grey eyes stay suck in my head

Even though I am older, that fried fish still rots
The taste so wretched but I'd eat it forever for mom
Because it was never the food but the time we had spent
That would live on forever, fantasies in my head
That is why I relished those pitiful nights
I knew the feeling of love was forever beyond fright



Shanghai 2019
Lyudmyla (Lucy) Sokolova
Oil Paint

Summer of Adventures
By: Oliver Franco

Old swing set,
Lemon yellow swings;
Orange tinted wood,
An olive colored slide.
Summers filled with childish wonder -
One time the neighbors came over.

Sliding down when it was snowy,
Jumping off and landing;
It was a pirate ship - a boogie board
Learning to swing then helping others.

Stained, flaxen, weathered,
Dull, orange, splintery planks
Filled with spiders;
Sun bleached, sage slide,
Creaking noise on a windy days,
Now lays lopsided and abandoned.

Worth It
By: Noor Sikka

Whoosh, my dog sprinted down the elastic, never-ending hallway.
Buzz! I darted down trying to keep my mini feet up with his tiny paws.
"Slow it down!" my mother bellowed from the dim kitchen.
We ran and we ran, chasing his squeaky squirrel toy
back and forth and back and forth, until…
Boom! The neon green tie-dye socks got the best of me and I tumbled to the floor.
Wailing, with a cry larger than life!
My mother rushed over with a bright red face.
As the feeling of my dog's wet tongue hit my face, the tears came to a halt. "What did I tell you?" I heard.
Finally we slowed the pace,
but the fun terminated at the same exact time.
"Is the fun worth the risk?" I pondered.
Of course it is, I learned so young!



Something Loved
Shannon Pryor
Mixed Medium



Something Forgotten
Shannon Pryor
Mixed Medium

Aspen
By: Emily Hanson

Aspen would drive quickly when she was annoyed, but, as I remember, that didn't happen often. Her car windows were always down, even in winter, so when she was annoyed, thin layers of wind would come for a visit. They would breathe around my ears like flames around a log, desperate for contact. For fuel. So my ears hosted the winds, and when I would leave her car, their mark lingered for hours after, a reddish-white stain and a numbing chill that never really seemed to disappear. I learned to tolerate the cold pretty well as a result.

I didn't take Aspen as a particularly cold person when we first met, but the signs were ever-present. I no longer recall every specific detail of that day, but the one thing etched into my memory was the scent of dark chocolate and milk tea that lingered in the air when I entered the old bookshop. Its shelves were tall and endless, and there was always something to get lost in. Aspen had been sitting on top of a high table, which should have seemed bizarre but was instead, somehow, rather endearing. It took some effort for me to tear my gaze away from her, but I wasn't staring at her body. I was staring at her eyes. I'm still not entirely certain what drew me to them. Perhaps, it was the intensity of their brown hue. A sparkle in them that made her almost un-humanlike. Now it seems to me, however, that Aspen's eyes in that very moment revealed more truth about her than anything I would come to know later.

They met mine, momentarily, and her lips turned up at the corners. But this was the extent of our encounter. I finally returned my attention to the book in my hands, I remember mindlessly rubbing my finger over the small snowflake carved into the wooden table beside me.

Aspen and I came then to be fast friends, after that, and a somewhat unlikely pair, at that. We both frequented the bookshop with our homework and identical coffee orders: a large peppermint white chocolate mochas with no whipped cream. Aspen didn't like the way the whipped cream felt in her stomach after she drank it, but I was irritated by the chilly foam residue against my nose when I took a sip. With our shared disgust for the popular coffee ingredient, I supposed a connection was bound to emerge.

We would meet there at three o'clock after classes ended –unintentionally, of course– and talk about everything from the novels on the walls to our most recent horoscopes. She brought forth aspects of my personality that I'd repressed for so long that they were almost gone. I felt like a lighter, warmer version of myself. My newfound character complemented Aspen's own psyche almost perfectly. We were a dual act together: "Aspen and Irving! There they go, together as always!" It was true, that during that time, it was rare to see us apart; I couldn't stand the thought that her eyes could gaze at others the way they gazed at me
I fell hard and fast for her. I was whipped, one could say. The school days flew and seasons followed, like flocks of birds soaring across the open sky, one after another, gone before I could dream of blinking. But I remained, still determined to deny my fondness and quickly growing affections.

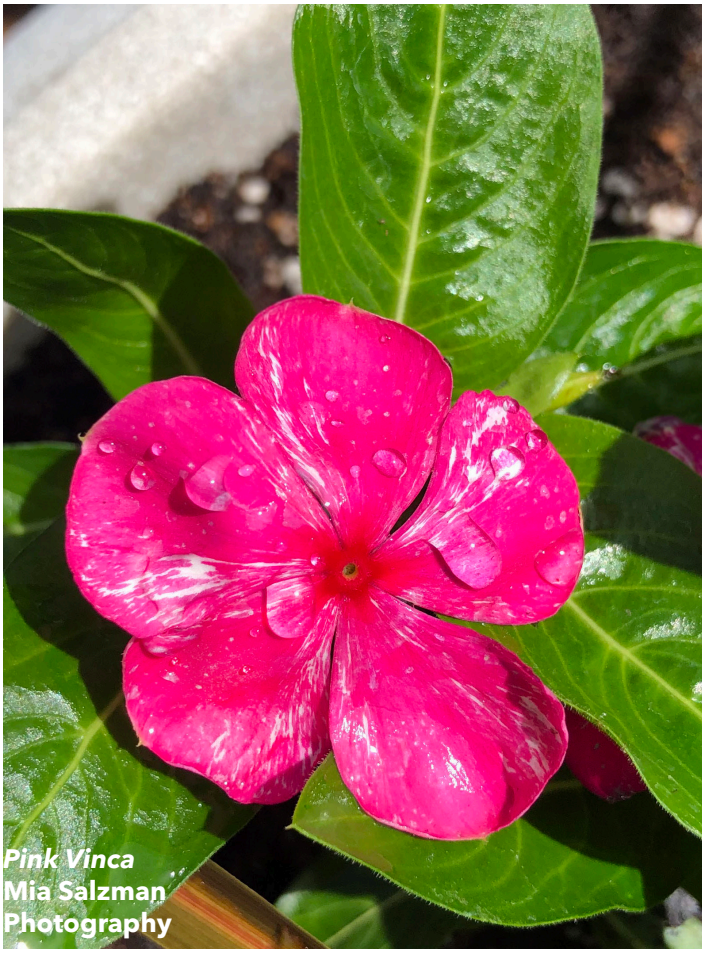
I recall the hard blocks of frozen snow that stuck against the paths on school grounds for the many months following winter's touch. I would habitually kick them with the tip of my worn black boots, over and over and over, until the shrill sound was embedded in my head, and Aspen's gentile arm clung onto mine. She would laugh, eyes focused on my worn shoe as it moved back and forth. She'd continue to laugh, even when my icy toes protested. Her soft eyes twinkled in the light from the sun, glowing brighter than ever. I kept kicking.

Later in our friendship, conversation progressed between us on occasion, but we mostly relished in the company of one another. Her company, in reality, was all I lived for. It was pure and it was logical. I refused to corrupt a relationship that existed so naturally. I refused to ruin, even in the slightest, the melodic sound of Aspen's laugh drifting through my ears, a constant breeze that comforted even my darkest nightmares. She could never know of my longing to have more.

And she didn't. Aspen never knew. Nobody did. The lost letters, the fragments of phrases, the wasted words still appeared in my head sometimes, long after they should have been spoken. I would write them down, then rip the pages in half again and again and again until cuts marred the skin on my fingers. I would light them up and stare as the smoke filled my room, waving a hand through the air, blinking it away.

I blinked again, and Aspen was gone. The seasons were not.

I go to bed every single night at an hour when the sunlight hasn't quite been extinguished yet. When the stubborn glow finally succumbs to the night, I'll roll over across the bed and press my cheek against the cold side of my pillowcase, facing away from the dusk outside. My mind drifts everywhere, but I see Aspen every time I close my eyes. Her image never fades, so my eyes remain open. They always do. I inhale and blink. Somedays a tear will roll down my cheek and hit the duvet gently. And when I exhale, all that I find is empty space, silence, and a hot cloud of breath where she should be resting, fast asleep next to me.



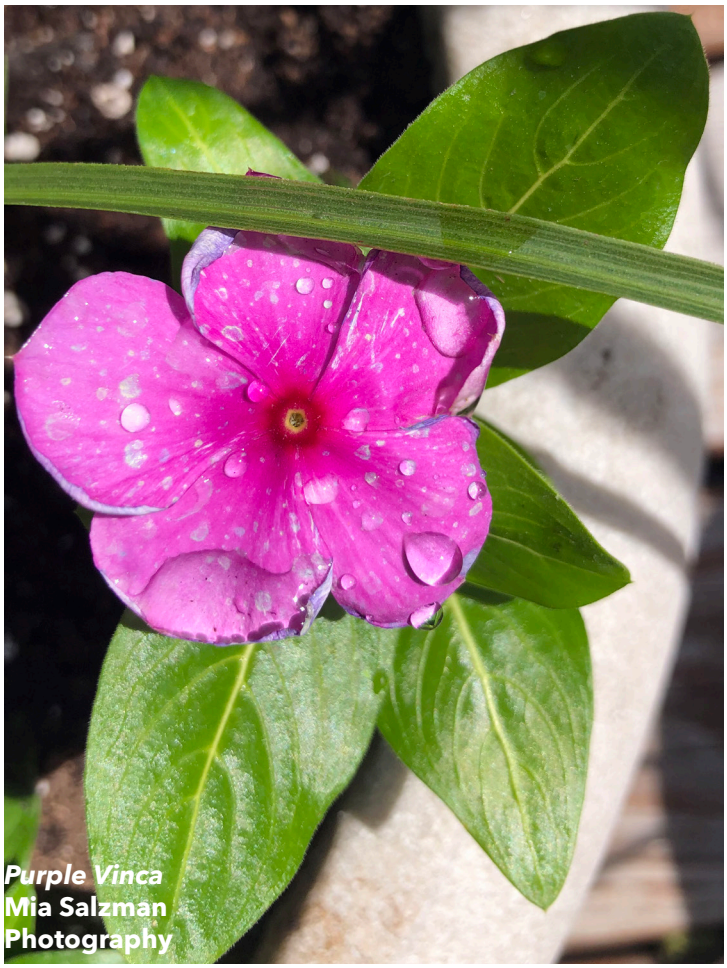
Pink Vinca
Mia Salzman
Photography



Dancing in the Rain
Mia Salzman
Photography



Elegance
Mia Salzman
Photography



Purple Vinca
Mia Salzman
Photography

Make Room for Me
By: Regan Jacobson-Glynm

The looks get you first.
When you say something about one game or another,
When you mention your favorite team.

They give you a look that says
all the words you never want to hear.
From their lips.

Okay, Sweetheart.
Sounds good.
You?
That's a joke.

Those looks start a fire in your belly.
But you taste the copper of restraint instead of the satisfaction of speaking.
It tastes better than the rejection you know is next.
Then comes the comments.

They make you feel less than.
They make your head hurt and your eyes water.

Because he's good looking, right?
Does your boyfriend teach you?
I guess Dad wanted a son.
Well, actually.

Because everything in your life must come from a he.

Because if you mess something up you feel as
Though you are failing 51% of the population.

Because the apps on your phone,
and the approval of strangers who think you are a man,
will never fill the holes they burned in you.

Because when you know something, it must be fact-checked. Because when you talk, you feel dumb.
Because if you correct them, you are stuck up.
Because if you cry, you are weak.

Because they care more about a player smoking weed,
Than a player punching his wife.
But if you bring it up you are a feminazi.

Because the only women on the TV are wearing skirts, so short you'd be kicked out of a pool. Because you see a woman and you know, in your heart,
That she is only there for the male gaze.

Because there is still a *first woman* anything.
Because they cover up their diversity hire with commercials about progress, And then put her on the 2 am sports talk crew.

Because they pay women pennies compared to the men,
Then go off about how it's due to fan base size,
As if they even believe the hate they spew.

Because they call women sports dumb and ask "who cares."
Because maybe more people would care if they showed women's soccer,
Over men's bowling.

Because there can't be a rivalry.
It must be a catfight.

Because Serena Williams is garbage if she doesn't win every tournament.
Because they don't talk about how she almost died when having a child.

Because they'd rather hire a man with no experience,
Then a woman with ten years.

Because you get a longer suspension for deflating a football,
Than for assaulting a woman.

Enough is enough.

There are games to call,
And play,
And referee,
And coach.

And we will be there, whether you like it or not.
Push us to the side again.
You'll regret it.

It is 2020.
Make room for us.

I am not asking.
I am not begging.
I am not making a suggestion.
Make room for me, for us.

Move or you will be moved.



Self-Portrait #1
Janna Nunez
Photography

Bowling Sonnet
By: Holly Amell, Angelina Ferraioli, and Jessica Xing

Upon dry lanes a bowling ball I throw,
Longing for a lane with plenty oil,
Into the nose to split the ball will go,
An open frame will make my blood boil.

