

# SKIN AND I

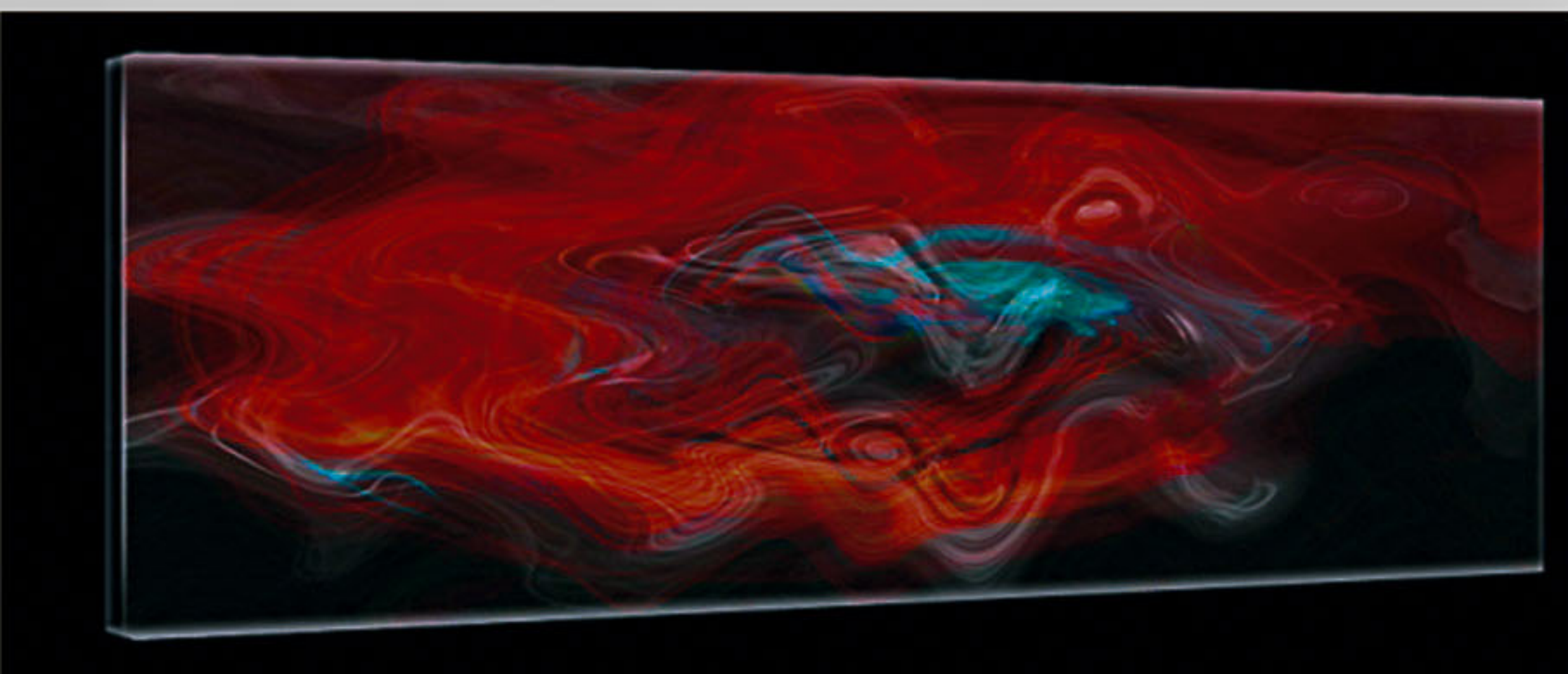
MASHIAT LAMISA

I sat right under her mouth, a bit slanted towards the left of her jutting chin. I did not know that after years of analysis, God would put me on skin that belonged to someone like her. I was an imperfection, and from the earliest of time, my ancestors have created kingdoms on skins that needed tiny spots of imperfection to balance their existing perfection. But she was already flawed; too flawed for me to recognize even her littlest bits of perfection. Hers was not the skin I waited to be on for so long.

Her skin was dark. Brown patches ruined cheeks already made unlovely by fat. Her eyes were tiny, with a crease thinner than thread. She had a blunt nose, and her nostrils always flared when she tried to sing in her hoarse voice. I hated how her jaws would move me along with the beats

always say, "This thing on your chin is going to be the death of you. No boy will ever love you. Go apply some turmeric on your face now otherwise we will have to deal with you for the rest of our lives." Tears would trickle down her cheeks and fall on me whenever mother told her these. I would cry too but you see, we do it a bit differently. We make no sound and we shed no tears. We swell and make the skin we reside on look crookedly worse. Our kind is made to be the imperfect beauty spot on perfect skins. How is it my fault that I landed on her skin? How is it my fault if she's already too imperfect for a boy to love her?

It wasn't until one morning I realized that she, trapped in her own body and skin, accepted me the way I was. And I didn't even know that her acceptance would matter to me as much as it did.



when she sang Backstreet Boys songs. She didn't even learn to eat chocolates properly; she would chew the chocolates with her giant frontal teeth causing them to smear on me, making me sticky now and then. I hated that. I hated everything about her.

Her Dadu always said I'd bring her good luck. Whenever she came to visit, she would take her grand-daughter's chin in hand, adore me and say, "You're so beautiful, you know that? This will bring you good luck and a very good husband." She would always frown at her Dadu's fortune-telling and say she'd never want a husband. It would make me happy though. My family has been legendary in our world for making marriages successful. It would be an honour for me to be the reason of her getting a good husband, no matter how much I disliked her personally.

Her mother had different opinions though. She hated me. She'd

She stared into the mirror that morning and combed her long hair. I sat still as usual, right under her mouth, slanted towards the left of her jutting chin. Eyes fixed on the newly polished mirror, she leaned towards it and touched me with one of her bare fingers. Her touch felt overpowered with a kind of sentiment I have never experienced before.

"You're perfect", she whispered to me through the mirror, rubbing her fingers on my rough surface and stared right through me with her intense, bulging eyes.

You see, I was a round, black mole -- an imperfection created to balance human perfection. And here she was, calling me perfect. As ironic as it was to me, that was the morning I started learning to love her.

And if you ask me -- there's no other chin, no other skin I'd want to exist on except hers. She was all the perfection I ever needed.

# UNDERACHIEVERS

ARUBA ADIL

Our heads hang lower than our cumulative grade  
 Our eyes were once sharper than any fresh razorblade  
 But now they've withered and weathered -  
 Like the hands of a 75 year-old maid.

They expect us to grow up to do nothing  
 But knit miniature baby blue socks  
 And iron puffed-up pink frocks.  
 They teach us to dress with great care,  
 And to carefully tend to our hair,  
 To brush a hundred  
 strokes for bouncy black  
 locks  
 And gingerly blush  
 whenever a boy talks.

They look at us like we're  
 timid creatures,  
 Blind to the fire inside us,  
 the madness that dwells  
 within  
 But it's as real as bone  
 beneath skin.  
 And while they wipe their  
 reading glasses clean  
 We could have set cities  
 ablaze  
 And they'd be in flames,  
 running in our own maze.  
 But we'd be rather be lost in this  
 daze  
 This math-induced blissful haze.



# The Ping Pong Song

BEJAMIN HASAN

When the day gets rough  
 And I risk a wee cuff

I like to play ping pong  
 And do a little sing song.

The balls were dank

The table was set

I do a little ping pong  
 And like to play a sing song

My eyes were green  
 The procurer was right;  
 The balls were mean  
 This is serious ping pong

