



# THE HUMAN CONDITION

*an exploration of art and literature*

Volume XXXI | 2026

UCSD School of Medicine



# DEAR READERS,

Approximately 45,500 years ago, a human stood in a cave on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi, meticulously placing stripes of ochre, made from grinding clay and mixing with water, into shapes representing the likeness of a pig. This pig painting may have been a diary entry or a guide for others as to which animal to look for when hunting. It may possibly have been documentation of a favorite tasty meal or even a trophy for a prized hunt. Regardless of its exact purpose, this pig has given archaeologists a window into the life of its painter- much like the tools, sculptures, poems, stories, and paintings that have told the stories of their makers.

As social beings, we long to share, to be heard, to connect with those around us. Evident in the collections displayed by museums across the world as well as in this magazine, art is how our species shares the parts of our lives that mean the most to us, the struggles we have overcome to get where we are, and the dreams we have of getting where we want to go. The paintbrush, the pen, and the keyboard are all tools that take us from being alone in our experiences to being a part of something greater: *the human condition*.

In this thirty-first edition of *The Human Condition*, we hope that you are not only amazed by the abundance of talent it contains, but savor the snapshots into the varied lives and experiences among those at the UCSD School of Medicine. May you discover new perspectives, see reflections of your own experiences, and find inspiration that you will take with you into the future as you collect more stories and build upon the growing library of experience we call humanity.

Thank you for being a part of our shared story and taking a glimpse into the window of the lives of our vibrant community of humans.

Sincerely,



Emma Rice  
*Editor-in-Chief*



Liz Timple  
*Editor-in-Chief*

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**FRONT COVER:**  
**"I CAN'T SPEAK IT ANYMORE."**  
**DEOMAR MATTHEW ARIZABAL**

**BACK COVER:**  
**YOU LOOKING AT ME LOOKING AT YOU**  
**KRISTINE LY**

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# this is what life feels like

Vera Arenas, MS1

I am grateful  
for my heart,  
the way it beats inside my chest,  
how it flutters when I'm nervous  
and excited just the same.

The way it loves  
and smiles and feels  
deeply,  
and mends after breaking.

I am grateful for my skin,  
how it feels the prickly grass beneath me,  
its warmth on my arms,  
imprints of sand stuck on my legs  
as the summer sun strikes,  
how it dries after a rainy day.

I'm grateful for my eyes.  
Through them I see the ocean,  
my family,  
the world.  
For tears they shed  
when I'm sad or mad  
or laughing harder than I meant to.

I'm grateful too  
for days when gratitude is just a word,  
when life feels like  
holding on  
and calling it enough.

“I'm grateful,”  
I think as I read the sticky note on my wall,  
a fact I know  
but sometimes needs reminding.

The good and bad,  
the flavors in between.

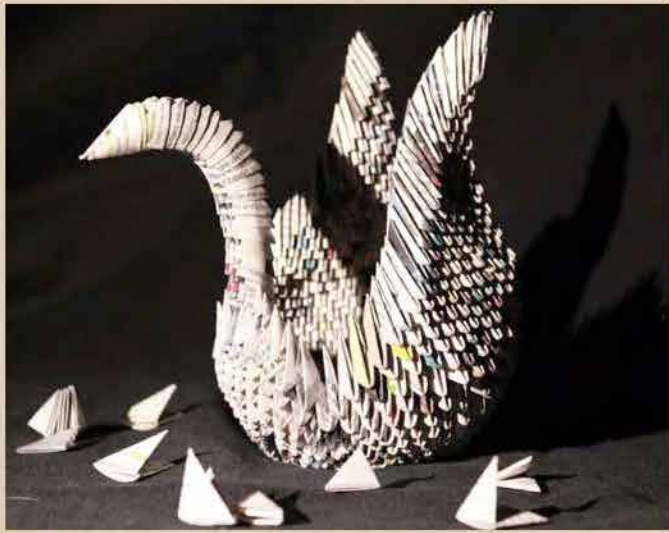
*Sit back.  
Relax.  
Enjoy the experience.*

I sit with it for a while.

*This is what life feels like.*



**BIRDSEYE VIEW I** Liz Timple, MS4



**ORIGAMI SWAN I** Deomar Matthew  
Arizabal, MS1



**SQUIRREL I** Emma Rice, MS4

# I hear the Human in the Healer

Lane Stucki, Staff

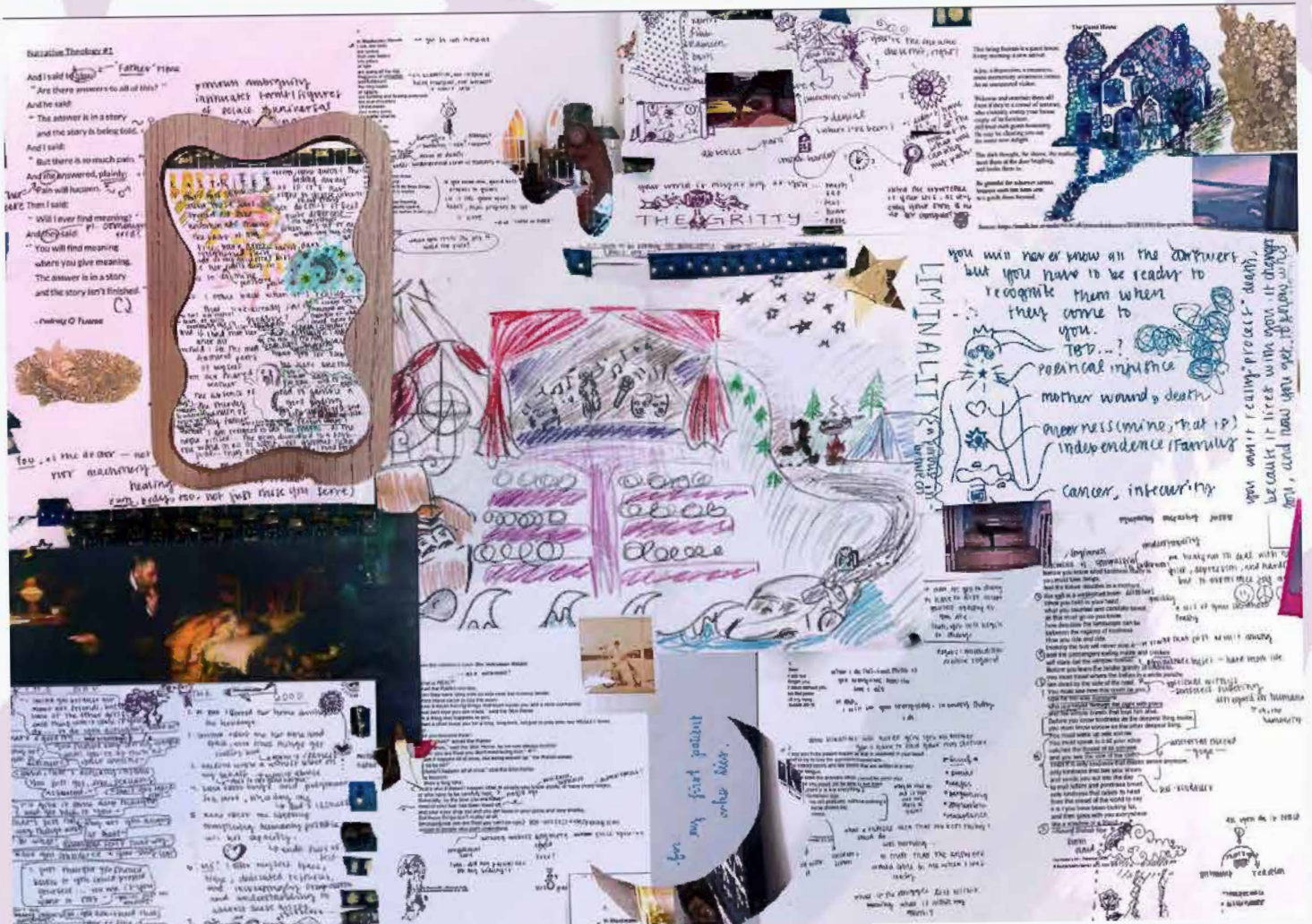
When I talk to a Healer  
And hear about the pain  
That they've witnessed and they've suffered  
It never sounds the same.

The unique pain of suffering  
Is as unique as you and me.  
It is said that all our suffering rhymes  
Like a song we All can sing.

When I talk to a Healer  
I hear about the love  
That they've saved, protected, witnessed  
For the job they've been dreaming of.