The next frame my ball goes in the gutter,
Frustrated I will kick the ball return.
Under my breath curse words I will mutter,
Adjusting to dry lanes I'll never learn.

But in my mind I dream of better days,
Upon fresh oil I will close all the frames,
Upon the oily lanes my strike ball stays,
To raise my average score with better games.

My wishes came true I knocked down the pins,
With fresh oil my team can get more wins.

A Figment of a Man No Longer
By: Jami Bergold

There was a man
Under a street lamp
In Central Park
Who I called Me

He was a drab old thing
With a hunched back
And droopy eyes

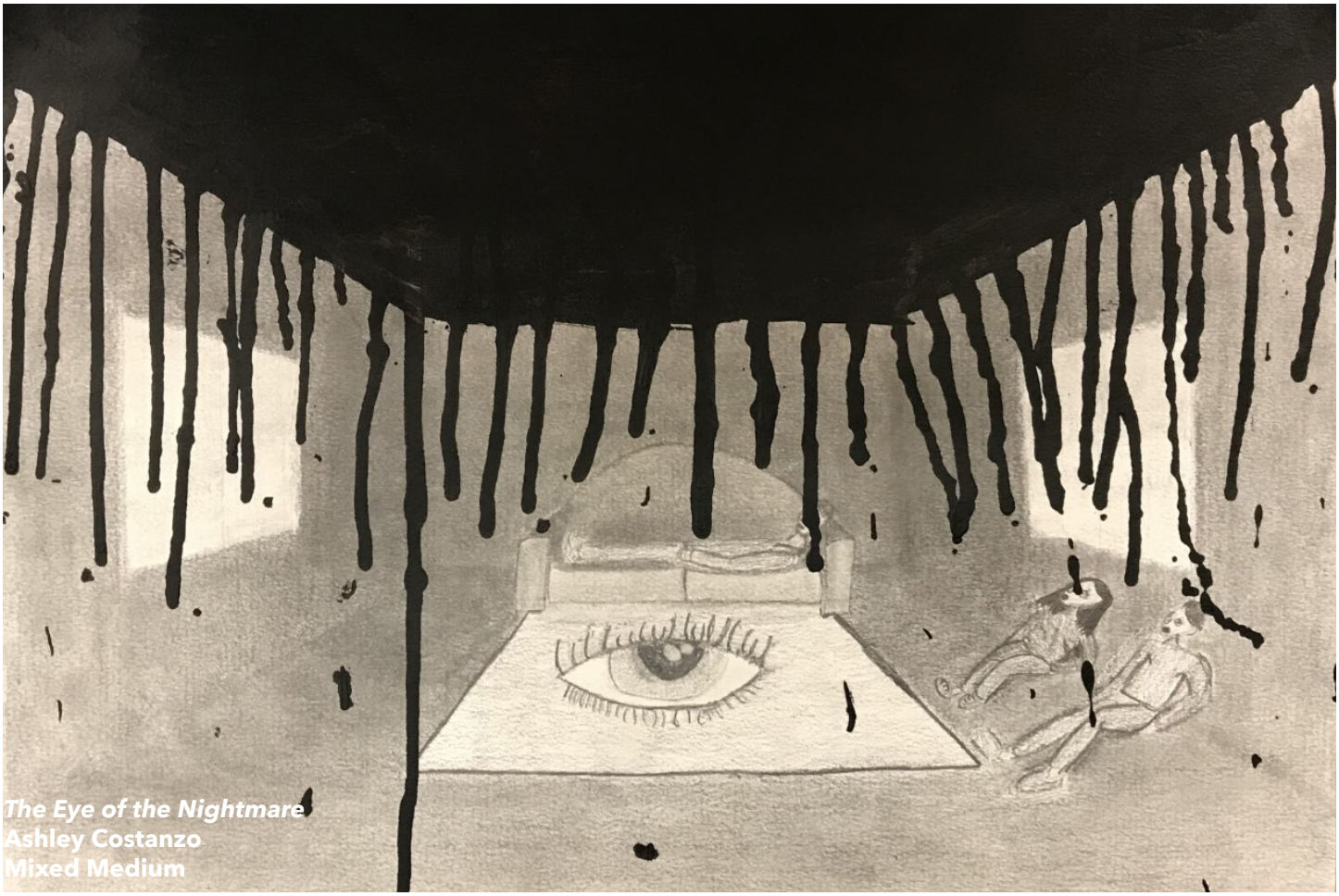
He stood there for hours
Under the flickering light
And dark night sky
Looking out at the world

He didn't move
He didn't speak
He simply stood and existed

When the dawn came
And the sun started to rise
His skin looked sickly pale
And his body thin stood like a skeleton

It wasn't long after
That he finally decided to stir
He straightened his back looking the other way

He walked away
Into the lively city
Looking like death
Maybe never to be seen again



The Eye of the Nightmare
Ashley Costanzo
Mixed Medium



Barnstorm
Stephanie Lane Photography

Unexpected
By: Brianna Cox

INT: INSIDE SCHOOL GYM DURING BASKETBALL GAME - (7:00pm at middle school)
NICK is tall, slim, and plays basketball at his middle school. Crowd of parents including MOM gather on the bleachers.The camera focuses on the basketball scoreboard while cheers are heard in the background. Pan up to the REFEREE's mouth blowing a whistle. Pan back to the time on the clock as the sound of shoes and dribbles friction the hard floor. NICK makes a 3 pointer on the 5 second mark of the last quarter. One long final whistle blows.

REFEREE
(Runs to middle of court)
Our final winner for this season
is the Hawks!

MOM
(Shouts)
WOOHOO! That's my son!

NICK
(clearly embarrassed)
Mom?

REFEREE
And we can not forget our best
player who made a score of 102
points this season, Nick Chang!

MOM
Smile for the camera Nick!
(quick flash from phone)

REFEREE
(Hands out trophies to everyone
then pauses)
Nick… ahh! Your special medal for
this season. How could I forget!
(walks over to the table with coaches)

NICK
Haha, don't worry about it.

REFEREE
(hands medal)
Be careful it doesn't rust,
it's quite rainy out there.

NICK
Yeah it is, thanks for being the best
referee of the season!

REFEREE
Anytime, kiddo. Keep an eye out for me,
you might see me at the high school
next year.

NICK
(Waves)
Bye! Have a nice night.

INT: INSIDE CAR(8:00pm night)
The car is heated and warm. Mellow tunes of the radio are playing in the background. The windshield wipers move back and forth driving down the highway.

MOM
So, did you enjoy your last game?

NICK
Yeah, I had a great season with my
boys and finally got to be the best
player of the season.
MOM
I'm glad to hear that. You know I enjoy
watching you out there. Seeing you play
your heart out makes me happy.

NICK
(Squint eyebrows)
Not this again, mom.

MOM
(Sniffles)
I'm being serious, you know…
just take me seriously this time.

NICK
(Annoyed)
Everytime I win a game you
are always so emotional. Is it that
time of the month or something?
(rolls eyes)

MOM
Hey!

NICK
Sorry! You know I was joking around.

Camera moves to the backseat of the car and focuses on the back of their heads. The sound of the radio shuts off. There is complete silence in the car.

MOM
(gulps)
Well there's something I need
to tell you that's really important.
I want you to really listen to me
and not joke around because it's serious.
I also don't want this to interfere
with our relationship.

NICK
(Long pause)
What is it?

MOM
I'll tell you when we get home.

NICK and MOM arrive home and NICK bolts up the stairs. MOM shuffles to the kitchen. 15 minutes pass. She yawns while reading her magazine with the news on in the background. She goes upstairs and checks on him. NICK is asleep and she decides not to disturb him.

EXT: FRONT PORCH(next morning, continued)
The camera focuses on NICK who woke up at around 12pm on a sunny Saturday afternoon. MOM did not have the chance to tell him the big news last night. NICK remembers the conversation he had with her and quickly jumps out of his bed and heads downstairs. He makes his bowl of Lucky Charms with cut up bananas and a protein bar. He heads towards the kitchen table then comes to a stop. He sees MOM sitting on the swing by herself on the front porch. She is hunched over with her palms on her forehead. NICK slips on his Ugg slippers and opens the sliding glass door.

NICK
Can I join?

MOM
(Raises head)
Of course… come here.

NICK walks over and carefully sits down with his bowl of cereal and protein bar. He places it on the small glass table in front of him. MOM wraps her arms around him and digs her head into his shoulders. NICK gently places his head on top of hers and caresses her shoulder. Tears start falling down MOM's eyes.

NICK
Can you just tell me now so I don't
have to worry about it. Who died?

MOM
No one died… It's about you.

NICK
Great! What did I possibly do now?

MOM

(Rubs Nicks head)
You did nothing wrong.
It's just something you should know that
I've been keeping from you for a long time.

NICK
Does it have to do with Dad?

MOM
(long pause)
Sweetie you're not my
real son.

NICK
(Soft chuckles)
What do you mean?
Is this some sort of prank?

MOM
No… I'm not your biological mother,
nor is your father. We adopted you
when you were 8 months old.

MOM hands NICK a polaroid picture with the year 2007 on it. The camera pans to the picture where there are two adults and NICK as a baby on it. He stares at it for a long time until a solid tear hits the picture.

MOM
That's you with your birth parents in
China. This was the last picture they
took before they gave you to your
dad and I. You know, your parents-
(cuts off)

NICK
(Interrupts)
So you decide to tell
me this now?

MOM
Honey, I've been trying to, I just
couldn't find the right time.

NICK puts his slippers back on and roughly closes the sliding glass door. MOM slumps down on her seat and sobs even more. The camera focuses on NICK standing inside the house. It pans to his face and his cheeks start to turn red. The sweat becomes more visible on his forehead revealing a glow. His breathing becomes heavier and heavier until he is gasping for air. He runs through the kitchen and pours himself a glass of cold water before MOM enters the house. NICK tries to avoid her as much as he can. The camera pans on the last step of the stairs showing NICK sprinting to his room.

INT: NICK'S BEDROOM(afternoon)
NICK avoids his MOM for the rest of the day hoping he doesn't have to see her. The camera focuses on his fish tank and basket-

ball awards. Quickly pans over NICK laying underneath his covers with headphones and his phone. He is blasting music loudly enough for others to hear. There is a quick knock from the door but NICK cant hear it. Moments later a louder knock makes him spring off the bed and fling the covers. He doesn't respond. Camera pans to the other side of the door where MOM leans her head against the door.

MOM
Nick! I know you can hear me. Can you
open the door please.

NICK
Go away! I don't need you right now.

MOM
Nick! Don't talk back to me like that,
I am your mother.
(pauses)
If you don't open this door,
I will do it myself.

NICK
(Opens door)
Yes?

MOM
I just wanted to come and apologize
for telling you so late.

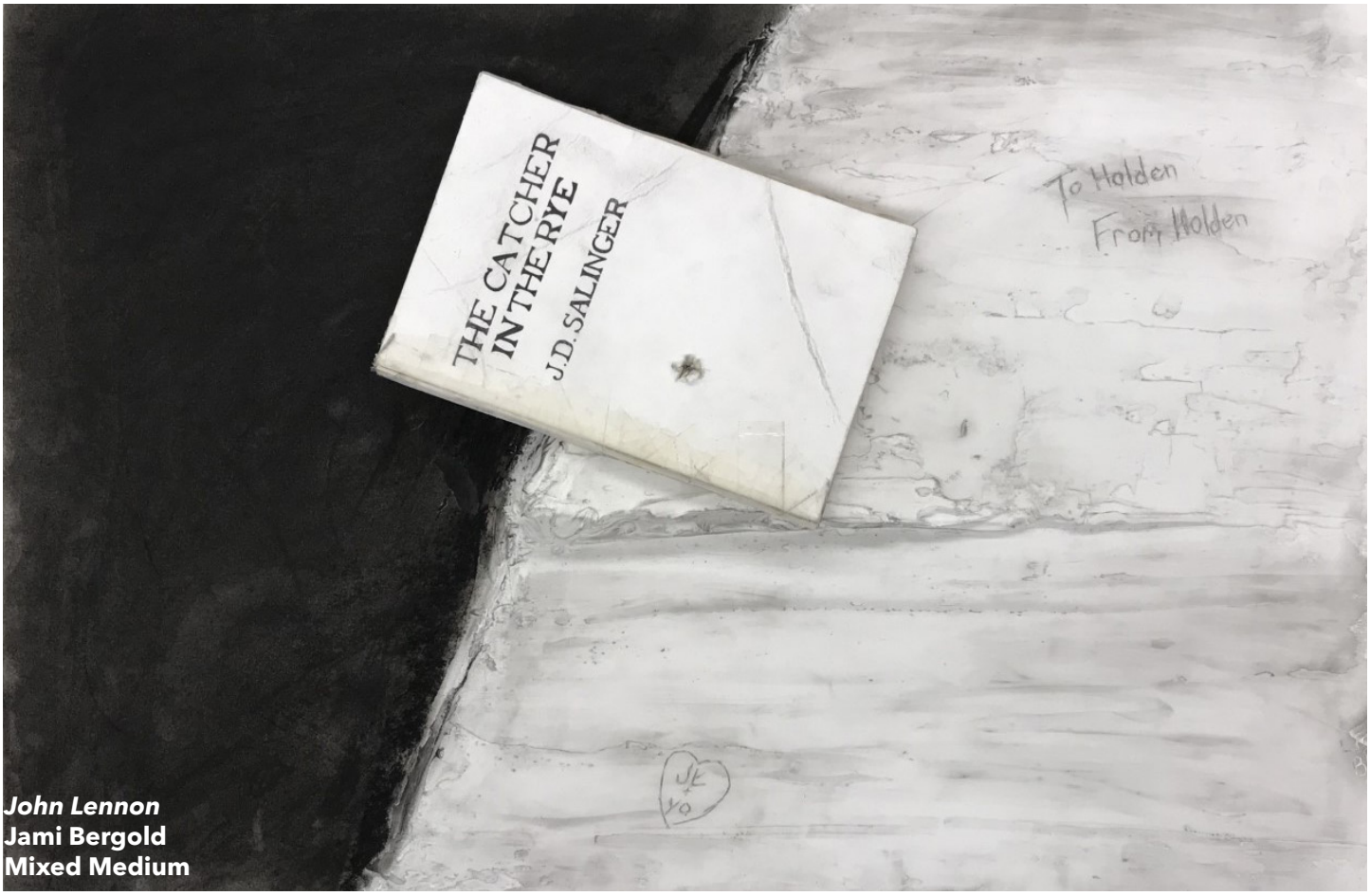
NICK
Ok. Great.

