

The Gryphon

Spring 2025

MC

**MONTGOMERY
COLLEGE**

*Cover Artwork by
Safiya Mowlana*

*Gryphon Logo by
Derek Olmedo Fernandez*

The Gryphon is a
mythical beast with
the head, wings, and
upper torso of an eagle
and the body, hind
legs, and tail of a lion.

The Gryphon **2025**

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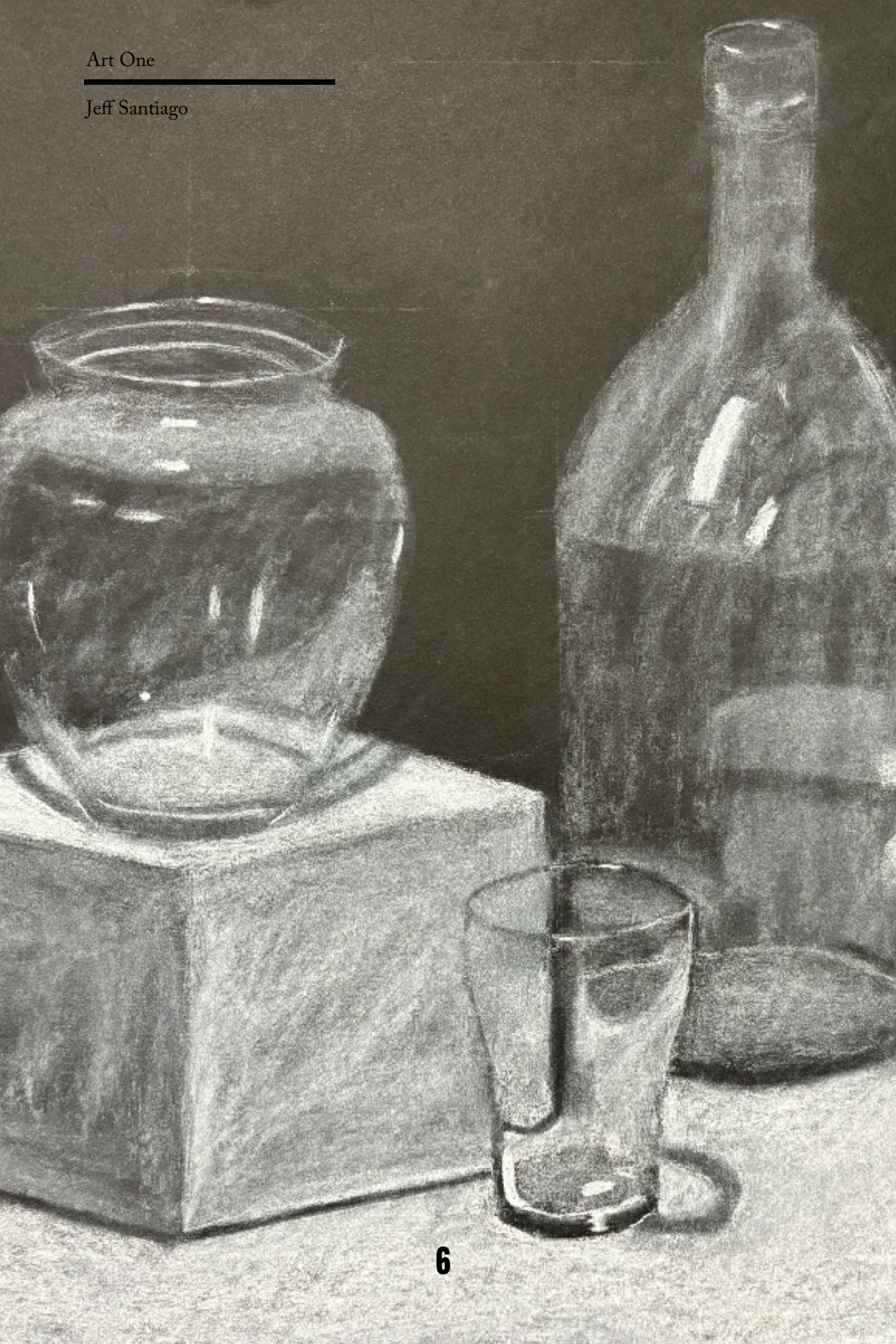
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Peninnah Victor

It excites me to think that there's a poem out there
Written by Someone I've never met,
But somehow replaces my words
Frames and rearranges them into a garland of not flowers but
thorns
Where every word pierces through my soul
Where every line rings in my ears and
plays flashes of memories
All of this done by a stranger
Someone I've never met
But someone who's met my soul.



