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Brain Candy: Wayne State University School of Medicine Journal of Arts and Culture, 11th Edition

Wayne State University School of Medicine Gold Humanism Honor Society

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Cover Artwork also found on page 11

**Brain
Candy
11th Edition**

**Gold Humanism Honor Society
Wayne State University School of Medicine**

We humbly thank you for picking up this year's edition of Brain Candy. It has been a labor of love and we are so proud of the contributions made by the Wayne State University School of Medicine community to this 11th edition.

The 1st edition of Brain Candy was published online and in print in 2009, produced by a generous grant by the Gold Humanism Honor Society (GHHS). The edition featured poetry, nonfiction, short fiction, as well as different types of artwork.

With generous funding support from alumnus Dr. Tom Janisse, Class of 1975, the journal continues to be an artistic outlet. This year we organized it to reflect the growth of a medical student. This work embodies our medical school community's hopes and fears, our disappointments and achievements.

If you are interested in the production of this journal or would like to contribute to further editions, please do not hesitate to get in touch with editor K. Arielle Best at gc6036@wayne.edu

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Gold Humanism Honor Society

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NEW BEGINNINGS

A Life that Sustains Life

There's a little girl on a farm and
Someone puts a chick in her hand
Warm and soft,
It vibrates with quick little movements
That cause quick little movements of her heart

For the rest of her life,
She will never feel anything like
Life in her hands
The squirms of her baby brother
A dog with its wet nose against her face

Delight at the pulse in her wrist and
the turgor of healthy, watered flowers -
Dismay when they wilt -
She will learn to feel responsible
For keeping life alive

She will feel it grow cold when
Her cat goes to the vet warm and
Comes back stiff
When grandfather's breaths grow small
As she listens next to his bed

So she will break open books
That fill her mind with the insides of cells
She will choose
A life short on time and long on labor
A life that sustains life

She will practice medicine
With all the nurture and strength inside her
When it breaks her,
She will remember the chick in her hand
The precious magic of life

Karis Tutuska c/o 2025



The Land of Ice

Jessica DeClercq c/o 2025

REALIZATIONS

if I were a glacier

if i were a glacier.

if i were a glacier
i would rip
deep the earth
beneath me

in hatred,
in base loathing
of the form

it had laid
itself into. as if

i had authority
to reshape it to
my want

as if
it were i
who sculpted, placed
into being

the mountains.
letting them live whilst
claiming their bits of neighbor earth.
gathering, accumulating wright through years
pulling them all along with me.

from the divide,
where the water flows pacific
and the wind threatens lift
you skyward,

it would be i
who claims also
your breath

with what i have left
behind.

