

NIGHT FLOAT

VOLUME 3



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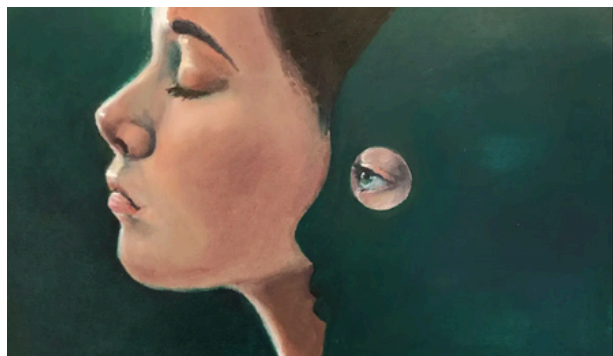
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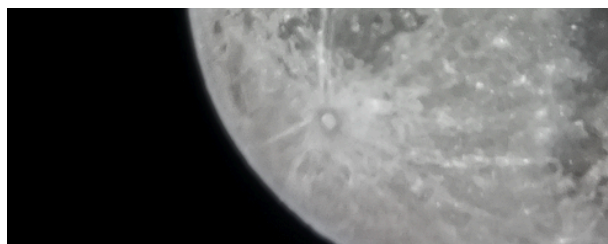
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TO THE READER

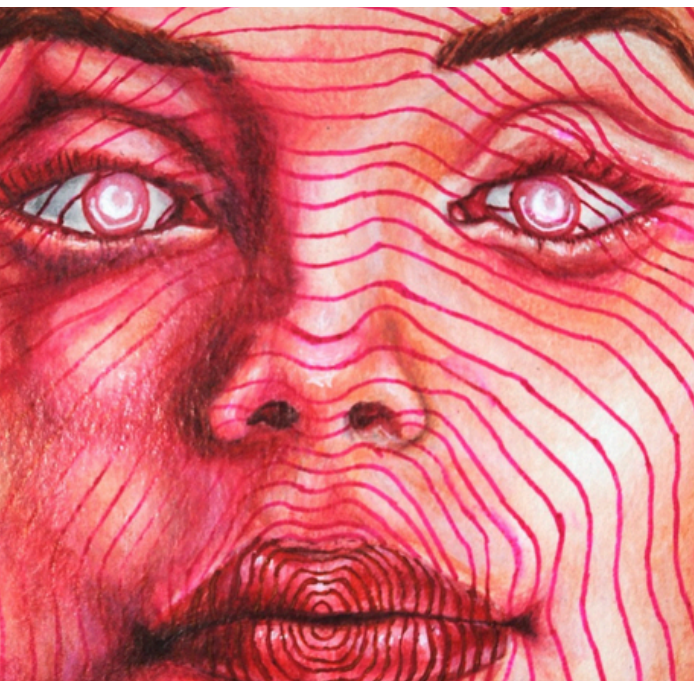
Thank you for taking the time to read this year's edition of Night Float!

After a brief hiatus, the MacMed community has come together once again to create a book full of talent and artistic expression. Every submission in this issue represents their student's hard work, creativity, and unique stories. We're so lucky to have so many amazing artists in MacMed!

Night Float is McMaster Medicine's arts and creative writing publication. This title was chosen by our predecessors because it represents an aspect of medicine that is grueling yet rewarding, and brings forth a change in perspective, has an air of mystery, and fuels the imagination.

Night Float serves to celebrate and showcase the creativity of our community, which can be easily forgotten when we are consumed by clinical or academic medicine. Medicine is, after all, an art.

We hope that you enjoy the pieces our classmates have worked so hard on. Perhaps they will inspire you, push you to reflect, or simply fill you with a feeling of awe and satisfaction. Whichever it be, we hope that this will help to connect you to the MacMed community.



Nightfloat Issue 3 Editor:
Donna Gao

MacMed IG Co-Chairs:
Donna Gao
Deeptha Ramikrishnan
Zain Jaffrey

The Lighthouse

Amanda Black



“

I spent a couple years in Halifax for my Master's degree and I really loved the landscapes of the east coast. I've done quite a few paintings of different lighthouses and shores, but this was the first one I did.

”

SUB MER GED

Chiara Di Scipio

Coloured pencil on toned tan paper. Having always adored the ocean, I look forward to diving into its cool, refreshing waters during my holidays. This piece, entitled Submerged, reflects that love, offering a glimpse into the calm that follows a deep connection with the sea.





Partial LUNAR ECLIPSE

Danish Zahid



September 17, 2024 at 10:47 PM



This image was captured through a telescope with 50x magnification at the peak of the partial lunar eclipse on September 17, 2024 at 10:47 PM.

The Earth's shadow is partially covering the moon's surface, and subtle details of the lunar craters and features can be seen.



In “The Clock”, an elderly woman with dementia is asked by her physician to sit before a blank sheet of paper and draw a clock. The Alzheimer’s Clock-Drawing Test is a classic way to evaluate the state of cognitive decline. Those with a worse prognosis draw distorted images; they may lose track of numbers or cluster them together. As the woman draws, memories of her childhood begin to surface. She struggles to regain a hold on time while the hands of the clock keep turning.

The Clock

The numbers cramp together,
A crumple of memories huddled at the beginning,
When you rode bicycles through the suburbs--
I winding road, II sisters pedaling,
III made a ruckus as the neighbour's dog snapped at your tires,
His tail beating in a frenzy, peals of laughter as you lifted into the air.
IV wings catching the sunlight,
Lungs fit to burst, legs aching with the steady churning,
Cycling second into second
Until the wheels turned
So fast that you
Lost control
And collapsed
Together, there, under an oak tree,
You whistered of who you would marry;
VI children, no V
Their names shifting and murmuring, rustling in the leaves.
Your syster smells of grass and dandelions, skinned knees and sunscreen.
VII, she was VIII, X, IX ?
Her face hidden like stars beneath a film of haze,
The sky eats flicking gaps in the canopy,
Devouring veined edges.
Your hand pauses, a tremor passing through as memory trembles
Towards your fingertips then

Fades--

Losing its shape in the scatter of
Seconds,
Days,

Years,

Until all that lingers is the scent of sunscreen.
"All done", you say.
There's a great hollow on the page
Something lost, slipping away into a vast span of emptiness
A crumple of time muddled and crawling ever onwards towards the blue
Or perhaps the blue is spreading backwards,
Compressing the numbers together until they disappear into the beginning.
I winding road, II sisters pedaling, III made a ruckus
I winding road, II sisters pedaling
I winding road
Lifting off into the azure.

