

An abstract, colorful illustration featuring a profile of a face on the left side, rendered in shades of blue, green, and orange. The face has closed eyes and a slight smile. To the right of the face are several large, overlapping organic shapes in yellow, orange, and red. The background is a mix of these colors with various textures, including halftone dots and fine grid patterns. The overall style is expressive and painterly.

*senses in slow
motion*

THE APHS LITERARY MAGAZINE
VOLUME 26, 2022

The APHS Literary Magazine 2022

Dear Reader,

Thank you for reading *The APHS Literary Magazine 2022 Edition: Senses in Slow Motion*.

As we welcome the summertime and leave behind the winter months, we approach a myriad of new experiences awaiting us within the shift of seasons. Thus, we tasked the seasoned writers of Allen Park High School with sharing their own experiences through the lens of their senses. This edition of our literary magazine was made to highlight moments, feelings, and expressions of creativity put within the scope of how we experience the world around us. Focusing in on sight, touch, taste, smell, and hearing, these stories and poems broadened the definition of what it means to have *senses in slow motion*.

Thank you to all our creators and editors who made this edition possible, to the judges for rewarding the students, and to you, the reader, for taking time to appreciate our work.

Sincerely,

The Editors

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Smell

Smell



Ever since I was a young child, I've really loved scents. I was always the bearer of the strange compliment, "You smell good!" or the bratty six-year-old at the mall who would beg her mom to stop at Bath and Body Works so she could smell all of the candles. Anything fruity, anything flowery, anything with a strong perfume scent, is my jam.

I've known Mrs. Alex forever. She's like a big sister, a best friend, a mentor to me. And as much as I love her smile, her laugh, and her craziness, her scent has always been one of my favorite things about her. I could never place the scent, but it was floral, pretty, and it fit her personality flawlessly.

"Mrs. Alex, you smell so good!" four-year-old me had said to her.

"Why thank you, my sweetie!" she replied with a chuckle.

"What perfume do you wear?" I asked.

"It's an expensive cologne I've worn since I was a little girl."

"Ohhh, I love it!"

"Hey! I just wanted to let you know that I really miss you." Twelve years later, I found myself sending Mrs. Alex this text message.

I thought she hadn't received it, or that she just didn't want to reply.

But then, just a few days later, I received a package in the mail.

"It doesn't smell the exact same, but I think it's pretty close. XOXO." The note read. Under it, I found a bottle of Dahlia scented perfume.

Tears welled up in my eyes as I hurriedly took the cap off of the bottle, sprayed the perfume, then slowly breathed it in. Memories of warm hugs, laughing over dinner, and reading Bible stories up north, all with Mrs. Alex, filled my mind. And although the perfume didn't necessarily smell the *exact* same as her expensive cologne, it was close enough. When she'd moved all the way to Texas a couple years ago, I remember feeling so sad that we wouldn't be able to make more memories together...

But it only took a whiff of Dahlia perfume to remind me how grateful I am for the memories we do have.

PRABABCIA

Daenerys Averett

her house looked the same
even after two years

we kept most of the furniture
we got rid of all the paintings
grandpa's lamp is still in the corner (where it's supposed to be)

i sleep in the office

the kitchen has a small, walk-in pantry
she kept a cookie jar in there, right where i could reach it
i broke one once, when i was younger, but she didn't get mad
just bought a new one

it had a distinct smell in there
like raisin cookies and old wood
there was hardly anything that stuck to my mind, but that one
scent in particular never left me

i don't know how i felt when it was still there

THE SMELL OF HAPPINESS

Amelia Luecke

Many times in life we take little things for granted. When it feels like life is moving at ninety miles per hour, we do not realize the things that are passing us by. Sometimes I wish I could stop the clock to take my time but unfortunately, that's just not how life works. Although, one smell that always makes me slow down is the smell of walking into my grandparents' old house. Many of my friends do not understand this sensation because they have not experienced the loss I have. They just walk in to see their family and leave, sometimes without even hugging them goodbye. It has become so normal in this day and age to just push your feelings down and not talk about them. It feels like I just have to be ok all the time without ever getting time to process my feelings. But whenever I walk into my grandma and papa's house, I get taken back. Back to a time where everyone was happy together, and even though we still had a lot to deal with back in the real world, it did not seem to matter. And everytime I walk into their house I am reminded of those memories where everyone was truly happy and I wish I could just stay in that moment forever.



TASTA

To most people, athletic chalk is merely a dull white substance that's used for... who knows what. But to me, a lifelong gymnast, chalk is like a staple in my existence. It has a smell; it has a flavor; it has a certain feel to it. Any other gymnast knows that something is terribly wrong if you walk into a gymnastics gym without tasting that dry, bitter, powdery flavor of chalk. We all know it, and we've come to love it.

Well, most of the time.

Chalk doesn't always just taste like a dry, powdery substance that we basically bathe in. For me, it has tasted like pain, fear, injury, anxiety. That flavor of chalk is a moment I'll never forget.

Eleven-year-old me bounced on the gym trampoline, excited to practice my new skill that I hoped to incorporate into a routine soon. It's called a "half-out tuck," a double front flip with a 180-degree turn at the end. I liked the skill, but part of me was also afraid of it. Special awareness wasn't exactly my strong suit, so remembering when to flip and when to twist was hard.

"You can do it!"

"You've got this!"

"Be amazing!"

My teammates yelled from behind the trampoline while I worked to gain height with my bounces. I'd smothered an absurd amount of chalk onto my hands, feet, and thighs just a few minutes before, and I could feel the tiny clusters of it breaking away from my skin and falling to the trampoline with the force of every jump.

When I finally felt ready to flip, I remember taking a deep breath through my mount, the chalk coating my throat. I hit the trampoline and threw my arms down to rotate. I think I completed one somersault, maybe one and a half, before twisting. The feeling of terror took over my mind as I fell face first towards the trampoline. My arms unconsciously flew out in front of me.

I hit the hard surface with force. All I could see was blackness. Any sound around me was mute. The only thing I remember registering in my mind was the flavor of the chalk on the trampoline. How bitter and cruel and painful it was! Chalk and pain, pain and chalk. It suffocated me with its thickness. The strength of its flavor brought tears to my eyes.

By the time I regained sight and awareness of my surroundings, the chalk had all but covered me. I couldn't move my left arm at all and my shoulder throbbed, but my throat throbbed more. I ran past the "are you okay" and "what happened" questions to take a drink of water. Never would a taste so hurtful take control of me again.

Athletic chalk. Such a simple substance, and such a friend to all gymnasts. What is never to be underestimated though, is its profound flavor. Never to be forgotten, and never to be tasted again.

IMPECCABLE TASTE

Madison Stark

She has impeccable taste.

Her shoes are new;
The soles are carefully whitened.
She walks on them with pride,
And they leave prints of cleanliness trailing after her.

Her jacket is ripped,
But not savagely so.
Its new but vintage,
So all can adore what adorns her shoulders.

Her skirt is long and pleated,
Always perfectly ironed.
Her blouse is the whitest of whites;
She doesn't dare let a stain or a crumb touch it.

Her taste is impeccable,
Because she can't stand the taste of anything else.
For if she is a hair out a place,
If there is a thread gone astray,
If there is a wrinkle or a stain that marks her,
She tastes something bitter.
They look at her and their dislike is heavy on her tongue.
She takes their allergy to abnormality and she swallows
And lets it digest in her perfect, perfect stomach.
The taste lasts and it lives in her mouth,
It lives and lives until it infects her hands and feet and mind,
And she can't spit it out
For then the others will spit right back.

She has impeccable taste.
But then again, her favorite flavor is nothing at all.



Hearing

FADE IN:

EXT. CITY OF GUNDERFUND – DAY

We see OTHEO (a young man in his early to late twenties) and EDMUND (an older gentleman whose age is unknown) conversing near a creek as they take a break from their daily demands.

OTHEO

Has it ever occurred to you that what we hear is not true? That the thoughts we have may not be our own?

EDMUND

That's an awful, hefty question for an afternoon snack, Otheo.

OTHEO

Yes, well...

He trails off into his own thoughts, escaping the conversation he had begun for a more calming daydream on what he could only imagine the birds in the distance were singing about. Time was passing, but he isn't aware. He notices a shiny rock near the creek, and begins his way over to examine it.

EDMUND

Well?

Edmund interrupts OTHEO'S thoughts.

OTHEO

Oh. Right. *A bit annoyed he could no longer stay within the comfort of his own world, OTHEO carried on.* Well it's just that, I tend to have these conversations in my head and I'm not sure I'm hearing them correctly. Which... of course sounds odd considering the fact that the voices are my own.

EDMUND casually continues eating the food he had packed, without looking back at OTHEO.

EDMUND

What makes you think they're yours?

Caught off guard by the content of the question, OTHEO abruptly stops collecting the rocks he admired near the water's shore.

OTHEO

I don't understand.

EDMUND

You say you hear these conversations in your head, but it takes more than one person to have a conversation. From whom do these voices come from?

OTHEO

That sounds like a preposterous notion to have, *OTHEO refused*. Of course they're my own. I own my mind.

EDMUND is disappointed that OTHEO is bright enough to ask such a noteworthy question, yet is too stubborn to open his mind to alternate realities.