Blake Bergeson c/o 2027



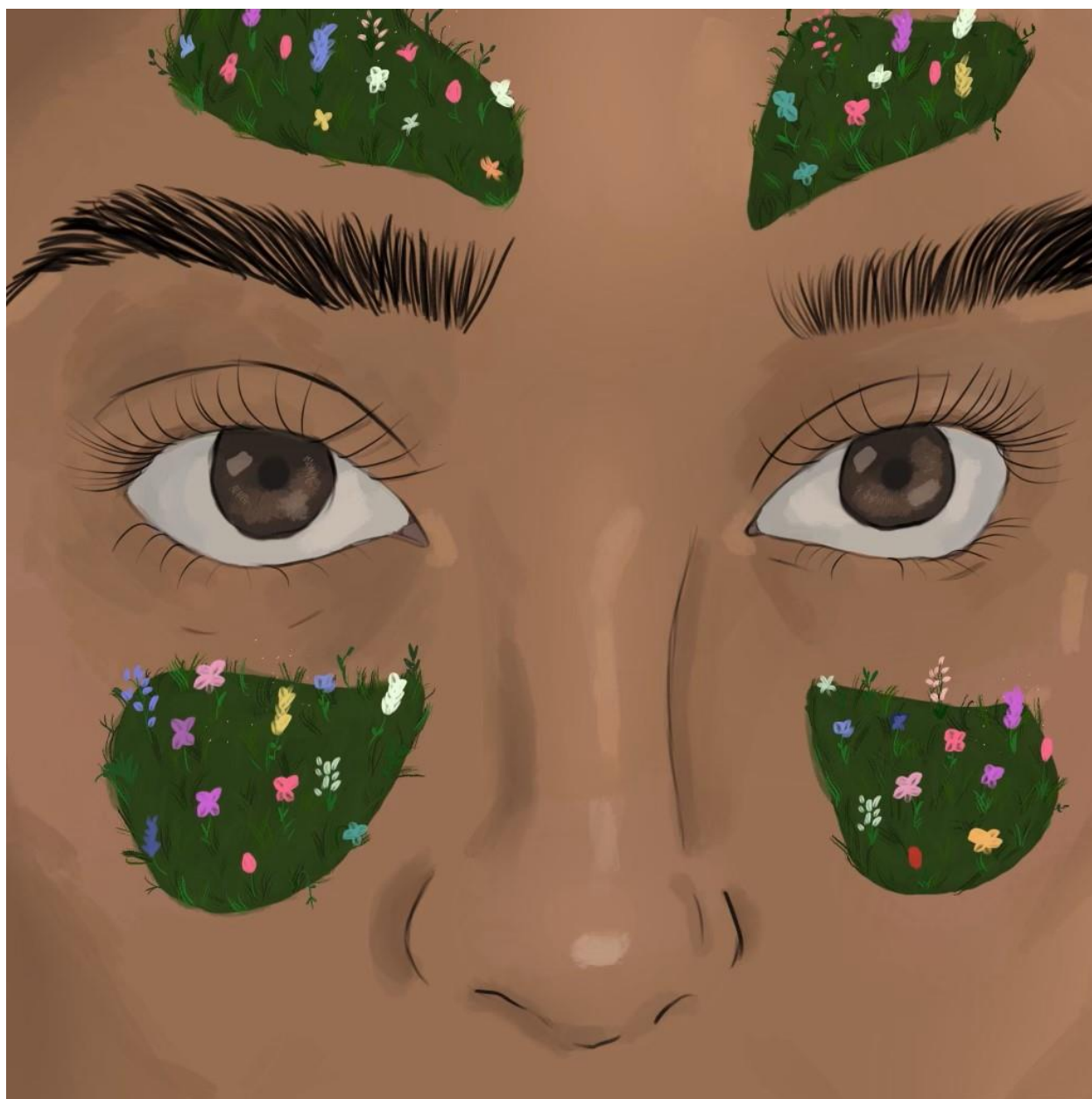
The Climate Crisis

Jessica DeClercq c/o 2025



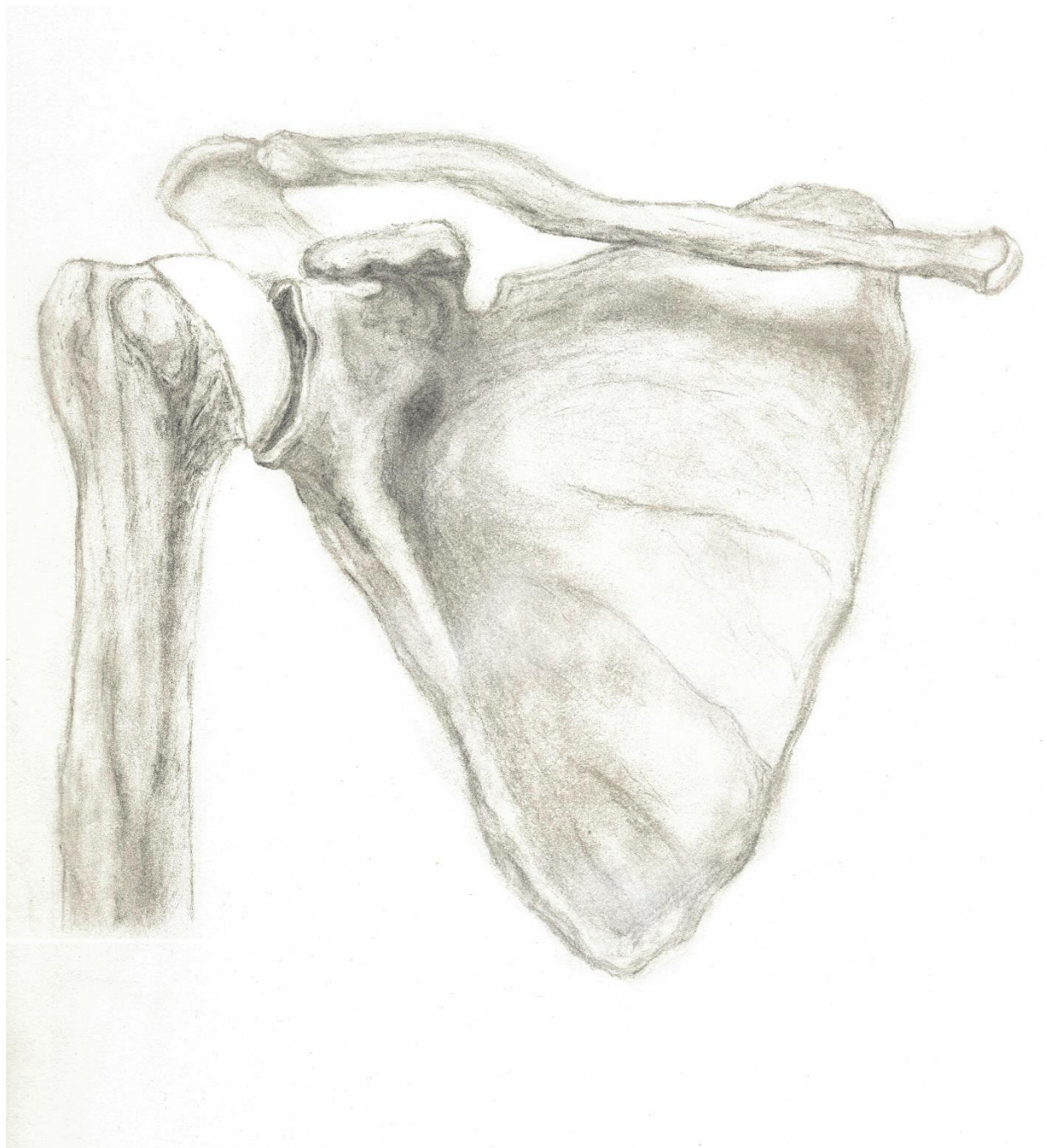
Lonely Cowboy in the Mountains

Mina Sitto c/o 2025



Allergic Sinusitis

Huda Warsame c/o 2025



The Shoulder

Susan Wager c/o 2024

For there is danger in the grass.

Over the safety of stone parapets
 dead foreign faces
 rattle warnings atop wooden pikes.

Behind slits in tempered helmets
 they are seated in banquet halls
 lined with tables full for feast.
 Gilded scales form robes and dresses,
 bellies swollen with meat.
 They toss their heads back in a hissing laughter
 at the merry jesters.
 Royal locks weaving gay dances about their faces.

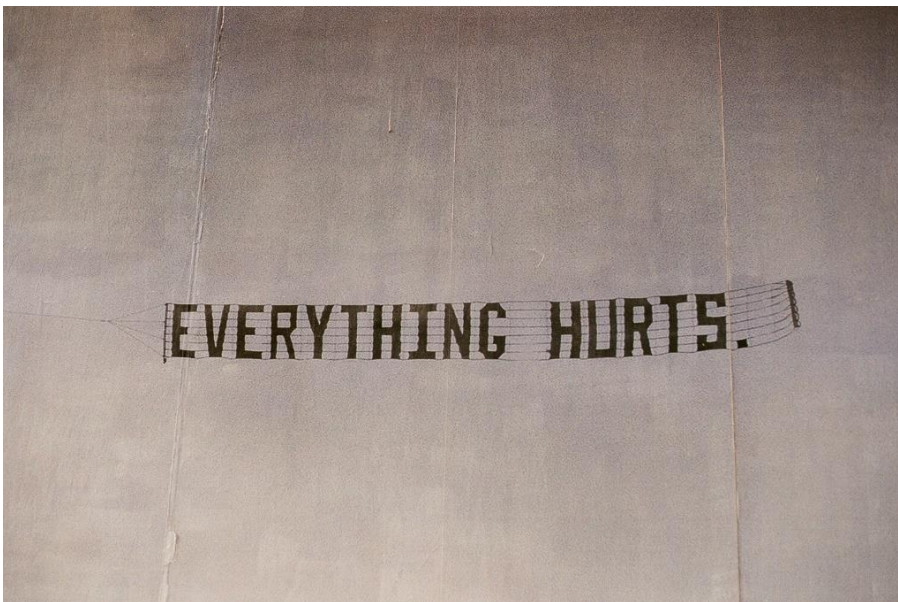
All hail the new kings.

Outside those royal rooms—
 a peasant draws a cart of bread and cheese,
 for the new kings.
 She pauses beneath shadowed cover of the castle
 and secrets a loaf of bread,
 into her cloak.

While under green crested flags
 that flicker through the air, tasting cold wind
 with forked tongues,
 deep in the stomach of the castle,
 her children cry.
 The cells are a lonely place.

All hail the new kings,
 their mercy.

Blake Bergeson c/o 2027



Everything Hurts

Karen Zapien-Guerra c/o 2027

The One

She stared out from the window waiting for the police to come. She had called them roughly ten minutes ago.

They were usually quick with fires, but this time proved to be the exception. Tatiana called the police to try and put out the fire in her neighbor's house. In the meantime, she figured she should keep an eye on the house, it was not completely engulfed in flames, but a good portion shown like a campfire. The rear area near the patio and garage side had a good portion already on fire, but the main area of the house was yet untouched. Tatiana could hear the sirens, but she feared they would not arrive soon enough. The fire slowly spread to the other areas of the house.

From somewhere she heard frantic barking, the kind a dog makes when it knows it is in mortal danger. Tatiana vaguely remembered her neighbors had a dog.

In truth Tatiana barely knew the neighbors, the Fishers, and if word around the subdivision was to be believed, they did not know anyone else either. Her two daughters seemed to know the Fisher kid, a boy named Richard, but nothing beyond a name. They told her the boy did not really have any friends outside of people he called his 'cousins.' Tatiana remembers seeing the parents, the man was fairly tall and not terrible looking, and the woman was of medium height with distinctive jet black hair. She did not know their names.

Now she assured herself that the Fisher's dog was inside the house, and there was no way she could help. What could she do? Break into their house with just her fists? Where were the police? The sirens seemed louder now, but no cars in sight.

The barking stopped, well tapered off more accurately describes the silence. Only the light crackle of a slowly expanding house fire. Now the distinct sound of someone banging on glass came through the still morning. BANG. BANG. BANG. In patterns of three. Frantically Tatiana stuck her head out the window and looked up and down her house to see if someone was attempting to break in. She then realized the banging came from something in front of her. The burning house.

Quickly Tatiana identified the window and could not look away. She saw a younger boy with short jet black hair banging on a window with his left hand. His eyes looked crazed, knowing the dire straits he found himself in. Tatiana decided now she should act, but she could not look away from his face.

Tatiana raced out of her bedroom and down the stairs, her husband barely moving as she ran past. Flying down the stairs two, three at a time she could still hear the banging in the neighbor's house. Was it in her mind, or was she actually hearing it? But it grew weaker as she reached the bottom. Tatiana felt the heat of the fire just before she left the threshold of her home.

Once outside she could still hear the banging coming from the house, but it lacked the ferocity of before. As Tatiana reached the window from which she saw Richard, but he was no longer at window-level. She still heard the banging, but more akin to a bump in the night rather than the frantic efforts of a trapped human. When Tatiana tried to lift herself up to look through the window toward the floor, the window exploded in a ball of flame, barely missing her head. In the sound of broken glass, the scream of a woman played in stereo.

Barely hearing the scream, Tatiana oriented to her left looking for its source. Rapidly scanning the windows to try and find another face. The fire really spread while she tried to get into the window. The garage was completely engulfed in flames, and the lower floors of the home were mostly ablaze. The once dark green paint, now slightly visible in the moonlight, falls off the house in flakes, coating the grass surrounding the once handsome home. Sirens sounded no nearer than before she left her bedroom.

Still walking to her left, Tatiana scanned the windows looking for other signs of life. Unfortunately, she found one. The matriarch of the Fisher family stared down at her through the second story window. The two locked eyes for a

brief moment and in them Tatiana did not see fear. In fact, she saw no emotion whatsoever. For an instant Tatiana believed the fire to be by design. However as quickly as that thought came it passed when, out of nowhere, the woman uttered a horrified shriek. Her eyes became dazed, almost like she did not realize where she was, and the danger she was in. After coughing, the woman looked down at Tatiana again, this time banging on the glass. The banging ceased as a knife slid into her throat, making a fine streak of blood barely visible on the window.

