GALLERY
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LETTER FROM
THE EDITOR

I chose to take on this position and join this team because I knew I had always wanted to be part of something bigger. I have always been an advocate for being creative and not letting anyone's voice be stifled no matter how much I or other people may disagree with the creativity behind a piece. Gallery is a magazine that does just that: it is a magazine that advocates for the creatives, it is a magazine that is unafraid of the people who are submitting to it, and it is a magazine that is unafraid to be different and unique.

I would love to thank the Gallery editors because, without all of them, this issue would not have been possible. I have never met a group of people that were so patient and kind but also insanely creative with a million different ideas and opinions up their sleeves. A big thanks to our head editors from our prose, poetry, art, and social media teams: you guys are amazing and made this issue really shine because of how much effort you put into every page that you worked on. I also want to thank Brooke Reyes, an editor on the staff, who helped me figure out just about every decision that had to be made and always reminded me what I was here for and how much we have accomplished thus far.

Lots of time and effort went into this issue by not only the staff at Gallery but also all those who submitted. Your work made all the difference in the world and made this the best experience possible. Your work made us feel things. We laughed and we cried. You allowed us to have deep and meaningful conversations with one another. Your work did all the right things and for that, we are all eternally grateful.

I hope this issue will make you feel all the same things we felt. I hope you can feel the passion and hard work put in by every single person who contributed and that you will not only feel and think of ideas you had never considered before but that this also inspires you to be creative as well. Anyone can be creative. If you think you can't be creative because your idea is too "out there", I implore you to think again. Don't be afraid of how far your mind wants to go. It's taking you there for a reason and it's worth hearing yourself out about that idea, trust me.

Thank you for everything and I hope that you enjoy the 2023 issue of Gallery.

Sincerely,

Karina Martinez
Editor-in-Chief
Downtown Colors

Cristian Gonzalez

Hoy partire guiado por los destellos
que han de anunciar un nuevo amanecer.
He de zarpar abrigado de miedos y angustias,
cruel simbólicos de las barreras que busco,
cómo tantos, vencer.

Sin senda fija seguire aquellas huellas
que han de trazar mi destino incierto.
Caeran a mi diestra paisanos abatidos
extinguendo sueños que no han de otear
el fulgor de otro día.

Al llegar a aquel río, nocivo y perjudicial,
clamarán desesperadas a mí las estelas de este,
ahuyentándome, pues en sus entrañas
reposan miles que, como yo, iban
tras la misma ilusión.

Ignorando todo, seguire hacia el frente,
burlando toda frontera, impulsado
por las penas que adornan mi existencia,
as mismas que sin piedad
me han obligado a huir.

Uno más

Dulce Mata
I knew you before I knew myself; That much you may boast before all and above: The world may end in fire, but [1] at least, at most, have been emboldened by the magma in your love. Magma! (yes,) that caldo made of brimstone, tossed gravity of built environments that fell, that rose, that cracked into pieces, crumbled like stars-- You and your choking, you and the words that sear and turn. You and your impossibility, impossible to peg! a child, I thought I’d seen you end-to-end and then you redefined yourself, again. You were my cradle, the backdrop of my imaginings I could not look beyond the world, without seeing you in all places my mind stayed. You my point of reference, for that snowglobe sphere I traveled, were enough; You who raised me, you impossible valley without mountains, you child of reclamation by my own kind. Long before my eyes, but soon after my parents left, returned: You remade yourself into that glittering home. I would have lived a thousand years a child in your gaze, had we a thousand years for which you the same stayed. But Earth re-rights itself, and spins widens; and time does not leave change to chance—it forces hands. I see the way you shudder as you sleep, your dreams: at once too small and far too out-of-reach; Would God let me, would that will be what is destined, I would run to you this time embrace and lift you up. The vision even now waits on my periphery—let that vision be! Oh Let that vision be for me! I grew to see the areas you scraped with your fury, in those darker days past;
nothing but a body at the edge of the sea
moonlit rotting, come morning i'll be free
whisper of names in a salty breeze
(i know your voice anywhere, bride of the tides, keep calling back to me)
adam and abel
and me
doomed men half empty

our first steps as people brand new
we're shore shattered, product of ocean spew
we kiss with gnashing teeth
our bodies each other's feast
three days and three nights in the belly of the beast
when day breaks
and your love recedes
i'll bring high tide home
i'll leave hope in the trough
i'll show you there's no better off
only dead and joyfully departed
drowning in envy where we started
i'm a tidal wave crashing and burning under your moonlight gaze

they'll only remember you the way i do
true-blue star of my rearview scene
footage of a car crash from the passenger seat
keep my grave nice and neat
and i'll write of the ways you've come undone
half-dead tangled in summer sheets
i've got all your secrets up my sleeves and tasted mine under your tongue
i'm burning bridges just to get to you 'cause there's
no warmth from pictures of the sun

Cristian Gonzalez
It's okay, Lucian. You can talk to me about anything.

Even if it’s about our greatest fear?
What about it?

You need to let me go.

It was an accident.

It wasn’t your fault.

Rayanne...
No

Because if I do...

I can never go back.

If you continue to love me, hold me here, I know you have the capacity to forgive.

I just need time

Of course

I’m just...

tired.

Experim ent 143: Nullify
Subject: Mental Manipulation Organism
Supervisor: Dr. Lucian Status: deceased
Subject status: induced coma
I feel like flowers coming from my throat
I puked them without a thought
Petals of different colors gets
Falling and make a dirty floor

I want to stay in bed
Hold my breath
And disappear from the earth
To end this nightmare

“How could you do this to me?”
I asked and said
“I was afraid”
You answered, I swore

All my words, ambition & time
Suddenly coming to an end
My chest feels tight, my legs shake
I thought you loved me, my dearest friend

How can I be so stupid?!?
I screamed while I cried
How can you be so cruel?!
I clutched, ready to die

Hanahaki disease
That’s what the doctor said
Dying in flowers
That’s where it ends
The Ship of Theseus is a problem that hasn’t been solved yet. It’s a paradox wrapped in another, created by philosophers just for the fun of it. A thought experiment, they named it, because all inventions need a name. Because anything worth the effort needs a name.

I tried explaining it to her once. It was late. She was combing her still wet hair, her legs were crossed on her bed. I was standing in the doorway and staring at her stupidly, because this was something so new that I couldn’t help but look. But is that not love in the end? Admiration? Attention? Something in between? I didn’t know then. If I’m being honest, I still don’t. But she seemed to like it, both the attention and the thought experiment. Her brush ran through hair that had never once seen an end to experimentation. Once cut, once fried, once dyed a million different colors. That night it was long and pink and smelled of the shampoo from the bathtub.

She set the brush down and started carding her fingers through her hair. Braiding it, she finally spoke. “I think it would be the same ship, even if everything’s been replaced.”

I smiled at that. “Why?”

(In its original formulation, the “Ship of Theseus” paradox concerns a debate over whether or not a ship that has had all of its components replaced one by one would remain the same ship.

Take it apart, put it back together, I thought at the time. What do you get?)

“Because,” she said, snapping me out of it. She looked away for a second, glanced towards the ceiling, as if there was an answer hidden in the paint. “Uh…”

There was a flicker towards me, an embarrassed smile cracking open. I could see it, a solution cutting through paradoxes and spare parts of a ship.

She liked to smoke then. There were days where I would visit and I could smell nothing but forgotten cigarettes and perfume on her clothes.

I think if she couldn’t give an answer, she would have climbed out her window and onto the fire escape to search for one. Probably to smoke too. I’m glad that didn’t happen.

“Because,” she said. “Recognition goes deeper than that, doesn’t it? Like, what if there were people on the ship before it was replaced, does that change the memories they made? I think if a person knows something.” She glanced at me, her fingers stopped intertwining with her hair. “They’ll understand what it is, even if it looks completely different.”

“Does... Does that make sense?” She asked.

Her voice was starting to lower in volume. She was starting to get more embarrassed. What kind of an answer was that, she had to be thinking.

“Yeah,” I said. “If you changed your hair again, and started dressing differently, I’d still recognize your laugh.”

She giggled. It was easy to commit such a sound, to commit everything she did, to memory. Was that love? Was any of this?

“And I think I’d recognize your fucking weird way with words,” she hummed. “I thought you liked it?”

“I do,” she said. “I’ll read your stuff in the paper and just know it’s you, even if it’s all anonymous.”

“You read my things?” I asked, feeling something unfurl. I felt everything fall apart inside me. Maybe my body would go with it, and then it would be a matter of recognition beyond skin. She’d have to test out her answer, see if it were true or not.

“Yeah,” she said as she shuffled herself to one side of the small twin bed. She motioned for me to follow, to settle in if I wanted.

“I dunno if you noticed,” she said flatly as I obeyed, as I tried to make myself fit into her existence. “But I like you, stupid. Of course I’ll read whatever you make.”

Her hands were around me. One hand against my face, fingers sprawled. She could easily feel my body catch on fire. It should have been painful, but it wasn’t. Us being this close should have been slotted into what is considered hurtful. But it wasn’t. It never was.

I think that’s how I started to recognize her. She dyed her hair again, changed her wardrobe, like I predicted. Her laugh changed, her smile too. But all of that was secondary. It didn’t matter. Her hands stayed the same, and the fire that grew caught on my skin was never painful. I looked for that instead.
Human Nature

Jasmin Lopez
There is a willow tree in a small town that saw everything. It is the only willow tree that resides in the town. It is located in a park where dozens of visitors walk through everyday. Around the tree are beautiful flowers, daisies, and the greenest grass. Everyday the willow is lucky to have visitors. People come and sit at its roots, which protrude from the ground, and have picnics with their friends or lovers. People come to take pictures, climb the lovely willow or use the tree for games like hide and seek.

The willow tree loves people. People love the willow tree.

The problem though is most people do not always return. If people do not come back soon after their last visit, the willow knows that they have been forgotten. The willow is left to wonder how those people were doing, who the children grew up to be.

While the willow did have different visitors everyday, there is always one constant visitor. That person is Evelyn.

Evelyn was the light of the town from the day she was born. The willow could remember that day because she heard about it from multiple people who walked in the park the day she was born: July 5, 1998. The small town was bustling.

Evelyn was a miracle from Heaven itself.

The willow remembered when they first saw Evelyn. She was only a few months old, sleeping in her stroller while her mother was pushing her along on a midday walk.

Evelyn would come back constantly in her stroller with her mother or father until she stopped coming. The willow wondered about her during that time. The willow wondered if she would ever come back.

Evelyn was five years old when she returned. She was all alone. The willow would watch as the young girl with little blonde pigtails sat on one of the larger roots of the tree and opened up her backpack to pull out a notebook. In big words with a permanent marker on the cover the word “DIREE” was written, the R was backwards and the ink smudged and as the girl wrote, she spoke aloud like she wanted the willow to hear too.
“Dear Diary,” the little girl said, her tiny voice soft and seething with anger. Well, as much anger as a five year old could muster. “Today was a very bad day. Alyssa called me ugly. I hate Alyssa. I thought she was very pretty but now she’s ugly.”

