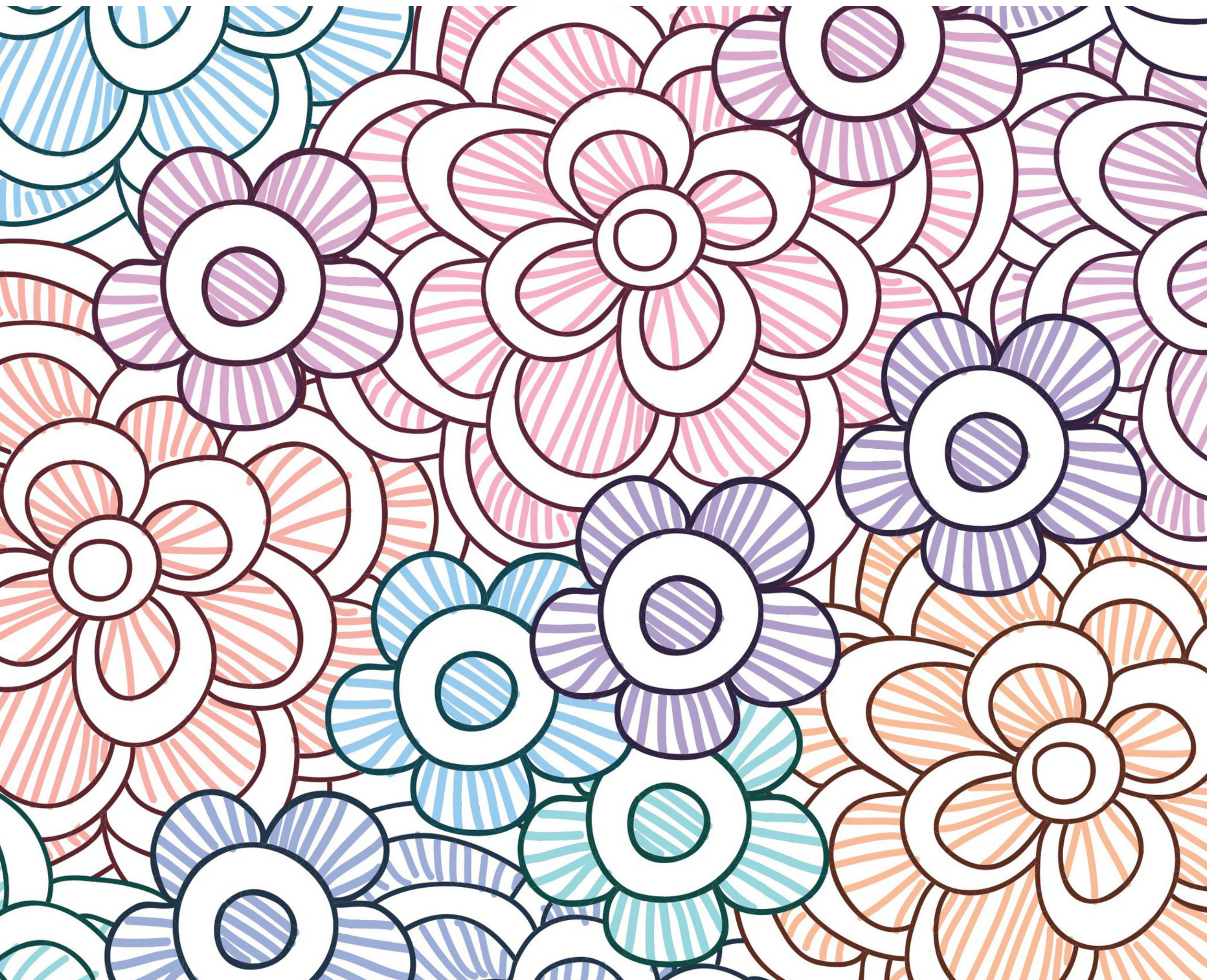




Wide Eyes

Star LaBranche





Content Notice

The following chapbook is a discussion of
sexual violence and abuse.

Please read with caution.