The knife's wielder, the man of the Fisher household, cast his wife's body aside as if it were a garbage bag. He then held his face at the window and looked down at Tatiana. In his eyes she saw nothing, not like with his wife's lack of emotion, but it was as if she looked directly into the blackest abyss when she looked up at that face. No smile, no frown, no scream no laugh. The only sounds the crackling of the ever advancing fire and the sirens that now sounded less than a mile away. With the bloody knife still in hand, the man tapped the glass four times. The fire now completely engulfed the lower level and Tatiana had to take some steps backwards to avoid burns. Once she made her final step, she saw another figure behind the man in the window. Something with a hand that looked like all its fingers were melded together placed it on the man's shoulder. As the hand lifted, the man winked at her and jabbed the knife into his stomach. He then served to disembowel himself and jumped through the window.

As an instinct, she was a nurse after all, Tatiana rushed toward the dying man and dragged him away from the house. His entrails sagging behind, some mangled bits completely left behind. The steam coming off the freshly eviscerated organs was illuminated by the light from the burning house. When she got him far enough away from the house, with a dying breath, the man spoke.

"Don't... look ... at ... window," just as he passed from this world.

Tatiana quickly made a glance at the window and saw the same hand that rested on the man's shoulder now resting on the broken windowsill. The being's face was obscured by smoke and darkness, but she could sense that it looked at her, that it wanted her. Quickly looking back to the now dead man, and then back up, the figure no longer appeared at the window.

At this point, the police arrived.

The squad cars, fire engines and ambulances burst onto the scene almost instantaneously. The fire was quickly doused, and the paramedics entered the house to remove the scorched bodies from the burned husk that was the Fisher house. They carted the disemboweled remains of the Fisher father (Tatiana later learned his name was Frank and his wife Rachel) off along with the charred remains of the wife and son. Once they took the bodies away the police wished to ask Tatiana some questions, she agreed, so they took her down to the police precinct.

The building had a faded shade of brown with grooves running up and down the exterior. Most of the firm brown color has faded from years of rainfall. Inside the fluorescent lights gave the light hum. Hardly anyone remained inside the station at this late hour, except the two officers that escorted Tatiana to the station, Officers Smith, and Roberts. The interview room looked just like it does in the police shows. A central metal table with four chairs, fluorescent lighting above and a one-way mirror to one side of the dark cinderblock room. The three sat down and Tatiana began to recount the events. Once that portion of the interview concluded the officers had some questions for her.

Officer Roberts began,

"You said the guy, Frank, just cut his guts open? Just like that?" she asked in a heavily sarcastic tone.

"That's what happened!" Tatiana frantically replied.

"Normal people don't cut their stomach open," Officer Smith said as he slid pictures of the deceased Frank Fisher toward her on the table, "this guy ripped his guts out, and for what?"

"It must've been the man he was with. He stood behind Frank, had his hand on Frank's shoulder." Tatiana replied sheepishly.

"Yeah. What kind of guy could convince a normal, everyday suburban dad to open his stomach with a knife? Did he have some kind of bomb in there?" Officer Smith asked Roberts.

"I don't know. Preliminary reports suggest no bomb in his stomach. So, who could gut someone like that?" Roberts asked toward Tatiana.

"You think I did it." She replied.

"Look, we don't at present know who gutted the poor bastard, but you were the only person there for it to happen. We found no evidence for the 'other man' you said was there. No one, aside from Mr. Fisher, made it out of the fire. Even the fucking dog got stuck in the house. The doors all had locks engaged and the fire department had to bust a couple of them down to actually get in. So, you understand our... speculation" Roberts continued.

"I didn't kill him," Tatiana firmly retorted.

"If you say so. We'll perform our investigation to get to the bottom of this shit show. In the meantime, don't leave the city," Smith stated.

"One question. How did the fire start? The Fishers had the same style house that I do, and I want to know if my family is in danger." Tatiana asked, trying her hardest to sound innocent.

"Fire Marshal hasn't finished the investigation yet, but early word is that the fire was started from inside the house. So, I'd check to make sure your gas isn't leaking. We'll get more information about the fire and we'll call you if you want. Considering you're wrapped up in this whether you want to be or not," Smith said.

"You need a ride?" Roberts asked.

"No, I'll just call an Uber." Tatiana replied.

During the ride home Tatiana's thoughts dwelled on the man, the figure, that dwelled behind Frank Fisher. The hand, or a flipper was more accurate the more she considered it, seemingly egging Frank Fisher on. Tatiana thought of old paintings where the father figure has his hand on his son's shoulder. Like a nurturing relationship between the two. Then she got home and awoke from her fixation.

The exterior of the house had light singeing on the right side from the fire earlier. The grass also had some light discoloration. Aside from those two things, the Zhou house was in good order. Once she walked through the threshold her two daughters, Constance, and Jamie, embraced her as if she left years ago. Her husband, Ken, came around the corner looking mildly concerned.

"Where were you this morning? Did you see the fire?" Ken asked.

"Yeah. That's where I was. I called the police and they wanted to take me down to ask a few questions. Nothing major." Tatiana replied nonchalantly.

The family ate together then went about some of their normal weekend activities. Tatiana heeded what Smith had said and investigated her home's gas lines and found them a little loose, but otherwise intact. Her children played in the backyard and heeded their father's direction to avoid the Fisher house. Tatiana was conversing with Ken when they heard a shriek from the backyard. Panic stricken, the two rushed out the back door considering the tragedy that had befallen their neighbors in the previous hours.

Outside Ken and Tatiana found Jamie looking down at Constance. Constance was not writhing in pain like one would expect, she looked rather numb instead. Transfixed on the sky.

“Honey! Honey, what are you doing?” Ken asked his daughter.

Ken would go on to start talking to his comatose daughter. Meanwhile, Tatiana went toward Jamie.

“Jamie. What happened?” Tatiana asked in a remarkably calm tone.

“I don’t know! One minute we were passing a ball around and the next she just fell!” Jamie frantically told her mother.

Tatiana began to hug her daughter. At first it was comforting, the type of hug a parent gives their child after the household pet dies. It slowly increased in intensity to a bear hug. Jamie began to struggle a bit, but Tatiana just tightened her grip. Jamie now struggled like a fish on land, but Tatiana just tightened her grip. Nearly suffocating her daughter.

Meanwhile Ken got Constance out of her trance and looked over to see the grip Tatiana had Jamie in. Ken rushed over to try and free Jamie. It took the better part of a minute to free her, mostly because Tatiana came out of that trance. Tears swelled in Tatiana’s eyes. She knew her intentions, she was going to smother her daughter and she actually wanted to kill her daughter. Right there. In their yard.

“What’s wrong with you?” Ken asked, clearly defensive.

“I... don’t know. I guess I’m just tired. You know, being up all night?” Tatiana responded.

“Go get some sleep then,” Ken replied, hugging his daughters closer.

Tatiana went inside the house to sleep. She felt as if she was being followed but shrugged it off. She felt tired, and figured it was a byproduct of her stressful night. She changed into her pajamas and got into the bed to sleep. Tatiana had a dreamless sleep.

Over the ensuing weeks Tatiana began to notice little annoyances with her family. Her daughters seemed more reluctant to speak with her, even when she drove them to school every morning. Her husband seemed less and less inclined to speak with her. She also began having headaches and, when she went to take a nap, she could vaguely hear her daughters and husband talking. About her, almost certainly. She felt as if she was losing her family. That one simple mistake resulted in their ostracizing of Tatiana. Feeling the worst that she has felt in weeks, Tatiana fell into a deep sleep and dreamt.

The dream looked like her childhood. Her childhood home had everything she remembered, the blue walls of her bedroom, the slightly cracked window to the outside, the off grey carpet; it mirrored her memory perfectly. The only difference was intangible; it was feeling. The house felt off. The warmth she always associated with her childhood completely opposed the feeling in this dream. Tatiana’s dream felt cold, distant, more like a prison than a home. Downstairs she heard yelling, a male and female voice having at one another. She could not make out the words, but from the tone this argument could become physical.

She left her room and began tiptoeing down the stairs to the left of her room. With each step the terror grew as the voices grew louder and more intense. Halfway down the stairs Tatiana heard the crash of a plate hitting a hard surface. She could now hear the voices coming from the kitchen. She continued down the steps.

“... have a family!” the voice of Tatiana’s mother screamed.

“Why? Because I thought I wanted one! I didn’t know it would be full of all this bitching. All you and the brat do is complain, complain, complain. Never fucking grateful at having a home!” Tatiana’s father yelled in retort.