Spring

Joshua Grief

Universality is few and far between. The wide range and variety of opportunities and experiences that exist in the world preclude any individual from living the same life. What do I have in common with a 31-year-old Angolan physical labourer or a 72-year-old Brazilian vovó living with her extended family in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro? December brings the frigidity of a Canadian winter while inviting a blistering summer to those down under. In a world of individuals lacking commonalities, what unites us in experience? While there are a number of different answers, there are few quite as ubiquitous as death.

Death lacks empathy. It's cold grip provides no condolences, no thoughts, no care. Nor does it discriminate; it terrorizes old and young, mothers and sons. Attempts to personify death fall short, as they are unable to capture the void that death creates. The hole created in the presence of death cannot be rationally attributed to a skeleton character with a scythe and a cloak for concealment. Our futile attempts to understand death offer up a chance to paint it as an insidious process – an event that should be looked at in gray-coloured glasses. Providing meaning helps us console the loss of a loved one, but to truly understand death is to embrace its cold stare, its apathy, its absurdity.

For better or worse, humans have become incredibly skilled at proceduralizing death. Similar to birth, modern medicine sterilizes and confines death to a select handful of locations. In first-world countries, the venue for the send-off is often the hospital, where physicians and healthcare workers play the roles of supporting actors. Hospital teams composed of an amalgamation of skill sets and attributes fulfill their duties with expertise. They are expertly trained to go through their checklist, ticking off every action in a mechanical fashion when dealing with the palliative patient and their families. However, this proceduralization hampers flexibility and empathy. After all, the cogs in the machine may not want to deviate from their preordained role significantly, at the risk of disturbing the machine's flow.

As for the setting, the hospital walls absorb emotion from its inhabitants, insulating it from the outside world. Life progresses forward on the streets below, oblivious to families enduring their worst struggles and personal calamities. Hospital floors and walls provide relief, shielding emaciated ICU patients from healthy newborns, grieving parents from elated ones.

Isn't it beautiful?

I enter the room. The walls squeal in agony. My heart cries out in response. It is snowing.

Atimid medical student enters the room; he is but two months out of starting clerkship, two years out of undergrad, twenty-five years out of the womb. He tunes into the muffled sobs emanating from across the room; an elderly woman is heaped in the corner while her son lies asleep in the hospital bed. Both the patient and his mother know what is

soon to come, yet only one of them has the energy to grieve. Victoria, the devout mother of one, has been by her son Bryson's side since his initial lymphoma diagnosis. Acting as his emotional crutch, she's aged a lifetime from the burden of watching her son deteriorate. At this point, his cancer has metastasized to his lungs, crippling his breathing in the process. Bryson's latest admission came following an acute bout of dyspnea that left him gasping for air. His condition has only worsened since arriving in the hospital, as he now lies in a semi-conscious stupor with high-flow oxygen to support him. When our medical student enters the room, Bryson is unphased, staring through the television that is providing an instrumental accompaniment to his mother's wailing solo. The window view provides no escape from the grief inside the room, as a snowstorm obscures the view of cars and asphalt in the parking lot below.

As our medical student steps towards the hospital bed, Victoria's attention switches from her son to the stranger facing her – yet another new face that she has to encounter. Right away, the medical student switches to physician mode, running through an introduction as Victoria's lustreless eyes gaze at his presence. Although bothered by Victoria's laconic responses, our medical student persists with his script, furiously scribbling away at his notepad to have something tangible to present to the attending.

This type of history-taking rubs him the wrong way. Entering medical school, he thought of himself as the empathetic type, one that would go out of his way to check on friends if they seemed off, approach a stranger if they looked like they were in need. He found himself surrounded by like-minded people in his classes; students were more than happy to volunteer in the community where needed, overflowing with generosity. Yet much of this feeling was stripped in the hospital. The whole gig felt performative, inauthentic, wrong. When in the hospital, his voice lost its sheen, his questioning turned blunt, his demeanour switched to reticent. His emotional compass lost its orientation.

Realizing his own dissatisfaction with the situation, he tries to ground himself mid-conversation. Concentrating on his breath, he inhales, exhales, inhales, and exhales again. Shifting his attention away from his medical script, he begins to focus on his thoughts and emotions in the moment. His feelings of discomfort and uneasiness creep into the spotlight from the shadows. The thoughts of death, despair, grief, agony, sorrow. The thoughts that you try to scrub off in the shower after a 12-hour shift. The thoughts that you're not taught to deal with in school.

His patient isn't much older than him. Even with his limited understanding, our medical student understands that the prognosis is grim. Viewing his mortality through Bryson's experiences brings a form of helplessness, which is only compounded when turning to Victoria. What could he do? He was only a student. He doesn't have the panacea – he can't even recognize half of the drugs that Bryson is on.

What can he do?

Death is accompanied by a certain type of intimacy. Loss of a loved one often feels tailor-made to cause the maximum grief in your life. Well-wishes from colleagues often ring hollow outside of their generous sympathy. Senses numb, melodies dull out, appetite gets put on hold. At the same time, other signals begin to take on new meaning: the smell of fixing agent makes you gag a bit more, old pictures make you a bit more nostalgic. Buried memories find their way to the surface after years underground. You hug your loved ones a bit closer.

The crime of death is not the loved ones we lose, but rather the memories we fail to gain. The trip to Orlando that will never happen. The fleeting moments of love that are captured in a glance, a hug, a touch.

