**First Place: Abdulaziz**

**Author: Nasra Al Manji**

Acceptance. Denial.

Some assumptions set by society,

A ring of crackling fire.

And then there’s him,

because he was different

Like those little shards of grass growing in the cracks in the cement.

And society, oh society,

You know some of them can be so shallow,

Some of them were just facade,

on the inside they were hollow

Because to them he was an error,

a liability,

an abnormality,

a malformation.

So, listen here, for your information,

just because you aren’t cultured enough to understand the beautiful creation that is this wonderful human form doesn’t mean that he is not extraordinary.

In all of his 5-year-old glory,

You’ve never seen a smile as wide as the one that spreads on that boy’s lips because of the simplest of reasons,

A new score on his favorite video game,

Learning a new word in a new language,

His father yelling something funny,

And I swear that smile,

it could melt your heart away;

it could brighten the darkest day that ever dawned on you.

And he still gets shunned, you see,

Because he likes to organize his toys by category,

Because of the repetition,

Because sometimes he can’t be with us,

Because there’s too much social stimulus.

His mind can’t contain it,

And your mind cannot bear it.

He is different.

You see brains are like blooming gardens of thought,

And his brain is a ever-green viridescent, vibrant surreal garden,

And some people don’t really appreciate botanics.

And what kills me is that they pity him because he’s different,

And I pity them because they’re all the same,

And what kills me is that people never think to credit anyone.

He has a meltdown and they think he’s a spoiled toddler and his parents need to give him some.

Truth be told, his parents deserve the world,

Because they are beating the odds, day by day,

And because society is too ignorant; they don’t see the capes flowing behind all three of their backs

because they are freakin’ superheroes

And he never fails to amaze us all.

The way his brain works could leave you in awe for hours--

Try spending one day with him.

Different is exquisite.

Difference is a splash of color in this awfully dark world.

Autism is exquisite,

And it’s your loss if you think it’s an inconvenience,

A sorry sight.

I’m the one who’s sorry for you;

I’m sorry that you’re so blind.

And stop with the jokes.

No, you don’t just ‘develop’ autism by spending too much time alone

No, being an introvert isn’t having autism

No. Go educate yourself before you come talking about how you can fix him.

You’re the one in need of fixing.

You’re the one who’s life is painted in black and white.

You’re just a bunch of wrong and right.

And you should really think before you speak to me about how

“his parents could have avoided this”

“medication will only make it worse”

“he will grow out of it”

“he seems very distant and anti-human”

And I could tell you, the warmest feeling I’ve ever gotten was being hugged by his tiny little arms for no reason.

And he has better taste in music than everyone I know, probably.

He is just so extraordinary.

And the world is getting crappier and crappier every day.

But please, please make it easier for him and others,

Because they are the stars, we’re just another patch of the night sky.