“We complain because you are not good enough. You bring home barely enough to keep the bank from taking the house. When you’re not here, I have to deal with Tati on my own. I work a job too you know!”

“I’m not here so I can keep the roof from falling in. You ungrateful little...”

Just as Tatiana’s father uttered the final word, he saw little Tatiana at the base of the steps looking at the two of them. Tatiana did not remember this before today, to be honest she did not even believe her parents ever fought, but now she seemingly remembered this verbatim. She exited her adolescent body, and watched the events unfold as an otherworldly spectator.

“Look, you woke her up.” Tatiana’s father said toward her mother firmly.

“Me?!?! You’re the one who came home at one in the morning.” Her mother shouted back.

“Mommy, Daddy, what’s going on?” Young Tatiana asked.

“Nothing, Tati. Go back to bed” her mother solemnly said to Tatiana.

“Nothing? You admitted just five minutes ago that you hated her.” Tatiana’s father said.

“I said I wish we waited to have a kid! I don’t hate you sweetie.” Tatiana’s mother said, to refute the father’s claim.

Just then the memory stopped as Tatiana’s mother started to walk toward the young girl. Mildly surprised, Tatiana began to look around the room. As she turned her head to the right, toward the entrance to the kitchen, and the color slowly left her vision; once she completely turned her head to the right the scene was completely in black and white. After doing a complete revolution, the kitchen turned completely black and both her parents and her younger self melted away into the background. Yet she felt a presence. Not a harmful presence which one expects in such scenarios, but something comforting. Something warm. Fuzzy. Something right behind her.

Tatiana turned around and saw her younger self. Her dark hair down to the lower part of her shoulder blades, the pajamas she got for her eighth birthday were dully colored, her eyes locked on the older Tatiana’s face.

“You saw it, didn’t you” the younger Tatiana spoke innocently.

“Yes. I always thought their marriage was sound” the older Tatiana replied.

“No relationship is sound. People naturally grow apart. Mother and father always grow apart. It’s natural, people change over time. You and Ken will inevitably grow apart. It’s natural. When Constance fell onto the ground, and Ken viciously ripped Jamie out of your embrace the seeds of separation were planted. Pretty soon Ken will spend more time with the children, they’ll come to him with their boy drama instead of you, at their weddings Ken will be the first person they invite and, on your deathbed, you will be an afterthought.”

Near tears, the older Tatiana tenured her reply.

“But I don’t want to lose them.”

“You don’t have to lose them. There are methods, unnatural methods, to keep people together. Togetherness in The One is... one method.”

“What’s The One?”

“Everything. And nothing. It’s you, me, this dream you’re in, it’s all The One. But... sometimes people can forget their togetherness. It’s natural. Siblings that were once inseparable in adolescence grow apart. They forget that, at one point, they were essentially the same person.”

“If you’re so for ‘The One,’ then are you The One?” Tatiana asked.

“No. Just an advocate. I guide people to, shall we say, the right conclusion. All those I help conclude that togetherness with those you love is the only option for sustained happiness of all. I bring people together, help them realize their love,” The younger Tatiana said.

The older Tatiana looked down at her younger self’s hand, and it looked almost identical to the hand she saw on Frank Fisher’s shoulder on the night of the fire. The same flipper-like appendage. Now that she was closer, Tatiana could see the no discernable fingers or nails. The hand could not actually be called a hand, it was just one elongated thin mass of flesh down to a thin flat edge. It was about the size of a normal human hand. The younger Tatiana reached her ‘hand’ forward beckoning the older Tatiana to grab her hand. Suddenly it all clicked inside the older Tatiana’s head. The fire at the Fisher house did not come out of hate, but love. She suddenly realized the Fisher family mirrored her own, children who slowly grew away from their parents, a marriage that slowly failed. She remembered seeing the Fisher parents fighting every now and then. She could have sworn that, at one point, she heard that they were married for several years, at least double what she and Ken had under their belts. Maybe they could be better, but why take the chance? This thing, this “One” offered perfect togetherness, why would she pass it up? Sheepishly, the older Tatiana reached forward, but stopped.

“Wait,” the older Tatiana said, “what will I have to do?”

“You know. This being you are now is not able to love eternally. Flesh is a... terrible medium to love in. It gets tied up with appearances and people won’t be able to love the true self. All those who claim to do so lie,” the younger Tatiana replied.

With a newfound conviction, the two gripped the ‘hand’ of the younger Tatiana. When the two came into physical contact the younger Tatiana began to change in form. She became taller and lankier. The childhood fat melted away revealing the full ribcage and the radius and ulna in the being formerly described as little Tatiana. The being grew, its posture straight as an arrow, its arms down to the knees. The head of the being collapsed into the torso, completely eliminating the neck and all of the black hair fell to the ground revealing an egg-shaped cranium. The feet became smaller to the point where the thin legs appeared to be stilts. The pajamas fell and were replaced by pale yellow flesh in this genderless being, there were no curvatures like the normal human form, its torso mirrored an upside-down trapezoid, but lengthened a great deal. Finally, all the facial features of young Tatiana melted away, the end face was flat as a wall, the ears replaced by small holes into the sides of the head, the mouth completely missing and the eyes replaced by single solitary black dots like those of a shark. Despite its somewhat jarring appearance, Tatiana felt nothing but love for the being which stood before her. She now understood why it had said flesh was a weak medium, when you looked like the drawing of an elementary schooler’s nightmare respect would not come easily. But in no way did Tatiana feel like this being had it out for her, it truly loved her.

“You know what has to happen, don’t you?”

Tatiana heard the voice inside her head, and instantly knew where it came from. It was in her mind. She felt its love. The voice radiated warmth and purity and innocence and love.

“Yes. They will join us.”

Tatiana awoke from her sleep in the middle of the night. Ken was asleep next to her and did not fidget when she left her bed. Tatiana went downstairs and locked all the doors and windows silently. She hung the drapes over the large windows (good thing she sprung for the non-fire retardant drapes) and tied them down. All the smoke detectors she could access were removed and destroyed. She then locked her daughter’s rooms and went about starting the fire. Gas? No, that would damage the neighbor’s house too and maybe kill them, and they did not need the neighbors to be a part of her family. She figured the fire needed to begin downstairs and near the stairwell, so Ken would not be able to stop their becoming closer. She collected an amalgamation of extra clothes and wood from the donation bin; Tatiana coated all those in spare lighter fluid and placed them at the base of the stairs.

As Tatiana reached for the matches, she felt a pang of doubt. Could she really do this? Why was she even considering this? She was going to burn her family alive! As soon as she felt the doubt, she felt a hand on her left shoulder and instantly all the doubts melted into a feeling of a warm fire on a cold winter's day. Her family had a weakness, and she aimed to help them eliminate said weakness. Any good mother would do the same, right?

She lit the fire and waited. It spread quickly enough, and pretty soon a good portion of her once spiffy home went up in flames. After a few minutes she heard stirring in the girls' room. Then she heard screaming as the fire neared the door. The hand on the shoulder gripped even firmer now as she faintly considered rushing to stop the flames. After a few minutes the fire, which had spread halfway up the stairs, woke her husband. She heard shouting upstairs, but Tatiana did not care about the words. He would be purified soon enough.

The screams coming from the girls' room grew louder, and she had to go investigate now. She got as close to the room and listened in. The walls and fire muffled the words, but she got the gist of what they were saying. They were trying to escape; they were going to reject Tatiana's love. Fortunately, she locked their window months ago when the two kept falling out, the only method of escape is to break the glass, which they could not even do together let alone separately. After a few minutes, the screams became less and less explosive and stopped altogether, replaced with only the coughs of the weak and dying. Tatiana then turned her attention to the upstairs and as she turned, she heard a male scream. Slowly making her way to the stairs she found Ken, he had burns all over his body and his clothes completely fell off due to the fire. He reached toward Tatiana, hoping she would pull him from this hell. The hand fell off her shoulder and she walked toward the stairs, actually stepping into the fire this time.

"Don't worry," she said, "we'll be one soon."

At that Ken uttered a guttural shriek and, with what was left of his melting eyes, looked past Tatiana to the dingy yellow figure behind her. He tried to retreat up the stairs, but he fell through the burning wood into the basement, breaking his neck in the process. Tatiana then decided to fall backwards into the flames, to let all her family finally be one.

