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## Tattoos Are Not Inherited

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### About the Contributor

Heidie Raine is a sophomore English major at Cedarville University ('23). She loves studying theology, writing letters, and perusing local thrift stores.

# TATTOOS ARE NOT INHERITED

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HEIDIE RAINE

Reach into the mirror with me.  
Dissolve the subtleties of you that are tattooed into  
me.

Wipe them off.

Ink over the veins that scream I am of you until they  
are the image of lost replication –  
severed hand-me-downs.

There is a difference between inheritance and  
development, inheritance and creation.

You created me to be useful, as  
a warm-bodied consolation to eradicate your lone-  
liness,

a vessel to deflect the contempt of your youth,  
an appeasement for your urges,  
a subject for your damning curiosities to explore.  
Your mistakes are etched in my back, and I request  
asylum from your genetic travesty.

I know you were strapped down and made a canvas  
for the faults of those before you —  
the faults of those who loved you, conditionally —  
the test subject for the final copy.

So it didn't matter if they messed up or left gaps in  
their sketch.

You swore you would never be the same, would  
keep only the best colors and images for us;  
you would not use a needle; you would use words,  
speaking the creation into our skin,  
filling us in completely.

You would not waste color, not waste love.

You crafted your designs with what you longed for  
and were denied.

You scribbled out who left you, who hurt you, who  
claimed you and molded you rigid and stiff.

I cannot carry the imprint on your lost desires, the  
narrative of another life.

I don't have enough skin to bear the images the  
needle is stuck on,

the energy to tell your story by my flesh.

Now the needle is dancing between absence and

suffocation,  
coming and going and coming and going and coming  
and going and coming and going, both  
teaching me the dangers of absoluteness.  
My skin has rejected your images.  
My blood is reclaiming them, making room for my  
mural.  
But you're still there in the gesso and outline —  
your smile, your stubbornness, your build.  
I can still see those fading imprints you placed in  
me;  
I see them begging for a savior in my bathroom  
mirror, tightening their constraints as they  
grapple at anything that will give them attention or  
share the burden.  
I cannot carry your voice until you finally decide you  
feel heard.  
Tattoos are not accidents.  
But I love you. I am you. I am not.  
The animosity, like ink, must dissolve.