The unique joy of love  
Is as unique as you and me.  
It is said that all our love rhymes  
Like a song we All can sing.

I hear the Human in the Healer  
Their songs are honest, raw, and real.  
Their Humanity's in Harmony  
And use the Harmony to Heal.





**BETTER TOGETHER** | Deomar Matthew Arizabal, MS1



# On Becoming: The Medical Student's Journey to Residency

Bridgette McCarty, MS4

There is no ceremony for the moment  
you realize the room will turn toward you.

One day you are practicing steadiness,  
the next you are expected to have it.  
The difference is subtle,  
like the shift between holding a map  
and being asked to choose the road.

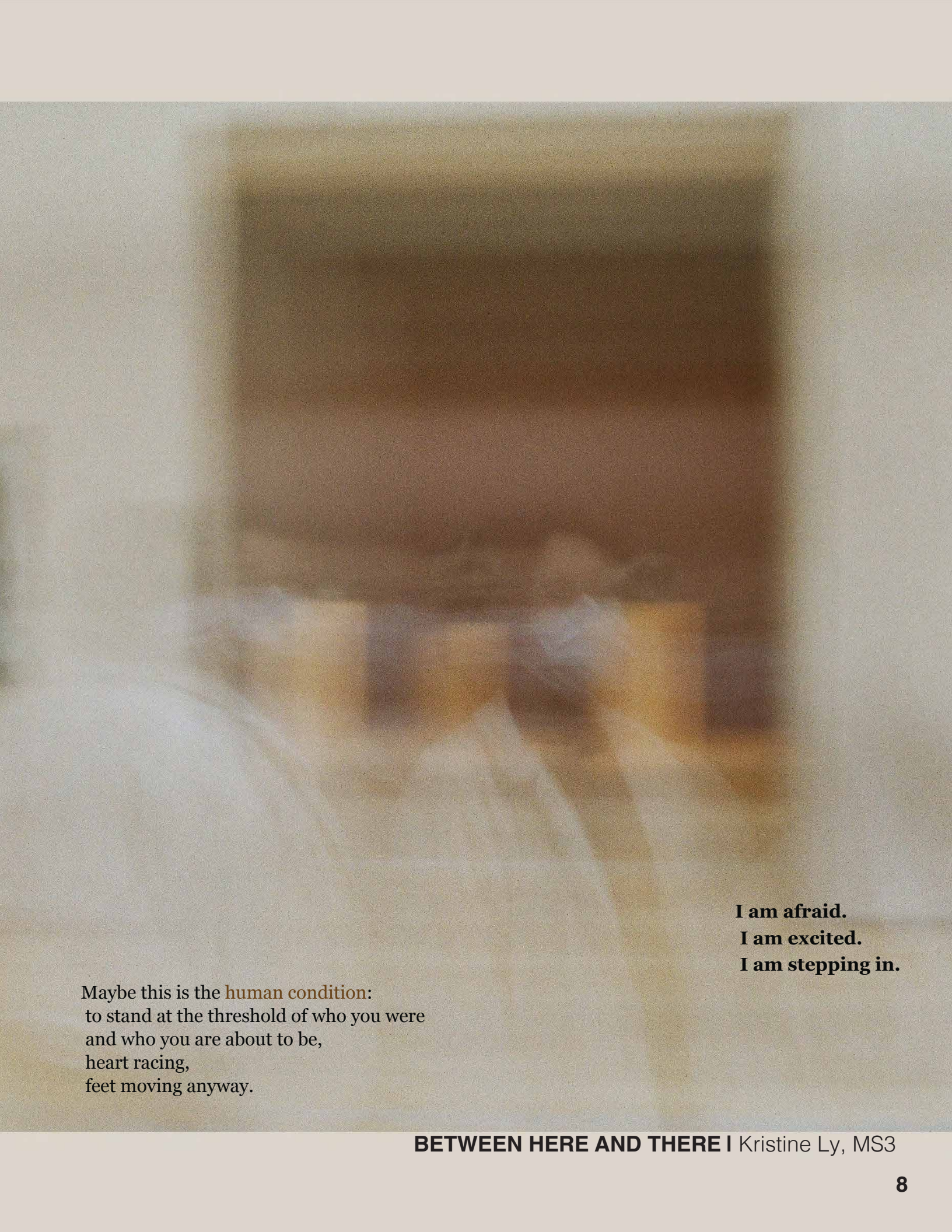
I carry both fear and excitement  
in the same pocket—  
the weight of responsibility  
pressing against the thrill of finally belonging.

My white coat still feels new,  
but my hands have learned  
how to hover before touching,  
how to listen longer than feels comfortable,  
how to admit uncertainty  
without surrendering care.

There are nights I rehearse futures:  
the page I miss,  
the question I don't know yet,  
the silence after a family asks,  
*What would you do?*

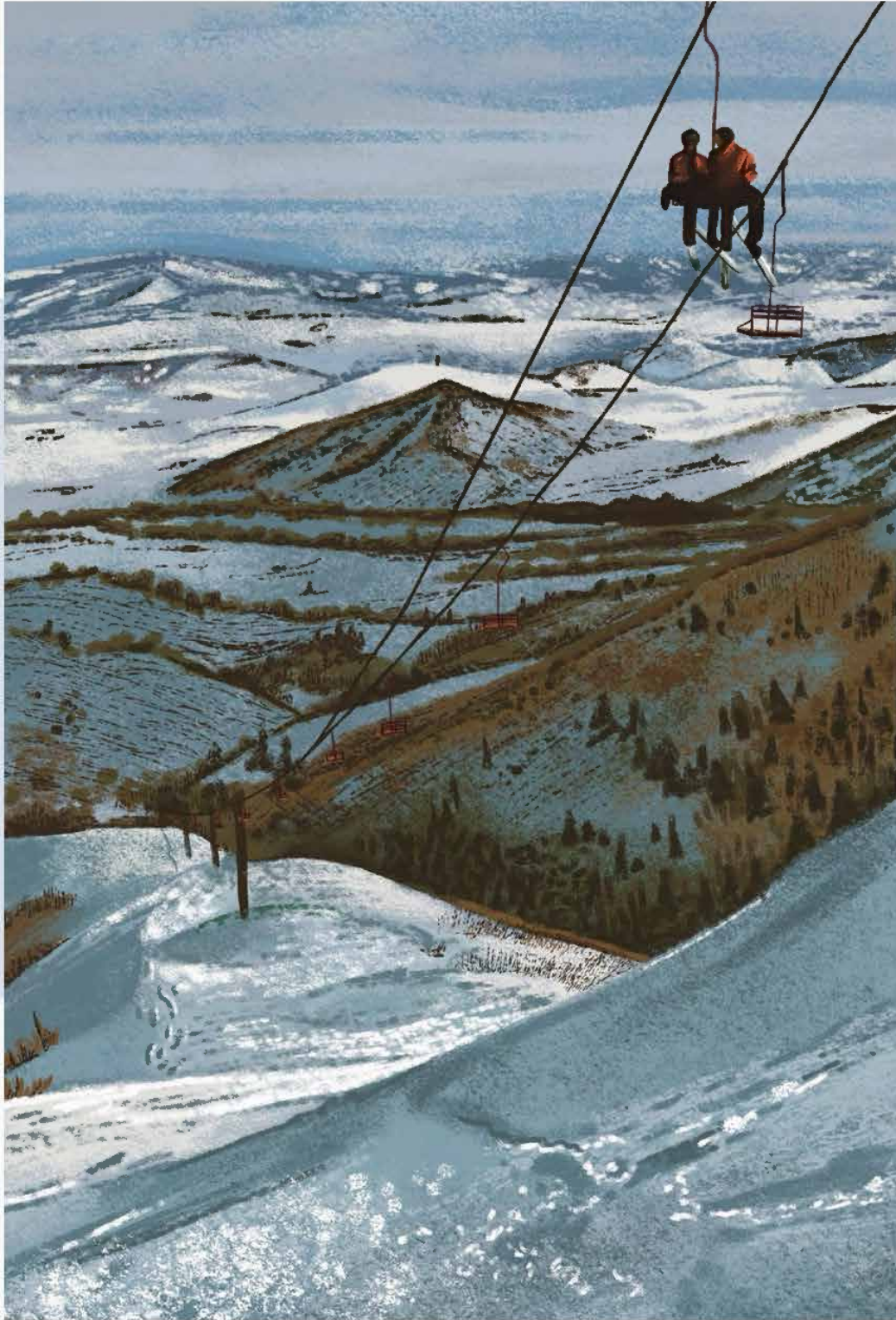
And there are moments—quiet, electric—  
when something clicks into place:  
a plan made thoughtfully,  
a patient who trusts me,  
the realization that learning  
does not end when responsibility begins.