She fell through the floor and into utter blackness. She floated in an infinite expanse of nothing, but in the distance, she saw a small light. Instead of the feeling of hope she believed she would experience, she felt cold and vulnerable. She slowly floated to the light, a yellow light. As she neared the light, she saw many faces, all of them in some form of agony. Bodies joined together in strange places, humps of flesh as far as the eye could see. Out of the corner of her eyes she spotted her family. Her daughters were falling into a pit, Constance holding on to Jamie for support, and a round figure with very round arms was tearing them from their embrace. She saw Ken screaming for his children, but another figure, one as square as a shelf, slowly consumed him starting from the foot. Oh my god she thought what is this place?

"Your heaven."

She heard the voice from her dream, but this time it sounded sinister, evil. Looking forward again she saw the yellow figure from her dream. The black eyes pierced into her very soul and Tatiana felt cold, distant. Past the figure from her dream, she saw an eye with a blood red pupil looking with anticipation.

"Welcome to The One, Tatiana. We have been expecting you!"

A rush of energy ran over her, and Tatiana was no more. Her individuality stripped; she was part of The One.

Zack Wojcik c/o 2027



Ofrenda: El Fuego Se Equivocó / The Fire Was Mistaken

Tannia M. Rodriguez c/o 2027, Jose Lopez c/o 2027, Rafael Ramos MD/PhD, Karen Zapien-Guerra c/o 2027, Ingrid Rocha c/o 2026, Sophia Gandarillas c/o 2026



In sad eyes

I asked her why
she was in sad eyes.

Why she had begun collecting rivers of salt blue and yellow,
the silt of the Milk and Missouri,
into deltas beneath the shades of her iris.

Why she looked to have turned
her chin and jaw
to the sun and stared at the dwarf
until those eyes melted into warm
liquid and were glazed under kiln by the heat
in the air around her.

She tried to stop them from watering,
to shut them, to close them off,
but her eyes could not grip the tears.
Could not prevent them from spilling out and over
the edges of her eyelids.

They strained,
eyelashes as childrens' hands,
small and not yet with enough strength,
grasping that tapered part at the top
where the water converges in a point.
Tried spreading fingers wide, hoisting the swollen basin at the bottom.

But much as one cannot hold a bathtub of water in their arms
nor collect a rainstorm into their fists,
they fell
without want
onto the bones of her upper cheek
and settled into the shallow valley between there and her jaw.
The sad eyes bashful,
searching for distraction and place to hide.

Her mind flashed away
before she answered me

showing that it was both her and a black expanse of stars in sad eyes.
In that brief moment they would lean closer and pour their many hearts into hers
echoing back to her the hopes of a people below.
Crying and crying giant bathtubs of tears
until she grabbed them all
every last bright and dying piece of gas
and took them
into her arms.
Closed her sad eyes and let them weep with and into the sky.

This flash stayed
her mind away
until the sun slowly erased the black from her arms and left her

still in sad eyes.
Left her, now
with an earth filled dam
to fortress the waters her brain kept pushing into her eyes.

When she finally returned to me,
when the sad eyes revolved back to mine
and her mouth moved to speak,
her sound was how you move, barefoot
across hardwood floors,
sliding foot over foot as to not wake the person
already asleep in your bed.

When everything feels tired and cool and open.

Her voice became how your hand stretches toward the pillow
palm down as you feel for
that instant, that brief moment, when the very tips of your flesh
touch the soft thing
and you sink slowly and quietly into and against
that person
while your chest stiffens
to cull any loud breathing that may come and wake.

It wasn't until morning had come completely and the sun illuminated everything
that the sad eyes could want to see,
that she whispered her answer.

'It is for you I am in sad eyes.
It is for you
I cry.'

Yet even as she spoke to me
in that small room with the sleeping dogs and the high ceilings,
I pictured her away.
Lost, foreign placed
standing upon mountaintops, yelling to the others
who gave her sad eyes
to take them—
back and away
by making the things she wanted stay.

And I too took up sad eyes,
opening the spillway,
funneling a reservoir of water into the room
until the couch we lay on
floated out of the house
through the locked doors.
Taking us both to the West.

Blake Bergeson c/o 2027

QUIET COMFORTS

Mortal Harmony
Mina Sitto c/o 2025

Pakistan

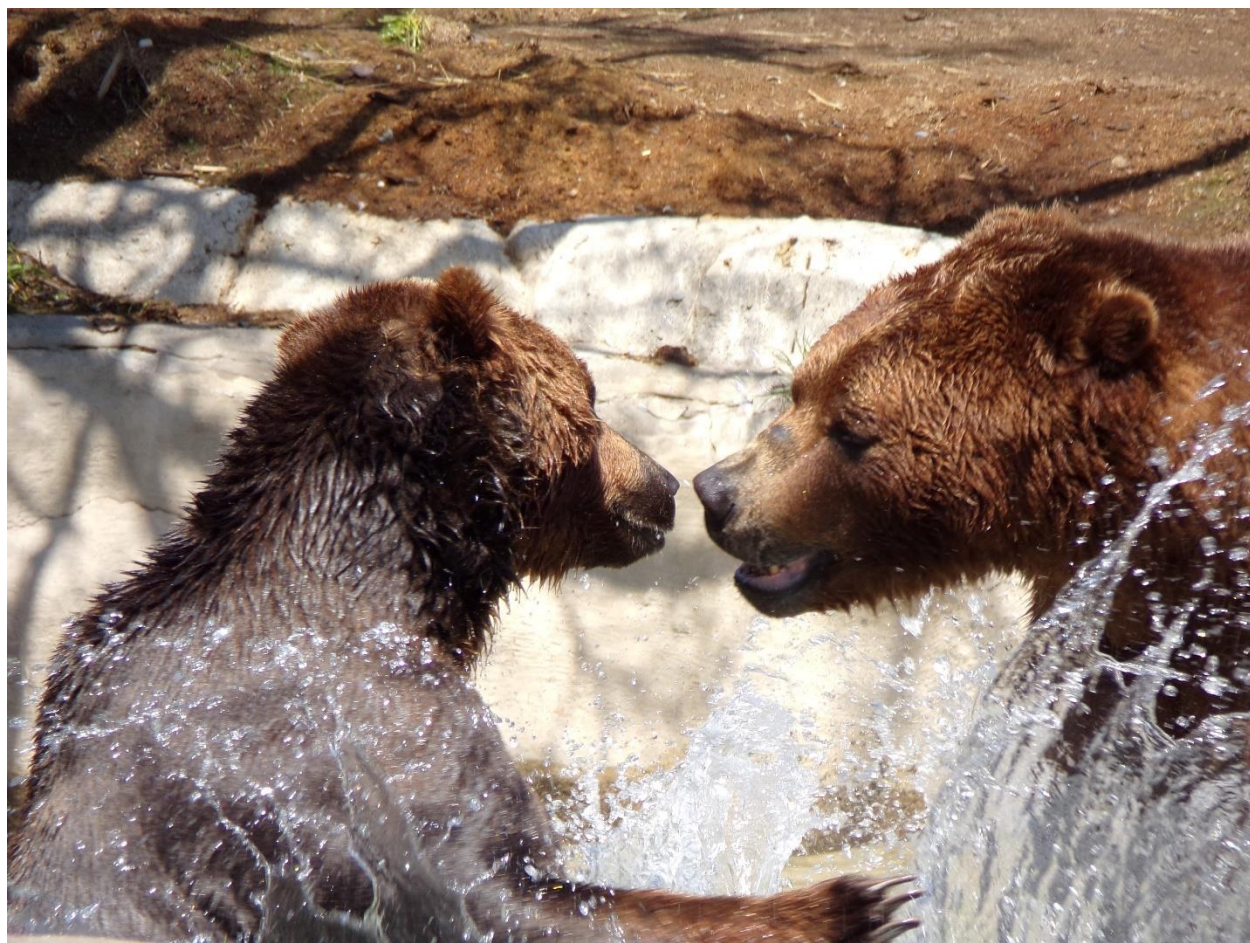
The blistering heat, the erosive air
So differently felt
By my skin
Which once had been kissed
By snowflakes.

The soulful skeletons
At the brink of starvation;
Whose young brains aged
Through adversity
Whose young eyes sang
Of aspiration.

The ceaseless chatter
Of bargaining
As the rich rob the poor
Possibly blind to their desperation
Possibly indifferent towards their situation.

The savory aroma of fried potatoes
Prepared in the streets
By Afghan refugees
Who once had been the brightest minds of their nation
Who now had discovered a means for their salvation.

