



sunlight

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ATHENS - ELBERT - GREENE - WALTON



PHI THETA KAPPA
HONOR SOCIETY

Editors' Introduction

Taking classes, teaching classes, working—all of us at Athens Technical College, no matter our role, are here to serve our families, ourselves, and our futures. We work hard, and that hard work unites us. What might be harder to see about us, but equally important, is that Athens Technical College is a creative place as well. This inaugural issue of *Sunlight*, an arts and literature magazine for and by the ATC community, proves it. Here you will find vibrant artwork, honest personal truths, and beautiful, inventive language. Whoever reads these pages will see that ATC is not only a place to get degrees and paychecks: it is also where our real lives unfold.

In the poems, stories, essays, pictures, and photos that follow, one theme is a profound, empathetic understanding of hardship as a valuable human experience. Abigail Campbell begins the journal by reaching out to anyone who feels themselves struggling at school: “If you’re here at Athens Tech and you feel like you’re so far behind everyone else,” writes Abigail Campbell, “you’re not. You can’t plan life. You are exactly where you are supposed to be.” Similarly, in “Society,” Kameria Allen paints the differences between the image we have of ourselves and the face we present to the world. This vivid, savvy painting presents one face dark and one brightly painted. Which is which? Erica Ellis, in “Depression Personified,” speaks unflinchingly in the voice of a devastating, and too common, malady with which few at Athens Tech are unfamiliar. The poem’s dark intensity, its taunting rhymes, serve to highlight both the power of the illness and that of the survivor: “I’ve known you for a while / I’ve stolen every smile / I’ve given you tears to fill a mile / Yet you pull yourself together in a neat little pile.” Look, also, at the vibrant bluegreens of comic artist Levi Latocha’s “Barely Floating On”—we, the readers and viewers, are here, cheering on whoever struggles to make it by.

Even as they reckon with life’s suffering, the pieces in this journal also offer myriad visions of joy. Often, this joy is artistic, an exuberance that comes from creativity’s exalted attention. “My sight has awakened / The very air is on fire,” writes Sarah Corley, who offers us generous revelations of word and image. These authors and artists transport us: in Brice Hollifield’s “One with the Wind,” the readers are gently released from the difficulty of the workday into a space of light and poetry: “How I wish to be wind. Unthoughtful as it flows.” Similarly, in Jenna Lunsford’s photo series, “Yellowstone,” we are awake to the precision of vision, each pine needle sharp in the show whose burn we are almost able to feel on our skin. And in Ashlee Hardee’s “A Day at the Ballards,” we are in an enticing, unfamiliar landscape, friendly and human despite its newness and dipped in kind purples and blue.

K. Chanta's "Hey Moon" brings us into solitary magic of a moonlit night and its "Winding roads, full of trees moving in fast motion," the enchanted bond that links a person to the world and to spiritual vision. Looking at James Rigsby's photographs of caterpillars induces a similar expansion of mind: in their bright, surprising color, these overlooked creatures remind us that there is nothing in this world worth overlooking.

Finally, beneath it all, these pieces offer a deep sense of connection. In Princess-Mia P's heart-wrenching "Mommy, Can I Stay Home?" a young speaker demonstrates the emotional complexities of growing up. Zidjian Badami and Anastasia Mack, each using rich blues and greens, each independently depict a feminine subject in a state of dignity, beauty, and desire. And Jasmine Francois, in "I AM!!!" unapologetically celebrates the beautiful phenomenon of a self-confidence with good boundaries, declaring: "I AM NOT YOUR SUBJECT OF A CORNY STORY TOLD BY YOU." Madison Isenhour, writing in the third person, describes a "true beauty" as someone who "doesn't save face / Even though she wants to fit in," and Sarah Mitchell, whose illustrations we've placed beside Isenhour's poems, depict women who display this true beauty – beautiful in part because the lines on their faces allow experience to glow through. The issue closes with Manuel Vargas' "Leave the Lights On," an enchanting photo series set in the night of a snowless winter, whose "lights ... illuminate empty spaces of street that are in a premature darkness that only exists in winter." In the quiet of this winter, enjoy the *Sunlight* – it won't be the last.

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Starting Over

by Abigail Campbell

To those starting over,

To my younger self, college was something that I thought I would be finished with in four years, graduating with my friends and trying to navigate the world with my degree in hand. Look out everyone, here comes Abby! It's laughable now because none of that happened. Not even a fraction of that happened. Apart from finishing school and starting my career, I knew I wanted to get married. I met my husband while I was in my second semester at a different school. He was not the reason I dropped out, but if I'm being honest, he did not help. He didn't make me leave or anything like that, he was very supportive. It was my mental health that stole not just my college experience away but ANOTHER college experience. I had left a different school that year before. He made me happy, so I wanted to spend all my extra time with him. So, there I was, a college dropout, 21 years old, and working fast food. Please don't misunderstand me, it's not wrong if people don't go to college, and they just work. It was just very different than how I thought it would be for me. Years went by and I kept working and dating the man I would soon be married to. School drifted to the back of my mind, nothing more than an afterthought. My husband and I talked about me going back one day but for now, we didn't need to worry about that.

I had graduated from fast food to a nice job at a bank. Decent pay, decent hours, it was very nice. I got the job right before my husband and I got married. Our marriage happened in March of 2020, right before COVID shut everything down. We had dated for six years prior to getting married. It was a very solid relationship, we had our ups and downs of course, but we had been through a lot that had nothing to do with our own personal faults. We took it as a sign that we were meant to be because we really had to fight for our relationship at times. It's amazing how you can know someone for so long, but they can still surprise you. One night in August 2020, my husband looked at me and told me that I should move out. He said I could take the dogs, but I needed to leave. I will spare you the details about the fights that followed, the begging, the screaming, the assumptions. I will tell you that it was not because of someone else. Basically, it boiled down to mental health. In October 2020, after eight months of marriage, I left. I tried between August and October to fight for us like we had fought before, but it wasn't enough.

