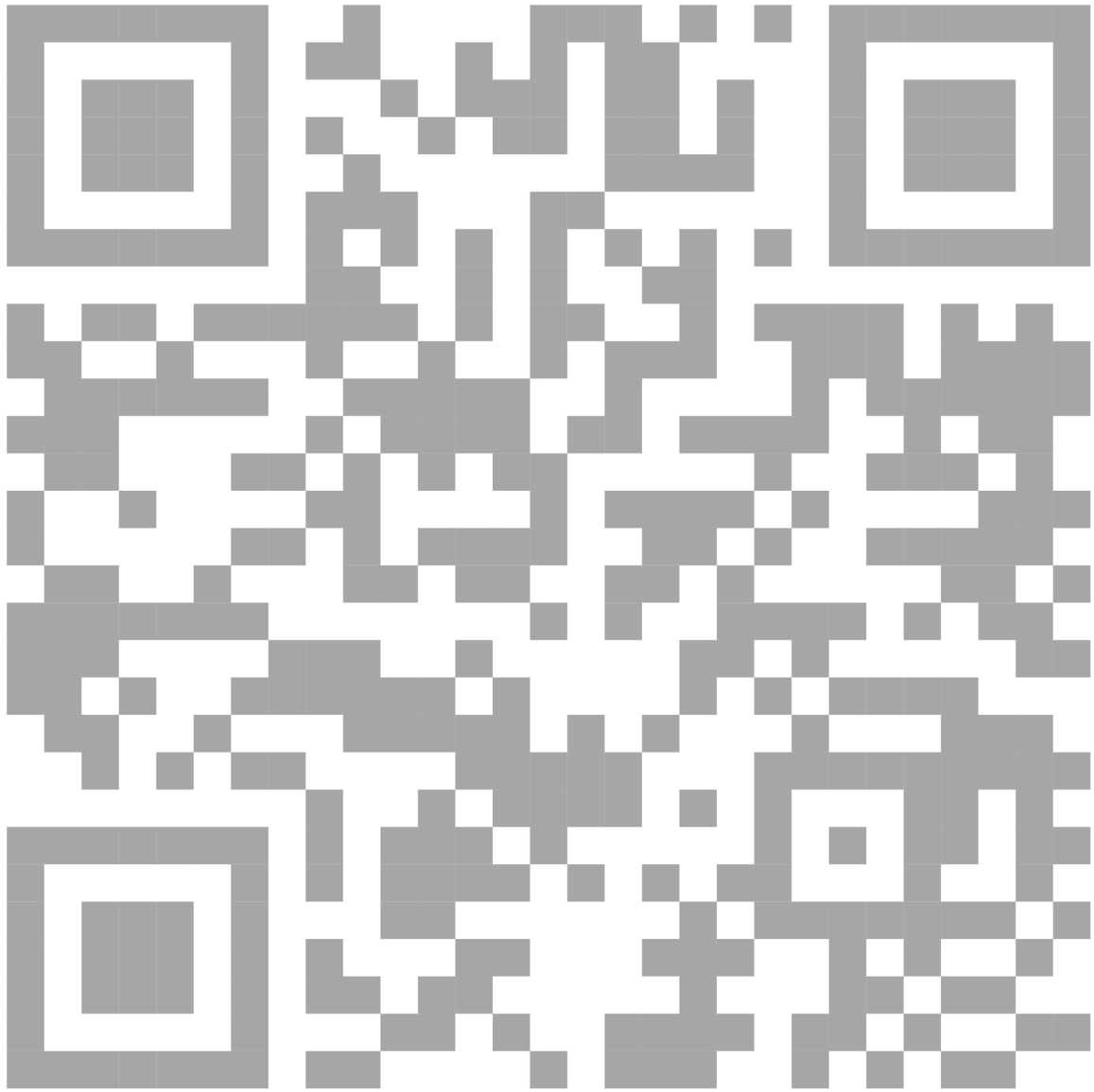


**Winter 2022-2023 Edition**

**Shenendehowa Literary Magazine**



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**Going Solo**  
**By Megan Perkins**

In 5th grade, I was engaged. I was backstage during a play rehearsal when I felt a tap on my shoulder. Spinning around, I found my husband—on one knee—flushing so that his face matched his red hair.

“Will you marry me?”

Suddenly the redness spread to my face. His friends watched expectantly behind him. All eyes were on me.

“Yes.”

Cheers erupted.

That same year was the first time I was in a play: *Seussical the Musical*. I was cast as Mrs. Mayor, so yes, I was married. Since we were never able to have a proper ceremony, my husband’s friends convinced him to make it official.

Those sweet backstage moments are what I remember most from the show, more so than opening night. Rehearsals were the highlights of my week, and once the show was over, I *felt* the loss. All summer, my friends and I dreamt about being in the middle school musical together. With one show behind me, I could do anything.

Then, audition day came. Students, most a grade or two above me, packed into the chorus room. My heartbeat pounded in my ears, a tone louder every time a name was called. I must have sat through a hundred auditions, each person standing up in front of the crowd and proudly singing solo.

The group diminished until only my four friends and I were left. Shakily, we stood up and I took my assigned place in line—dead last. I tried to look over the music one last time, but my hands were shaking too hard to read the notes. All too fast, my turn arrived. I took a breath and launched into song.

I wish I could say that I nailed it, but leaving the room, I knew I wasn’t going to get a part in the show.