Untitled

Alejandra Bolanos Manzanares

And in the chaos,
She found her way,
She found her identity.

For yes, the ultimate goal in life
Is to attain happiness,
Beyond any obstacle.

To find balance,
And to be true to oneself,
Such is the key to human life.

Gabrielle Yimginia

In the middle of a mossy floor, surrounded by walls that echoed like caves, sat a figure curled into himself. Briar binds kept him chained to the ground. Thorns barely piercing his skin, drawing little blood, but enough for an irritating itch.

The figure doesn't know how long he's been there. Days. Weeks. Months. Any sense of it faded in the darkness. He knows that he shouldn't stay there, he can't. In the beginning, he had the energy to bring himself up and walk along the cave wall, tracing his fingers around rays of light between the cracks. There was a moment in the cave when he found enough light to escape through, but when he tried, it felt like he couldn't go through—as if something was pulling him back. Like he didn't deserve to go yet. He tried and pushed and failed, only feeling drained with every attempt. Now he lies in the middle of the ground, moss grown in patches on his skin, briar crawled on him and found comfort in keeping him down.



But there was a day it changed. A wall of the cave collapsed; leaves followed, blown in by a wind. They met him on the ground, surrounding him, and fell. He managed to pick a leaf up. Light bounced around it as he twisted the blade between his fingers. Warm in a way, he felt comforted. Then the itch of the briars came back. He scratched at it, finding little relief. He went back to the blade and wrote that it hurt. That it bothered him. That the thorns irritated him. That the itch hurts him. That he's hurting himself. And without warning, the itch disappeared. The figure looked down and the thorns weren't there, only the tendrils of a plant that began its retreat. He found a release in his binds through his writing. Through his admittance.

The briar blood on his ankle melted into ink. He wrote until he was capable of moving again. To trust he wouldn't fall again. Picking up the leaves and using ink to paint words on the leaf blade. Once a leaf was filled, it crumpled into dust, and he found the next one. With each leaf, he found himself closer to the light without resistance. The figure managed to reach the opening of the cave in the end, straight into the forest he's always known. It was his hands that touched the lining of the walls last, parting with each step he took on the steppingstone ahead of him. Leaf-shaped prints stained the path as he left.

Black Ink Pen

Sara Heydari

Last week I made a stop at the supply store
I bought myself a new, black ink pen
This pen is a link between you and me.
This pen is as quick as a traveling lady,
eager to keep a record of her loves.
With its pointed tip, .5, like a thin thread that keeps
us stitched together.

This pen is as bittersweet as our shyness, funny how words failed us.
Sharp like my wits when I'm not so tensed up around you
Spills as I do when I am forced to speak, back against the wall with not
much choice
It has a boldness to it like the kind I wanted you to possess.
Making marks recklessly, the pen as messy as you and I.
I wanted more intention behind my choices,
so I got myself a new pen at the supply store.



Safiya Mowlana

Textile



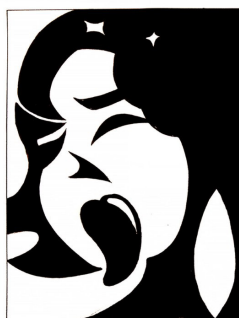
When did I let
melancholy swallow me?

When did you hand
it to me, so free of grace
it was shameful?



When did I trade my
femininity for
dominance?

When did you abandon
your post?



When did shame begin
to follow my love?

When did I trade
intimacy for a shadow?

Gabrielle Yimginia

The sadness caused by rejection—is it a reflection of our insecurities, or is it due to the love we had for the protagonist?
This is the question I ask myself every day.
Rejection hurts immensely.

The best physical manifestation of the effect of rejection is standing in front of a mirror that highlights all your imperfections, both internal and physical.

It feels as though your deepest flaws and regrets are being listed in an insensitive way.

The magnitude of rejection's effect on a person lies in their self-esteem, their self-mastery and narrative, and their self-confidence.

When all these conditions are met, rejection itself transforms into deliverance. A mentally healed person who faces rejection experiences it as liberation. They are grateful because they firmly believe that anything aligned with them cannot reject them.



Safiya Mowlana

Mono

You ask too much of me. My story is nauseating.
It'll gut you. Split you open and spit on your remains. You
really want me to vomit up my soul and serve it
to you on a silver platter? Give me time to choke
up pieces first - so I don't suffocate.
You ask too much of me. How am I to be loved
by you if you must carve out my heart to see
if it's worth loving? How am I to let you have
your way with me without promise of you
staying? You want me, but you must look at me
bare and bone to know for sure?
You ask too much of me. Why must you see
blood for you to know I have a heart? Why must
I lie naked for you to see my scars? You do not
have to know where I have been to know where I
will go.
You ask too much of me.