Our medical student goes off-script. "How are you feeling?" A weight lifts off his shoulders. Victoria's eyes focus on our medical student for the first time. Opening her mouth to answer, she fails to find the words. Rather, tears begin to flow down her cheeks, filling the soft wrinkles that host memories of days gone by. Whimpers eventually turn into wails, then back into whimpers.

The question works to break the ice. Over the next twenty minutes, Victoria and the student talk back and forth about how Bryson is doing and how she is feeling. She explains that Bryson's father passed away when Bryson was a child, leaving her to juggle the responsibilities of raising a child while keeping a roof over their heads. Dedicating all her spare time and income to support her child, Victoria slowly watched Bryson blossom into a charming and gregarious young man. Her efforts paid off, she thought, as she provided the best opportunities for her child to excel in life. Shortly after finishing university and starting a new job, Victoria noticed that Bryson seemed more fatigued than normal. Initially chalking it up to his new job, Bryson downplayed his mother's concerns. As the months passed by, however, Victoria noticed her son losing weight and energy. Urging him to see a medical professional, Bryson begrudgingly visited his family physician. This was just over a year ago.

Teary-eyed, our medical student thanks Victoria for sharing her story. Sympathizing with her struggles, he offers social work support through the hospital – someone to continue helping her in her journey of grief. Victoria happily accepts, and reciprocates the thank-yous for giving her the chance to vent about her situation.

Reporting back to the attending, our medical student is filled with sadness, but also satisfaction. Even though Bryson's prognosis remains the same, our medical student knows that his conversation helps Victoria in one way or another. Regardless of his supervisor's thoughts on the importance of "the social side of medicine", our medical student finally recalls why he wanted to pursue medicine in the first place. Just because the outcome may be grim, doesn't mean that the path has to be as well. Before heading home for the day, our medical student looks outside again. The snowstorm has calmed to a trickle. The snowflakes are now waltzing on their way down, twirling before they land softly on the ground.

Seasons have a funny way of sneaking their way in. Although their borders are clearly demarcated in the calendars published each year, the slow change in temperature and sunlight eases the transition. Boots and snow pants are stowed away in exchange for sunglasses and bucket hats. The trees appear happier; the squirrels skinnier. Winter may stick around for longer than we may prefer, but rest assured that the weather will always get nicer eventually. Invite in Spring.



JACKAL

AND THE HARE

Sydney
Uglow





Thoughts

Mindy
Baroody

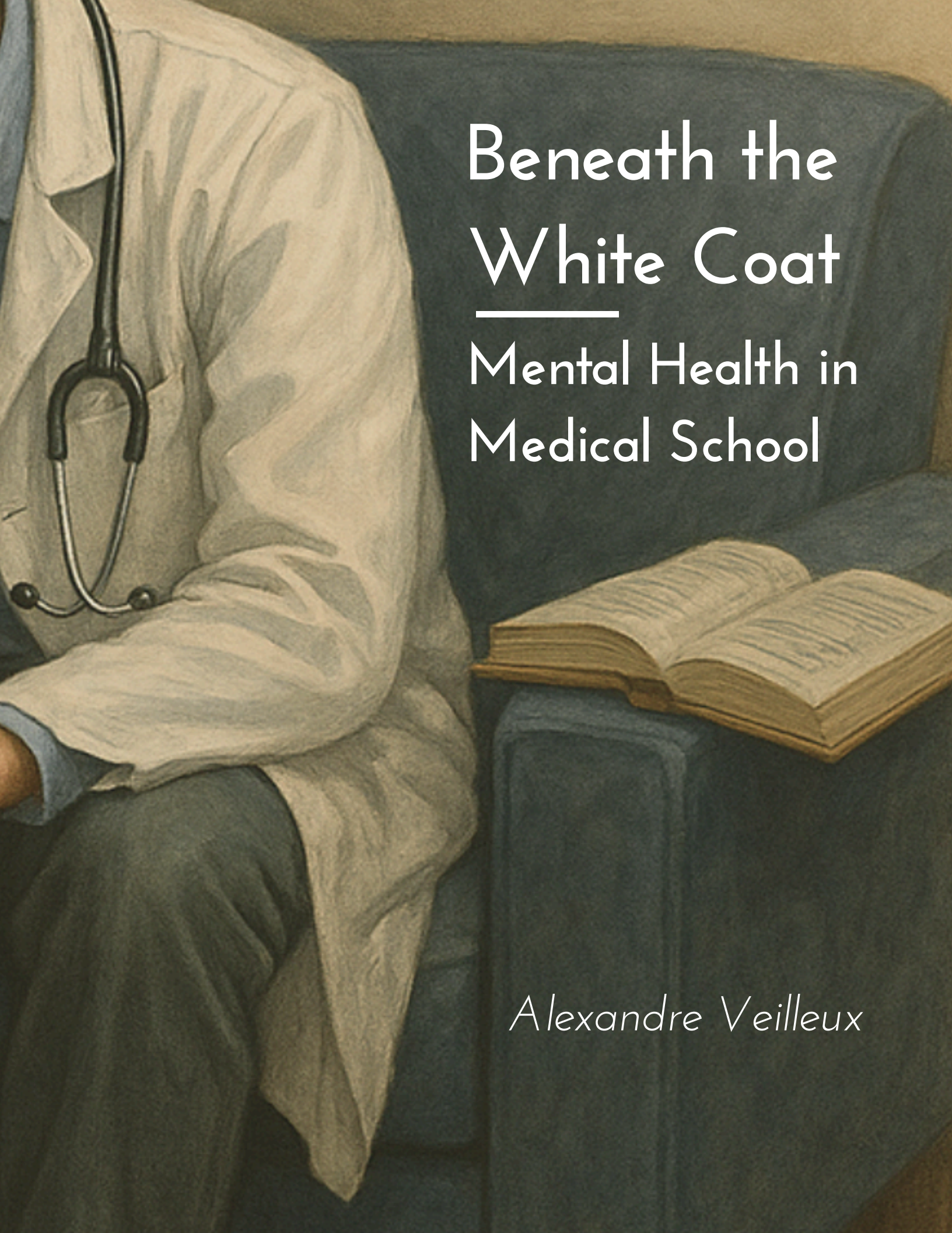




Looking inwards can be daunting. It is normal to wear masks, showcasing different facets of our personalities to the world, while concealing the more vulnerable aspects of who we are. These hidden parts of ourselves often serve as our shield, protecting us from judgment and vulnerability.