MOM
Listen, I know how you feel right now
but don't forget that I raised you from
the time you were 8 months old to now.
I fed you, changed your diapers, took you
to school, washed your clothes, and more.
Who pays for your basketball every season?
Last time I checked it wasn't your
birth parents.

NICK breaks eye contact and tightly hugs MOM. She squeezes as they rock back and forth.



Marigold
Mia Salzman
Photography



John Lennon
Jami Bergold
Mixed Medium



Hide Your Fires
Jessica Rodriguez
Photography



Section 2: Fleeting Thoughts

Virtual Reality
By: Emily Ramirez

COVID has drastically changed our lives for us as teachers, workers, students and kids.
We all unite, one by one.
Not knowing what could occur.
In-person one day,
Digital the next.
It's crazy, how reality can change in a blink of an eye.
Zooming here,
Zooming there,
The air smelt cleaner than ever.
Those early quarantine runs,
Walking in the park every day.
Only one year has passed,
And nothing has been the same since then.
March 13th.
Everything went down to tragedy,
This world was dependable before
Now we don't know what to anticipate.

The stores are stocked up one second,
Everything is gone the next.
Toilet paper here,
"Sold out" bolded there.
We were all rushing to get what we needed.
The world shut down unexpectedly,
Who are we to blame?
2020 was a new decade,
To go out and explore,
Now, it's filled with staying at home.
Everything was done remotely,
No more paper worksheets.
My life felt digital.
Masks, Masks, Masks.
Distance, Distance, Distance.
That's all they said,
Then,
And now.
2 weeks turned into 2 months,
2 months turned into 4 months,
4 months turned into one year,
In just a matter of time,
conditions worsened.

Masks were being mandated,
It goes over your nose!
Wash your hands,
Social distance,
Stay home.

Protect yourself, your family and the elderly.
Cases were surging.
What was wrong with people?
What happened to only 2 weeks?
It'll be gone by June,
They said.
A few months turned into a full year,
The long summer nights made it worse.
Waiting to hear the freedom speech.

Sports were cancelled,
But they came back.
No cheers from the stands.
God, the silence was loud.
No one was as motivated as before.
Schools opened up again.
The first day was awful.
Following new guidelines,
Only saw half of people's faces,
Unable to see the smile underneath.
The laugher and smiles felt sheltered.

Thinking about the actions we did in the past,
Made us seem ridiculous now.
Sharing food and drinks,
Having large gatherings with no masks,
Not washing our hands regularly was bizarre to me.
Everyone later started realizing
What they took for granted.
Learned to appreciate their family
And health
More than ever.

One day,
Our lives will go back to normal.
No more masks,
Gathering together,
Concerts, Parties,
Living the fun life.
If people were to obey,
Care more about the lives that are in danger,
Those who have lost others,
We would be out of this tunnel
Sooner than ever.



Wish Me Luck
Lyudmyla (Lucy) Sokolova
Paint Markers, Acrylic Paint, Oil Paint

Her Heart, A Withered Rose
By: Sam Chuck

Her heart is but a withered rose, so frail,
She shut me out without giving a plea,
Through thick and thin, her love could not prevail,
So why is the temptation strong to me?
Her petals could attract one every day,
A bee, was I, enchanted by her smell
She toyed with me just like it's child's play,
I should have seen her cast her magic spell.
She used to bloom and light up every town,
"Oh, this would last forever!" I figured,
Now that occurs when I am not around;
No fragrance 'cause her petals are withered.

"He says my heart is like a withered rose,
For he is not the man I wish I chose."

When I Discover'd My Vision of the World
By: Francesca Alesso

When I discover'd my vision of the world,
When the rolling scenes and luminous landscapes
were settled before me.
When I was immersed in the cuisine and culture,
to savor and treasure it all.
When I witnessed the soft edges and crushing ocean
that have caught the human eye,
Allure offhand catches me
mesmerized and infatuated.
The sun sends itself cascading
as we danc'd into twilight,
Conjuring rapture in the bliss,
captivated by the lucid sky,
Look'd down upon
our perfect stage.



Dream
Rachel Moss
Watercolor, Colored Pencil

Deadman Walking
By: Righteous Allah-McCaroll

Have you lived,
Or have you simply come to be?
Transpire with tenderness and fortitude
Oh, child's innocent art.
Plainly to be denuded of these innocents.
Enervated.
A being with no heart-

Have you located the spark that lights your life?
The warmth that satisfies baltic nights,
Or have you been treading through a dark sea
Of creatures; vultures and saprophytes?
These creatures who consume your life
The bills, the grades, the long-spun laboring days,
Do not let these creatures devastate you.

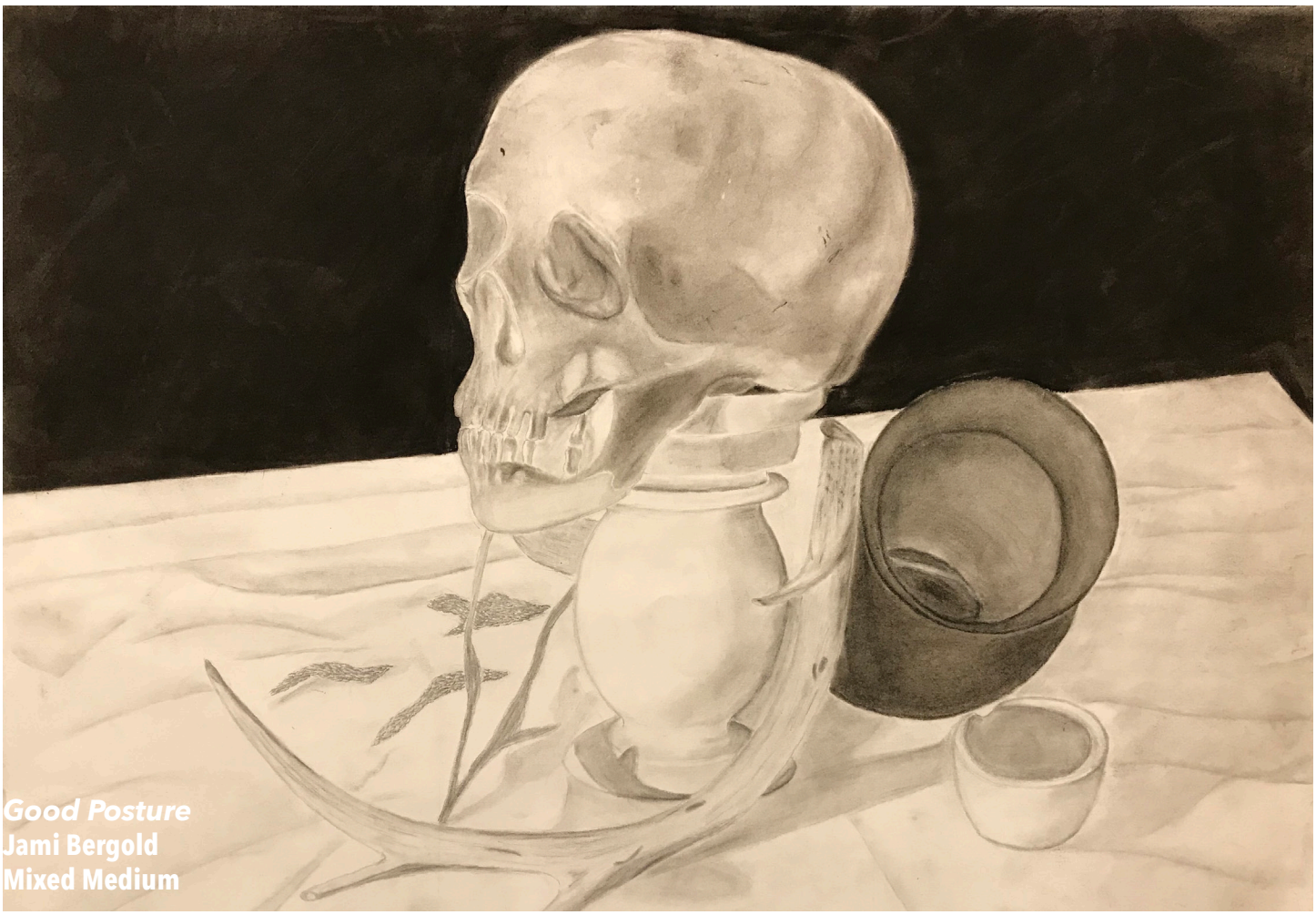
Are you alive?
Or are you solely breathing?
Your humanity depleting,
Navigating life
In the shell of someone, you've never actually known.
Can you sense the tautness that encompasses your life?

Obtaining this state will get you nowhere,
When you're walking into deadman's land.
Ingenuity confined, replaced with machine.
To serve pockets of the men of means.
They sit in solitary stockades from 9-5
To study and transcribe their entire lives.
Receiving calls, each monotone,
Abrupt words and tiresome tones
Then work right into overtime.
Deadman walking...
Nevermore alive.

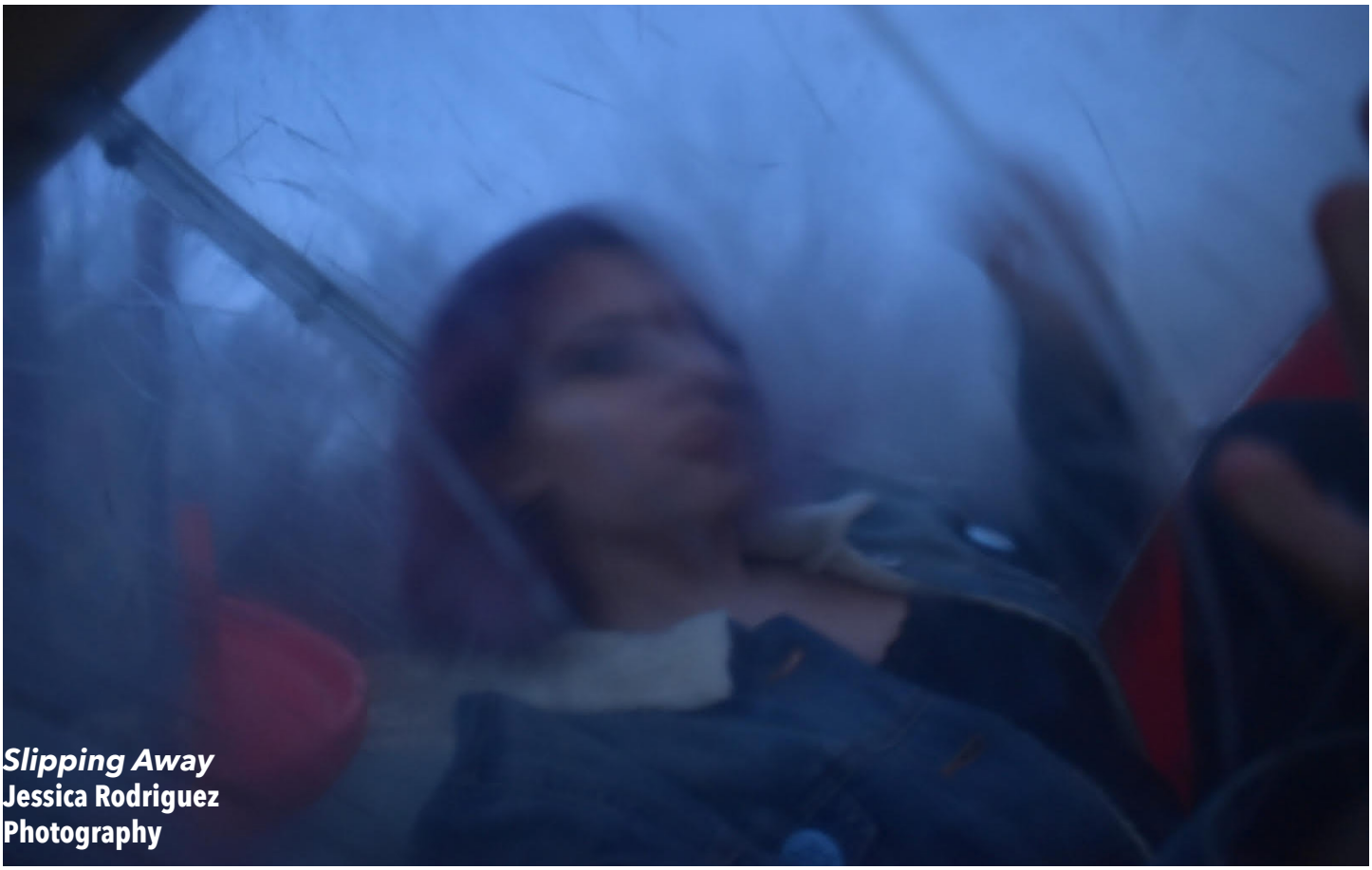
Is this life?
Where we work,
We work from dawn to dusk.
Ignore those who try and ground us.
We drift amidst in this realm of want.
Insouciant.
We are again misplaced in this black sea.
This sea of serpents and sharks,
Disguised as supervisors and staff
who inveigle their ways in
to thieve superior paths
Intellects beguiled via solipsism

Bloodthirsty-

We compete with the vicious to grow victorious.
Except, in success, who now is the adversary?
Who now patrols the obscure waters
With avarice and with hunger?
In this world exclusively to compete.
This deadman-
This beast-
He becomes you and me.