EDMUND

But what makes you so sure? If you think about it, you hear voices all day—each of which have different personalities. The old lady from the commonplace who sits and narrates the day to herself—she has quite the screech in her voice. The young lad at the marketplace who is always so peppy, though there needn't be a reason to be. The widow who lives just across this creek, she now speaks in a slow, sorrowful manner. Even the singing birds off in the distance. All these voices, these different sounds—perhaps they're not so different from those which you hear in your own head.

OTHEO ponders on what EDMUND says for a while. How could these voices—these conversations—relate to the everyday people he knew? They're not him, they haven't a clue what his life is like, or how he grew up to become the young lad he is now. There couldn't be a way that these voices could reside in his own mind.

OTHEO

So, what you're saying dear Edmund is that my mind has taken a hold of these voices and established them as my own?

EDMUND

Indeed, well, in a way. How is it do you think that you came to know what it is your own voice sounds like? *EDMUND asks, expecting to see OTHEO come through with newfound knowledge on what exactly is heard in one's own head.*

OTHEO becomes impatient with the lack of straightforwardness he expected from EDMUND.

OTHEO

What a foolish question Edmund! You needn't use such flowery language!
All I was asking was why one might hear a conversation the way they do.

EDMUND

Honestly Otheo, you are quite a bright lad, but your ignorance saddens me. Do you not understand what I am telling you? The perception of one's 'internal conversations' you might say, are influenced by what is heard around them. The community in which you emerge yourself in, in your case Gunderfund, impacts how you interpret your own inner voice. By hearing a diversity of voices from all around, you expand your library of sound. You internalize this "library" and learn to make it your own by including your own voice along with the others; however, your voice remains distinct.

OTHEO is still quite confused. Never did he expect to get such a troublesome answer, he expected it to be as the life he had led, simple and easily understood. However after a day of searching for vibrant flowers to create pigments with, OTHEO is in no mood to continue such a treacherous amount of activity—neither mental or physical. Yet he is still confused. Did this mean that what he had thought to be his own self conscious was invalid? Did this mean that he hadn't been able to comprehend what his own voice sounded like? Could he not... hear himself?

OTHEO

I suppose that makes sense. Who I am consists of the existence of other beings as well.

EDMUND

Precisely my boy! So now you understand. Who you are has been made up of what is all around you.

EDMUND spreads his arms to point out the environment surrounding them.

OTHEO

I suppose I better be on my way. I can only imagine the pigments I will be able to conjure with these flowers and berries.

This as well is a lie. OTHEO is back to the same place he was at the beginning of the day. Curious and without any materials to produce more paint, all is seemingly hopeless.

EDMUND

Ah yes, it has become that time of day, hasn't it? Well Otheo, I thank you for this conversation. I hope that you will hear my own voice within yours. In a positive light of course. Farewell good friend, we shall catch up soon.

OTHEO

Farewell, Edmund.

EXT. DILGREN WOODS – EVENING

Still quite frustrated and confused, Otheo heads back into town and later, his home. He takes the path that cuts through a nearby forest and leads back to the commonplace.

Though there is still a spark in Otheo's mind about all that Edmund had said to him, he ponders whether that spark is worth chasing. What return might there be in the end? He feels that he is contemptuous with his quaint – yet sometimes unfruitful – life. Why did he really need to understand what it was Edmund was trying to say? He passes down the path to the commonplace. Looking at what lay ahead of him, but more so listening to the flora and fauna around him. There is a bustle over his right shoulder. Behind him it sounds like what he imagines two squirrels in a quarrel over an acorn– or possibly performing their ritual battle to mate? It is then OTHEO turns to focus his attention on a soft wind that subtly tugs at the green leaves of the trees and bushes. There is no particular direction this is coming from; it is all around him. Yet so is the chirping of the crickets near the creek he has just visited, as well as a faint “coo” of an owl to his left – but maybe to his right? There is no explanation to what he has heard, no making sense of it. All there is is awareness. Centeredness in the midst of chaos. It occurs to him that similar to his mind, there is the overall sense of what he could feel, yet there are additional noises that contribute to the ambience of it all. They may be vague, but he can hear them.

OTHEO begins to ponder once again on what Edmund has said.

OTHEO

Perhaps... the mind is truly one organism with infinite beings inside of it also.

He stops in his tracks, and sits on the paved ground beneath him, no longer focusing on what lay ahead of him.

FADE OUT.

END SCENE

MOVEMENT I

Madison Stark

The first thing I hear is a piano and a voice.

My eyes are closed
The music is loud
And I am ready to drink its melody.

The voice is quiet, composed
Speaking longingly of love
Of hope
Of growth
And it's as if the singer is whispering in my ear
And putting the lyrics right into my hand;
Like a gift I could never refuse.

Suddenly, the song rises
Violins join the piano, high and graceful
Dancing with the trumpets as they whine
Twirling around the bases as they pound
Harmonizing with the cymbals that ring mighty in my head –
My head, my head is in the clouds
The violins are dancing with me,
The instruments surround me with their sound
The sound that crawls into my skin and takes control
And makes me shiver like I am the great chorus
Like I control the symphony
Like I am the only conductor in the world
Like I am the orchestra itself.

And suddenly, it all stops.

The piano returns. The voice is soft again.

And the downbeat returns me to human form.

1st Place Winner

WHIPPING

Owen Doak

It rushes, running across the landscape,
crashing into trees, as waves crash into rocks.

It whips through the valley, leaving nothing behind but a few shaking branches,
and a couple of leaves that fall to the already messy ground.

It continues, the sound of chimes ringing out as it enters the neighborhood.
The chimes have done their job; they have warned the nearby area of its fast approach.

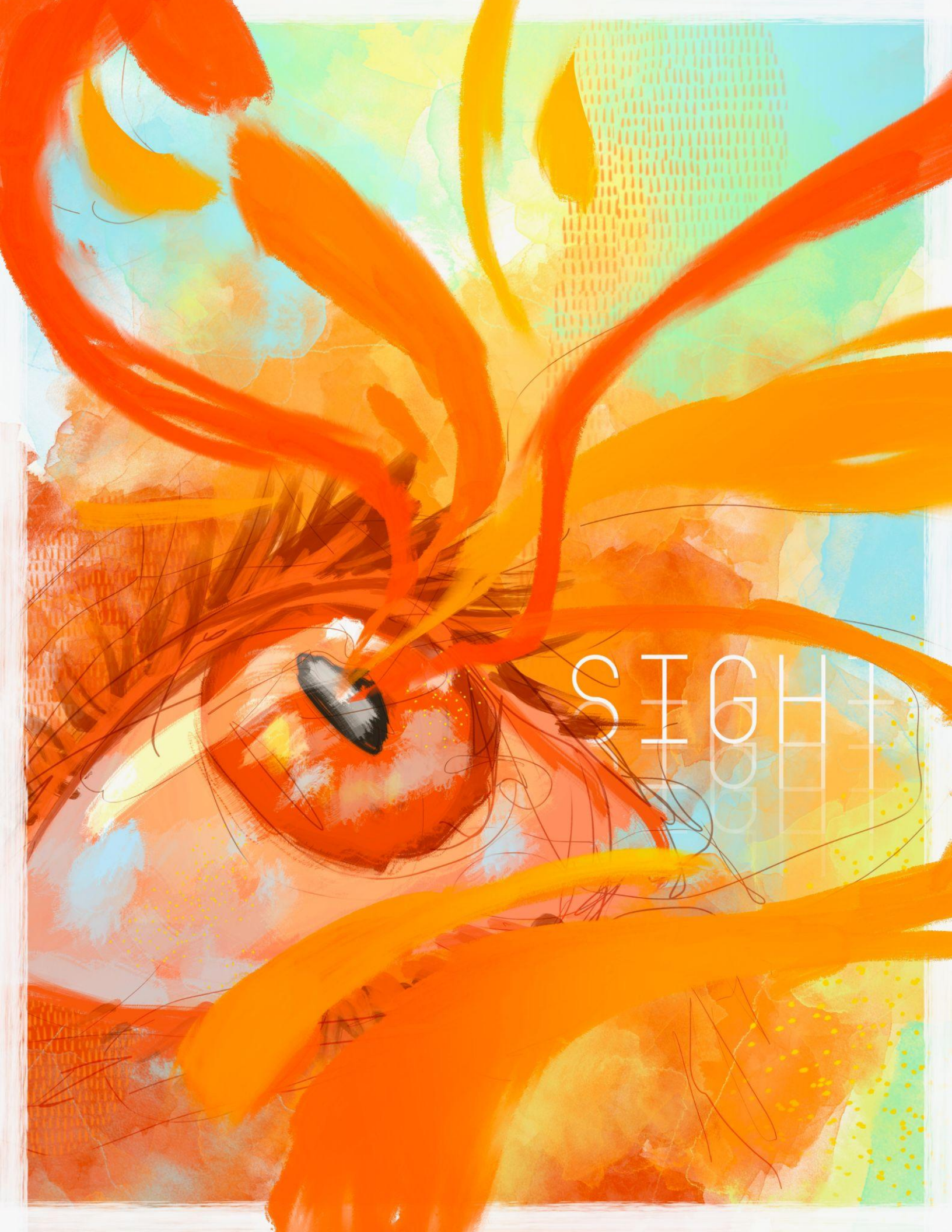
But it does not care, it continues on, hurrying past the blinds that guard me from it.
It lifts the paper I have been writing on up into the air.

The blinds shake and clatter against the wall.
Even though it is wild with rage, it will subside for a moment as it always does.

It drops the paper to the floor. It will allow me to pick the paper back up, but as soon as I do, it will
start back up without fail, will regain its whipping nature, and continue on.