Alexander Maurer

Esha Manoj

Deep within a beating heart, from one fractured soul, manifested two beings.
One suffocates within a bulbous vile wall of flesh of her own making,
desperately trying to breathe as she chokes on the fumes of her identity burning
just out of reach.

The other is long and stretched thin by the responsibilities they heap on their
head and toes, with the softest broken smile,
one which blooms when an existence understands the magnitude of What It
Means To Love,
curving up to meet doe eyes surrounded by the evidence of sleepless nights.

The trapped one watches behind her barrier as the stretched one treats *Every.
Single. Thing.*

With the heartbreaking kindness that follows the realization it is the most
selfish path to defy the past and future fate-

But never turns to her.

The trapped one's eyes water as she watches their carefully straightened back
get smaller and smaller as they walk away, one slow step at a time.

She was so young, she can only do so much, please-
Why aren't they taking her too?

The child opens her mouth to call out to the weary one, to ask for the support
she craves, for those tender hands to reach out to her just as they do for
everything and everyone else
but nothing comes out.

She has no breath left to cry for help.

Instead, she gags on the ashes of a fire she lit with her own flint,
struggling to put it out with the tears helplessly streaking the soot on her face.
But what to be done?

The trapped one is ensnared, bound within a blazing fortress
and the long one, with splinter smiles yet the gentlest touch,
is too hollow to turn around and see what they are leaving behind.
The free one has learned the meaning of forgiveness and promised
to never look back.

Bailey Mathis

You feint left, right, diagonal, up, down, discourse
Is disallowed—only “truth”—
Holiest of holies—lay down your sword
For the end of the day brings the fate of your world.
Nothing sacred, hail your men
As slaves, not martyrs for the battle you won.
Overplay your hand—lose more than your head—
Confidence, grace, respect.
Games of wits, turns of phrase
Brought down by a binary code.
You writhe, you hope, you renege on your word—
Words, words, words... nothing means anything,
Anything goes—immoral laws stand
And backs break for the king
Work, work—nothing ever does.
Sacrifice all for the title you gained—
It means nothing when no one is left.

Reflection

Safiya Mowlana



I always hated to look at myself in a mirror. Well, not just any mirror, my bathroom mirror. Every time, I looked like I was shattered. A mosaic of images that resembled me from other people's expectations. Longer hair. Makeup. High pitched voice. But none of them were me. Not truthfully at least. My voice was trained to be high from chorus. My hair's longer since I haven't learned to cut it on my own yet and I always like to do a half-up. Makeup helps me accent parts of myself that I like. Without a reflection, I'm comfortable in my body, I know how I look to myself and that's what I love most. I'm not the typical man. I'm the man I want to be. At least in the ways I can without help. For now. But when I look in that mirror, I see what everyone else sees. I hate it. It feels like I want to crawl out of the floating array of shapes and pieces to shatter the glass. At the very least the mirror would match my reflection.

The feeling subsided when I got to college, I found people that saw me the way I saw myself. And I thrived in it. I could act unapologetically without catching myself and needing to hide. Be involved in things that I stopped myself before because of my doubts and not wanting to be misgendered. I grew to be comfortable in myself that I didn't need to care—if I wanted it, I would achieve it. I built my image from the ground up and I'm proud of who I am and what I've done. But it does get to me sometimes.



The misgendering, misinterpretations, and miscommunication—or lack of it in the first place in my parents' case. Back in their house, I'm not the thriving college student, I'm the eldest that they debate whether I'm an adult or their baby. Allegedly prepared to for when I leave but refuses to let me grow. Every time I look in that mirror, I hate that I can see it too. What they see. What everyone else who doesn't know me sees. I lead a double life that wasn't my choice but is my circumstance. Minus the action-packed thrills, replaced by emotional exhaustion. There's only so much anyone can take, that I can take before I punch my mirror and crack it. We finally match.

From shards of the mirror to my broken tears, I find myself at a lake. In its serenity, there was no judgement, no hiding. I sat by the edge, allowing my tears to fall abandoned. They dropped into the lake and made a wrinkle. I peered over. I could see the cracks swirl together and the misshapen reflection complimented me. I could finally see Me in this liquid mirror, and I smiled. I'll eventually get them to see how I view myself. I want it and I will achieve it. Ripples can make the biggest waves, and I plan on being a tsunami.

And suddenly, I felt like I owed myself an apology.
Yes, an apology for putting others before myself.
An apology for prioritizing the presence of someone by my side
over my health and self-respect.

Instantly, I broke down in tears, shouting, crying, and begging God
to forgive me and make me better.

