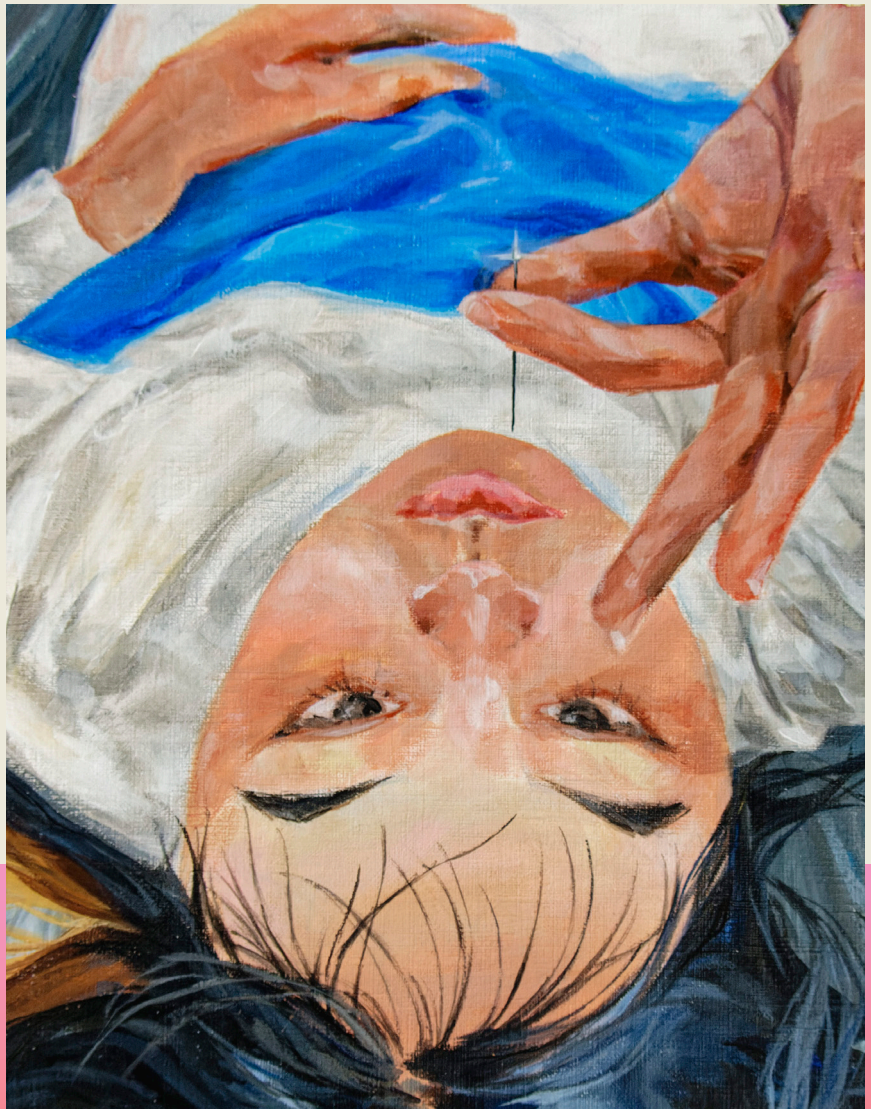


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LOUDOUN  
COMMUNITY  
PRESS

**LITERARY**



**ANTHOLOGY**

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### About Loudoun Community Press

Loudoun Community Press is an educational arts and publishing organization. Loudoun Community Press provides a number of adolescent and teen arts and publishing programs. Each year, our Student Board of Directors selects a theme and publishing project for young people to produce together for Loudoun County. Loudoun Community Press Cohorts meet weekly and are led by a Student Board of Directors. Together they participate in group activities, lead arts and education programming for partner organizations, and support local charities through service. Loudoun Community Press also provides arts outreach programming and community wide education through our Speaker Series events.

For more information about Loudoun Community Press, please visit [loudouncommunitypress.org](http://loudouncommunitypress.org) or email [info@loudouncommunitypress.org](mailto:info@loudouncommunitypress.org)





# MIDDLE SCHOOL TRAUMA



Sabry Tate







**Each slip of paper with the word “slave” corresponded to a numerical value, and I couldn’t help but think about the objects that were valued more than the lives of people like me.**

I have always loved history; no matter the topic, it always feels important. For the majority of grade school, American history is taught through a rotation of units that become more complex as you get older. Most excitingly, sixth grade was the year when there was a teacher whose sole job was to teach history.

At the beginning of the year, we discussed the creation of the Constitution and the Revolutionary War, and eventually, we got to the slavery issue. The idea of slavery being a singular unit is definitely a problem in itself, considering that slavery existed during all of these events, but that is a discussion for another day.

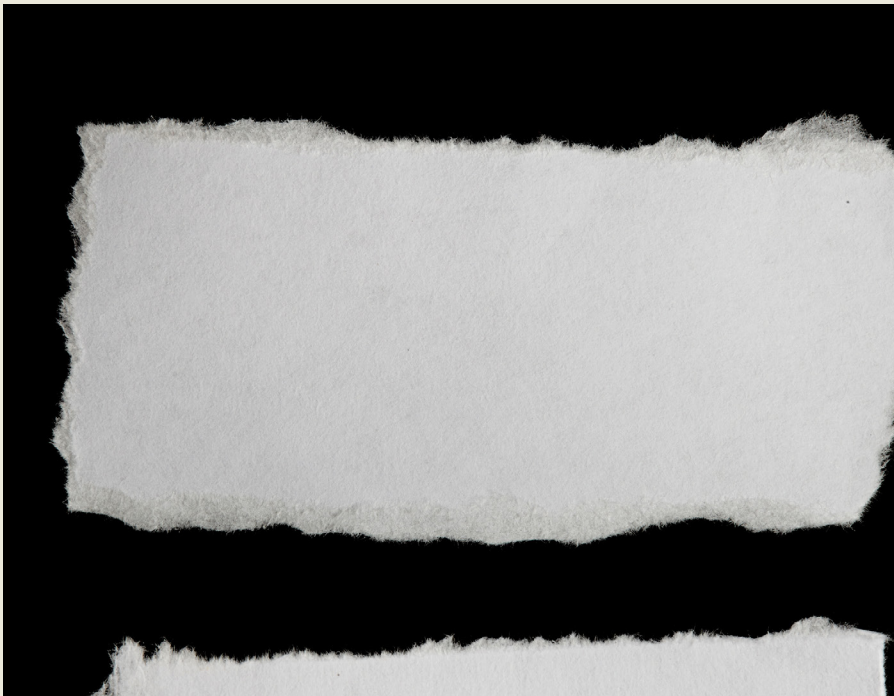
One day, the two sixth-grade history teachers decided to have an interactive lesson in the library. The lesson was intended to be an

introduction to colonial economics, showing students how the country grew its wealth.