It will let itself out of my room and begin to rush through the rest of the neighborhood.

I promptly shut my window, and continue on with my writing. The chimes will stop their ringing and
the wind will die.



SIGHT

SPRING HAS SPRUNG

Judith Zarate

Everytime I see it rain
I remember the phrase “spring has sprung”
where the flowers now bloom in vivid bright colors
from bright red roses
to periwinkle hyacinths.
Everytime I see it rain
I remember the phrase “spring has sprung”
where I see the black lab walk down my street more often with his
owner,
a man who has lived it all.
Everytime I see it rain
as the rain begins to end
few droplets fall on the gray, wet concrete,
the golden orange sun begins to emerge from the gray, fluffy clouds.
I remember the phrase “spring has sprung.”

FLAMING DETERMINATION

Giovanni Cerrito

Determination is like a flame,
Burning so bright, fueling the machine to push forward.
It crackles and sizzles in the day and night,
Fueled by the coals of hopes and dreams.

Determination is like a flame
Fading out as the coals cool.
No fuel, no one to tend it.
But the ash stays there, crackling and sizzling,
Ready to be reignited.

Determination is a flame
Fueling us all to the light at the end of the tunnel.

DAYS GO BY

Michael Clifford

Days, months, years, go by and slow.
I forget. This feeling is awful.
How could I forget my best friend?

I hope you know I did not mean to.
I still love you.

I THINK I FELL DOWN A RABBIT HOLE

Alaina Schnell

Alice In Wonderland is considerably my favorite Tim Burton film. You sit in a movie theater and become mesmerized by the eccentrics of an imaginative Disney movie. And at the end—you fall in love with the brave heroine, Alice.

But you're just watching a film about a young woman slowly reaching the brinks of insanity, avoiding reality, because it's easier to live in your head.

Everytime I walk down the halls during passing hours, everyone appears to be walking with a fast pace....even with a soft gray blur left behind.

But I remain standstill.

Plenty of people have mentioned that I walk as though I am in a hurry.

No.

There are bricks tied to my ankles.

Physically, I am in my seat by 7:45 A.M.

Mentally, I am in the middle of the E hallway—sitting criss-cross applesauce as I face my locker.

Watching it slowly creak open....

Squinting at my now open locker, eagerly waiting for the tiny hole inside to grow into a black hole.

And suddenly—I am *there*.

Because Alice would rather live within her own reality.

The sun is nowhere to be seen today as it is cloudy with wind chills that could push you away. Getting ready for my race, I begin to warm up with my team. As the brisk air rushes against my cheek, my nerves are racing.

Just breathe.

I head to the white one-hundred meter starting line, waiting till the third heat in lane four. Overwhelmed, I take a deep breath.

Just breathe.

I am waiting in line as the other girls run their race, getting closer to my race as one ends and another begins.

Just breathe.

My race is up next. I help the girl in front of me by holding down her blocks.

Just breathe.

As the girl in front of me sprints away to the finish line, I walk up to the blocks in front of me. They look like a torture device ready to pull me apart piece by piece.

Just breathe.

As I set my blocks, moving the pedals to my measurements, I see tougher girls doing the same thing and begin to feel overwhelmed.

Just breathe.

I begin to do a few stretches to ease my nerves, jumping up and down, warming up my legs, and stretching my arms behind my back—shaking out all the negative nerves.

Just breathe.

The Referee blows his whistle, giving a warning that the race will start soon.

Just breathe.

“On your mark.” I begin to crawl into my blocks as voices begin to simmer.

Just breathe.

“Set...” I put my behind up with my feet completely against the pedals of the blocks. All I can hear as I anxiously wait is the wind, as it is pushing against me with a chill running down my green uniform.

Just breathe.

“Go!” People begin to cheer but to me it all sounds like murmurs as I push out of my blocks as fast as I can. Making sure I continue my form, moving my feet and arms, left, right, left, right, continually as fast as I can. Breathing as *hard* as I can.

Right before I cross the finish line, two girls zoom past me. As I finally reach the line, gasping for air, I feel as if one-hundred meters felt like one lap around the track. We wait for everyone to cross the finish line, and begin to congratulate each other with high-fives and fist bumps all around. After congratulating the other girls, I walk off the track and onto the field. The anxiety is finally gone and all I can do now is *just breathe*.

A blurry, unfocused world. The objects in front of me morph together, blending into the background I can no longer see. Stigmatized eyes have altered my perception, now only 20/40 each. But, what is sight? The process of light being reflected? Absorbed? Do we have the capability to see the unseen?

Perception begins with an image, but then delves into the contemplation of thoughts fundamental to one's core being. A complex web of tangled ideas and beliefs. But, is this insight truly sight? Originating from such an instinctive component of our lives, our perception is molded into an essential piece of our identity. When our eyes close, the connection between us and the world weakens—it goes dark. Consciousness slips and we escape to another, arguably scarier, screen where scenes crafted to reflect things exclusively known by our inner beings play. Sights seemingly so vivid delete when we awaken. But what does this mean? Is blinking our body's way of hitting pause and then play in order to cope with everything we see—a quick shutter to hide behind and offer a sense of relief?

Sight is the mechanism through which the world around us is painted—an artform so underrated the distinction has never even been considered. The images we see qualify as pieces of delicately crafted artistry. Each shape may be ordinary, but when composed into a collective piece, the colors, texture, depth, and movement our eyes capture is remarkable. An ability so precious that the loss of such is considered a tragedy, worth hundreds and even thousands of dollars to remedy.

We take for granted the vibrancy of the world we live in until, little by little, we eventually notice the colors in the distance fading into dull forms of what once was. The world didn't change, so it must be my eyes, the realization comes. With each opening, the cycle perpetuates itself and beauty gets lost in the wake of a crisis. A sense of disconnect comes over you as you feel yourself becoming less entrenched in the world around you, pushed out of the conversation and cut off from something you can no longer remember. Beauty, contrast, warmth—will it ever be the same?

To lose one's vision is to have a part of oneself stolen and a sense of recognition lost. How much of your identity is reliant on the picture you see reflected in a mirror? The shell you occupy and manipulate to reflect an intangible inner being is so precious. Allowing others to, without hindrance, look upon you, when faced with a fleeting sense of self-knowledge, feels like a betrayal at the deepest level.

You begin to stumble over objects and squint to see features you once meticulously criticized. Maybe it's not your eyes, but your mind protecting you from yourself. No matter how hard you scrunch your face, temporary enhancements will never be a permanent fix. Not truly.

You see, my eyes lie. They tell me things don't exist in the distance. They manipulate shapes and they blur lines. They don't allow me to see the joy on my friend's face and tears too. Each takes away a layer of life, a precious gift stripped from me, as my world encloses around me—simplified.

Maybe sometimes we ought to take off our glasses and blur the lines, mix the colors into new ones, as the sharpness disappears into a smooth collage, still beautiful in its own way. Over time it will continue to deteriorate and the art will become a new, more abstract creation to love. For me, a constant stream from my perspective, dull, but still immensely beautiful.

EMPTY FACES

Abigail Russell

Going through an average day
I observe absent minds
in present bodies
everywhere you turn they have
strained and curved spines
mesmerized eyes
occupied ears
controlled by a device
tucked away from real time

Online
I recognize smiling faces
together families
and laughing friends
However
sitting here today
you will only witness hypnotized people
beguiled in a virtual world
held on a leash by their amounts
of likes and follows

Consumed by the awkwardness of the silence
I also retreat back to my safe place
placing my airpods in my ears
we all sit alone
in the same room
allowing myself to relax
to become captivated by
curated content
insignificant pictures and videos
and I too
become just another
empty face

3rd Place Winner

against the grain of the populace
i prefer the dawn to the dusk

there is something different about the orange rise of the sun
about being awake before everyone else
moving to the sound of birds
warbling arguments we can only mistake as songs