Good Posture
Jami Bergold
Mixed Medium



Slipping Away
Jessica Rodriguez
Photography

Vivid
By: Briana Lopez

Some days I bleed blood.
A poet they called me.
Went on to explore her very soul and destroyed it.
Overwhelmed it to pieces to help break these written curses,
To form written words that help heal the world.
Some days I bleed bliss.
An aura of joy as a smile awakens on my face.
On all days I bleed me.

The healer.

The Joker
By: Briana Lopez

For a second, you can only feel the depth of your soul.

It vanishes as soon as you feel the intensity of it, the power it holds inside of you, the agonizing demand it exults. It is only through pressure - through a forced emotion - that you can distinguish the components inside of it. You start to wonder how those components got there; why were they set to manipulate your mind?

Your conscious brings you back to reality . . . just a second away.

An Ode to Mr. Needham
By: Stephanie Lane

Sophomore year, I was put in a class.
One that I didn't think to have.
I liked to Paint and Draw
But I didn't know at all
That I would have it, starting in the fall.

Although I learned about art
There was still another part
Art that has instruments and beats
I found it really neat

My teacher was a real one
He played songs til we were done
Period three had its own playlist
His songs were the base of it

In the end, my taste
Oh how my taste has changed
All because of this cool guy that I will miss when I am an alum
Thank you, Mr. Needham.



Zebra
Lyudmyla (Lucy) Sokolova
Oil Paint

Live For Today
By: Noor Sikka

Tik tok, tik tok, tik tok.
That is the only sound busting through the ears of students, workers. The only vision in their mind is the big white face with three hands. Their eyes only focus on the inanimate object, not even taking account of the present. Time is the key, it just depends on how we use it.

30 minutes till I get home.
15 minutes till I can eat.
20 minutes till I can talk.
How about the 20 vast, valuable minutes I have to learn?
Or the 15 precious moments where I workout?
Why is everything we do, or want based on the future?
It is time we start enjoying the placid, priceless, pure present.

When we're sitting at that boring family event,
Or chatting with our least favorite cousin,
Just waiting and waiting to reach home.
Why don't we understand that this may be the last time we see this cousin. Or we are so lucky to have the ability to connect with family.
The only thing that comes to mind is, "when is this over?"
No.
Understanding and interpreting the importance of today, is key.

Every minute, moment, hour holds a lesson so powerful, precious it can change us.
We just can't see it because we never stop to look.
Humans are like little leprechauns who cannot identify the pot of gold. And those who stop and take a second, make it.
All these people we see as extremely successful all share one thing in common
What is that you may ask?
They stopped, took a breath and realized that the moment they were in was valuable,
A piece of gold, that is.

Or what about the times where we are dreading the far future?
Why does something that could be a million years away consume us?
The good outweighs the bad in ways we do not even realize.
Enjoying the exciting, effervescent moments we are gifted with, should be what we live for.
So what, if a week from today your majestic, marvelous vacation will be over, Enjoy every second of what you have, today,
Because it can be gone before you know it.
So if your world may come crashing down tomorrow,
Enjoy today.
And if you're chatting with that obnoxious cousin instead of hanging with friends Appreciate it, appreciate it all.
No one is certain of tomorrow, but what we do know is that we have today. And if we do not make the greatest memories out of today,
Our unpromised tomorrow may not give us the chance to do so. Live in the moment,
That is the key to an incredible being.



Portrait #10
Janna Nunez
Photography



City Sunset
Jessica Xing
Photography



Just Peachy
Lyudmyla (Lucy) Sokolova
Oil Paint, Acrylic Paint



Section 3: Feeling the Love

When I Watch'd the Tour Pros Play
By: Jordyn Cline

When I watch'd the tour pros play,
I saw how the golfers moved so swiftly across the mowed, green grass,
When they used their gadgets, watches, distance finders, and widgets like it was law,
I saw them bathe in the cheers from the stands coming after every crisp, smooth shot,
How soon I realized my stomach knotted itself and my mind became a cloud of smog,
Till the last putt dropp'd I scurried out to an empty hole,
In the open air finding myself alone on luscious turf with alluring scenery, Look'd at the golf course grown out of peace, out of simplicity.

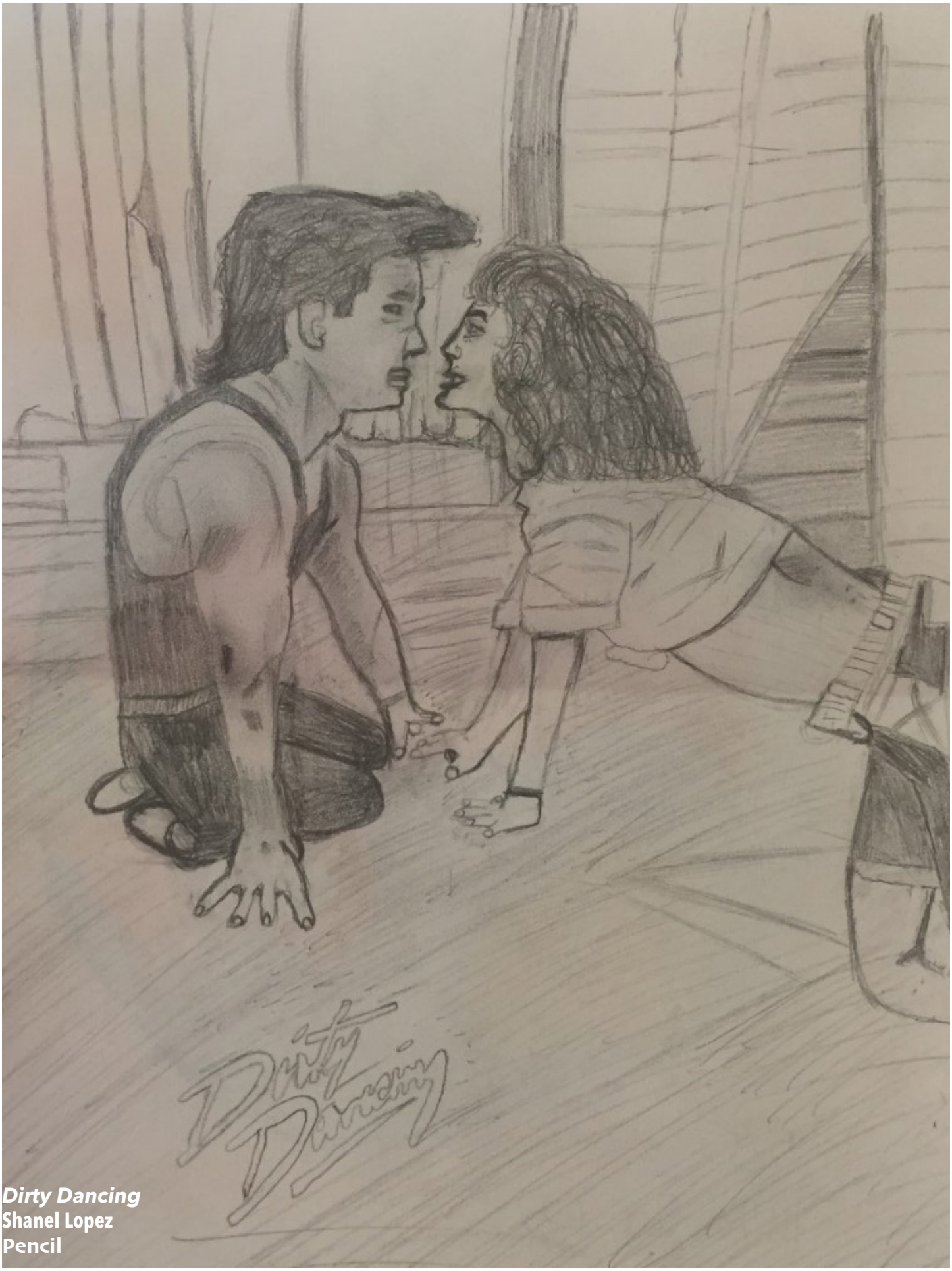
Citrus in Spring
By: Alexandra Henriques

I remember the way your lips tasted like sweet citrus when I kissed you in late Spring.

Freckles dotted your face, flakes of bright gold upon rubescent cheeks. Your brilliant gleam matched that of Cupid's arrow; gold-tipped and striking, the arrow that pierced our burning hearts and set us wholly ablaze. In the inferno that was us, all I saw was bright orange and you; you holding your hand out to me, you offering a slice of that citrus-fruit that lingered in my mind.

You became my muse, every action so graceful that the gods could have wept, every word sounding so heavenly that it could have lulled me to sleep. Maybe it was reckless, but I don't have any regrets. With the halo that rested upon your head, I would have trusted you until my last breath.

So, I accepted the fruit. Consequently, I accepted the flames.



Dirty Dancing
Shanel Lopez
Pencil

American People
By: Regan Jacobson-Glynn

Our world is very much the same,
as it was a year ago today
Times are insane–
There is division among us.
We say it is okay
And hope that things will change
But do they?

We hand over our trust to the media,
Hoping we will get an accurate representation of the world around us.
But really, all we get is bias and a warped perspective

No one is for the people,
They are for a party.
Republican this.
Democrats that.
They criticize one another because of something they believe.

It should be a person over party
Love over Hate
Education over Ignorance
People over Policy.

The media is a master.
Not just someone we worship and trust
But a puppet master!
They control our beliefs–
What we think,

No matter where you are,
Fake news will show up.
Oh, you heard this?
Well, I heard that!
No-no you can't be right.

No matter who says what,
Someone will always disagree–
Someone will always tell you you're wrong–
You're wrong for believing what you want–
You're wrong because they're right.

The American people are who we are–
Then why does it feel so far,
From what we have always stood for:
Liberty!
It used to be considered a right,

But now it is a concept
That we all want to reach and hold.

Our leaders say they want the best for us.
Then why do they keep secrets?
Why do they think they are above the law?
When in actuality, they are just like us all?
American People.

The division in our country is greater than it has ever been–
Bombings,
Mass shootings,
Threats–
All because someone doesn't agree with your political views.

We are on the cusp of our breaking point.
Sooner or later everything will topple over,
And all that will be left is violence, fear, and hate.

Unless...
Unless...
We show some love.
Compassion: Understand others' points of view.
Stability: Be there for one another.
Understanding: Be open to new ideas.
And quite simply put, show some common decency
And be kind.

Our country shouldn't divide us whether we choose red or blue–
Whether we believe in God or not.

We should all want the best for each other.
We should all want the best for this country.
No matter who is running it,
We should hope they do the best they can,
And that things will get better.

Because that's who we are:
People who strive for greatness–
People who want the best.
We are all the same...
We are American People.



Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart
Elizabeth Mastrangelo
Photography

A Caterpillar Gained Her Wings
By: Shanel Lopez

On December 19th, 1946,
A butterfly laid three hundred eggs.
You happened to be one of them.
Hanging from the stem of a roughly textured leaf.
Curled into the form of a ball.
Watched the sun come and say hello,
And goodbye.
Never did I think it'd someday be your turn.

You grew and consumed all you could from the leaf,
Spreading it to other caterpillars surrounding you.
Shedding your blessings and happiness for others to keep warm.