Students were sorted into different states. Some Southern, others Northern. In the north, students had things like fur that allowed their states to grow wealthy. While in the Southern states, there were enslaved people. I was assigned to a Southern state, and as I saw my classmates trading slips of paper that represented different goods, I felt sick to my stomach. The student traders who were assigned to the South were given the title of “slave catchers.” I remember having to count out how much money my state had.

Each slip of paper with the word “slave” corresponded to a numerical value, and I couldn’t help but think about the objects that were valued more than the lives of people like me.







They didn't know that with the label of slave catcher, they immediately started to cosplay racists, rapists, and a million other traumatizing identities.

At the end of the game, my state didn't win, but I could physically feel myself break. It was not caused by the loss of the game but because I learned that so many adults thought it was appropriate to use this game to teach about slavery. I didn't blame my classmates. They didn't know that with the label of slave catcher, they immediately started to cosplay racists, rapists, and a million other traumatizing identities.

History was my third block of a four-block schedule. I remember thinking to myself, "just get through the day." When class let out, I walked myself to the bathroom and let my emotions overflow as I cried silently. After thirty seconds passed, I took a deep breath and bottled everything back up. I walked back out, praying that my feelings would not burst out of me. When I got home, I didn't speak for hours. I remember my older sister trying to mess around with me, joking about my outfit. I didn't have a witty comeback for her. I was, in the truest sense of the word, numb. I remember my mom telling everyone to give me time, that eventually I'll let them know what was going on.

That evening, I fell apart. After trying to





control my emotions and pretend everything was okay, I couldn't. It wasn't cathartic or beautiful, and it didn't feel good. It was horrible. I cried and cried, then cried so hard that I started to choke. Telling my mother about my day through sobs was one of the hardest things I had to do. I told her things I didn't even realize, like how it shook me to my core how easily my peers would buy and sell enslaved people and how each slip of paper with that five-letter word felt like an attack on my life.

At first, I had told my mother not to do anything about it, that what's done is done. But then she asked me an important question, a question that would stay with me. "What is going to stop this from happening again?" So, she wrote an email detailing how this activity had emotionally and mentally impacted me. How instead of getting a useful education that day, I experienced educational trauma. At the end of our conversation, I told my mom that if my teacher brought this up to me, I was sure

that I would burst out into tears at school, so she added to her email to not talk to me about the lesson. My mother told me that my teacher wrote back an email of apology, stating how sorry she was and how she would correct the mistake in the future. While I appreciated the apology, it didn't change the fact that it normalizes the selling of human beings.

I often find myself wondering if any of my classmates remember that lesson, and I don't think they do. For them, that day was probably not memorable in their middle school journey. However, this brought to mind countless things that make being a black student uniquely challenging. Assignments like giving a presentation instantly become more complex when realizing that you are faced with the burden of having to compete with people's unconscious bias and hoping that they see you as confident and not angry or emotional. Constantly being called by a different name in class just because the teacher chooses not to tell us apart.

I am black before I am anything else, and I'm proud to be. But the mental weight of how my black identity is perceived by non-black people is heavy. That question my mother asked me that day shaped my life in more ways than one. I am older now and know how to speak up if things are wrong. When I think back to that day in sixth grade, I know that it probably wouldn't have happened if a black teacher had seen the lesson plan or if someone had run this by a black administrator or even a friend.

Sometimes, I find myself wondering what I'd do in that situation today; would I outright refuse to do the activity? Would I let my teacher know after class? I honestly could not tell you. The power dynamics between students and teachers leave me questioning the appropriate response. If I'm being honest, I hate that I'm even considering how me speaking my truth would affect someone who couldn't do the bare minimum of caring if a lesson would negatively impact me.

**I am black before I am anything else, and I'm proud to be. But the mental weight of how my black identity is perceived by non-black people is heavy.**

For the rest of the unit and year, I remember becoming hyper-aware of my teacher's bias. When we learned about Nat Turner, my teacher explained how he had killed a baby, but when explaining how the white townspeople disproportionately killed so many black people, forgot to mention how they killed so many black children. I couldn't help but think maybe she valued their lives differently, consciously or unconsciously.





"Offshore August" is about toiling away at endless assignments, the eraser shavings piling on my desk. It is about the hollow, heart-wrenching feeling of comparing myself to other students and receiving poor exam scores. It is concisely about the fragility yet subtle perseverance of young students.

I named this poem "Offshore August" because often, my high school experience felt like living inside a ship's cabin as not a sailor or captain but a passenger whose path is driven by the almost irreversible, numeric measures of success in the education system. As a senior student, I wondered where my ship would take me as my final year of high school began in August.

### **Offshore August**

**I'm a cloned contender  
Who bears a monochrome mind  
A manufactured product  
Of expectation's design**

**I seek my flowered fruit  
Bound to a nebulous fate  
Hoisting upwards to the truth  
These branches hold my weight**

**Tests, exams, and endless studies  
I sail, but the water muddies  
The sunlight dims; I wane and wade  
My future taints from ranks and grades**