I'm not writing this for sympathy or to passive-aggressively bash my ex-husband. I have accepted what happened and I'm happy now. I'm writing this for two reasons:

1. No matter where you are in life, if you're 27 like me, or 57, it is never too late to start over. I decided shortly after I left my husband that I was going to use this as an opportunity to rewrite some chapters of my life that I thought slipped away. I applied to Athens Tech, and it was exactly what I needed. So, if you're reading this and you're not sure if you should or can do the thing, trust me, you can do the thing.

If you're here at Athens Tech and you feel like you're so far behind everyone else, you're not. You can't plan life. You are exactly where you are supposed to be. There may be hurdles but you can do anything you put your mind to.

2. you have done the thing, whatever the thing is, and you need to back away, take a break or revamp your approach, do that too. Your mental health is so important. One of the things that has always hindered me is my major depression, bipolar II, and anxiety. I have learned that you don't always have to dive in headfirst. If you're here at school and you realize that a full class load is too much, drop it back a few classes. That is exactly what I had to do this semester. No shame! You can still pursue your dreams at a pace that is healthy for you.

I'm always afraid (there's that anxiety again) to write and share things like this. Afterall, who am I to try and give advice and who cares about some random girl's sob story. But when I feel that way, there is always a little voice that tells me that I should. If just one person is comforted or inspired by my story, then being vulnerable is okay. I'm not trying to say I have all the answers, but if you read this, I hope that you too can start over when you need to, regardless of what obstacles stand in your way. If you're like me and you've started over again, you're not alone. We can do this.

I'm rooting for you all, always.

- A

"FOREST BATHING"
MICHAELLA IVIE



The Shift

by Sarah Corley

Like a dragon waking from its slumber
A rebirth long past, I've been sleeping through the
summer

My sight has awakened
The very air is on fire

Every touch upon the earth
It connects me deeper
Straddling the line between present & not

A piece of me is here grounded in the moment
Pieces of my past are scattered on the path

Sifting through what could have been
Like sand running through my fingertips
Seeking, searching, desperate for the thread

Tangible to my spirit
In tune with my very being

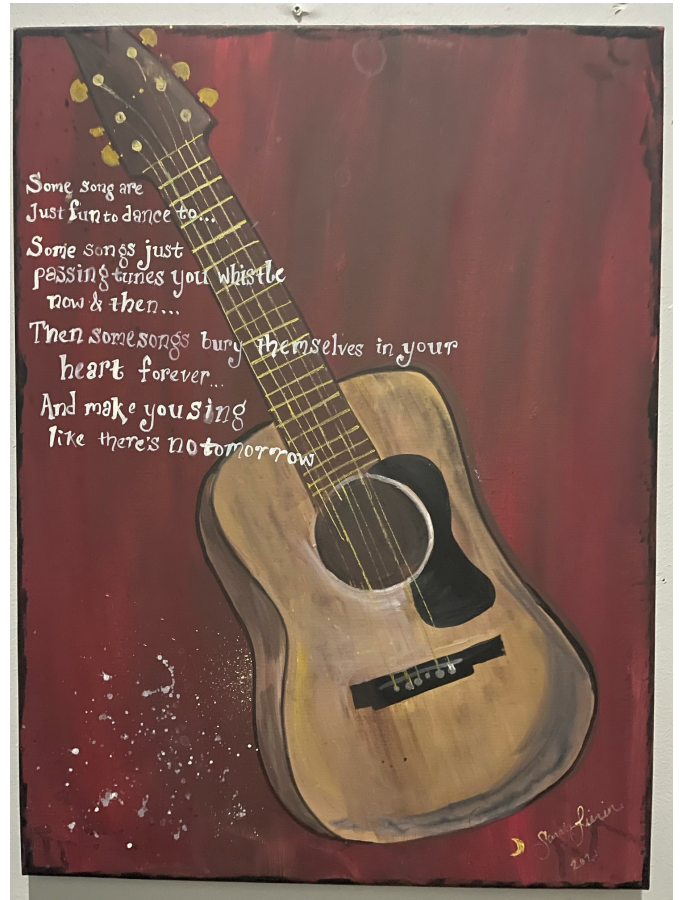
When my mind tries to fight it, I stumble.
When I accept and embrace and sift, I see.

The light and the dark
That which tries to pull me back

They cannot have me
I have awakened too fully
They cannot win this battle

As I step more fully into faith
Trusting my Creator to guide my steps

I become



Artwork by Sarah Corley

Carefully Careless Thoughts

by Sarah Corley

In a world that is copy & paste, create.

When ego is cast away and true humility is reached then one can become.

Life is but a series of awakenings... only your own mind will limit the number.

Creator, create! Why do you hold to these man made walls? The extent of which you can expand is immeasurable. Expand. Be set free!

What are these constructs? These bars that hold me captive? Will you not let me out? When you feel me rage?? Will you not let me be unleashed? Artist! Create! You make worlds with your very mind. Why do you sit so docile? Caged?

You are a huntress. Primal in your own right. Why do you allow these man made irons to hold you back? Why do you allow these rules & regulations to create a barrier?

We are not meant to be caged. We are fierce. We are passion. We are fire.