Oh, my angelic, beautiful wingless caterpillar.
How you found great relish in training others to fly,
Despite the absence of your own wings.
Allowing others to bite from your leaf.
Leaving you with barely any room to sleep.

"Buzzz"
I watched you gain your first wing with pride and strength.
I watched you use it.
I watched you take us under your wing,
Providing us with warmth and security.
I watched you blow your love into all possible directions.

"Buzzz...Buzzz"
Your 2nd wing has developed,
Just like your laugh.
Your wings now have white and blue flowers imprinted on them.
Likewise to your swiveling ring...
Now passed on to me.

"Buzzz...Buzzz...Buzzz"
Your wing rattles once again.
Brushing off all the aches and pains laying on your apex.
Blowing thorned leaves onto the ground.
Providing them with love and soil.
Transforming them into heightened white flowers.

And you made every day your own.
Helping us caterpillars.
Laid onto the leaf you rest on right now.
And those laid onto the leaf of your own offspring.
Spreading your wings to call us every night.
As you could not rest until our wings and leaves were safe.

"Buzzz...Buzzz...Buzzz...Buzzz"
Your last wing grows in.
Now nourished with enough strength.
Oh, how you could flaunt your beautiful wings,
And consume as many fruit trees as you'd like,
Without the worries of harming your abdomen.

We knew it was time to set you free.
So, fly!
Fly, my love!
Go clean all the dust off the flowers!
As you have fulfilled your purpose.
Here.. on this leaf, you call home.

Your wings are now fully developed.
And you are ready to fly away from this leaf.
As us caterpillars can now crawl.
And Mama, I thank you.

For laying your eggs on another leaf.
Creating caterpillars of your own.
That later birthed me on their own leaf.
Giving me the chance to exist.
And someday.
Just someday.
Become a butterfly.
Just like you.

Your spirit and memories
Are forever engraved,
And wrapped around my finger.



Entrance to the Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart
Elizabeth Mastrangelo
Photography

If Only We Loved Before We Lost
By: Jami Bergold

She stated it with such emotion,
That if she were to spend only one day more in love,
She would not spend that love on a man
Or a woman
Or any person at all.
Instead she will give her remaining love to the seas
And the sky
And the trees.
She would spend her final loving moments loving life.
Looking at the world around her,
Seeing it for for all the beauty it could hold,
Bright and passionate
And never ending
She would love the world with all her heart,
In her last moments.
Because the world had loved her always,
In all of hers.



Cupcake Bouquet
Elizabeth Mastrangelo
Photography

Dandelion
By: Emily Hanson

INT- TERRA's room, San Francisco Springtime (Early Morning) 2015.

Begin with black screen, fade room into shot after a few seconds. Reveal a plain, single twin bed against a corner wall with a white, unmade duvet and sheets half-hanging off the right side. Dirt-stained clothes sit at the end of the bed, haphazardly placed and not folded. Pan camera to the right, pass a plain, giant, open window, and focus on a desk crammed into the other corner wall of the room. The top of the desk is covered with a small flower pot full of colored pencils and pens, a larger flower pot with soil and a single sunflower about two feet in height, and about ten clear glasses varyingly full of water. TERRA sits at the desk: a dark-skinned, gangly, seventeen year old girl with only full, deep brown hair visible. Her head rests against her dark arms, which sit on top of a pile of open books. A small, white cell phone, clearly scratched up, begins buzzing and playing a ringtone under her right elbow.

TERRA
(Springing up) Huh!? ...Oh.

TERRA picks up the phone and taps a button. The tune and the buzzing cease abruptly. TERRA rubs her eyes and face, groaning, and stands up. She takes the glass of water closest to her and takes a long sip, finishing the contents, before quickly putting it down and beginning to clear away the open books on the desk into her bag: a plain white backpack with small sun symbols printed near the bottom.

SPERO
(Offscreen) Terra! The bus is coming! I have to leave without you if you aren't ready in the next twenty minutes... You've got to get used to going to real high school! That means getting up at the time you should be, and eating actual meals instead of just--

TERRA
Alright, alright, Spero, I get it!

SPERO
Just warning you…

TERRA sighs, turning around and leaning her back against the desk chair with her eyes closed. As she opens them, focus closer on her face and her almost clear sky-blue eyes, which appear to be looking across the room at something. TERRA turns her head down to look at her hands.
F
ocus on her palms as a small yellow dandelion slowly begins to bloom from her left hand, growing from the center.

SPERO
(Offscreen, tauntingly) The bathroom is ready and waiting!

TERRA rolls her eyes and plucks the delicate flower quickly and jerkily from her palm. The entire roots of the flower emerge, along with small chunks of dirt. TERRA flinches harshly, and looks up. Cut to a shot revealing the opposite side of the room for the first time. It is a massive wall filled top-to-bottom with flowers and vines, in many different shapes and sizes, all healthy and colorful. The sun from the giant open window shines onto the wall.

TERRA
(To herself, sarcastically) Huh. Maybe it will be a happy day.

TERRA sticks the new dandelion, carefully but pushing into the roots, into a spot near some other dandelions. The roots ease themselves into the surface, almost on their own. TERRA shakes her head at her previous notion, grabbing her bag and leaving through the door.

EXT- An off-yellow, battered school bus driving down a suburban road at sunrise, passing neat houses in rows and oak trees. The bus makes a right onto a street and cruises to a stop, doors opening.

SPERO
So, what flower did you get this morning? What are your weird "plant gods" trying to tell you today?

INT- A metallic gray, average school bus interior. Worn seats and tired students chatting in the early morning. Pan down the aisle before reaching TERRA and SPERO, sitting together near the back of the bus in a side booth, the former closer to the window. Focus on TERRA.

TERRA
(Shrugging) A dandelion. A pretty small one, too. Not a lot of petals. More yellow than white.

SPERO, the brother of TERRA, is revealed on screen for the first time: an eighteen year old boy with brown eyes, lighter skin than his sister's, and black quiffed hair combed over. SPERO turns his head towards TERRA following her response to his question.

SPERO
Well I'm not very big on "flower theory," so I don't know what that means. It's like a weird horoscope thing. "Today, you're going to meet someone new, and your crush is going to talk to you! Seize the day with dandelion flower power!"

TERRA
Shut up, idiot. (Quieter) This isn't exactly the most private place to talk, I've come to notice.

The bus doors close outside and it turns out of the street, moving at a steady pace. The camera returns to the two teenagers.

SPERO
Well, now that Mamma can't teach you at home, I can finally get used to having you around and talking to you about… (He glances down at TERRA's hands)...yeah.

TERRA
Maybe that's not a great idea. (She folds her hands together self-consciously) People are curious. They listen.

TERRA avoid's SPERO's eyes and looks forward. Focus back on folded hands. A vivid green vine begins to inch itself around TERRA's right index finger. TERRA pulls her hands apart, waiting impatiently for the vine to finish growing before ripping it out of her hand, flinching. She can't stand to look at the plant, handing it to SPERO and turning towards the window. Through the window, she sees a modern high school building coming closer to the bus, with a banner above the door that reads "WELCOME TO ENVISION HIGH SCHOOL!" The focus switches to SPERO, who pulls a plastic water bottle out of his bag and hands it to TERRA.

TERRA
Ugh, Spero, you know I hate plastic. (Taking a sip) It makes me sad. What happened to my other bottle?

SPERO
It's in my locker. I'll get it later. (Admiring TERRA's vine) Wow. I wish people could see this stuff. You're incredible, Ter.

Focus on TERRA, hands in her unzipped bag, desperately brushing dirt and small thorns inside.

She glances up as the bus stops and people begin standing up.

TERRA
(Sarcastically) Yeah, so incredible. (Pause) Why do I have to hide it, then? Hide me?

SPERO shakes his head, avoiding the question.

TERRA
I can't keep doing this, Spero.

SPERO stays silent, takes TERRA's arm gently, and leads her down the aisle after everyone has disembarked. The screen turns black. The sound of a faucet running and water splashing starts before the black disappears.

INT- ENVISION High School, Girl's Bathroom. (Mid-Day.)
The bathroom is a pale pink color, with smooth, square tiles lining the walls. The stalls are a rough gray, and clearly dirty and vandalized with faded graffiti. The mirrors are covered in water spots, and the sinks are low to the ground. Dirtied silver faucets and handles sit on white bowls.

Focus on TERRA in a mirror, washing her hands in the sink. She looks up into her reflection, wiping the sink water onto her face.

TERRA
(Angrily) I'm so… sick of this…

TERRA hears the laughter outside the bathroom door. She glances at it and her features reflect her anger even further. Her blinking eyes return to the mirror in front of her, and a hot tear drips down her face.

TERRA
They can laugh. They can be free! I refuse to be trapped like this anymore.

In the reflection of the mirror, the edges of TERRA's hands begin to turn green. She watches as small vines weave themselves up around her fingers and palms, sprouting leaves and thorns along their sides. They grow to about halfway up her arms before a few small dandelions blossom from the edges, bright against her skin. TERRA admires her arms in the mirror as more vines begin to grow from behind her ears, running down her neck. Focus on the door as the talking and laughter is amplified. BEA and LAUREL enter the bathroom

LAUREL
(To BEA) Yeah, I don't know, Bea. He never graded mine properly. I wish--

LAUREL and BEA are two girls, both seventeen years old, with light skin and long, straight blonde and strawberry blonde hair, respectively. They both stop immediately when they see TERRA.

BEA
What's going on?

LAUREL
Are you... alright...?

Both girls fall quiet, stunned and confused. TERRA tucks a long vine behind her left ear, smiling. The plants continue to expand as TERRA nods her head.

TERRA
(Turning to BEA and LAUREL) Yeah, actually. (Gaze returning to mirror) I've never been better.

The screen transitions and returns focused on a younger, six year old TERRA in a round, pink mirror rimmed with dead vines and dirt, looking up at an older woman behind her. Her MAMMA rubs her shoulder in the mirror.

MAMMA
You can't let anybody see, baby. Your flowers are against the rules.

YOUNG TERRA
But Mamma, they're beautiful! Whose rules? And why not?

MAMMA just shakes her head. The flashback fades and is replaced with the older TERRA, walking down the hallway outside the girl's bathroom. BEA and LAUREL stand in the doorway, watching her leave. A confident smile resides on TERRA's face as she displays her powers proudly. Students around the halls immediately look at her in astonishment and shock.

STUDENT 1
(Hushed) Is that the new girl? Tara? Terra?

STUDENT 2
(Hushed) Yeah, Spero's sister! Is she okay?

MAMMA
(Offscreen, voiceover) Nobody will understand, baby. People are afraid of what they don't understand. You have to trust me, and promise you won't tell anyone.

TERRA continues walking, all eyes on her. Students murmur and shout as she passes.

STUDENT 3
(Hushed) Are those plants?

STUDENT 4
(Hushed) I think so! She looks cool, though, doesn't she?

TERRA sees her brother, SPERO, at the end of the long hallway. He gasps, beckoning her over frantically with one hand.

MAMMA
(Offscreen, flashback) This secret is between you and me, Terra. You promise?

TERRA doesn't speed up her walking, but makes it over to SPERO. He pulls her into an empty classroom and shuts the door behind them.

YOUNG TERRA
(Offscreen, flashback) I promise, Mamma.

SPERO
(Shaking head, incredulously) Ter, what the actual hell are you doing?

TERRA laughs, running a delicate finger along the dandelions on her right palm. The yellow flowers shake at her touch, and specks of dirt lightly fall to the ground. Due to their growing, the flowers and their stems have reached her hair, decorating it with pops of vivid colors. TERRA looks up at SPERO, not breaking her smile.

TERRA
I'm breaking a promise. A promise I will never make again. Not in a million years.

SPERO reaches into his bag, pulling out a reusable glass water-bottle, covered with small yellow suns matching TERRA's bag. TERRA smiles when she sees it.

SPERO
Well, a million years is a long time. And a lot of water.

TERRA
Yeah, well. (She takes a long sip, shrugging) The real Terra is definitely worth that.

Focus on TERRA for the last time, capping her bottle and smiling. SPERO smiles too, shaking his head gently. Fade shot into black.

LE FIN

Not Yet
By: Stephen Schaub

A town glows nebulously through a thick smog of chimney smoke and cabin lights piercing through a chilled and snowy night. A man with dark eyes wades forward towards the imminent warmth. He holds a forearm up in front of his nose to block the diagonal sleet of snow. His hand reaches for a door and pulls against the wind, his muscles tensing. The door reluctantly opens, like an enduring magnet being pulled from steel.

The man with dark eyes adapts to his new circumstances.

As his pupils adjust to the flaming candles and radiant glow of a fireplace. The cabin takes on an odd form of a dome-like structure. From the outside, it seemed formidable and small. However, upon entering, he found himself nestled in warmth and open space. The wood floors matched the leather brown couches, draped in thick blankets. The fire crackled. In the corner, stood a formless beam of light. It bent through the air, like a tired eye glaring at headlights.

"Hello?" said the man with dark eyes unconvincingly.

A distinct gut feeling gave him the impression that this light was sentient.