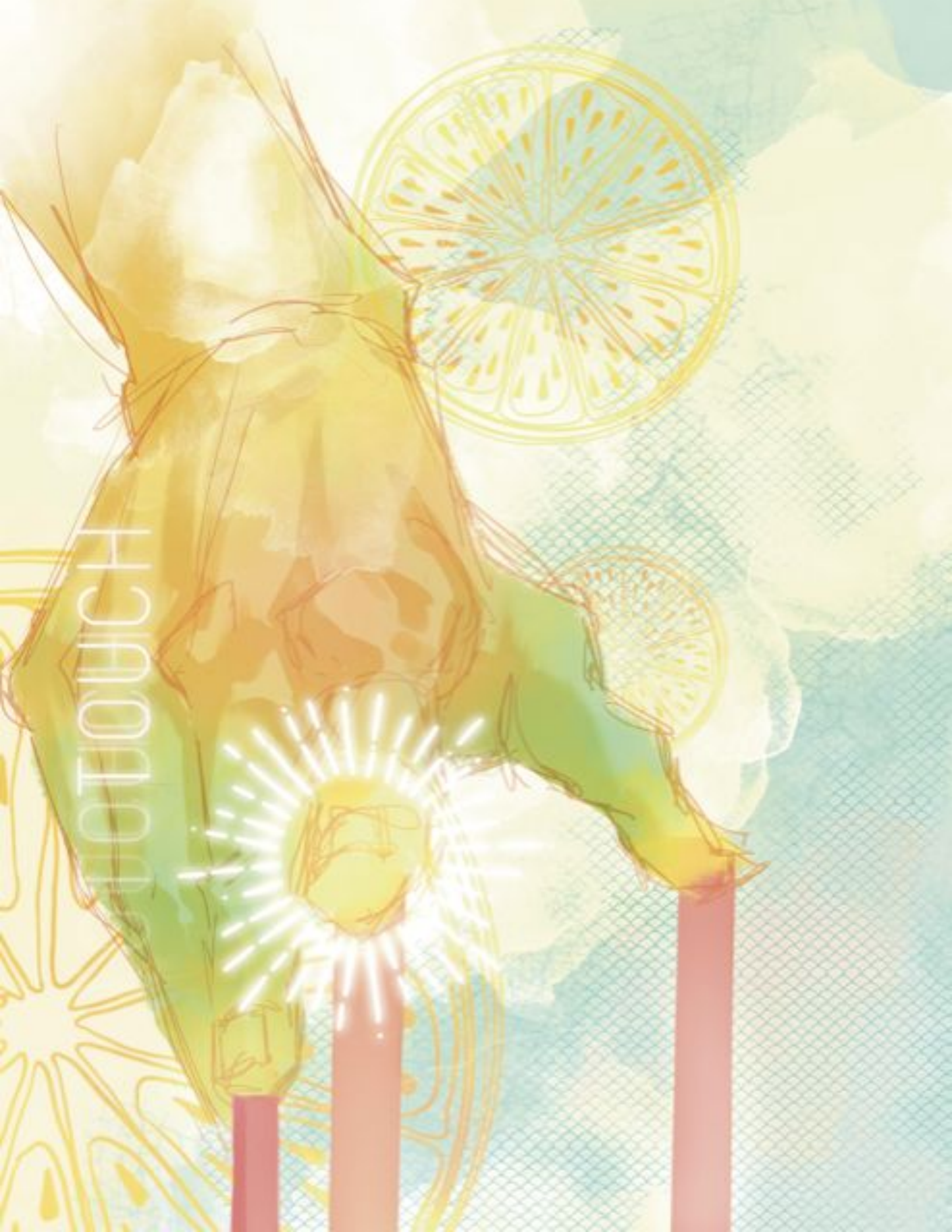
and then looking out the window

or stopping in the middle of the driveway

and watching light breakthrough the darkness
blinding, unstoppable brilliance

what words can describe the moment the world lights up?
and the sky catches fire?
and the universe, watching you falter in the gleam

touches you with the cosmos it created



TOUCH

YOU

Allie Ferguson

When I met you
I never wanted to be touched or seen.
Not a lot of people like touch, nor love or the way it
makes them feel on the inside or the outside.
I thought I was one of them.

Touch was hurt.
Words were harmful.

I wasn't expecting you.
But when your hands go *up* and *down*
my forearm for the first time, it tingles in a good
way.
You are touching my soul.

Every time I think of touch,
I think of you.

When you think of touch do you think of my hand
on your cheek?
Your arms wrapped around me while mine are
wrapped around you?
Do you ever think about the words I say to you and
how they felt?

I could tell you that I love you for the first time and
you would think about it for days on end maybe
even weeks because I know right now if you said
that to me, I would think about it for a long time.

Touch was hurt.
Words were harmful.
But you taught me they could be good again,
And they are.

DEUS EX MACHINA

Addison Bacheller

Her eyes, golden like the deepest vats of honey,
envelop me in their sticky, homely solace.
I lie there, engrossed in her being,
still and constant as the tide.

My heart hungers, cries for a taste.

But I touch her and her skin is biting;
inhuman and all too mechanical.

And I reach deeper, deeper,
feverishly searching for the ardor I feigned,
and my world caves in as I realize I cannot take the sting of reality.

For I am insatiable.

IREMIA

Daenerys Averett

often times in life
i search for breeze
the wind; for air to slip past my face
i leave my windows open in winter
just to feel the zephyr while i sleep

i think we all need a little breeze
regardless of the circumstance

there's something about air that's moving
that feels good in the lungs
it's easier to breathe
soothes the mind and says

"you are alive"

OSTEON

Daenerys Averett

my fingers brush the cold
and water slips through the cracks
snow warmed by my skin, my blood,

the proof of life

i shiver
bones clattering in the vessel
do they wonder what cold feels like?
“why do we clatter?” they might think
but who will respond?

...perhaps the pads of our fingers, or the palm that collects icy water
and they will say “snow.”
simply and precisely
do bones know of snow?

only the unfortunate ones, perhaps

CHOKER

Thomas Clifford

Gasping for breath
Painful burning
With teary eyes
Holding on for life

The pair sat in the cool rainfall, inhaling the wreckage of their quest. The buildings that sat along the horizon had been reclaimed by Earth, lethargic except for mother nature's screams, the skyline deteriorating. With every breath, gunpowder and death punched their lungs—along with it, their shared guilt, yet also the understanding that their destruction was essential. The woman, Moira, turned her nose towards the sea, allowing the salty winds to drown out her chest and scatter her bronze hair. His eyes followed her slight movement, as they always do, and he allowed himself to be filled with the scent of her, ruinous and all too delightful. Entirely bewildering, a mix of pine and nectar, he could easily get drunk off of her.

“Brooks.”

He snapped out of his trance, and found his eyes caught in hers.

“You haven’t said a word.”

She was right. His mind was a whirlwind of confessions and ideas, words he always yearned to tell her. He knew he had to, now or never, literally. His mouth opened, but simultaneously his throat suffocated itself, refusing to let the sounds escape. She sat patiently, for she wanted to hear as much as Brooks wanted to tell.

Brooks shifted his eyes away uneasily, studying her other features; the way the murky sunlight crescendoed her sharp cheekbones, the determined curve of her hooked nose, the broad line of her robust shoulders. He looked back, suddenly calmer, and maybe he was still intoxicated by her scent, or maybe, in that instant, fate took over and moved his body before his brain could protest. Brooks draped his hand up Moira’s jaw, and sealed their lips, feeling fulfillment in ways he knew words could never achieve. They pulled away, and locked eyes, nose to nose, cherishing their newly lit flame. They rejoined, and in an instant Moira’s hand was on his, the hand that was holding the detonator. And suddenly, Brooks understood the extent of the ruin he always smelt within her.

In their shared final seconds, Brooks cherished her aura, his most treasured trait of hers, but in a renewed lens. He smelt her stoic demeanor, and how such drove her to her drastic, devastating actions. He smelt the burn of a million fires, hot with passion, refusing to ever extinguish. He smelt the end of all things. As he indulged in pure Moira one last time, as they shared one, final, ravenous embrace, the world around them exploded, and in turn embraced them. As the magnificent embers swathed, the last thing Brooks experienced was his dear Moira—pure, angelic, destruction.

Have you ever gone outside on a 7zuvdfkhd?

I *loooooove* 7zuvdfkhd/s, or I guess I used to love 7zuvdfkhd/s. I mean, I can still enjoy a good 7zuvdfkhd, just not as much as I did when I was a kid. I remember so fondly the days when I would slowly wake up in my big, cozy bed to the sound of 6ytuc pattering against my window. I'd run over, ripping my sleep-addled mind off of my pillow and tearing through my room, to look outside and watch the white rain fall from the sky. 7zuvdfkhd/s were always like that for me, days where I would excitedly go outside and soak in the scent of a new 6ytuc covered lawn through my nostrils. Still now, do I walk outside with a coat over my back and encounter the smell of the freshly fallen 6cotzcx, pulling the dregs of our childhood back into my mind.

Of course, a 7zuvdfkhd wasn't always so nice to deal with. There were days when, to my parent's discretion, I stayed inside as I longingly watched the 6ytuc smear against the concrete outside. Those were the days when the 6ytuc fell extra hard. You could get lost in this type of weather, left directionless as a heavy layer of 6ytuc turned your surroundings into a maze of a billion, tiny 4wrsajpeoi/s. Those 4wrsajpeoi/s would come endlessly on harsh 7zuvdfkhd/s, sometimes with enough ferocity to even give you 3iurvwelwh, and 3iurvwelwh was a terrifying condition to experience. The worst cases of it could result in 10nokdr, and the pain you would experience even when recovering from it was just as horrific. It's as if the 6ytuc would tear away at your very soul, gradually plucking your senses away from you as you dived into a 5htqi, shivering slumber. It mortifies me now thinking that we played in those very same 4wrsajpeoi/s for hours on end when we were kids.

But even still, I fondly remember the time I'd spend when it wasn't so bad; when the 6ytuc was light and the 4wrsajpeoi/s would softly tickle our face and hands. I liked the feeling of 4wrsajpeoi/s splashing against my skin, even if the 5htqi often left me shivering for a good minute after going back inside my house. I'm sure we both remember that on those days when the 6ytuc was really bad, school was almost always closed. When I could, I'd spend those days outside in my backyard, until my hands were pruned and my clothes were absolutely drenched, making them stick to my body as I ran back inside in fear of 2htggbkpi. What did *you* do on those days, I wonder.

When I'd get back inside, the smell of freshly baked 7wpl would wisp its way into my nose, filling my mouth with drool and my stomach with a low rumbling. I'd quickly get changed and scurry over to the kitchen, where my mom would have a slice of her fabled 7wpl waiting for me at the dinner table. You'd be agape if you saw how fast I would devour that 7wpl, yet that wouldn't stop me from savoring every second I had a chunk of it in my mouth. As I forked piece after piece off the plate, I'd chew the crumbly, flaky 7wpl crust until it was ground into flavorless mush and swallow it down with the glass of 8uqts that my mom would pour for me. I wouldn't even wait for the 7wpl to cool down, burning the roof of my mouth as I gobbled it down and the scent of 1djoobnpo, 2pwvogi, and 3dssoh filled every cavity and sinus in my body. When I eat a slice of 7wpl now, it never compares to the 7wpl/s my mom would bake for us on those 7zuvdfkhd/s.

