



2025

PHOENIX

Phoenix

Literary and Arts Magazine

2025

Trenton Central High School

P H O E N I X		M E M B E R S
---------------------------------	--	---------------------------------

Daniel Brown

Abdulrahman Daranijo

Maura Galvez Guerra

Genesis Hernandez Martinez

Saul Landa

Jively Rosario Morales

Suliman Hassan

Jeneve Slocum

Mac Tito

Anthony Irizarry

Jayden Graham

Gloria Alvarez Coyado

Allan Ramirez

Taziyah Johnson

Trenton Central High School

ADMINISTRATION

Mary Courtney	<i>Principal</i>
Lawrence Parker	<i>HPA Vice Principal</i>
Maritza Abreu	<i>COMM Vice Principal</i>
Tilottama Bose	<i>VPA Vice Principal</i>
Jonathan DeSimone	<i>R&B Vice Principal</i>
Deirdre Brown	<i>STEM Vice Principal</i>

CLUB ADVISOR

Janet Devine

CHIEF EDITOR

Oscar Santos

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

TCHS Phoenix Partners, Nicole Dent, Jessica Massenat, Alan Francis, Colin Campbell, Mark Hopkins, Shawn Truppo, Rebecca Schwartz, Jamie Delany, Angelo Mitala, Barbara Episale, Thomas Montanari, Keith Wallace (TCHS class of '88), Robert McGuckin, Crystal Feliciano, Kira Royster, Karen Rivera, Yanisha Pujols, Nasir Dickerson, Denilson Samayoa-Guidiel, Valeria Lemus-Ramirez & Silvana Batz Lorenzo.

The Phoenix would like to send out a special thanks to Wanda Austin (TCHS class of '68) for her timeless wisdom and inspiring spunk!

Table of Content

Cambiando – Phoenix Writing Competition Winner	1
First Phoenix Submission of 2024-2025 by Abdul	2
Hopes in Autumn Hues by Em	4
Pictures by Alana Jackson	5
In the Alley of Dreams by Hadja Sylla	6
Drawing by Dyshanique Ayers	7
Mourning by Rosario DeLeon	8
Drawing by Nayla Hills	9
America by Maya Harrison	10
Drawing by Aniyah Jackson	11
Springs Hope by Karen Hernandez	12
Drawing by Abigail Batz	13
The Life of an Eagle by Christopher Garcia	14
Hey by Thalia Maldonado	15
Picture by Uri Gonzalez	16
Forbearance by Karen Hernandez	17
Drawing by Michael Imoroa	19
The Forest of Choice by Albert Lopez	20
Let Them Stare by Usaidah Mir	21
Drawing by Alex.	22
Wrestling is gone and so am I by Eileen Morales	23
The Hole by Saph Conway.....	24

...

Table of Contents

The Dangerous Art of the Fight Game by Donta Sanders	26
Photo by Alex	28
Privilege by Karen Hernandez	29
La Fleur by Daniel Brown	30
Playas de RD by Keury Sosa Cuevas	31
The Constant 4 by Marcos Munguia	32
Photos by Jessica Nasario and Janet Devine	33
Pig's Pen by Emily Finch	34
Drawing by Kain	35
Falter by Karen Hernandez	36
Photos by Denilson Samayoa	38
She is a Williams by Malia Lacey	39
Drawing by Alex	41
Now Recording by Angel Mossucco	42
Self-Portrait by Malik Fleming	43
Deep Blue Love by Kadelin Corporan Morales	44
Drawing by Anonymous	45
Winter Haikus by Jevon Lin	46
Illustration by Anonymous	47
Composing a new life by Angel Mossucco	48

Table of Contents

Stranger Things & Rose Moon by Anonymous	51
The Box by Angie Sanic-Gil	52
The Reality of Teenage Love by Emily Gonzalez-Calle	53
Masks by Yeferson Romero Lanza	54
Illustrations by Nayla Louis	55
Reflections by Thalia Maldonado	56
Drawing by Princessstorm Woody	59
The Siege of Kalamán by Esteban Taveras	60
Six Minutes of resilience by Adeboye Ololade	62
Eye of a Prince by Dyshanique Ayers	63
Music Drama by Isaiah Young	64
Photos (Gambino) by Denilson Samayoa	66
Looks Can Kill: A Reflective Essay by Iyonna Jones	67
Drawing by Anonymous	68
Title by Author	65

Phoenix Writing Competition-Winner:

Genesis Duarte

Cambiando

El cambio pasa lento como el
viento en el atardecer, lento como la luna
y el sol cambiando fases resistiendo
pero contento porque el cuento
comienza a cambiar.

Te comienzas a enfocar,
la perseverancia hace efecto
para terminar el cuento contento
que comenzamos lento e
Incompleto.

Changing

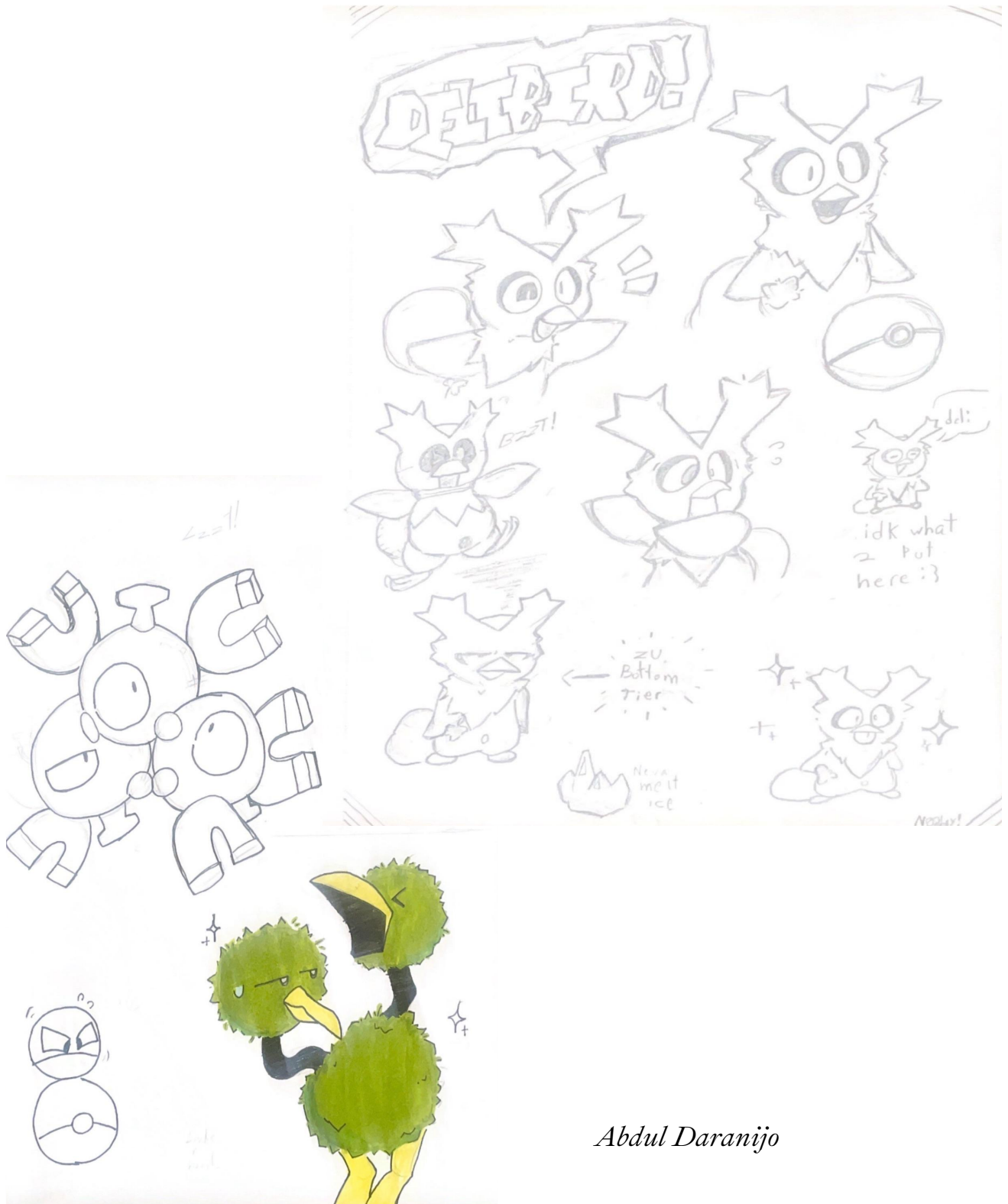
*Change happens slowly
like the wind at dusk,
slowly like the moon
and the sun
changing phases, resisting
but happy because the story
begins to change.
You begin to focus,
perseverance takes effect
to finish the story
that we started slowly and
Incomplete.*



A Brief Biography...

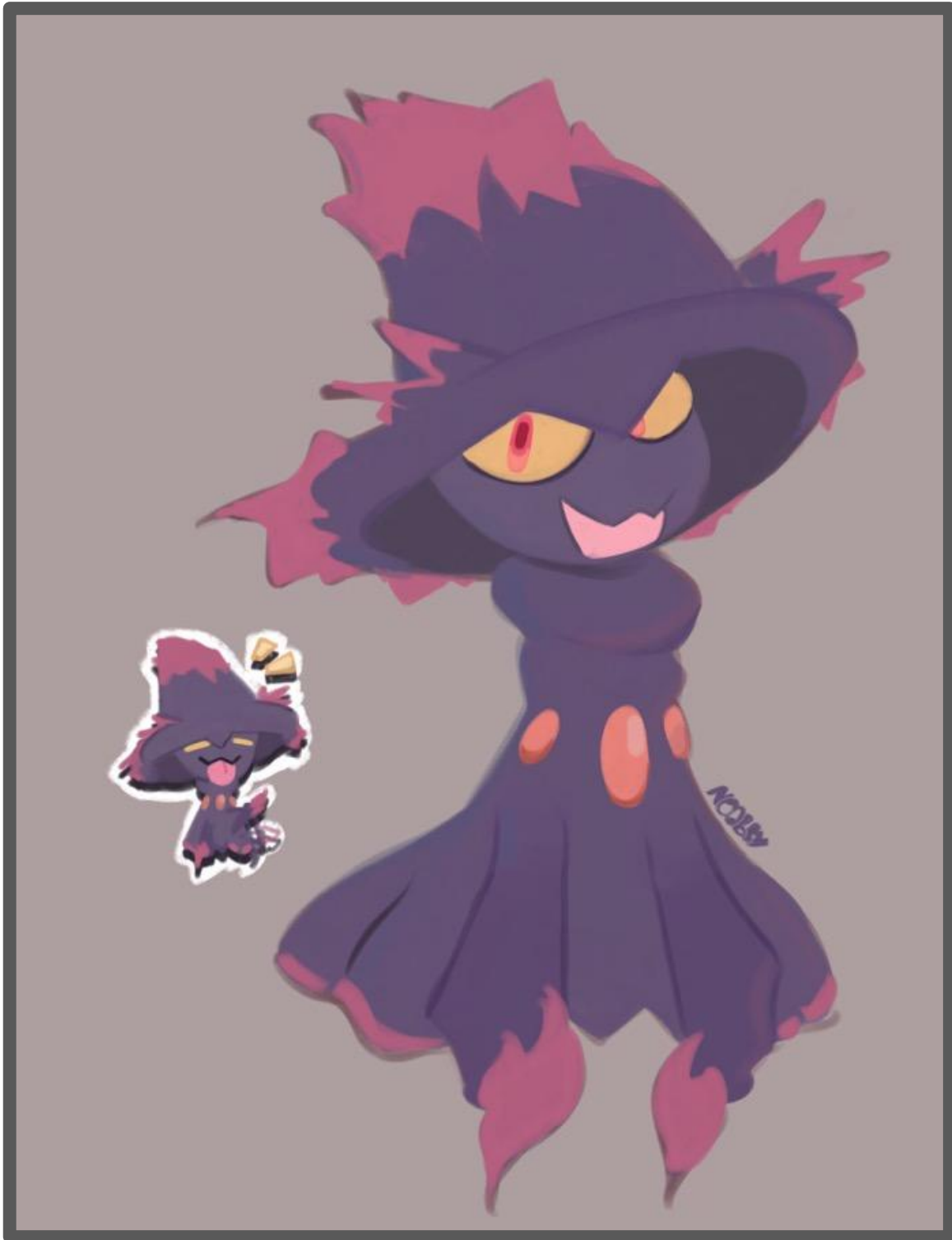
Genesis, Class of 2025, is a first-generation Guatemalan college bound student. She is an aspiring architect with a passion for soccer, science, and the arts. After moving to the U.S. at the young age of nine, she participated in the second PTECH cohort, gaining early exposure to advanced manufacturing. She is a captain of the varsity girls' soccer team and works with the yearbook.