It was in the midst of those tears that I found the answer to my
cries, to the pain of a lifetime.

This answer came instinctively from my mouth, and I said,
"I try to be better, but this fight is against myself, against the little
girl who's felt alone since childhood."

As simple as it may sound, that was the answer to the pain of an
entire life.

This simple response explained all my discomforts, all my
shortcomings, and all my sorrows.

The habit of being neglected and abandoned had planted within me
the desire to be accepted and loved.

The desire that one day, someone would love me so much and make
me their priority without any prior request, without logical reason,
and without limits.

The longing to feel, in unspoken words, that loyalty, devotion, and
love forever.

In the unknown of true love and the yearning to feel it, I made a ton
of mistakes in my life.

Yes, I made a ton of mistakes trying to be loved.



The Unmasking

Peninnah Victor

Love unmask your deepest souls, they say, and rightly so,
A love like mine will strip you bare,
makes sure all your secrets show.
It pulls you closer, then forces you to stand before the glass,
I stand in awe of what I see, while you can barely pass.
The face that stares back at you, a monster in the frame,
Clear as crystal, raw and true, my love whispers all your truths.
It rips away your masks, exposes all your sins,
Vile yet forgivable i say and
run to the embrace it, while you turn and flee into the day.
You call yourself a warrior bold, but you're not quite the same,
For in your heart, you fear the dark, you shy away from pain.
I stay, my heart with monsters' eyes, a language we both know,
I speak to them, alone again, while you run from what you owe..

What used to be a blanket is now undone.
One by one, the strings came together.
She made the blanket throughout years of her life;
As for now, it took 20 years to make.
The number changes every 365 days.
What used to be a blanket is now undone.

The blanket's material was soft—
Soft, comfortable, and large.
The blanket was able to stretch and provide comfort to others.
The blanket was able to help and love.
The blanket was there to protect and catch tears.

What used to be a blanket is now undone.
The string of the blanket came apart,
And what was once a blanket is now a single string.
What happens when the string is broken—

The single string that's left?
What happens when the string is broken?

Please, Jesus, let me in when I face self-death.
What used to be a string is now undone.
One by one, the strings fell apart.

The String

Raenelle Turner

Untitled

Kayla Matibag



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three hearts, one broken
reach for a hand, an excuse
run where no one can be found
reach a dark corner, privately
whisper the lies you've made to
protect yourself from the truth
you run away
speak of nothing, lean against their
shoulder, shed a tear silently
stay quiet, see nothing
listen in when needed, pretend
to sleep
put on your mask when you're
noticed
don't forget to talk
at least a mumble
no time to think
keep your mask on til you sleep
three hours in, you still pretend
find your mask, hold composure
if you let it take over,
who will you go to?

never in my life
have I ever felt like this
a true pain to hide
always in my heart
heavy streams, never ending
a silence transcends
witness my heartache
my prayers stay true tonight
an endless longing
never have I thought
forever a misery
a sleepless darkness
a love you deserve
safety and satisfaction
always remember
a place you can find
comfort and tranquility
someone who loves you

Someone Who Loves You

Astoria Siahaan

I Am

Chenkin Kaden

I am the tearing of muscle, the pain that refines,
A furnace of will where discipline shines.
Each morning I rise, rebuilt and anew,
Stronger in mind, in body, in view.

I am my father's sailor, steadfast and bold,
Disciplined, driven, with iron to hold.
Through storms, I have wandered,
through tempests I've sailed,
Yet never once faltered, never once failed.

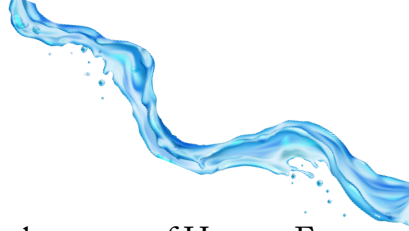
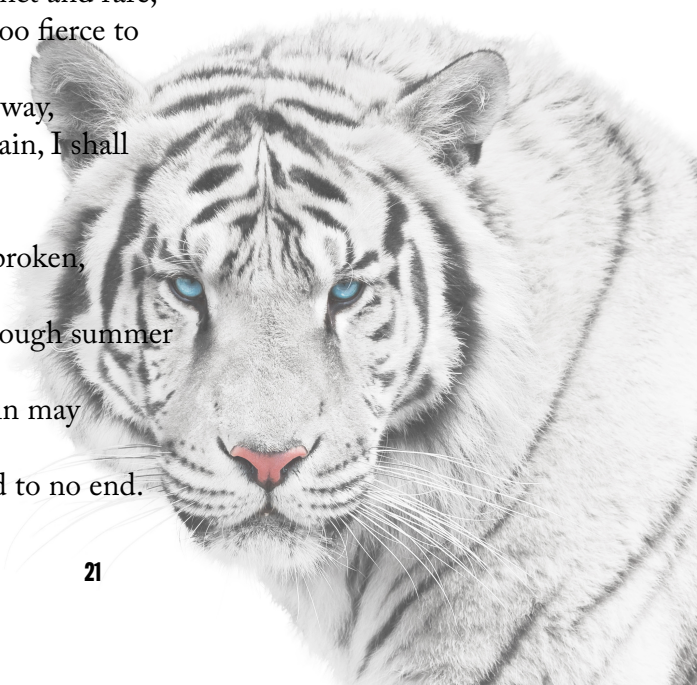
I am John Locke, a thinker untamed,
Seeking to challenge, refusing the chains.
Old institutions may tremble and shake,
But the truth is the hammer no force can break.