Yet, to truly grow, we must confront and reconnect with what we keep tucked away. By embracing our complexities, we open ourselves to fostering a deeper connection with both ourselves and others.



A painting of a doctor in a white coat with a stethoscope, sitting on a blue couch with an open book.

Beneath the White Coat

Mental Health in Medical School

Alexandre Veilleux

Beneath the White Coat: Mental Health in Medical School

Medical school is for many the ultimate in education;
Noble, challenging, and held in high esteem. Why not
pursue such a sought-after occupation; Motivated,
successful, working towards the dream.

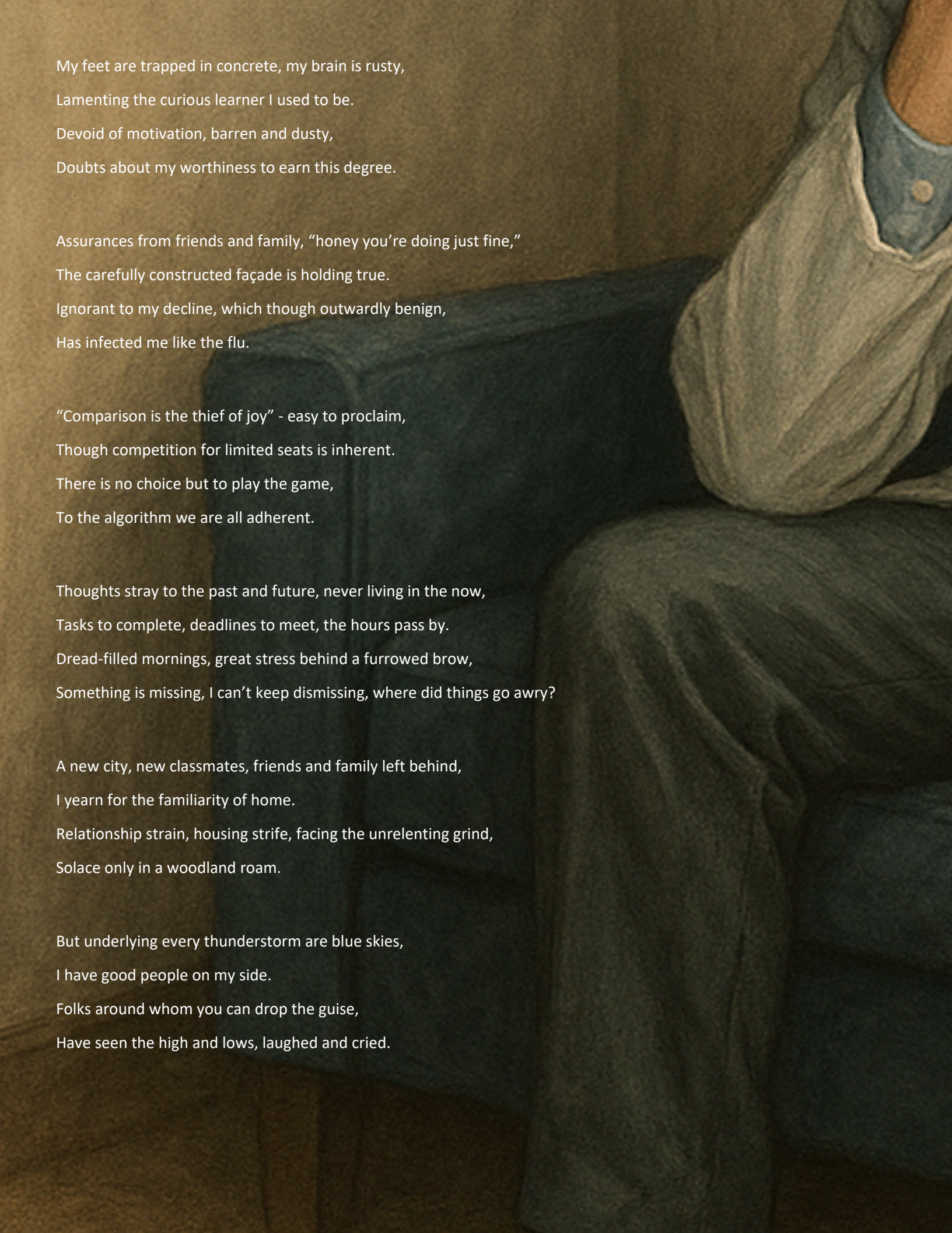
Acceptance would bring clarity and control,
Putting an end to the constant rumination.
Tunnel vision towards a singular goal,
Becoming integral to my self-identification.

Foolish to believe this yoke could be lifted,
For life is naught but unpredictability.
With admission my anxieties shifted,
Fixating upon the coming change, now an inevitability.

The jubilation of admission was transient and fleeting,
Fading novelty once rubber met the road.
The tire tread was slowly depleting,
Creeping fear that I could not bear this load.

Internalized beliefs that medical students should be infallibly stoic,
False assumptions about my chosen profession.
Imposter syndrome has me feeling entirely unheroic,
Constant repression of this dirty confession.

Nose to the grindstone, just keep working,
That tired old mantra playing on repeat.
My responsibilities, they're not meant for shirking,
Get up and go, why am I slumped in this loveseat?



My feet are trapped in concrete, my brain is rusty,
Lamenting the curious learner I used to be.
Devoid of motivation, barren and dusty,
Doubts about my worthiness to earn this degree.

Assurances from friends and family, "honey you're doing just fine,"
The carefully constructed façade is holding true.
Ignorant to my decline, which though outwardly benign,
Has infected me like the flu.