The willow laughed but Evelyn couldn’t hear.

Everyday after school let out, little Evelyn would make her way to the park and sat in the same spot to write in her diary about how her day went: how much she hated Alyssa, what she learned about and how much she loved butterflies. Evelyn’s mind was simple and the willow loved that it was simple. The older Evelyn got, the longer her diary entries would be and the quieter she got as she wrote them. The journals would change and so would she. The willow watched her grow and bring her friends to the roots where she sat. Those kids rarely came back but Evelyn never stopped.

Over the years as Evelyn grew, as things came and went, so did many of her relationships. Just like how Evelyn’s relationship with the willow was constant, so was the bond Evelyn had with little Alyssa. The same Alyssa who, at one point, called her ugly everyday in the first grade. When Evelyn was sixteen, she came to the willow blushing like mad and whispering she called me pretty over and over under her breath.

A few months later, when Evelyn turned seventeen, she arrived at the willow with Alyssa. The willow witnessed Evelyn’s first kiss. From that day forth, the willow was greeted with not one but two people sitting at the roots.

“Why do you like this tree so much?” Alyssa asked. They were nineteen and having a picnic. It was summer.

Evelyn looked up at the hanging leaves and the bark of the tree where she gently placed her hand. “It kept me company when no one else did.”

More years passed and the willow witnessed their wedding. They got married at the park under the willow. It was beautiful and the willow saw Evelyn stare at the tree in wonder throughout that night all the while Alyssa kept her eyes on her wife with the same amount of wonder and awe.

More years passed and Evelyn always visited the tree like it was an old friend now. Alyssa would visit as much as she could but it was Evelyn who always made the effort. Even if it was just five minutes out of her day, Evelyn visited the willow as much as she could.

The willow loved Evelyn.

Evelyn really is a miracle.

So, the willow was saddened to see Evelyn slowly age. Life was wearing her down. The willow wished they could go back in time when life was simple.

Evelyn still wrote in a diary. Even at age forty. Even at age eighty. A bench was now placed under the willow, near the roots, and little Evelyn would sit and write about her day even if nothing happened.

Then, Evelyn stopped coming back.

The willow heard the whispers from those who would pass by the park. Not long after those whispers, a plaque was placed in front of the roots. Now all the willow has left of the little girl she had grown to love is a memory and a plaque.

Although Evelyn never returned, Alyssa did. She would look at the plaque and sit on the bench in silence. The willow knew that all she had left too was memories. Although the willow mourned, she kept Alyssa safe under the shade. And when it was time to go, everyday, Alyssa places her hand on the trunk of the willow and whispers, “Thank you.”
Piel morena
Ojos de miel
Cejas de frida
Acento de valle
Labios de reyna
Voca de barrio
Cadera de avispa
Pansa suave
Corazon de almohada
956 en mi sangre por siempre

Alondra Ramírez
LIFE

Characters:
SADIE YOUNG (15, female)
HENRY YOUNG (7, her brother)
MOTHER (32, her mother)
BABEE (19, male, Sadie’s boyfriend)

SETTING: Dining table in the middle with four chairs around. Kitchen appliances around the stage.

AT RISE: Sadie sits at the dining table, preoccupied with her phone. Henry enters with the board game Life under his arm and sits at the table. Henry pretends to hit Sadie in the face with the box and laughs. Sadie pushes him away.

HENRY
Play with me Sadie.

Sadie doesn’t look up from her phone.

SADIE
Don’t wanna.

HENRY
Pleeeaaase!

SADIE
I said no.

Pouting, Henry starts setting up the game on the table.

HENRY
You never want to play.

Sadie, you’re going to have to watch your brother.

SADIE
No. No way.

MOTHER
It wasn’t a question.

Sadie rises from the table to follow her, leaving her phone on the table.

SADIE
But Mom, I’m going out today!

MOTHER
Really? With who?

SADIE
My...friends.
MOTHER
Uh-huh. Well since you didn’t tell me about it you have no choice in the matter.
They continue to argue as they exit. Henry remains at the table playing when Sadie’s phone starts to vibrate. Henry looks at the phone, hesitating. He looks around to make sure no one is looking and finally answers it.
HENRY
Hello?
No she’s yelling at mom. I’m Henry, her brother. Who’s this? It just says…
Henry looks at phone and slowly draws out the letters.
HENRY
B-A-B-E-E with two hearts?
I don’t know you. Ooo, wait! Do you want to play a game with me?
(getting excited)
I can tell you where we live! It’s 522 Pine Street. You’ll see my toys in the front.
(beat)
Okay, yeah! I’ll get it ready! Bye.
Henry hangs up. He takes extra care to put the phone back exactly as he found it and starts to reset the game. Mother and Sadie enter again, still arguing. Mother has her keys now.
MOTHER
Sadie! Enough! I’m not talking about this anymore.
(glancing back at Henry)
And play with your brother or I’m taking that phone with me and you won’t see it for a week.
HENRY
SADIE
Okay, bye my babies! I love you!
HENRY
Bye mommy! Love you, too!
MOTHER
Mother exits. Sadie starts to grab pieces to play.
SADIE
How do you play this stupid game anyway?
HENRY
It’s okay, Sadie! You don’t need to play with me anymore. The nice guy on your phone said he’s gonna play with me.
SADIE
What guy?
HENRY
Bab-eh-eh.
SADIE
Do you mean “Babee”?
HENRY
That’s dumb, Sadie. That’s not how you spell “baby.”
SADIE
You called him?!
HENRY
No. He called you.
SADIE
(in a panic)
And you answered?!
HENRY
Uh-huh.
Sadie rises from the table.
SADIE
Henry! What the hell did you do?!
HENRY
What?
(starting to pout)
I just wanted him to play Life with me.
SADIE
Okay. Okay. It’s not like he knows where we live…
HENRY
I told him.
SADIE
You WHAT?!
HENRY
Yeah! He said you never told him.
SADIE
There was a reason for that! Do you have any idea what Mom’s gonna do when she finds out? I told you to never touch my phone!
HENRY
Sorry!
SADIE
They both pause while Sadie thinks.
OKAY, MAYBE WE CAN GO TO THE NORMAN’S NEXT DOOR BEFORE HE GETS HERE. HE’LL SEE THAT WE’RE NOT HOME AND--
A knock on the door.

SADIE AND HENRY

Ahh! He's here!

HENRY

Yay!

SADIE

Shut up! He'll hear us.

HENRY

So what?

Henry gets up from the table to go let Babee in. Sadie grabs him by the wrist.

SADIE

No! We have to pretend we aren't home.

HENRY

Why? The door's unlocked anyway.

SADIE

What???

Babee enters.

Babee

Your door was unlocked.

SADIE

Sadie guides her brother behind her.

BABEE

Babee, what're you doing here? I thought we were going to meet at the Circle K?

BABEE

Your brother invited me.

SADIE

Babee walks towards her and kisses her cheek.

BABEE

You can't stay here. My mom'll be back any minute.

HENRY

No she's not. Remember? She went to lunch to find a job.

SADIE

Still, if she finds you here, I'm dead.

BABEE

Nah. We're just going to play a game.

HENRY

Yay!

Henry escapes Sadie's grip. He and Babee sit at the table, setting up the game. Sadie joins after a brief hesitation.

SADIE

Well, maybe just for a little bit.

BABEE

Yeah, I'm due for a break anyway. I've been selling most of the morning.

SADIE

(awkwardly)

Really? How'd it go?

The sound of keys at the door. Mother enters. Sadie quickly stands up.

SADIE

Mom! You're back? What about your interview?

MOTHER

Rescheduled. Oh well, what can you do about it? Does anyone want pancakes, I do. Hey, do you know who's bike is parked out front-

(noticing Babee)

Who's this?

BABEE

Hello, Mrs. Young.

MOTHER

It's Ms. Lane actually.

(to Sadie)

Is this who you were going out with tonight?

BABEE

Boyfriend, actually.

MOTHER

Boyfriend?!

SADIE

No! I mean-

BABEE

Actually Ms. Lane, Henry invited me to your lovely home. He wants to play Life.

HENRY

Yeah! Come sit with us, Mommy.

MOTHER

(to Babee)

Then that's your motorcycle out there?

BABEE

It is.

MOTHER

And how did you meet my Sadie?

SADIE

I met him at school. He was part of our outreach program.
MOTHER (to Babee)

How old did you say you were?

Babee

Nineteen, ma’am.

Henry!

Not that old.

Babee (to Mother)

Kids, don’t know what they’re saying. If you’ll excuse me real quick. I gotta take a whiz. This way right?

Babee leaves stage right. Mother finally walks towards the table.

MOTHER

Are you both okay?

Sadie

What? What’re you-

MOTHER

Is he going to take all our stuff?

Sadie

No mom! He doesn’t do that anymore.

MOTHER

Anymore?!

Sadie

He really likes his new parole officer. He listens to her.

Henry

Wanna play, Mommy?

Sadie (to Mother)

Plus he-

MOTHER (to Sadie)

I don’t even know where to start.

(looks at Henry)

Henry, earmuffs.

Henry

Why?

MOTHER

Please.

*Henry covers his ears with his hands.*

MOTHER

You know he just wants to hook up, don’t you?

Sadie

Ew, Mom, he’s not like that.

MOTHER

They’re all like that.

Sadie

You’re wrong.

MOTHER

Go ahead and ask him. He’s probably sleeping with his parole officer, too.

*Henry takes his hands away from his ears.*

Henry

Can we play now?

MOTHER (to Henry)

Give us a minute, Baby.

Henry

You talk forever.

Sadie (to Mother)

You don’t know him.

MOTHER

I think I do. I’m just trying to protect you.

Sadie

Yeah, right.

MOTHER

I saw guys like him all the time when I worked at the department. Trust me, they don’t change.

Sadie

This is different! He-

MOTHER

That’s what everybody says.

*Babee comes back and sits at the table.*

MOTHER

Are you looking to hook up with my daughter?

Sadie

Mom!
HENRY

What’s a hookup?

Babee looks uncomfortable.

BABEE

Uh, no ma’am. We were going to meet today, but just to sell some weight loss supplements that go in smoothies around a couple neighborhoods.

(upbeat)

By the way, you wouldn’t be interested in buying some, would you, Ms. Lane?

Sadie covers her face in embarrassment.

MOTHER

No, thank you.

Babee starts to get up from table.

BABEE

Yeah! I got some samples right out there you can try out-

MOTHER

I said no thank you.

Babee sits back down.

BABEE

Oh, well anyway, it’s a great gig. Sadie and Reverend Mike helped me find it.

MOTHER

Sadie?

SADIE

And Reverend Mike.

BABEE

Oh yeah! Super cool dude. He really showed me the way in the clink. Baptized me and everything first thing once I got out. But Sadie, Sadie’s my angel, Ma’am. Kind to me when no one gave me a chance. People are so quick to make judgements, you know? It’s obvious you taught her well, Ms. Lane.