I am the White Tiger, distinct and rare,
Marked by my difference, too fierce to scare.
Older, yet wiser, I walk my way,
Through jungle and mountain, I shall never stray.

I am the Appalachians, unbroken,
standing tall,
Standing through time, through summer and fall.
The wind may howl, the rain may descend,
Yet I remain firm, unmoved to no end.

I am the waters of Harpers Ferry,
strong
Rushing through barriers, pushing far along.
Like rivers that are carved
through stone over the years,
I sharpen through struggle,
reshaping my fears.

I am the long grass, proud and untamed,
You cannot cut me, I cannot be maimed.
Like water, fire, stone, and air,
I change, I endure, I rise, and I dare.



A Mother Unspoken

Maimouna Barry

My mother is like a comma,
The separation of ideas
Or the continuation of a point
A life she has brought me into
Still in progress, still in motion
An interruption i was,
And an inconvenience I continue

My mother was never a full sentence
Never came to a full stop
You can hear it in her walk and when she takes a breath
Waiting to exhale
And when she does, incomplete
A disappointment without fail

She already passed that down to me
The built in rejection of being
The built in dissapointment of self
The built in guilt off recieving

Love is not apart of her dna
Like the maternal mitochondria in the both of us only know what it knows
She knows I will never know
True acceptance of myself

You are my mother
My first enemy
Yet the brightest star in my life
My first friend
Yet the biggest critic to my strife

I punish myself with what I think your punishment will be
I neglect and alienate myself before you can
I beat you to it
I did it first
So in that way, you don't ever need to

I already did it
I already starved myself for 3 days and looked sad when I needed to
I looked how I thought you wanted me to
So that my sorry didn't seem untrue



I play a role
This life is like a stage
I react to you
And never let you know how I truly feel

I never let you tell me how you truly feel
I already punished myself
So that I'm pitiful enough for excuse
I'm sorry is not enough from me
And it will never be what you deserve

My life is lived for you
It has been since the day you became a
door,
Opening into a world you promised for
me
I immediately became the object of your
expectations
The frame for your conditions
The essence for your existence
All for me to call you "Mom"

I depended on you
And you'll depend on me
I hurt you
And you know how to hurt me
I hurt you
Yet you choose to hurt me

I'm new here
I've only known you half your life
I'm only a fragment of your story
A piece of your legacy
Something you can choose to claim or
let be

But you're an unconditional for me
You're not a maybe, a might be, or an
option to me
You are the start
You are my beginning
You are my mother

I cannot believe I came from you
And you looked at me with disgust
You looked at me with pity and hints of
regret
I looked at you with what I was taught was
love and what I was taught was pride
You looked at me because I am only half your
life

I want you to know I am my own person
But I couldn't have been without you
I take you for everything
All the hurt and the pain that you put me
through

But I'm glad you did
Because without it, I wouldn't be an extension
of you
I wouldn't be the essence or the object of
what is your truth
I wouldn't be your second heart
Or your second breath
I would just be a piece of meat
Floating in a sea of meaningless memories

I love you
Nene, I love you
Mother, I love you
I hope that you love me more than your duty
to
More than your role
More than what you supposed to

Because I cannot imagine my world without
you.

I remember the dark void my eyes saw until my life flashed before me and woke my eyes with a powerful bang and all I saw was still a dark void and a small hint of the road ahead of me.

I remember the tiredness of my eyes and the slur of my speech and everything slowing down, but all I could hear was his voice gently speaking to me and giving me comfort despite the cold dark wet air that surrounded our touch of a close-knitted hug.