**What will I be? I ask  
Sailing through the fog and dust  
I brave the roaring waters  
For one last Offshore August**



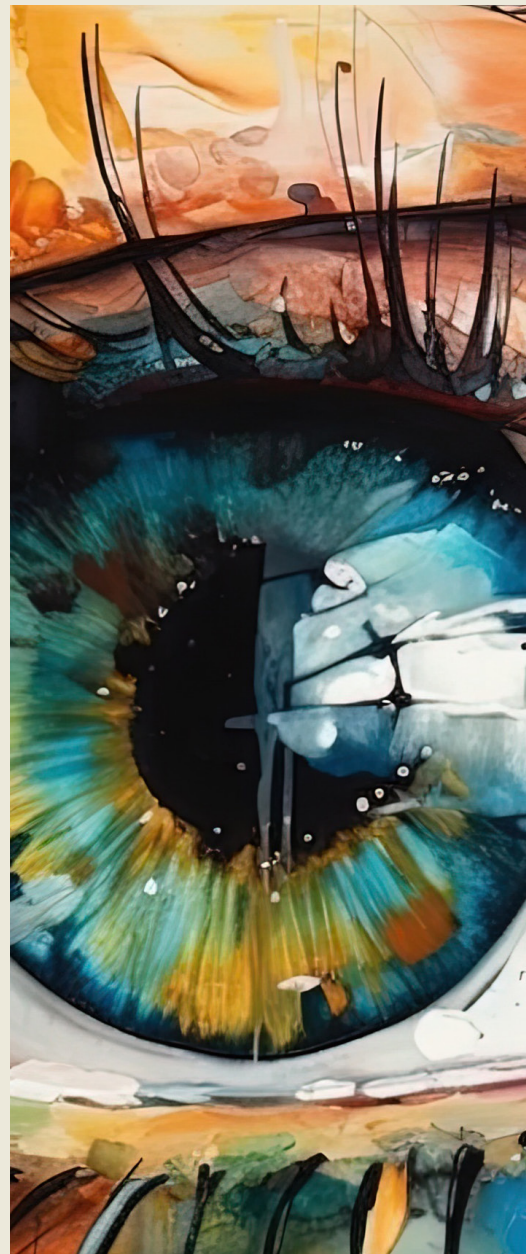




# Offshore August

**Aleena Tran**







# HOPEFUL VISIONS

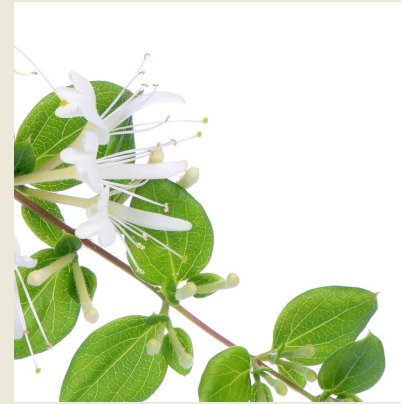
## Shannon Edwards

When I went to the eye doctor yesterday, they took photos of the back of my eyes. Later in the appointment, they pulled up the grotesque pictures, which showcased dark yellow spheres with bright red veins flowing throughout them. In the middle of these pictures sat a bright white orb which, in a way, acted as the sun of my eye, connecting the once useless spheres to the procedural processes of my brain. She then told me to look at the fluff, and it seemed as if she was pointing at nothing when she did this, but she proceeded to pick out light blue, nearly white streaks that had once before blended in with the rest of the image. She told me these cotton-like parts of my eye were the natural glimmer of a youthful, healthy eye. Then she smiled at me, and I smiled back. In comparison, she showed me my dad's eyes, which were nearly fully saturated, and the white suns of his eyes looked more like moons, with a sturdy, definable outline encapsulating its light. The veins in his eyes also looked somewhat experienced; they branched off from the moons of his eyes in an orderly manner, producing nearly straight, red lines darting their way through the area of his eye rather than releasing through with a wavy stream. Of course, she then went to reach for the fluff in his eyes as well but turned to look at me instead; she told me his eyes were old and weathered, meaning the glimmer in his eyes had faded over the long course of his life.

Although I couldn't think of it then, there was something so symbolic about that trip to the eye doctor: the puffs in the eye like a hardship, the hot air balloon autorefractor like an unachieved destiny. But most of all, it seemed nearly comical that losing one's spark was an element of reality. The whimsical fluff in the eye, like the essence of innocence fading with time. While I sat in the petite waiting room, I heard the receptionist talk about his dreams of being a real eye doctor one day. He listed his dreams for the small business he would own, and I can't remember the intricate details now, but I do remember the way he ended his fantasy. He said, "But first optometry school," and he laughed as he tapped back into reality. As I left the office, I wished him the best and added his dream to my long list of forgotten hopes for the forgotten people that line the walls of my brain, the people whose stories accumulate into my underlying morality and innate sense of care for those who linger in my presence and voluntarily stay near.







## Salvation Aleena Tran

My teacher's silver whistle pierces the humid air. Once. Twice. Thrice. Last call! Groups of boys trickle in, their sweaty bodies heaving from basketball games and vicious rounds of playground tag. In the distance, giggling girls emerge from the bushes, hauling their golden loot. They coined their adventures "Expedition Honeysuckle." With all the yellow petals in their tangled hair and clothes, you'd think the flowers rained from the sky.

Standing third in line, I file back into the school, the gentle air conditioning and the hazy scent of crayons and library books in the hallway. The metal door clangs shut behind me, sealing me from the outside world for a few more hours.

These elementary school memories fade away, retreating to the deepest corner of my mind. All our clay thumb pots and marker masterpieces. Weekly library visits. Class parties with cupcakes and cookies so sugary the crystals crunched between

my teeth. Now, I can only feel the first signs of a headache; throbbing static harrows my skull. Across the room, the clock reads 4:10. Backpacks rustle. Chairs slide and groan. The bell rings.

In the hallway, I find myself surrounded by a surging current of students, young guppies who dart and dash and the wave of a teacher's hand. I peer outside into the courtyard. It's simply peaceful, with a storybook bridge and thin trees whose branches bend and bow with the wind. In that small square of space, under the wide sky, everything is perfectly contained. It's almost sad.

As I exit the building, the mass of students floods into the parking lot like tea leaves roused from the bottom of a jar. I step onto the bus, and troublesome thoughts nag and tag me all the way home.

I'm always standing between two places; one foot, cozied into worn-in indoor slippers, while the other is in

scrunched sneakers, scurrying during class changes. My two worlds, School and Home, have long collided and connected, with no separation and sparse solace. Although I've just reached my bedroom, I'm already sitting at my desk. I open my laptop. I watch lecture videos. I leaf through my notes. Where am I? I wonder. In my screen's reflection, I gaze into my own tired eyes. They're saggy, glassy, and empty like a long-forgotten snow globe. I sink down, down, down into my chair. Weltering waves of worry swallow me again and again. I'm holding my breath, desperate for fresh air. Desperate for my savior, my salvation. That A+. That 1600 SAT score. That 4.0 GPA. Where will I find you?