For the next four years, I watched school performances come and go, wishing that I could be in them. *Once Upon a Mattress, Into the Woods, Charlotte’s Web, Mamma Mia*. I don’t even remember a lot about them, just how I felt while watching. Shame that I didn’t have the guts to audition, envious that everyone else did. A longing to be on stage with them, but a prying sense of self-doubt.

That feeling haunted me until last summer when an unexpected opportunity arose. While checking in on the first day of summer camp, I found myself in line with a group of talented friends, many of whom had been in the performances I'd seen over the years. A sign immediately caught their attention: JOIN THE MUSICAL PROGRAM!

Joining my friends, I listened to the two counselors who explained that there was a choir program with speaking parts and solos that they needed people to join. Most importantly, they said that anyone in this program would get to skip the lunch line each day so that they could get to rehearsals on time.

My friends were sold. They chattered excitedly while one counselor got our names. I told him mine before realizing what I had gotten myself into.

At the first practice the next day, the director asked for those interested in a solo or a speaking part. On a whim, I raised my hand. As it turned out, being "interested in a part" actually meant being "willing to audition." Later that day, I found myself—once again—in front of a crowd. All eyes were on me.

"Are you auditioning for a speaking part, a solo, or both?" My heart pounded in my ears, so hard that I could barely hear the counselor. Then the sound died, the tones mellowing. Flashes of the shows I had seen shot through my head, and I committed.

"I'm auditioning for a solo."

Two days, six hours, and three missed free blocks later, I stood onstage as music played behind me, warm light washed over my face.

I took a breath... and I sang.



## **The Demons in the Dark**

**By Matt Balboni**

I had my mission, and I knew exactly what I had to do. There I was, an eight-year-old with a full bladder, staring down a hallway overwhelmed with darkness. There was a bathroom at the end: my only destination in the wasteland before me. Seeing as it was past midnight, I had to be quiet as a mouse so my parents would stay asleep.

Against my better judgment, I sprinted down that hallway with such speed that I probably could have beaten Usain Bolt in a race; he would have eaten my dust. I reached the bathroom, flung the door open so hard it nearly flew off its hinges, and began to do what one does whilst within the confines of a restroom.

After relieving myself, I prepared for the reckless sprint back. My mother awoke from her slumber. Needless to say, she was quite angry at me for the calamitous level of commotion I had caused. I didn't see the problem. Why was she mad at me for trying to outrun the insidious beings that were surely surrounding me in the darkness? She brought me back to bed and told me that there was nothing in the dark waiting to give me a cruel embrace, and granted me the salvation of a night light, a small and fragile beacon of hope in an endless sea of shadows.

As a kid, the dark was always seemingly full of everything negative; the ads on TV for R-Rated horror movies would echo in the back of my mind, and the next thing I knew, I'd think some embodiment of death was waiting to rip me to pieces. I treated every walk through a dark hallway as if it were the last time that my legs would still be attached to my body, with my only objective to reach the warm, flowing embrace of the light.

The most extreme example of this was when I was with my grandparents. I kept my safety blanket, which was cleverly named "Blankey," wrapped tightly around my person at all times. This was because I saw a trailer for this interesting movie on TV. Seeing that doll on the cover with its twisted smile was the most terrifying experience for a younger me. I was scared to go to the bathroom when everyone else was awake because I felt like the door would cascade into a portal straight to hell, a ravenous gaping mouth ready to get me lost in an endless void. Eventually, my immature mind managed to move past the horrors I'd witnessed, but to this day, I still haven't forgotten that twisted, broken smile.

I eventually decided to face my fear. As I approached my teenage years, I put on my big boy pants, sat down in my closet, and I invited the dark. I sat there for 3 hours and eventually managed to reach a state where I was calm, at peace with the shadows crawling around me. Leaving my closet to the bright sunlight streaming through my windows was the pinnacle of the triumph that I had just experienced, as I immediately felt the unmatched power of the sun flowing into my retinas. I turned off the night light and for the first time in my life, I could finally stare into the abyss and stand my ground as it stares back.



## Hemoglobin is Important, Apparently!

By Lauren Greene

“Aughhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!”

It's that time of year again—the dreaded doctor's appointment. Now I don't usually mind the doctors, but I do mind the phlebotomists, AKA the “Blood Lady.” My mother and I walk to the doctor's office as she pushes my sister in her stroller. The closer I am to the office, the slower I walk, waiting for the evident doom I shall face. You may be thinking *oh what a baby, she's 16 and afraid of getting her blood drawn.*

The doctor's office has always brought out this fight or flight reaction. Why? I have no clue, but from my earliest memories I've always been deeply afraid of the doctor's office. I am known within my family as the wimp who faints when getting their blood drawn. And that's for good reason. After all, who likes getting their blood drawn? The fight or flight instinct switches on immediately in the office. Adrenaline pumps through my body, begging me to run away while I turn red.

*Never understand why I turn red, but when I do, I feel like a chameleon trying to hide from its predators.*

My predator is the Blood Lady. She's been taking my blood routinely every 2 years ever since I was 4, and nothing has changed.

The most painful thing about the doctor's office is the waiting room. It's just the silence of sitting in a room for over an hour. And somehow that hour in that waiting room drags on for an eternity. During that eternity my mind begins to wander, sadly not the good type of wander. I begin to map out escape routes within the office.

