

The Mess She Was

The seams of life
wove a creation of my own:
a frail being
brought from my womb to my home.

My second chance, she was,
her capabilities limitless;
for if only she knew
what she tore undone.

A washout she grew,
blue hair and tattoos—
could she not see
all she could be?

“Her mother won’t listen,
that girl’s imprisoned.”
But they could not view,
the sight that I knew.

I’d shove and I’d push
each piece into place.
It had to be done—
she must not disgrace.

The pieces would fall—
she never put in her all,
for she’d only declare
“I am not your doll!”

Ignoring her plea,
she turned from me.
All that lay left,
a wasted opportunity.

A “doll” she declared,
was that really fair?
Arose from my heart,
a feeling of despair.

—

Molded to be flawless,
I had always been faultless...
the snap never failed
to quell my volition.

My efforts insufficient,
a failure I became;
all that remained
was what I could be...

What could I be?

Pursuer of the arts,
forced to play darts:
each movement deliberate,
no room for omission.

But what could I be
if I wasn't me,
if I were born free,
could I be anything?

If my faults weren't berate
and sparks were embraced,
would I have found more
outside these constraints?

The bindings that held me
had turned me a pawn,
forced to pursue
a perpetual aim.

For every mistake,
they put me to shame—
forced to confinement
until I repaid.

—

What's so bad about
dyed hair and tattoos
if they reflect who we are,
who we long to be?

My outdated restraints
held my daughter in place;
I can finally see
their futility.

My second chance at perfection
has become all she can be;
she's passing her classes
and pursuing her passions.

True to herself,
that girl made a stand,
tearing out the seams
of decades of damage.

For once I can see
what it's like to be free,
what it's like to be me,
what it's like to breathe.

Inside

A light emerges
Look inside
Shapes, strokes, faded lines
Quirks and flaws begin to shine
Cracked but whole, unbreakable
Overflowing with
Creativity
Color
Clever
Capable
The cracks let light seep through the seams
It sparks and touches our deepest dreams
Each trembling stroke speaks a truth
Fear, joy, wild youth
Every waking moment
Every breath and silent scream
Nothing but a blur
Falling out of place
Coming together
The door starts to close
A pretender surrounded by void
Fit in
Conform
Belong
Darkness

“Perspective” *by Kyla DeCambre*

My curious eyes search for a muse

For the canvas that is my soul.

I copy and copy what they say makes me better—

Her porcelain skin, his white smile.

My sense of self slowly fading into obscurity

Is their acceptance worth my identity?

Is it?

There are flaws in my design

Differences in my thought

But does that make me any less of a person?

My skin was not painted with the same brush as yours,

Nor was the song of my heart

Composed of the same instruments as yours.

But all our songs together could make

A masterpiece if we tried.

What makes a trait imperfect?

Does my skin, though decorated with spots and bumps,

Not protect me?

Does my smile, though chipped and worn,

Not do what it was made for?

Am I not a human, regardless of how I look?

You base my worth on your values,

But I am mortal, nonetheless.

Would a uniform heart and mind

Make me a better human?

Make me more worthy of love? Of morality?

Or does it just make me worthy of your approval?

Could my imperfections, if I stopped calling them such,

Be more powerful than I think?

Could they, if considered with care,

Bring new perspective to the world?

numbers on a scale

Adrienne Huynh - 11th grade literature

I am five years old and watching Mama stand on a scale.

One hundred L-B-S, it reads. One hundred is my favorite number because we just learned it in class, and L-B-S is a funny way of putting together letters because it doesn't make any sense, I tell Mama. She frowns at the scale and I'm scared I said something wrong, but then she smiles at me and tells me to go play and learn more numbers.

She is so pretty, like a model, maybe, except the models on-screen and in the fancy magazines Mama always buys never look like us, with our yellow-tinged skin and black hair that Mama keeps coloring brown. My hair is still pretty though, Mama always tells me, but I think maybe when I grow up I can dye it brown to look pretty like her.

(Maybe when I grow up I can be nice like she's always nice to me and make her not feel sad about numbers on a scale?)

I am seven, and Mama is walking outside with me.

She says that it's good to get sunlight because it makes you happy, and I think it's true, because ever since she started walking and running outside, she smiles more and frowns less at the scale.

"Aren't you hot?" I ask her, because she's wearing full-length sleeves and full-length pants in the summer sun. I expect her to ignore me because maybe it's one of those weird adult things that Mama always tells me I'll understand when I'm older.

"Yes," she says, surprising me, and pats my head. "I'm really hot, but I'm also a little fatter here, and nobody wants to see that from me," and I know enough to know that's the end of that conversation.