"Comparison is the thief of joy" - easy to proclaim,
Though competition for limited seats is inherent.
There is no choice but to play the game,
To the algorithm we are all adherent.

Thoughts stray to the past and future, never living in the now,
Tasks to complete, deadlines to meet, the hours pass by.
Dread-filled mornings, great stress behind a furrowed brow,
Something is missing, I can't keep dismissing, where did things go awry?

A new city, new classmates, friends and family left behind,
I yearn for the familiarity of home.
Relationship strain, housing strife, facing the unrelenting grind,
Solace only in a woodland roam.

But underlying every thunderstorm are blue skies,
I have good people on my side.
Folks around whom you can drop the guise,
Have seen the high and lows, laughed and cried.

The clinical environment becomes a welcome change of pace,
Trial by fire, stepping up to the plate.
The theoretical made real when tied to a name and face,
Skills to acquire, incentive to study late.

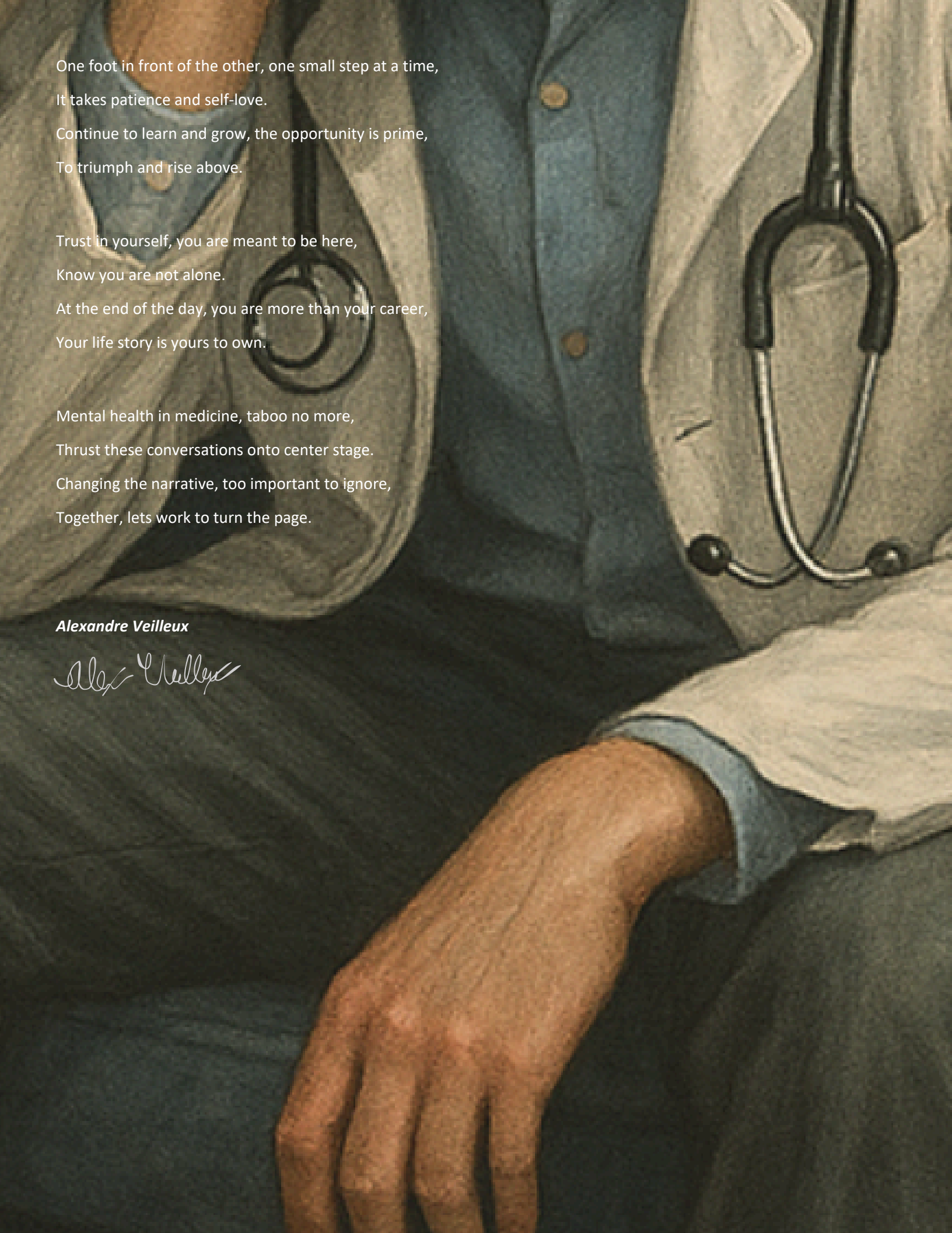
We're all in this together, finding our way,
Medical trainees navigating a hidden curriculum.
Asking questions when unsure, admitting our naivete,
"On that CT abdo, is that a diverticulum?"

My worth is inherent, distinct from medical school,
It need not be all-consuming.
Battles with my own brain, the perpetual duel,
Into young adulthood I am blooming.

Mental wellness is not a static target achieved,
Faced with good days and bad, the natural ebb and flow.
Dispel these notions preconceived,
It takes consistent effort, anxiety the ever-present foe.

My story is not unique, one amongst countless others,
Our paths related, yet distinct.
Bound by medicine, sisters and brothers,
Similarly fated, inextricably linked.

Tend to your mental health, the path ahead is trying,
And at times you may stumble.
Accept help when offered, no sense in denying,
Overburdened foundations crumble.



One foot in front of the other, one small step at a time,
It takes patience and self-love.
Continue to learn and grow, the opportunity is prime,
To triumph and rise above.

Trust in yourself, you are meant to be here,
Know you are not alone.
At the end of the day, you are more than your career,
Your life story is yours to own.

Mental health in medicine, taboo no more,
Thrust these conversations onto center stage.
Changing the narrative, too important to ignore,
Together, let's work to turn the page.