Izma Khaliq c/o 2026



Brothers Bear

Sarah Eggert c/o 2027



The only true wealth
Victoria Kelley c/o 2025

My Patients Eat Me Alive

I'm wasted- no, wasting
I reach for my pen
No one knows what I keep here

My patients
My patience
My patent mind, sometimes the only thing tethering me to this earth
Or lifting away, flying out of this room to ask a god- demand-
Why do 23 year olds get cancer?

My heart breaks, my soul leaves my body
This is no place for a soul
What words can I offer?

I squeeze her hand
Her eyes ask me if things are ok
And I'm afraid to look up and see her seeing me seeing her

This fear that I feel? She must feel it in mountains
My next moves are careful
I disentangle myself from the side of her bed
It will be hours before I return

My stethoscope swings low as
I stand high
Wiped and cleaned before I'm fully out of the room
It will be hours before I return

Victoria Kelley c/o 2025



**A Hospital's Horizon:
View From Henry Ford**
Pragathi Pathanjeli c/o 2025

It was in late December, I met the dead man.

It was in late December.
When that wicked winter weather
dusts the streets in white
and shoos children inside.
While wind whips tops of sledding hills
'cross gravel roads
and the mothers and the fires cry to those
newly numbed hands.

It was in
late December, I met the dead man.

And I stood there,
in a slow warm room of brick bookends,
and breathed his napalm cancer.
Let his disease fill my lungs and
I felt the weight of his sickness.

And he told me,

that in his mind
there's still a hotel in Moingona.
Where
she
forgot to say goodbye.

See,
this is not the first time
he's died.

Blake Bergeson c/o 2027

Cat Call (Professional)

A moment
Stolen by anger from your words

How dare you call “catty”
Cat call cat call cat call

A professional uses this language
To describe a group of people they once worked with
But in truth I only hear it about ob/gyns
Which is soft cover for women

Repeated and repeated and repeated
From one pair of lips to the next

Until mine become hardened
For fear of releasing my lash of anger
Now rage
Building and building and building
Towers of reactions left standing, for now

A moment in time I could have spent
Doing most anything else

And yet I am what I'm told to be
A quiet professional
Hearing-
Cat call cat call cat call

Victoria Kelley c/o 2025

Chronic

the beeping, once irate, is a lighthouse in the dark, reminding me breath expands my lungs
 images of children laughing, shared meals, sunshine plague my subconscious difficult to discern
 memory or broadcast
 distantly, I'm aware of a friendly voice checking on me
 the details are hazy despite the daily reminders *do you understand why we're keeping you here*
what questions can we answer
 pain is unrelenting consuming, my pleas take flight to the heavens with broken wings
 everything is blinding white, the lights, the sheets, the floors
 tossing turning for comfort monotony dictates my days
 Days? But time is elusive, slipping out of my grasp like the red stop button on the control board
what, who, awaits me on the outside the door creaks open
 a student from the earlier sea of faces, carrying a bag, green and yellow logo
 a tiny gesture, a glimpse into health
who knew a sandwich could bring so much joy

Aila Rahman c/o 2025



Old Mazatlán

Karen Zapien-Guerra c/o 2027

HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL



Path Forward

Victoria Kelley c/o 2025

The Mechanics of “What If...?”

The question: “What would you pursue if you didn’t choose medicine?”

The response: “An educator because ‘doctor’ means ‘teacher’ in Latin.”

Major eyeroll. And I’ll be completely honest — I *was* one of those people who responded like that. I spun some long-winded answer about how I have always valued education and wanted to be a lifelong learner. And for a while, I even convinced myself. The best “second-choice career” for a future physician would *obviously* be a teacher.

But then I thought about it. And thought about it some more. And some more.

What profession embodies the characteristics of medicine the most? The characteristics of clinical reasoning, humanism and empathy, teamwork, and understanding of social determinants.

The answer? **A mechanic.**

Yeah, I’m talking about those folks who I very heavily rely on to make sure my car is fully functioning. How unconventional, huh? How can a mechanic be the most similar to a physician? No one’s parents force them to be a mechanic.

Just trust me. More than a teacher, more than any other career, I think a mechanic has the most similarities to the art of medicine. A physician is the healer of people, and a mechanic is a healer of cars.

Immediately, I can easily (*easily*) point out the differences between these two professions. One: level of education. A mechanic goes through a few years of trade school, while a physician goes through four years of undergraduate education, four years of medical school, and three to five years, minimum, of residency training. Not to mention the additional fellowship training, if desired. So, let’s do the math. That’s about three years for a mechanic and... upwards of 11 years for a physician. Two: car vs. human body. This one is self-explanatory — a car is an inanimate object, and the human body contains living, breathing organs, so the stakes are higher. And finally, the impact. A car is loved by its owner, but a person is loved by many. Sending a vehicle to the scrapyard has a very different protocol than sending a body to a graveyard.

And yes, I acknowledge all these differences, but I still maintain that this profession is the *most similar* to medicine, not particularly an exact match.

The primary reason is the thrill of clinical reasoning. Clinical reasoning underscores the crux of medicine. Generating and justifying a differential is one of the most valued skills any physician can have. Using both the history and physical, along with labs and imaging, a physician needs to piece together each facet to create a fuller picture. Similarly, a mechanic gathers data using the customer’s version of the events coupled with various diagnostic tests to determine what is wrong with the car. Is it a faulty part? An issue with the engine? A mechanic must know which diagnostic tests to order and how to fix the problem. They must use all their senses to give the customer a final diagnosis: what is wrong with my car?

And while it may not be overt, being a mechanic involves strong interpersonal skills. A physician is a patient-facing role, and a mechanic is a customer-facing role. They both must be able to provide a clear plan and empathy through strong communication skills. A patient's health can be affected by many different social determinants. Likewise, a mechanic must understand the customer and their connection to their car. For example, a father may be a single dad who is desperately in need of new brake pads, but he also has an obligation to lead the carpool for his daughter's friends. When should obligation compromise safety? As stated before, the stakes may not be as high, but they can still have disastrous complications. A mechanic must be able to convey the necessity of a "procedure" and help the customer come to an informed decision. Sound familiar?

However, I think the root of the original question is not to pick out a particular profession. It is to look beyond the surface — to highlight one's values and passions within the field of medicine. Instead of simply looking at the surface-level factors, such as the specific profession or degree, we should focus on the underlying values that make someone a great healthcare professional. *What if I am not a doctor because of the degree I hold but because of the way I approach life?* Ultimately, it's not the profession that defines the person but rather the person who defines the profession.

So, to that age-old question, "What if... you weren't a doctor?" I propose an unconventional response. Unconventional, yes, but logical all the same.

But — there is one aspect that mechanics have it better, I must concede.

They don't have to write SOAP notes.

Riya Shah c/o 2025



Sandy

Sarah Eggert c/o 2027



The dolls of San Miguel de Allende

Karen Zapien-Guerra c/o 2027



Moonlight
Allie Boland c/o 2025

BEGINNING ANEW



Kearsarge Pass
Mina Sitto c/o 2025



Gram Positive Affirmations

Abrielle Fretz c/o 2026

The Bair Hugger

Curious whirring, gentle humming, oh, who could it be?
 Like a warm embrace, you grant our patients grace,
 Winnie the Pooh has nothing on thee.
 I love the sounds of each crinkle
 And when the air fills you, my eyes twinkle.
 So many options to prevent hypothermia,
 I'm sure our patients would experience euphoria
 If they knew just how many lives you've optimized.
 The operating room is lovely, dark, and deep.
 But I always appreciate that beautiful heat;
 Your thankless devotion to patient safety is such a treat.

Zechariah Jean c/o 2024

A Collection

Shifting through my memory file
 Are a collection of moments that will stay with me a long while

Click

Ms. A's bypass surgery started off without a hitch
 Until her heart started to glitch
 I held my breath as the vtach appeared
 Despite its resolution, the adrenaline and my pounding heart persevered

Click

For 17 days I followed Mr. B post colectomy for his promising healing
 Until his body revealed the abscess it was concealing
 He abruptly went into septic shock
 Our footsteps echoed in the empty hallway as we raced against the clock

Click

Scrubbing into my first C-section-it's twins!
 With the cut of a scalpel, Ms. C's surgery begins
 Before I know it, a child's vigorous cry fills the room
 My eyes well with tears, in awe of how life blooms

Click

Trying to position Mr. D on the operating table
 Sends the team into chaos as his vitals become unstable
 We rush back to the ICU, me bagging him for air
 I quickly realize how easy it is to be caught unaware

Click

Life is fragile
 Ever changing
 Exchanging
 Rearranging

Anything and everything can change in the blink of an eye
 The lowest low can become the highest high

Click

A 5-year-old dressed in scrubs from Party City

Click

A 12-year-old nervous and excited about dissecting a frog in her grown up science class

Click

A 16-year-old on the way to her first volunteer shift in the ER

Click

A 21-year-old stressing about her personal statement

Click

A 24-year-old taking Step 1

Click

A 25-year-old making more storage space
For the new memories she will come to embrace

Aila Rahman c/o 2025



Artisanal Ice Cream for 50 Years

Karen Zapien-Guerra c/o 2027

Vigilance

Happy juice, snooze

Stinging, burning, then silence

I tend after you.