We serve a purpose and if they extinguish us, who will kindle the fire the next time around?

We will not burn to ash. We will instead light the flame and set the world on fire.

SARAH CORLEY



"YELLOWSTONE"
JENNA LUNSFORD

SUNLIGHT



"YELLOWSTONE"
JENNA LUNSFORD

SUNLIGHT



One with the Wind

by Brice Hollifield

How I wish to be wind.
Unthoughtful as it flows,
across waters of ocean
and through flowers of rose.

How I wish to be water:
to have resolve so bold,
refining over land and all in its hold.

How fire burns bright
and darkness turns to cold,
simply with purpose
do they forever unfold.

How I wish to be wind.
Inevitable it flows,
For seemingly forever
Back unto the rose.

"A DAY IN THE BALLARDS"
ASHLEY HARDEE

SUNLIGHT



114 Days

by K. Chantá

It's been 114 days since you walked out the door,
I don't know how many days I blamed myself for not doing more.

Maybe if I told you to move around more your lungs would've been clearer,
If I would've known the end was coming I would've risked my health to be nearer.

I let the blame go knowing I did the best I could do,
It doesn't stop this current meltdown right now that I'm going through.

Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, New Year's Eve, New Year Day, I didn't have your
presence,
Those holidays will never be the same for me without your essence.

I try not looking to see if your car is in the driveway coming home,
It always meant you were here but now it's a reminder that I'm alone.

I need a hug a big warm one but I'm afraid to ask anyone for that request,
Because I know it's nothing like yours and I may break down into a mess.

Grateful for the ones distracting my thoughts daily even when they don't know,
Truth is I'm lost and don't know where to go.

I talk a good game, laugh a good laugh, put on a brave face,
Underneath it all is a pain, a hurt that will never fade.

School has been a distraction but semester ends in 10 days,
Followed by the first Mother's Day without you 22 days away.

I want to be alone but yet I want company,
Your brother's the one that got me crying and in my feelings at the moment, ain't that
funny?

I don't want to be bothered with flowers or anything in nature,
But I feel like honoring you that way cause last year's garden was major.

Saw the last quarter of GA's G-Day and you crossed my mind,
Who's gonna plan their Saturday for college football with me this time?

So many things have happened since you drove away that evening,
Something you saw that I thought was misleading.

I ask almost every night for your guidance through life,
As of now I don't know if I'm doing anything right.

I took nothing for granted and maybe that's what gets me out of bed,
I just hope you didn't leave and I left anything unsaid.

114 days since I watched you put on your jacket, grab your keys and purse,
93 days since I got the call they say time heals but at times the pain feels worse.

HEY MOON

by K. Chantá

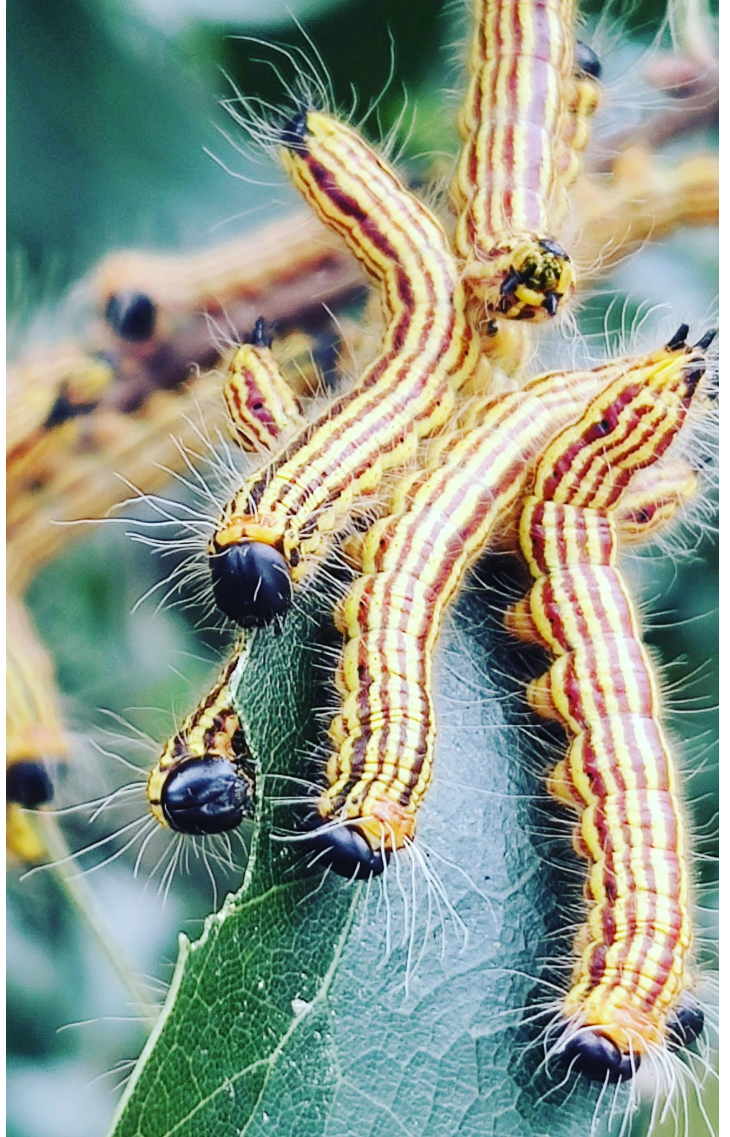
I couldn't help but notice you
 It seemed as if you were screaming for
 my attention
 As I made my way home near midnight
 Like almost every weekend
 Traveling down the countryside, less
 gentrified part of town
 Winding roads, full of trees moving in fast
 motion as I pass by
 Dark , streetlights there aren't many
 Bright lights to watch for deer and any
 possible pedestrians
 But tonight, I didn't need them
 The sky was a midnight blue but I noticed
 a flashlight
 Ah, Hey Moon
 I see you up there
 Shining
 Glowing
 Energy mesmerizing
 Lighting up the street, my path, my
 journey home
 It's nice out tonight
 A few days from the first day of summer
 I pull my wig and toss it in the passenger's
 seat
 Rolling down the windows taking in the
 fresh air of nature
 No music playing
 I glance up to you
 I couldn't help the smile suddenly but
 slowly spread across my face
 You know how to capture my attention
 I wonder if you know your magic
 I wonder if you know mine
 Do you know my intentions