Alexandre Veilleux

Alex Veilleux

Somewhere in Quebec

Madeline Hubbard

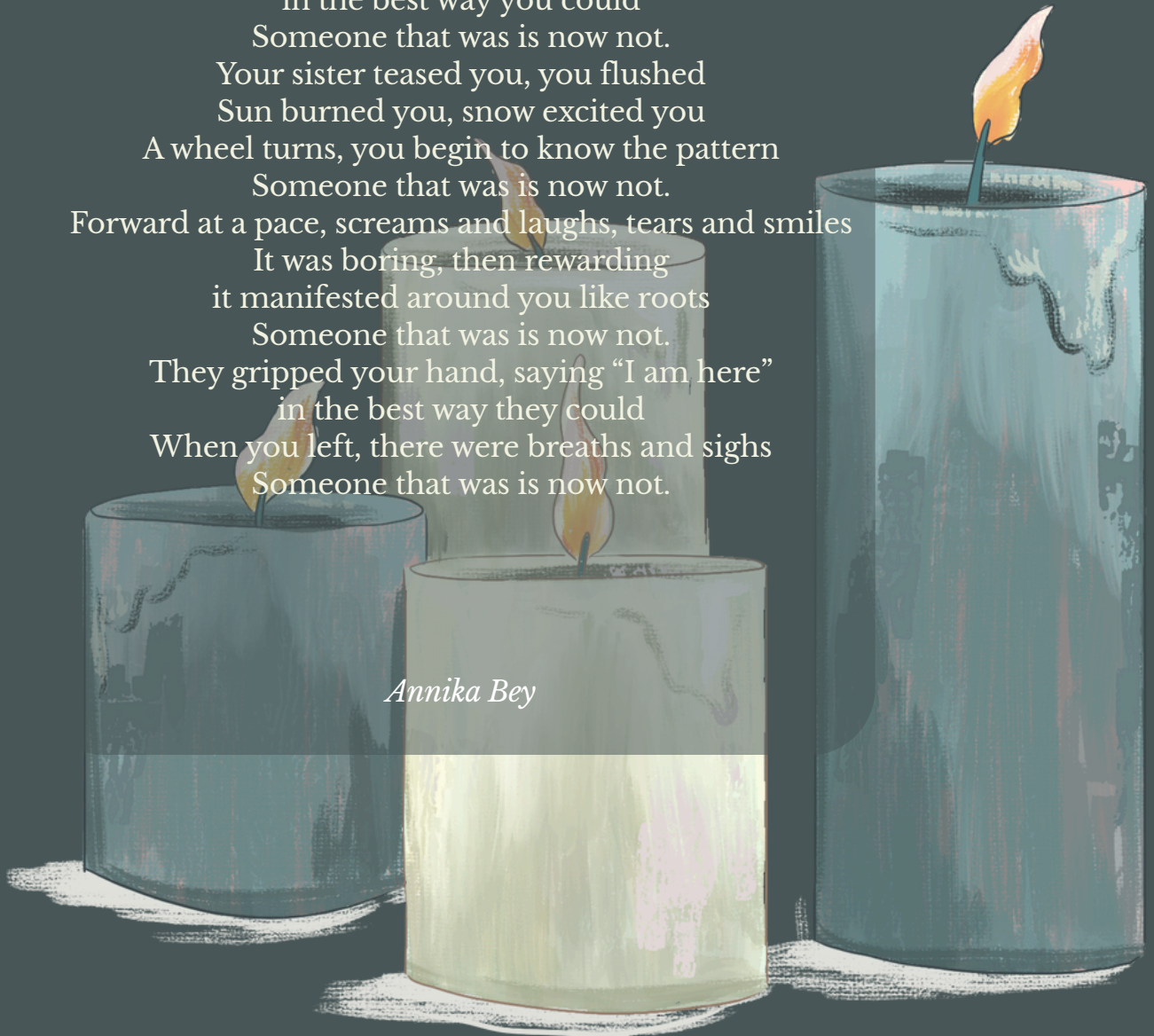


The view depicts Ivry-sur-le-Lac, Quebec. It was originally captured by Adam Ptack (a fellow c2026!) in a stunning photograph. After seeing his photo on an instagram story, I immediately felt compelled to pick up my paintbrushes again after a lengthy hiatus. The result is shown here! Painted with Acrylic on canvas paper.

ANATOMY LAB

Someone that was is now not.
When you arrived, there were breaths and sighs
You gripped their fingers, saying "I am here"
in the best way you could
Someone that was is now not.
Your sister teased you, you flushed
Sun burned you, snow excited you
A wheel turns, you begin to know the pattern
Someone that was is now not.
Forward at a pace, screams and laughs, tears and smiles
It was boring, then rewarding
it manifested around you like roots
Someone that was is now not.
They gripped your hand, saying "I am here"
in the best way they could
When you left, there were breaths and sighs
Someone that was is now not.