I remember the confusion I felt when my dad gave me his final hug and kiss at dusk, while the neighborhood is still waking up, the strangers in our house murmuring some kind of nonsense, I, still sleeping on the couch, listening the trembles of my father's love.

I remember the soft touches and the gaze of his soft eyes, the gentleness and how he holds me close and tight, with the consistent stare I hold upon him, he brings me in closer and leaves one peck on my head and cheek.

I remember the torture of laughter, never-ending, the cramps of our stomach and the cries of our lungs, and nothing could or would stop us, and at that moment we all knew this was the best high we have ever felt in forever.

Asma Abbas

An aging house, sun shining through
cracks,
woods behind that brimmed with
mystery,
walls and desks adorned with
knick-knacks
they lived there, the sisters, there were
three.

Trekking through the large open
woods, they felt so free
running along a lazy creek, and
skipping rocks.
Inseparable, the sisters were happy to
be three.
like children, they believed the fun
would never stop.

Books at the kitchen table,
they laughed, they talked, they played.
The youngest always in search for the
elders appraisal,
now she peers into their desolate room,
wishing that they'd stayed.

An aging house and an apartment
the sisters were two and one.
Routine had become boring and
redundant,
so the girls still found ways to have
some fun.

Roads dark and streaked with rain,
the lights smeared in the reflections of
dew,
when they were together the sisters
could hardly complain.
"I'm just happy I get to see you!"

They found solace in late night drives
always wanting to grab some food.
Though they now had separate lives,
like in the old days, they laughed, they
talked, they chewed.

A state, a campus, and an aging house.
The sisters were no longer three.
One left behind, one moving forward,
and one with their spouse.
Though they do meet, their visits are
brief.

The woods no longer rings out in cheer,
the house, asleep
awaits their return in a miserable state
Wanting the girls to come home, back to
their keep,
because only then is the house awake.

Maimouna Barry

Jayahthi's mother didn't open her door, much less knock. The girl sat at the corner of her bed, waiting for the wooden wall to swing, making way for a short woman and her jangling arms to embrace her. She waited for footsteps to run up the wooden steps that cascaded from her room, anticipating the familiar taps at the carpeted steps. As she waited, she surveyed the coveted life that lay furnished around her – a queen size bed at the center of a room with four walls, limbs at the mercy of her complete human body, and a stomach that never starved. Yet, her eyes were wet and her mind was full of tar, with only a glimmer of hope that maybe, her mother would follow the routine she always had.

Jayahthi's mother has had access to her daughter's brain since the day she was conceived. Her power was in her ears, hardwired to the very thoughts in her daughter's brain. She used to reminisce about the first time she heard her daughter's two halves swimming towards each other in her womb, and the happiness she felt when she realized the voices that wailed in her sleep was of the life she was soon to be carrying. In the early years of Jayahthi's childhood, she remembers using the first day of kindergarten to test the limits of her power, curious if distance could wain it. Sure enough, every thought Jayahthi had, her mother heard. From the ouches at recess to the excitement of coming back home, Jayahthi's mother always knew.

Jayahthi's mother also knew that Jayahthi wanted to kill herself. She's been like this since she was young, since her first spark of self awareness. Jayahthi's mother hadn't realized her anticipation for the day her daughter realized she was brown, but when it came, all Jayahthi's mother felt was disappointment. Disappointment that her daughter, her mind, would also have to endure the ills of this world. But Jayahthi's mother didn't know that her daughter's newfound awareness would manifest itself into a monster.

Jayahthi hated herself. Her mind sought to undo all the lavishes of a life her mother had built for her. She innately believed she didn't deserve any of it. Every mistake she made was another reason to make another scar, and another reason to lock herself in her room up the wooden stairs. Every thought she had felt like it was echoed into a vacuum and ceased to be real. Jayahthi didn't notice how transparent her suffering had been, until she realized someone else could hear them too. Hear the monsters she made. Hear them, exactly how Jayahthi saw them. One day, as Jayahthi cried into her cut up arms and bruised legs, the hand of her mother found itself on the blade of her shoulder, almost as if it was summoned. The comfort was only for a moment, for when Jayahthi looked up to see her mother's face, her cheeks were as dull as Jayahthi's, and her mother's eyes were more sunken than her own. The sadness became shared, as if the monsters she once suffered alone to were now her mother's too.

The extent of Jayahthi's mother's blessing would soon be discovered to be a curse, as it would trick Jayahthi's mother into thinking she knew it all. Jayahthi's mother worried, ached and cried along with her daughter, praying for these thoughts to fade and for the hormones to lessen. Hoping for God to cut her daughter's mind some slack. But what Jayahthi's mother didn't know was that what she knew was only what she heard. Jayahthi's mother couldn't feel the cuts on the arms and thighs, the many attempts at suffocation, and the sound of shaking painkillers in her daughter's palms. Jayahthi's mother heard numbers, countdowns, that lasted until 80. She heard gasps, and hisses, and curses. She heard exasperation after every failed attempt. This is when she'd run.