No one tells you  
how much becoming asks of you.  
How it stretches you forward  
before you feel ready to be stretched.

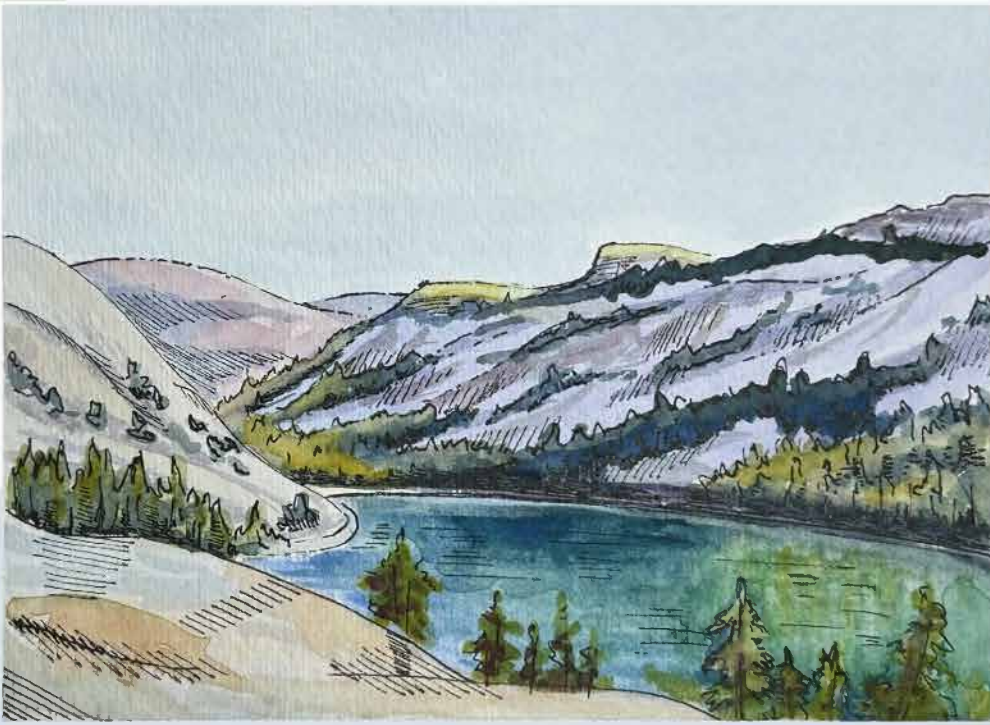


Maybe this is the **human condition**:  
to stand at the threshold of who you were  
and who you are about to be,  
heart racing,  
feet moving anyway.

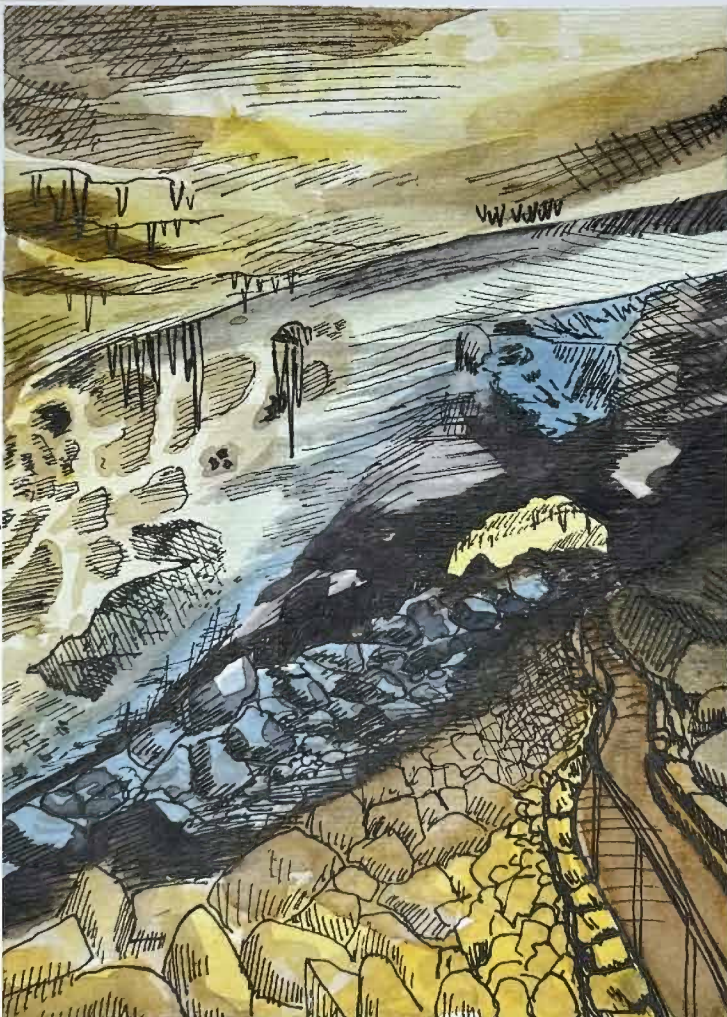
**I am afraid.**  
**I am excited.**  
**I am stepping in.**



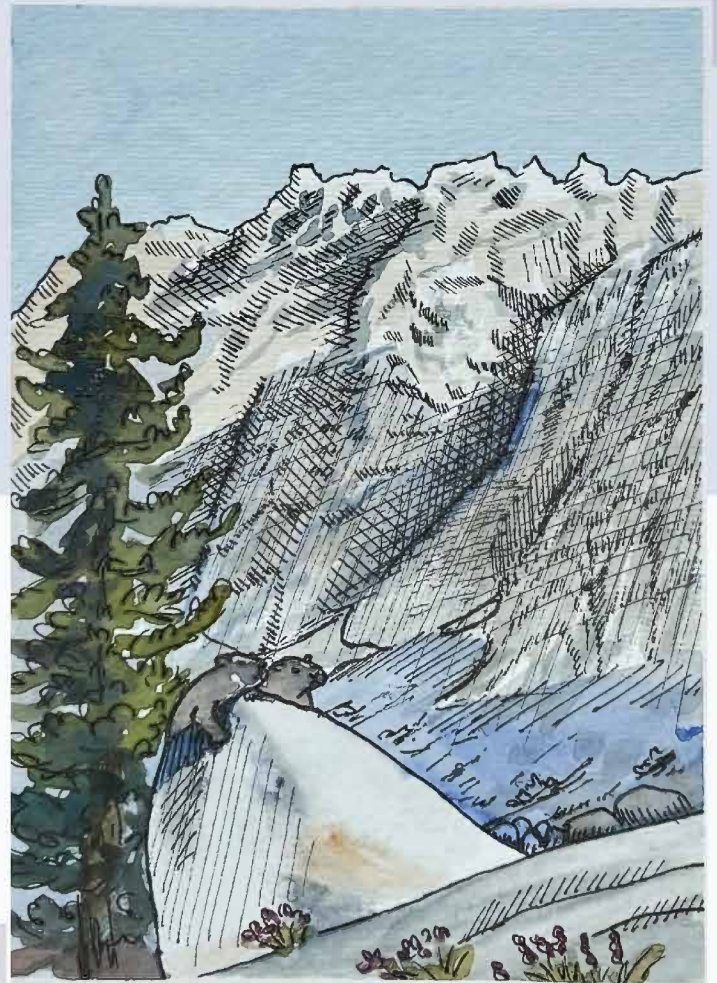
*My husband and I have loved escaping to snowy mountains on weekends throughout medical school. Snow Day captures my husband's love for skiing, my dream of learning to ski, and the cozy atmosphere that has helped us get through med school together!*



YOSEMITE | Amy Xue, MS3



CARLSBAD CAVERNS | Amy Xue, MS3



SEQUOIA NATIONAL PARK

Amy Xue, MS3



# The Fifth Chamber of the Heart

Melissa Martinez, MS1

Just beyond the twenty condiments,  
the unopened relish  
and the almost-empty bottle of Tabasco,  
past the applesauce and yogurt,  
Sunday's pancakes,  
and the marinating chicken breasts,  
a right turn at the dozen eggs  
carefully balanced on top of one another,  
and down the shelves into the dimly lit produce drawer,  
under the spinach, zucchini, and potatoes,  
and behind the lonely cherry tomato  
lies the fifth chamber of the heart.