Dedication

for five-year-old me





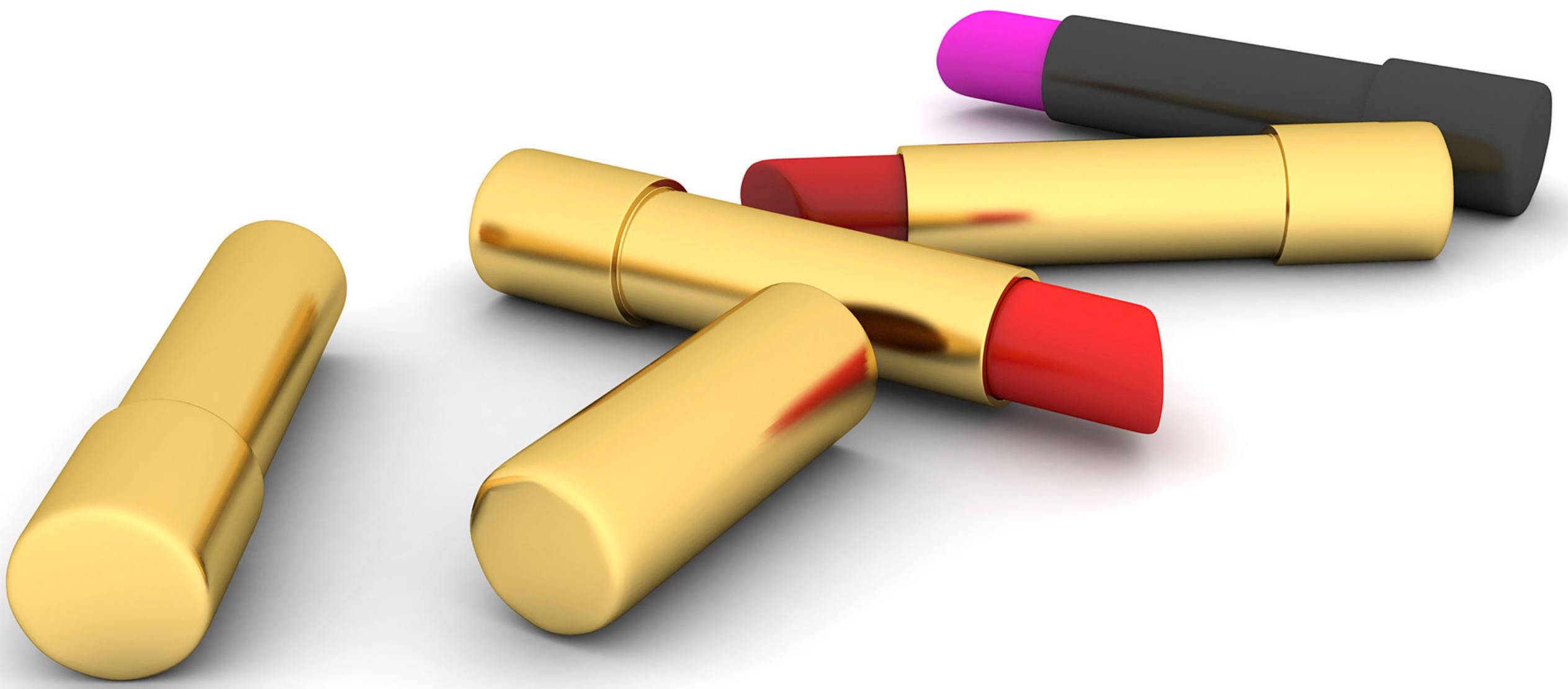
Wide Eyes

you're five and he wants to look at you
but not at places like arms and legs
he tells you that you have to do this
it's no big deal and really, your hesitation
is just holding him up from his day

you're still five when he wants to
do other things, some things you
can't remember, because memory
is so strange when you're young
and your brain was probably
protecting you from his hands
in a way no one else was

you write his name on an envelope
then spend time looking up insults
in the dictionary with your older sister,
who doesn't know, and write those words
on the envelope, where they belong
because you might not have great
penmanship, but you have a message

as an adult you'll get yourself into
situations where men want something
you're not willing to give and they get it
anyway, because sometimes you're
still five and you still don't understand



Fix Your Lipstick

childhood taught me I was helpless
and when he took over with the lessons
it was moving from high school to college

but I would fix my lipstick and leave my
house as if whatever he said was absolute truth
and I was a liar sullyng his kingdom

when he touched me I thought, this is it,
this is love, this is passion, this is someone
who cared about me caring about me so much

I gave a self to him that wasn't mine to give
and he took this self that wasn't his to possess
I gave everything with no thought to consequence

because what consequences are there, when you're 17?
not the same consequences he had, a man in his thirties,
telling me he loved me after one week together

for years I never questioned the beauty of his skin on mine,
but when the dust settles and reality becomes a mirror
you watch your past failures in, a niggling feeling sets in

I wasn't an equal in a relationship that he ended with silence
I wasn't every heart-broken girl left crying herself to sleep
I wasn't his lover between his dirty sheets – I was his victim



Lost and Found

when he shoved his hand between
my thighs and rubbed my crotch
I screamed at him to stop
and then apologized for doing so

because somewhere in my mind
I thought not giving him exactly
what he wanted was cruel and he
wanted my virginity

I've always been interested in why the
phrase is "lost virginity" and the reciprocal
is "taken virginity" because that's how it felt
I lost it, he didn't find, he took