First Phoenix Submission of 2024-2025



Abdul Daranijo

First Phoenix Submission of 2024-2025



Abdul Daranijo

Hopes in Autumn Hues

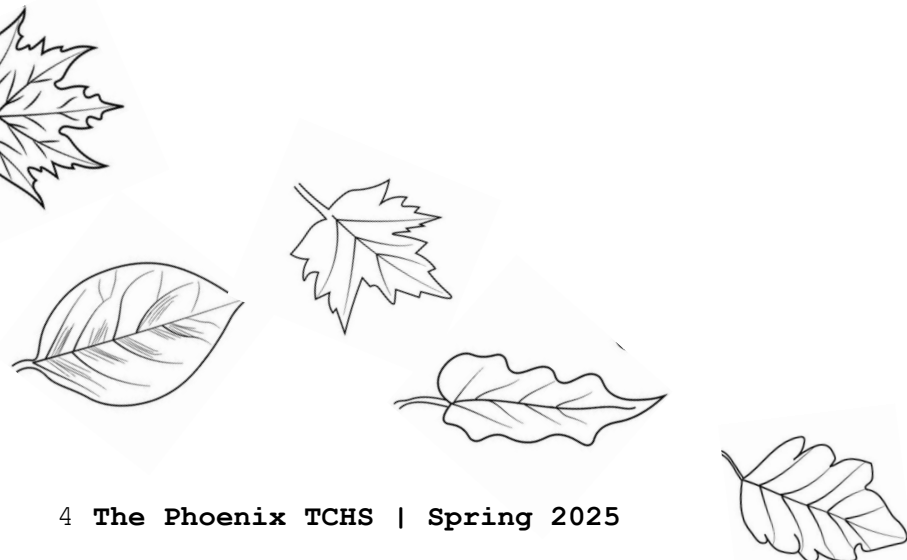
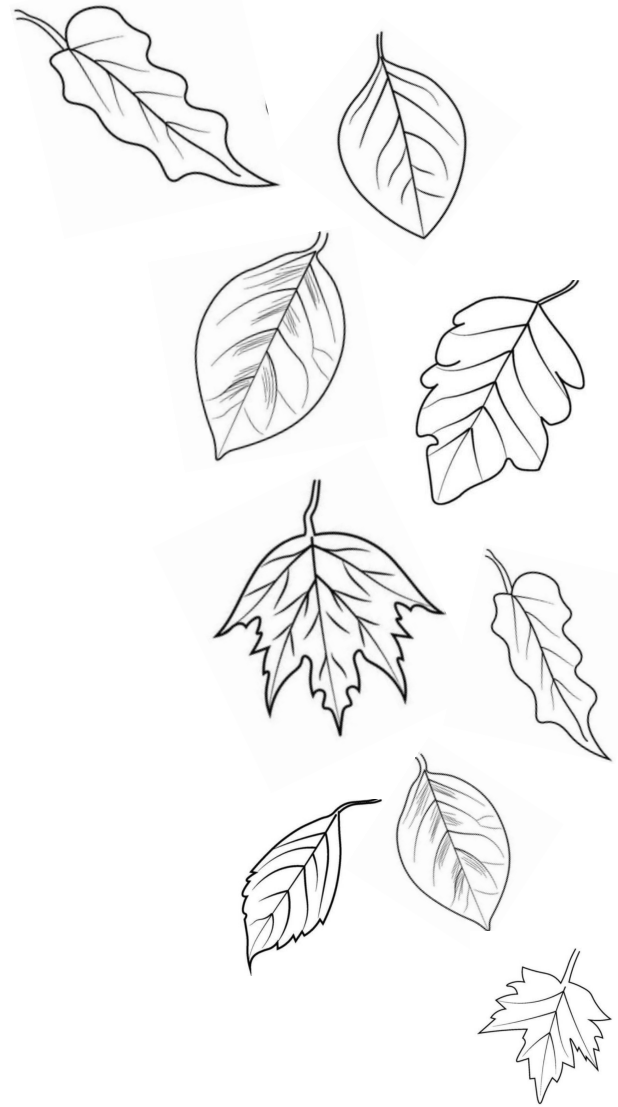
Autumn's golden hues unfold,
Painting the world with dreams untold.
Hopes ignite like embers bright,
Glowing in the fading light.

Leaves dance on the gentle breeze,
Whispering tales of memories.
Seasons change, but dreams remain,
Weathering the joys and pain.

In the crisp, cool autumn air,
Aspirations take flight with care.
Embracing the path ahead,
Stepping forward, unafraid.

Autumn's canvas, a canvas of change,
Invites us to rearrange,
Our hopes and dreams, a tapestry woven,
Revealing the future, yet to be proven.

Em





Alana Jackson



In the Alley of Dreams

In the alley where neon lights shine,
and jazz music flows,
I feel the spark of creativity,
a heartbeat in the smoke,
a wild dance of free spirits.

Success? Just a word tossed
like a cup in the rain,
a mirage on cracked streets,
where dreamers paint their lives
with bright colors,
where truth is the real treasure,
and hard work is what counts.

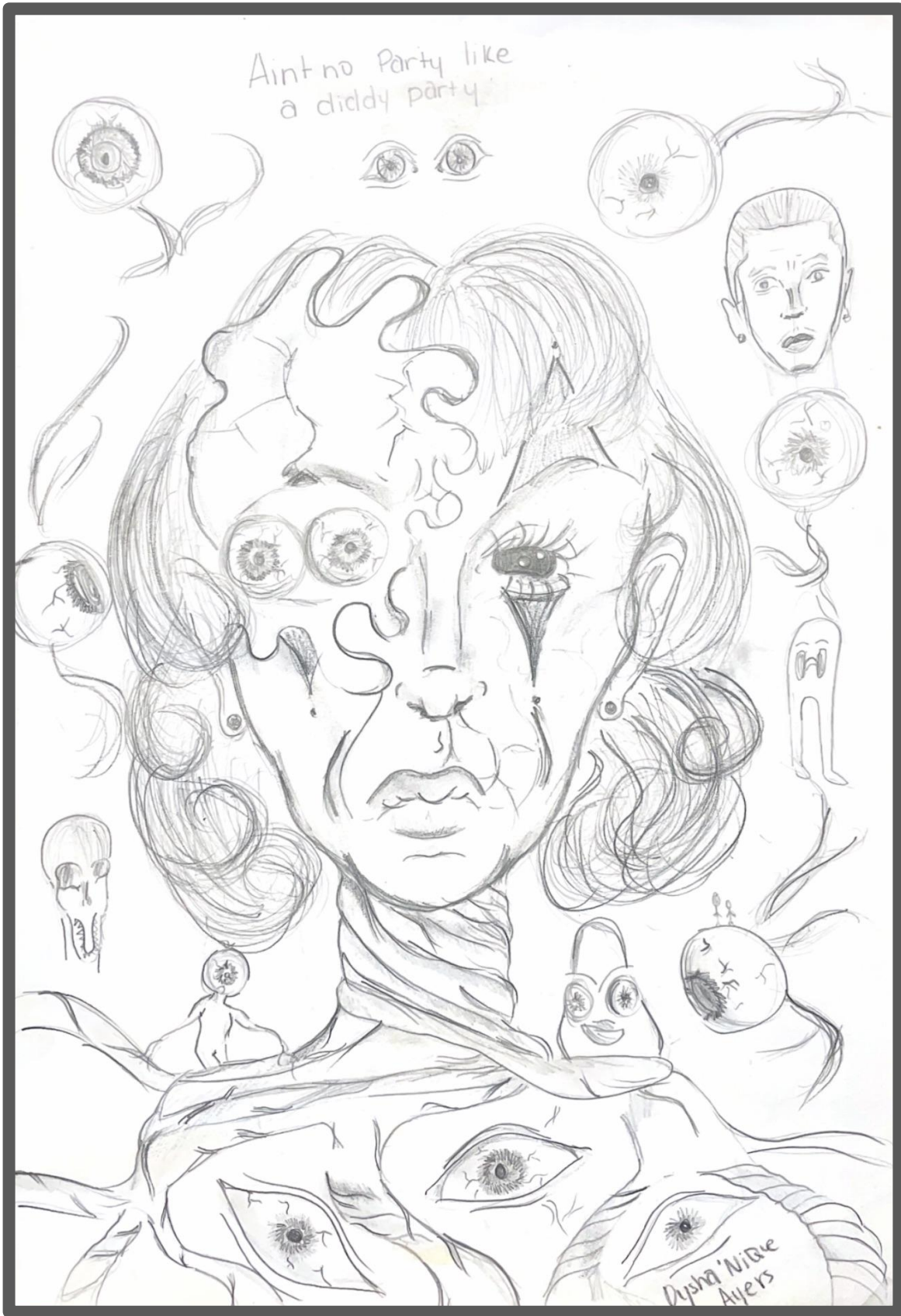
Whispers fill my ears,
"Keep going, don't stop,"
as I scribble thoughts on napkins,
nodding along,
the our stories play,
and outside, the world forgets
the ticking clock, the suits,
the money that weighs us down.

Instead, we breathe in the chaos,
the beauty in the broken,
finding success in laughter,
in shared smokes,
the moon hangs low,
lighting up our dreams.

Let artists create,
this is our life's story,
woven from moments that shine,
in passion that set us free,
where creativity is our guide
and freedom is the goal.

Success? It's the ink on your
hands,
the fire in your heart,
the way you rise up,
like a phoenix from the ashes,
in a world that forgot
how to dream.

Hadja Sylla



Dyshanique Ayers (Dysh)

Mourning

The light of the sun shone down on the town. Pretty purples and oranges colored the empty streets. People were going home from a long day at work and families were starting dinner.

In a building, a woman sighed. She looked at the window down to the sidewalk, where her neighbors' kids drew in chalk. Random images of *-she squinted-* the town were drawn and colored. All of the drawings were terrible but had a odd charm to them. The woman paused at a sketch of a family. A mother was holding, what she assumed, was the child next door. Next to them was the father and the apartment building. She frowned at the image. Stepping away from the window, she snapped the curtains closed. She took a deep breath and walked out of the living room. Dropping onto the couch, the woman leaned against the arm rest.

It was almost five, her fiance would be home soon. The fading light of the sun came through the holes of the curtain, making the amethyst on her ring glint. The woman looked at the ring before turning her head away. It was a plain silver band with shards of amethyst making a flower. The ring was supposed to be given to her on her wedding day by her father. It had been her mother's ring, it was a family heirloom of sorts. Unfortunately, it was given prematurely. She rubbed her eyes as water started to fill them.

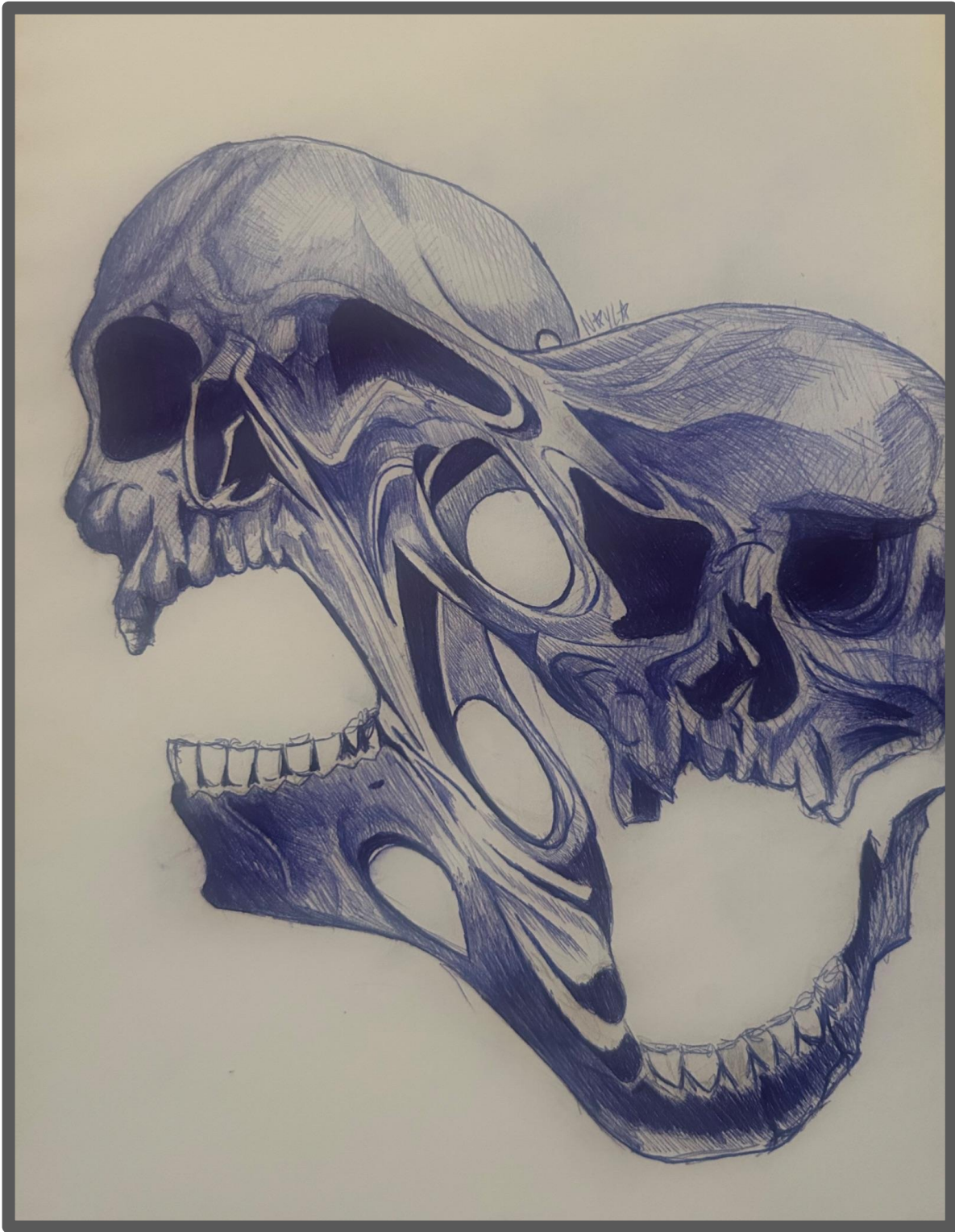
Her father had recently gotten sick. When she asked him about it, he said it was nothing serious. She felt that he was downplaying the severity of the illness but she didn't know how bad it really was. The hospital called and said that he wanted to talk to her. She didn't even know he was admitted in the hospital. Shaky sobs echoed around the room. He wanted to be the one that gave her the rings. Even in his last moments, he still smiled.

"I'm sorry that I couldn't walk you down the aisle like you wanted." He coughed, blood spilling down his chin. "Hey, but at least I got you the rings. That has to count for something."

She only cried harder as he slid the ring off his finger and onto hers. In the empty apartment, the sun was the thing only warming her up.

The wedding was next week and her father wouldn't be there. The woman took a deep breath, choking down her cries. It was going to be fine. Sure, the man who raised her and the only family she had wasn't going to be able to make it. That was perfectly fine. Another sob crawled up her throat. It was not going to be alright. It probably never was and that would have to be okay. When her mother died, she was sad for a while but it eventually got better. It would just take some time for her to get used to the idea. The wedding was only a week away. It was going to hurt but it was going to be fine.