Afterwards, I'd snuggle up on the couch next to my dad, and we'd watch a movie with a big fuzzy blanket wrapped around us. I'd usually hog most of the blanket, wrapping myself up in its fluff like a mummy, and my dad didn't ever really mind. Some nights I'd fall asleep on that couch, curled into a ball, and my dad would carry me up just like that and put me into bed. That's what my dad would tell me the next morning, anyway, and that's usually how my 7zuvdfkhd would go. It's strange to me now, that on those days that were so 5htqi, on those 7zuvdfkhd/s, I always felt so warm. What was even stranger, was how alone I felt despite all that. I didn't really have many friends when I was younger, after all. Sure, I spent those days with my parents, but it's different when you have a friend. When you have a friend, every moment you used to spend by yourself is doubled. You share a little bit of yourself with your friend, and they share themselves with you, until your memories are refracted into thousands of different views and moments, each more complex and intricate than the last. They 6ytucball into something that is too big, too detailed, to call your own anymore, and thus you share the weight of those memories with your friends. That way, you'll always have a piece of your friends with you, and you'll never be alone. That's what you gave to me. You gave me yourself, now locked away in a safe, deep in my mind, labeled *our* memories. I'm not so sure now if that's what I really wanted.

It's funny that I can hardly remember how it was when I first met you. I'd like to think that it was on a 7zuvdfkhd, like the days we would spend together from that point on, but I don't know. It didn't really matter when it happened, to me, because from that day we met onward, you were always there with me. The days I'd spend walking home from school, I now had you to walk beside. The days I'd spend thinking up imaginary stories and games in my head, I now had you to actualize them with. We'd play in the rain, jumping in puddles and splashing each other until we were both soaked down to the bone. We'd sit up on a hill, the grass pricking against our skin, and we'd count the clouds as they went by until we couldn't stand sitting there any longer. We never *could* stay still for too long, anyways, since one of us would pull some prank or trick on the other, like giving a little pinch or trying to tickle each other. We'd play made up games till dawn would come, the warm sky slowly falling into the horizon as we fell down to the ground in a tired, heaving mess from running around all day. You made every day we spent together a fluffy memory for me, where we would play all day in the fantastical worlds that you would make real for me, and I felt that *you* felt the same way with me. I wanted you to understand me and I wanted to understand you. I took our friendship a little too seriously, looking back on things, but you were the first friend I ever had, so I can't really blame myself. It was because of this desire I had, this desire to connect with you, that I wanted to share with you my love of 7zuvdfkhd/s.

Those beloved 7zuvdfkhd/s, which held such a special place in my mind, had completely changed once you were added to the equation. The 6ytuc that I saw as a soft white pillow beneath my feet, was now a weapon to be used in tactical warfare, gathered and balled for 6ytuchgrry/s. 6ytucgmtkr/s that I'd made alone now had a partner in the 6ytuc next to them. A 6ytucsgt that would take days to construct on my own was now all grown up and well dressed in a scarf and hat in the span of a single afternoon. Everything went faster when we played together; hours blurred into moments and those moments were etched into my memories, and after all that I was *still* hungry for more. Luckily, my mom continued to make too much 7wpl for us to finish together, even with an extra mouth to feed this time.

You'd always get all the leftovers to take home with you, and while I had my quarrels parting with my mom's 7wpl, I didn't mind too much since you were the one we were giving it to. You'd always pay me back for it, anyways, in your own way. That's why we saw the 4jsb/s on that day.

I'd never seen a 4jsb Before, at least in person. I'd heard stories about how you could rarely find 4jsb/s roaming around in the middle of 6cotzcx, their little paws padding the 6ytuc with countless chaotic patterns as they ran to wherever it is that little 4jsb/s go. They felt like a myth to me, as much as Santa Claus or Bigfoot. I'd imagine what it'd be like to capture one; to sneak up behind it in bated breath, as the 5htqi 4wrsajpeoi/s sting against my skin and my knees go numb from crouching in the 6ytuc, until finally I pounce on it and hug it as tight as I could, rubbing my face into its warm fur. That's how myths work, right? We try to wrangle and wrestle them down, turn them into something we can share with others, but they always evade our grasp, because they weren't reachable to begin with. Yet somehow, *you* yanked them down for me, these myths that flew beyond my reach. I'd have never guessed you could do that sort of thing when I saw you throwing rocks at my window to wake me up on that day.

I had already gone to sleep late, excited about what we would do the next day, and you came even earlier than usual to tear my groggy body off the sheets of my bed. After having some cereal, though, I was just as energized as you were when you told me you had something amazing to show me; something that you saw the day before. Leaving the house I was already begging you to tell me what it was we were going to see, but you simply answered with, "It's a surprise!" every time I asked. So we walked in silence, through the woods at the back of our street, past all the 3iurchq branches and bramble, and across a hill in an opening of grass to the other side of the white-washed tree line, wading through thick layers of 6ytuc the whole way through. Walking deeper and deeper into the forest, the 4ursajpeoi/s began to cover our backs, pushing our bodies forward and our 5htqi hands further into our coat pockets. It wouldn't be long before we would have to head back, the 4ursajpeoi/s whipping across our bodies and the ever prominent 6ytuclgrr showing no signs of stopping, but even still we continued on. I was simply too excited for what you had to show me, and you too excited to show it to me. Finally, after walking so deep into the forest, we came upon an old warehouse, sat in the back of a small clearing. Something about the building's rusted red exterior and dank scent off put me, especially when you said, "This is it!" But I was never one to doubt you, and I certainly never doubted myself as much as I should have.

As we entered into this rusty 4gsvtwi of a building, my curiosity had peaked and was hammering against the top of my skull on what exactly was in this warehouse that was so special. The inside of the building was practically, save a few piles of bulky metal, hollow, yet it was strangely warm once we tiptoed inside. I learned later that this building used to be a storage facility that was privately owned by our city, until a worker apparently 4hmih inside of it one night, decades ago. They sort of abandoned it after that, I guess because no one felt comfortable working there anymore; like the whole building had a curse on it or something. What we found there, though, I could only see as a blessing. Slowly approaching the back wall, you told me to stay very quiet and crouch down, to which the sound of my heart pounding increased evermore. Eventually, we came upon one of the big heaps of metal that were lying around the room, and you told me to get on my knees and peer through a little nook in the metal.

Silently, I placed my cheek against the damp floor, sweat droplets moistening where my hair met the ground, and sat in awe as I looked through the smallest of small tunnels at the center of this mound of scrap, lined with countless jutting blades and nails, and saw a small family of 4jsb/s nestled in a pocket within all this chaos. I think I sat there for a while, just staring at these 4jsb/s, holding my breath. I felt like the second I breathed out and back in again, time would start flowing again and this moment would pass forever. Then you nudged me on the shoulder and asked me what I thought, with the biggest smile on your face, and as I hugged you I thought to myself that this moment would stay with me forever. Nobody else would believe us when we told them what we'd seen, but I didn't mind. It just showed how special it was, this secret we held between each other.

Even still, it bothered us that no one else could understand what we had stumbled upon. So, instead of trying to get others to understand us, you had the idea that we could make it so only *we* could understand what we were saying to each other. The day after we saw the 4jsb/s, you came over and we created a secret code we could use to encrypt "important" messages to one another. It's been so long, but I can still vividly remember the method we came up with to go about this. We would pick the word we wanted to encrypt and then a number between 1 and 10 to pair with it. Based on what we picked, we would move each of the letters in the word down the alphabet by the amount of the number. For instance: if we picked the word "tree" and the number "two," we would move each letter in "tree" two letters down in the alphabet until we got the new encrypted word, which in this case would be vtgg. Then we would put the number we picked at the front of the new word like so: 2vtgg. If we needed to add a suffix to the word, we would put a slash and then put whatever suffix we needed after, and if we reached the end of the alphabet, we would just wrap around back to A and continue counting down from there. It certainly seems like a relatively simple cipher, but it took us the rest of that entire week to flesh out this idea of ours and make it actually work. When we finally did complete it, though, we were ecstatic, and we probably wrote thousands of notes using this code the weeks following. Even now, our memories together come up in garbled letters and nonsense in my head, blocking me from seeing the whole picture, protecting me, because it knows I don't like what happens next.

Among those 4jsb/s, there was one that was smaller than the rest, most likely a pup. We went back to this warehouse at around dusk the next day and left small fruits out in front of 4jsb/s little pile of scrap, and waited with still breath at the door of the warehouse to see if any of them bit. Come nightfall, when the moon casted a faint light on our backs while we waited in impatience, the little pup would be the first to awaken from its warm slumber and, slinking out of the small cranny of its metal home, it would nibble on the fruit we left out for it. The joy and endearment I felt when I saw this little 4jsb pup nibble at the food we left out would well up in my chest, threatening to explode if I didn't run up and cradle that little baby 4jsb in my arms. But I had to resist, for the sake of the 4jsb and for *your* sake too, since I'm sure you were struggling to hold yourself back as much as I was. Nevertheless, we would continue this ritual torture of our hearts as often as we could, returning to the warehouse at night to watch this cute 4jsb eat our fruit, and at some point we began to do it on a daily basis.