Annika Bey





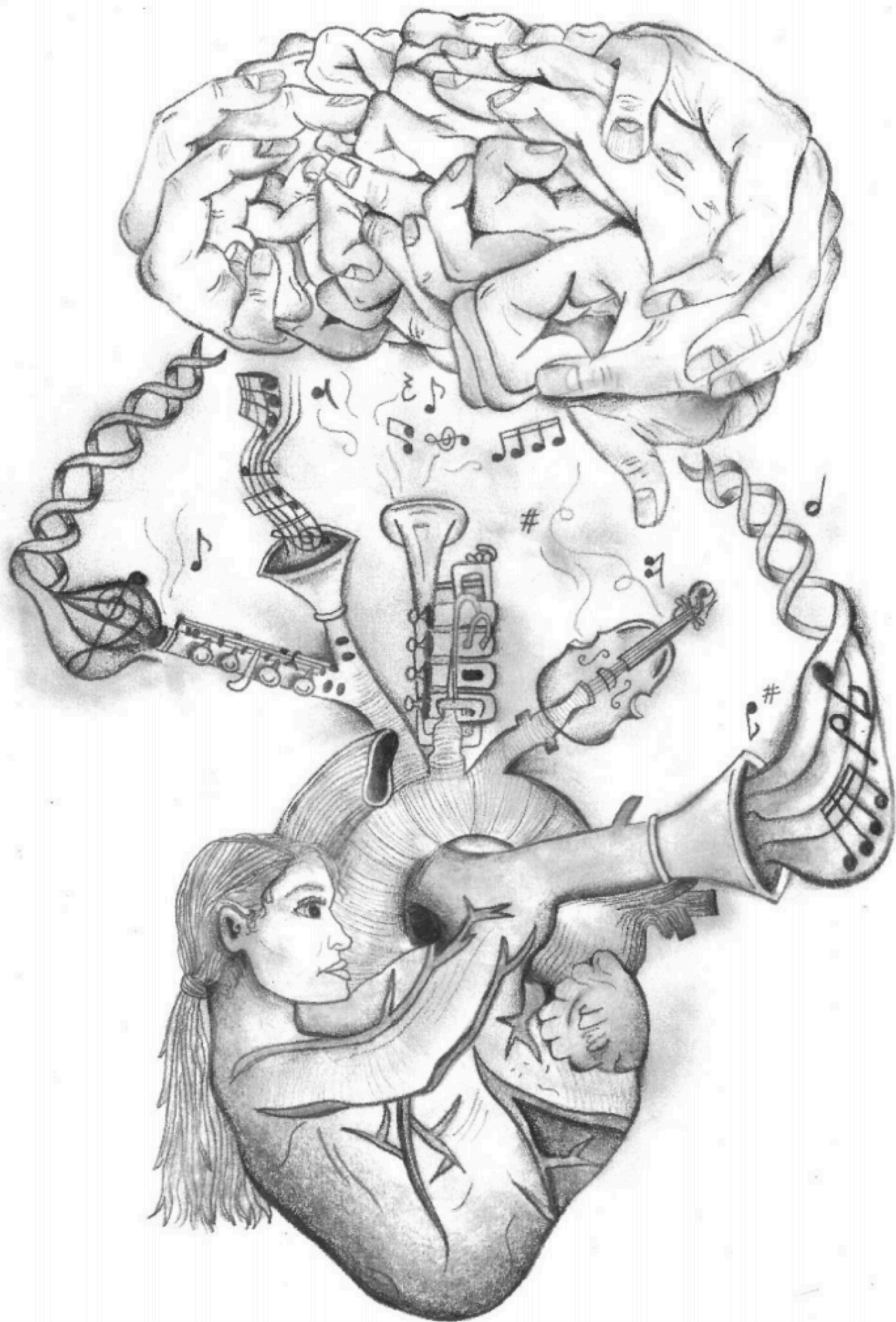
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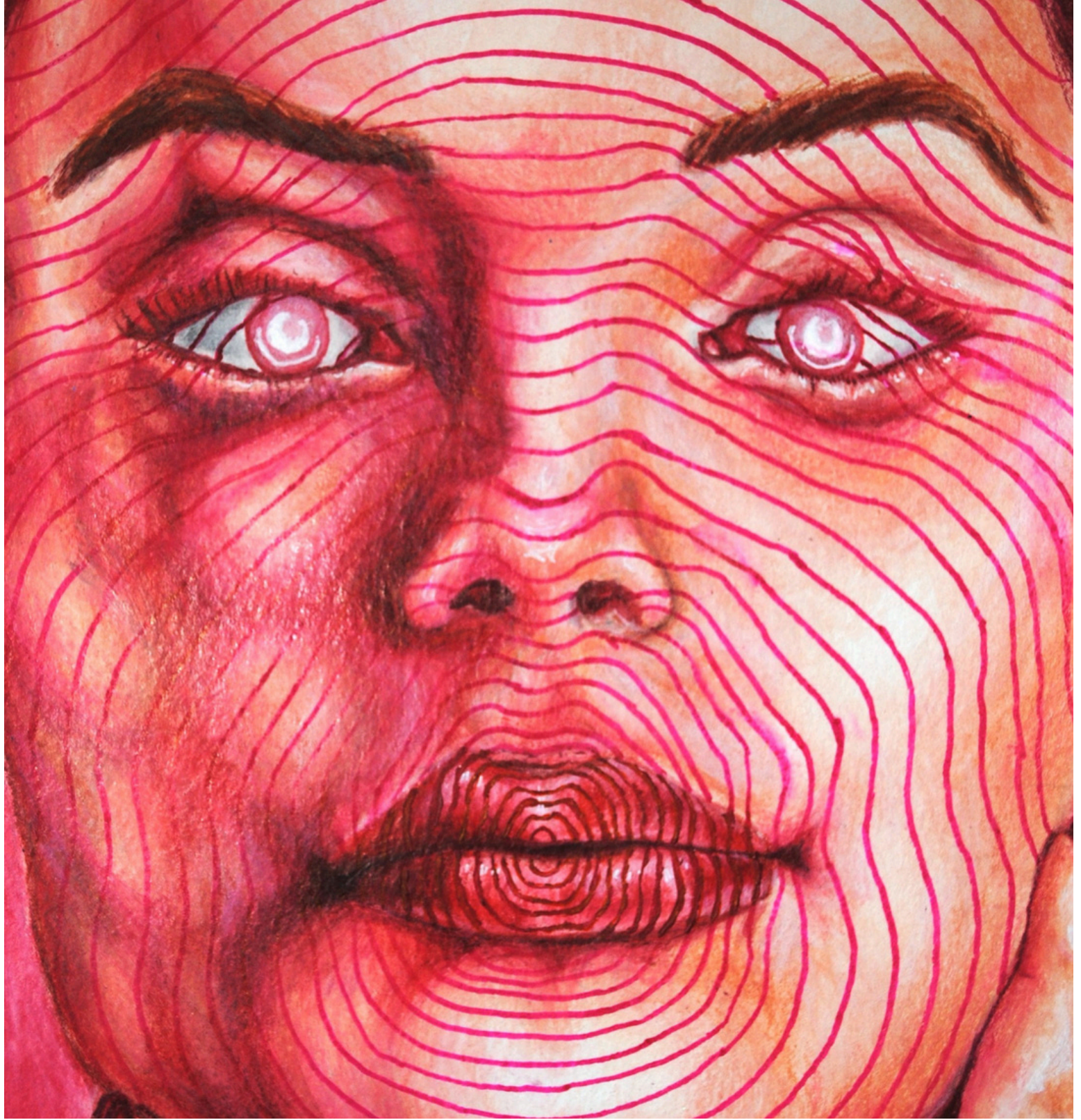
Grasping for Life