Are you willing to share yours with me
 tomorrow night
 When you're full
 I turn on my street and I can no longer
 see you
 The trees hang over into the street
 blocking my view
 Pulling into the driveway my eyes search
 frantically
 I can't find you
 I get out
 Looking up in this direction
 To my right
 To my left
 Have you left me Moon
 Did you decide I've had enough for
 tonight
 And then, it's like you whispered, "Turn
 around."
 I spun on my heels and there you were
 In the open
 Staring at me as I gazed at you
 Ah, Hey Moon
 I see you up there
 Shining
 Glowing
 Energy mesmerizing

JAMES RIGSBY



JAMES RIGSBY



Mommy, Can I Stay Home?

by Princess-Mia P

Mommy can I stay home?
 Because I don't want to be alone.
 I know I said I wanted independence
 But I think I only said that because of the
 emotions
 That I was feeling during that moment.
 Because the moment I stood waiting in the
 airport line with my ticket,
 The ticket that will give me my freedom,
 I couldn't help but wonder if I really wanted it.
 Mommy can I stay home?
 Can the goodbyes be momentarily
 postponed?
 I know I want to live my own life
 I know I want to have fun and strive
 But I don't want to part like this.
 You didn't want me to leave,
 We both were screaming
 And crying
 And the memory stings.
 Of course, I know
 You will let me go.
 So why do I feel this low?
 Mommy can I stay home?
 Can you hug me and never let me go?
 An apartment miles away
 Doesn't say
 Welcome home, are you feeling okay,
 after work each day.
 My friends don't really know the real me.
 So, they can't invoke the same feeling
 As that of my family.
 Mommy, can I stay home?
 Do I have to grow?
 Yes, I do
 At least that's what I told you.
 But my dumb pride
 Is keeping me from saying
 Mom I feel lonely,
 I want to see the world out there

I feel wasted here.
 I have no friends
 And my soul can no longer pretend
 That living this life is okay for me again.
 Mom I want to feel something
 And staying in the nest I'll find nothing.
 I feel caged
 And I can no longer bear to remain.
 But I don't know how to tell you out right
 Because every time I try
 I worried you won't understand or that
 you'll get hurt.
 I worry I'll leave with you being mad
 And even when I don't say it, I don't want
 that.
 But now I'm sitting in my apartment's chair
 Looking at the new world out there.
 Looking at the fall leaves and the clouds
 that block the sun rays.
 And I can't help but feel a bit lonely in my
 heart
 When I think of how far you are.
 Mommy, can you leave the doors of home
 open?
 So, I know that there's one place I can go to
 where I don't have to be perfect?
 Mommy did you ever know how much I
 loved you?
 I know I can't ask that if I know the answer
 The real question is, why did I let that go
 overdue?
 Why didn't I make that my priority to tell
 you?
 And now I'm afraid I never will
 Because your heart has gone still
 Now your ears will never hear
 What my dumb pride withheld from you for
 years.
 Because I'm really, really afraid of being
 alone.

"SOCIETY"
KAMERIA ALLEN

SUNLIGHT



She is a true beauty.

by Madison Isenhour

She bleeds underneath her skin like everyone else,
Yet she's special.
She doesn't save face
Even though she wants to fit in.
She'd rather just be love for who she is
She's seen more in her life than anyone knows.
She's not afraid to say she's been depressed.
Been hurt, laughed at, and traumatized.
All by people she thought were to be valued.
She values what she learned from those experiences.
She has all the makings of an angel without wings.
She is not just beautiful,
She is a true beauty.



Artwork by Sarah Mitchell

SARAH MITCHELL



SARAH MITCHELL



I AM!!!

by Jasmine Francois

I AM NOT YOUR PRE-PACKAGED, PRE-CONCEPTIONS ALL WRAPPED IN A BOW.
 I AM NOT YOUR SUBJECT OF A CORNY STORY TOLD BY YOU.
 I AM NOT THE NAMES YOU CALL ME, BECAUSE YOU'RE MAD.
 I AM NOT A JOKE YOU REPEAT OVER AND OVER, JUST TO MAKE ME SAD.

I AM NOT SOMEONE WHO IS HIDDEN UNDER COVERS.
 I HAVE A GREAT PERSONALITY
 BUT PEOPLE DON'T WANT TO SEE THE PERSON DEEP DOWN INSIDE OF ME.
 I AM NOT GOING TO SAY WHAT I FEEL EVERYTIME YOU BELITTLE ME.

I AM NOT THE GIRL YOU FEEL YOU WANT TO SEE.
 I AM NOT UGLY, BECUASE YOUR SELF-ESTEEM IS LOW.
 I AM NOT LIKE OTHER CHICKS WHO PUT ON A SHOW.
 I AM NOT HANDICAP, JUST BECAUSE YOU SAY SO.