I would make sure to come early, so I could place the fruit out before the night fell, but after a while of this repetition, I noticed something had changed in the little 4jsb one day. It woke up earlier than usual, sitting outside of its burrow as if it was waiting for something to happen, its curious eyes peering around the room.

I realized then that it was waiting to be fed the bright fruit that was hanging from my hands, and while I thought for a moment how that was cute, something was unnatural about this situation I was in. As I hesitated, I hadn't noticed that you had snuck up behind me, snatching the fruit from my hand and racing so fast to feed that 4jsb that my suspicion had no time to take root. Leaving behind my worry, I joined you as you awkwardly pushed the fruit across the chilled concrete floor towards the shivering 4jsb pup. It sat there for a moment, its ominous and empty black eyes gleaming straight at us, until it finally got up and slowly began to bite its way through the fruit. What you did next, even now I don't think I would have been able to tell you to stop, to see the repercussions; to stop our debt from stacking up. You reached down to pet the little 4jsb cub on its head. It looked up at you with those empty eyes it had, and all of a sudden the 4jsb was full. It rubbed its nose in your hand, licked your palm, and then it trod back over into its rift in that jumble of metal wisps, gone as quick as it came. When you filled its eyes in that moment, had you taken that 4jsb from its family, or did that 4jsb take *you* from me? I feel like I've asked that question so many times to myself by now, but just like when I saw that 4jsb waiting to be fed, something felt wrong inside me everytime I repeated it in my head. I know now that you only ever took what you were given, what I gave you.

The next day, there was a terrible 6ytuczuxs. You had slept over from the day before, since it was the weekend and we got home late that day. As the 4ursajpeoi/s outside slammed and splintered against the walls of our house, we sipped cocoa in the warmth of our dining room. Yet you still seemed anxious, like the 6ytuc outside was tugging at your heart with every whoosh of wind that passed over us. While we were washing our cups, you asked me to wash yours for you, since you had to use the bathroom. When I finally finished, I had yet to find out that our front door was left open, the only hint being the 5htqi wind rushing through the doorway and down my back. When I realized what you'd done, I quickly put on my coat and called out to my parents that I was going out, chasing after you into the white abyss outside my door before my parents could stop me. Tearing through the deeply padded 6ytuc, my eyes tried to peer through the whited-out landscape, only to be met with darkness of the night shrouded in an angelic fury of 6ytuc. Eventually I reached the forest, forging forward into this thick fog of 6ytuc that was plaguing the branches and bushes and my skin, frosting my eyelashes and choking my eyes. For hours, it feels like I wandered aimlessly through the forest, every direction around me clouded by countless 4ursajpeoi/s, ripping away at my spirit and turning me into a shivering mess. Yet the wind whipped against my back, stopping my retreat, and as I felt the 5htqi creeping into my very nerves, the fear that I felt in my heart pushed me forward as I tried to find you in this 2dnkbbctf. The weather that was once a shelter for me, my bright hope reflected in the fallen 6ytuc, was now a 3iurchq wasteland; one that stripped me of my vision, my movement, my freedom, and my friend. When I found out that you left, I immediately knew where you were going. That poor 4jsb, you thought it was going to freeze to death didn't you? Sitting right outside its warm steel bed, it was going to die waiting for us to come feed it, so how could you sit still knowing that? We had *given* it that hope after all, that memory we shared with it, and now we had to pay. I wondered *who* exactly *I* was paying, though, as I layed in the 6ytuc, a shaking mess of flesh on the verge of consciousness and unconsciousness, locked in a battle with my subconscious. You see, my conscience was telling me that I didn't *have* to pay *anyone*, that this was simply the cruelty of life, but my subconscious was saying something else.

It was telling me that I was paying for what I had taken, and for what I'd given. Everything we shared, everything we made of what we had, everything you said to me and I said to you; I had to pay for it all. *Even now*, our memories come up as garbled nonsense, the price I paid for what I gave and what I took. I wish I paid with my life instead.

They found me later, and they found you a week after. It's so funny, you know? They said they found you, but when I saw you in your 4gewoitx, it wasn't you. I was mad that they hid you from me, that they kept you between themselves like the codes we shared so often. But just as I paid for what I gave, they were paying too. I still couldn't help it, though, and I ended up throwing a fit at your 2hwpgtcn, but because it *wasn't* your 2hwpgtcn. It was mine. It was the 2hwpgtcn of what I loved, of what I held so dear in my heart. All of my senses stripped of me, just as they'd been stripped from you. I watched and buried them deep down, as they buried you. The 6ytuc was light that day, slowly trickling down like the rain that fell between us. I didn't notice it, though. All I felt was a chill pass through my back and out my chest, and all of a sudden I really wanted to go inside and warm up.

You would hate this type of ending for me, but I hate it even more that this wasn't the end. Those tragic stories we'd see in the movies we watched together, *they'd* always end with the heroine being defeated or losing a loved one for the sake of something greater, but life's not like that. The tragedy of life is that it doesn't end; whether you're feeling down or doing great, it keeps going on. It just drags and drags and keeps dragging even after you're just a lifeless 4gsvtwi, until what made you happy before is just mundane and what made you sad is simply a distant memory. *You* made me happy, and your absence made me sad, so maybe that's why I came back to our hometown after so many years, and why I'm writing this to you. Because if I do, maybe I'll be able to move forward with my life instead of being dragged away by it. Maybe, instead of our memories becoming distant, locked behind ciphers and the subconscious mind, I could take them back for myself, make them mine again. You might think that sounds selfish but, despite everything we took from each other, we never really had the chance to be selfish, did we? I know now that our relationship... my relationship... I shouldn't have taken any of it, shouldn't have stood for it. I should've wanted more for myself, for you. I don't know anymore; I don't know what I'm saying or what I'm doing and I know that half of this is just indecipherable garbage. But It's 6cotzcx time again, you know? I wonder when was the last time I could enjoy a nice snowy day.



Ray Bolger as the Scarecrow: Completed with Copic sketch markers (neutral gray set) and a Posca paint pen.

I still remember the day.

The sweet sunshine that beamed through the bus window as I leaned up against it. The cooling touch of the glass, the slight warmth in the direction of the sun.

The side of my bus window was half open. Enough to welcome the crisp, February air, but sufficient to shield the fractals of the sun's spots. A sign of protection, or hesitancy maybe.

The bus was loud, a long-awaited end to another school day. Now was my well anticipated time to socialize eagerly; to recap, to recall. That day I seemed to have not though. Somehow my mind had become wrapped in knots around something. Something, to which captured a strange indifference.

Soon enough, the noise of the bus had devolved into no more than a familiarized static, a background sound for thought. The unknown melancholy further lingering within my mind. Ideally, nothing was actually different nor wrong about this day. No particular concern or issue seemed to cloud the skies, not even an underlying worry to form light rain. However, it was as though mysteriously the world outside the window had enthralled me. The objects of mother nature though no more than a blur during a bus ride, were now a foundation for thought. It was as simple as the trees, how their first floral signs of spring began to sprout. The barrenness of their branches now, suddenly, less barren. How the contrast of their bark against the diamond sky would soon become a more agreeable green. A green that would resemble the grass. The grass beneath these trees, how carefully they enveloped the ends. The richness of their color so earthly, with tips still evident of a light afternoon dew. The kind of dew that provides the ground an inconvenient dampness, yet creates the perfect surface for the sunlight to shimmer upon, even as the bus graced past.

Perhaps it was just that, the glisten of the sun that February day, that filled me with the feeling of an approaching change. The inexplicable notion that what was before my eyes was somehow temporary, if not already reaching its point of expiration. It always seemed impossible to experience such a premonition—that life is to change when we least expect it. But now the town in which I spent my earliest memories appeared to be looking at me like it knew something I didn't. Within a month, I would come to realize that would be one of the last bus rides of my sophomore year. Within the following year, I realized I would no longer live in my childhood town.

Though only a little over two years have passed, I feel this memory may be forever. Sometime in the future, when a cool, February air brushes past me, I hope to think of the day of an earlier spring. The day in which the sunshine was sweet, and the bus window was half open.

2nd Place Winner

thing

it breathes
it's warm

creature

big eyes
soft fur

big eyes
innocent

see everything
think nothing

hide nothing
comfort

i want one

Dog.

THE COMPLICATIONS OF MODERN SOCIETY AND THE AFFORDABILITY OF LIVING SPACES

When you're young you don't understand
things like
renting vs. buying a home

Children are simple.
Simple solutions to simple* problems.
They ask *simple**** questions.

Who owns this house?
We do, of course.
Why?
Because we live here, of course.

Young me didn't know who this "real house
owner" was
She never saw him
Never knew his name
He didn't exist

Simple.

Yet this "real house owner" stood in the way
of her aspirations
How?
She didn't understand.

'No furry pets'

That was the rule: 'No furry pets'
That's what her parents told her
They told her, yet they said it wasn't their rule
to begin with

How does *that* work?