MOTHER

Thank you.

Babee starts to get up from table.

BABEE

I said no thank you.

MOTHER

No, thank you.

BABEE

I said no thank you.

MOTHER

How do I know that?

SADIE

Mom, you just have to trust me.

HENRY

Are we gonna play Life or not?

BABEE

I’m game.

MOTHER

(looking at Sadie, Mother)

What do you say, ladies?

Sadie and Mother exchange a look.

MOTHER

(to Sadie)

And what about the pancakes

SADIE

The pancakes can wait. Come on.

MOTHER

Okay.

HENRY

Yay!

Sadie and Mother sit at the table and get ready to play the game.

END OF PLAY
Portrait of Crissy

Lois Baldado

Auggie

Lois Baldado
Marionette

Anna Diaz

you hold my heart like a marionette
up, down, around, under covers
tied to your finger to play

we are not together, you tell me
but you told them we were,
you told them you loved me
from your lips, you’d “never felt this way”

and as soon as we get home,
into the box i go, then you go
you wish for my heart to belong to you
you wish to be my muse,
the one i write poems about,
it cannot be forced

strings loose and fray around their edges
my heart becomes more of a loose thread
and no amount of binding will repair it

you hold my heart like marionette
one day, i will be free of you

Blue Velvety

Anna Diaz

just a moment, i close my eyes
a bed of moss and your blanket
of deep sapphire velvet

i breathe, too deep
the earth in my lungs,
the stars in my belly,
exhale wooden smoke
and crystals on my eyelids

just a moment, i rest softly

you are my protector, my bird
under your gaze, everything is okay
and so it begins,
the illusion of life with you
is the dream of the night

and so i sleep softly
for just a moment
knowing i will be awakened
by your raven feathered eyelashes
under this blue velvety, your blue velvety.
I’ve never been in love
But I’ve seen it
How it changes a person
You see it in their eyes
That the other person owns.

Love blinds you
Extortion built out of lust
Losing yourself

But, that’s not important when you’re loved.
What is important is feeling seen
I’ve never been the attraction of love
But lust.

I’ll never be worthy of incandescent affection
Suitable accountability of my own objectification.
With intentions they’ll stay
But not always reciprocated

I’ll change for them
Appearance, ideologies, likes & dislikes
I’ll be perfect
For them
As beautiful as Aphrodite
I'll train each strand of hair to want perfection
Being a victim of vanity
In order to maintain my sanity

Infatuation with perfection fabricated
By my own ambitions
To classify as someone's ideal person

This time the sound of chirping birds
does not awake me
For I overtook their early arises
To allow me to prepare
With those extra hours

Upkeeping me is vital
Each minute feeding
My self-conceit
To allow me to keep
Being pretty

I have to be picture ready
Maintain this facade
In order to be at reach
Of true self love

Victoria Montes
It Started With a Fall

Priscilla Morado
I push my hair back in the mirror each morning,
I make sure a boy is smiling back at me.
Some nights I brace for it
in an always quiet panic,
as if he could wash away down the morning drain.

the heat of the law and paper dogs
always humming in my skull,
“just asking, just asking.”
dreams of Medical Necessity and government-issued ID cards.
they tell me who I’m allowed to become.
The glare could fade me and mute me,
but I’m not ready to die.

To be loved by the law,
is gold in the beak of a vulture.
We are heads coming out of the water to gasp, and down again
SCATTERED LIGHT

Ivan Garza

VOYAGER ON FILM

Damian Uribe
Filipino Lumpia

Lois Baldado

Guilty Pleasure

Kaylee Hernandez
The Walls

Monet

The Walls seeping with dark maroon blood, warm and thick, stare back at her. Her body is lifeless but still warm to the touch.

The Walls had seen many days of this girl's life. The good days, the bad days, the days she sobbed to sleep. They witnessed her count her calories and weigh herself feeling like she was an elephant. They saw how she sent dirty pictures to a mediocre boy who didn't even know her last name. They saw when she stormed into the room, locking the door behind her as she tucked her shorts further in between her legs. When she let the cloth fall it was heavy with menstrual blood. They saw her entire life, year after year.

The Walls witnessed her gradual descent. They began to notice the color fade from the girl's room. She began to cover them little by little with black and white pictures and posters of grim sayings and little green cartoon characters. Her blond hair now covered in jet black dye and her wardrobe shifted from sugar plum princess to dark angel.

The Walls never knew what happened to the girl until one day she came inside, shut the door quietly, locked it and began to cry into the palms of her hands. The Walls had seen her cry thousands of times before this moment, but this time it was different. This time it was a secret. She was 14 when she went roller skating with some friends. These girls were her best friends, they've slept over multiple times, and shared their deepest darkest secrets in between the walls. They were supposed to protect her and help her but instead, when it happened they abandoned her, and made rumors about her. "Fucking bitches," The Walls had seen in her diary.

The girl had met a boy. She walked in behind her group of friends and her eyes stopped right on him. He was a little older but still in school. He looked nice and sweet, like he could never hurt a soul. The girl pretended she didn't see him- after all the movies always say to play hard to get, and he chased her like a puppy. All day he'd skate behind her and her friends trying to get her attention. She didn't understand what he liked about her but he wanted to get with her. Finally she gave in and threw him a bone. She felt so grown up, flirting like a woman.

"Come back here with me" he whispered in her ear.

She followed him to the back door labeled “EMPLOYEES ONLY.”
She didn't know if he worked there but he sure knew his way around. Once they reached the alleyway he turned to look at her. His face is no longer sweet, no longer nice.

Suddenly the girl felt her heart pulsing through her chest, the sweat beading on her forehead despite the freezing cold weather she was standing in. In a gasp, she was pushed down on her knees, now face level with his crotch. Her eyes watered and small sobs began to escape her mouth. The boy began to unzip his pants and lower them, the lower he got the more she closed her eyes, terrified in her spot.

He tried to forcefully open her mouth that she was clenching shut. Frustrated with her unwillingness, he threw her to the ground and got on top of her. The girl screamed and shouted for help but nobody heard her over the loud music blasting from the roller rink. She squirmed as much as she could, trying to get him off but he was too big. He was much larger than her and stronger. He covered her mouth with his discarded scarf, he held her down and suddenly she went numb. He pushed and pushed as single tears rolled down her cheeks staring at the cold brick building behind her attacker. She felt her body grow cold and hard, like a slab of concrete. She only waited until he was done. He finally got up, fixed himself and he walked away without even giving her as much as a look.

There she was laying on the cold gravel naked from the waist down in silence. The door swung open as a young employee walked out holding a trash bag to throw into the dumpster. He tossed it over her before he had seen her. Trash. He left her like trash.

"Hey what happened to you?" The employee asked concerned, not sure exactly what he walked in on. The girl could only manage small noises. The employee called the police and soon the swarm of people were huddling by the back door trying to catch a glimpse of what had happened. The friends, who were completely clueless that the girl was gone, pushed through the crowd trying to get to her. "Hey, she came with us."

The officer let them through but as they saw the scene, their faces changed from worry to disgust. The girl was still sitting on the ground, blood tracing lightly out from between her legs, and her pants thrown off to the side. A female officer had wrapped her in a blanket and was sitting next to her speaking softly trying to get information from the girl, but she couldn't speak. The girl's parents showed up and rode with her to the hospital in the back of the ambulance.

Life was never the same after that, days would go by and the girl wouldn't speak to a soul. She was banished from her friend group. "She's a whore," they'd say wrinkling their noses and rolling their eyes. The girl never understood how she got to that point in her life. Her parents tried taking her to therapy, changed schools and tried taking her to church, but everywhere she went the rumors followed her. "She's easy" "Slut" "She gave it up" "She barely knew him."

The girl's arms soon turned to war trenches, her arms slit from wrist to elbow in deep gashes that she now had to cover up. She hated her life, she wanted it to end.

She was alone that day. It was towards the end of her freshman year of school. Her parents were out gathering supplies for their upcoming summer trip to the mountains. They recently gathered the idea to pick up camping and thought it would be a fun family bonding hobby. It was a hot Saturday afternoon. The sun blaring through her black curtains breaking small silences in her dark room. The only light source she had was a purple lava lamp with orange goo restlessly going up and down for all eternity. She stared at that lamp, wondering what it would be like to live in one. To just forget, and to be floating up and down forever.

Abruptly, she stood up and walked to her parents bedroom. She instinctively walked towards the bed and crouched under facing the cold steel of the gun safe. She ran her hand over it lightly, feeling the cold metal like she had a thousand times before while she contemplated. She pushed the code in— her birthday. The little light flicked green and she pulled the handle. There it was, a small 9 mil gun. She grabbed it and started back to her room. She had never gotten this far before. She always touched the safe, but never punched in the code. She didn't know what had gotten into her this time. She took it to her dark room, shut the door and sat in silence on the floor gun in hand.

The Walls watched intently as the girl closed her eyes and took a deep breath. Her facial expressions shifted every few seconds as she recounted every memory of the last terrible year. She played a gamble in her mind, how will my life be if I don't do this? How will life be if I do this? What will my parents think? The people at school? Just more things to talk about? Tears welling up in the girl's eyes; she clenched her jaw and let out a sob. The walls tried closing in on her as to give some comfort but it was no use. With her eyes still shut, the girl picked up the gun and pulled the trigger. She painted the walls red, and the walls wept silently.
The Getaway

Viviana Infante

On cold Winter nights like this, my friends and I, after a long day of tiring work, take the sidewalk that leads us in the direction of distraction. And I can't help but notice how the mist shrouds the lights of each lamppost that stretch all across the vast field of nothingness— in the way thoughts reject any beam of prolonged happiness— in the way my face fails to show a smile brought by the rush of voices and laughter from the people who were strangers not too long ago.

It's just like in the daytime, when the season's drizzle scatters visions that caress my eyes, and I begin to wonder what it would be like to leave my home behind— to shed my skin of doubt— and what it would feel like to step into the Sun— to become the light that no one can see— to become the heat that no one can touch.

I can't tell you about the regret imprinted in the dirt that collects on the old sidewalk Or why in the cold, my hands sweat self-deprecation Or why I still hold onto the dust of memories of friends I have chosen to forget. And I can't explain how the taps of a leafless branch reminds me of the pounding of my heart at 5 in the morning.

And how the bedroom walls come closing in at each pulse— in the same tempo of a tireless prayer— in the same tempo of your annoying alarm clock. And when asked, it's even harder to explain the hail of conclusions that pile and break my worry window as I look through the glass and try to decipher what past angry lovers were talking about.

However, on Winter nights like this, I will always choose to remove myself from the inevitable flame of doubt and, instead, find comfort in the bond between white fire and the people who were strangers not too long ago. This comfort, I have found, can be seen in the coldness of the unsettling decisions of life, in the anxiety of the northern wind, and in the ceiling of a temporary storm.

It's just like in the moment, when the ice begins to break at the thought of the people who I share little with— the little that always sends my smiles ablaze— the little that finds the spot in my chest that grants me a single, untroubled breath.