“The doctor is ready for Lauren Greene.” I abruptly stand up, mentally preparing myself for this visit. It is as if the two sides of me are arguing in my head:

“Tough it up buttercup, you're not a baby.”

*Yes I am, no shame, only strong people cry.*

“Yeah, that's something only a wimp would say.”

*Hey, I'm not a wimp.*

I continuously have this argument in my head as I walk to the patient room. I manage to get through the usual tests easily. But then the doctor walks in.

“Hello, how are you doing today? It looks like your chart is up to date.” I could feel the color leave my face.

“You're due for blood work.” Oh, the dreaded blood work.





My doctor immediately notices the red hives popping up on my chest and starts examining it, when in reality that was just my body's way of saying "get the hell away from me."

*Blah blah blah blah.*

My doctor continues talking and finally says goodbye. I am smiling ear to ear. Then, the Blood Lady comes in, and my smile falls flat.

"Hello, it's nice to see you again Lauren. How have you been?"

Her voice is inviting and kind, but no way in hell am I going to fall for this trap. I start holding my arms in preparation, and begin to sweat profusely. She starts by wiping my arm with the cold alcohol wipe and I already wince in anticipation of the pain.

*You can do it. Prove it to everyone who called you a wimp.*

I think this motivation is gonna work till I start crying. Yeah I'm not afraid to admit it, my grown 16-year-old self was crying in front of my mother, sister, and the blood lady. The blood lady was nice enough to try and console me, but I don't want it. ESPECIALLY from her.

"It's alright honey there's no need to fret. Look, I'll even be using the baby needle on you, you won't even feel it. Look at your veins honey, they're so beautiful and full."

**WHAT THE HELL DID THIS WOMAN JUST SAY? I HAVE FULL VEINS, GET ME THE HELL AWAY FROM HERE IMMEDIATELY!**

I cry even harder. Those are not words of comfort; those are words that would make any sane person run away. She eventually gets my arm still enough to insert the needle as I whine like a little child. As she's drawing my blood, I weirdly lose feeling in the arm the needle is in which sends me further into panic. As she finishes and gives me a bandage she congratulates me, but I just look at her with disdain. I want to jump up and celebrate when she leaves, but an issue arises when I get up from the table and try to walk out of the room. I immediately faint.

*Apparently, 2 nurses rushed to me as I was in and out of consciousness.*

*What a fun day, am I right?*

My mother stands there in panic trying to help me as my sister tries to run out of the office. After about 20 minutes, I am back to my usual self. Sadly, I left my pride in that room.

*Ya know what? Being a coward isn't so bad.*

## **DUN DUN DUN**

2 weeks later

My mother picks up her phone to receive a call from my doctor's office. I ignore it, thinking nothing of it because they're probably just telling her that I'm in perfect health, as usual. To my surprise? When my mother gets off the phone she apparently has bad news.

*Can't be that bad, am I right?*

Well, it is.

"So the doctor's office just called and told me you are very anemic."

That goes through my head and hits me like a truck.

*Wait a damn minute. Anemia. Low iron? That's not good. But it's an easy fix . Until my mother brings up how I need to reschedule another blood test in three months.*

*Three months. That's funny. I need to see the Blood Lady 90 days from now. I was still scared from two weeks ago. I need another 24 months to mentally prepare myself for this.*

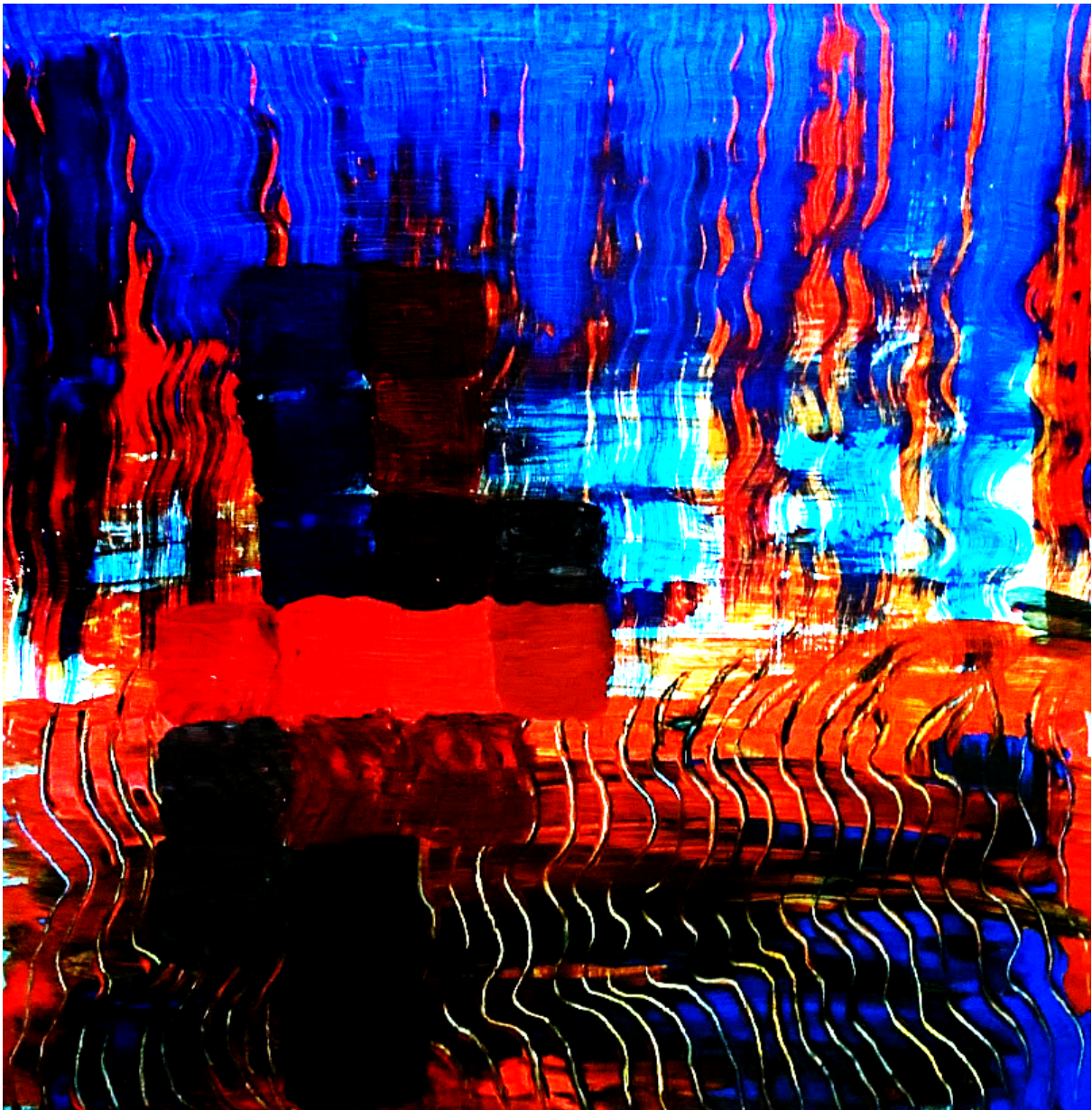
At this point, as it may be obvious, I am having a panic attack. I am not prepared to see the blood lady again. I take it lightly for a week and then my mother swarms me.