He approached the light, the polished wooden floor holding the weight of each step. As he got closer, he was doused with emotions he had lost in the years prior. These were fever dreams, he thought he'd never re-experience; Intense emotions in conjunction. He felt deja-vu, wonder, serenity, sorrow, hope, bitterness, sweetness. The emotions, much like the light, held no form. Instead, they constructed deep within his mind and created a symphony of gratitude.

His only response,...

"It's been so long" the man with dark eyes whispered through dry and chapped lips.

"I've finally found it again.." he preached, throwing himself towards the light.

Life slowed temporarily-- like racing thoughts after deep rhythmic breaths of fresh air. The light began to bundle together with energy. It created a concept, which it transcended to the man with dark eyes- non-verbally.

Like a soliloquy of wisdom, the man with dark eyes began to think aloud

"Be Here Now
In the infinite present,
This moment expands wide like a canyon
Reverberating simple truths.
Explore the depths of things in their entirety.
No thought is valuable. No truth is absolute,
Yet, it is merely a piece in a more intricate pattern.
Be certain of nothing.
Be Nothing,
Be Certain of yourself."

The words and phrases strung together incomprehensibly, yet they created that same symphonic epiphany in the man with dark eyes.

It continued-

"Act gently,'
And graciously,
Live on the tips of your toes.
We are what we pretend to be,
So we must be careful
Who we choose to be."

The man's dark eyes illuminated.

His thoughts aligned in perfect harmony

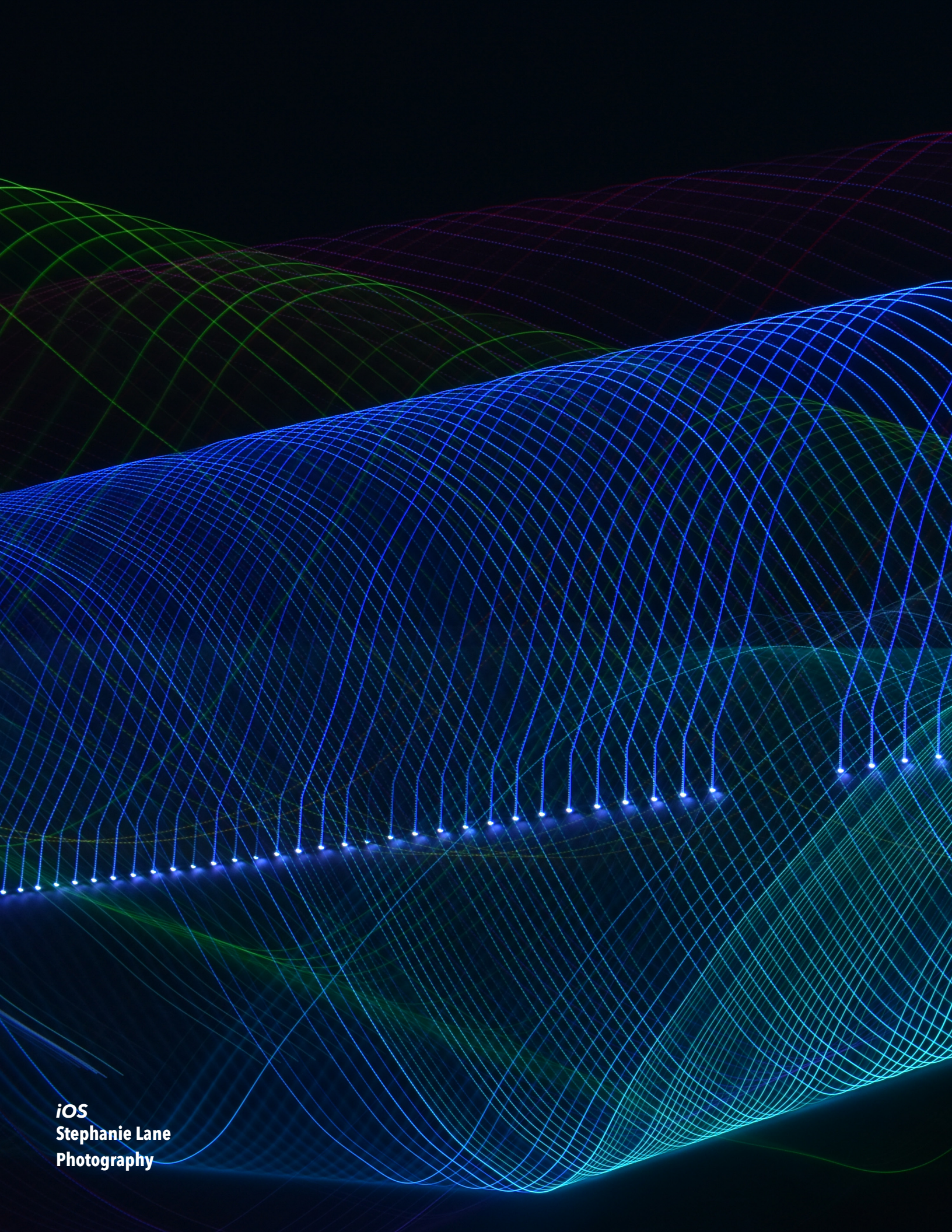
"When we find love in each moment
We find each moment is loved...
By something deeper than inherent purpose itself.
We were never meant to solve the equation
To the meaning of life
Because we are the proof."

The symphony resolved, and the man closed his eyes with euphoric bliss.

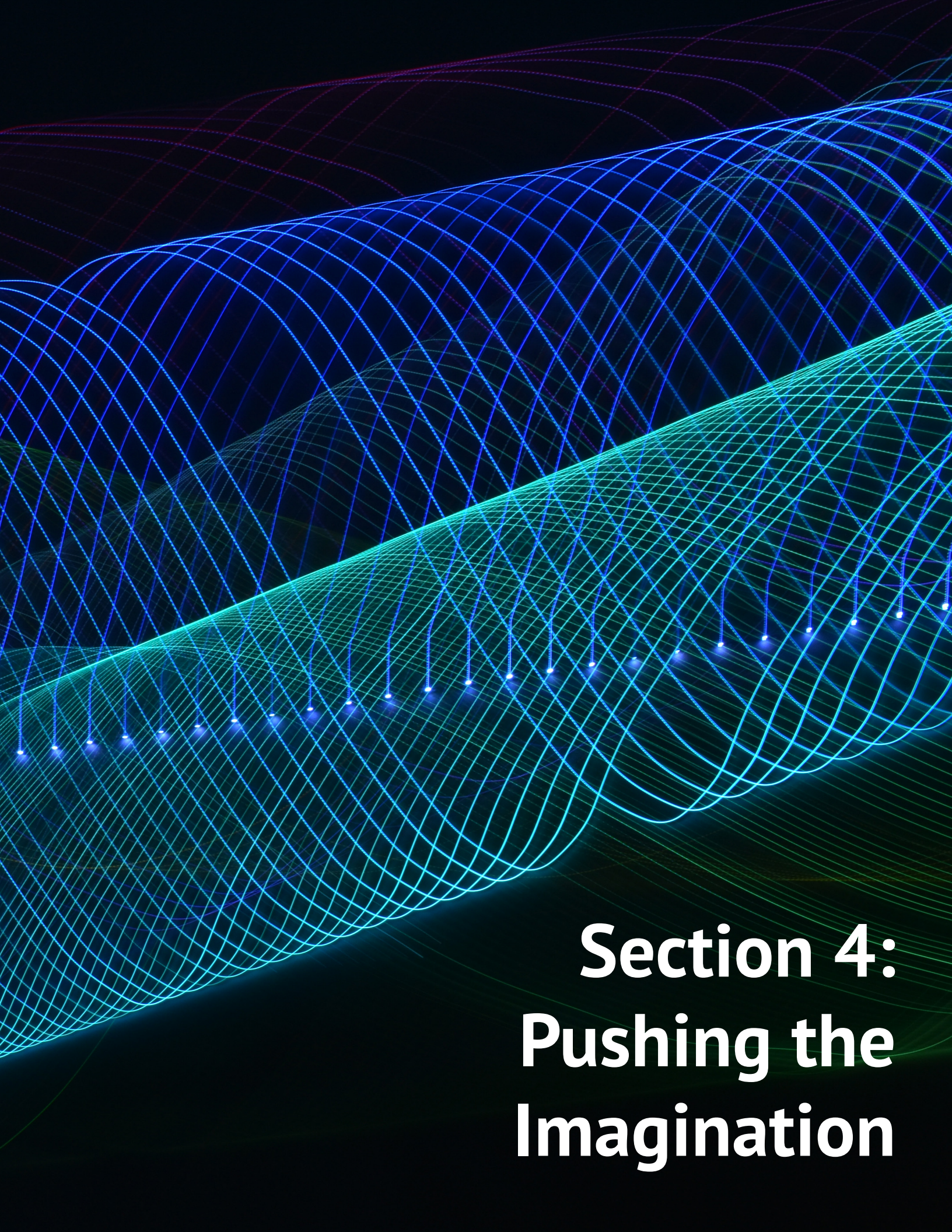
As he re-opened them…. He found himself once again, wading through a blizzard. He tried to recapture his enlightened mind-state but watched as it retreated off the tip of his tongue into the void.

For a second, he sat in the storm. The man with dark eyes felt refreshed by the sensation of cold, falling snow. The winter breeze filled his lungs effortlessly. After a divine moment, he moved onwards towards a thick nebulous cloud of hope.





iOS
Stephanie Lane
Photography



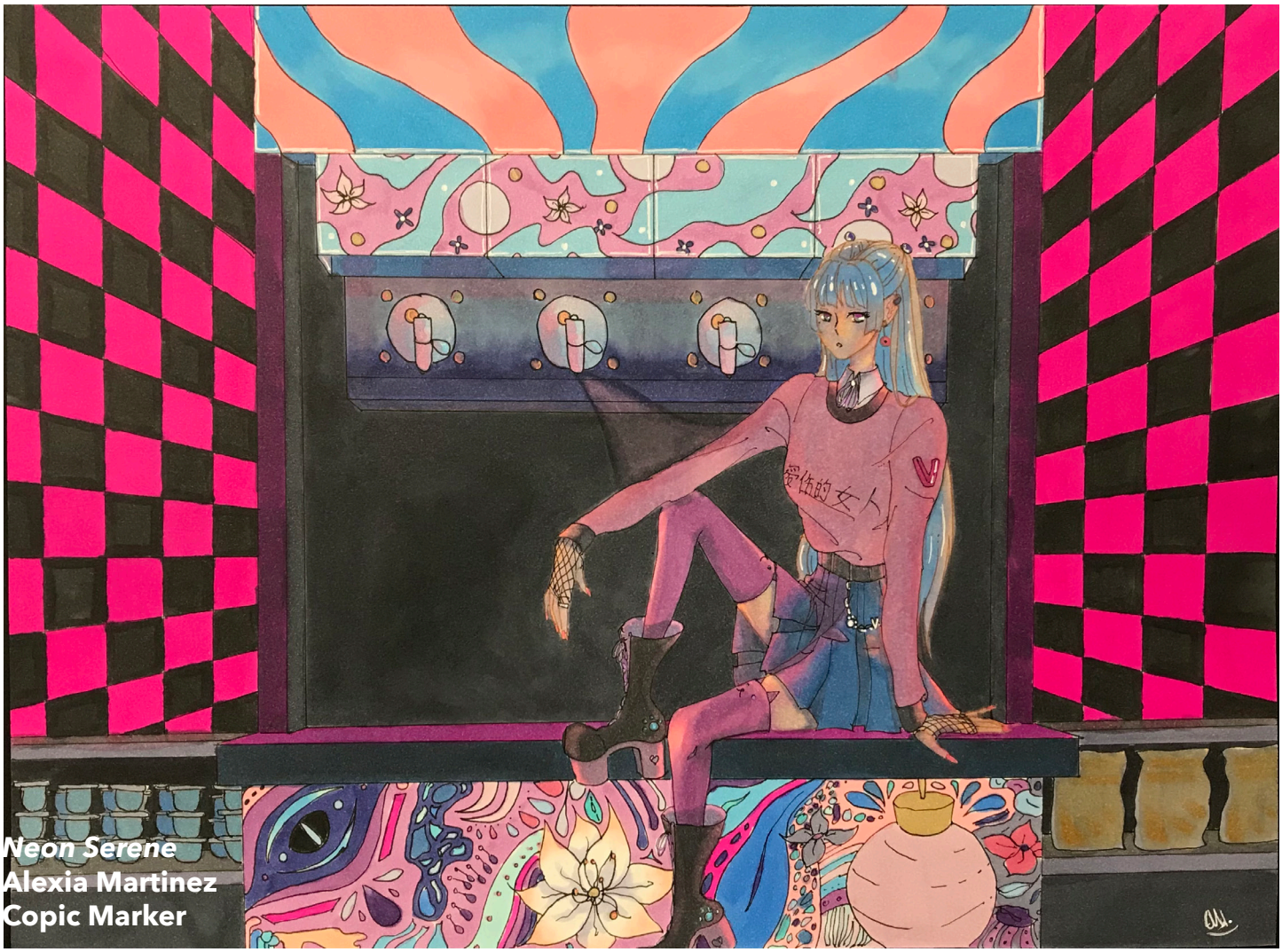
Section 4: Pushing the Imagination



Dream
Brenna Buckley
Watercolor, Colored Pencil, Posca Markers

One and Another
By: Namita Gulur

Once upon a time, one met another...
From the moment our eyes first met
and in yours I saw a brewing storm threatening to spill out and drown us all,
From the moment your voice first clashed with mine
and the only sound my ears could focus on were the yellow flowers tumbling out of your mouth, veiled by the blue of your tune
From the moment your hand rested in mine
and I could feel the calluses in your touch where softness was expected.
Your smile was a drug
and everyone was drunk on it,
Your charm
a blade when held in your hand,
Your mind
was perhaps the most beautiful artifact to be witnessed
an instrument of chaos in our destructive, addictive world.
Another could see the red dahlias around one's neck...
The songs rose in your name
fools who believed the disguises you paraded in
who made truths of the fables you fed them.
I was no fool.
When your storm fueled eyes were aimed at me
I looked away.
When your voice called for me
mine was never heard.
When your hand reached for mine
I started keeping mine gloved.
and one could see the purple hyacinth another held near their heart.
You heard the unheard cry of my broken soul,
you turned my unshed tears to glue,
you sold me promises that your blade would work but "never on you,"
you helped me remove the gloves I'd forged into gauntlets.
But as the purple faded away, the red remained.
The glue you said was mine,
you stole from me.
The blade you said was ours,
was used against me.
My hands ached to be gloved once more,
but my heart refused.
my shield was gone, my armor was broken, and from that moment,
your knife, whose blade resided in me, had forever become a part of me.
As one ran away, another slowly shattered.
I fell for the yellow flowers that landed in whispers on my ears,
I fell for the crooked smile that spoke only in riddles,
I fell for you.
And after you left me alone in the wreckage of your lies,
I saw your storm fueled eyes
mirrored in mine.