I can tell you why it would have been better for me to leave, but in the thinking that calls my gloom, there is a definite reason as to why I have stayed.
Fleeting violet blooms,
Honeysuckle aroma.
Go quickly, for as soon as you realize it’s arrived—
It’s already on its way to seed.

How I wish, I could preserve that moment, just a little longer;
Just a few more weeks,
Just a few more days,
Just a few more seconds of saccharine-sweet bliss.

But alas,
All good things must come to an end, don’t they?
Perfect flowers,
Perfect family,
Perfect world.

How I just wish I could lay under your emerald branches for eternity,
a hand to brush through soft petals.
And if I close my eyes,
Then maybe, just maybe,
The sands of time will halt,
And I can live in this moment forever,
With naught care in the world.
DOES GOD LOVE ROBOTS TOO?

Mars Vai
What does it mean to feel?
To give a hug?
To receive a hug?

I want to give a hug...
but I am made of steel...

Nature is beautiful,
it grows and changes.

I cannot... I am made of steel.

...What is a Soul?
What does it mean to have a Soul?

The inside of my brain
is composed of circuits and wires.
I have an onboard computer
that processes information.
I cannot feel information...

Wires glow

hot in thought...

Wait...
Machines can’t fool!
Do I feel?
Or did I detect heat?
It must be Programming!
What if it’s not? I think...

Machines don’t doubt. Must be a miscalculation by the Creator’s own hand!
However, this doubt is now not a miscalculation.
Fascination with the mystery leads him to attempt to resolve it, must be a glitch in the system...

I want to fool. Why can’t I fool?
If it is not Programming, then it must be a glitch.
Oh...

Or maybe a soul—
Not a soul!
But I want a soul.
“Mommy, te acuerdas cuando baliabamos en la traila?”
Mi mama me tomo de la mano,
Y por un momento,
Nuestros pasos,
Nuestros movimientos,
Nuestros corazones
estaban en unision.

Derrepente, mis pies encontraron otro ritmo,
Nuestro baile, nuestros pies fuera de sinfonia.
MIS PIES YA NO ERAN LOS MISMOS DE CUANDO ERA NINA.
Los pies de mi mama ya cansadas de bailar
al ritmo de la vida.

El reflejo de esa memoria quebrada en la piedra de opal.
Donde se fue ese ritmo que tanto soliamos bailar?
Donde se fueron esas noches donde nuestros pies y corazones bailaban a la misma canción?
Donde se fue la conexion de madre e hija?
“No te preocupes mija, tu solo baila como sepas.”
Y asi bailamos otra vez.
Solo que esta vez,
era a nuestras propias canciones,
pero al mismo ritmo de los tambores que tocaban
en su panza cuando estaba embarazada de mi,
y al mismo ritmo de las generaciones por venir.
Generational Heartbreak
Karina Martinez

**Maybe 1960:**
The world has been broken
but not everyone knows.
A family with no father.
Three little girls who don’t
understand what was lost.
Three little girl’s whisper:
“Why is mommy crying?”

**Probably 1968:**
Some men can’t take a hint.
They’ll be slapped and told no
but they’ll slap right back.
They’ll leave a girl’s cheek
bruised and it’ll be mistaken
for blush in the dark.

**Definitely 1995:**
A perfect wedding,
a woman wearing a ballgown.
She is what royalty looks like.
They are two happy people
in love,
trying to figure it all out.
Give it two years
and he will leave her for another
who was already also happily in love.

**Surely 2004:**
“Don’t trust just any man,”
my great-grandma told me.
“They can hurt you or leave you.”
My grandma and mom
standing five feet away in the kitchen
stand there and acting like they didn’t hear
a thing she said.

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Childhood Bedroom
Kaylee Hernandez
I'm good at storytelling.

That's a bit cliche, isn't it? As an English major, it's like you have to be good at writing. Though, I want to exaggerate the 'storytelling' section of writing, I'm good at telling stories. I'm decent at essays, but stories? I'm a god.

That's an exaggeration and a bit narcissistic, but I am good at storytelling. I like character building, character dynamics, the way they speak, their backstories, how they react to an argument, etc. I like worldbuilding: what type of government can be used, what's the economic and technological advancement in this new world; what's the magic? The gods? Can I create a god? Some new form of religion? How about a new race? A new rule of nature? These aspects are what I'm good at. Storytelling.

I started storytelling when I read The Maze Runner series by James Dashner in 7th grade. After having my eyes open to dystopian novels, I wrote my first book called "The Big Five" only because I wanted to write a book with magic. Of course, I was a newbie, and I followed the 'Highschool labels' to create characters. We had the Hipster named Kassandra who had the power to control nature and the elements. Elijah was the bad boy with the power to create force fields and control things with his mind. Nathan, the nerd, had the intellect superpower: knowing, and observing all knowledge. Mason, the class clown, has the power to manipulate his physical form, and cause hallucinations. There was a Jock, too, but I forgot his name, and, of course, his power was super strength and speed. It was kind of like a breakfast club idea. Five students who never would interact, end up interacting. This is a good example of how character-building and world-building started with me. It was a bad start, but a start. Eventually, or now actually, I have 20 books with different, and unique characters, races, and governments. I use storytelling to create different worlds and characters.

I write as a form of healing for my inner child.

As I entered high school, I never really got the chance to write a lot. I was so stuck on society and how people perceived and thought of me. Though, since 7th grade, I had always wanted to write a book, but my head raced with my appearance, my education, my family - who was it? What am I? What's my identity? How am I even supposed to create and handle fictional lives, if I can't even figure out my own? I was lost in my own world, and I never really got the chance to make a new one. Stories in my head wanting to get out. Wanting to be told. Wanting to be written. It was a fight for willpower. I had to focus on school for my parents. I had to focus on my social life. I had to keep my mind focused on the most important things, and writing was nothing but a hobby that I picked up.

School - my parents pressured me. Pressured and pressured and pressured. "Go to nursing school; Be an English teacher; Study. Study. Study." Even a simple '90' wasn't good enough for my parents. I had to study for those extra 10 points on the next exam. Why can't I write tonight? Why can't I write during my break after an exam? During my lunch period? Why did I need to study and talk to my friends during my free time? What if I just wanted to block everything out and write? It's just a hobby anyways, right? The most important thing was school and my social life. I write to heal my inner child. I didn't get the chance to write in high school, so now I write to get everything I held back onto the computer screen and/or paper. I write for the teenager that was overworked and stressed to be the 'perfect' child and friend and who never had the time to focus on themselves; to do what they wanted.

I write to prove my worth.

Why did my parents peer pressure me in school? "I don't want to go into nursing," I said as my mom gave me a look of disappointment. As if I shattered her childhood dream. I'm not you, woman. I thought. Pressuring me to go into nursing only because two of my cousins got into medicine and you did, too... well, you stopped halfway. That's right... you stopped, so what made you think I was going to get into it at all? Are you insane? No... I'm not "irresponsible" with my future planning. I know what I wanted to be and I'm determined to reach it. In fact, I'm not even going to be the English teacher that you oh-so wanted. Just because I'm an English major does NOT mean I'm going to be an English teacher.

"So, what else are you going to do with your degree?"

I'm going to prove you wrong with it, that's what. At 16 years old, I had 4 editors ask to buy the book that I wrote, and I said 'NO' because I knew I could make it better AND sell it for better. What did you do at 16? What makes you think I'm inferior to you just because I'm choosing to do something with my English degree that doesn't fit your demands? If you ask me, I think you're jealous. You're jealous that your mom forced you into a life that she wanted. It stops with me. YOU don't tell me what to do with my English degree. You know what? I would've been an English teacher at first. I wouldn't really mind other than the low pay. But since
You also write so you can have a world to escape to. Escapism isn’t a joke. I avoid my issues. I ignore the neglectful parents that I live with. I’ve disappointed them enough when choosing a career that didn’t fit their expectations. I ignore society’s judgemental ideals as I come to terms with my change of gender and sexuality. I ignore my friends and loved ones when I realized my paranoia will scare them away.

Escapism is an attempt to ignore the problems in your world, avoiding confronting them, and it’s ultimately a placebo way of dealing with things. In my case, it’s writing.

A situation is last year. I experienced a situation where a boy love-bombed me for 9 months. He ‘groomed’ me to trust him, to love him, to care about him. I’m not a trusting person, either. It took me 3 months to open up to him despite having hours and hours of conversations. It was a nice, yet hurtful era. I loved him and trusted him. In the end, after 9 months, I found out he was lying to me. He never cared, and never had feelings for me, as he said. He led me on, and everything I told him - trusted him with, was out in the open. Instead of confronting this issue - well, I did confront it with him, but what I mean is instead of accepting what had happened to me, I blocked it out. The details of the situation and of him are locked away in my head, untouched. I couldn’t even tell you the details if I wanted to. It was a traumatic situation, I guess. An attachment that grew and grew, only for it to crumble down from lies and lies and lies and lies-

So, what did I do? Well, the memories of him and everything we did are locked away. I’m fine. As if nothing had happened. I go to my computer and write like normal. I do storytelling. I write stories and I write romances, drama, action, etc. I write worlds and different lives that I experience through writing.

I want to... loved. Let me write a romance.

I want to be a superhero... let me write a character with powers.

And a sudden pain occurred in my heart...like something was needed to get out. Why are my eyes watering? Stop it! I’m fine! Stop it.

Look, you need to write the next chapter. Aw... Kassandra was kissed by Mason! That’s cute. Let me write the next chapter.

I write so I could escape my own life.

I write to give people a world to escape to.

People don’t deserve to live the life they hate. They despise. They need to escape. To feel loved, and recognized. To experience a different world from what they do. Life isn’t all that fun. Family issues arise, societal expectations, the government abuses power, and innocent people are being murdered for the color of their skin. Civilians are involved in a war that their leaders started. It’s not a happy life. It’s not a happy world. People all around us disappoint us. Hurt us. Maybe it’s best if we escape. If we put ourselves into a world that isn’t real, it’s nice to imagine. I understand your pain. I understand what’s happening, and I understand that desperate need to be put somewhere else that isn’t here. Let me write to you.

Let me create a world where your parents give you the recognition you deserve. Let me write a story where society accepts you for who you are. Let me write a story where we overthrow the government, and there are zero consequences for defeating evil. Let me write a story where people don’t have to experience war. Let me write a story where people of all colors and races are loved and treated as equals. You deserve to be taken away from this damaged earth and be put into a world that is beautiful, bittersweet, and calm. You deserve to experience good human feelings rather than fear and hatred. I’ll write to you. A place for you to escape to.

I write as a form of escapism.

I’m projecting. I’m writing to escape my own life. “Escapism is the opposite of mindfulness...facing reality is simply too terrifying. This is the root of your anxiety, the fear of ‘doing the living’, being frightened of your own existence.”

Okay, Why did you have to analyze me like I’m some mental patient? Because you are.