It's cold—almost frozen,  
frost gripping its edges,  
right at the center still fresh, still green,  
where the frost has not yet reached.

Waiting for the drawer to open,  
For a hand to guide it  
To the dinner table.



**ARTEMISIA & AMARANTH I** Inaya Riaz, MS2.5





# Lights.

Melissa Martinez, MS1

A million lights filling our chest.  
A million paths splayed out at best.

What are we?

Are we only the tip of a pencil,  
nothing more than a fading stencil,  
gulped up by a mirror of fangs?

It cuts, but I've been here before.

A thing of the past lives in my pocket.  
I keep the key that opens the locket.  
Some days it shines,  
mostly it's rotten.

HALEAKALA SUNSET | Amy Xue, MS3



# Pathology of the Thaw

Samuel Fuentes, MS2

The cold has lifted, replaced by a fever within me.

The basement's silence is gone, drummed out by a thousand diseases, stacked like kindling.

We are not learning how the house is built anymore; we are learning how it burns.

I step into the room, breath catching against tightened ribs. No formaldehyde, just the smell of warm skin and the startling heat of a living hand.

I reach for a wrist, I find a pulse: urgent, wet, fast. It pushes back against my fingers.

I place the stethoscope on their chest, listening for the echoes I memorized in the quiet. But the living do not echo; they roar.

A valve snaps shut, the air sharp with stridor. I close my eyes to filter the noise, searching for the map she gave me.

In the dark behind my eyelids, I see her again. The chill of the lab settles over the heat of the room.

She taught me in silence so I could hear the sound. She who is now ash taught me the cold so I would not burn in the fire.

*“Pathology of the Thaw” is intended as a companion piece to my submission from last year, “Anatomy of Reverence.” While the first poem focused on the stillness and sacred silence of the MS1 anatomy lab, this piece explores the transition into MS2. It reflects on the shift from studying structure to studying pathophysiology—the “heat” of disease and the mounting pressure of clinical training. It centers on the idea that the donor remains a “silent teacher” whose lessons in anatomy provide the necessary map for navigating the noise and urgency of living patients.*

# My Favorite Title

Linette Acosta-Mercado, MS4

“Gracias, mija.”

I’ve been bestowed the honor.

There is warmth in those words.

They are dipped in chocolate de Abuelita,  
served with freshly baked conchas.

I smile as I leave the room,

for I know the weight of those words.

They wrap me in a blanket of familiarity.

For a moment, the hospital walls feel like home,

and the smell of bleach is briefly masked by Mom’s chilaquiles.

The moment passes, and I remember

what an honor and a privilege it is

to understand you.

Know that I carry the title “mija” with pride.

Gracias a usted,

I walk these halls with my head held high.



**WINTER BOUQUET I** Jane-Frances Uche, MS1



**JANUARY IN BLOOM I** Liz Timple, MS4



**CELEBRATION I** Amy Xue, MS3



**INCOMPLETE BUT UNDIMINISHED** | Kristine Ly, MS3

## **jaded eyes**

Emily Martinez, MS1

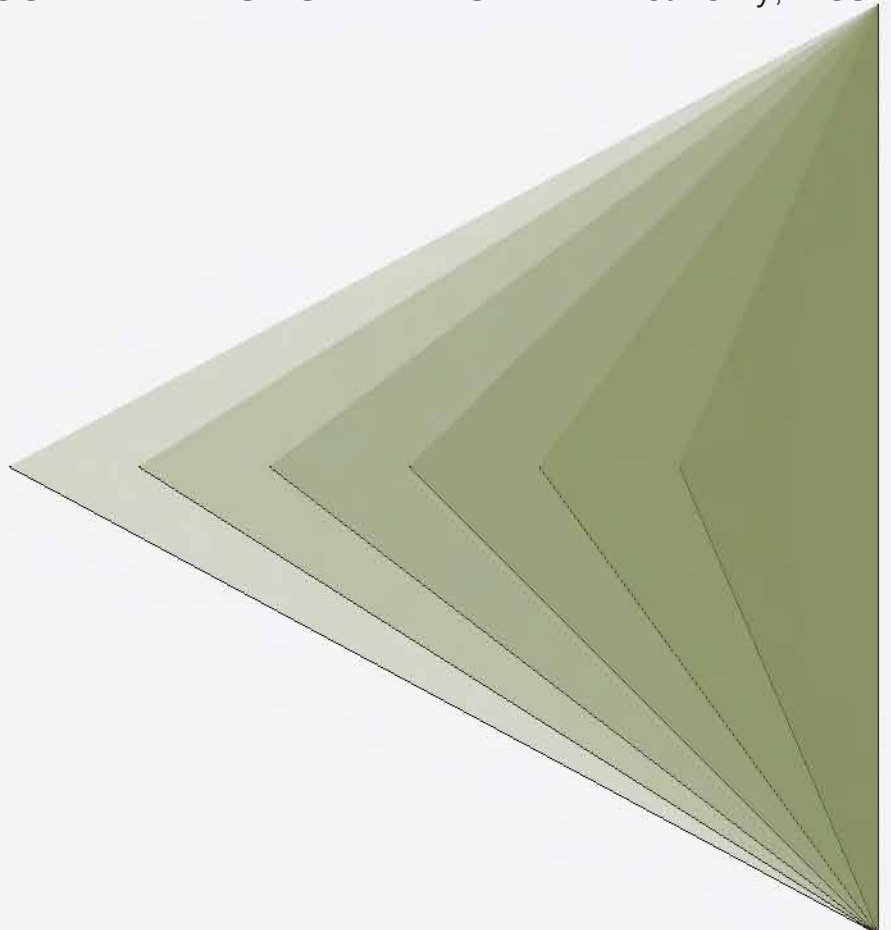
with eyes of naivety,  
and a heart so full,  
it's so easy to say

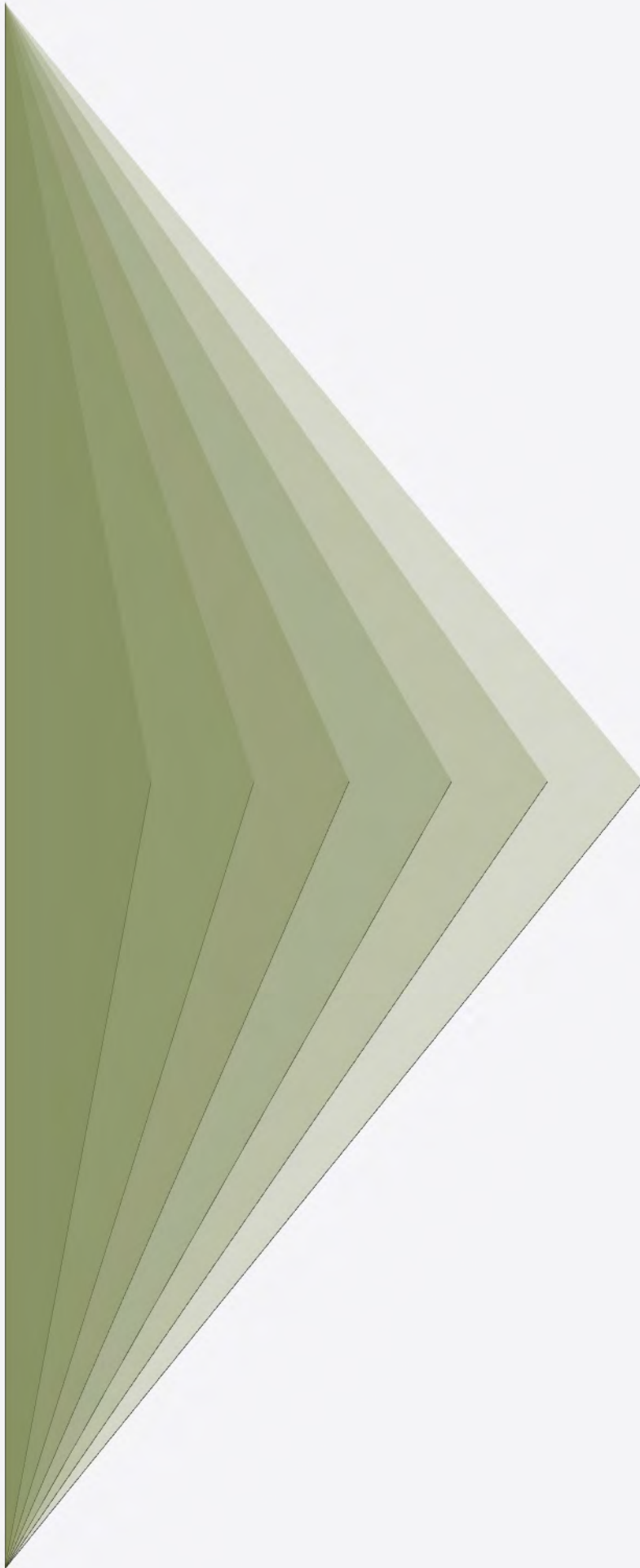
I wish  
I want  
I will

yet, when we finally arrive  
what is there to derive

a hauntingly long strife  
a rabbit carcass in the snow  
thus is the natural order of life,  
this I know.