I AM NOT YOUR ORDINARY GIRL.
 I AM TIRED OF PEOPLE'S CRITICISM.
 I AM ABOVE ALL OF HOW PEOPLE SEE ME ON THE OUTSIDE.
 I AM CONFIDENT IN ALL I DO.

I AM MORE EXPENSIVE THAN ANY SHOE.
 I AM KIND, SWEET, AND A DIVINE GIFT FROM GOD.
 I AM MORE THAN THESE OTHER GIRLS WHO SHOW OFF THEIR HOT BODS.
 I CAN BE YOUR BEST FRIEND OR YOUR WORST ENEMEY.

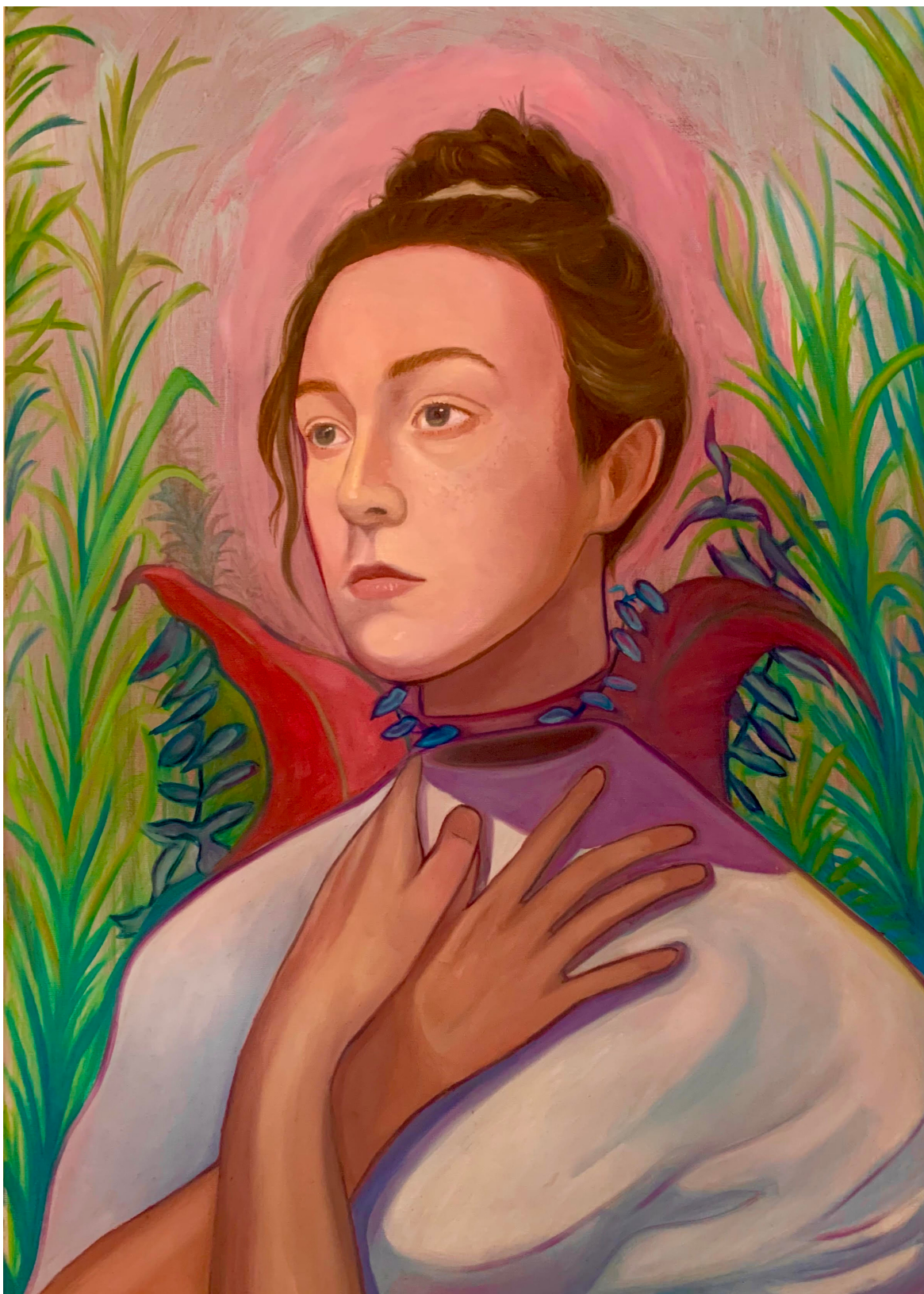
I AM SICK AND TIRED OF MEN WHO HIDE THEIR TRUE FEELINGS OF ME.
 I AM ABOVE HOW YOU SEE ME AS BEING THAT "BIG GIRL"
 I AM A HEALTHY CHILD IN THIS CRUEL CRUEL WORLD.
 I AM JASMINE FRANCOIS, BORN WITH A DISABILITY.

BUT DON'T GET IT TWISTED, I CAN FEND FOR MYSELF IN THIS TIME OF IMPOSSIBLE
 POSSIBILITIES.
 I AM THAT AFRICAN-AMERICAN QUEEN, THAT DOES NOT LIKE TO STAND IN BETWEEN,
 HOPES AND DREAMS.
 I AM MY MOTHER'S CHILD AND I WILL BE MORE THAN WHAT SOCIETY SEES OF ME!

I AM ME !