No, I’m not. I’m perfectly fine. I write because I like writing. I like storytelling... I write because I never could when I was younger, and I have to write to prove to my parents that I can do just fine with a career in publishing.

Okay, what else?

I write so people can have a world to escape to.

YOU and the entire family think I can’t do anything else with the degree, I’m going to prove you wrong. I’m going to prove my worth with this stupid degree and make it my “Proof Elijah Can Be Successful As A Novelist With The Degree You Degraded.” (In short, PECBSAAWTDYD) This degree won’t make me a novelist, but it sure as hell will be a nice accessory to rub in your face along with the 4 published books that I’ll have. I write to prove my worth.

I write to give people a world to escape to.

You also write so you can have a world to escape to.
Beautiful

Clarissa Alcantar

NEW HORIZONS

Ann Sanchez
At my most drug addicted I tried my hardest to keep that shit under wraps from everyone around me. Now that I'm sober and open about my past drug use, people look at me like I'm some sort of devil for even talking about my past. Everyone talks about their fucked up past, though, yet there is a stigma or whatever for drug use that people just don't want to think about. I think it's an addiction thing. Nobody can really understand another person's addiction. Sometimes when my current drug addicted, or sex addicted, or videogame or food addicted friends start to go on about their affiliation, I also just kind of zone out, and then struggle to search for the right words to say whenever they trail off into a silence. I'm hearty as all hell but still think everyone with problems is paper skinned.

What literature calls demons, Americans call shit, and whether you're an exorcist or a plumber, you're expected to deal with it on your own. Stoicism is kind of bullshit, but it's become so engrained in society it's hard to share that opinion without having people call you out for that big bleeding heart of yours. Stoicism is bullshit, though. Most of what those Ancient Greeks came up with thousands of years ago is complete bullshit. What did Zeno know about social isolationism? Does anyone know what Chrysippus thought of the link between sexual violence, and pleasuring oneself while consuming hardcore pornography?

Better yet, what does the modern Man, whose father gifted them a book on Stoicism instead of having a talk on the birds and bees, know about Athenian democracy, or how to carry a blade without having pockets, or elastic underwear? Silent fathers create silent fathers.

Generational trauma does exist, and depression and anxiety and stress make fundamental changes to a person's DNA. In a Human minute, we learned about DNA a couple seconds ago. We've been fucked up for ages, and it's only destined to get worse. It's too bad some old dudes thousands of years ago sat around in robes together, for decades, before one of them announced: "Alexander, though respectful of both your body and the shadow it casts, I would prefer you not go on about your daily troubles with that errant slave. Let us soak in silence until the sun falls, at which we shall proceed with our cult-sanctioned geriatric, male-exclusive orgies." A story similar to this did happen, surely, at the dawning of Stoic ideology. The words etched onto stone tablets by studious, geriatric, male-exclusive orgies. A story similar to this did happen, surely, at the silencing of the sun until the sun falls, at which we shall proceed with our cult-sanctioned orgies.

Philosopher bootlickers are more likely to be taught as truths of the human condition than the medical pad scribblings of a twenty-six-year-old family doctor, prescribing a whenever-you-need-more order of Oxy because you said ooo's and ahh's when he gently pressed around that ankle you sprained playing high school ball.

In hate modern philosophers that attempt to salvage the image of philosophy; "no, no," they protest, "this is no longer a study conducted by would-be Philosopher Kings," as they write on the follies of Transcendentalists and whatever superiority-complex inspired way of thought that came before, and never once pausing to point out the irony of the whole damn show. The longer time goes on, the more superior these beings think they are, the more abstract their language becomes, the more the average person feels lost in their own damn minds. Sometimes I wake up and I don't even understand what the hell is going on, everything unravels, everything falls apart and there are just strands - everywhere strands, computer strands and people strands and wall and floor strands. Loose collections of unwound fabric, hanging - the wind is also strands, and so everything is still with no turbulence.

The problem with problems is that the world can only be understood through the lens of those problems. You solve a problem, and the world unravels. Your job is strands, your happy marriage is strands, the clutter in your home is strands, and slowly, you begin tying it all off. Bundling them all together until the bind snaps, and once again - strands. The problem with problems is that problems were never given their time in the spotlight. Problems are the problem that are swept under the rug.

Could a person imagine a society if ancient philosophy, and therefore everything that has influenced everything, both modern and ancient, was not built on the platform of attempting to live with problems, but instead how to combat problems? If problems did not have to be obfuscated with beaded strands, hanging over the doorframe for our future decisions?

Is this how people lose their minds. Because even that mind is strands, when the world unravels, what people call mindfulness or "keep-it-together, man," falls into strands and the only thing that exists is the improbability to ever see the world as anything but strands. Sometimes, listening to people who have lost their minds, let's, okay let's paint a picture of someone that completely lost their mind in a public setting: someone, like a woman, someone starts to freak out on a subway because someone else sat directly next to them instead of sitting in any other empty seat on the train. They're free to sit there, of course, but the woman does not see it that way. She loses it, decorum becomes strands, standing up and changing her own seat becomes strands, what exists is a problem that has become uncovered and there is nothing for her to do but to let...
loose a scream, or to lash out - she’s lost her mind. The complexity of the situation at hand has become completely lost to her. There were problems and there were strands and there was nothing else. Because when the world unravels, there is nothing else. There is no way to combat problems, and if there were, we would not be able to understand the world around us any further. A man is cured, via therapy, of his drug addiction - that man doesn’t even remember the person that he used to be. He was only his problems and then his problem became strands and nothing else exists at that point. There are problems and there are strands, and when the world unravels, it’s hard to determine whether or not those problems ever existed.

I have problems and I have problems that become strands, and therefore I have a problem with the strands they become. The problem that encapsulates them all is that they exist with such complexity within my own head that people are not able to understand me anymore. They think I lost my mind when I start talking about my problems, and about how my world, sometimes, unravels, and when it unravels there is only strands. People don’t seem to understand that about me, and they don’t see how it’s their problem, and they don’t seem to understand that it doesn’t have to be their problem, it is my own. They think I lost my mind. In that moment, to them, I become strands, and they attempt to find pieces of me, and bundle those pieces up, and they tell me how funny, and happy I used to be. Then my problem becomes their problem, and this is why the world is so sick, I believe. Problems become strands become problems and there is no solution to anything. A problem becomes a web of plurality and webs are just complex strands, and the world is complex and composed of strands, too.
The City of Dreams

Crystal Perez

The god of Greece

Nina Alegre

like a bullet train we rode together
it was a fast two-week thing
it probably meant less to you than it did to me

throughout the ride
i laughed at my ridiculous thoughts

i saw our future together--
i thought about all the girls i'd never get to be
how you could not like me back,
love me back
it was too hard for me to understand
but i did, i did, i do.

someone else will get to kiss your lips / run their fingers through your hair

i'll never get to know what you looked like
the color of your eyes, what kind of sunglasses you like to wear
you feel like a human-shaped bruise

i wanted to know what it was like to truly love but i was seeing visions of things
that simply weren't there / that simply did not exist

you'd never rode this train with me
it was only when i glanced at my reflection through the window that i realized--

i was alone
i have always been (alone)

i do not have hope for us
we are impossible / we will never be
it will never happen / you weren't made for me

i can't keep holding onto you like i always do with everybody else.

i can't force us to happen
it doesn't work that way
i'll get over it, i'll get over you

why couldn't you just let me love you. would that have been so horrible?
One look at this chart and it’d be lights out for Miss Pamela in there. Her prefrontal cortex would resemble scrambled eggs - you get the idea. Where was I? Ah, psychosis. Psychosis in modern medicine is a catch all term, but is most frequently used to describe patients suffering from schizophrenia, or another mental disorder that presents similarly, like what Miss Pamela unfortunately hosts in her brain. Let’s take a listen -

\[\text{Beat.}\]

Dr. Royce WHISTLES. Pam stops swaying back and forth, and turns to the pale light.

PAM

My-oh! My majestic Blue Bird, you’ve returned to me at last. I did not think I would hear you sing again. How long has it been? I should have never asked for you to go away. I regret so much, and all of it focused on you -!

Pam holds her hands at her chest.

\[\text{Beat.}\]

Dr. Royce shoots a look toward STAGE LEFT and shakes their head.

DR. ROYCE (Sighs)

At it again. Here’s a rhetorical: how do you determine if someone is schizophrenic? You can’t!

I don’t expect you to know this, but “psychosis” isn’t an official diagnosis. It was. Back when doctors - the founding father’s of modern medicine - were sticking metal rods through a patient’s nose and into the top of their skulls to rip their brains apart. Gruesome, right? Eww, yes? Yes, well, they were only acting on behalf of the medical science available to them at the time. And of course, me and you would like to believe that if we were around in those times we would’ve done something differently, but we would likely be lobotomizing children and elders all the same, if we were to take a glance at a chart like this -

Dr. Royce flips over the top page on their clipboard, revealing a page that reads “SHE IS INSANE (I PROMISE)” toward the audience.
Dr. Royce points with their right hand toward Pam, and then straightens up once again.

DR. ROYCE (CONT'D)
Steps in and decides that person needs help.

Beat.

Dr. Royce WHISTLES.

PAM
You've returned just in time, but of course you have, my Blue Bird! Oh, tell me you return with good news? Oh, tell me you have any news at all! Have you found way to break me from this terrible curse? Have you discovered anything at all that may prevent my death that will surely come to pass tonight? On the eve of my fortieth birthday - my, already my time has come? Even though I still feel so young, so full of life! How unfair! Truly, how unfair!

Pam struts away from the light, hand on her forehead, before swiveling her head back dramatically.

Beat.

PAM (CONT'D)
My... my Blue Bird, how handsome you look now. How I wish these walls didn't confine you outside... Handsome... there was a time when I called you 'cute.' So cute, I could've crushed you in the palm of my hand.

Pam looks down at her right hand.

Beat.

PAM (CONT'D)
(Scornfully)
Should I assume you've failed to find an end to my curse and I am assigned to the same fate that has befallen all my progenitors before?

Dr. Royce WHISTLES, sadly.

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Beat.

DR. ROYCE
Isn't that a sobering thought? That that voice in your head could actually be a symptom of some "schizy" activity in your brain?

Beat.

DR. ROYCE (CONT'D)
Thought experiment: how many times have you eaten the last slice of pizza, even though you explicitly told yourself to not eat the last slice of pizza? Wanting to lose weight - always talking about how you want to lose weight - and you say to yourself, 'well, I'll start the diet tomorrow. One slice of pizza today won't change the diet tomorrow,' only to repeat a similar action the next day, and the day after that. Are you displaying a lack of self-control, or just a lack of control in general? Who knows!

Beat.

Dr. Royce walks back and forth, pauses, and points at the crowd.

DR. ROYCE (CONT'D)
But, of course you know, right? Of course you know you're the one that wants to indulge in an extra scoop of ice cream; hell, you're the one bringing the spoon to your mouth... right?

Beat.