"Ya know, if you don't get your iron up you have to get a transfusion."

She then proceeds to show me the size of the needle and it makes me do a 360 on my eating habits. I am determined to not get a blood transfusion. However, iron pills are disgusting.

*How is something that's supposed to improve health make you feel so bad?*

The constipation and stomach pain is unreal. So healthy eating is the next option. And I honestly never felt better after that. I still have a strong dislike for the Blood Lady and I'm just happy that I never have to see her again. Well, at least not for the next 2 years.



## Unforgiving Grounds

By Riya Mistry

Hot stomach acid creeps up my esophagus, as the plane jostles. My face is the color of spoiled milk with salty teardrops running down it. Hunching over the airplane toilet, I let it all out. Then, sudden relief. The bitter sensation lingers in my dry mouth. My legs raise me up from the cold ground as I blink away tears. Color floods back into my face. To help me keep steady, both hands clutch the sink. My head rises with my jaw clenched. I stare at the greasy monster that appears in the mirror.

The cold air hits my face as I leave the bathroom. The plane turbulence exacerbates my sickness. It shoves me into the wall, once, twice, thrice: I freeze. The menacing coffee upsets my stomach again. Breathing in and out, I try to allay my nausea. But it doesn't work.

*Uh-oh.*

I sprint back to the bathroom.

---

Unfortunately, that puking incident was the first memory I recalled from the summer of 2018. I was on my way home from India. The monsoon season there was hot and muggy, it made sweat cling onto every part of the body. Walking into a building with A/C felt ten times more refreshing.

That day, seven hours were spent on the drive to the airport; India's jam-packed highways were outrageous. After the grueling drive, my mom dragged me into a cafe to rest prior to being ushered into security. The humidity seeped into my favorite black leggings causing them to stick to my legs with every step I took. The cafe welcomed us with a warm coffee aroma, and we proceeded to order drinks and settle down.

There it was, my mom's cool, refreshing iced brew. The robust brown look, the inviting scent, the condensation dripped down the side. My clammy hands brought the cool plastic cup to my lips, not even a full sip in, and my eyes snapped open. The rancid taste was overwhelming, everything but welcoming. The coffee left me suffering from the bitterness.

Hours later, the coffee started to churn in my stomach as we boarded the plane. I hated it. The awful aftertaste lingered on my tongue. My face was full of disgust and I feigned a smile so my parents didn't suspect a thing. I wanted to cry for help but my timidness covered my mouth. Even if I told my parents, it would just become another problem for them to worry about. They were already stressing about the flight. It was best if I kept quiet.

---

I always find myself looking back at a small insignificant experience about a praised beverage. Who thought a normal day in an airport could turn out miserable? I was naive back then. Something that seemed to be pleasant turned out to be the opposite. I could have gotten help, but I was reluctant to speak up when I was in distress. Now I wash out the aftertaste of fear from my mouth.

**The Reappearance of a Hard Pill to Swallow**  
**By Chelsea BenAoumeur**

I can't remember a time in my life when motion sickness wasn't a shadow lurking behind every vacation.

When the contents of one's stomach slosh as they fight their nausea, most people don't think twice about it. My parents, however, sprouted grey hairs regarding my motion sickness.

"Caran, it's all in her head. It's anxiety." I overheard my dad say to my mom from where I sat on the stairs. *Anxiety?* I wondered. At six years old, I didn't understand what that word meant.