yes, to ride that wave,  
to struggle to stay,  
*un mar muy tracionero*  
my mother would say





tired and restless  
Jaded eyes that fade into abyss  
do not forget.  
what you give is what you get.

struggle and fight  
sit a little more upright.  
hold your breath another day.  
the future is bright, but an ocean away.

we've come this far  
more than just a dreamer  
we know who we are  
soon to be future healers

we do this not for us.  
we do it for our loved ones,  
and the stranger we have yet to meet.

a noble sacrifice,  
the price of time.  
that much should suffice  
to heal for a lifetime

a dance with death,  
unconditional service,  
until a patient's final breath  
Jaded is the one who lost purpose.

do not allow those legs to falter.  
let Jaded eyes become emerald  
tiny flames that blaze in splendor.

from bone to dust  
all that's left is far from permanent  
and yet, we feel we must,  
that spark, so pearlescent

for even the coldest tundras  
reach a spring full-bloom  
let it serve as a reminder,  
that we too shall rise from our tomb



SCHOOL OR SHOAL 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 | Tudor Hughes, MD





**RACCOONS** | Emma Rice, MS4



*We are very fortunate at UCSD to have the amazing craft center. I have been coming here since retirement for pottery/ceramics. I have a very drab fence at home, so I decided to make fish with a combination of pottery and glass to brighten things up.*



# Dirt.

Inaya Riaz, MS2.5

*do you think it hurt this bad?*  
when god's favorite creation fell through the earth,  
dusted by dirt,  
spackled light  
retold as burning flames

*it hurt*, when i pulled through the worst  
to find i was alone  
a self-fulfilling prophecy i've felt  
since ten years old,

but i've lived through worse  
i'll wet my ashes into clay  
to form a new identity  
*that's how this works*

the only way this ever worked  
is when i was the one to leave first  
can't feel it if it's in the dirt  
but now it's become my curse

*do you think my good intentions will count?*  
when it comes down without a doubt,  
staring into the eyes of all i've betrayed  
with absolutely no words to say

*it counts*, the way my lips and tongue fall speechless  
i try to beg, but i can't hear it  
please, please know i'll feel it  
50 years from now, in secret

i've lived through worse  
i'll wet my ashes into clay  
to form a new identity  
that's how this works

*the only way this ever worked*  
is when i was the one to leave first  
can't feel it if it's in the dirt  
but now it's become my curse



**SUNDAY SHOWERS I** Breanna Collins, MS3



**SIMPLY COMPLEX** | Mohammad Khuroo, MS1

**WHERE DO WE GO WHEN WE DREAM?** | Emma Rice, MS4



**RUST IN RUIN**  
Veronica Shubayev, MD

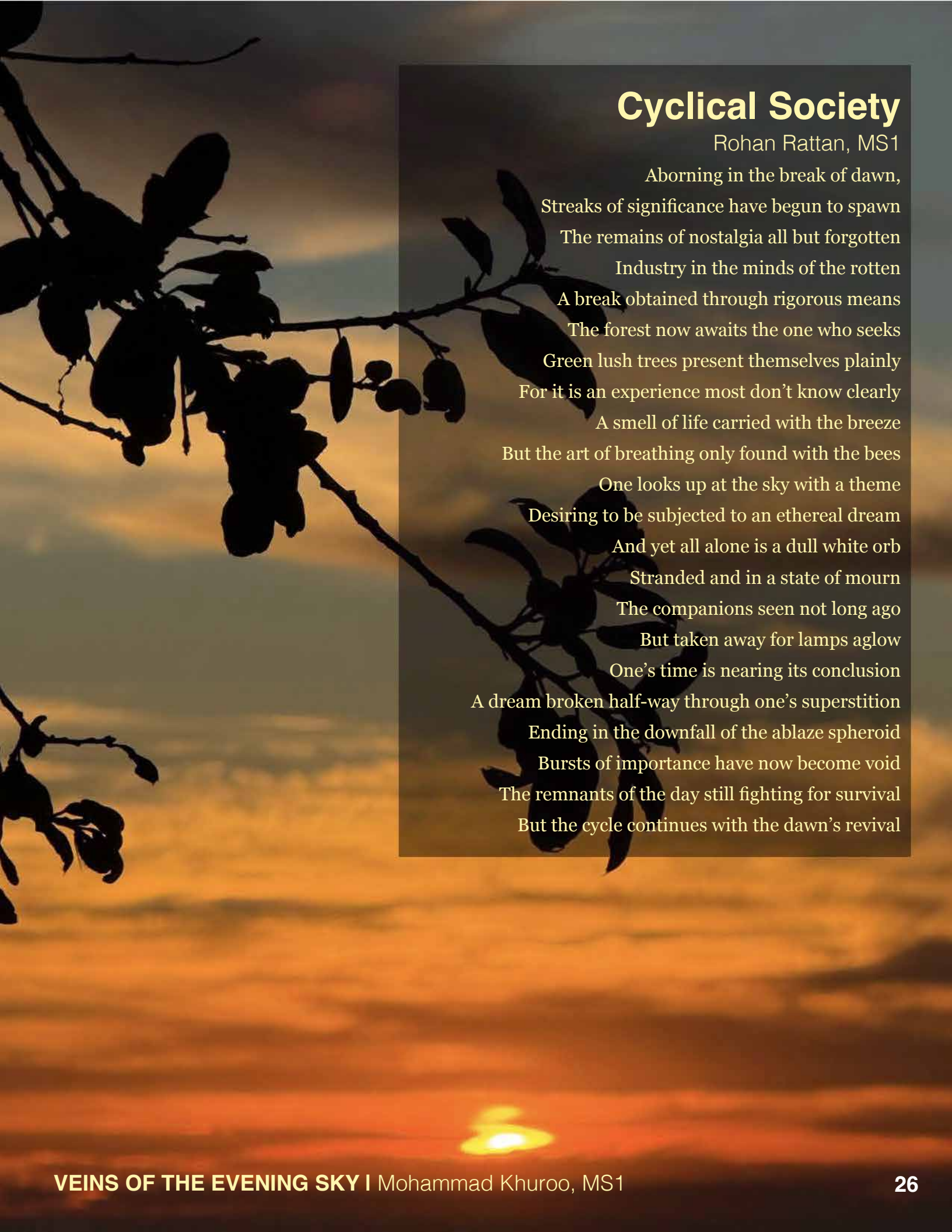


**CRAVINGS, WAT RONG KHUN**  
Max Silzle, MS1



**ALTADENA FIRE-TORN**  
Veronica Shubayev, MD





## Cyclical Society

Rohan Rattan, MS1

Aborning in the break of dawn,  
Streaks of significance have begun to spawn  
The remains of nostalgia all but forgotten  
Industry in the minds of the rotten  
A break obtained through rigorous means  
The forest now awaits the one who seeks  
Green lush trees present themselves plainly  
For it is an experience most don't know clearly  
A smell of life carried with the breeze  
But the art of breathing only found with the bees  
One looks up at the sky with a theme  
Desiring to be subjected to an ethereal dream  
And yet all alone is a dull white orb  
Stranded and in a state of mourn  
The companions seen not long ago  
But taken away for lamps aglow  
One's time is nearing its conclusion  
A dream broken half-way through one's superstition  
Ending in the downfall of the ablaze spheroid  
Bursts of importance have now become void  
The remnants of the day still fighting for survival  
But the cycle continues with the dawn's revival

# Little Girl Leaning

Alyssa Ing, MS1

*Inspired by Mary Cassatt's Young Mother Sewing*

Little girl,  
leaning on your mother's lap,  
elbow digging into her tender thigh,  
Don't you realize you're obstructing  
your mother's stitchwork with  
your wild chestnut hair?