Rosario DeLeon



Nayla Hill

America

*The city buzzes like a hungry beast under my feet, streets cracked and coughing up smoke,
voices lost in the wind, jazz pouring from old bars like prayers,*

*night stretches long like a junkie's vein, red lights blinking in puddles,
dry dreams shattered like broken glass on the sidewalk,*

*I walk with empty pockets but a head full of stories,
wise old men in thrift store suits spinning wisdom over diner coffee,
poets with smoky lungs whispering their dreams to the night,*

*the train rattles my bones, shakes my ribs like a jazz song,
this is the song of the lost, the prayer of the hustlers,
the chant of the wanderers searching for something more,*

*we shout, we sing, we burn like pages of unpaid bills,
carrying the weight of the world like a heavy suitcase,*

*America, you sold me a dream full of holes,
where do I go when the road ends?
what do the streetlights pray for at night?*

Mya Harrison



Aniyah Jackson (Niy)

Spring's Hope

And I used to feel the embodiment of beauty
That spring vested upon me—by a majority
How easily I'd heed to those specks of leaves
That beforehand turned into white ease

And that cream-sickness of white,
Shifts into the formation of a petal
And if you inspect it long, it'll turn—as
The light source seeps through its own veins

You acknowledge it's not becoming a tree
Even if it's known to have leaves
But from what you see—a performance
Of possibility—and that possibility
Truly is—white formed into purity

And if you're detail-oriented, you're enlightened
By the tone of heat—of course with fast mood
swings
A moment—you're loosening up your sleeves
Then another—you're nudging them down helplessly

And you pondered if the season was the same as the
last
Always within the competition of which one won
From the past—and it is here that you don't realize
A blossom is on your knee

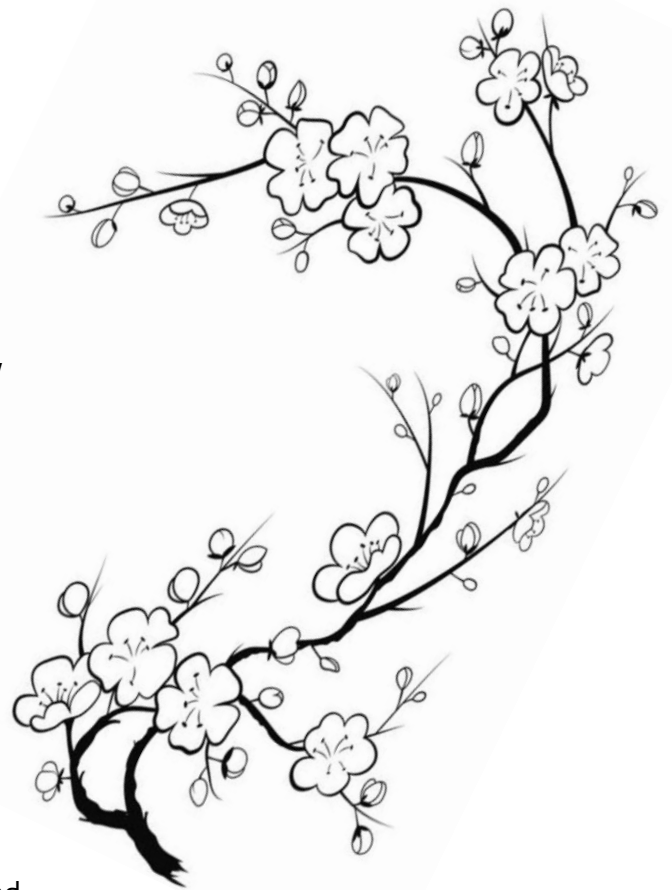
Two options: you lift it and obtain it
Or
Your ignorance sees it but leaves it forsaken

Either way, it's not as though more won't come around

But I'll say this: when you start to feel a thing curve after you
It's not because of the change of possibility
But because of its purity

And to tune it well
It'll turn to you,
Spring chose you.

And that—without a single doubt
Shouldn't make you question
If you're still worthy of someone's
Mindless drought.



Karen Hernandez

My Humanity



Abigail Batz

The Life of an Eagle A Sonnet Poem



En la vida tienes que luchar como un águila
Nobody tells you life will be hard or easy
Como un águila que lucha cada día buscando comida
An eagle that protects and loves its family
Un águila fuerte que no se rinde resolviendo sus problemas
Like when eagles' beaks and feathers get old
Ellos luchan por tener esos nuevos picos y plumas
To start new beginnings with their beaks and feathers
Siendo esa águila que no se rinde sin importar su problema
Being a strong eagle that wants the best for its family
No importa su condición, el águila siempre lucha
Being that strong eagle that does its best every day
Siendo esa águila que lucha fuerte enfrentando la vida
An eagle that doesn't give up and continues its best life.

Christopher Garcia

Hey

Walking in the mysterious woods at night in my Appalachian hometown was not unusual for me. I enjoyed the soft breeze that flowed through my hair and up through the leaves, the gentle rustling always soothing my anxiety. I walked further into the forest until I heard the familiar wishing of the small stream. My parents always took us here to play on hot days. At least that's how things were when she was here.

I took a deep breath, taking in the fresh air, and sat down watching the river sway softly. I watched the moon's rays dancing across the water's surface, as the sounds of the forest made my body tingly. I laid back, feeling the prickles on the grass along the sides of my face. I felt the tingles flow up from my fingers across my chest and through my whole body.

Suddenly I heard a snap of a branch.

My heart jumped in my chest. The soft prickles of the grass grew harsh and the hair stood up on the back of my neck. I sat up and opened my eyes looking around quickly. The silence was excruciating as the atmosphere, once fresh and smooth, now turned eerily quiet. I continued looking around before stopping.

Remember the Appalachian rules: If you hear something...*no you don't*. If you see something...*no you didn't*. I tried to calm my racing heart as blood rushed to my ears. I got up slowly, trying not to look in the trees. Back to the rules: *Don't look in the trees. Don't look in the trees.*

I picked up my bag, walking at a steady pace. *Don't look panicked. Don't be panicked. They can sense fear.* My heart raced as it took every fiber in my being not to run. The forest grew darker. The leaves stopped. The air felt heavy in my lungs. I heard a familiar voice in the distance.

"Hey."

I froze. My heart grew faster. *If you hear something, no you don't.*

"Hey."

I don't hear it.

"Hey."

I scolded my heart as it pounded against my ribcage.

"Hey."

As the voice grew further away I knew it was growing closer. *Do not look up.*

"Hey."

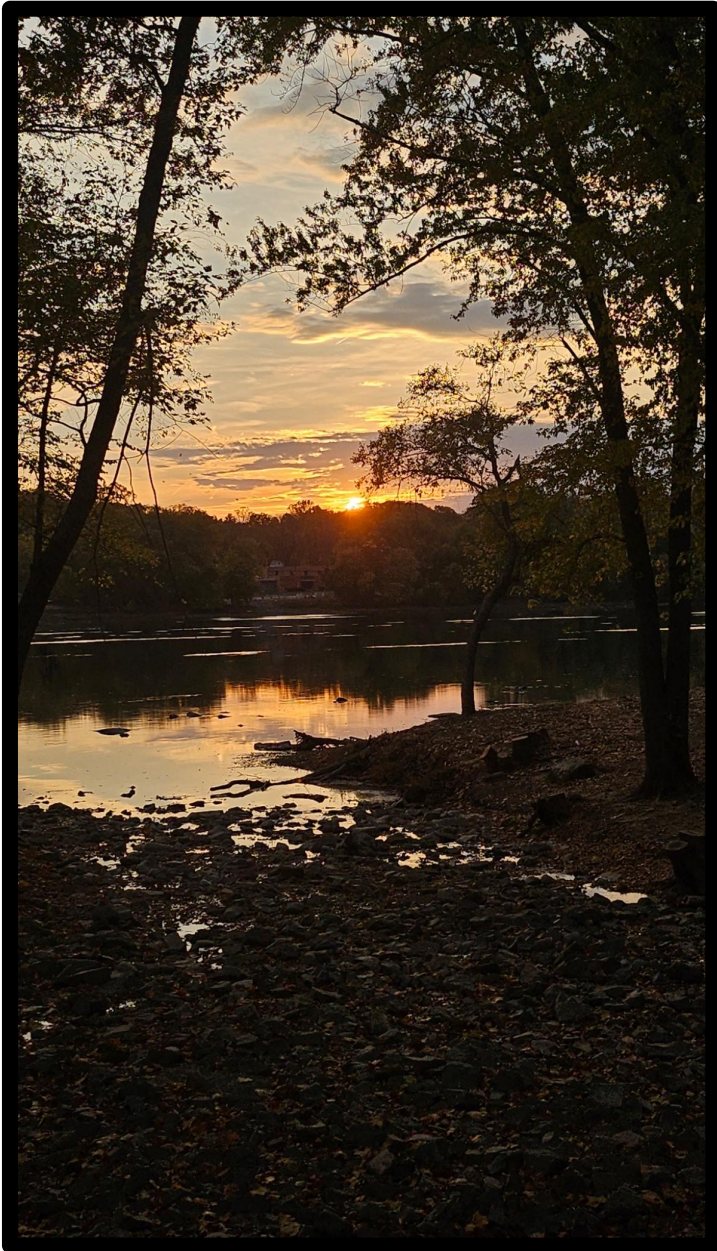
You did not hear it.

"Hey."

Nothing is there. I walked faster. The only thing I could hear was my shaky breathing. As the breeze pushed back against me I panicked. I ran as fast as I could out of the forest until I couldn't hear it anymore. I looked around, my breathing labored, and saw a farm. I took deep breaths reassuring myself. I was out of the forest. Safe now. As my heart rate slowly went back to normal, I felt long cold fingers slowly wrap around my shoulder.

"Hey."

Thalia Maldonado



Anonymous



Forbearance

You know—that man was right.

A round cold, beautiful times such as this
Such as this year

It doesn't disturb me—the high rate of fatality.

Each day, it freezes more
Either a cold mind or
A warm soul.

Every hour
A baby is born
And a person
Gets rid of their own.

You're not allowed to know who
Since your goal is now the baby
A baby who demonstrates life
And the other
Dirty and dug
Into demise.

Whether frostbite
Or the length-less breath that
Puffs into the sky,
Perhaps a distance
When you step out of your car,

You ponder without
Wearing your usual material
Neither your hat
Nor one glove
Nor the clingy, embracing scarf

Or your friends who would
Holler on the soft dawn that
Withers on the horizon.

You no longer think like them
Or do they know if they should.

Each step you make
It'd drench like the life
Ridded away.

Yet, not everyone will know
That, right?

You're enduring
So much
Of the flakes as if
They have decided to flutter
Like birds and birth a nest
In your widowed mind.

Your face is flushed
But not in the sweet, aesthetic way.

Your nose tingles with specks
Of heavy white upon it
Each time.

And your cheeks
They somehow ache instead.

And for once,
Your hair is done today
Or—was.

Now—you stand elsewhere
Parked a little too far
And your friends delivered you
A swarm of vibrations

In a way you knew.

It's a way to say
You already left it behind
Before you could answer.

You don't like the rain
So why do you stand under
The follicle of snow?

I know you won't answer
Neither could you hear me
If you dare try.

Only could I watch
The way you walk:
Steady, shivering steps.

Your ears near the stems
To be blown.

And your hands
No longer move on their own.

You're standing
Letting it all collide with you;
Let the babies in your hair blend
Through you.

And the day
Perhaps with the start of dismay
Where someone like me can't stop you
From committing your life
Into a purposeful decay.

Karen Hernandez





Anonymous

The Forest of Choices

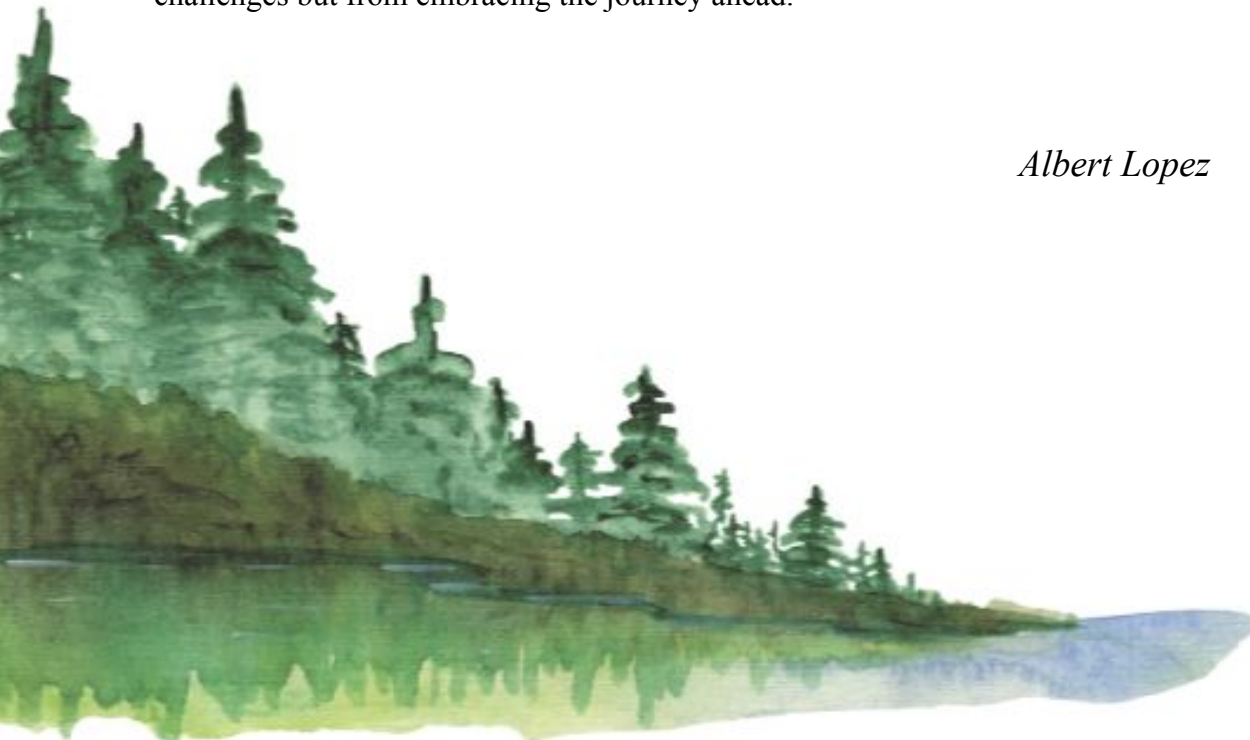
In the Forest of Choices, the animals lived in harmony, but at the heart of the forest stood the Tree of Decisions. Its branches stretched wide, heavy with fruits that glowed in vibrant colors. Each fruit represented a different life path. The animals often hesitated to choose as they had heard stories of the tree's power, that once a fruit was picked, the path it led to would shape their lives forever. Some feared the unknown and avoided it altogether, content with their safe, familiar lives.

One day, a young rabbit named Lira entered the forest, feeling lost. She had spent her life hopping through familiar fields and paths, but something was missing. She longed for a greater purpose, though she didn't know where to find it. After wandering for a while, she came across the Tree of Decisions. The tree seemed to call to her, its fruits shimmering with possibilities. Nearby, an old owl perched on a branch and spoke, "The path you choose here will shape your future. The journey may be difficult, but it will help you grow."

Lira gazed up at the glowing fruits, unsure of which to pick. Some were golden, offering the promise of fame and glory, while others were more modest, glowing with soft, inviting light. Lira thought of her past, a life free from challenge but lacking true fulfillment. She feared the unknown paths, but she also knew that staying still would never lead her to the life she craved.

With a deep breath, Lira chose a simple, green fruit, glowing quietly but steadily. As she took a bite, she felt a sense of calm mixed with excitement. The path ahead would not be easy, but Lira knew she was ready to face whatever came, understanding that true growth comes not from avoiding challenges but from embracing the journey ahead.