As I grew older, I found the pieces coming together.

Whenever we traveled, I got motion sickness. The persistent fear of spontaneous vomit made my stomach churn.

The same story repeated year after year: my family traveled; I got sick. Myriads of different medication all ended with my head over a barf bag, and my breakfast was the star of the show with its very own encore. Until we finally found the medication which eased my motion sickness: *Dramamine*.

"Mom!" I called from my room, "Don't forget to pack *Dramamine!*"

"Already packed. Don't forget your chargers!" she shouted back. I was furiously packing for my overnight flight leaving in five hours. Making the third lap around my room, I closed my eyes, taking a deep breath. *You're going to be okay. It's only a week.*

"Chels, we're leaving!" my sister shouted from downstairs. As I said my final goodbyes to a few unlucky stuffed animals who weren't chosen to come along, I headed to the car.

It was 5pm when my family grabbed fast food in the terminal.

"Mom, grease messes with me. I don't want to chance it on the plane," I complained.

"Okay, well look around and see if there's anything else you'd like."

I found a prepackaged chicken salad on the shelf of a mini-mart in JFK. We scarfed down our meals then boarded our plane.

If only I'd paid attention to the expiration date on the salad.

I took *Dramamine* that night, unquestioningly. After watching *Bohemian Rhapsody* on the inflight entertainment system, I decided to go to bed. I opened Amazon Music, tuning out

the fussy toddler nearby with show tunes. As my eyes fluttered closed, I felt a sharp pain in my gut.

*This shouldn't be happening. I've been on planes before! I took my Dramamine!* Then my dinner reappeared in the airplane toilet. I dashed between the bathroom and my seat for three hours straight that night. I wonder to this day how I ate so little but vomited so much.

The following morning, we landed in Granada, Spain. Arriving at our hotel, my face was unrecognizable in the mirror.

"Mom!" I called out, "What's wrong with my face?" I pointed to the person in the mirror who stared at me with hollowed eyes and rosacea. I looked chronically ill. Mom was quick to calm me down and explained that the stress my body underwent caused the change in my looks.

"Let's find some breakfast. You must be starving." And so, my family found a Spanish café where I was introduced to churros dipped in thick cocoa.

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Nearly 3 years since then, I still think about that breakfast. In fact, I often reminisce about the week I spent in Spain regardless of the motion sickness that plagued the start.

As a sophomore, I'm still riddled with this burden. A simple bus ride to school causes unbridled anxiety. But I'll rest knowing my experiences helped me become resilient.





### **She ate my cake**

**By Alei Rabie**

She ate my cake.  
 The sorrow, the misery, what is there to see  
 in life without a slice, of such great cake,  
 oh so fine...  
 cake that should've been mine!  
 But she made a mistake  
 and ate my cake,  
 so I must cut her up  
 to eat its remains.  
 'Twas a good time with the cake.

### **The Girl with the Heartache**

**By Samantha Manning**

She asked herself who she was, but she was  
 speechless, blank.  
 Drowning in her own despair, while her  
 heart quickly sank.  
*How could she love another more than  
 herself?* she thought.  
 Because she believed that they were  
 perfect, and that she was not.  
 She wanted to fight, but her heart and mind  
 gave in  
 to the recklessness around her, letting the  
 tears begin.  
 As she sobbed away her soul for a stone  
 cold heart,  
 Her now emotionless person, completely  
 torn apart.



### **No One Great Was Ever Late**

**By Mujtaba Siddiqui**

Do you know anyone great  
That was ever late?

Great people choose to respect time  
A second lost would be a crime

Time is priceless, incredibly valuable  
Be present, it is not malleable

That is to say it is rigid  
Try not to be late even by one digit  
If you must be tardy have a pass  
Rush to class incredibly fast

Be punctual so that you may succeed in  
school  
Do not be late, do not act a fool

You may not be entertained by my rhymes  
How could you not be, they are so sublime  
At the very least, I hope you practice  
punctuality  
As a student, this is ideal for your  
functionality

Be great, not late

### **Fallen Astray, A Haiku**

**By Patrick Driscoll**

One is Lost in heart  
Unknowing, force tears apart  
aching core, no chart





**Multiple Stories: Same Book**  
**By Jasleen Saini and Kaleigh Montanez**

A stereotype developed from a “single story” is not okay,  
But unfortunately it is the society we live in today

From one story alone, we are quick to assume that everyone is the same,  
But we do not ask their background or from where they came

Every cultural group has a story in which they are categorized in society,  
But that’s the problem; it’s one story, not the variety

East Asians are often stereotyped as geeks who read books,  
Whereas their Lunar New Year celebration is off the hook

Indians are described as curry munchers or made fun of for their skin,  
Whereas India is so beautiful, just where to begin?