Jayahthi's mother would fly up the stairs as if gravity had no effect on her. Her clothes disheveled and her mind a mess, she used these faint and almost impossibly quiet cues sent directly from her daughter's mind to alert her of the worst. She thought if she could interrupt it, she could stop it. If she was there, she could help. She didn't know what to do... she was frantic. Her ears received Jayahthi's call for help, and her instincts would lead her to autopilot. She realized this was her duty, to use her power to save her daughter. But every time she flung the door open, and swiped the bottle from her daughter's frail hands, or the scarf from her neck, Jayahthi's mother's mind deafened a bit. Her baby wanted her life gone. And it didn't seem like she had the power to stop it.

So back in the room, Jayahthi sat. She had soon figured out that the pattern of events was undeniable – her thoughts sparked a panic in her mother, and her mother was her diffuser. She knew her mother would come running. So, this time, she didn't find a razor blade, nor anything tight to tie. She just sat and thought. She cried, and let her thoughts materialize. Jayahthi's arms turned to bone and her skin became darker. Every breath she took felt like she stole it from someone else. She felt like she wasn't meant to be here. She believed she was not supposed to be born. She felt like she wasn't supposed to be loved, or take up space. She despised herself for doing so, for even living. She felt deeply, as she did the many times before, and waited for the door. And she sat for so long, the handle began to look like decoration.

The morning after, Jayahthi's mother made herself breakfast and tea. She ate quietly as her daughter stood at the end of the table, her hollow face streamed with traces of hot tears and eyes darker than the nights she couldn't sleep. Demanding her mother why she didn't come to rescue her, Jayahthi threatened that she was truly going to end her life. That she was going to do what she's always wanted. Her mother looked up slowly, her ears red and swollen. The night was long for the both of them. As Jayahthi had sat the night before, waiting for her mother to save her from herself, Jayahthi's mother was pulling at her ears. She yanked and jerked and plugged, anything to stop herself from feeling this pain. Anything to stop herself from hearing her daughter's mind. She began to believe what was funneled into her ears, and began to believe her eavesdropping all these years were more than a curse; a punishment. Jayahthi's mother gave everything for Jayahthi to live the life she never could. Even her ears were for Jayahthi; she began to hate herself for being able to hear Jayahthi's thoughts and not being able to console them. She was spent. Hopeless, and left with nothing but bruised ears, she said to Jayahthi:

"I only want what makes you happy, Jayahthi. Your peace and your happiness is all that matters to me. I love you so much."

Jayahthi's mother attended the funeral in washed-out gray clothing, with a white veil draped at the crown of her head. The attendance was small, and scarce in people. The casket was blank, shiny and new. Jayahthi's mother's face, lowered and still, was covered as she accepted condolences from the loved ones around her. They called her brave. Self-less. A wonderful mother. The ceremony was beautiful, sweet and short, since there was not much life to recognize. The pews of the funeral parlor emptied, and Jayahthi's mother was left with the casket. As she grazed her hand over the polished wood, she touched her ears, and listened. Nothing. No thoughts but her own crossed her mind. She was satisfied.

As Jayahthi's mother descended the steps of the building, a plump and healthy looking Jayahthi waited in front of her path with her arms open, her smile as wide as her incoming embrace. Her hair was full, and the spots of baldness from nights of pulling had faded. She had covered her cuts with bracelets and wrist bands, and her eyes sparkled seeing her mother walk towards her. Her mother smiled too. As they embraced, Jayahthi unveiled her mother, and lightly stroked the sides of her head where her ears used to be. The scarred and calloused marks of what used to be Jayahthi's mother's greatest power, were now marks of her past. Her ears were gone, tucked away in that wooden coffin. Her sacrifice to her daughter lifted both their burdens.

Jayahthi's mother realized as much as she heard Jayahthi's aches, her pain for her daughter was reflected back into Jayahthi. She couldn't bear for her ears to be the guilt of her child's life. She couldn't help that she could hear everything for her daughter, and that she could respond as quickly as she wanted to, but she could help how it affected her.