It doesn't work, she decided.
It didn't work with her logic
It most certainly didn't work with her life
aspirations

But she was a resilient girl
She would persuade them
With numerous essays and powerpoints-
Letters and notes left on the table for curious
(or amused) hands

She was a clever girl
Writing an essay on how a snake would make
a lovely addition to the home,
tacking on at the end "of course, we could
always get a dog"

She was unsuccessful

EASTER SUNDAY (AS AN ATHEIST)

She was 89
A great grandma, but I never called her that
Too many syllables

'Grandma'

Yes, that would do

I saw *Grandma* every Friday
I spent the night at *Grandma's* every Friday
We (*Grandma* and I) played with empty
yogurt cups and domino pieces on the carpet
Grandma was 89 but she got down on the
floor with me anyways

Grandma had a stroke Easter Sunday
Paralyzed on the left
Blind
Mute

Her mind was there but her body failed ~~me~~
her
(I never liked Easter)

People in white coats would find her tubes
pulled from her face, her veins
Put them back, find them undone
Over and over

Eventually they gave in
Let her have what she wanted
Grandma was sun

She wanted to go on her own terms

Things were complicated at home
More complicated than most kids
I didn't know that then

Kids don't understand how *home* can also feel
like *not home*
How *parents* can feel like *not parents*

Grandma wasn't complicated like that

Her love was unconditional
Her love was easy to understand

Friday was *home* day

Grandma left us her house in her will

I WENT TO A FUNERAL AND MY SHIRT COST 60 DOLLARS

The next summer we looked* for dogs

We, my mom and I
Dad didn't want one; I didn't care

Over a decade I spent asking, all fruitless, but
not pointless
The enemy were wore down before the fight
began

Dad didn't want one, but he ended up buying
the fence anyways

The shelter was loud
The dogs were barking because there was
people, they were contained, they were
stressed
Dogs not meant for the street but taken off
them

We walked around the room
Mostly pitbulls
One looked like a German Shepard
I was interested but my parents didn't want a
dog that big, so I moved on

We passed by one cage, the only dog that
wasn't barking

Big eyes

That was the first thing I noticed
Big, round, light eyes

I noted her and we moved on

We got to meet some of them,
The ones we were interested in

An excited, white pitbull
A dog that took a purple plush everywhere
And the quiet one

We had to meet the big-eyed dog outside
because it was quiet out there
Sleeping Beauty was her shelter name

Perfectly still
Tail tucked between her legs
Jet black besides a small white patch on her
chest

She was a pit but she had ears like a lab
Pinned to her head though her muzzle never
moved

I asked to meet her first
Then, cause I felt like I should, I met the other
dogs too

I want that one

I thought the whole time I played with other
dogs

I want the quiet one

We were supposed to go to other places
Other shelters
See other dogs

My dog was 50 dollars

She was on sale

“Good night, mom,” I said tiredly.

“Good night, Kailee,” my mother replied.

I walked into my room and closed the door behind me. I fell onto my bed and put my hair back into a ponytail. I turned off my lamp placed next to my bed on a nightstand. I yawned loudly and fell asleep quickly, more quickly than usual. I was asleep, but not quite.

All I saw was black, but my eyes were closed. Suddenly I felt like I was falling. It was really terrifying. Then, my back hit the ground. Was this a dream? It felt so real though. I opened my eyes and got up. There was a whole new world. I looked behind me and there was a giant screen showing me asleep in my bed. I soon realized this wasn't a dream. This was...reality. There were so many things floating around: cake, eyes, jewels, and weird swirls.

I backed away in confusion. *Where was I?* I've always been a good person. I've never gotten in trouble before. I couldn't understand why I was here now. I decided to walk around and explore more of this...fantasy. Weird colored trees surrounded me. I was so confused. I tried to touch this cloud that came close to me. It disappeared into thin air. After a few tests, only some things would disappear, not everything. I looked behind me and saw that I was asleep. *How do I wake myself up*, I thought. *What would wake me up?*

Loud noises. A loud noise would wake me up for sure. I took a deep, long breath and screamed. I screamed as loud as I could. I saw myself shifting in my sleep and my eyes twitching. I saw the red sky form a long crack across it.

It wasn't enough. My voice was not loud enough. I then punched my face. “WAKE UP KAILEE!” I yelled as loudly as I could. A small crack appeared in the sky above again. *The louder I get, I will break the sky*, I thought to myself.

I looked around frantically. I needed to find stuff that would be loud enough to wake me up. I looked at a tree that looked like it was from *The Lorax*.

I became aware of all the dreams I had dreamed before. I once had a dream about me and my dad eating cake. There was cake floating in the sky. I once had a dream about being stuck in a room with a bunch of people with eyes for heads. It was really scary. The eye laid still in the middle of the land.

There was so much more. I started to think of a dream that I had that caused noise. I could feel the light bulb on top of my head. I had a dream about a week ago of me playing in the school band. *I need to find that dream*. I ran into the weird fantasy. I searched for my dream. I stopped myself as I saw drums and two sticks. *Perfect*. I picked up the drums and sticks and ran back.

I've never played the drums before, but that might be even better. I would scream while hitting the drums loudly. I grasped the sticks and hit the drums as hard as I could and screamed as loud as I could. A huge crack appeared in the sky.

I thought it would break. But it didn't. I needed something louder. I realized that the drums were not the only instrument I played in that dream. I didn't know how much time I was taking but I knew I needed to wake up. I ran and saw a dream about a teddy bear that chased me two years ago. I tried to touch it but it faded. *Maybe the older the dream is, the more fragile it becomes*, I thought.

I yelled again, then continued speed-walking to find other instruments I played. A trombone! I smiled. There was a trombone floating in the air. I was lucky I was tall. I grabbed the instrument and ran over to the beginning of the world. The trombone would not be enough. I needed the drums too. I looked at a big tree and smiled. I had an idea.

I would need one big noise. I carried the trombone over to the tree. I tried to lift the tree. “Light as a feather...” I mumbled to myself. I steadied the tree and wrapped my feet around the tree so it wouldn't move. I stared at my sleeping face.

“Good morning Kailee,” I whispered. I positioned the trombone, dropped the tree onto the drums, and blew into the trombone. My eyes flew open and the sky fell down. I felt that feeling of falling again and woke up in the real world. “Kailee, it's time for school,” my mom shouted. “Coming,” I replied.

Later that night...

“Good night, Kailee.”

“Night, mom.”

I yawned and fell asleep. Then...I felt the feeling of falling once again.



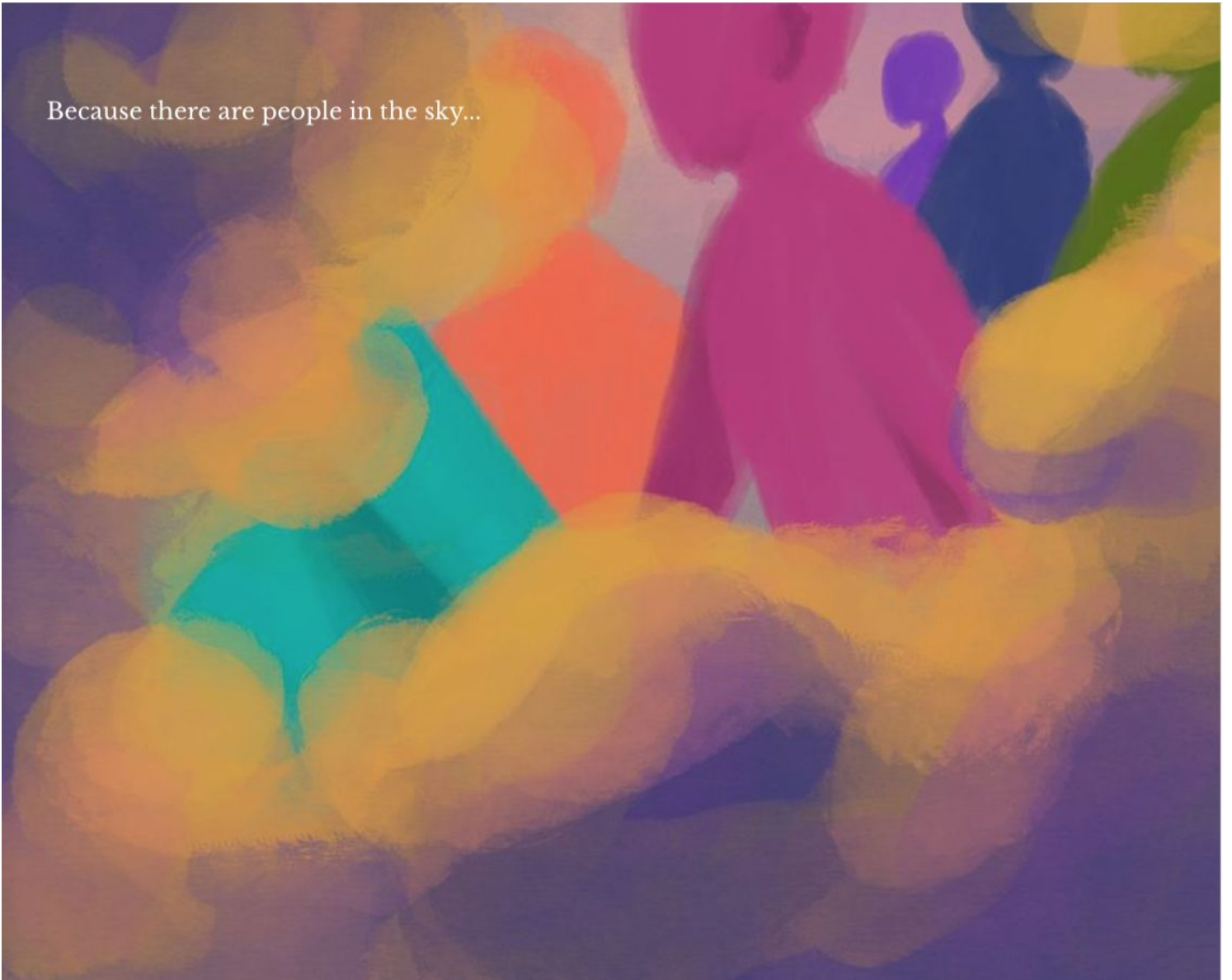
Why Does It Rain?