*Lean* any further and your locks will get  
all caught up in your new blue dress.  
The dimensions are tailored for a woman,  
the woman you'll become when you go *on* to  
venture the wild woods behind you,  
without *your mother* by your side.

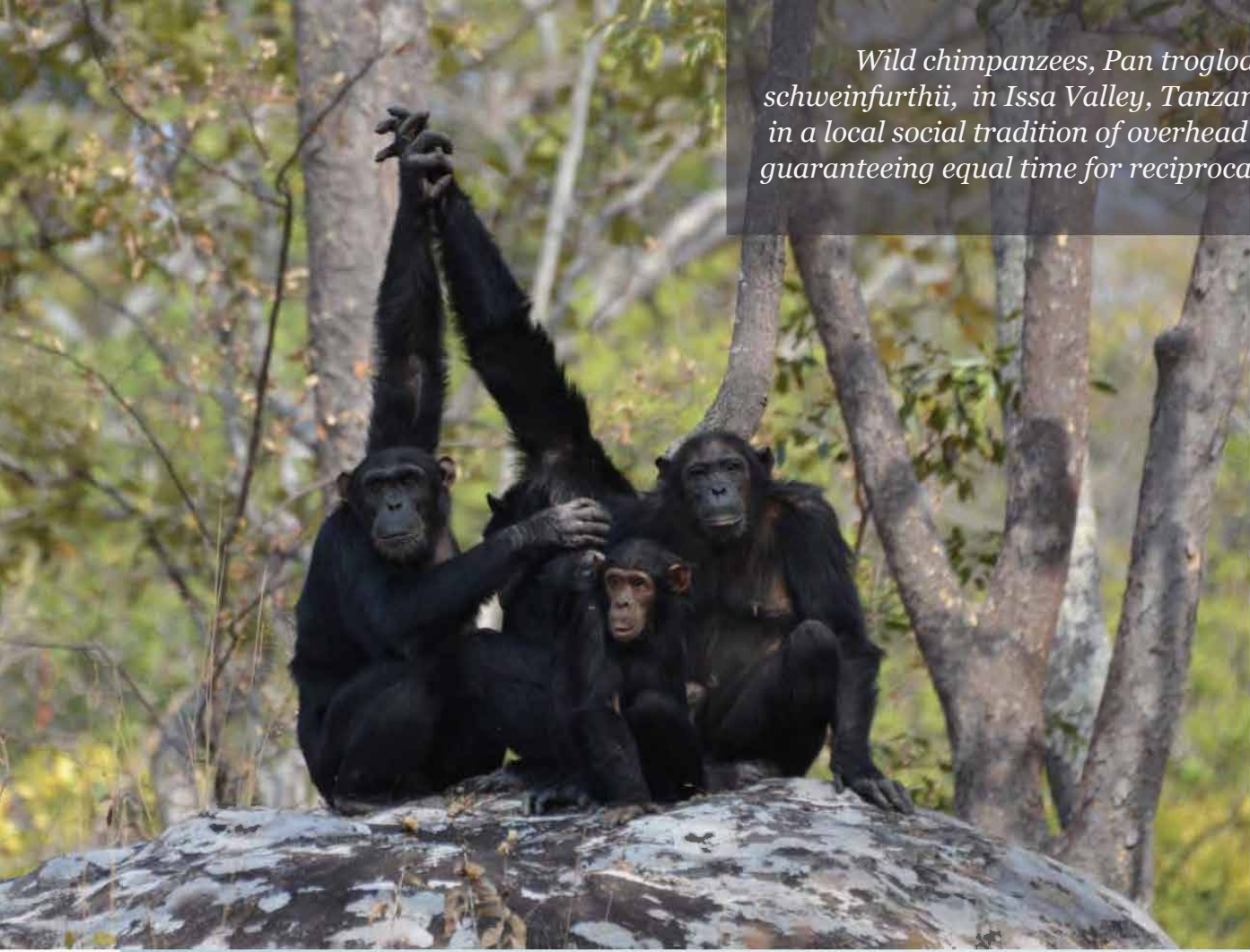
Do not fret; you're not yet tall enough to  
*glean* them from the window,  
and *your mother's* hands are sewing  
a map of caresses, wrapping  
kisses of silk around your body to  
keep you warm and remember her by,  
when we're not so young anymore.

**JUST BEACH HUTS** | Tiffany Ho, MS2

**FLOCK OF BIRDS** | Sabeeca Vadakkan, MS2



**TIDAL BLOOM** | Trenzen Torres, MS1

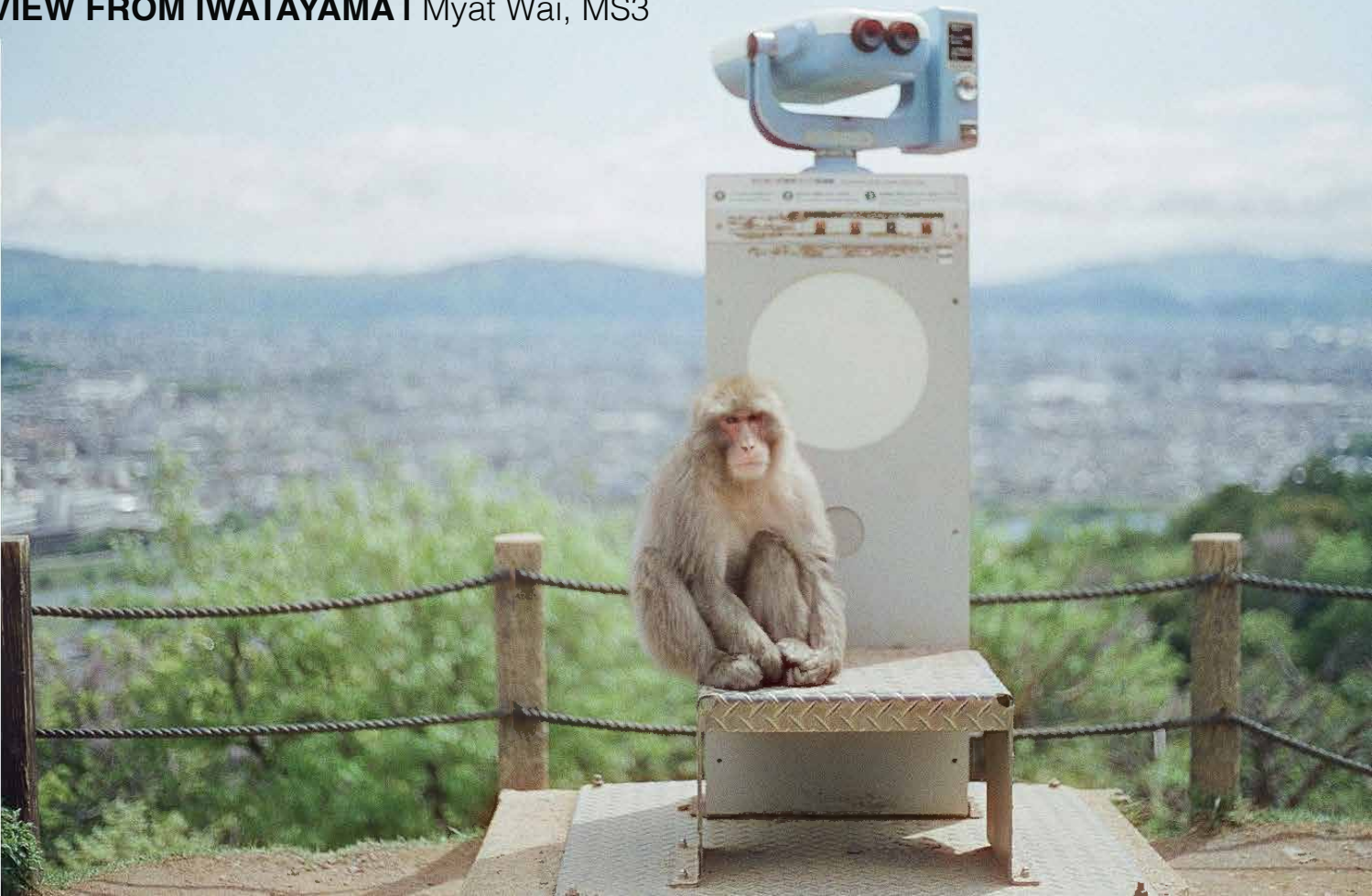


*Wild chimpanzees, *Pan troglodytes schweinfurthii*, in Issa Valley, Tanzania engaged in a local social tradition of overhead handclasp, guaranteeing equal time for reciprocal grooming.*