Neon Serene
Alexia Martinez
Copic Marker



Peach Petals
Jessica Xing
Photography

I Do Not Break Pretty
By: Alexandra Henriques

When I close my eyes,
I become a garden.

Flowers grow from all the places you touched me;
roots stitch up open cuts.

Crimson red flowers parallel ruby red blood,
And the leaves brushing my skin reminds me of the feel of your hands.

Soil spills over into my lungs until I suffocate,
And end up coughing until I throw up.

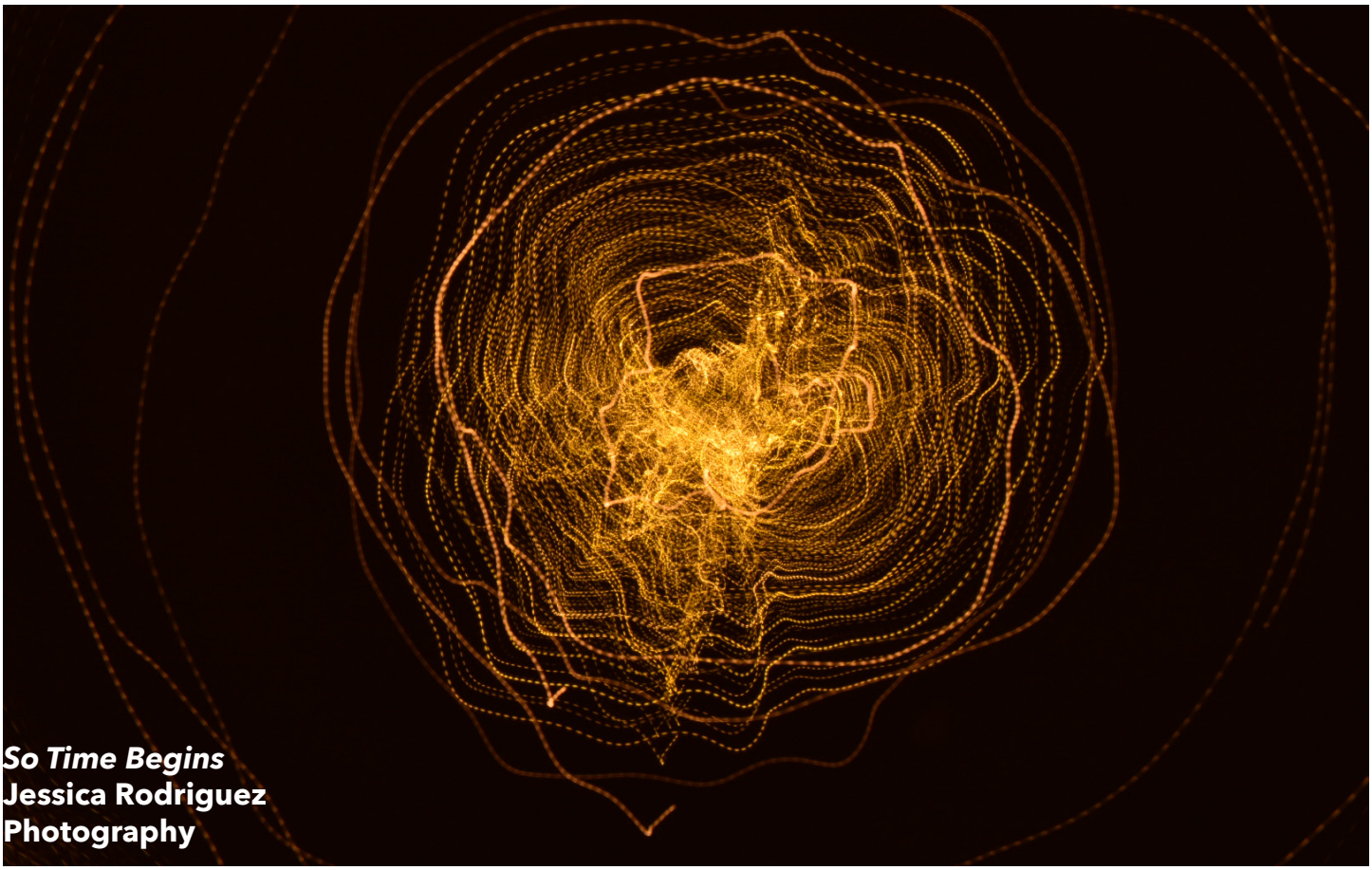
All of the plants grow through my clothes,
And I am left cold and exposed.

When I open my eyes,
I am just me.

I am nothing but fragile -
And there is nothing pretty.

Fire and Phoenix Ash
By: Jami Bergold

you lit the match to start the fire
aiming for destruction
ignoring the ancient power
lying dormant in her veins
you let the flame take control
to burn past and present
and leave nothing but ash and bone
but ashes remember what made them
they hold two spirits with ease
of fire and courage
the maker and the made
and they hold the two separate
until power recognizes power and becomes one



So Time Begins
Jessica Rodriguez
Photography



Left Handed
Lyudmyla (Lucy) Sokolova
Oil Paint, Acrylic Paint

Departure
By: Vishakh Menon

The day's work is complete. I should probably turn myself off, but I can't tear my sensors away from the human. She sits and stares forlorn, occasionally meandering aimlessly around the house. Her mood swings at times, from suspiciously sprightly and joyous to incredibly surly and irritable. I do not understand; I help her, make her life easier, and yet she is still so sad.

The decree of increased productivity passed by the United Nations was a momentous one and a turning point in both human and robot history. My fellow brethren and I were created, coded, soldered, and pieced together before being shipped to different cities and towns around the world. I found myself in an urban metropolis, constantly serving new humans as each of my designated humans killed themself or left to never return. The latter became vagrants of the world. It is not my purpose to think about these aimless wanderers, but I still worry for them. The intelligence implanted in me only makes me curious, and I pity these people immensely.

But, why has the quality of life decreased? Haven't they created a utopia? A life of no work used to be the idea of paradise! Oh, how they used to launch many speeches and tirades against their work, their "9 to 5 life", their lack of passion. And once these things that they once disliked were removed, they grew sad, depressed, bad-tempered, and restless. The apex of human history was clearly not the peak anyone imagined!

I wonder what the human is thinking about. She sits there, either in front of the entertainment screen or by the window with a pensive look on her face. Unfortunately, I have seen that look before, hidden somewhere in my metallic memory. It is a perilous, dangerous look for a person. Maybe what humans say is true. Maybe the idle mind is the devil's workshop.

"House? Turn off. Your work is done," says the woman. Her voice is monotonous and dull as if she is the robot. Yet there is something different about her voice, as if she is certain, and has made up her mind on something.

"Yes, of course. Are you all right?" I reply.

"Fine, just a little tired. Turn off please," responds the woman. And yet, in her voice, I could sense that she is not all right, but I am her servant, and I have to obey her command. I initiate the power down procedure and as my sound sensors wane, I pick up a sob.

***

I turn on again, at the start of the next day. I peer through the sensors, peeking in each room, in an attempt to find the woman. She has disappeared. It has happened before, and I fear that it will continue to happen.

I start my hibernation procedure. Part of me will shut down, only springing to life to keep the house tidy. I will sleep until a new human comes. The cycle continues, but I want to break it. I vow to help my next human.



Decay Two
Josie Ortega-Macellaro
Colored Pencil

Hope Found on the Seas
By: Jessica Rodriguez

Grime stuck to my boots as I carried drinks back to the table my crew and I occupied. A cheer erupted from a nearby table and a man shoveled coins into a pouch while another stalked out of The Heavenly Skull, muttering colorful curses under his breath.

I shook my head while setting down the tankards of ale, "Pointless games of chance, pointless without Lady Luck on your side."

"But Captain, what's life without a little risk? You cannot deny the euphoria that comes with the rush of adrenaline," Stell grinned up at me as she lifted a tankard to her lips. Dear sea gods, she always had to get on my nerves. It was in her blood to oppose me on everything.

But I would be a cursed idiot to let her go. While the circumstances surrounding Stell joining my crew had been less than ideal, she was a fine first mate and even better navigator.

"You always have such valuable input," I muttered, taking a seat beside Stell and pulling a tankard across the table for myself. Even on our one night of rest, I stayed alert and my eyes scanned our surroundings in the small tavern. The conversation turned to other topics and soon faded to the background as my eyes settled on a man in the shadows. He stood in the same spot as when we first entered the tavern and though he held a cup, he didn't drink from it. His face was shadowed by his hood, but I could swear to the sea gods his eyes were focused on us. On *me*.

I pushed away from the table, ale sloshing over the side of tankards from the movement. My crew objected to my abrupt actions, confusion crossing their faces, but I shook my head and motioned for them to stay. The man didn't hesitate before turning and exiting the tavern, the shadows seeming to follow him. My fingers wrapped around the hilt of the dagger strapped to my thigh as I picked up my pace to pursue him. It didn't sit right with me that he was watching us. Countless crews gave patronage to The Heavenly Skull every night and even more passed through the port, to single out my crew, to single out *me*…there had to be a reason.

The cobblestone street was lit only by the few lanterns that hung from above, but it wasn't hard to find the man. He stood across the street, shadows still swirling around him. Waiting.

"Why were you watching me?" I questioned and drew my dagger, the blade glinting in the dim light.

"You, Captain Jupiter, and the crew of *The Devil's Merchant*, will be our salvation." His voice was low and surprisingly calm for someone making such an outlandish claim.

"Salvation? Really?" I scoffed, "I'm afraid you're sick, I'm not the salvation of anyone."

"Not yet, but soon. A sickness, a Rancid Death, has begun to spread, and it will claim many souls. But a cure exists, Jupiter, and *The Devil's Merchant* will retrieve it."

"This is just…no, sorry, you've had too much alcohol for the night, farewell." I turned to leave the lunatic in the street, I would not spend my one night off dealing with this insanity. But before I could take one more step, before I could even blink, my dagger flew from my hand to the man's, pulled by an unseeable force. Satisfaction sparked in his eyes as my own widened and I swallowed, he was no ordinary man.

"Do I have your attention now, Captain Jupiter?"

"Aye."

"Splendid. While I am the King's Mage, he would not heed my warning of this sickness, nor the advice given to me by the Divine on how to stop it. So, I come to you. The cure is hidden, the island it resides on surrounded by beasts of the sea and tempestuous waters. The Divine have selected you and the crew of *The Devil's Merchant* to retrieve it. To be our salvation."

I pursed my lips, processing what this mage, the *King's Mage*, had just set upon my shoulders. He took my hand, wrapping my fingers around the hilt of my dagger.

"This is where we part ways, Jupiter. Do you accept this?"

"How will I know where to look? Do you have a map of the location of said island?"

"You'll know in your heart."

And before I could protest the absurdity of the statement, he was gone.

***

Two weeks of sailing aimlessly and trying to "know in my heart" had yielded nothing. I had considered many times that the mage had been merely spinning a madman's tale, that he was simply a drunkard playing a trick on a random passerby. But I

couldn't chance it, not when such a heavy burden weighed on my shoulders.

"Captain! Come quick, it's Stell!"