Albert Lopez



Let Them Stare

Music to my ears - the sound of nature

Only can be heard by free souls not those trapped by societal expectation

The trees' dead leaves have a rhythmic crunch

Petals swirl in the wind like the waves of song

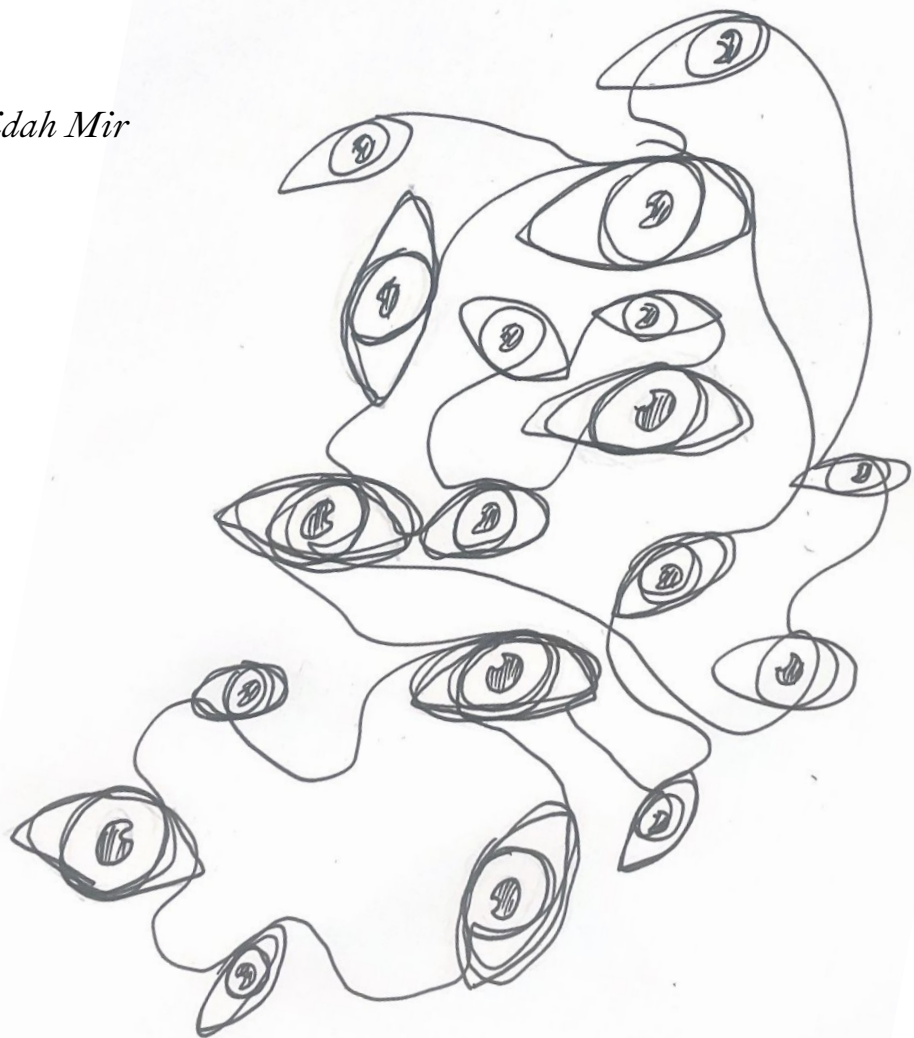
Sitting in the green grass

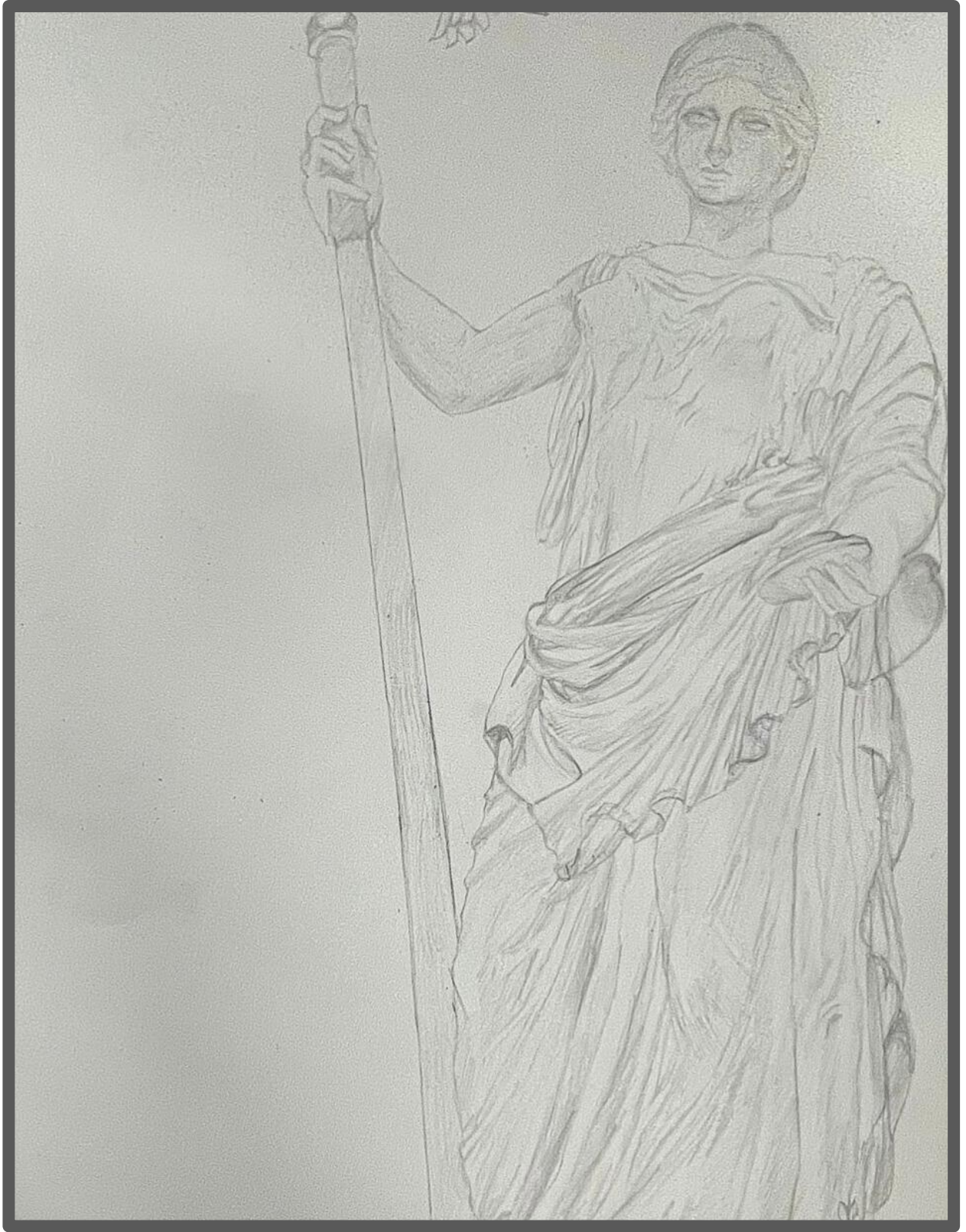
Enjoying nature in this empty park

Don't care about stains on my pants, let people stare

Let them stare.

Usaidah Mir





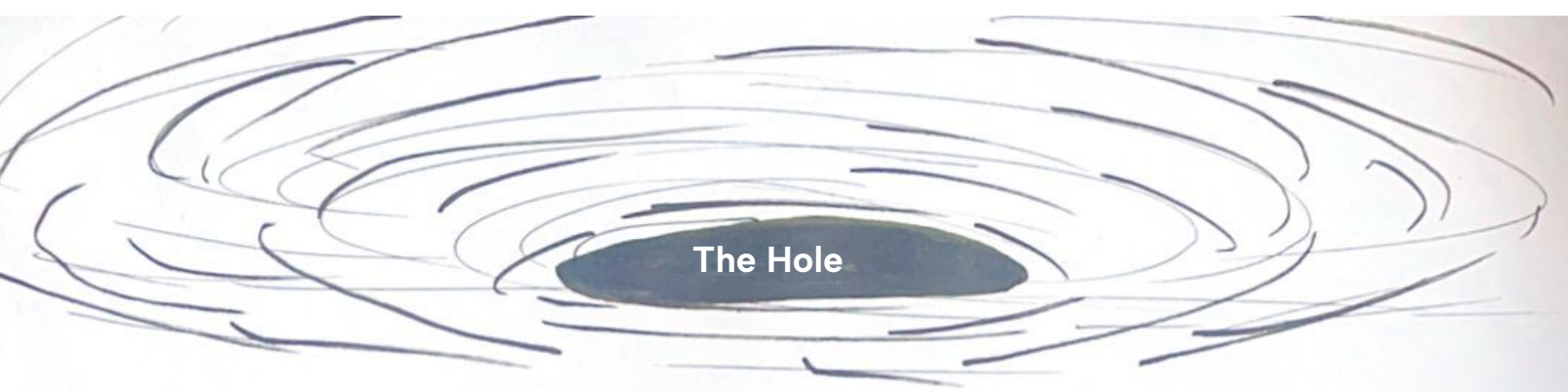
Alex

Wrestling is Gone and So Am I

The wrestling trailer is closed, locked up tight, til next season.
It smells like sweat and hard work left behind.
The season is over, and I don't know what to do.
I starved, I fought, I bled, I cried,
And now it's all just memories, fading fast.
The crowds cheered, the whistle blew, now it's silent.
No more takedowns, no more long hours in the trailer,
Just school, gym, home, repeat.
Something is missing, but I can't have it.
I drive around with nowhere to go,
Everyone is thinking about the future and I feel stuck,
Like I should be somewhere else, doing something else,
Chasing a dream, but it's all gone.
The world is moving on, but I'm not.
I'm still stuck on my last match, still waiting to get my hand raised,
Still chasing the dream that made me feel alive.

Eileen Morales





Falling

Falling

Falling.

Where might I be? Where am I? I saw a deep darkness from which I could not escape. A deep black; a black that overpowered all light. I saw and I didn't. *I don't. I don't know what to do. I know?* As I hit the ground I tried to pick myself up... but I couldn't. The ground beneath me was not beneath me. The only guarantee I had in life had been stricken away from me as lightning hit the ground and the clouds got darker. If not that then what could I be certain of?

Falling

Falling

Falling.

It had been one hour, then another and another. The time grew long as I grew tired, fatigued. No love, no light, no light, no light, but dark... dark? Buy why? What did I do wrong? What did I do to be trapped in this infinite fall? What did I do but to trust, to trust that things would be alright. Standing on the cracking ground, knowing that the ground wouldn't give out. Hoping that the ground wouldn't give out. Hoping that the ground wouldn't give out. Trusting that the ground wouldn't give out. This was the only thing promised to me, the only thing I was assured of as the air I breath and the light I sew; all that makes me human. Yet there I stood, or, better yet, fell.

Falling

Falling

Falling?

Water? I could smell water as well as detectable foods, foods, food food food foods. An echoing growl evaporated from within me as the dessert that was my mouth continued getting dryer and dryer. I begged to any higher power, to either be put out of this curse or to be given the bare minimum I needed to survive.

Falling

Falling

Falling.

Yet to my pleas and hymns came no response. The only sound was that of my starving stomach and sand storms within my mouth.

Falling

Falling

Falling

Falling

No response from above or below... but one from within. There was no god to help me.
There was no one to help me.

Falling
Falling
Falling
Falling into despair
Falling
Falling
Falling

To give up would be calming but.... Why? *Can I do this? I can do this.*

I must help myself if no one is to help me. I continued to

Fall
and
to Fall

Shifting towards what I believed, hoped, where the walls of this blasted hole. I felt... dirt.
There was a wall, there was something to grab on to

I cleaved my fingers into the dirt and that red ink in which my life has been written burst
from within, my hands helping me to write another chapter of my life in that red ink.

I was falling no more

The metallic scent of the ink filled the air. The sharp pain in my hands meant nothing
compared to the idea of getting out, of being free.

*Red ink of that scarlet lettering, release me from my suffering and pain for there is no life
without you, no life without you. Oh scarlet rain there is hope for me as long as I hear you
pumping as long as the red ink flows I'll never give up.*

Climbing
Climbing
Climbing

I slip to my horror and continue plummeting down and down

Falling
falling
and
Falling

But for as long as I breathe, for as long as that scarlet ink continues to flow through me I'll
never give up and will continue to try to get out of this hole even if my life it does take. It's
better to die trying that to die allowing yourself to

Fall fall fall fall

Saph Conway

The Dangerous Art of the Fight Game

Mixed Martial Arts is an escape for people and a way to show skill in self-defense, as well as to defeat opponents in competition. Many partake in the sport to become noticed by big companies like the UFC, to become a top fighter, even a champion.

However, for one champion in particular, the road there and its end was nothing short of bumpy rotten. Her name was Carolyn, and she stood out among other fighters for her remarkable trait of resilience. She grew up in a small town Delaware with an abusive mother and father, who gave her nothing but scraps and bottom of the barrel care. While any child would resort to violence and destruction, Carolyn was motivated, determined to be someone. **She'd always dreamt of being a fighter, a warrior of the octagon.**

She started to train with the local gym and began to fight opponents on the amateur scene. However, after going five wins and no losses, the unthinkable happened: she tore her Achilles tendon after getting caught in a heel hook. In the hospital, Carolyn broke down, feeling nothing but sorrow and pain. The road began to crack, her car's tires began to flatten. Then, just when she was about to break, she felt a small fire burning in the fireplace that was her heart, growing larger and larger with each breath. Tears turned into a smile, Carolyn started to beam with motivation. She rose out of her hospital bed, cast and all, and started to do



push-ups in sets of fifteen, but not to grow muscle or because she was bored, but because she wanted to feel the pain of it. She went through physical therapy and made her return to the cage, where she eventually got the UFC's attention. She won her debut match and went on a six fight winning streak. Despite this and becoming the #3 ranked fighter in her division, she was paid less than half the division's top 15, as the UFC didn't see the potential she had. But Carolyn didn't need them to see it though, because she already saw the champion in herself.

One day, as if the fight gods themselves were rooting for her, a call came in. The top ranked fighter in the division injured her foot, meaning that Carolyn would be next for a title shot. Even though she'd train and train, and



done all the technique practice and conditioning, she was going up against the dominant, undefeated ruler of the division, Anna “Anaconda” Oliveira at UFC 325 in Brazil. No one could stop Anna, and she steamrolled through every challenger that stepped up. Carolyn wasn’t fazed though, but she didn’t know what she would walk into.

The week of the fight came slowly, like a lion approaching its prey, and soon Carolyn found herself in the middle of a press conference. Anna was a master on the mic and verbally silenced the up and coming star with insult after insult. Carolyn though, would take one thing into the fight that Anna said, “Who are you?”