I said yes, in the end, after I couldn't
hold out from the constant pressure
I gave myself over to him and thought
it made me an adult to say I lost my virginity

I walked away with my new experience and
my new feeling and my new missing piece
I walked away wondering why I didn't feel
like anything other than the same five-year-old

Like Love

he wanted to be a preacher, he told me he wanted to spread the word of the Gospel
dark hair, dark eyes, I wasn't worthy of anything right now, let alone him
he was so handsome, I thought him forcing himself on me meant that he liked me
he liked me so much that my No meant Yes, my refusal was actually consent, he had to pry
every piece of my body from my hands where I held it fast because he cared about
me

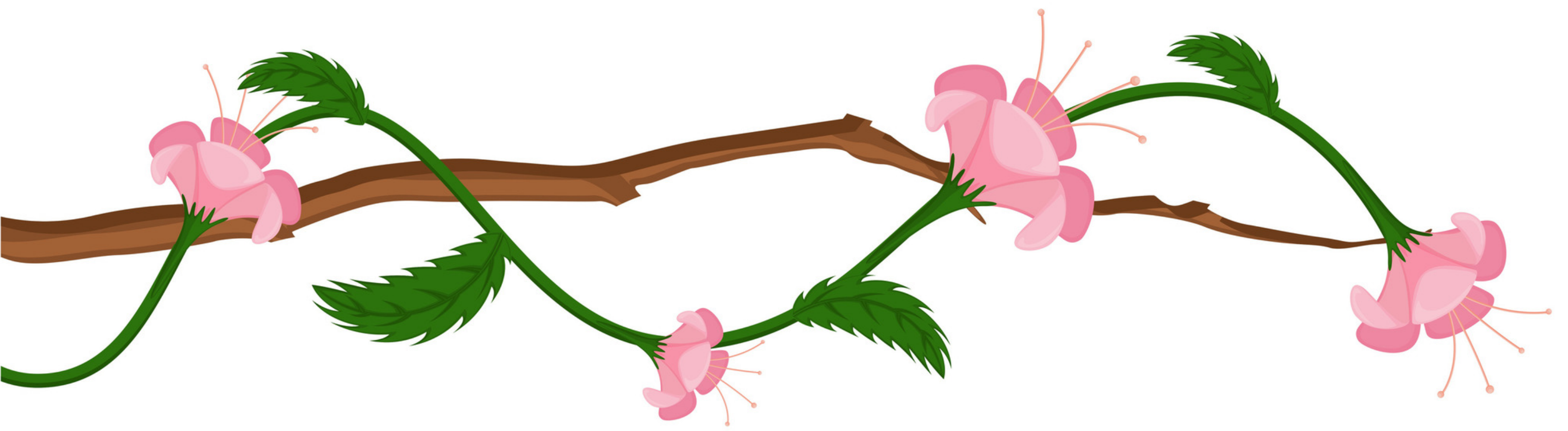
after it was over, I thought it meant I was his girlfriend because he had broken down
my walls and taken what was his and didn't that mean that now we were dating?
I wrote him long letters about my thoughts and feelings and he would answer vague
statements about the future being unknowable and I shouldn't bother making plans
I thought that was wise, I thought he was wise, and I thought I better make sure I
honor this prophet





Breathless

you were a man of so many words
they left absolutely no room for mine
now my words have space to breathe,
I have none to spare for you



Dear Diary

the worst part is the aching from where his hands have touched, grabbed, forced, pried
you lay there in your bed, and remember, you're still five, and you don't understand what
just happened and why the nice police officer decided to rape you in an empty parking lot
you lay there in your bed and you curl up because that feels safe and you distract yourself

and through the eyes of your five-year-old self, you long for comforts like favorite stuffed
animals and candy and a nice big hug from someone who loves you very much
but you're not five, and you do understand some things, and you realize the pain you feel
between your legs is nothing other than violation and it throbs like a broken heart

you feel like you have to tell someone, anyone, you have to expel this bile from your body
and put it out into the world so the world can absorb, the world can handle this, right?
but then you're five again and you don't know who to tell so you scream it at the top of your
digital lungs, then everyone knows and everyone has opinions and everyone wants you
to stop being five