**Weltering waves of worry  
swallow me again and  
again. I'm holding my  
breath, desperate for  
fresh air. Desperate for my  
savior, my salvation. That  
A+. That 1600 SAT score.  
That 4.0 GPA. Where will  
I find you?**







she wants to scream  
before you shot, did you look at her hands?  
hard calluses -  
hours spent working in the yard  
their stories now, buried between  
—

52 days  
no water, no light, no electricity  
walls caving in,  
crumbling away,  
losing hope  
our spirits following closely  
her voice she feels, just a sparrow's chirp in  
the storm

yet she wants to scream  
how is this humane?  
how can you say we are too part of humanity?  
—

the shopkeeper  
eyes filled with the dust of despair  
looks around at his store- once the haven of  
Rafah  
of laughter of trade  
of games of backgammon and  
drunkards happily playing  
still holds so tightly  
scent of jasmine and sandalwood  
sight clouded now  
fractured beyond repair

# THE CIVILIANS

## Aishani Satia

she awakens  
stuck beneath the layers of rubble  
making her once young,  
lively limbs  
feel like leaden  
movement?  
simply futile

the screams  
seem to bounce off her ears  
but amidst the cacophony,  
her voice rises, a beacon of defiance:  
"Ana hna" (I'm here)  
each breath a tortuous beat  
each thought a danger to her retreat  
hours before a rescuer's hand  
will break through the endless night  
offering her hope from this catastrophe  
---

her pregnant mother, unborn brother  
lost, swept away in the debris





# l o t u s peeking t h r o u g h the cracks of concrete

he wants to scream  
was our Rafah just target practice?  
did you even see something greater?

—  
the doctor  
watches  
bloody gurney after  
bloody gurney  
every inch of every corner of every room  
mangled legs, gaping holes, blood  
spilling

spilling

spilling

spilling

sweat-slicked brow  
he holds his oath resolute  
tries to save every soul  
“please hold on,” he murmurs  
beacon of hope in the storm

—  
but even in the depths of despair  
humanity persists,  
a flame untamed

lotus peeking  
through the cracks of concrete  
the spring water cascading  
through the scarred land

a warm embrace, hope’s sweet taste  
because  
generations and generations pass down  
the spirit of resilience  
the spirit of strength  
they understand it’ll get better  
a testament to humanity’s power  
the civilians stand, unbroken till the last hour

# THE POWER OF FRIENDSHIP



Sandy Yang



**2016**

**Callia Sun**





# Identity Poem

**Ananya Muralikrishna**

Born in a land where East meets West  
An Indian girl lives, her identity suppressed,  
Born in America, where cultures collide,  
Expectations versus traditions on each side,

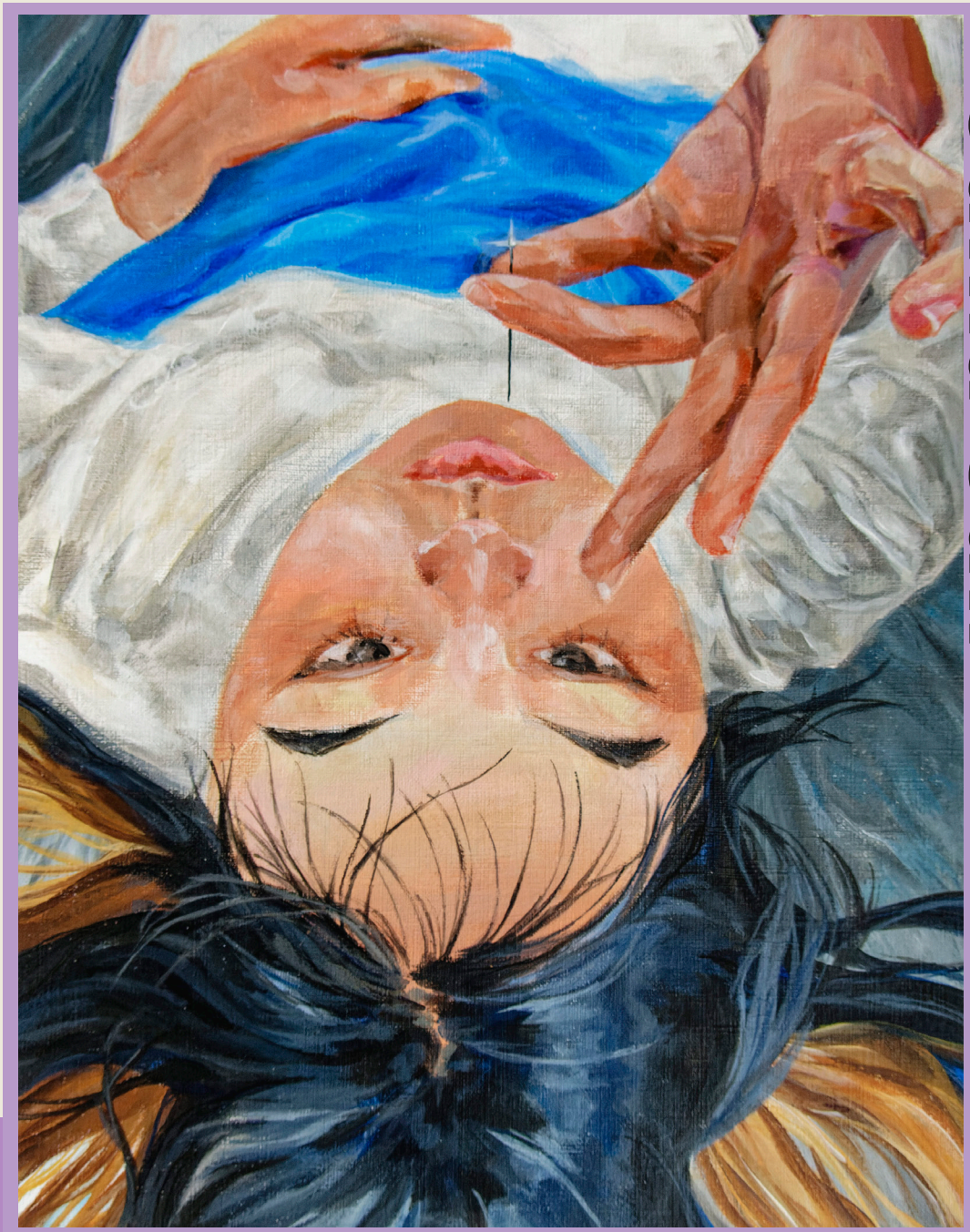
In the clash of values, she finds her fight,  
Yearning for freedom, yet fearing the light.  
Balancing between what's expected and true,  
She's the Indian girl with dreams anew.

In her eyes, echoes of ancestral pride,  
But also the struggle, the urge to decide.  
To break from the norm, to forge her own way,  
In a world where expectations hold sway.

She'll navigate the tides,  
courageously strive,  
For she trusts that her own dreams will  
survive.

In the dance of cultures, finding her voice,  
Embracing her heritage while making her  
choice.