Ding! The bell rings, and the fight begins. Four rounds go by and Carolyn was losing badly, even seriously bleeding. She almost tapped to a heel hook at the end of the round. But even that couldn’t remove the permanent smile on her face, her confidence higher than the sky. She

knew who she was, a diamond forged in the fires of Delaware, the Delaware Diamond. With time running out, she got it, one lucky and well timed cracking blow to Anaconda. The Brazilian fall, and she was out. Carolyn had finally done it, and once she had the mic in her hand, she knew what she was, who she was. Her resilience got her here and she had only one thing to say. **“Brazil, my name is Carolyn Carrasco, and I am the pressure-lovin’, beast-slayin’ diamond forged from Delaware and I am your new featherweight champion of the world!”**

* * *

“Mommy, what’s that gold thingy, it’s so pretty,” Rosie said. Carolyn looked from her daughter’s hand and to the belt on the wall. Her body couldn’t fight anymore, but her smile remained, as it all came flooding back to her, the adrenaline, the gore. Rosie would never know who her mom had been, but the echoes of the Delaware Diamond resounded through Carolyn’s mind. She sat there with her daughter thinking about what her career turned out to be and the challenges it brought her. She lost her family to it, she fought with little pay doing it, and she even bled for it. Despite all of it, her resilience gave her purpose, to be a champion and earth-breaker, and she did just that. That, despite everything, is the destructive art of the fight game. While some rise and fall, Carolyn Carrasco rose and stayed there, with the heart and pride of a resilient, an unfazed warrior.

Donta Sanders



Allison Duarte

Privilege

May it be a good start
To say—it is so honorable
To be sent something
That's exactly part of you
Just younger.

As you dedicate yourself to them
It would be as though you are
Loving your younger self
For being dense and open-minded
And again—caring and needlessly giving.

Those things make features better
In having a younger sibling.

Although they may be a waste
when they come across your room
wander in without an excuse
But proceed to make you comfortable
After they witness your stress;
They can't detain themselves
And instead be as sincere to you
Because stress always occurs.

There are those who hide it
Which makes it difficult for the younger one
To fully understand what it is.

However, when you express it—with tension
and understanding,
They'll learn how valuable it is—to feel,
Especially if it's done in public;
Being able to show the kind of feeling
Held within the depths of your soul,
they'll learn to meet it.

They'll learn to realize how important it is
to have care and an unbearable empathy.

Having a younger sibling,
A younger sister
Is the one who is at least by your side
Whether annoying you or not.

You are likely their biggest inspiration
Their biggest care to own
And something they can taunt but
love, too.

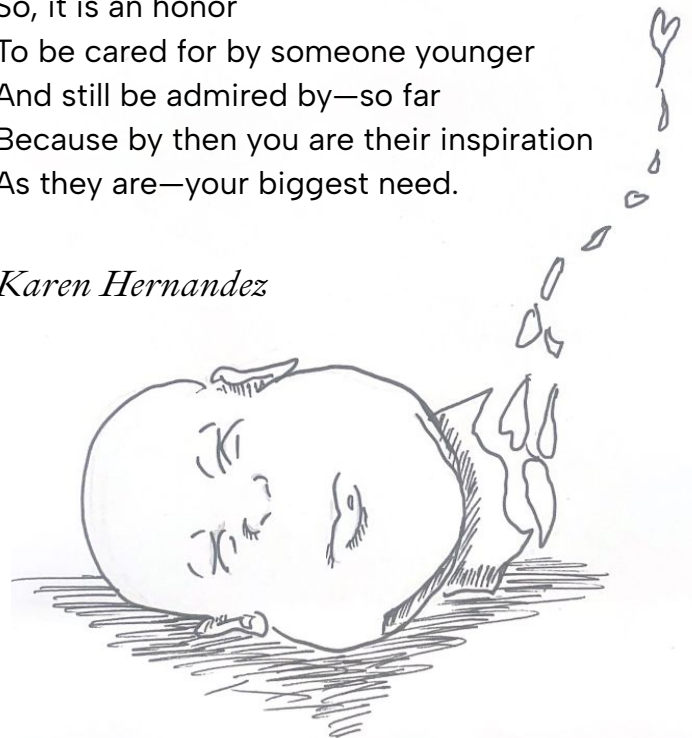
And when they develop this closure,
Being inseparable—hurts.

Having them younger
Brings care and annoyance
But pure love and abundance;
A bond between siblings
Middle and youngest.

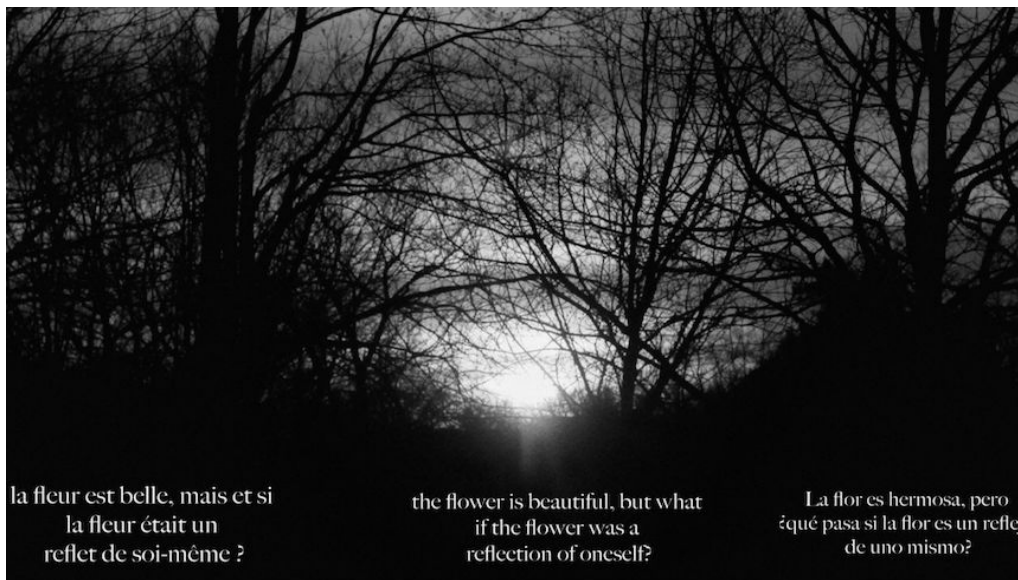
It'll be okay that way.
As long as their boundaries are respected
And offer the qualities of love that is necessary
Then their relationship won't be broken
And any need requested—will be approved.

So, it is an honor
To be cared for by someone younger
And still be admired by—so far
Because by then you are their inspiration
As they are—your biggest need.

Karen Hernandez



La Fleur



la fleur est belle, mais et si
la fleur était un
reflet de soi-même ?

the flower is beautiful, but what
if the flower was a
reflection of oneself?

La flor es hermosa, pero
¿qué pasa si la flor es un reflejo
de uno mismo?



Daniel Brown

Playas de RD



Keury Sosa Cuevas

The Constant 4

How have we gotten here?
Millions and billions of years
And today we are here.
Our home hasn't changed
with the passage of time.
We infiltrated the home.

We live,
Virtually and physically.
Most through glowing rectangles.
Eyes open, mouth closed,
Consumed.

Green and blue around,
We stay enclosed in the constant 4.
The glowing rectangles.
Home.
Mind.

The leaves fall
As the leaves fell.
Orange, yellow, green.
Crunchy and crackling,
Air pure

Enclosed inside the constant 4

Billions at home
How did we get here?
We infiltrated home
The virus struck.
Critical and at its final stretch.

Miracle we haven't self-destructed yet

Evolved from theories where
Nothing is true.
Speculations through 'evidence'
Life is playing a joke.
Deposit your laugh at the end.

Move through everything picking up evidence
and theorize myself

Purpose and propose.
How have we gotten here?

Escape through the constant 4
Glow and forget
Addiction, can't let
Go.

Sense makes nothing.
What do we do?
Continue spreading our virus.

Reality far, far away.

Outside my window
The constant 4

Outside my door
The constant 4

Over my bed
The constant 4

Move the virus to our neighbors
The constant 4

Time
The constant 4

How have we gotten this far?

Marcos Munguia



Jessica Nazario

The Faces That Wear Us



Janet Devine

Pig's Pen



I be sitting there, right there, at the foot of my porch, the golden rays of the sun shining upon my face. I looked towards it, the burn of the sun being but a light blister on these old eyes that have seen much. I seen a boy walk over and a'round talking to that blasted pork, the swine of hell, chatting it up with the devil's dog. Blasted thing done chewed up my leg and give me nothing but the merit of my loss. And there it be. Doin the same to some poor boy.

Ain't nothin I can do. Porky done licked it up in the brain of that poor boy.



Ain't nothin I can do when a boy don't listen to reason. He be ready to meet up with me. Pig done told him 'bout my loss, painting it up as a sacrifice for my rousing "victory" and that boy be eatin it up.

Ain't nothin I can do when the boy come up to me and says "but you won." Ain't no winnin' at the pigs pen. He take and he take. Boys from mothers, men from wives, women from children, wives from husbands.



Ain't nothin I can do as I watch them pigs over at the pig pen parading around my lost leg, my lost pride, and my lost life, in an attempt to bring others to their cause. Them pigs, those pigs, they all the same devil. Fattening themselves while the rest of us starve. We working while they on our backs oinking up orders, commanding and demanding respect while they on their fat backs.

Ain't nothin I can do when the phantom of my leg come to visit, the flashes of my past, the glimpses of what I remember, what I'm forced to remember of the pig pen.

Ain't nothin I can do.

Emily Finch



Kain

Falter

Part I:

Falter - As You Move Forward

How aware he is
Witnessing the accustomed
That she couldn't divide into;
Unable to expel him
The moment he knew
His departure would affect
The greater cause of liberty
A little girl couldn't obtain

Apart shall he linger
Biting back the tongue
He'd used for proper leisure
Since she is now a cast
A young partiality of the universe.

To utter any doubt
Perhaps spill any consideration -
No.
None. He isn't allowed to.

Her bell finds no similar chime
Only when the breezes walk by
And granting her a reason to
Still survive
And shed her mourns into a cry.

For - he knows,
Even if his presence glows
And his eyes provide balance

It is not enough.
It can never - or ever
Be enough.

Despite no longer being a child
Or the years swift away
By her own feet.

It will be his tomb
His unwritten name
Latching selfishly as though
His palms still warm
protectively
And remain parental
So, as she wanders
His tongue will guide
Every structure
That comes into
Her life.

Part II:

Falter, but I Will Walk Forward

I know I was not left stranded.
Never - not even for a second

He left me poised
Tangled in the literature
Of his mind.

It is as if
I can see it all
Know and feel when
Something turns the other way
Like the brief flickers of light
And you knew it happened
But you were never in the room
When it did.

When I ponder his return,
It makes me hope deeper.
My bell
tingles joyfully
As if he traded places
For the wind
To welcome me
Home.

I understand him now
Why his name exists
Then - doesn't.
Why - I now flower his tomb
anew like his flesh was instead
The seeds of leftover life
He could've given to me.

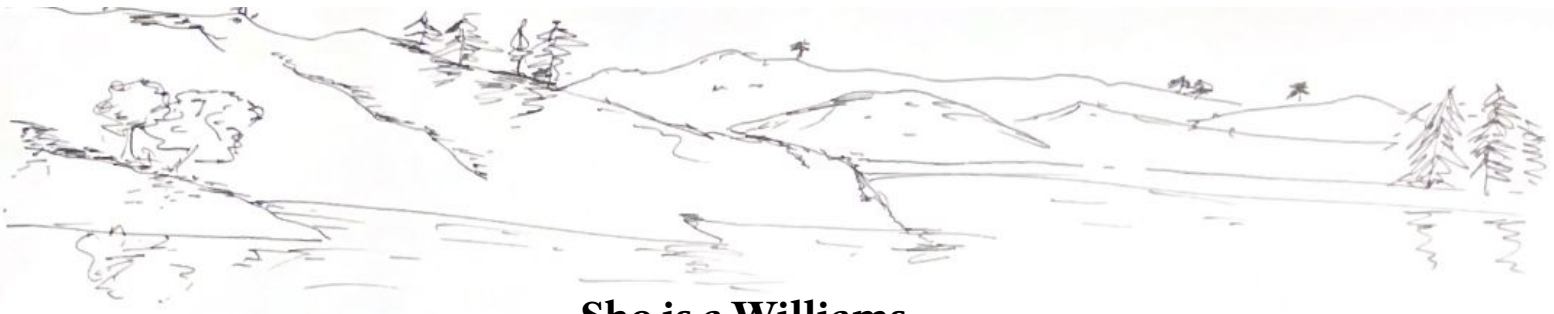
But, I'm not against it.
No.
I couldn't be.

Because even if I leave
His name behind as I walk
To the gate,

He sports everywhere
To gently remind me
I am always safe.

Karen Hernandez





She is a Williams

Jessie hadn't been able to sleep since they had arrived. Bailey had been the most excited to be able to meet a part of her family that she hadn't even known existed despite the little information her mother had given her on the ride there. But like most parents, Jessie didn't have the heart to share the truth with Bailey about why she didn't speak all that much about her family, especially her mother.

She turned her head and looked towards her husband who laid comfortably on his side of the small bed, with not as many thoughts running through his mind as she had. With a sigh she lifted the heavy large quilt off her body and sat up from the bed to slip her feet through to the slippers that sat on the floor. As she stood she grabbed her husband's hoodie which hung on top of the bedpost and slipped it over her t-shirt before walking towards the open bedroom door and slipping out of the dark and cold room. The memories of her younger self flashed through her mind as she walked through the creaking hallways of the childhood home.

She remembered waking up every morning, before everyone else, so that she wasn't left behind and could get a ride to school. Her childhood was a constant cycle of trying to be noticed so that people could at least remember that she lived in the same

house with them. When she reached the front door she opened it as quietly as possible before pushing open the screen door, allowing the cold drift of the wind to slip past her face and bare toes.

Jessie stepped onto the wooden front porch gazing at the lake in front of her with a look of disdain, knowing that body of water in front of her held no good significance in her life as it did to others in her family. She had no good luck. She wasn't blessed enough to be considered one of them so the body of water would never receive a nostalgic look of love from her. She walked over to the front porch swing and sat down on the cushion, slowly beginning to swing gently back and forth.

She couldn't understand why she had even entertained the idea of coming back to this town, knowing full well that it couldn't do anything for her. That's why she had left her family in the first place; she knew that if she stayed there she couldn't possibly ever become the person she was meant to be, the woman she was today. Jessie needed to leave with nothing or else she would fade off into this endless memory of absolutely dust.

"Jess?" The sound of a voice pulled her out of the drowning swirl of memories and thoughts that had led her to be sitting in this cold place in

the first place. "What are you doing out here?" Her brother asked as he walked up the wooden stairs of the porch

"I couldn't sleep." She didn't add on anything further to her words, hoping that could be enough for him to walk away, like all those other times, but he remained standing in front of her.