**GROOMING ETIQUETTE** | Pascal Gagneux,  
1998 PhD (Zoology) University of Basel,  
Switzerland

With thanks to Jessie Robie for exposure adjustment

**THE VIEW FROM IWATAYAMA** | Myat Wai, MS3



# Great Stone

Thomas Scott, MS1

*This is for my father, Steven Scott*

Great Stone forged from the breast of Earth's grit

How present his strength  
How immense his breadth

Brazenly uttered against the open sky

He holds

But as the wind weeps and rain riddles  
His form into broken selves

He withers away

Into the own from which he came

Welcome home Great Stone





**TORRE DI SAN MARINO** | Christian Bey, MPH, MS2

*Built atop a Roman fort bordering a sheer cliffside around the 11th century, the rugged construction of San Marino's Cesta Tower stands proud over the surrounding Italian countryside. It serves as a reminder of the microstate's unique history and the pride of Sammarinese people.*

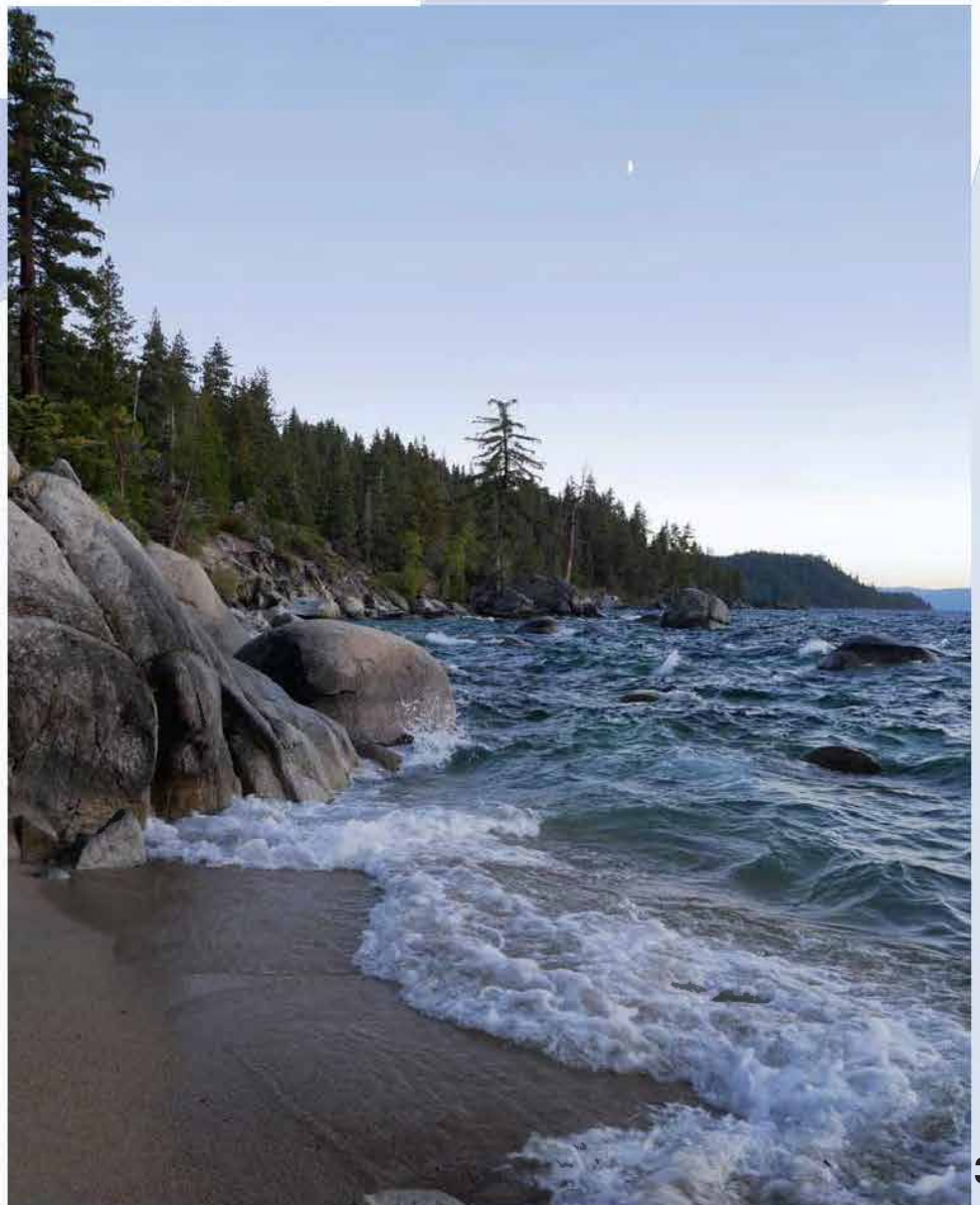
**PHU SOI DAO** | Max Silzle, MS1





*This intimately small window inside San Marino's 11th-century Guaita Tower offers a glimpse across the expansive Italian Marche region leading to the Adriatic Sea. The timeless view, enjoyed by countless generations, elicits a sense of wonder as to what exists beyond the seemingly infinite horizon.*

*Having attended the University of Nevada, Tahoe holds a special place in my heart. Some of my most cherished memories were going to Tahoe every Tuesday (or "Tahoe Tuesdays," as we called it) in the summer. It truly "[is] the fairest picture the whole earth affords," as Mark Twain said.*



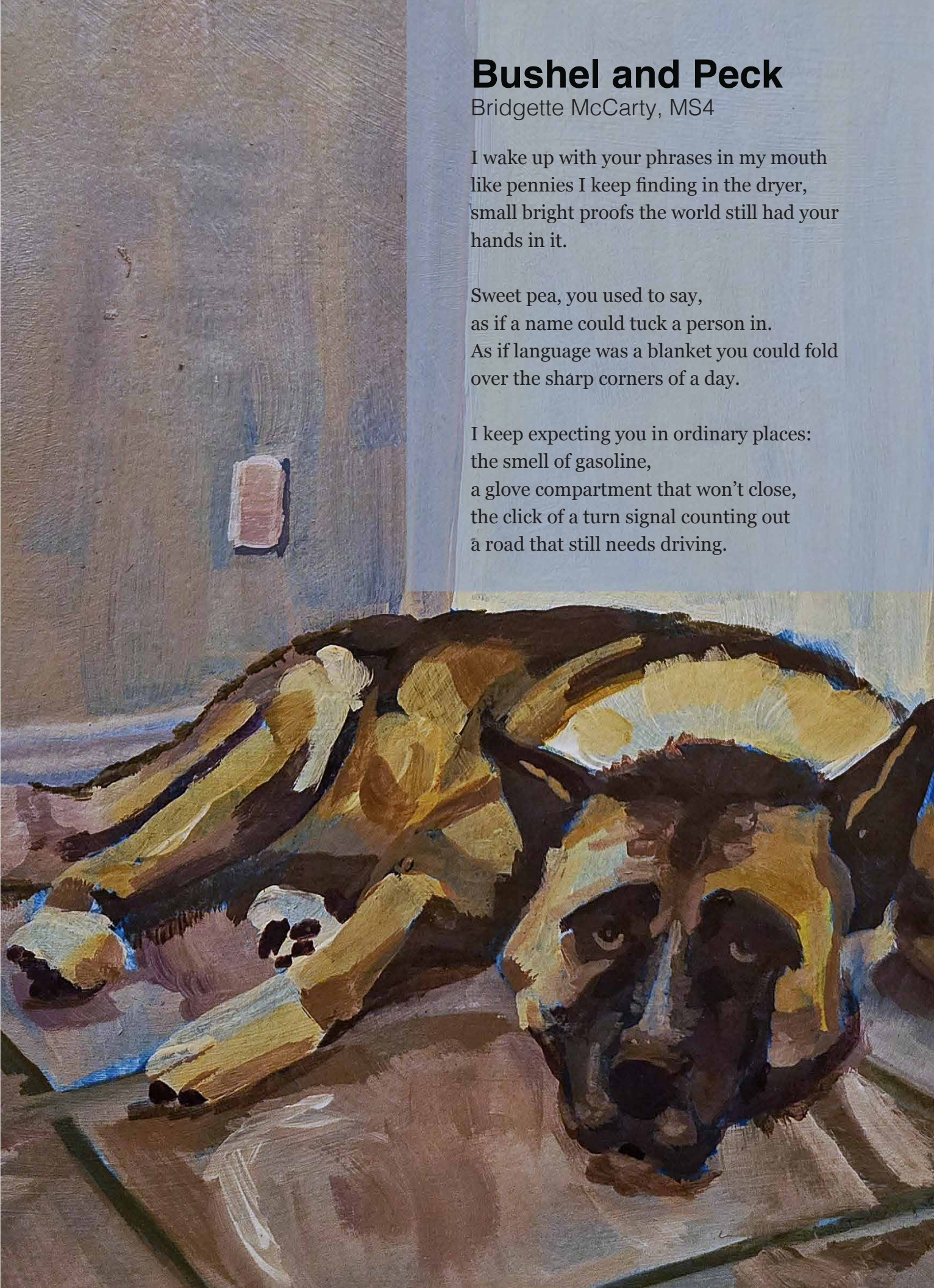
## Bushel and Peck

Bridgette McCarty, MS4

I wake up with your phrases in my mouth  
like pennies I keep finding in the dryer,  
small bright proofs the world still had your  
hands in it.