Zechariah Jean c/o 2024



Comfort Food

Kathleen Young c/o 2025

When you depart.

If you could take one thing from here
when you depart,
I ask you, Love,
let it be me.

Rather than choose the shallow curve of the Missouri,
or the smell of rain upon the spillway,
name me.

Over the reservoir
or all the brown hills falling
into the green ones,
over the dredge cuts with their dead barges, and the tiny villages of summer
homes that dot the small sea shores,
I ask that it be me
you take.

Mary my soul to yours and place it
in your palm, if only for a moment,
if only to then store me into an old suitcase,
and lay me alongside your collections of papers and musics and inks
those things that you love so much
and carry with you now always.

For I would willingly go to those foreign harbors
and see with my eyes the new lives you will create for yourself.

Send me to stay in countless hotel rooms
with bright wallpapers and open windows
to let the suns of Asia into the room
and soak the carpets, illuminating
all the tiny pieces of dust floating
in the air you breathe.

Or rather, from your suitcase,
put me again into your palm,
to then place me into everything around you,
into all things both breathing and still.
So in every glance
I could share your life
for the rest of mine.

If I could live outside your suitcase,
I would become one of those pieces of dust and follow your winds
to the Great Barrier Reef
to witness your eyes
when you behold the mazes of coral
twirling into themselves and housing all the sea and fish
you've seen in dream.

And I will become one of those fish,
peering from her home

in hopes to see your eyes, shielded from my salt,
become inspired
by the way I breathe
where you cannot.

Then to the North and the cold,
I would follow in snow and whip your cheeks
with the smallest of designs
which I will cut to please you.

Into the crumbling castles of Europe,
the ghosts of the Welsh coasts,
into all the noise that crawls through your ears,

I will be in tempered metals and long tables,
foreign citadels and whitecaps,
all dissonant and somber cords.

Into great libraries of dusty books,
I will lie myself onto page
where I will see your eyes as you learn
new ways to say the things
you already know to speak.

I will become the words you read,
the very things that enter your brain
and inspire your cavern of a mind.

And in that mind too,
I will house myself into a great cabin
built from your childhood memories,
the beautiful ones in which you felt strong and capable.
And the windows I will build of the clearest blue
with the oceans and seas you have created and forever return to.

And I will build a steep fire of pine and cedar
with the kindling of all your imagined lives
whose smoke will forever compel you
to write and speak the dark and beautiful things.

Then, when you find yourself in the empty rooms
of unpacked boxes and floorboard beds,
I will be the one who places my hands into yours
and quiets the fires of your mind.
To lay with you
as those eyes go blank and rest.

Until morning
when more fires are lit and we start
all over again.

I ask you,
carry me with you
when you depart.

Blake Bergeson c/o 2027



“Sunrise on Mt. Lamlam- Guam, USA”

Julia Rinck c/o 2027

Inexorable Responsibility: Reflections of an Almost Physician

Everyone thinks the biggest sacrifice when you go into medicine is your time. It's the long hours curled up in front of a desk, pounding detail after detail into your head. It's the weekends you didn't go out, the birthdays you missed, the loved ones you didn't call. It's working hard through the most formative years of your life, delaying gratification year after year. It's the debt, it's the long nights, it's the mental exhaustion.

None of those are the hardest thing. The hardest thing about entering medicine is accepting the inexorable responsibility of life and livelihood. It is being told as a third year student that you will mess up because you are-- surprise, surprise-- human, and that's what humans do. Except when you mess up, people could hurt. People could die. The hardest thing is accepting that.

I can almost already feel the weight of that first mistake - the mistake that changes - or takes- a life. I feel as if on some plane it already exists. It was breathed into existence the moment I decided to become a physician. The moment I make that mistake, I will pick up a gauntlet to carry for the rest of my life. But even now I can feel the curves in my shoulders where the gauntlet will rest. I am dreading a feeling that I already feel.

Sometimes, I cope by thinking I can be perfect. I have become hyper-critical of myself. I have stood in my kitchen after burning my toast and wondered how my patients will ever trust me if I cannot get something as simple as breakfast right.

Sometimes I cope by wondering if it is too late to turn back. I wonder if one morning I will wake up and finally decide I am unworthy of this responsibility. If I will leave medicine behind and retreat to a cabin in the country, where I will plant seeds and pull weeds and the highest consequence of my mistakes will be an unfruitful garden.

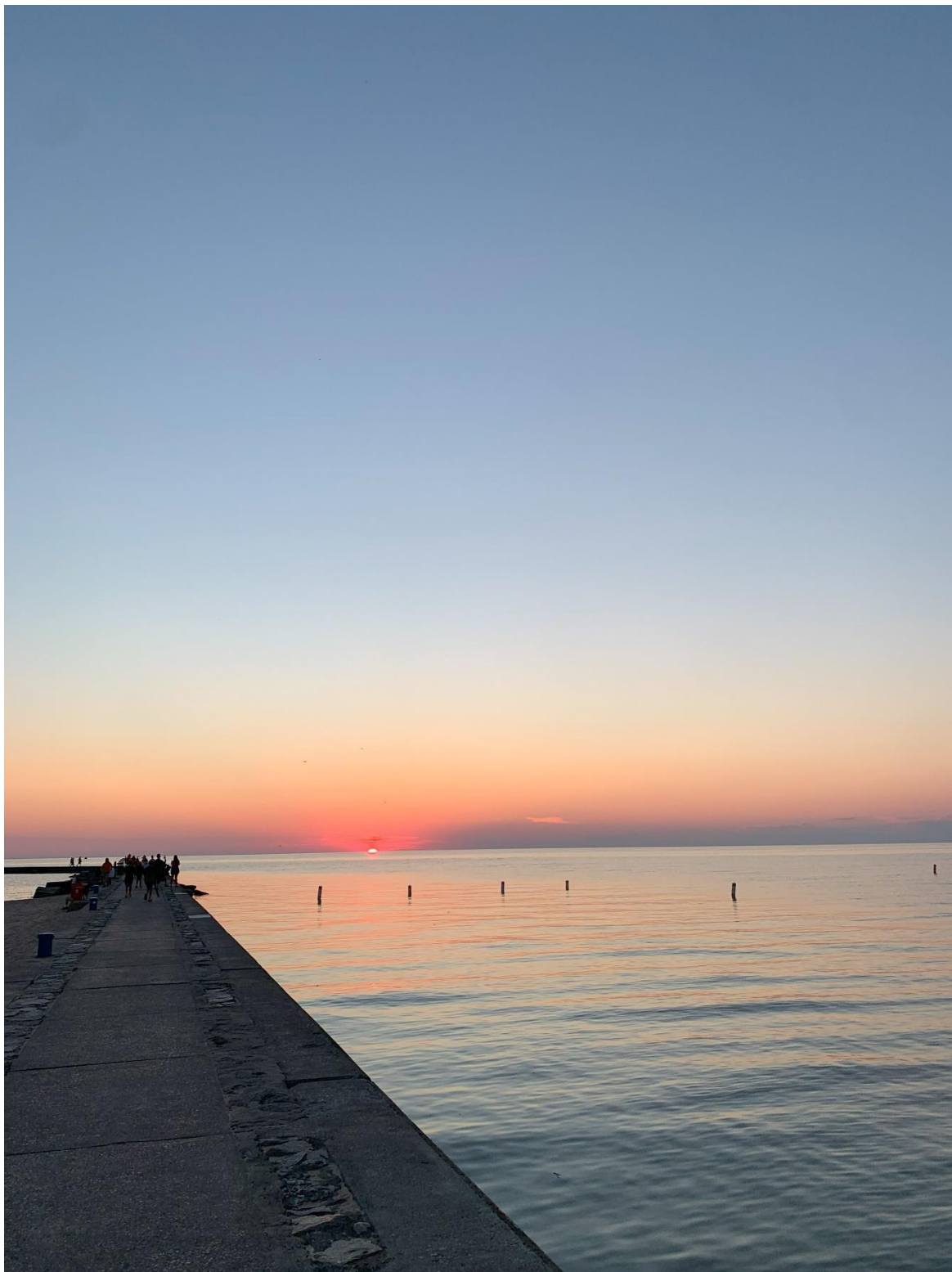
But running from this responsibility does more than prevent the bad. It also prevents the good. To err in earnest attempt is one thing. To refuse to try out of fear is another.