"Your face says otherwise." His voice sounded amused but she didn't have the heart to entertain him so in that moment she decided to end whatever conversation he had hoped to start.

"My face can say whatever it wishes, good night Mack." She stood back onto her feet and walked past him.

"Why did you leave?" he asked, stopping her just as she pushed the screen door to get back in the house, "Mom was worried sick when you wouldn't answer the phone. She tried everything to see where you could've possibly ran off to but it was like you had practically erased yourself."

Something in her had wished to yell and scream that the answer was more than obvious but she kept herself calm as she turned to him, "Because I had to."

Her brother scoffed at her vague answer, "You didn't *have* to leave; you wanted to. Admit it. You left because you were reckless and you didn't care who you hurt when you were gone. As long as you were gone."

"When have you ever known me to be reckless? None of you knew me at all," She received silence but she took a step closer, "I left for myself so that I wouldn't be left stuck in the endless dark pit this entire family had built for me and one that I never thought

I could escape from. And now look where I am. I have a family, a career, a LIFE. One that I'm sure none of you could've seen, not even mom. I was a dark sheep in this family full of selfish, absorbed arrogant pigs that took one look at me and knew that I couldn't live up to the family name so I lived up to my own. I changed something and now look at what I have. Mom wouldn't be proud to see what I have because she would've done everything to change it," She took a final step towards her brother with a look of pure confidence and pride, "My daughter, the light of my life, doesn't deserve to know what kind of selfish lineage she comes from. If I could change anything it would be my blood connection to you."

"Bailey deserves the truth--"

Jessie cut him off with a sharp laugh, "You don't know what my daughter deserves; none of you do. You don't think I already hear the whispers? Those same voices that were behind my back for years because I wasn't what they expected. Not even our own mother cared enough to stop them. That won't be my daughter. She is a Williams, not a Regent."

Jessie and Mack gazed steadily upon each other as she breathed heavily before she took a step back, turning towards the screen door ready to leave. "You can't change where you came from Jessie Regent. No matter what fancy name or title you come up with next." She looked over her shoulders towards the man she no longer considered her brother."

"You're right, I can't, but God knows I should've a long time ago."

Malia Lacy



Alex

Now Recording

They tell me to follow
but they want me to hide
every wise and beautiful part
of myself
to walk on some road made of
nothing
but fatal charades
to forsake good neighbors
taken
to places of hate and of pain
to lie inside my zip-tied
mind
like our former neighbors'
zip-tied hands
and find a way to live
with it but I stand here cutting
through the thick plastic cuffs
to find out
who I am

Angel Mossucco aka Ms. Angel
February 2025



Self-Portrait



Malik Fleming

Deep Blue Love

At the bottom of the ocean I lose myself as I did
when I saw your eyes blue as ocean deep as darkness
darkness as deep
blue like sky; sky-like blue.
When I'm in front of the ocean
It's like I'm in front of you
Emotions pulling me inside as a riptide
I swam in blue as I swan in feelings
I swam up to breath but there wasn't an up.
Blue

Blue

Deep

I see my reflection in your eyes
like I see your face in the waves.
Falling deep into the ocean.

My own dress pushes me down as I remember how cold, how deep, how dark, how
anxious for a breath you make me feel.
It looks elegant, looks like a dance.
How can something be so ethereal and at the same time so menacing?

I've tasted the end of time just with a sip of the sea.
And before I breathe
I see your face.

Blurry from my eyesight
Shining close to dead
White as the myth of death
And before I pass out
The cold waves envelop my glacial body.

My red hair is the only sight left of me,
disastrous fate for a bride who met her end at the bottom of the sea
She once found life in oceanic hues,
deep love for those blue eyes.


Kadelin Corporan Morales (Kade)



Anonymous

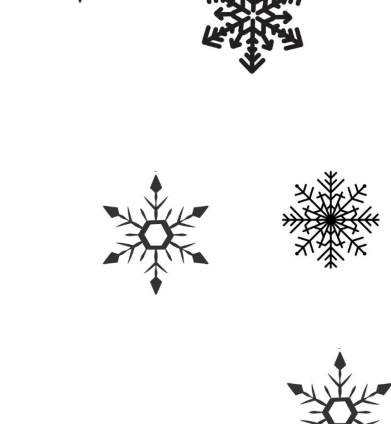
A collection of various black snowflake illustrations scattered around the top and sides of the page, framing the title.

Winter Haikus

A collection of various black snowflake illustrations scattered around the left side of the first haiku.


Frozen crunchy grass
Ankle twist like pretzel dough
Crunch ankle on ice

Jeffry Arteaga

A collection of various black snowflake illustrations scattered around the right side of the second haiku.

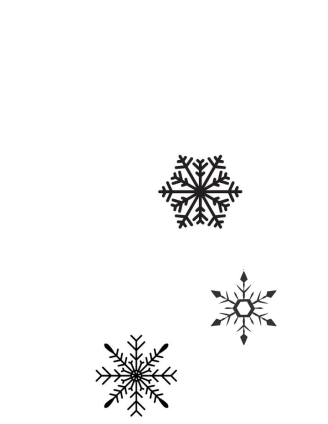
The snowflakes fall down
The trees outlined in white snow
What peaceful silence

Usaidah Mir

A collection of various black snowflake illustrations scattered around the left side of the third haiku.

I walk in the dark,
cold, freezing. I don't know where
to go in this snow.

Aniyah Jackson

A collection of various black snowflake illustrations scattered around the right side of the fourth haiku.

Room is freezing cold,
Pity, bed too warm to leave
But I have to rise

Jevon Lin



Anonymous

Composing a New Life

*Dedicated to the grandparents who I never met and to those
grandparents who I knew briefly before their death.*

I'm talking
about the

Renaissance

in the New York

city of Harlem

during which the Black artist

Jacob Lawrence

portrayed Black families in exodus

who'd chosen the path

of leaving the state of the unwanted South

to the *past*—

Painting the migrants
who chose the risk

Of leaving the system
with a borrowed ticket

On trains and in stations where
custom once forbid them

On foot and in cars
circumventing
all restrictions

To the North and to cities
where paid-work awaited

In factories, on trains, in homes, in restaurants
that paid CASH to Black workers, as had LONG been sought;

Like Isabel Wilkerson's book title implies:
finding *The Warmth of Other Suns* is a human right

To move from places that restrict dignity
To places, in which people can be more free

Is largely how this space
that WE inhabit came to be

For in the era that Black sharecroppers rejected *Jim Crow*
My own grandparents, too, left their Italian, village homes

For the American jobs advertised that they sought
to escape the destruction that the First World War had wrought

In which hundreds of miles and millions of men
were destroyed by the greed of imperial dominion

And by tanks, poison gas, by machine guns, and planes
that turned men into bodies and fields into waste

The rich men's war
that gave poor men the disease
called *shell shock* then
and now: P.T.S.D.

The war of consumption caused a hellish inner landscape
where patriotic abuse became xenophobic hate

But my grandparents left in a boat across the sea
by choice, to find jobs, in a place with more safety

Where they could not speak the language
But they tried to find a life
Getting married, having children
All resulting, in my life

And today we meet here, in a school space, in Trenton
As a celebration of strength and intention
The descendants of the Great Black Migration to the North
And the descendants of the immigrants who fled a different war

And now it's our turn to keep writing the score
As a composition of the lives they endured

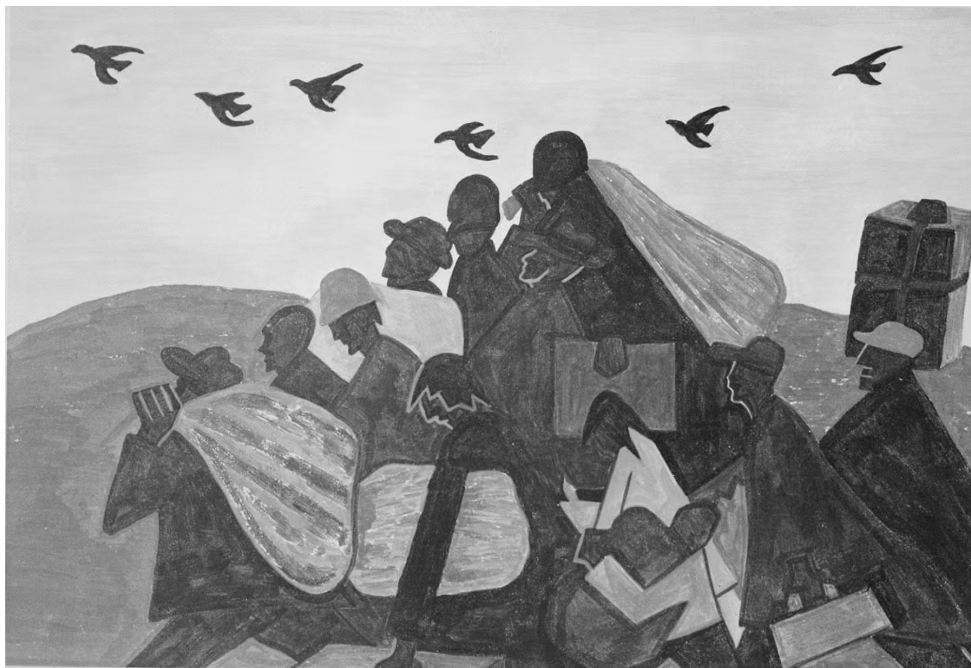
And of course all of those who were here before
Reframing our lives, as we intersect more

We celebrate the journalist who wrote the book I cited
Spending her time recording history long-sighted

We celebrate the painters who composed their bright paintings
Spending their time documenting great migrations

And we celebrate the people in this place today
Who carry the message of *hope* in all the words
that we relay

Angel Mossucco aka Ms. Angel



The Migration Series, 1940-41.

Jacob Lawrence

Notes:

Isabel Wilkerson: the first African American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize in journalism.

Jacob Lawrence: Harlem Renaissance painter who depicted the everyday life experiences of African Americans in his art.

Stranger Things

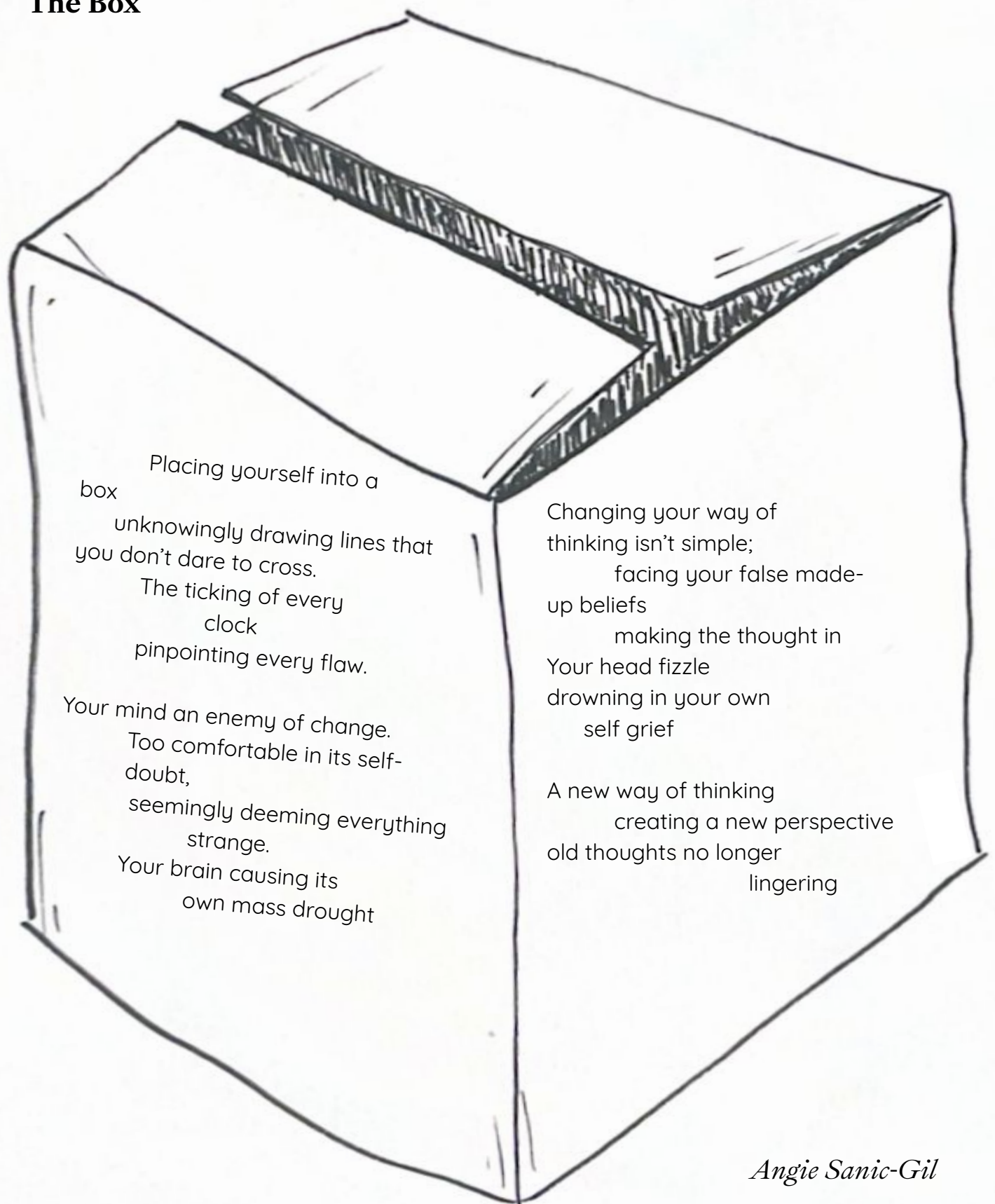


Anonymous

Rose Moon



The Box



Placing yourself into a
box
unknowingly drawing lines that
you don't dare to cross.
The ticking of every
clock
pinpointing every flaw.

