

## **Cages Aren't Meant To Last**

He sat on his stool, stained with faded reds and greens from the weekends before. He turned around, smiling with two missing teeth.

"Mummy, I'm going to draw all the animals we saw at the zoo!"

I couldn't help but laugh as he gripped the paintbrush in his hand and painted the first few strokes in neon yellow without waiting for my reply. In the middle, he drew two stickmen holding hands, one much taller than the other. I had drawn cards for my parents more than a decade ago with the same stickmen in fields of flowers flying on unicorns, but in this drawing, I was no longer the shorter stickman.

And then I remembered.

*Sitting by the window of my room, trying to capture the sunlight and wind dancing in my backyard, swinging on the jacaranda tree. I dug my cold feet into the carpet as I mixed the colours together, not knowing it would be one of the last times I held a paintbrush.*

*And it just happened before I could regret it. I didn't stop the worksheets and textbooks from burrowing my paintbrushes and coloured pencils deep under my bed. I didn't stop the assessments and homework from chasing my imagination away, as she hid behind the remaining artworks I hung on the wall, slowly retreating to my once beloved sketchbooks deep inside a box in my closet.*

He turned around again exclaiming, "Mummy look at my tiger!" Thick steel bars dimmed the bright orange stripes of the tiger, its face engulfed by the grey lines. As he turned back to his work, there was a thump, followed by a splash.

The plastic cup lay mercilessly on top of the paper, yellows, blues and greens swirled around in a puddle, pulling the giraffes, penguins and lions off the paper into a polluted river flowing down the table. The grass and the sunny sky melted together into grey stains, leaving my son and I behind, still holding our hands.

I grabbed paper towels, dabbing on the blotched paint, trying to salvage as much of my son's work as I could. We watched as the tigers sleepily rose from the grey and brown patches, their striped faces now visible through the steel bars I had smudged off. Dusting their paws, they leapt into the embrace of the two waiting stickmen.