Sweet pea, you used to say,  
as if a name could tuck a person in.  
As if language was a blanket you could fold  
over the sharp corners of a day.

I keep expecting you in ordinary places:  
the smell of gasoline,  
a glove compartment that won't close,  
the click of a turn signal counting out  
a road that still needs driving.





It's strange, how grief is both thunder  
and housekeeping.

I rinse a mug. I answer an email.

I carry your absence like a second set of keys

I can't stop reaching for.

You were generosity disguised as practicality:

It's just money, honey,

as if the whole point of having anything

was to turn it into shelter for someone you loved.

Now the holidays come with their bright insistence,  
their music in public places,

their jingling certainty—

and I feel the wrongness of the ending again,

how fire took what time should have taken gently.

But listen:

if the world insists on moving forward,

then let it be this way—

Let me keep you in the small continuations:

the car that starts,

the apartment light switching on at dusk,

the way I still survive hard things

by borrowing your calm voice.

I loved you a bushel and a peck,

you said,

and I didn't understand it was a measurement

for what could not be stored.

So I scatter it now,

grain by grain,

into the living:

into every road I keep choosing,

into every kindness I can afford,

into every ordinary morning

that still lets me say your name

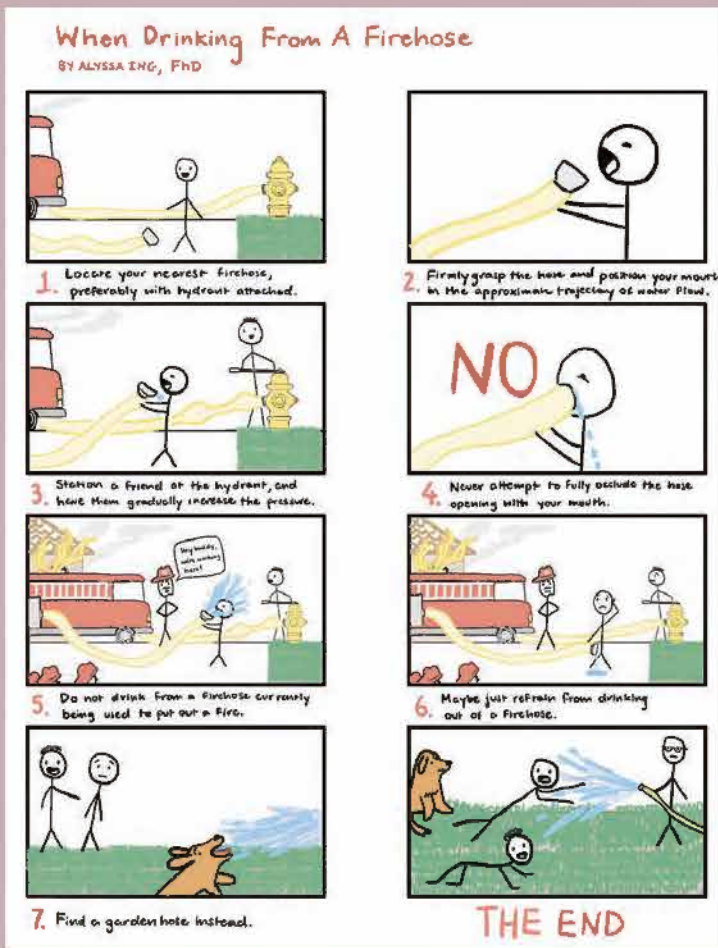
without burning.



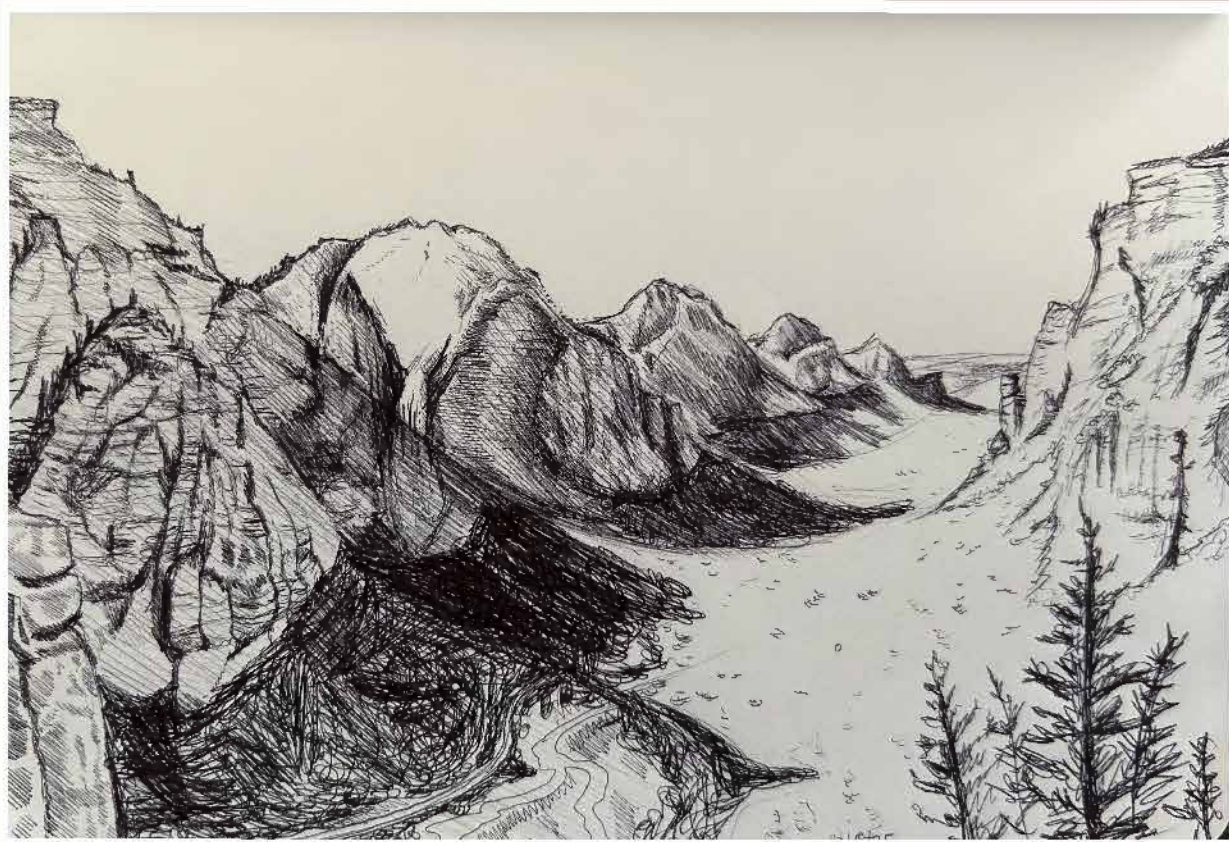
*During Nyah's birthday party, we 24-/25-year-olds ignored instructions and repurposed cupcake toppers as headgear/lobotomy picks. And so these puppies were born!*

**FRONTAL LOBE DEVELOPMENT**  
Sophie Chang, MS2

WHEN DRINKING FROM A FIREHOSE | Alyssa Ing, MS1



**TIDEPOOL TOES** | Amy Xue, MS3



**ZION I** Amy Xue, MS3

*Early morning workouts have always been part of my daily routine. When I entered medical school, I was very grateful that our graduate housing had gyms that allowed me to continue staying active. Yet the best part was being able to see the sun rise and shine on the apartments—so peaceful and a great way to start the day.*

**THE SUN ON GRAD HOUSING I** Arleth Lozada, MS1