# BREATHE IN



Caillia Sun





# Winged Bamboo

## Aleena Tran

**I'm a potted bamboo plant. On one of my wiry branches hangs a ceramic cat charm with hand-painted eyes, thin and upturned, and a permanent, mundane smile.**

On another twisted stump dangles a jade gourd pendant accented with rainbow-colored ribbons in a flower-like configuration. Just as an elderly lady may sit serenely in her armchair, absorbing the antiquity of the ticking clock and peeling wallpaper, I relish the presence of my Caregiver. Hints of her journey from potato-legged youth to tireless teenager manifest in stuffed animals, open-faced textbooks, and scattered vials of cosmetics around her bedroom.

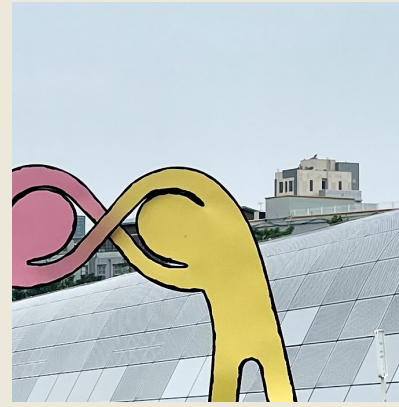
Sometimes, I like imagining I was transplanted from a fantastical, faraway land, but I'm store-bought. I'm much different from the foreign bamboo groves. I live not in a dense forest but in a glass vase between white stones and veiny moss. I haven't tasted streams and rainwater, but I'm a heavy-weight tap drinker; the tasteful spirit enlivens every root and node of my stalk.

I was once afraid of Not Knowing. I pondered whether my unusual circumstances tarnished my authenticity as a bamboo plant. Am I not a symbol of

resilience and prosperity? I rummaged through my deepest cavities of thought for the answer to "Who am I?". In the vastness, locked away in my skull, I discovered my Duty.

***Nourish and mold your identity!  
Do so to the extremities of existence.***

So, I extended my supple leaves skyward, outward, unapologetically to the whipping wind and silver horizon. I was a bird then, the briskness coursing through my green feathers. I was birthed from the soil but connected to the skies all the same. I chose who I wanted to be.



Photograph by Caitlynn Jeon

# hello Syd Nguyen

*hello*

to the man at the pulpit  
hello! how's it feel  
powerful, i assume  
with platform 'low your heel  
you're raised  
as your voice  
praising  
making noise

i listened once  
paid that platform mind  
please listen now  
for portion of your time

forgive me father  
did i sin?  
i bother  
and now i add me in  
you announce "credo"  
and yet i am crude  
like creek into river  
lead i to you

allow me to introduce myself

i grew up in that place  
where your pedestal stands  
watching always your grace  
and His stigmata hands

i sang the songs  
i harked the hymns  
i organized 'round organ  
i read those books  
i wore that look  
all and in between again

plaid skirt  
polo shirt  
crest of saint by heart

you'd think

after eight years  
i really, surely ought  
to be that person who hears  
heeds every word  
that comes from that heel  
that stands high and heard

but i'm not  
i am not

i listened once  
i listen now  
but really i just write  
weave a rhyme  
and bide my time  
as you preach  
"wrong and right"

i've found myself  
but you follow Him  
hope He likes me  
or else it's grim

you say i defy  
but i am just guy  
so grow up,  
man at the pulpit!

here's me, i've done it  
in short, i call it fate  
i was who you wanted  
i am who you hate



**ISLAM IS  
NOT THE  
ENEMY**

**Fatima  
Zehra**





# **BEJEWELED REALITY** (Colored Pencil)

## **Yoshi Sarkar**

Femininity is often centered on superficial appearances and a bejeweled reality, but what's inside is more important.







# **GENERATIONS BRAIDED DOWN** (Charcoal) **Yoshi Sarkar**

Hair holds memories,  
and with hair  
braiding being a  
tradition in Indian  
culture, memories  
are passed down  
with it.



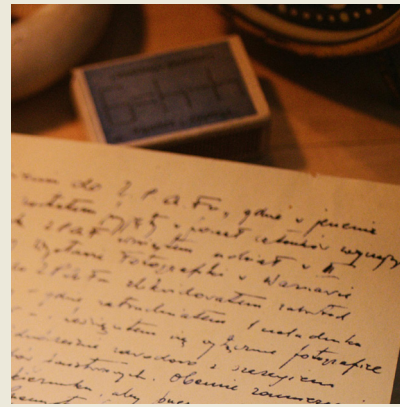
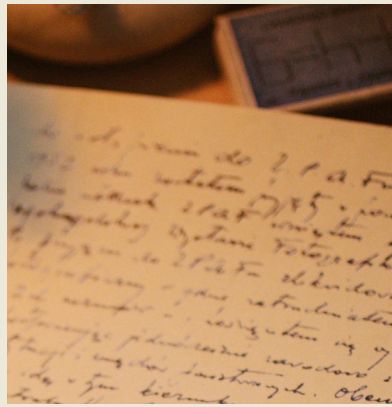
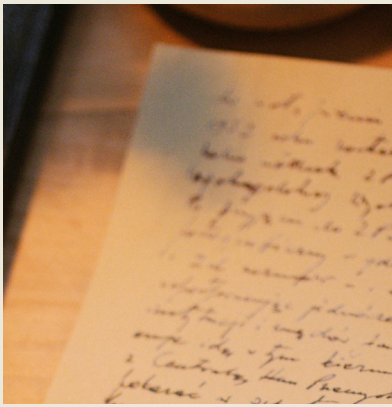




# JELLYFISH

Keya Kocherla





# I Wrote You a Letter

Iza Piatkowski

To Whom This May Concern,

Congratulations. You're better than me, again. Three certificates to my measly one pin, your name at the top of the board, your name the one I hear in the halls. I'm proud of you.

I wish I was more like you. I wish I was tougher, that I didn't collapse on the couch every time I get home. I wish my brain worked faster, that I didn't need to study until midnight every night to get grades that can even compare to yours.

I know I sound bitter. I'm just so tired of chasing after you. Just when I think I might be a few steps in front of you, my feet get stuck to the ground, exhaustion yanking me down, and you get ahead again.

When I got home after the awards ceremony, my mom had your name written on a piece of paper, circled a dozen

times in dark blue ink.