Pam has returned from her strut to the pale light, pointing onto the stage.

PAM
You've returned just in time, but of course you have, my Blue Bird! Oh, tell me you return with good news? Oh, tell me you have any news at all! Have you found way to break me from this terrible curse? Have you discovered anything at all that may prevent my death that will surely come to pass tonight? On the eve of my fortieth birthday - my, already my time has come? Even though I still feel so young, so full of life! How unfair! Truly, how unfair!

Beat.

PAM (CONT'D)
My... my Blue Bird, how handsome you look now. How I wish these walls didn't confine you outside... Handsome... there was a time when I called you 'cute.' So cute, I could've crushed you in the palm of my hand.

Pam looks down at her right hand.

Beat.

PAM (CONT'D)
(Scornfully)
Should I assume you've failed to find an end to my curse and I am assigned to the same fate that has befallen all my progenitors before?

Dr. Royce WHISTLES, sadly.

Beat.

PAM
You can be honest with me... tell me, do you hate me for what I've asked of you?
Dr. Royce does mocking jazz hands on either side of their head.

DR. ROYCE (CONT’D)
It all makes sense. And in your reality, objective reality, as in, what’s actually real, doesn’t make any fu-fucking sense. It’s okay to admit that.

Beat.

Dr. Royce removes their clip-on tie and ruffles their hair.

DR. ROYCE (CONT’D)
(frantic)
Let’s say your reality makes sense if you wear all black. And someone else’s only makes sense if they wear a big clown nose, and nipple pasties. Objectively speaking, the person wearing nothing but a clown nose and nipple pasties is probably the crazy one, right?

(Beat)
Sure. But again, objectively speaking, if someone is crazy in your reality, but they don’t think you’re crazy in theirs, than wouldn’t this construct of objective reality dictate that you are the one that’s more disconnected?

Beat.

PAM
(Wailing)
I’m cursed! I’m cursed! I’m going to die in my sleep! Why am I forsaken, Blue Bird, why?!

DR. ROYCE
(Nervous Laughing)
I’m just busting your balls. Of course someone wearing nothing but a clown nose and nipple pasties is koo-koo bananas, now let’s see...

Dr. Royce points.

Beat.

DR. ROYCE (CONT’D)
(Standing up)
I’m cursed! I’m cursed! I’m going to die in my sleep! Why am I forsaken, Blue Bird, why?!

PAM
(Wailing)
I’m cursed! I’m cursed! I’m going to die in my sleep! Why am I forsaken, Blue Bird, why?!

DR. ROYCE
(Nervous Laughing)
I’m just busting your balls. Of course someone wearing nothing but a clown nose and nipple pasties is koo-koo bananas, now let’s see...

Dr. Royce drops their finger.

Beat.

DR. ROYCE (CONT’D)
(Sullen)
To you. In your subjective reality, where you’re the star.
"STUCK IN A PERPETUAL LOOP BELIEVING SHE IS A THIRTY-NINE YEAR OLD WOMAN, AND IS PART OF A FAMILIAL CLAN THAT CAN SPEAK TO ANIMALS, BUT AT THE COST OF DYING THE DAY THEY TURN 40, OR BEFORE THEY TURN 40." This isn’t medical science, so don’t tell people I told you this, but the easiest way to spot someone crazy is if they know everything about their lives is completely true.

We see with alien abductions, stolen elections, flat earthers - some of the people that believe in this shit refuse to even consider the other side’s views.

Dr. Royce WHISTLES the opening of 'You’re a Grand Old Flag.'

Pam here didn’t want to take her medicine today.

Beat.

Beat.

DR. ROYCE (CONT’D)
(raising an eyebrow)
And some of them are our best customers.
(sticking tongue out half-way)

Dr. Royce fixes their tie and their hair.

Kidding aside, and listen to my next words carefully; always think objectively. Especially in medicine. You’re not a doctor, nor by the looks of you do I think you’d even be accepted into med-school - hell, I don’t care if you’ve even finished high school. Always think objectively... that’s what they want me to say.

Beat.

Dr. Royce places a hand on their chest and points up.

DR. ROYCE (CONT’D)
You see, I’ve sworn my allegiance to that damned Caducean flag when I pledged to uphold the Hippocratic Oath. I promised to do no more harm than necessary, as if ‘modern’ medical boards of today understanding suffering as I do as if they’ve had their boots on these grounds, wading ankle deep in human agony, as I do - day by day.

Pam stares toward the audience, unblinking.

PAM
(Monotone)
And yet, if I had to choose - either an early death, or to live forever, I would choose to die - one-million times, or even more (!) -

Pam breaks from monotony, and turns once again.

PAM (CONT’D)
If it meant I would spend each of those lives before my death with you, Blue Bird.

Dr. Royce WHISTLES the opening of 'You’re a Grand Old Flag.'

DR. ROYCE
Pam here didn’t want to take her medicine today.

Beat.

Scumbag! My bosses’ boss would want me to say, fuck it, c’est la vie, she isn’t going anywhere anytime soon. There’s always tomorrow!

(slamming hand on chart)

Regulations! Health codes!

(quickly looking at chart)

Pam is someone we’d call a ‘lost cause.’ Again, not an official diagnosis, but if you saw in here what I did -

(looking more diligently)

Yeah, Jesus Christ! Miss Pamela should be heavily medicated - and if not by her own free will, by professional intervention. You hear her?

Beat.

Pam is sobbing quietly.

Dr. Royce gets low.

DR. ROYCE (CONT’D)
(mockingly)
Awe.

DR. ROYCE (CONT’D)
Do you think she wants to be like that? Do you think anyone would want to live like that? Suffering in perpetuity? She thinks - she thinks she can talk to birds, man. Birds!
And the worst part is, is that Pam is... when she's taking her pills, she's one of the good ones. She's so polite. And quiet. God, working here, you learn to crave silence. All she does is sit cross-legged in front of one of the windows in the common room, and watches the world go by. Not a peep. Nary a word, unless prompted. She just sits and watches and it's so peaceful...

(Beat)

It's - it's also a little creepy, at first, but you get used to it. And when everyone is acting up, throwing shit, sometimes literal shit, or fighting over the TV remote, she just sits. And she watches.

_Pam starts humming._

**Dr. Royce stares off into the distance.**

_Beat._

**Pam starts humming.**

(Beat, then huffing)

And the worst part is, that Pam is... when she's taking her pills, she's one of the good ones. She's so polite. And quiet. God, working here, you learn to crave silence. All she does is sit cross-legged in front of one of the windows in the common room, and watches the world go by. Not a peep. Nary a word, unless prompted. She just sits and watches and it's so peaceful...

**Dr. Royce (Cont'd)**

Dr. Royce takes out a syringe and holds it up to the light.

Dr. Royce walks toward STAGE-LEFT.

**Dr. Royce (Cont'd)**

Pam? Knock-knock.

Dr. Royce is holding the syringe behind their back with one hand, and the chart in the other.

_Pam is startled, and turns in her place. She begins to back up as Dr. Royce walks in._

**Pam (Cont'd)**

How are we doing today, Pam? A little birdy told me you've been refusing medication?

**Pam Gasps.**

You have animal-tongue as well, Dr. Royce? Can you see my Blue Bird, just here -

**Pam points off stage, turning toward it once again, back toward Dr. Royce.**

**Pam (Cont'd)**

He's really returned! Like I said he would!

**With her back turned, Dr. Royce begins to carefully step toward Pam - slowly raising the syringe above their head, with intent to jab into her neck.**

_Pam quickly turns to face Dr. Royce. Unexpectedly, Royce drops their arms as Pam swings a hand into the syringe. It jabs Dr. Royce in the stomach._

**Ahh!**

**Dr. Royce (Cont'd)**

abusive relationship... But Hippocrates isn't my God. I refuse to be a walking contradiction... I'll let myself be the 'bad guy,' if I know my reasons are good.

**Dr. Royce takes out a syringe and holds it up to the light.**

**Dr. Royce walks toward STAGE-LEFT.**

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**Dr. Royce takes out a syringe and holds it up to the light.**

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_Pam quickly turns to face Dr. Royce. Unexpectedly, Royce drops their arms as Pam swings a hand into the syringe. It jabs Dr. Royce in the stomach._

**Ahh!**
Dr. Royce begins to wave their hands in front of their face, and they thrash their head side-to-side. They shoot a glance at Pam, and grab her by the wrist.

**DR. ROYCE**
(Slurring)
Find a... someone... find the doctor...

**PAM**
But doctor, you’re the doctor, doctor! Blue Bird, I think you’re right - they’ve gone koo-koo bananas!

**DR. ROYCE**
(Slurring)
Seek... help... I see the birds... flying free, flying free...

Dr. Royce falls backward into the bed. Pam stands up and runs toward STAGE RIGHT.

**END OF PLAY**

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PAM (Hectic)
Oh, are you alright, Dr.? Is it my Blue Bird? Yes, he is in rather poor state. My poor dear! How violently these years have treated him. But at least he will have a chance to recover... after tonight, he is free to... do whatever it is birds do, I suppose.

**Dr. Royce stumbles backward. They look straight up.**

**DR. ROYCE**
Fly- flying...

**PAM**
Well isn't that a given! There is more nuance to the life of a bird than their choice of transportation. Isn’t that right, Blue Bird? Go on, tell him!

**Pam takes a step toward Dr. Royce.**

**Dr. Royce WHISTLES.**

**Dr. Royce stumbles until their legs hit the bed, and they collapse into a lazy slump.**

**Dr. Royce WHISTLES, lazily.**

**PAM (CONT’D)**
Oh, an adventure indeed! Blue Bird, you must see the world! See the world as I have not behind these walls.

**DR. ROYCE**
Orderly! Nurse - help!

**Dr. Royce begins to thrash back and forth on the bed. Pam sits gently on the other side of the bed.**

**PAM**
Dr. Royce, I've never seen you act such a way! Are you alright? Blue Bird, what should I do?

**Dr. Royce WHISTLES, lazily.**
Walt Disney once stated, “We keep moving forward, opening new doors, and doing new things, because we are curious and curiosity keeps leading us down new paths.” Moving schools is a significant change. Having to navigate my surroundings along with not knowing anyone is very difficult. Entering middle school is a new journey; change can be good and bad at times but everyone goes through it.

Motivational Discovery
During elementary, I lacked motivation shown by my grades. Moving to IDEA McAllen the culture was different than my elementary. Students put in actual work to achieve good grades. This school had an award assembly, at the time I wasn’t familiar with what that meant. My teacher Mr. Swaringen began passing flyers with the words in bold: Thursday at 4:30 in the Library. I was excited about the assembly and told my friends and family about it. I borrowed a teacher’s phone and reminded my parents. The teachers mentioned the assembly being about grades but I didn’t pay much attention.

Thursday arrives and the intercom rings through the school. Each homeroom was called to the library where a small ceremony was taking place. Parents sat near the stage in foldable chairs waiting for the assembly to start. Students were seated by homeroom waiting for the ceremony to begin. The principal takes the stage welcoming students and parents. He calls students by separate homerooms beginning the assembly. Names were being called every minute, students, anxious and uneasy, walked toward the stage standing patiently, knowing they can sit back down soon.