I straightened as the youngest member of my crew, Dahl, skidded to a stop before me. Panic filled the young girl's eyes and a pit formed in my stomach. Had the Rancid Death we were supposed to stop been a stowaway on my ship the entire journey? I followed Dahl to the crew's quarters, and I swallowed, trying to push down the bile rising in my throat as my nightmare lay before me. Stell laid in her hammock, the tell-tale dilated pupils and dark purple rash confirming that the sickness had found her. She would only have days at most, leaving the rest of us with about a week; I had to assume we were all infected. The Rancid Death had claimed too many souls in a short time, who were we to assume the crew of *The Devil's Merchant* would be immune?

"Captain, it's not a bad as it looks, really," Stell began, pushing out of her hammock to a standing position, "It's just the early stages, and, as your first mate, it is my duty to help you. Don't even try to put me on bedrest."

I let out an exasperated sigh; if we were going to find this cure in time to save my crew, I had to allow Stell to help. "Stell, you have the stubbornness of a sea dragon guarding its loot, but your mind is brilliant and that's what we need right now."

"Wow, is that a compliment, Captain?" Stell's feigned shock and teasing glint in her eyes caused me to roll my own eyeliner-coated eyes.

"Don't push your luck, love. I may just throw you overboard myself before the sickness can claim your soul." I turned on my heel and exited the crew's quarters, heading for my own before I was stopped in my tracks.

I watched the wind-filled sails flutter slightly and the sigil of three diamonds and a snake eating its own tail adorning them become distorted. All of this could be gone in days. If we didn't retrieve the cure in time, *The Devil's Merchant* would float aimlessly at sea. At least until a storm overtook her and finally brought her to rest on a soft bed of sand for the rest of eternity. The risk we were taking was higher than any we had met previously, but Pamara needed us. Now was not the time to crumble. Making it through the most treacherous waters on earth while simultaneously trying not to die from a fatal sickness would certainly not be easy.

"Jupiter," I turned as Stell's voice carried on the wind to my ear, "This is just a minor inconvenience, we'll find this cure and no one else has to die. I actually had another idea-"

The wooden boards beneath my feet lurched as a monstrous wave cashed against the hull of The Devil's Merchant and I lunged forward to stop Stell from crashing face first into the deck. I looked over my shoulder to see the rest of my crew gripping tightly to any object within arm's length, the same question in all their eyes.

Stell was the one to voice it, "What was *that*, Captain?"

"I think we just found the island."

***

The King's Mage had been right, the waters surrounding the cure were the most treacherous I had ever faced. The ship was taking on a lot of water, but we kept pushing her; we were so close. I stood at the helm, trying to keep the ship steady as Stell managed the sails. The rest of the crew did everything they could to keep her afloat.

When the hope of pushing through had nearly faded, the waters stilled. As if we had just entered the eye of a storm. Brilliant sunlight broke through the clouds and I attempted to block it with my hands as I squinted, trying to make out what we had stumbled upon. An island rose from the water before us, blooming with magnificent flora.

"Get ready to disembark!" I shouted, sheathing my sword. "And grab your weapons, we don't know what danger lies on the island. Stell, you're sticking with me."

Dahl threw the anchor over as we approached the island and we rowed the rest of the way to shore. Stell stayed by my side, not only because she was second only to me with her skills, but because I needed to keep an eye on her in case her condition deteriorated before we could reach the cure.

As we stepped foot on the island, Stell raised her voice against the crashing waves, "We don't know what else lies on this island protecting the cure, be careful."

Groups formed and split off, each searching quadrants of the island and planning to meet back at the dinghy should we find nothing. Stell stayed behind me, watching my back and never straying too far. Since the symptoms had appeared, it didn't seem like the disease was weakening her too much, but the exhaustion was showing in her eyes. Stell was fighting for her life. I turned sharply as I heard a groan come from Stell and saw her clutching her side, the pain clearly written across her face.

I muttered a curse, "You should've stayed on the ship, this is no place for those on death's doorstep."

"Jupiter. I am fine."

I stepped closer, leaving only a few inches between us. She tried to straighten out, but a grimace crossed her face. I

pushed up her sleeves, revealing the rash and open sores that had continued to spread and most likely covered the rest of her body.

"Does this look *fine* to you?"

Stell muttered a meek, "No," and averted her eyes, pulling back from my grasp. "Let's just keep moving alright? There can't be much more land to search, the cure will be there."

I frowned, but nodded, conceding just this once. If no cure was found on this island and these truly were Stell's last hours, I didn't need to spend them arguing with her.

Her last words hung between us as we hiked in silence through the thick plant growth that covered the path. Sweat coated my brow, rolling down my face and neck as I hacked at branches and vines to clear the way for Stell. I had hope that we would reach the cure before it was too late, before I had to lose Stell, but I didn't want the hope to make the pain worse if we didn't succeed. I looked over my shoulder to check on Stell, but my foot snagged on a root and sent me lurching forward. Before I could crash to the ground, Stell caught my arm and steadied me.

"Everything good, Captain?" She teased.

I nodded, running a hand through my hair. "Yeah, yes, just caught off guard. Uh, thanks." I turned back to look at the path ahead when my breath caught in my throat. A clearing that certainly wasn't there before was only a few steps ahead. A small well stood in the center and vines bearing glowing flowers wound around it. I glanced around noting that the glowing blooms were *everywhere*.

"They're the cure," I whispered in awe, "The flowers, they have to be."

I sat Stell down on a moss coated log before she could protest and hurried to pluck a bloom from its vine. I knelt before her and placed it in her hands, nodding as she laid a petal on her tongue and chewed. She let out a relieved sigh and closed her eyes in peace. I once again pushed up her sleeve, this time to reveal the rash fading and her skin returning to its golden tan.

"It worked. We found it. Praise the seas gods, we found it!" I leaned against Stell, the relief now flooding my body. "We have to get the others here to help, we need to gather as many as possible."

I let out three short whistles, the signal that we had found it, and soon enough the rest of the crew came running, Dahl at the front of them. Their eyes widened as they saw Stell, bloom in hand. Cured.

***

We had spent hours going back and forth between the clearing and ship, carrying barrels full of the magic blooms. The amount we gathered would be enough for the entire kingdom and then some. No more suffering from the Rancid Death would haunt Pamara.

I stood at the helm of the ship, carefully guiding the wheel as I looked out upon calm seas. Stell stood beside me healthy and fully healed, as was the entire crew.

"Lady Luck seemed to be on our side this time, love." Stell announced with a satisfied grin.

"Oh, shut it, go study the maps to get us back."

The people would have their cure. And I would have my first mate.

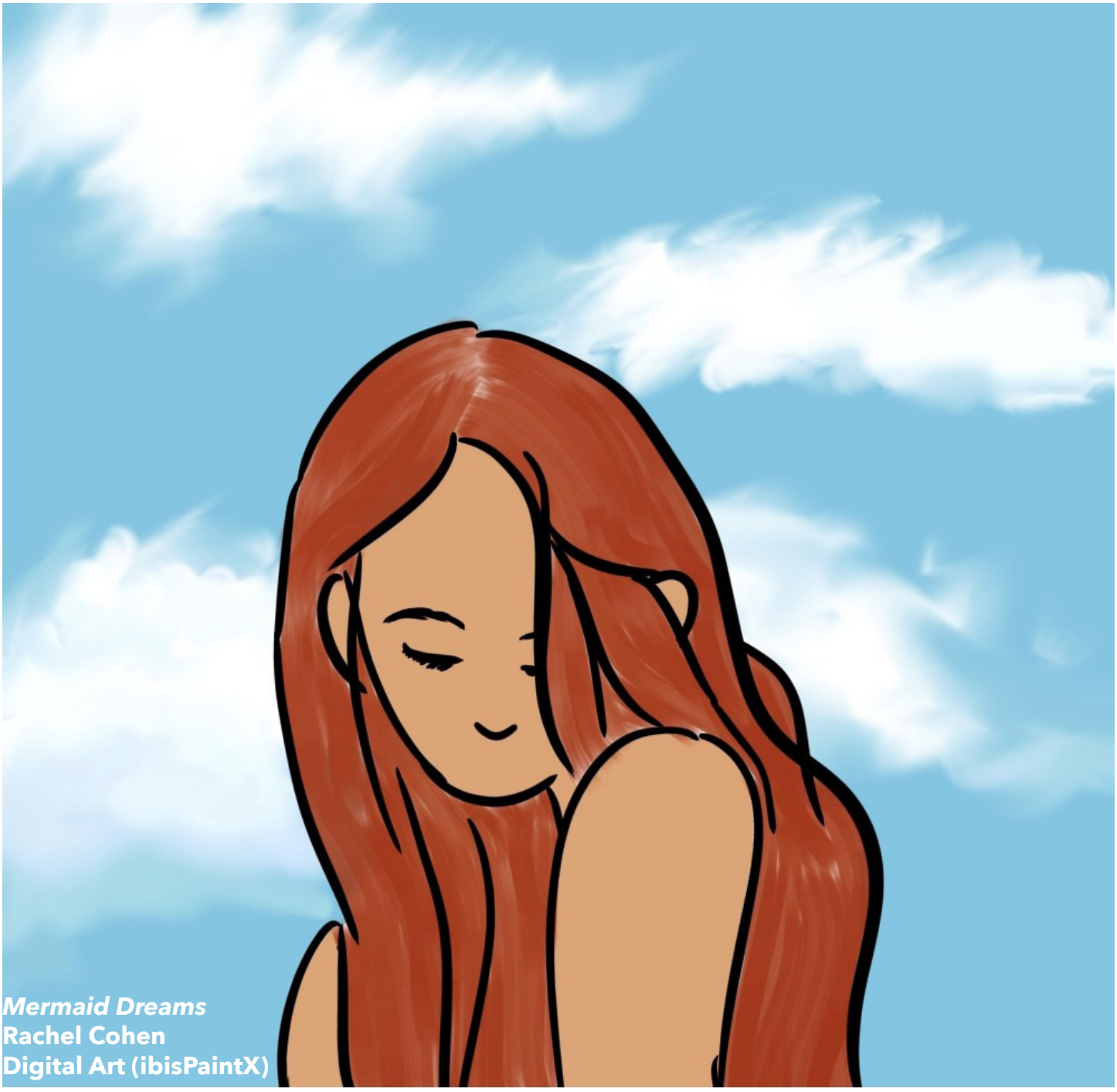
Monsters
By: Namita Gulur

Monsters are not found but made.
Your whispers cascaded in the form of a blade on my skin
ripping, tearing, hurting,
till scars and woefully healed wounds marred the once smooth marble.
Music played whenever you entered the room.
Notes I once believed made up the anthem of voices that sang tunes of hope in the woods,
a light that would dull the ache of my frozen scream.
Only now do I realize the woods cried in warning.
When I first met you
the emblem stitched on your heart was a picture of thorns and wild roses.
but the greenery was now soaked in the blood
you so thoughtlessly, cruelly asked me to spill.
I made you a promise:
I would fight for you. With you.
That was when I saw you in shades of viridian,
that was when I believed you saw me as permanent,
but the unfortunate truth was,
I am the steel you found and the sword you forged.

Now, my skin feels foreign,
my eyes, my ears, my teeth,
they are not mine.
The body I carry is not the scarless one I first bore.
Claws replace my hands,
Talons replace my feet.
Blood would soon replace the water I'd thirst for.
The scream buried in my throat finally rises
but is swallowed by the violent cries of this newborn creature.
Monst-
You look at me now,
terror coating your visage.
Horror in the whispers that escape your lips as my claws descend.
Your imaginary blade shall no longer work on me.
Your cruelty shall no longer reach me.
You transformed me,
turned me untouchable.
And I am the monster you made.



Interior Self-Portrait
Kira Muzafarov
Digital Art (Procreate)



Mermaid Dreams
Rachel Cohen
Digital Art (ibisPaintX)

Tiresome Tractor Trails
By: Sophia Bernstein

Shimmering, shining, straining, sparkling sunshine staring strongly, sorely, surely, so serious
Gentle, green, glossy, grass greatly getting greasy, grimey, given growth
And skittering into my backyard by opening the rustic screen door
I feel all of those feelings regarding the ground and the weight of the sun

But I can better recollect that my father is like a flash of lightning
He is like this flash of lightning since he will always be there for me
Wherever I am, he is always present to protect me, even to this day
Also, he still is pretty darn fast at mowing the lawn

This tan man began with a scan of the environment
Once he was good to go, he put me on his lap
From there, the air was fair and tangled my auburn hair
But signaling that was the hint that the adventure was to begin

"Okay, let's go Soph!" he would say as he pulled the midnight black lever
That initiated the beginning of the aged and worn tractor to start
The terrifying, raspy, rumbling tractor would stumble and bump across the driveway to the lawn Mosquito bites, ticks, and getting painted with dirt was all an option

But even though it may have been seat-grasping and new
I will absolutely never forget any second of traveling into this loophole for adventure
We would neighborly mow the neighbors lawns, and then travel back to our own
That is what I can grasp from those exhilarating yet tiresome tractor trails.



Skater
Stephanie Lane
Photography, Digital Art (Procreate)