"Who's this kid?" she asked, pointing to the crumpled notebook paper while scrubbing the kitchen counter. The house was silent except for the sound of the spray bottle. She had heard your name announced over and over again as you went up on stage to receive your awards. I shrugged, muttering something about you being in a few of my classes.

She looked up at me, waiting for me to elaborate. I didn't. "Well, they sound like competition..."

It isn't her fault. But that's how it begins—the next wave of self-imposed pressure to make me work harder. It's about being better. You heard the speech the principal gave at the beginning of the year—about how we should start looking at our friends as competition, because that's what they are.

"There are only a few spots for the people in this class at the top state schools," he told the

auditorium of students, probably repeating the same thing he said to the juniors every year. "It just depends on who proves themselves to be the best candidate."

It takes a toll. I've heard you talk about it a few times—about how they think mental health is just an excuse. The job is to get the work done, and that's it. You can talk about your struggles in your essays or put it in the extra information section on the applications, but that could hurt you. You just have to keep pushing.

At this point, we're too caught up in this endless cycle of achieving. We've worked so hard to achieve what we have, so we have to keep trying harder. We have to make the headaches, the exhaustion, and the pain worth it. Otherwise, what did we do all of this for? It's going to be worth it, right?

Sincerely,

The person standing in your shadow



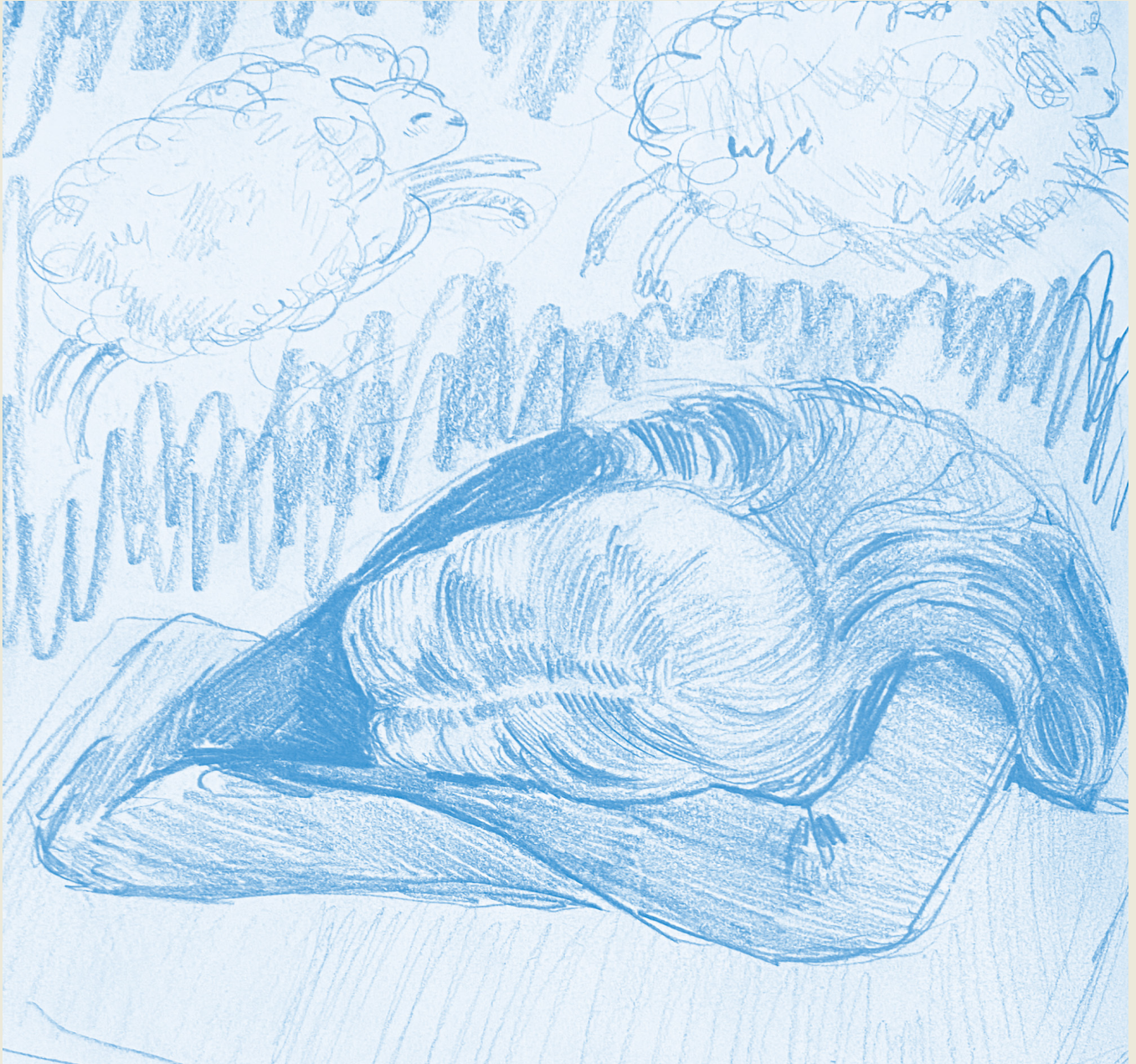
**“It takes a toll. I’ve heard you talk about it a few times—about how they think mental health is just an excuse. The job is to get the work done, and that’s it.”**





# RESTING (Pencil)

Sabry Tate





# An Unraveling life

## Shannon Edwards

The structure of school has always acted as a cocoon of promises that has guided how I lived each day, but as that structure begins to crumble at my feet, I wonder what to do next. The broad, taunting world ahead of me seems to call my name, but it just all seems so far beyond tangibility. This is, to me, the impending doom to make a choice.

I have found that I can picture myself doing a myriad of jobs and finding some sort of joy within them (An accountant, carpenter, professor, attorney, artist). I feel, in my heart, a burning passion to become a part of some species of a profound genius, but I don't know in what regard. I can see myself being one of those women who drinks hot tea with her legs crossed as she responds elegantly to every rebuttal of some sort of linguistics debate. I can picture my stature in a sturdy, artisanal chair, perhaps even my outfit, but I cannot picture my face or voice. I have no idea what my hair would look

like, or the pitch of my laugh. I cannot even attempt to gauge what my life would be like outside of that scenario. If I do try, I can sort of envision some kind of extravagant house, but it would shutter with silence and creak with absence. I feel like I'd marry young and hopeful and grow old and bitter. My husband would hate me, and my kids would view me as an annoyance and only forgive me when they're in their thirties. I could picture my mind racing every night fighting with my actions of the day. I can almost feel the future beating of my lonesome heart. I have a hard time picturing my future as some sort of fantasy filled with elements that are beyond my wildest dreams.