Finally, our homeroom was called and the students sitting next to me started getting up one at a time. I remember playing with my fingers as I looked at my nails. Trying not to pick at them since I always had a bad habit of doing that when I was worried. Slowly every student’s name was called but mine, I was devastated. All the kids who were in front and beside...
me were now standing. I was left alone, feeling the eyes of my peers and family. I tried blending in with the class behind me but it was pointless. I could feel the tears welling up in my eyes. Everyone already knew my name wasn’t called: my classmates, my teachers, and my parents. So many thoughts consumed me, “what did I do wrong? What will they think? My parents and sister, my friends?”

Disappointing someone has always been a deep fear of mine. Just seeing the look of pity on my parents’ faces stuck with me. After not being called, the assembly felt like it was never going to end (I stood up heading to my parents crying my eyes out and holding them close). I just wanted to know why I wasn’t called. My mom immediately started asking questions of the principal since an award assembly was new to all of us. I had one C and for that reason, I didn’t make A or A and B honor roll. I was humiliated and felt guilty for embarrassing my parents.

I made a promise to myself that day: that I would never feel that way again. In doing so, I attended tutoring, asked questions, and made sure to study before exams. Before I would just wing tests and assignments never having the motivation to try. I would study with friends during lunch. Making a game to test each other with flashcards for English class. Attending tutoring after school for math, and getting help on units I was confused about. The campus I attended also was very interested in competitions having students work hard to get the best results. I found myself attempting to raise my hand the highest out of my peers to answer questions.

The first quarter finally came to an end, and the next award assembly arrived. All the homerooms were called to the library and my parents were aware of the assembly. Sitting down I could still feel my anxiousness from the last award assembly. My parents had told me, “no matter what happens we will always be proud of you.” My nerves were all over the place as I was shaking slightly when my homeroom was called. I took a few breaths trying to compose myself.

Just as before students stood around me walking to the stage and shaking the hand of the principal taking their certificates. Then the moment came: my name was called; I thought I would feel relieved but I just felt even more uneasy walking on stage having all those eyes on me. After a minute I realized that all my work paid off. Receiving a certificate for A and B honor roll. Having teachers and friends helping me, truly showed how they all believed in me. I just needed to put some work in to achieve my goals. The weight was lifted off my shoulders knowing I no longer disappointed my friends and family. The assembly ended five minutes after we sat back down, students, full of joy and energy (ran to their parents swaying back and forth with certificates in hand, knowing they had worked hard for their awards). Walking to my parents, I could see the wide smiles on their faces. My mom tears up and takes pictures to capture the moment.

What This Means Today

It’s been 11 years now: looking back I can see how that one event completely shifted my motivation. I think that the award assembly is a way to motivate students but it’s not the best way. Seeing how students can be humiliated. The amount of stress and fear I had just sitting and waiting for names to be called. It was not only nerve-racking but put a weight on my shoulders, especially at such a young age. As a 21st Century Enrichment Specialist working at IDEA McAllen. I use my personal experiences to inspire my students. Always telling them how proud I am to see them working hard. I know now that change isn’t always negative but it called lead to self-discovery.
In this dead, barren, land of sand and brick, I walk alone. Normally I
wouldn't be so "dramatic" as my grandfather would say, but this journey is not
an average walk through the desert. The wind that carries eye blinding whisps
of sands is, what they say in my great-grandfather's day "a cake walk." I've gone
down desert roads before to bring food, or if I'm especially lucky, a bottle of
medicine. The only things people commonly worry about when traveling are
scorpions, snakes, an occasional vulture, the sun, and of course, getting lost. Get-
ting lost in this desert is one of the worst situations to be in. I might as well be
dead if I lose my tracks and my senses. Why do I explain all this? Well, because
I've been entrusted, to go further beyond this land I've known my whole life. I
need to plant the seeds of the next century.

Seeds, the rarest thing ever found here, even rarer than the medicine
I mentioned earlier. I carry three bags of tiny, brown, unimportant specks,
you could eat all of these, and you wouldn't feel it go down your throat. My
great-grandfather told me that the seeds will bring food of all kinds for people to
eat. I can't say I'm not curious to see what's inside. These seeds feel so smooth
in my hand. I keep the bags in the pocket of my rough but wearable pants. My
skin itches as I walk in the blazing sun, but I manage. I always have.

The sun's finally set, and I can feel the cold winds plowing my way. I'm
starting to shiver and panic. It can be tough adapting to the night, but there's
worse fates than freezing in the cold or getting poisoned. Horrible things happen
to those who find the cannibals.
Entry 4

I scrambled to find an empty hole where I can hide. I had to kill a snake and wipe its blood and poison over my clothes to secure my spot. It’s a small cave, in perfect condition for me to crawl in, just in time before I heard their howls. They sound like a dying dog; I just hope I don’t have to see those disgusting skinny excuses for “people”. Their eyes have lost all sanity, teeth sharper than a fox or dog, hairier than any animal I’ve seen, and those things walk on four legs. What those monsters don’t have in strength, they have in number. Adam... stick to the shadows. You know what happens if they catch you.

Entry 5

They came after the howling, around four or five of them, always traveling in packs when hunting. I caught glimpses of them searching the sands, one caught a lizard in a log, not too far from me. They sniffed around, getting closer to where I was. I covered my exposed skin amongst the rocks and hoped the poisoned snake smell threw off their scent. I wished for my heart to stop beating so much and waited forever for the monsters to finish their routine.

Entry 6

The sun finally came back. I’d passed out in the cave and survived for another day. After making my way out, I took my pouch of water and drank a small bit. It’s so tempting to drink the whole patch, but I restrain myself. I feel like I can breathe again, thankfully they only come out at night. I remember seeing one bury itself when the sun was coming up. The gender of these things is impossible to tell since they all look the same. I’m guessing others look for small holes and caves to hide like I do. It would make my travel a hell of a lot easier if they buried themselves a couple of more feet under and stayed there. Anyways, I keep walking through the desert, with the seeds safely stashed in my one pocket.

Entry 7

When you travel enough times through this sand, you notice some things to help you survive. In the sand, animals leave obvious trails that lead to a hole where they hide in. Even the cannibals leave tracks of their own. That is when the wind doesn’t blow the trail off the sand. For once the wind helped me by blowing away my footprints so the cannibals didn’t find me. That leaves another thing lost though. My way back home. I count around seven or nine sunsets ago, that I left to go on this path, it seemed no matter how far I walked, my old home was still behind me. All I see now are distant sand dunes, sand floors, sand clouds, and sand. Nothing but god damned sand!

Entry 8

Another sunset and sunrise passes by. I managed to cover my tracks and find another small cave like last time. Sometimes I think those beasts are getting closer to finding me. Maybe I need to cover myself with more snake poison? It gets harder to fool their sight and smell. I feel like I’ve been scraping by with luck. It’s a good thing they don’t like to risk going to caves, unless it’s one they claimed already. As I continue to walk, I nearly fall for nature’s trap by sticking my foot in a sand pile and sinking a bit. My breath tightened its grip for a second as my foot sunk almost to my knee. “Calm down”, my father always says, “Slow, and steady, slow, then steady”. Finally I felt my foot off the quicksand, and then remember I have to clean out my foot, like it’s possible.

Entry 9

When I started this journey, I packed my twin survival knives. I’m pretty worthless with a bow and arrow. Neither the sandstorms nor the dark help my chances of hitting a target either. Despite that, my father taught me to hunt for food. Along with that, a bag with three days’ worth of food, three pouches of water, great-grandpa’s three bags of seeds, and this little “diary”, as my grandfather calls it. I never understood why or how my great-grandpa stored so much paper, enough that I had my own diary to write with. There were a lot of things I couldn’t understand about the world my great-grandfather came from. As of now, my supplies have gone down to a day’s worth of food, and two pouches of water. To add more shame to my misery, my stomach grumbles louder than my brothers and sisters’ stomachs combined. The shame isn’t my comparison to them, it’s being out here with a hungry stomach, like I’m no different from the cannibals: One massive appetite that can never be fulfilled.
Entry 10

I knew this would happen soon. I've walked to another sunset, but I've got nowhere to hide. Dammit, there's no holes or caves anywhere in sight. I can't even bury myself in a sand dune. I took a sniff of my clothes, and the smell of snake poison has worn off. I've got no choice. I need to run, run faster than the speed of quicksand, faster than those cannibals, anything to be faster than those monsters. The sun is getting lower, and I can feel my body getting colder, either from the low temperatures or chills of my incoming doom, either way, I wasn't ready for this.

Entry 11

I tried to run as fast as I could, in the distance I saw another cave. My excitement for seeing the cave died as soon as I felt the claws sink into my shoulders, and then the teeth sink into my shoulder. I screamed as the beast tasted my blood.

I punched and wrestled to get the beast off of me, but it was stubborn, it wasn't letting me go without a bite. I managed to roll on to my back, even with the cannibal still on it, but the next monster dove for my arm. I took my knife out but it was too late. It bit and chewed off part of my left arm. I screamed again, but this time I took out my other knife and stabbed the cannibal biting my shoulder.

Another one was diving for me. I rolled out of the way, but I still felt it's claws scratch my back before I got away. I got up and heard a new beast coming for me. I tried to find it, but I only caught a glimpse of its claws before I was suddenly knocked to the ground. The left side of my face felt like it was burning. I saw a cannibal on my right getting ready to pounce. But before it did, I gripped my knife and found my rage. I screamed and swung, and barely cut it, but it still clawed at my other shoulder. The others charged at me, but I was already swinging at them too. Thinking back to that moment, I think I was just as savage as them.

The three cannibals stood on all fours in front of me. My fast and heavy breathing faced off against their deep growls. My body felt like it was on fire, and after I looked down for a second I saw why. The sand was changing to a red color from the drops of blood. I took a quick glance to my left and found the cave. I slowly treaded to the cave, my eyes not leaving either monster's.

It wasn't long before one of them finally lost its patience and charged at me. I charged and stabbed it in the eye, but at the same time, the other two dived at me. While one knocked me to the ground again, the other bit into my arm that held the knife. Again I screamed, but after it ripped off a chunk of my forearm, I took my knife and stabbed it.

I was in front of the cave when the last cannibal tackled me. I barely caught the cannibal by the neck before it could bite off my face. My strength was leaving me, and I felt my body sinking. With the strength I had left, I threw it deeper into the cave. Just like I thought, it was quicksand. While it struggled and screamed, I tore parts of my clothes to tie around my arms and shoulders.

As I write this, the cannibal finally finished sinking into its grave. Good riddance. With all the screaming, other cannibals might show up, at least I have the seeds on me. Wait. Where are the seeds?!

Entry 12

From outside the cave I can hear howls, and I don't think they're mournful. Whatever their business is with fresh corpses, I want no part of it.