Jayahthi's pain was hers to bear alone, and that gained her a newfound reign on her own emotions. She wasn't a puddle to be soaked up, or rain to be caught. She was Jayahthi, who is as human as her mother. Her tarpool of depression was hers to receive support, not to be shared. She wasn't an equation to solve, or a sequence to interrupt. She didn't feel tethered to her mother's emotional wellbeing due to her distraught. Her guilty conscience had built up in her brain every time her mom came to save her, and her mind would twist her mother's helplessness into a burden. Jayahthi had to know she wasn't a burden. So Jayahthi's mother stopped answering the distress call to share the distress. A cycle had to be broken, a crutch to the crutcher.

And Jayahthi lived to see another day.

I Am

Sahil Kharel

I am nothing and everything,
I am the path to an awakened being.

I am a mountain that is still and calm,
I am a sand that won't fit in a palm.

I am a river carving stories in stone,
I am the melody of Karnali's tone.

I am the shadow of Everest's grace,
I am the calm on Buddha's face.

I am a footstep on a foreign street,
I am intersection where dreams and
hard work meet.

I am the echoes of my family's voice,
I am the weight of their sacrifice and
my choice.

I am the curve where economies bend,
I am the model that predicts the trend.

I am a prayer that rose with the temple
bells,
I am the story that my journey tells.

I am Sanatan, the truth ever known,
I am the seed from which dharma has
grown.

I am nothing and everything.

In the endless night
Appeared so far away
The Star and I

I cheekily watch the
Star
For many countless nights
Wondering when the Star will
become mine

The line between Heaven and
Earth
Suddenly became hearth
With the cold months passing by

The Star and I
Hand and hand
The Star glistens in sight
Nothing felt so right

Felt forever
Nothing could break this endeavor
Until ever was in forever to never
The Star happens to be losing its
tender

The truth I couldn't bear to
remember

The Star
Couldn't stay much longer
Even if I tried

What once was mine
How could a Star shine so bright
Extinguish the light from inside

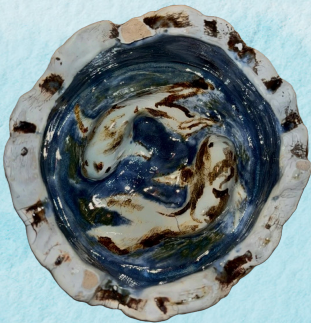
Only I

Melisa Ayala Orellana

The Star did not need me
The Star and I
Was only I
In the endless night



A hug from behind. His voice melted into the fingerpicked chords.
The mirror would remind him of how much he longed for yours.
He began to confess. Poured his heart out.
You found that his loneliness could not be cured by the mouth.
His thoughts speak louder than any comfort you could give.
Every day he'll cower through the sad song he lives.
The adlibs speak his truth. Not even he knows
How long he spent his youth wanting to be alone.
After he's done, the piano still sings.
While his message hums, forever echoing.



I Am

Emma Poch

I am the echo of footsteps on a dewy
morning,
fading into normalcy as they string
from day to day,
coalescing into a constant.

I am the squirrels who chatter
and murmur
and flit left and right in fear
and eventually forget to fear at all.

I am an exchange cut short by the roar of
exhaust.

I am brow, furrowed
and a step forward
taken to get just a little closer.
I am a step back in reply.

I am a vulture circling, hungry,
I am the cars driving by,
I am the mother mourning,
I am the runner passing,
Leaping over the scatter of blood and viscera
so it doesn't get on my shoes.

I am roadkill worn to a nub against the
asphalt,
dragged along by the ridges in the wheels.
I am the onlookers, aghast,
helpless to do anything but watch.

I am the hum of airplane engines overhead,
Ceaseless.
I am sorry for all of it.
I am covered,
claimed,
consumed by mold
And it is so much brighter than anything else
I've ever known.

A walk in the snow
Through the forest it covered
I want to go further today,
inside this snowy forest.
Wrong shoes on my feet tread forward
Fearless, I have these paths cemented
in my memory
I turn my head every 4, 8, 12
minutes
Footprints disappearing!
Never mind that,
my wrong shoes tread forward.
I like to look back every 4, 8, 12
minutes
and see no trace of my steps
I am so lonely in this forest
The beauty it beholds amazes me,
my head cannot come down.
Life has granted me sight of this forest
4, 8, 12 minutes and here I am
Like I've been birthed in this place,
no proof of me before or after.
Lonely and craving the birds above
my head
Though I never really longed for their
songs in the summer.

Untitled

Sara Heydari

Nature Is the Dancer I Want to Be

Kayla Matibag

Let my dance captivate like fire
Attracting the eyes of the audience
Aching with burning passion
Let it be as versatile as wind
Breezing then blizzarding
Blowing them all away
Let my body flow like water
Creating ripples from within
Crashing when the time is right
Let it be as grounded as earth
Doing things on its own
Desiring for balance

On the Shore
Yusuf Benya

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