Your mind an enemy of change.
Too comfortable in its self-
doubt,
seemingly deeming everything
strange.
Your brain causing its
own mass drought

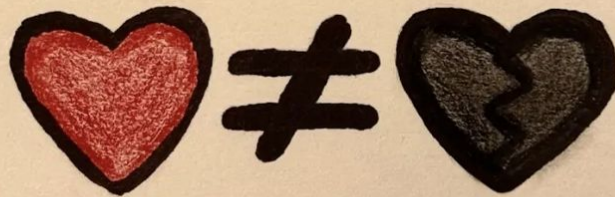
Changing your way of
thinking isn't simple;
facing your false made-
up beliefs
making the thought in
Your head fizzle
drowning in your own
self grief

A new way of thinking
creating a new perspective
old thoughts no longer
lingering

Angie Sanic-Gil

In love until my heart shall cherish his love
He will still be mine after we both die
Learning to love in order to fully love
Mysterious will forever be my ride or die
Enduring these feelings despite my heartbreaks
Having a tendency to come back every year
Getting back with a young boy whose tenderness leaks
My partner having nostalgia of how much I tear
I pray he will portray his devotion for me
Both introducing affection equally and sincerely
Displaying these feelings of mine to not lose Andie
Our love life will never be the same, unfortunately
In behalf of our relationship I truly believe it won't last
Unless a miracle will happen and make a cast

The Reality of Teenage "Love"



1/12/25

Emily Gonzalez-Calle

Emily Gonzalez-Calle

Masks

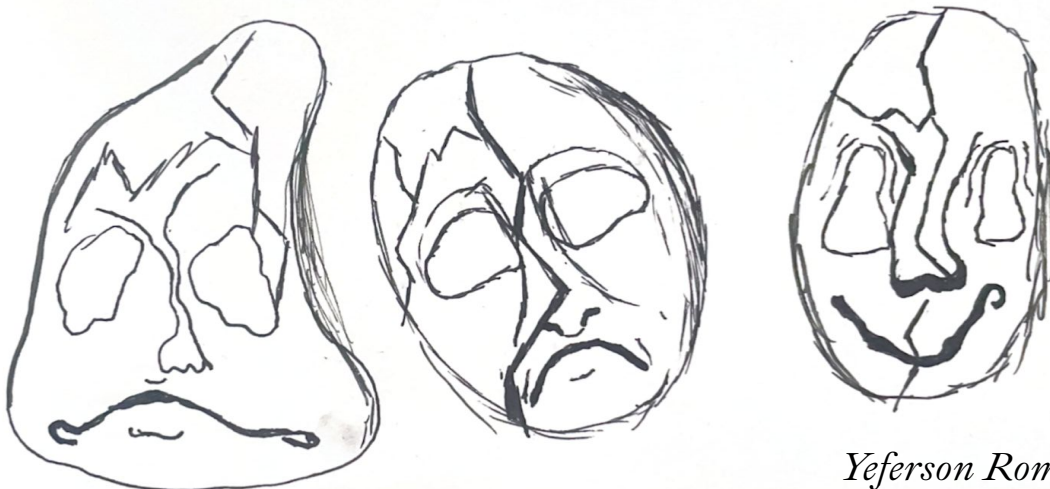
In a city with tall buildings and endless noise called Luminaria lived a large population of people. These people wore masks but not for disguise; they wore them in order to survive. All the masks were different, some were smooth and shiny to show confidence and others were sharp edged, long, and scary to keep people away. Nobody ever took their mask off in public, that's how things were in the city.

The people of Luminaria moved carefully everyday, they thought carefully before they spoke or said anything, and they hid their true thoughts and emotions behind these masks. A powerful person might have worn a mask of power though behind the mask they felt like failure. Some people with shiny masks seemed happy but behind the mask they were hiding pure sadness. From a young age kids learned what mask they would wear in order to fit in and be accepted.

One day, a strong storm hit the city. It was a thunderstorm and the wind was so strong that it was blowing houses away and even started to crack and blow away the masks that people were wearing. As the storm went on, people saw each other's true feelings and emotions just for a quick moment; some seemed tired, others unsure, and felt like something was missing.

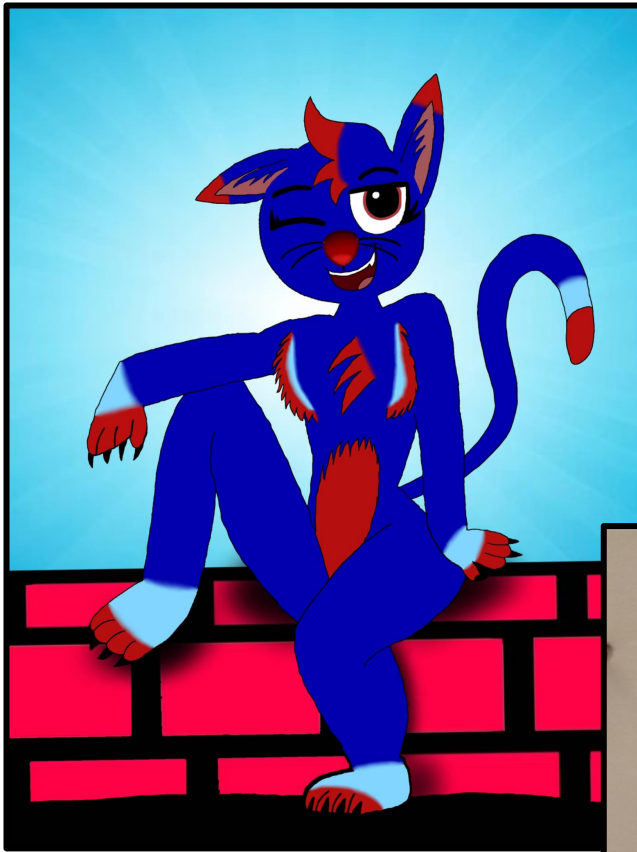
When the storm was over, the city got quiet and was no longer noisy. Some people quickly fixed their masks and put them back on and just continued with their life, others paused. The ones that paused had seen something else behind the mask, something real and interesting. Some even walked around the city without a mask showing their true faces and emotions to the world but just for a moment.

After everything was over the city remained the same, but something had changed. The people who had truly seen each other even if it was just for that small moment, now felt a silent connection to one another. each other.



Yeferson Romero Lanza

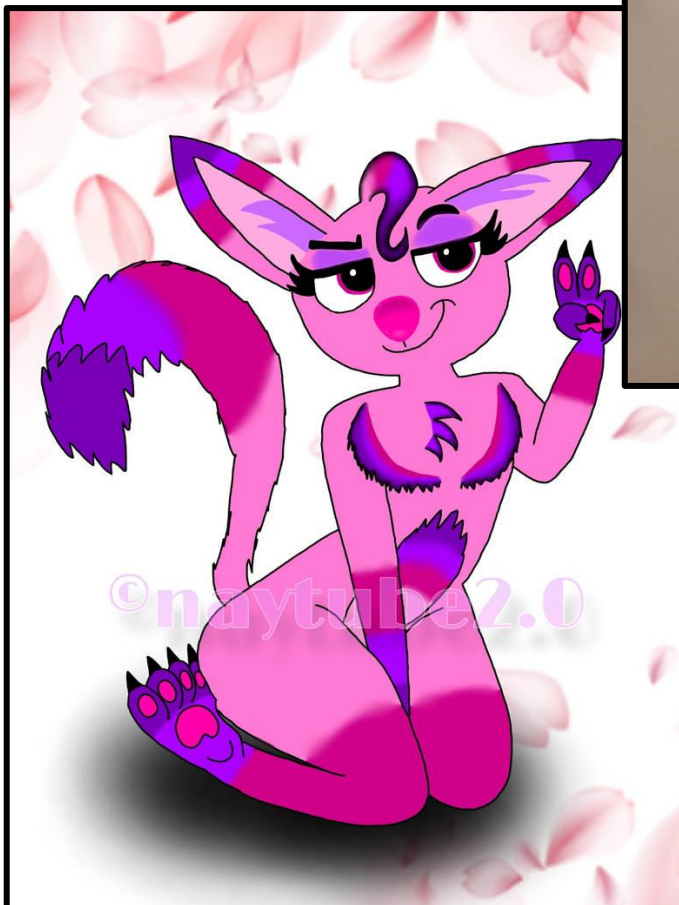
Sapphire the Kitty



Jade Dalmatian



Adella Foxman



Nayla Louis

Reflection

I. Empath

Everywhere I look I see me.
Like a thousand mirrors
all with the same
pitiful
reflection.

A reflection I try to hard to avoid
yet
can't seem to.

The very reflection
I have grown to hate.
The same hairstyle.
A half up half down
with a bun that's falling out of the hair tie
no matter what I do.
Stray pieces of hair fall all over my face.

The same old hoodie which has the design peeling off and the strings cut.
The same jeans that don't quite fit me but feel nice on my skin.
Everything is the same.
Their faces were the only thing that didn't match.

I would hear my voice surrounding me
as I walked through the halls of the school
And on the bus every morning.
The teachers would teach using my mannerisms,
Circling the classroom,
Silently snapping their fingers when waiting for kids to raise their hands.
Twirling their hair
and bouncing their legs every time they sat down.

No one ever looked at me.
Or spoke to me. It angered me when I would look around and no one could see what I did.
Could feel as I was,
when all I did was feel for others.

II. Mirrors

Once I got home I was met with a slap and yelling.

The only person who wasn't a reflection of me was my mother.
I couldn't even hear what she was yelling about as I closed the front door and walked to my room.
My ears ringing as her empty words and screams filled my brain.
Clouding it like cotton.

I never say anything.
There was no point.
No need.
She would follow me up the stairs and tell me of every little thing she blamed me for.
My birth.
My father.
My brothers.
After yelling she would leave me be and the routine continued.

I would go to the bathroom, take a shower, and look in the mirror.
My face looked warped and droopy.
My hair looked like it was melting.
I touched my face but couldn't feel the skin drooping.
It felt normal. My hair felt normal.
I looked at my naked body and felt disgust as it bubbled and sagged.
Little holes.
Lots of them.
I could see the inside of my body through them.
Yet.
I couldn't feel it.
My skin felt smooth and solid.
I wished the hollow of a girl staring at me was someone else.

III. What I'm Supposed to Be

This was how I proved myself,
how I gained my identity back.
I did what they wanted.
I did everything right.

This wasn't supposed to happen this way.
It was supposed to work.
I thought she'd be proud of me.
I felt tears rolling down my face and I gripped at my skin trying to pull the melting
skin off.
I screamed and yelled out of anger.
It only made it worse.
Get off. I whispered to myself.

Get off.

Get off.

Get off!

I screamed, tears streaming down my face.

I repeatedly clawed at my skin and screamed until my throat was raw and all I could
see was my eyes and my bones.
The squeezing in my chest got worse as I couldn't breathe anymore.

All I saw was a skeleton of what I was supposed to be.

Thalia Maldonado



Princessstorm Woody

The Siege of Kalaman

Once there was a grand and prosperous land known as the Kingdom of Kalaman. It was a grand powerful and peaceful nation most roundly known for its flying citadel. One day the town was sieged by the forces of the Demon Lord and so a great and terrible war broke out, as the invaders tried to seize control of the great lands of Kalaman.

One year later a party of heroes was summoned to deal with the ever-growing threat of the Demon Lord's forces. I was the first to be summoned. My name is Orgot the Wizard. The second to arrive was a disheveled-looking lady with a rat on her shoulder with a wizard hat on its head. Then came Etheldre, a knight of the king's order whose job it was to escort us through the battlefield.

Last to arrive was

Oz, a youngster who was to become my apprentice and accompany me in hopes that he could learn more magic and so we set off.

Standing before the grand entrance to the kingdom we were impressed by how massive the gate was. Its ever grand presence made me wonder what kind of threat could be so great that not even something as gargantuan as this gate could not hold it off.

Just then, I saw a blur of red pass the corner of my vision. It was so fast I could not get a proper look.

“What was that-” I blurted out.

“Adventurers, it is now time to set off into battle. Keep your eyes peeled and your senses sharpened. This will not be easy but I believe that it can be done” Eltheldre gestured at the door for us move forward.

The grand gates began to part as the ground shook under its immense weight. Before us we saw a burning bridge. The people of the

village across the gate were screaming in fear as the forces of the king stood at the gate, too terrified to face whatever was terrorizing that poor village.

We trudged forward putting out the flames of the bridge as we gained ground, just enough so that we could clear a path for ourselves. Suddenly a gust of wind hit us as the ground tremored.

Something large landed, something massive. *What could it be?* A dust wall obscured the creature that caused all of this commotion. Before anything could be said, a portion of the the dust began to glow as if something was being hurled at us. It all happened very quickly so we had no time to react. Thankfully, with lighting like speed, Eltheldre was in front of us wielding his mighty shield. He instructed us to stand behind him.

A giant burst of flame struck us and the land around us became charred. When the dust



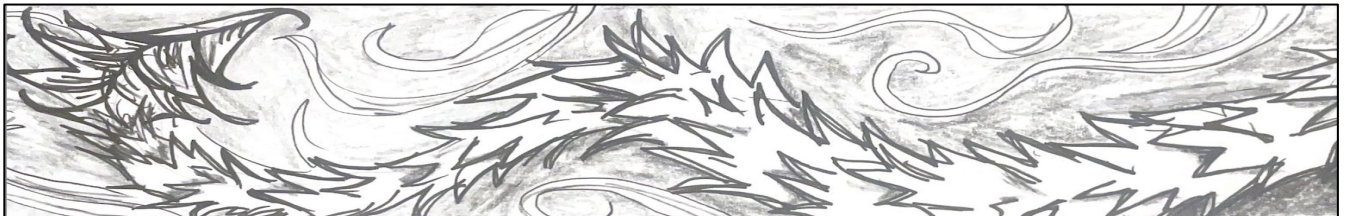
settled, standing before us was the last thing I wanted to see: a large, strong, powerful, nearly impenetrable by any kind of damage, red dragon. The rat on the lady's shoulder swiftly jumped into action, casting a fireball. To the dragon, however, the rodent's powerful fireball was nothing more than a nuisance. We could see it preparing to strike us again but Etheldre leapt forward and slammed his battle axe into the skull of the dragon. He was thrown against a building as the dragon, becoming enraged by the powerful blow, began to charge us.

I tried to protect Oz but he made the stupid decision to draw the dragon's attention to himself to buy us time. Etheldre was still unconscious and our options were limited. I began to conjure up a storm cloud while the lady charged forward, wielding her two daggers, sinking her teeth into the dragon's scales. Surprisingly, she managed to pierce its armor with nothing but her teeth. She was promptly thrown off the dragon but quickly got back up, hurling acid bottles that she hid under her robe at the beast's face. The shocked creature began to roar in pain and I finally struck it down with a lightning spell.

Etheldre finally got up to finish off the dragon but was blown away by its wings as it struggled to lift off of the ground. Oz then cast a magic missile to try to end its flight but he was bashed by its tail and was unable to move.

I shouted the young man's name to no avail.

Finally I had had enough so I knelt and began to chant. Etheldre found his footing again and, approaching the dragon, was able to cut one of its wings. The mighty beast began to tumble down. It crashed against the hard floor, breaking apart like an old dilapidated sand castle. By this time, I managed to finish chanting my spell and smote the creature, sealing its fate. The beast would never pose a threat to us again. The party finally rested up even though we knew this just the first of many adventures to come.



Esteban Taveras

Six Minutes of Resilience

In the sport of wrestling there are three periods. Each period is two minutes.