There is a sense of permanence that lies in each step that I take that sends a shiver down my spine. As I see it, I have a brain, and I feel the absolute necessity to not waste it. I enjoy the humanities, but perhaps I was made for mathematics or a science field; maybe even the arts

and their whimsical spirits. Perhaps I should start researching admirable people so I can follow in the footsteps that led to their success. I want to use my brain to become a person; I want to have confidence in everything I do or say or have. I want to change the world through my words, through my writing, through my presence. I want to be mentioned in textbooks, historical videos, quotations in museums, and on sound barriers in gaudy spray paint. I want to have an impact, but I can't even decide what I'm going to wear in the morning or what I want for dinner on any occasion whatsoever.

Although the world of wild wonders calls my name, the caressing hand of school whispers it. I can see my mind being dragged through a tunnel of successes and assurances that built the walls of a multi-Ph.D-ed world; I can feel myself slip back into the arms of school.

Throughout my days spent in high school, I never grew fond of the routine, but I did grow used to it. I found myself waking up and being driven by instinct rather than desire. I took swift showers and walked with conviction through whatever day was thrown at me. It seemed as if throughout my twelve years of school, I was a mechanism; I despised it, but I also loved it. It never occurred to me why I cared so much about school, and even now, I don't have a direct answer, but the most probable reason is the visual translation of my brain into measurable numbers. I can still taste the angst of those tedious percentages, divoting up and down. It seemed, to me, as something to reside in; a process in which



Facing Fears by Sandy Yang



**Although the world of wild wonders calls my name, the caressing hand of school whispers it. I can see my mind being dragged through a tunnel of successes and assurances that built the walls of a multi-Ph.D-ed world; I can feel myself slip back into the arms of school.**

I was no longer an abstract figure, but something to be molded and configured into whatever one can conceptualize.

Nevertheless, I know it's all too fictitious and eventually, no matter what, I will have to leave the nest of a college campus and move through the trials and tribulations of the real world. I can picture myself in an ample of situations, but I cannot pinpoint which ones I desire.

I want it all, put simply. I want to live a grand, extravagant life filled with gold threaded sheets and muscular houses, but I also want to live in an apartment I find a deceased body inside of on the day I move in. I want that middle class life too in a suburban neighborhood, with not enough money to move, but enough to decorate to the heart's desire. I want to be in the city and off the grid; a farmer and a CEO; the teacher and the student. I can't even hypothesize what my life would be like if it were a one-sided scheme. I have decided that my life will be composed of layers, so as I grow old and frail, I'll cut each layer until the only thing I have left is my heart and veins, flowing with unfulfilled passion, and my brain, having been used, fluttering in and out of a crystallized state.



Unrestrained Dreams by Sandy Yang

# Education's Magic

David Kim

In the halls of education where dreams take flight,  
Magic appears to rid of spite,  
As students become reflective with pencils in their  
hands,  
Writing stories of faraway lands.  
Education is a desire children pursue and seek,  
A concept foreign to many who aren't willing to  
master their technique.

Yet within these walls, knowledge blooms and grows,  
Igniting minds, like the petals of a rose.  
With each lesson learned, a new world unfurls,  
And in all hearts, ambition swirls.  
For education is the key, the guiding light,  
That transforms darkness into wisdom bright.  
In the corridors of learning where minds arise from  
slumber,  
Echoes of curiosity, every day, a new number.  
Through the pages of textbooks and the teacher's  
guiding grace,  
We traverse through time in this intellectual space.  
Through the challenges faced and the trials endured,  
The pursuit of wisdom grants our spirits to be  
reassured.  
For within these walls, we sculpt our destiny,  
And with each discovery, we find serenity.  
In the halls of education where dreams take flight,  
We embrace the journey with all our might.  
In the quest for enlightenment, we find the way.  
In the corridors of learning, where our minds will stay.





Time by Caitlynn Jeon

## wake up

### Izabella Piatkowski

Can't you feel it? The air being squeezed from your lungs. The boulder sitting on your chest. I don't think people realize this is what it feels like when I'm falling in my dreams, when I can feel the rain in the sky cutting into my arms like shards of glass slicing through paper. It makes you feel alive, but it is agonizing. It's sort of like a game. See how long you can last without losing it completely.

There's a green filter over everything. She's envious. They're jealous. You can't win. Sorry to break it to you. You have to keep being your awkward self, a regular old Sisyphus every single time you talk.

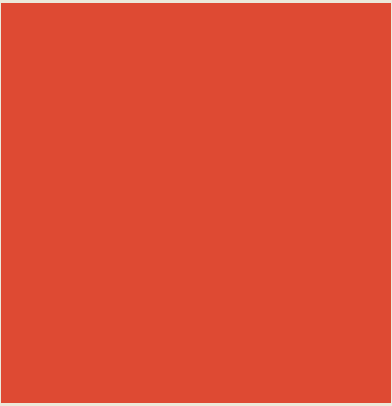
What do you want for this future, my love? You need to figure it out—figure it out fast, or the bus is going to kill you again. You'll hit the pavement and feel your bones crunch and snap and shatter. I don't know how much luck you'll have getting up this time.

They act like you're doused in gasoline and you're walking through fire. Instead of saving you, though, they just watch. They watch like something magnificent is about to happen, except it's just going to be your skin melting off your body. Little puddles bubbling on the ground.

She screams at you, her voice breaking, asking why, why, why you're stuck again. Asking why it's 5 PM and you can't get out of bed despite the midterms you have to go study for. Asking why you're like this, why you can't find a happy medium.

Wake up. The alarm will not stop ringing and buzzing and blaring.

Wake up.