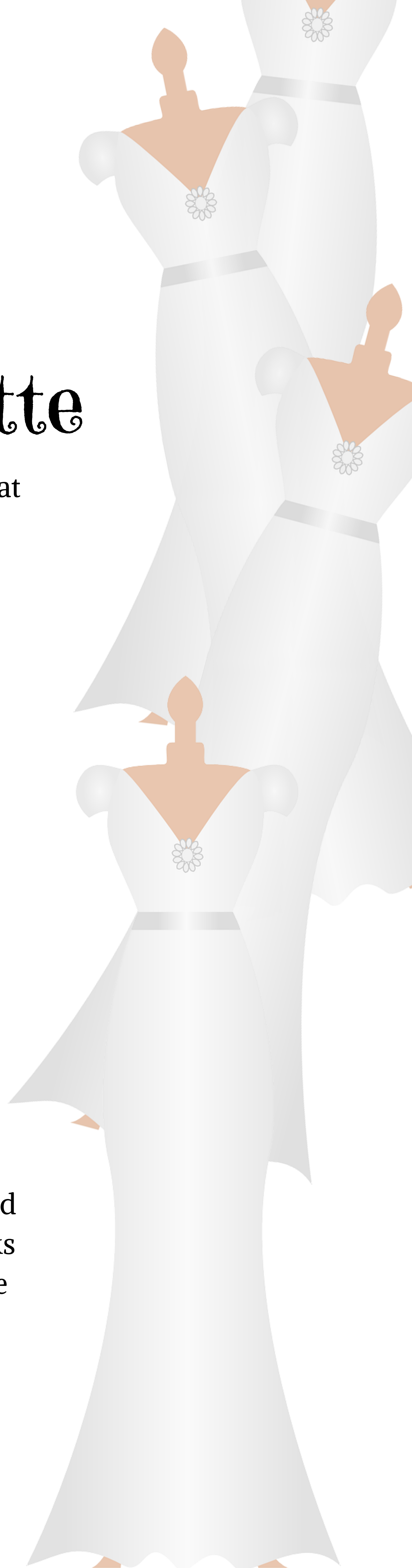


Mermaid Silhouette

hours after a cop puts his hand on your throat
and squeezes and kisses you as if he
thinks this is how Prince Charming did it,
you find yourself in a wedding dress store
watching your sister try on dresses
you watch her twirl in mermaid silhouette
gowns as if it's the most natural thing
to do when you can still feel your own
violation

you give opinions on fabric and silhouette
and cut and your sister criticizes you for
liking everything, but it's hard to focus
when you're trying to keep up with the
horror taking root in your brain like
a dark, knotted tree

you look at wedding dresses hours after
your rape, as if, what else were you supposed
to do that day? as if, when the sales clerk asks
you how you are, you have a good response





Context

I can't find words

my hands are shaking and I keep wringing them because I don't know what else to do

I know the look he has, I've seen it before, I'll see it again, and there's a futility in recognizing it
but I have started, and I have to keep going, so I press on, still panicking

suddenly there are too many words

I'm rambling, I'm stopping and starting sentences that don't fit together

my hands are red and burning, and that look is still in his eyes as I fumble
if I was smarter, I would stop talking, maybe even walk away, but I have
never known a battle I can't lose in spectacular fashion

there are no more words

now there are questions, all revolving around my choices, my logic, my thinking

and I have no explanations, because the only proof I have is me, and that proof is anecdotal



Weightless

it's a strange feeling
you see your body from a third person's point of view
it's just lying there, stunned, unable to move
he continues, of course, his handprint now
reddening your cheek as if belong there

and when you try to find words, all that
you can think are half sentences and nonsense
that swirl through your mind like the milk
into steaming hot coffee

so there you are, staring at yourself,
he hasn't noticed you're not responding,
you can't respond because you're lost
in another world, and you almost want
to root for yourself, as if with just enough
encouragement you could wake from your
haze and rise up against his hands

but there is no encouragement
to overcome this situation
because you're lost and you're
five again

Spilt Dr Pepper

I will never understand
why some men believe
the word “No”
has so many meanings





Fine

my anger is soft, white, feathered, and gentle
my anger is small, wet footprints on the mat
my anger is lit memorial candles for
the parts of me I lost while looking for the rest
my anger is pleats in the dress I wore which
always looked better on the model than me
my anger is dusty mason jars from
Pinterest projects I could never complete
my anger is soothing pale waves of ambiance
and I sing it loudly when no one can hear





Loudmouth

I told no one
I made no social media posts
I didn't want to admit this happened
again

I was sure it was one too many
I was sure I would be met with skepticism
I was sure someone would comment
there must be something I'm doing to
provoke these fine, young men

I knew at a certain point
I wasn't the victim anymore,
I was just crazy and imagining crazy
things happening to me
probably for attention
crazy people love attention

so I held in every word
and didn't even cry in private
because I had used up all of the
belief and goodwill I was issued
and there was nothing left for me

Hope is a Thing with Razorwire

dirt-smeared, bandaged, hope emerges from the smoking ruins
a thousands deaths and it's once again ready for battle
and when it finds me and asks me where I've been
I don't know whether to smile or groan
but it hands me a rifle
and off we go