Some consider Mexicans to be “dangerous illegal immigrants”  
Obviously, they were blind not to see their educational brilliance

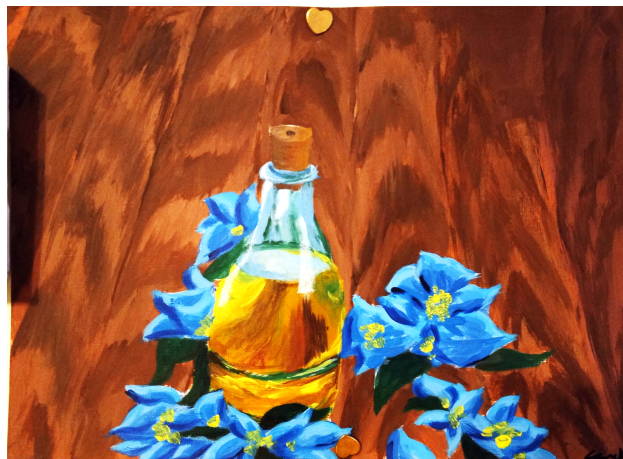
Hispanics are made fun of for their accent or their nose,  
But have you ever seen their divine clothes?

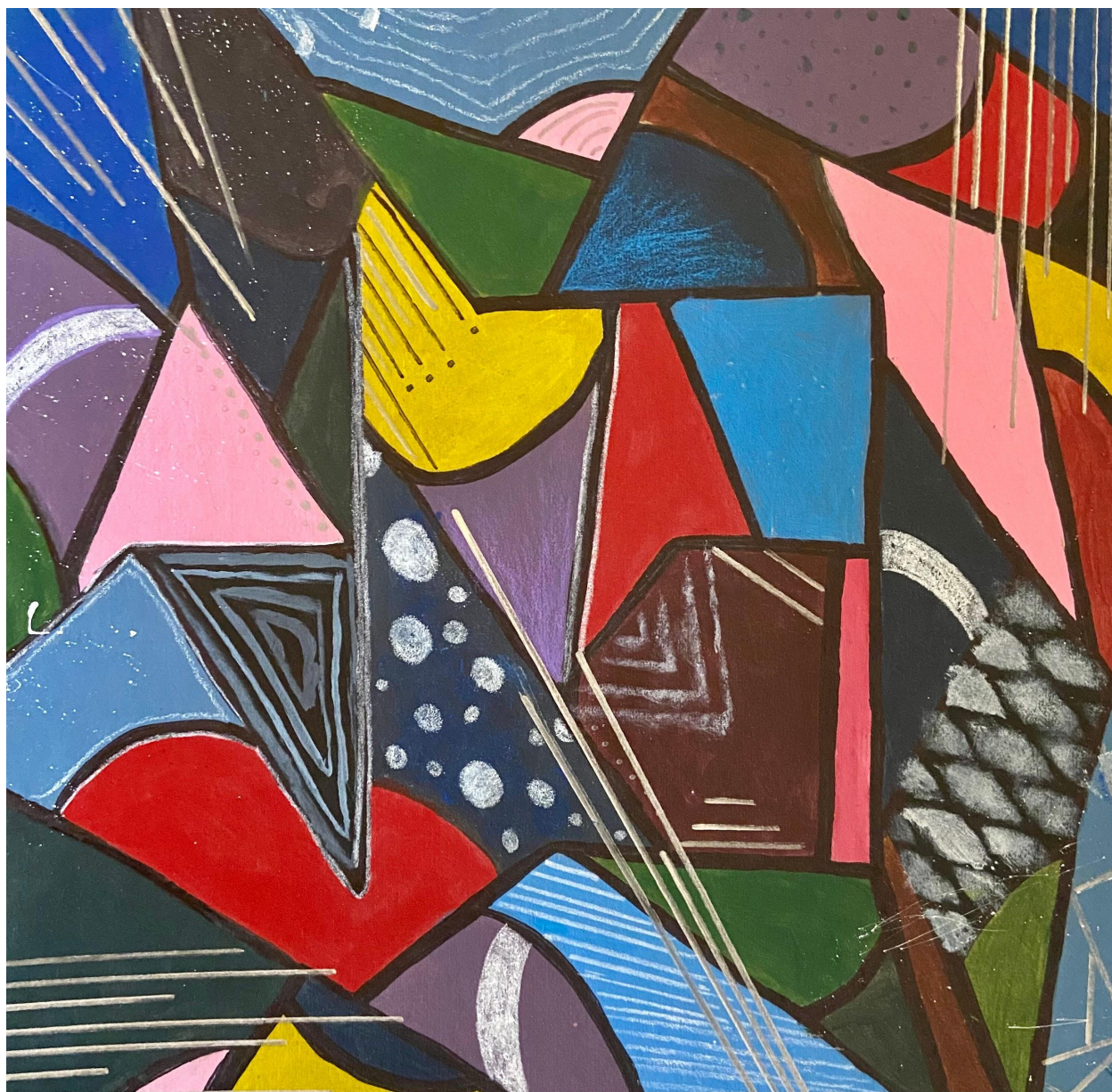
Some say Africans are impoverished or don’t have a future to look forward to,  
But once you look deeper you would notice how much they can really do

Muslims are stereotyped into committing harmful acts,  
But what about your Muslim friends who have always had your back?

Sikhs are associated with the September 11th attack,  
Whereas their faith is about serving humanity and giving back

So next time you get the chance, dive in closer and take a look,  
You’ll notice that there’s multiple stories even though they’re in the same book





## One Final Mistake

By Skylar Yeo

Somaril, the panacea of Earth, is known to cure all ailments for an ephemeral period. This drug was highly sought after and was only used by the richest of the rich. As with most valuable resources, people would stop at nothing to get it. This was Natalia's job: infiltrate labs, steal Somaril, get out undetected, and sell it to the highest bidder. She was meticulous which made her good at the job. Tonight would be no different than any other job, or so she thought...