A seasoned physician once told me something that I repeat to myself often. He said: "We are human, but we must continue, even with all our faults."

It made me realize that there are no perfect physicians. And yet, we need them. Medicine does good in the world despite the absence of perfection.

As long as we remain human, expecting perfection of ourselves is a wasted and exhausting effort. Perhaps, a physician who embraces their fallible nature will be driven to seek after learning at every corner, to rely on teamwork, to elicit feedback and change accordingly, to correct their wrongs. Perhaps, they will be better poised to understand their patients and the complex circumstances that affect their utilization of care. Perhaps they will be more compassionate. Surely, such a physician must be better than a perfect one that does not exist.

Karis Tutuska c/o 2025



Sunset Over Lake Michigan

Jessica DeClercq c/o 2025

The Vow of Time

The city had changed.

The park, not as much.

And although the park had once been an escape from the times, it was becoming impossible to no longer notice the city roaring beyond its confines. The buildings looming over the foreground of trees, grass, paths, and runners were an almost annoying reminder. They were a reminder of change and of growing old.

Inside the park was a bench, and an old man sat on it. There was also a boy. Like any boy, he had energy long lost in the old man. He had curiosity not yet met with disappointing and satisfactory answers alike. Both of them would often be at the park, mostly on Sundays. As usual the boy came with his ball, and the old man came with his thoughts.

On this given Sunday, the boy kicked his ball and sent it flying towards the bench. It nearly toppled the old man, breaking him out of his pensive and serene state. The boy ran over and profusely apologized while the old man laughed and scolded him in jest. The boy's curiosity found an opening in relieved guilt. This opening prompted a flurry of questions met with amusement by the old man. When they were both tired of talking, the atmosphere was that of two people basking in pleasure at the end of a good meal. The boy felt it natural to sit on the bench alongside the old man. Here they both could enjoy the well-earned silence.

A good deal of time passed by according to the boy's point of view, although it was arguably a mere few moments for the old man. In his boredom the boy asked, "what are you thinking about?"

The old man spoke. "I've had a good life. Regrettably not a great one. I always knew what I wanted, but rarely had the courage to seek it. I always got what I needed though, that much I do know. I still don't know if that was enough but I'm thankful for it, I think. I guess that's what everyone should say at least. I hate that I have regrets, because I can't do it over. And pretty soon I won't be doing much at all. But I found love, real love that did not disappoint. And that makes my life a hell of a lot better than the deal a lot of folks get. So let's end on that. Let's end on a good note."

The boy watched incessantly, unsure how to respond. He felt slightly confused, slightly sad, and slightly anxious. The old man smiled at him, and in one smooth movement he patted the boy's head while leaving the bench one more time. A core memory was made for both beings. One of them would carry it longer.

The city, the park, and the bench remained after that Sunday. And they still vowed to change—the city, then the park, then the bench.



Stargazing At Sunset

Sarah Eggert c/o 2027



“Ugochukwu”

Ashley Kramer c/o 2025



Reaching

Kathleen Young c/o 2025



Reflecting

Jessica DeClercq c/o 2025

The Storm Before the Calm

torrential rain splatters on the ground blurring the lines between Earth and Sky

lightning jumps from ^{point} to ^{point}

thunder threateningly rumbles in response

This storm feels final

Absolute

isolated to the here and now

yet not quite surprising

days of tumultuous temps, highs and lows, staleness suffocating the air

anticipation *dread* building until that first rumble of thunder anger howling through the

trees, unrelenting then.....

silence

the grass seems appears greener somehow, muddle puddles interspersed

serenity in the sky with an eerie calm

eventually—cautiously—a sole stem emerges a few mm of.....

A bright yellow flower unravels its petals, fearful of the before, of the storm

anticipation building until another green stem emerges a few mm of.....

of.....

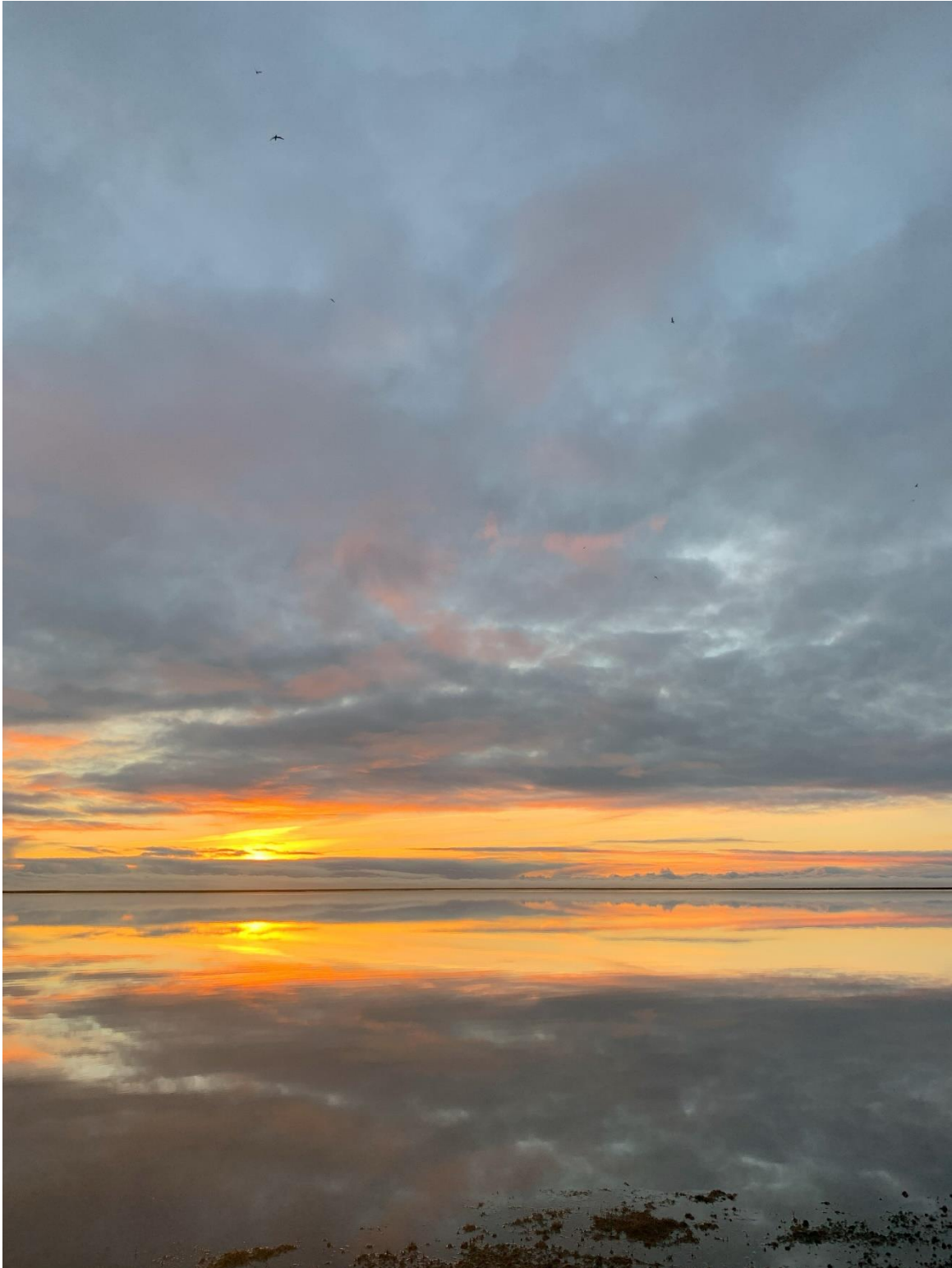
companionship

Aila Rahman c/o 2025



Embrace the Journey: Navigating the Uncharted Path, Inspired by The Road Not Taken

Zechariah Jean c/o 2024



New Beginnings

Jessica DeClercq c/o 2025