"AUTOPILOT"
ZIDJIAN BADAMI

SUNLIGHT



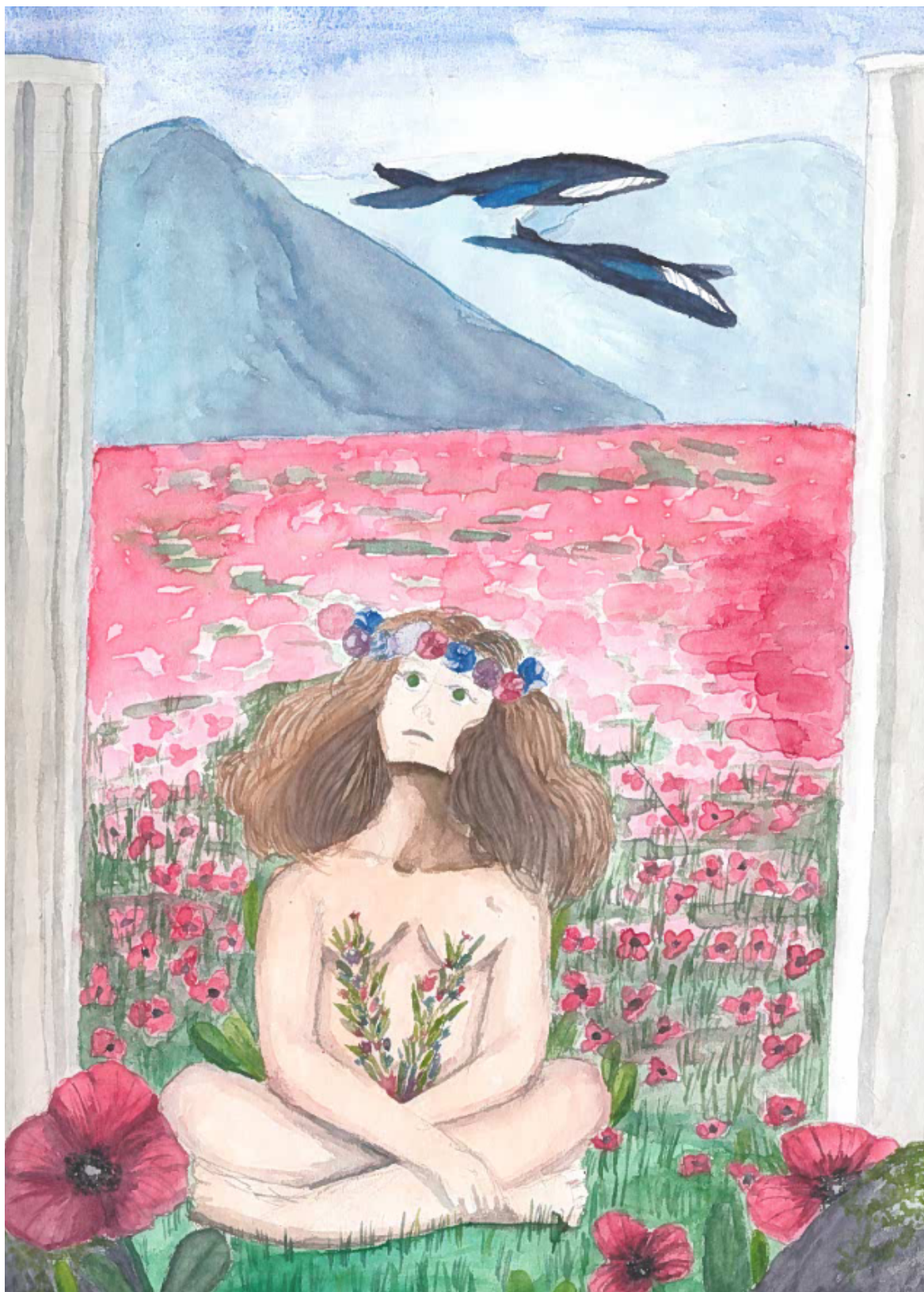
Depression Personified

by Erica Ellis

Just go back to sleep	You and I know it will be the opposite
There is nothing you need	You the submissive and I the dominant
Happiness isn't something you'll achieve	I'll work until you are no longer confident
I spent my time, making you bleed	That there isn't a hope; dark will be predominant
Yes, Depression is what they call me	My Pain will always be prominent
I've known you for a while	I'll never let you go
I've stolen every smile	You'll try to rid of me but I'll only stay low
I've given you tears to fill a mile	I'll come back around and you'll never know
Yet you pull yourself together in a neat little pile	Until you begin to break and I'll rise from below
And grudgingly pull yourself through every trial	Never fully gone, I'm ready to show
But we both know how you really think	
How behind that fake smile, you really shrink	
How you would accept death without a blink	
Yet you pretend that your life is in sync	
And that you will move on, though the pain's distinct	