First Period

The whistle screams and the battle begins.
Muscles tense, the fire within flares
A test of speed, resilience, determination and resolve.
The mat feels vast and expansive, the air turns still.
Resilient is the first step you take,
When doubt creeps in and bodies shake.

Second Period

The pace slows down, realization sets in,
Every move is a war, every inch hard fought ground,
Fatigue whispers "just let go,"
But resolve replies "No, not yet."
Resilience is the refusal to break,
To accept defeat,
To not let your shoulders touch the mat.

Third Period

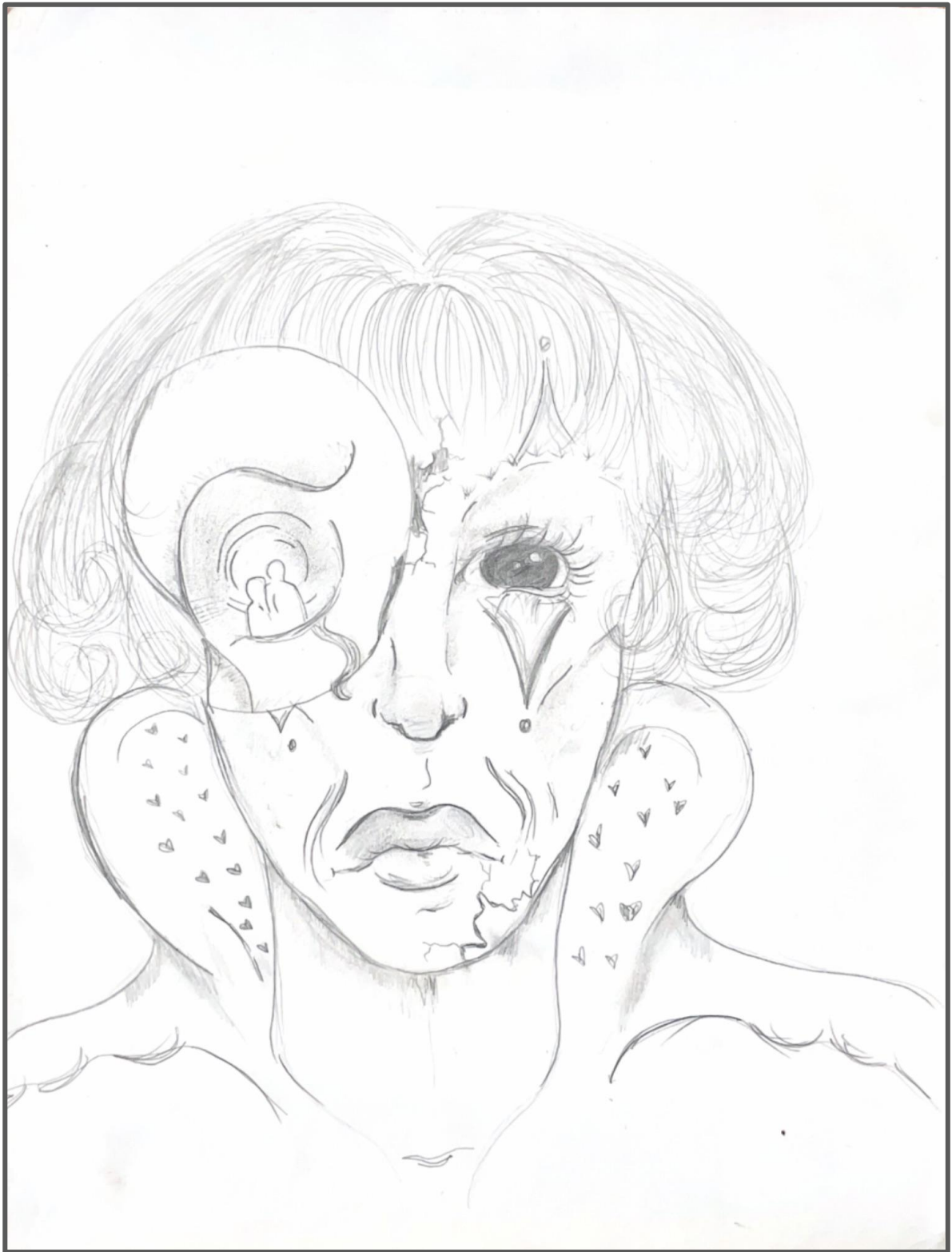
The final push, the last stand.
The whistle screeches, your heart pounds,
But you have to dig deeper, fueled by resilience and resolve.
Resilience is the fire that won't die,
The strength to rise, to fight, to dominate.

Three periods, a test of one's determination, resilience and
Resolve.

At the end you are able to stand tall,
Regardless of the results.
Deep down you've conquered yourself in a sense.
You ignored your screaming muscles and have broken down your mental walls;
You've truly won.

Adeboye Ololade

An Eye of a Prince



Dyshanique Ayers



Music Drama

Nidra, a girl with a stunning voice and extreme musical abilities, was writing a song in class, not paying attention to what the teacher was talking about. Suddenly, the sound of someone banging on their desk could be heard, startling Nidra and making her look up.

"Why is this worksheet so difficult?!" A boy with messy black hair complained.

"Maybe if you paid attention in class you would understand this." Another classmate interjected.

"Shut up, Titanic." The black haired boy growled. Nidra was used to the chaos her class created. She smirked and turned towards the black haired boy.

"Connor, if you want I could help you." She told him, knowing she never pays attention in class to even help him.

"You paid attention to what the teacher was saying?" He asked.

"Nope." Nidra laughed.

"Figures..." Titanic sighed. Nidra's best friends, Mel and Sakura, walked over to her.

"Nidra, could we talk about something?" Sakura asked.

"Go ahead"

"It's about some of the others. They don't have the confidence to perform for the concert you're working on and they're thinking of dropping out." Mel said, a hint of sadness etched in his voice.

"And by *others*, I assume you're talking about...?" Nidra questioned. She turned her full body to Mel and Sakura.

"There's quite a lot, honestly." Sakura said, rubbing the back of her head.

"The main ones are Clarissa, Inamay, and Seiji." Mel informed her.

"Seiji? Him too?" Nidra questioned. Her

voice and face showed how shocked she was. "Sakura, you're his twin. Did he tell you he was thinking of dropping out?" Nidra was practically panicked at this point. She had always wanted to perform on stage with her classmates and had even written songs for them. To have her dreams be in danger due to her classmates' fear wasn't exactly something she wanted.

"Yes he did. I tried to tell him everything would be ok but he wasn't convinced." Sakura answered.

"Oh.."

"Nidra, maybe this dream of yours was... Too big? I mean, to get 22 of us to perform in a concert is kinda...insane." Mel said, trying to put it in the gentlest way possible.

"Not saying it's a bad thing. Besides, we can do it with just a few of us. That way we have more time to sing certain songs and not have to take turns." Sakura jumped at the idea. Nidra shook her head and stood up.

"I told you two before, didn't I? This is the first time I've actually felt compelled to do something big, fun, and exciting. Music always came naturally to me so I was starting to lose drive but then I heard Sakura's voice and something sparked inside me once more. A feeling I think I lost a while ago." Mel and Sakura smiled at Nidra's resolve. Sakura put her hand to her chest and closed her eyes. After a couple seconds she opened them again, a fierce glint in her eyes, a look of fiery determination.

"Ok, fine. We'll try to convince them to change their minds and have our concert with the 22 of us. Sound good?"

"I knew I could count on you two." Nidra beamed.

"Clarissa would probably be the easiest to convince. She seems to look up to you and Sakura a lot." Mel told them and sat in the seat next to Nidra.

"Then we'll talk to Clarissa first." Sakura and Mel nodded. They could feel the drive in Nidra and it was starting to affect them as well.

After class was over and everyone started leaving the room to the next class, Nidra and Sakura walked over to Clarissa who was still putting her stuff in her bag. "Hey wacky weirdo." Nidra teased. Clarissa looked puzzled at the comment.

"Wacky weirdo?" She questioned. "You're the one who decided to dye your hair a bizarre color!"

"H-Hey! Green isn't bizarre."

"Still wondering why you decided to do it." Sakura snickered.

"Whatever. Clarissa, can I ask you something?" Nidra asked.

Clarissa smirked, "You just did." Nidra's face frowned quickly.

"Are you nervous, Clarissa?" Sakura questioned. Clarissa gave a confused look and stopped stuffing things in her bag, the scarf around her neck loosening slightly.

"Nervous about..?"

"The concert." Sakura answered.

"Oh, that. Look, I know you guys want to do it with everyone. I want to as well but I hear the two of you and I think to myself, *How am I supposed to share a stage with them? They're too talented!*" Clarissa sighed. "We have a trio song and I feel like I'd mess things up."

"Clarissa, I don't care if you mess things up. I've heard everyone either rap or sing. I've even seen Chaewon dance so I know everyone is very talented. Everyone in the class is at least decent at singing." Nidra assured her, trying to spark a little bit of confidence in her. Clarissa didn't look too confident even after hearing that.

"I'm decent, yeah, but sharing the stage with talented singers like you and Sakura? That's a bit too much, no?"

"Do you think the only thing that matters on that stage is your singing ability?" Sakura asked.

"It is, no?"

"Not even close! You know, Alexis isn't that great of a singer but she has a stage presence that no one else has. She literally owns the stage. Marie as well. She can write lyrics and produce songs too." Sakura smiled as she told Clarissa this, But most importantly, why not just have fun?"

"I don't think it's very fun if I fail." Clarissa shook her head.

"Chaewon, Alexis, Kaido, Sakura, and I have a lot of fun on stage. Some people may not be the best singers but if they can bring a little energy, that'll make them unforgettable then that's when they win." Nidra encouraged.

"Unforgettable. Did you just use a pun for our song?" Clarissa asked.

"You guys changed the name of our song?" Sakura questioned.

"It was Clarissa's idea. I think the title fits. Clarissa has incredible balance and sense of rhythm so dancing will be nothing to her. That's only if you have fun." Nidra smiled.

"I don't know." She said nervously.

"Join me and the other girls for dance practice today. We'll be practicing 'Aurora'. If you have fun while practicing then you have to join the concert. Deal?" Nidra smirked. Clarissa looked surprised at the comment again.

"Fine but don't expect much, ok?" Clarissa smiled solemnly. Sakura smiled and Nidra jumped with joy.

"Ahem," Someone coughed. The girls turned and saw their teacher standing at the door.

"Oh, we're late for third block. Hehe.." Sakura laughed sheepishly.



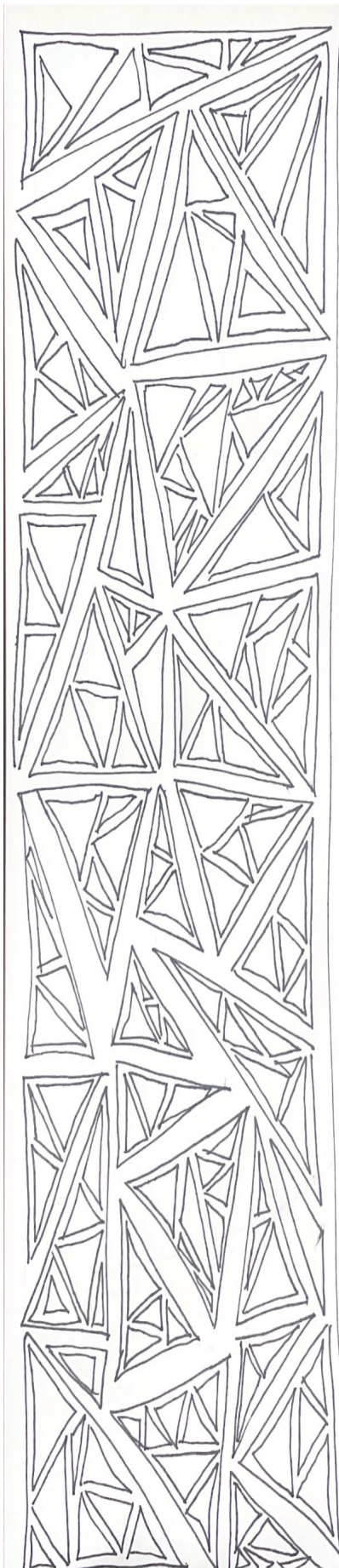
Isaiah Young



Denilson Samayoa

Gambino





Looks Can Kill: A Reflective Essay

Self image is subjective. It is formed by the minds and beliefs expressed by others around you. The way we think about ourselves isn't an actual thing that we somehow come up with. We unintentionally conform to the ideas and thoughts we hear growing up. The people around us share their beliefs passed to them by the people around them. It's an endless cycle of beliefs made up from someone years ago. In our minds, we firmly believe these beliefs, although sometimes we don't even have proof. When you look in the mirror you might see an "ugly" or "beautiful" person, but none of it is technically true.

The idea of self image can relate to the illusions or shadows portrayed in Plato's famous *Allegory of the Cave*. In this allegory, Plato refers to prisoners shackled in a cave. They cannot move at all. Everything they know relies solely on shadows on a wall in their line of vision. The shadows are created by puppeteers. The prisoners' minds believe that the illusions that they see are real. One day, a prisoner is freed and sees the light, realizing everything he knows to be true is not. The now freed man goes back to try and free the others. The prisoners believe he is crazy and do not listen. They react with violence and strong opposition. Their beliefs are so strong that they would rather stay true to what they think know in the cave.

Self image can be compared to this allegory in many ways. The distorted shadows created by the puppeteers represent the reality we believe is real. The journey of finding yourself relates to the prisoner being freed from the cave. The freed prisoner returning to free others oppose freedom references others trying to free us from the misconceptions our minds create with the result of disbelief. The allegory reveals a connection between self image and the cave.

Self image is something I've always struggled with. I tend to believe the shadows or beliefs made by the puppeteers of society. The way I view myself can be negative at times. Others try to free me from my "cave." They give me encouraging words but my mind is still shackled firmly to my incorrect beliefs. It's difficult to see that the shadows and illusions are distorted. Self discovery is a journey that I work on, striving to free myself from illusions every day.

Plato's allegory is a great way to more deeply understand self image. It serves as a metaphor for the cave that self perception puts us in. Self image is something that was constructed and is not true. We must recognize illusions that shackle us to be free from the cave.

Iyonna Jones



THE PHOENIX MAGAZINE: SPRING 2025

THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO SUBMITTED THEIR WORK TO THE PHOENIX MAGAZINE!

If you would like your work to be featured in our next publication, scan the QR code below or visit our Instagram page, which has the submission form and much more information about The Phoenix Magazine.

CONTACT US

Instagram:@thephoenix.tchs

Email:thephoenxtchs@gmail.com

Club Advisor (Janet Devine):jdevine@trenton.k12.nj.us

SUBMISSION FORM