The plan was going smoothly, and the lab she had broken into was decorated for the holidays. The once bleak walls were adorned with colorful lights and whimsical snowflakes. Since it was the holiday season, the halls were empty except for the occasional security guard, not given the liberty of vacation.

*Just because there's no one here does not mean you can extenuate the situation.*

She quietly made her way to the roof, avoiding both the guards and security cameras. Crawling through the vents, she found herself above the laboratory which synthesized Somaril. After scanning the room, she deemed it safe and dropped down. Unfortunately, she miscalculated her jump and landed on a nearby desk. The papers that were once on the table landed on the floor with a rustle. Natalia thought nothing of it since it was merely papers. Little did she know the papers piqued the interest of a security guard.

Alongside producing Somaril, the lab produced drugs that achieved the same beneficial effects of steroids without the drawbacks. The successful tests on human patients left scientists jubilant as they departed for the holidays. The test subjects were ordered to guard the lab. Was it unethical and immoral? Yes, but it was effective in keeping people like Natalia out. Nicholas, one of the subjects, was tasked with monitoring the lab with Somaril. Hearing the papers fall with his drug-enhanced senses, he sprinted to the lab to see Natalia rummaging through drawers for a key card.

"Ahem," Nicholas cleared his throat with disdain as Natalia jumped up and whipped her head around, trying to see him.

"Surely you're not stupid enough to think we would just leave the key around," Nicholas said with a sneer. Such impertinence left Natalia irate as they stared at one another. Nicholas expected her surrender, but it never came as she lunged at his throat. He reciprocated in kind, their objectives forgotten with every punch thrown. When they paused to catch their breath, they now saw each other with a sense of reverence rather than hatred. At that moment, Nicholas decided to let her go and turned around to leave. That was his last mistake. Natalia pulled out a pistol and shot him in the back.



**See No Evil**  
**By Olivia Thayer**

Morning eyes flutter open, hands wiping away the night, when suddenly, the woman feels a sting. One eye remains shut due to the pain; the other opens fully to reveal the dark substance that paints her fingers. Blood. Blood that used to live inside her boyfriend who is lying face down on their brand new bed sheets, in their brand new bedroom, in their brand new apartment, dead. Although thousands of thoughts flood her mind, nothing but a shaken breath leaves her lips as she pushes herself off the cold floor. Unable to look away from what's left of her love, she backs into the bathroom.

Eventually, she pulls her gaze to herself standing in the mirror wearing blue silk pajamas now stained with red. An arm wraps around her waist as the other traces the handprint streaked down her face. Emotions overwhelm her body, releasing themselves through her mouth into the toilet.

*Strange, she doesn't recall eating anything since the night before.*

She clutches the bowl and the chilled ceramic sends shivers through her body. The sound of the water flushing down the drain echos in her ears. Using what little strength remains in herself, she pushes off the toilet seat onto her feet once again. Dragging her feet toward the bed, she clasps the clean half of the comforter and pulls it to the other side in which her deceased lover rests. She wraps it around his cold limp body to conceal the tragedy. The woman places a hand where her lover's face lays underneath and brushes her thumb gently across his cheek.

It is then she utters two soft words, "I'm sorry."

She makes her way to the dresser and finds a pale yellow crew neck sweatshirt and some light-washed jeans. She shuts the bathroom door behind her and drops the clothes to her feet. She pulls the knot of her pajama shorts free and they fall to her ankles. She crosses her arms, fingers tucking under the hem of her top and lifts it over her head. Only in her underwear, she turns on the faucet. She cups her hands and fills them with water then brings her palms to her skin. Carefully scrubbing at the dried blood that has crusted on her olive flesh. As the last speck of red washes away, a single tear takes its place. Quickly brushing away the only sign of sadness, she begins to re-dress herself.

Now clothed, the woman sits on the edge of the bathtub, racking her brain for any memory of what could have happened in the last 12 hours. Coming up with...nothing. Her mind races as she contemplates her choices moving forward. She could report the crime, that is the ethical and morally sound thing to do. However, she knows, being a law student herself, that she would need some sort of story, some sort of explanation as to why she woke up covered in her boyfriend's blood. There is no way to excuse herself for being the murderer. She needs to find out who did this. Even then she needs to find out if she is being framed. If she is the real target here. She is the only one with enemies.

*Her boyfriend was gentle, generous, and kind. Everyone loved him. No one understood why he loved her. She was insensitive, egotistical, and never cared for anyone or anything unless it benefitted her in some way. Polar opposites.*

The last 12 hours remain a blur.

*This is not the first time this has happened. Blacking out. She used to do so when she was a child; however, it stopped. For years, she never had a blackout occur, until last night.*

More confusion and questions arise. The only thing she knows for sure is she needs to leave this bedroom. To buy herself more time, she texts her boyfriend's boss that he would be calling in sick. That way there shouldn't be anyone looking for him. She places the phone, still plugged in, back on the nightstand. She takes one last look at her partner and carries the pit in her stomach with her out of the room. Opening the kitchen cupboard, she pulls a Disney's *Tangled* mug out and places it upon the countertop. Back leaning against the fridge, she waits for her coffee to finish brewing. When, out of the corner of her eye, she catches a glimpse of something tossed in the kitchen sink. Stepping towards the unknown object, she then recognizes what she is seeing and, only for a second, a memory. A memory flashes across the back of her eyelids. The object in the sink, a knife.

