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The Wind Through Your Hair

Abstract

Faatemah Tapali, a first-generation undergraduate student at Durham University, explores the complex reality of navigating higher education without a guide. The burden of imposter syndrome, the guilt of asking for help, and the fatigue of navigating a new road are all conveyed in her work. Yet within these challenges, she also uncovers the resilience that takes root and the unexpected joy that makes each hard-won memory shine brighter. Through her writing, she offers solidarity and hope to fellow first-generation scholars, reminding them that even amid struggle, life holds profound beauty.

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The Wind Through Your Hair

Heavy, tight, ever-present. The shackle attached leaves a drag mark on the winding path behind you in the maze of university. It is built of many situations and feelings.

To me, first-gen is feeling like an impostor by simply being present. It is the strive of success through sleepless nights so you can get out, so nobody will have to be bound again. It's the wish to repay those who have given this opportunity as fast as possible and as best as you can with little guidance. It's the hesitation to ask for help and the guilt of so desperately wanting a map, some water, a pit stop.

First-gen is finding out part way through the maze that others have torches, equipment, a guide and most importantly, no shackles. The realisation hits you as you look down at your ankle, bruised and blistered. It's all you've ever known. First-gen is the internal conflict, asking yourself, "Why only me?". Hearing others say they only came to university for the party culture. Being able to only nod, feeling the cuff dig deeper. Anger boils inside, but you have nothing to direct it at. It is feeling all these things, but having no choice but to continue. How could you ever express how you feel, when so many dream of being able to stand where you do?

You look out at the path in front of you, dark and foggy. You are promised an exit, but will you ever reach it? When? Will it be when you get a degree? A graduate job? With a high enough salary? The path only seems to stretch further, but you are already so weary. You focus only on the pain, the aches, the struggle. It's hard not to. But even in chains, you can choose the freedom of joy.

A quiet, unexpected happiness. Being first-gen is no doubt a struggle, but it allows you to experience the world in a way nobody else can. It causes every moment to be precious and treasured; memories as bright as gold in the sun, dearer to you than anything. With each glittering addition, the shackles become lighter. You can barely feel its presence, and you find yourself running.





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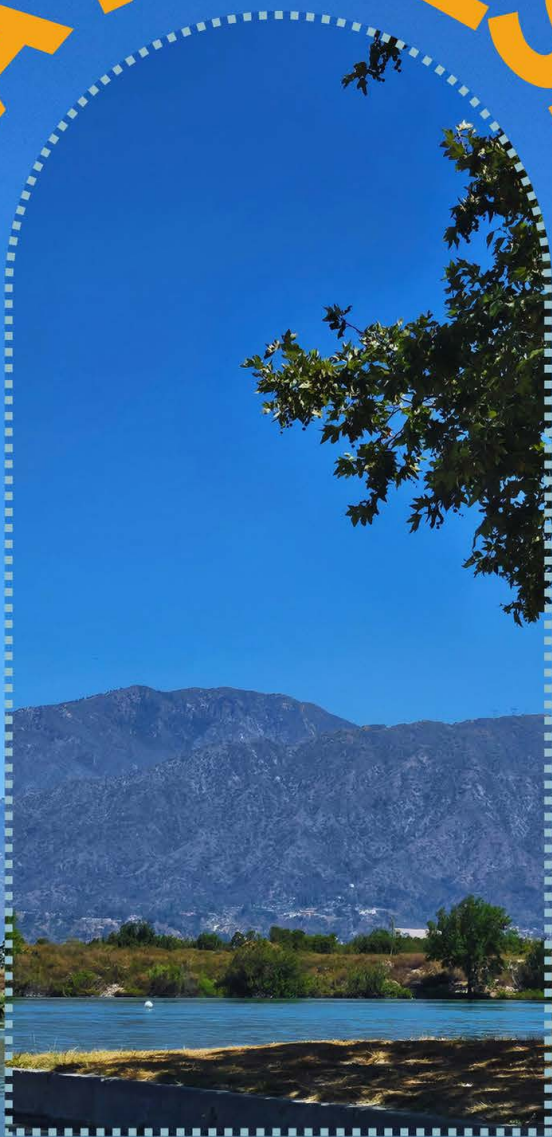


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