(But really, I wouldn't mind seeing that at all, because mama is so pretty and her weight seems to make her so sad, even though the idea that she's fat at all with her model-skinny body is a little funny.)

I am ten, and Mom is bringing me to the doctor for my yearly check-up.

"All healthy," Dr. Smiley says, winking at me. "Just remember to eat your veggies!"

"I will," I reply, even though I already always do, because Mom always eats salads, and whatever Mom eats, I have to eat too.

"I'm worried about her weight," my mom cuts in.

"She's right where she needs to be," Dr. Smiley says, and suddenly she's not smiling as much anymore despite her name.

"Isn't she a bit heavy for her age," my mom presses, but Dr. Smiley shakes her head, firm.

"She's right where she needs to be."

(In the car, Mom tells me that Americans have different standards than we do. I tell her that I understand, even though she always tells me that I'm just as American as my classmates.)

I am thirteen, looking at my body in the mirror.

Girls in my class have big chests and a small waist and an hourglass figure, but all I can see is flatness and disappointment. The scale in my room stares at me like it knows that it's my own fault I don't look like my friends.

"I made cookies," my dad shouts from downstairs, and I am so, so tempted. But—

"A moment on the lips, a lifetime on the hips," I remember my mom telling me, and so I pretend to have not heard my dad.

"They're your favorite," he says sometime later, and I feel bad, because cooking for us is the way that he shows love.

"Sorry," I say, hugging him tightly. "I feel nauseous."

"Get well soon," he tells me.

(Maybe I'll finally be well when I look in the mirror and feel happy.)

I am fourteen, and I weigh myself every day.

My friends are all trying new diets every month. I count my calories and wish I was thirteen again, when I was skinner and didn't realize it.

I don't wear tank tops without a jacket, because they make my arms look big, or shorts or skirts because they make my legs look big, or oversized clothes because they make my midsection look big—and if I ever find clothing that I do like, it's almost a guarantee that my mom will say how it would look better on me if I was skinnier.

("Americans can get away with more than we can," my mom says, "because when people see Asians, they expect to see someone docile and small and dainty." I tell her how unfair that is, and she raises an eyebrow at me.

"Life's unfair," she says. "Deal with it.")

I am fifteen, and I haven't had a cookie in months.

"You look like a sausage in that outfit," my mom's voice reminds me, and so I put the sweets away, back into the pantry, and reach for another sip of water.

Sometimes the urge to eat one is so strong that I almost cry, even though I know it's dumb and it's for my own good. If I ate one, I might not stop, and that's what scares me the most, because it might mean that I truly am the pig that my mom calls me.

She means well, I know; they're all jokes, but I don't find them very funny. She just wants me to be skinny and look pretty and feel good about myself, the way she was never able to, but what about what I want?

(I don't even know what I want; I think about my friends who can eat whatever they want and wear anything they want and boys will fawn over them no matter what they do, and I want that rose-tinted life so badly that it hurts; I think about hating myself and missing out on the best parts of my teenage years over something so temporary and shallow when I know I can never be like them, and I run faster on the treadmill until it drowns out my thinking and the unfairness of it all.)

I am sixteen, and more than anything, I am tired.

I am tired of comparing myself to others; I am tired of spending so much energy hating myself when others already do that enough; I am tired of letting other peoples' opinions affect me so much, even if I love the person.

Maybe I will never be able to look at myself in a mirror and be happy with how I look; maybe I will always be afraid of numbers on a scale. Maybe I will always eat and feel guilty, but maybe one day I will also be able to acknowledge that I am good enough, that I do not need to be perfect in order to deserve love.

(Maybe I will choose healing and break the cycle of self-hatred that has been pushed onto me since birth; maybe I will choose to accept myself in a life where I have had so little power to choose anything that has happened to me.)

Perfectly Imperfect

imperfect
im perfect
-at least i was perfect..
out the womb, into the world
with not one sin to my name...flawless
un-flawed. devoid of wrongdoing
the embodiment of beauty that they wrote about,
fought over,
sang about.

All of the above being nonexistent after my first word...
our first word.

made up of different shapes and lines,
curves and patterns
We're *Perfectly Imperfect* .
it is the nature of nature.

a highly glorified subject – the focal point of a multitude of works.
nature although not perfect in micro, evokes great emotions.
yields life.

despite the imperfect nature of humans, we too do the same.
evoke emotions.
create life.

only when death does us part we begin to see the accumulation of
imperfections that makes the perfect being.

so appreciate the imperfect now.

in being imperfect,
im perfect.