*That knife. She sees the metal piercing her boyfriend's chest.*

The image takes her back and she stumbles to the floor. A wrinkle in her forehead forms as she's trying to figure out what this means. The woman forces herself upright.

The sound of her Keurig goes off, bringing her focus back to what is happening in the present. She pours the coffee into her mug, leaving an inch of space for her hazelnut creamer. She brings the steaming beverage to her lips and softly blows to cool the surface enough for her to sip. She can feel the liquid travel down her throat and it warms her body. She stands quietly, enjoying her cup until the last drop is gone. The woman places the mug into the sink, again reminded of that taunting knife. Annoyed, she tosses the utensil into the top rack of the dishwasher along with the coffee cup and slams the door shut. With three beeps she turns away, leaving the washer running.

*Why last night? Why not any other night?*

Now she has to solve a murder without any help or contacting the police with zero information to go off of. Well, other than a knife found in her sink. The same knife she saw stabbing her partner just a few hours ago. Then again she knew there were many more pieces missing, waiting to be found. She plops herself down onto her velvet green button-tufted sofa. With the light sound of the velvet rustling against her jeans, another remembrance appears in her mind.

*Hands. Hands belonging to her love, reaching out. Reaching out to touch. No. To push away the attacker. The look of despair apparent on his face. Then his arms fall to his sides.*

Tears form, puddling along her bottom lashline with her fingers intertwined and her wrists pressed onto her mouth. She begins biting her blistered thumb, a habit that only festers when the woman is stressed or anxious. Both could be used to describe her at this moment. She has tried to paint her nails as a way to stop the biting from taking place, but nonetheless her baby pink nail polish is not stopping her from doing so. Chips of polish flake away until the taste of blood reaches her tongue. She pulls her finger out and rubs the wound on her sweatshirt. Her cell phone buzzes on the end table next to her. She glances over to see her mother is calling.

"Hi sweetie! Just wanted to see how you're settling into the new place. Is there anything you need? I have some things I want to bring over to you."

“Hi mom. No, I don't need anything and I don't think now is the best time for you to stop by.”

“Oh don't be silly. It will only be a quick visit, I want to see how you've decorated.”

“It's very... red.”

“Red? That's a strange color. Red doesn't compliment your skin tone.”

“Ha. You know, there is something I wanted to ask.”

“Of course, sweetheart.”

“Did I ever do anything weird as a kid?”

“I'm not sure I know what you mean, darling.”

“Like while I was sleeping. I just remember... blacking out.”

“Oh. Well, you used to have some issues with sleeping, but me and your father took you to a specialist and he got you some sleep medication. You were fine for years after that. Why do you ask?”

“What kind of issues? Why did you bring me to a doctor? What happened?”

“Sweetie, I promised your father that I wouldn't tell you.”

“Mom. I need to know.”

“Okay, okay. One night, you were about 8 or 9, it was around 2 a.m. and I woke up to the sound of our cat. You remember Fluffy right?”

“Yes, I thought we gave him away though.”

“Well, not exactly. I woke up to him, screeching. It was coming from your room honey. I peered open the door and, well, you were hurting poor Fluffy, and I pulled you off. As it turns out, you were asleep the whole time and had no idea what you'd done. So the next morning, me and your father agreed to take you to a sleep specialist in a mental health facility. They gave you some pills that were supposed to suppress whatever thoughts haunted you in your sleep. The doctors told us it was just a phase. Now you tell me, what happened to you? Why are you asking about this?”

“Oh no reason. I just remembered having trouble sleeping. Thank you. I have to go now. Love you.”

“Yes, love you t-”

Shenever has never hit the end button so fast. She tosses her phone onto the floor and starts pacing back and forth analyzing the call.

*Could she have done this? Was she really capable of killing someone?*

Asleep or not, the thought is too scary to even question. Trying her best to ignore the truth, she begins to search her apartment for anything. Anything that could prove another person was here last night. Something to steer away all the signs pointing to herself. At this point she does not want to remember the event and how it happened, she wants to deny, deny, deny. She begs to find something she knows does not exist. Anxiety surges through her veins, she is tearing apart her home, and with the last book thrown off its casing, she sobs. Sobs as she drops to her knees. The gut-wrenching sound of the woman's cries fill the space.

It is at this moment that the night comes back to her. Every second. She sees it all. She can see her feet dragging along the hardwood floor of their bedroom into the kitchen. She sees her hand and her blistered fingers wrap around the knife stowed away in the butcher's block. She hears the sound of her lover's snores perfectly in rhythm. She can see her arms raise

above her head and plunge into his chest. She watches his eyes lose life. And finally she still feels the chill of the cold floor she woke up on this morning.

She knows what she did is wrong and she knows what she did is punishable, which is exactly why she knows that she can not be caught. She is young and has her whole life ahead of her, a life she refuses to spend behind some dingy metal bars. So she packs a bag, grabs her passport and empties her vacation fund. Leaving her phone behind, she steps out of the apartment, locks her sins up and throws away the key. She gets onto a bus and gets off at the nearest airport. She boards a plane and watches her city grow smaller and smaller until it is nothing but a dot in her vision.

*She never does anything for anyone unless it benefits herself. Going to prison wouldn't help her. Starting over does. That's exactly what she's going to do.*