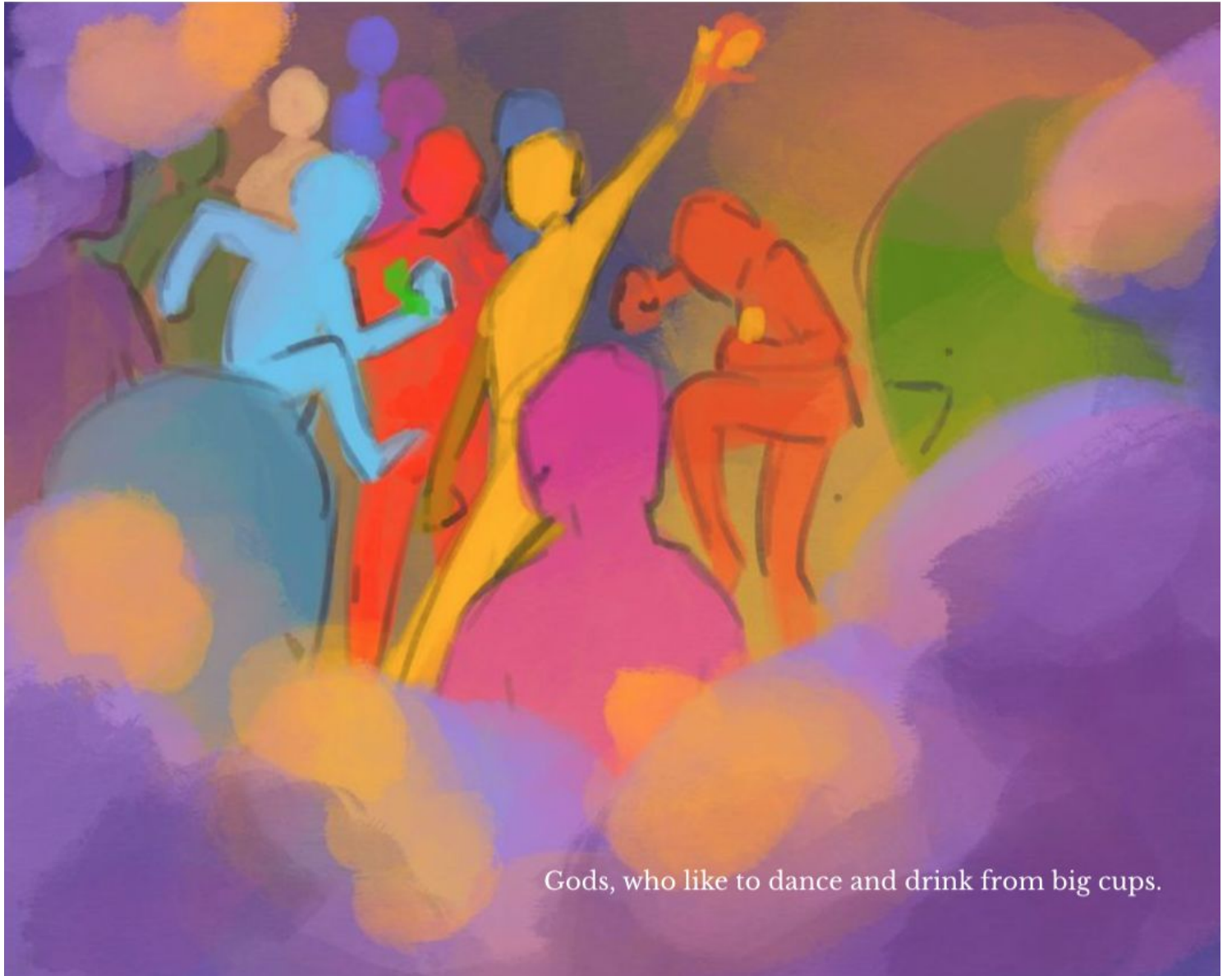
Written and Illustrated by Daenerys Averett




Why does it rain?
What a great question!
Why does it rain?

Because there are people in the sky...






Gods, who like to dance and drink from big cups.

A watercolor illustration. In the upper left, a yellow, rounded figure is shown from the chest up, holding a blue cup. The background behind the figure is a mix of warm colors like orange, pink, and yellow. Below this, the scene transitions into a dark, blue, and grey landscape that appears to be raining. The rain is depicted as fine, vertical lines. In the lower right, a dark, vertical structure with a small orange light at the top is visible. The overall style is soft and painterly.

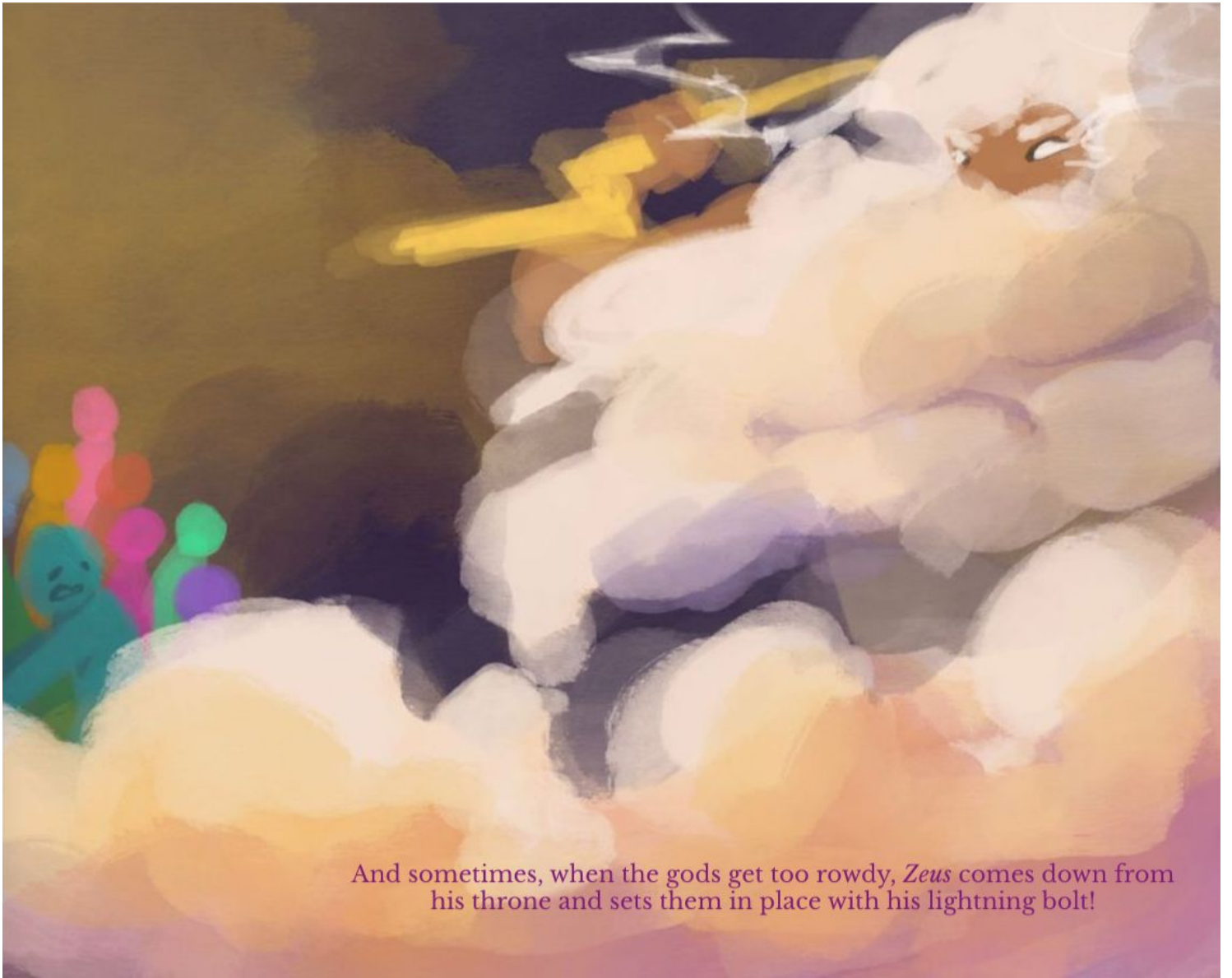
Sometimes, when they dance, they spill their
drinks-

and send rain allllll the way down to us.

An illustration showing a child's feet in red shoes on a yellow and orange patterned rug. A blue and white checkered blanket is partially visible. In the bottom right corner, the head of a brown dog is shown, looking towards the feet. The scene is set in a room with a dark floor.

When they dance, sometimes they stomp their great, mighty feet...


Creating thunderous noises that rumble our houses.



And sometimes, when the gods get too rowdy, *Zeus* comes down from his throne and sets them in place with his lightning bolt!



Unfortunately, he gets mad *pretty* easily and the lightning can escape the clouds...



It snows when the people in the
sky shear their giant sheep...

and hails when they get too much ice for their drinks!



Why does it rain?
Well, now you know!
The gods are the clumsiest people the world
has ever known!