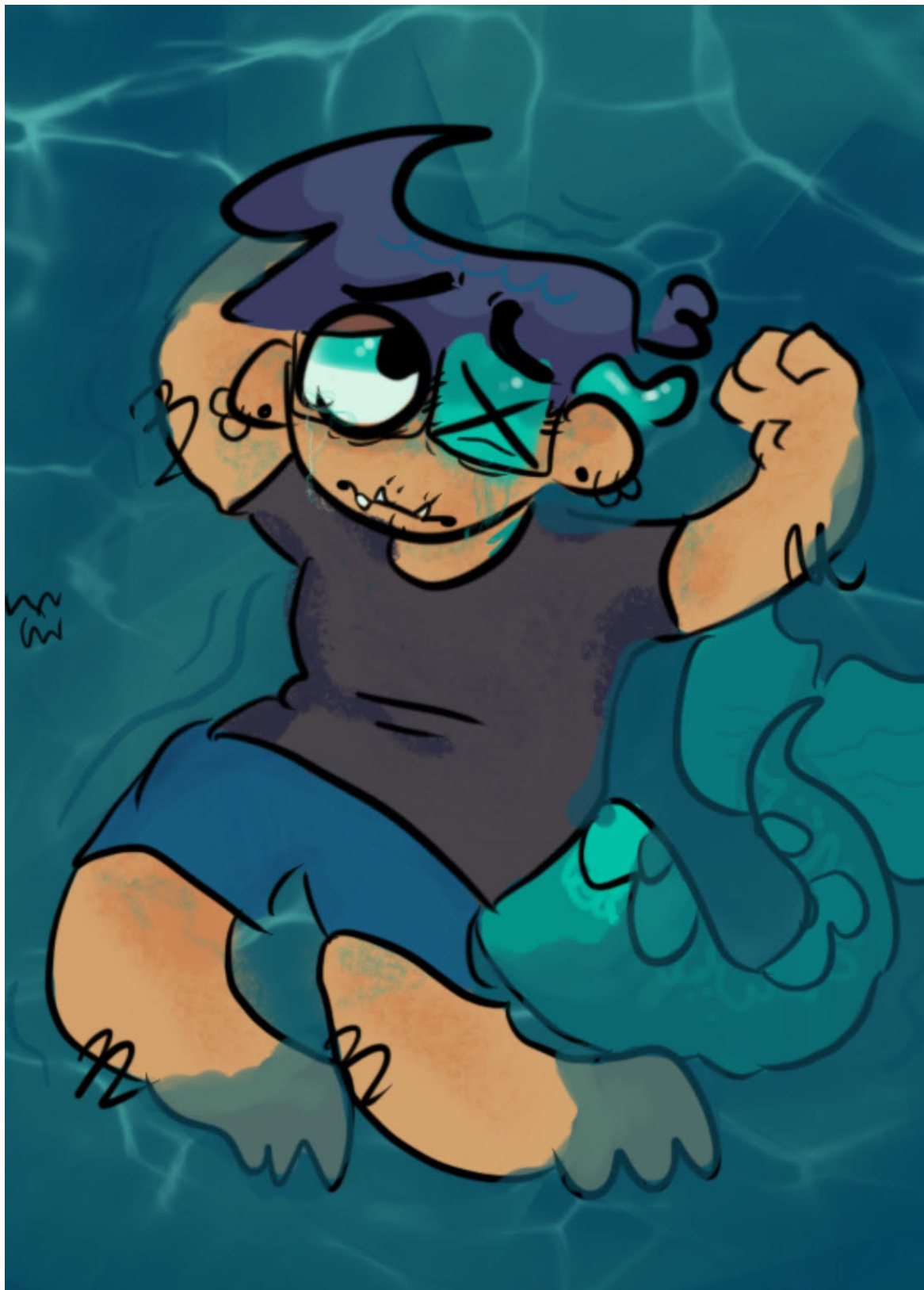
"SHE WAITS"
ANASTASIA MACK

SUNLIGHT



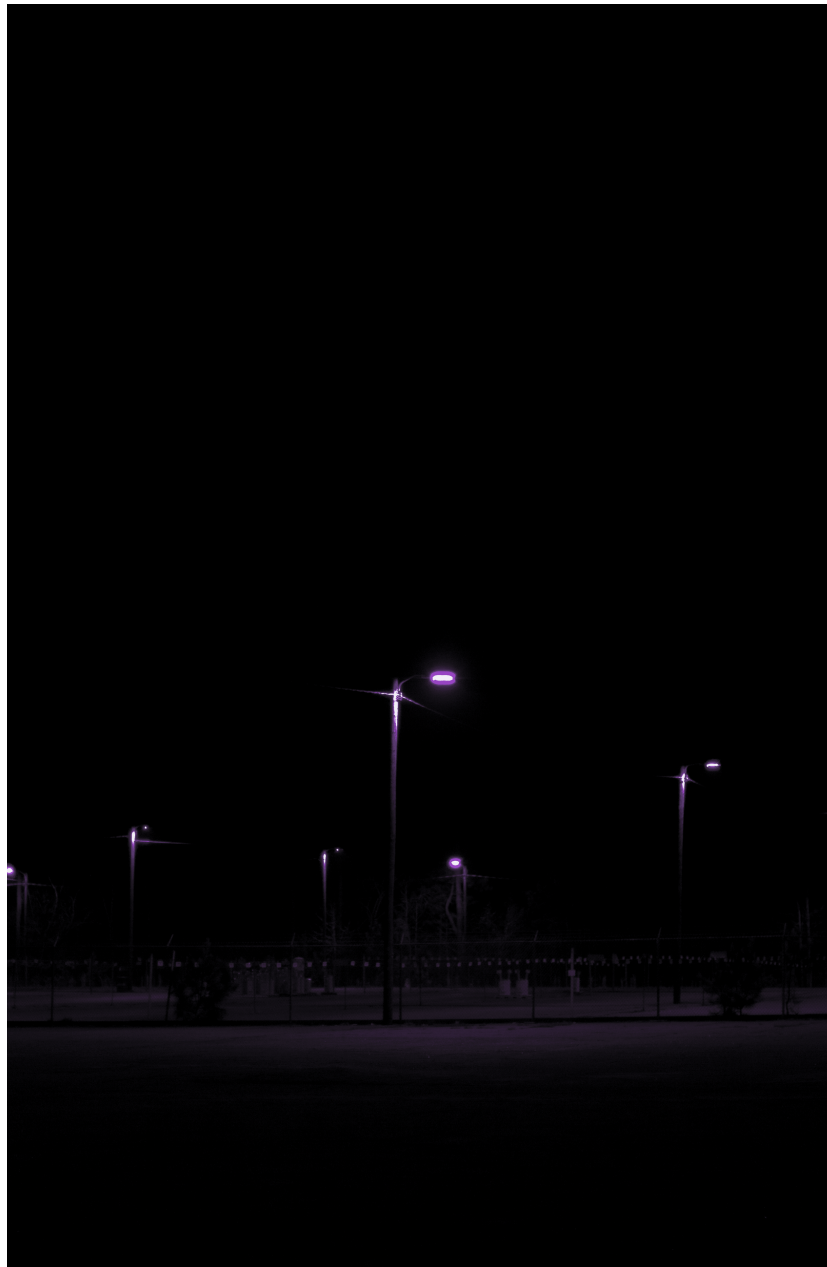
"BARELY FLOATING ON"
LEVI LATOCHA

SUNLIGHT

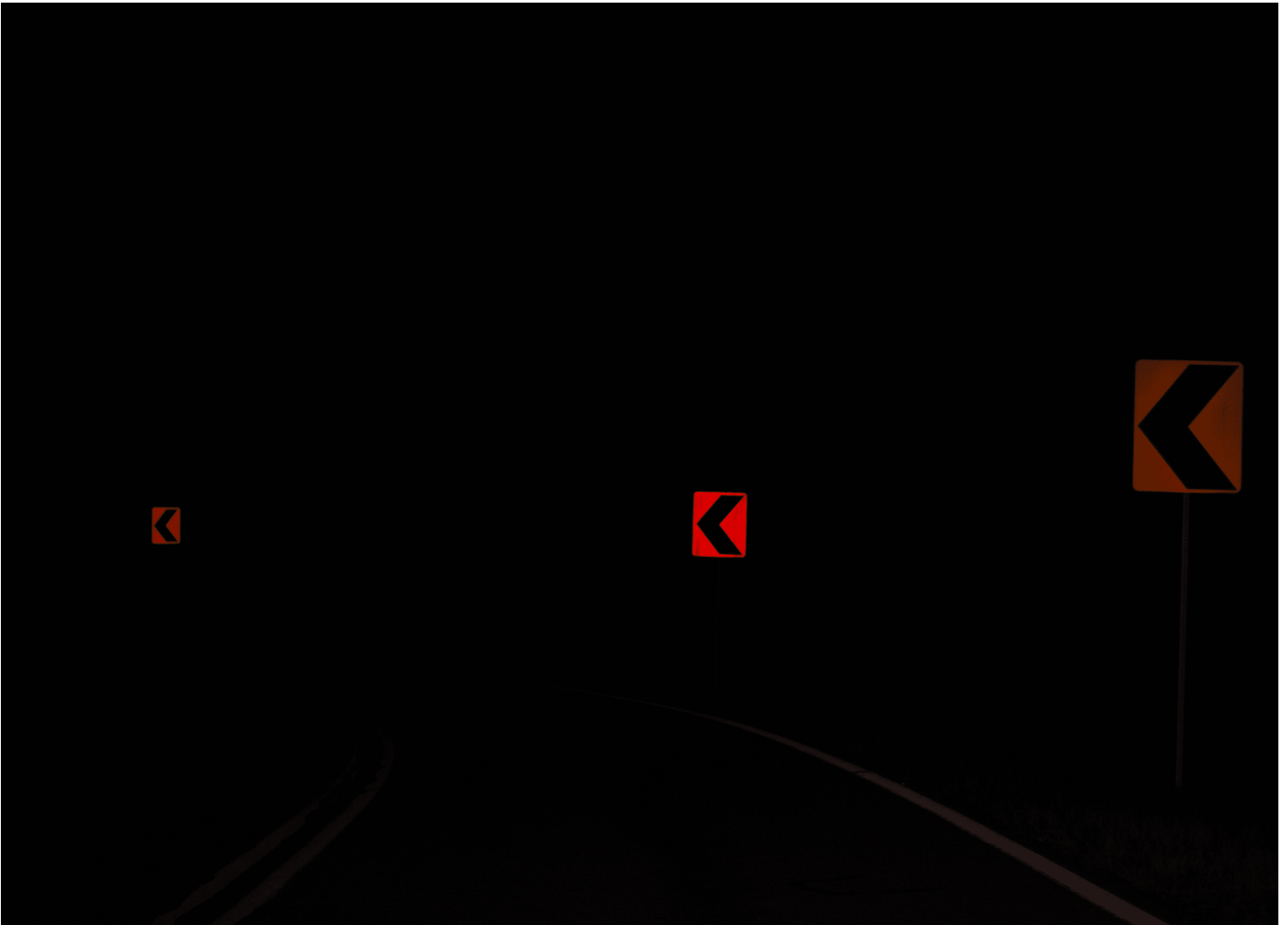


"LEAVE THE LIGHTS ON"
MANUEL VARGAS (MANVARDU)

Silence and distance characterize the suburbs, where everyone drives home alone in their cars. On the way home the only thing that stands out are the lights that illuminate empty spaces of streets that are in a premature darkness that only exists in winter. I'm not sad that summer is over, I'm nostalgic because the long nights are back.



"LEAVE THE LIGHTS ON"
MANUEL VARGAS (MANVARDU)



"LEAVE THE LIGHTS ON"
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