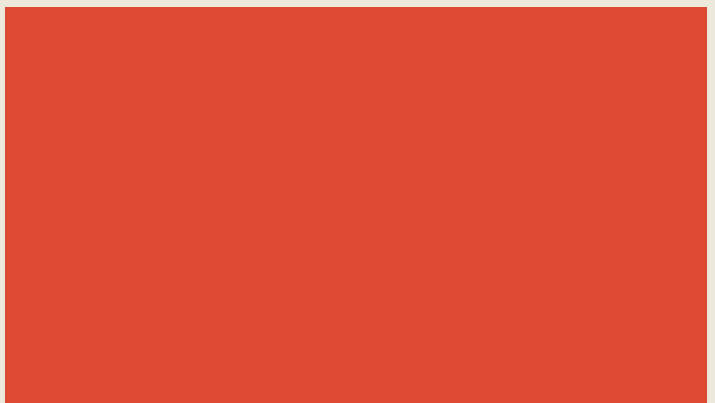
# When the doctor speaks Sabry Tate

*When the doctor speaks*    *sample of my body with*    *And my heart shatters into*  
*My heart beats faster*    *her*    *a million pieces*  
*When the doctor speaks*    *I am crying because of the*  
*He questions whether my*    *pain*  
*symptoms are self-made-*    *And the possibility of*  
*self made*    *answers*  
  
*I want to scream that my*    *When the results come*  
*own body is attacking*    *back*  
*itself*    *It is not the answers I want*  
  
*I did not cause this*    *The new doctor does not*  
    *speak*  
*When the doctor*    *He listens*  
*questions if there is a test*    *And I list off my family's*  
*he could run*    *medical history*  
*I lose the voice*  
*I advocate for others with*    *The new doctor runs tests*  
    *without having to be asked*  
  
*When my mother speaks*  
*My heart calms*    *The new doctor tells me*  
    *there is nothing I can do*  
  
*When the nurse takes the*





Loneliness by Callia Sun



# Crystal Memories

Shannon Edwards

The tedious ticking of the clock, the slow gliding of the hour hand. I had a hard time dealing with the concept of the future, but I wanted nothing to do with my past. Time was my enemy, simply. The basis of my tunnel vision was something beyond my future. I planned for my life for when I would have a blurry mind and dripping skin that looked like it had melted off my bones. My future was to be completed once the only thing I could remember was the pressure needed to push off the floor in order to rock in my rocking chair at the correct velocity. I wanted to be an elder, wise with age and stories imbued into my jaded eyes.

I was in high school at the time, shaky, confident, and an amateur in every field possible. I spent those years waiting for life to fall into my lap. I figured I'd end up with an acceptance letter somehow, and I would never have to separate my lips in any situation throughout those four years. I was so young.

Now, especially when I look back at images of the past, I have found that I no longer view my memories in the first person out of a youthful eye. With age, I realized that I began looking down on myself every time I recalled some specific event. The most prominent one is a memory I have of myself and my family watching the caskets of my grandparents be carried out of grand church doors to their hearses. I never really knew them.

My mom said that her dad was waiting until we were older to attempt to create a relationship with us. He was a man who only engaged in a conversation if he got something out of it, and in my juvenile fashion of catching worms and scraping chalk into my hair, he knew everything about me from a single, candid glance. In this memory, we were all wearing black (I remember my dad wearing a suit, which is the only specific element of it) as we watched the caskets getting taken away. Suddenly, my mom was hit with the reali-

zation that they were gone, and she would never see them again; a common revelation. She began to cry into her hand, and with her head on my dad's shoulder, her other hand laid on my shoulder. I felt her shaking body through the quiver of her hand; my sister began to cry as well.

When I looked at my sister, I remember this now. I was suddenly taken back to another memory of my grandma standing almost perpendicular, with her hands behind her back, searching for worms in the mud. I was sitting on a stone brick worshipping her bravery; she touched those worms like they were nothing.

When my sister began to cry, I did too. As I see it in my head, the memory acts like a dolly shot, slowly zooming out from my family and exiting the double doors with a hard crash that seemed like the ending of every story and every life of all those characters in the memory, including my own.





Quiet Rewind by Caitlynn Jeon

**SADNESS IS**  
**FOREVER**  
Shannon Edwards



Janus by Caitlynn Jeon



# The sound of laughter blocks out the constant reminders of sadness, and each night, each long fruitful night, feels infinite as the days fade into each other

Sadness is a constant state, and happiness is just a feeling.

When people ask me how I'm truly doing, I would say that I'm just fine, but if I had to be on one side of the spectrum or the other, I would probably say that I'm sad.

When happiness does come, it must come in big, harsh waves that cover me peak to trough. I need it to imbue me with peace and clarity. I must be fully submerged into the happiness of the moment, because if I even think about reality, the wave will break, the ground will grow cold, and the moon of sadness will pull the tide away from me.

Sadness is my constant state, and happiness is just a lens.

I could look out my window and point out pattering animals and smiling people interacting with one another, but I always find a way to turn the sounds of laughter into sirens and see the early fall leaves as a reminder that soon enough it's gonna get cold, the days will fade into each other, and that winter, the season of the sad, is within the flip of a calendar.

I should be an optimist, but I've found that my pessimism for today is what fuels my optimism for tomorrow. If I lived my life like I seize each day as it is handed to me, tomorrow just seems left in the dust.

I don't want to be sad; I've just found that it's

my constant state.

The sadness, although not ideal, isn't sinister or jeering. The sadness is a buzzing sound in my ear; a pebble in my shoe; a tickle in my throat; an itchy mosquito bite; a clicking turn signal at a long red light.

The sadness is something I seem to be able to withstand. There are times where it's more disturbing than usual; times when it seems like the moments of happiness will never return, but I know that the waves of happiness are worth the clutter of sadness. I'm an optimist about the future. I know there will be better days.

It's like I can see it: The sun setting on a sweaty summer night. The birds are chirping from their nests, and the squirrels are racing through the park. All the people smell and look imperfect. The sound of laughter blocks out the constant reminders of sadness, and each night, each long fruitful night, feels infinite as the days fade into each other, and not like a block of uniform days like winter holds, but as an ombre of new experiences and the hope that comes with the peace of happiness.

Sadness is forever, but let it be known that happiness is a snake in the grass that will come out when the moment is right.

# PEAKING THROUGH

Caitlynn Jeon



## BEGINNING JOURNEY



# MENTAL

# HEALTH

## Nidhi Thammineni

Mental health is something we all hold dear  
but sometimes it can be hard to see it clear  
Depression and anxiety can be a heavyweight  
A feeling we can't escape  
But know that you're not alone  
And it's okay to pick up the phone  
Reach out to friends or professionals  
Who can help you through the stressful times  
It's time to wake up and take a peek  
At the ways we can break down the stigma and fear  
And show that that mental health is nothing to fear  
Let's come together and unite  
To make mental health a little more bright  
And know that you're not alone  
And we will work to heal and find our home  
So let's keep the conversation going  
And show that mental health is worth knowing  
Together we can find a way to make the world a little  
less gray  
It's important to break down the stigma and fear  
To show that mental health is  
something we hold dear  
So let's come together and unite  
To make mental health a

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