Ainsley Johnstone

In this artwork, I explore the interplay between human intelligence, creativity, and compassion—qualities I believe are essential to the practice of medicine. The heart, cradled by a woman emerging from the right atrium, embodies a commitment to protect and nurture life. The brain, woven together by hands, represents the collective effort and unity that drive medical progress and intellectual development. Musical instruments represent the arteries, symbolizing the emotional resonance and humanity that art brings to science. This piece reflects my belief that healing is both an intellectual and deeply empathetic pursuit, one that harmonizes knowledge with compassion.



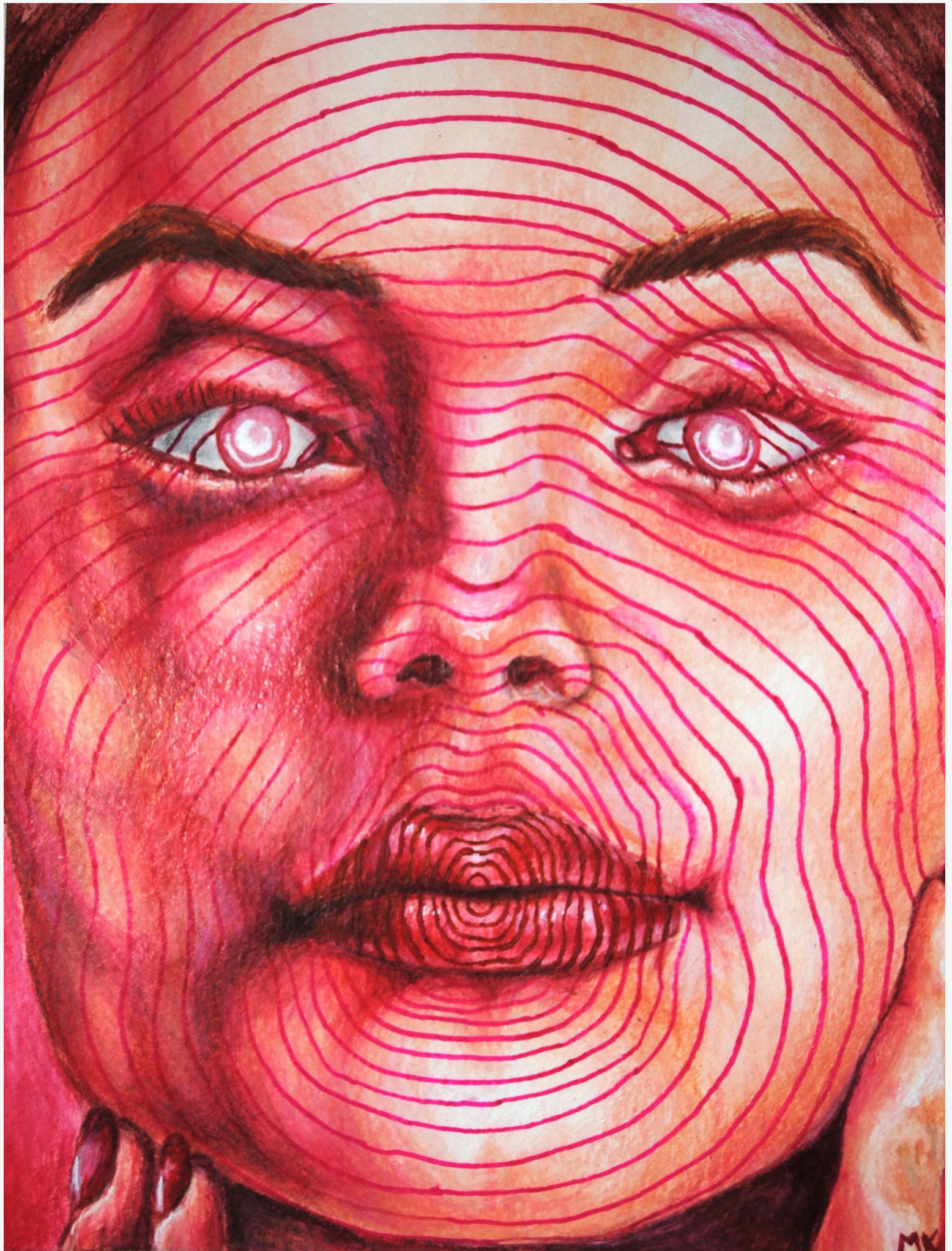




TENSION

MADELINE KOMAR

A work of pencil crayon, ink and acrylic





ALL YOU REALLY NEED

MADELINE KOMAR

Acrylic on Canvas





CADIUM RED STUDY I

MADELINE KOMAR

Acrylic, pencil crayon and ink



HOW DOES THAT MAKE YOU FEEL?

PARM PAL SINGH TOOR

THIS WORK DEPICTS THE COMPLEX INTERACTIONS BETWEEN OPPOSING IDEAS. IT AIMS TO CAPTURE THE TRANSITION BETWEEN "GOOD" AND "BAD" ELEMENTS. THE VIEWERS ARE INVITED TO KEEP AN OPEN MIND AND QUESTION IF "GOOD" IS TRANSITIONING INTO "BAD" OR VICE VERSA. AT THE SAME, THE VIEWERS ARE CHALLENGED TO REFLECT ON THE POSSIBILITY FOR GROWTH THAT SUCH TRANSITIONS OFFER.

WATER FALLS

Donna Gao

Please enjoy this watercolor piece dedicated to a
very memorable hike in Hamilton, the city of
waterfalls