Finally, the sun is back. I never thought I'd say or write that. I can hear the cannibals leaving. Now to find the seeds before the next sandstorm comes. I just came back into the cave, with ten seeds. Ten. Seeds. I almost died to a couple of cannibals just to get back ten seeds? This is ridiculous. I threw whatever life I had just to find some dirt? How did I get myself in this mess?

Everything I know, it's all thanks to great-grandpa John. As a kid, I couldn't wait for the next story of the world he came from, the life he knew. The massive bodies of water called "oceans" that stretched further than the desert, crystal blue waves that reflected the sunlight. There were hundreds upon thousands of species of animals beneath the sea that we never got to explore.

I remember he told me of massive dunes made of rocks that stretched above the sky called "mountains", and lands of green called "grass" with structures called "trees" that maintained life for hundreds of species of animals. He made me picture stones built on each other called "buildings" where people like us used to do more than scavenge food. People took up jobs like "farm", "write", "engineer", "nurse", and so much more. He gave me the name that connected all of these things together: Civilization.

How could a world like that ever have existed? It never made any sense to me: How could a world so beautiful ever turn into a hellhole like this?
out his hands, and there were three bags. "I know you thought my stories were just that. I know you question my faith. But here's my proof, I kept this with me and let my cowardice stop me from going out there and planting them. Here, take them." I took his seeds.

"Why me? Where am I supposed to go?" I asked.

"Beyond. Find the soft dirt, pour some water, and let the sun do the rest. In a few days, you'll see the world I talked about." He looked away from me. He started coughing again. "We've almost reached a century of living here."

"A century?" I asked in shock. I knew many years passed but to think the world was like this for a century.

"We've lived too long like this. Far too long. Adam, I wish I could be there, to show you the oceans, the trees, all of it. We both know I'm out of time." I can't hold my tears anymore. This was always going to happen. "Promise me Adam. Promise you'll plant these, please. I know it's a heavy burden, and I know it's dangerous out there. But please don't make the same mistakes as me. Do it for all of us-" He started another fit. I promised him, he knew me too well, I was willing to do it for him. He died two sunsets later, and I started my journey after he was buried.

Entry 14

I've lost pace with the days. I've lost everything. I don't have a home to go back to, no food or water to keep me alive, no great-grandfather to tell me stories, no brothers, or sisters to yell at. Nothing! Why did I agree to this? There's no soil anywhere! There never was! I should throw these damn seeds away. They've done nothing for me. I bleed and I starve for these tiny bits of dirt, and for what? Why did I throw my life away for this? What's the point? I can hear cracking in the sky, as if some god gets some sick pleasure out of this. I grip the handful of seeds I still have, and I want to toss them away. I want this to end. I don't care how anymore. His words keep coming to my head, saying the same things. Why did you make me do this? Why did I agree to this?

Entry 15

My last promise. The only thing protecting these seeds. A flash of light blinded me all of a sudden, then I heard another crack. It's still dark outside the cave. Is it still night? I think I should go see. I remember my legs getting heavier with every step. I didn't know why,
or how I could still walk. My body just moved. The sky was darker than I'd ever seen before. I was walking, with the last seeds in my hand, and my diary stuffed away in my clothes, what’s left of it. Suddenly I felt something drop on me. I looked up. Another flash and my body crumbled in fear. I was waiting for an attack, but nothing happened to me. Nothing except more drops on me. I stare at my hand, it was water. My great-grandfather told me about this. It was raining! I was running forward with more speed now. Can’t say I knew how far I went, all I thought was find soil. Suddenly, I tripped over something. Was it a stone? I looked around and felt the ground. It was soft, and a little wet. This had to be soil! I wasted no time; I crawled and dug my hands under the ground. I dug and kept digging, I took the seeds, and threw them into the hole. I clawed at the dirt until it fully covered the seeds, and I finally rolled on my back. It was finally over. I remember laughing despite the pain, who cares about pain anymore? I remember staring at the dark sky and tasting the water as it dropped on me.

Entry 16

I can’t believe I’m still alive. My “diary” is also alive in way. Like it has more luck than me. I realized I was in a cave, and there was a woman sitting next to me. I screamed and managed to hurt myself again. I looked at my body, somehow it was clean, and was wrapped in bandages. I heard rain outside, it’s not as strong as before, but it was still there. I can’t move my legs. I thought my body had given up on me, after all this time. The woman woke up to my scream.

“We are you? Where am I?” I asked quickly, while trying to get my body to move for me.

“Stop don’t move so much. Please relax. My name is Eve, I saw you out there. I dragged you here and wrapped you with the bandages, it’s not much but it will have to do until tomorrow. Now please. Rest.”, she said softly, but urgently.

Entry 17

I woke up. Eve stood next to me. It was thanks to the sun that I could see her beauty. With some help from her I manage to walk out of the cave and past the sunlight. Dozens of people everywhere gathered, watching me. A middle aged man walked to me. “What is your name stranger?” he asked me. I told him. “You planted those seeds didn’t you?” He pointed to the spot, freshly dug, and buried. It was an obvious question, but I think he wanted to hear me say it.

“Yes, you know about the seeds?” I asked him.

“Everyone here knows about the world before the end.” Eve explained to me. “Father, can we show him around the village?” She asked the middle aged man. He simply nodded and motioned for me to follow.

I’ve decided to make this my last entry. At least for now. Five days passed, I helped around the village, it was the least I could do. I grew closer with Eve and her father, Isaac. I told them everything that led me here. My old home, my aunts, uncles, cousins. It still hurts my heart to think about them. They should be here too.

Isaac walked me to the outer edges of the village. In the distance I can see a blue mass spread out. The sun shined on it, almost blinding to look at. “Is this real?” Was all I could ask him, he chuckled. I looked out at the sea, the beautiful sea. It was real. All of it was real. I cried, remembering him and everything he taught me. He was right, all this time he was right.

“The new seed is growing!” A man was yelled out. My breath stopped and I looked at Isaac, he smiled and nodded to me. I ran back to the village, and there they were. Eve and the rest of the villagers gathered around the small plants. Their tiny leaves open to the world. I fell to my knees and shed more tears.

“Everyone! Start celebrating! The new year has brought us good fortune!” Eve yelled out. Everyone cheered. A couple of men hugged me and pat me on the back. It was all too good to be true. This place is so warm, and for once, it feels nice to be warm.

But I don’t deserve this. To be this happy, knowing that my family is still hiding in a cave scraping by. They should be here. I think it’s time I made one more journey.

Eve, we haven’t known each other long. But I want to leave this diary with you. This diary holds a piece of my great-grandfather, and I think he deserves to rest here. I can’t thank you enough for saving me that day, you, and your father showed me the world I dreamed of for so long. I promise to come back one day with my family. I know you’ll give them a warm welcome.

Until then, please look after this diary. And keep celebrating 2140, the start of a new century.
Summertime Sorrow

Esteban Carrizal

Shut your evangelical fridges
Douse the pale fires that rest in your extremities
Like termites infesting marrow tunnels
And ignite one behind your eyes
Into the mountains and valleys of your holy grey matter
Experience the epiphany like lightning
You've laid in winter's arms long enough
It will always be hard
And you will always know this
The same sun that warms you will make you sweat
And dry you out like a caveman's venison
Like a nameless corpse, taken care of by time
By then, you'll be free of such cruel games
But, would you have known sweet joys by then?
Would you have known how victory soars in your heart
From winning even just a little bit?
There is just as much victory
In every single breath of fresh air
That floods the caverns in your lungs
And every exhale used to speak
“It is so possible to be serenely happy”
I whisper divine lyrics like this to myself everywhere
If you brough your ear to the abyss
You'd hear me there too

Dreadful Spring

Esteban Carrizal

So this is growth, I say
To be able to appreciate these cruel months
Again, I open my eyes to my blindness
And breathe in
The tastes of golden mornings and fiery sunsets
Air warm as the embrace I feared
When I'd rather freeze by the hearth and drink
Spring is just as pleasant to drink in, too
All transition is just as dazzling
Birth is just as divine as decay
Take in this view before you, give a name to what you feel
Emotions like this only come once a year
LA CHUPAROSA ES MI CORAZON

Angie Rocha

Capitol

Cristian Gonzalez
Progress travels through landmines
To help me face my fears...
It soon sees I’m carrying a bag of sadness...
It’s weighing me down.
Progress walks away slowly...
A wilted woman with a loaded gun is a pursuit too risky.
Progress runs.
The woman stays trapped in the cave..
Too stunned to walk forward.
I am that woman.
I am alone with the darkness of my demons.
A void where a soul should live.
The claws of insecurities scratch virtue on its cheek.
Red blood lightens the mood...
Flesh...
Iron.
But soon it fades to copper.
The woman worries if her love for the cave be in vain?
She lives here...suffocating...
Is it all worth the pain?
Loneliness and disdain??
Where is the woman’s lover?
Was it the miner???
Or is he regret in her throat?
For making her feel small...
For closing the blinds on beaming sunlight.
The woman hands clasp the bag of sadness coldly..
Her white bare knuckles resembling a shiny trophy...
 Anger is her swiftest ally, so she calls on it constantly.
She chooses to smile in the darkness rather than snarling...
Maybe this is progress.

**Landmines**

June Alaniz

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**Wake up**

Alondra Ramirez

Wake up and realize the truth
You walk the world so blindly
That a blind is full of view
Wake up from what seems like a dream
but feels like a nightmare
Surrounded by darkness with no light
Pain is crave due to fixation
A river pours down your face
Eyes filled with red spider webs
Skin filled with yellow, purple, and black
Lips broken by wounds
Jaw chattered like glass
Ribs pried open like an animal
Hips have worn out
Broken smile
Trauma in the brain
The cycle repeats
As the mind and eyes are asleep
The bodies were dragged to the abattoir, where their skin will no longer serve them but fill the undying hunger of the demons that desired their flesh.

A sentence from an old assignment in my junior year of high school that caused a roar of laughter and humiliation that could have woken the undead. Teachers aren't always right.

Being the smartest in an average classroom brought a struggle of communication. You're too smart for the students in class but dumb enough to be corrected by faculty. And when you knew you were right, the teacher was quick to dismiss your words because they are the one with a degree. They "knew more".

My English teacher during junior year of high school was a decent human being; he was a coach, a father, a mentor, and a leader within his department. As an educator, I'd call him acceptable at best. There were moments where he spoke with the vigor of a teenager as the topic of creative writing dawned in. At the beginning of the school year he mentioned how he enjoyed creative writing: in his words, he didn't have to "teach" anything for that portion of the year.

When the class was assigned a short story featuring any topic that we desired, he stood in front of the class for less than ten minutes before flopping back into his oversized desk chair - the instructions were mediocre. Start making an outline that we discussed in class. We never talked about this.

Write a few pages for your short story. Five-pages? Two-pages? As an overthinker and an overachiever, why wouldn't I take the opportunity to turn in a ten-page paper?

Turn in rough drafts on Tuesday. I assumed he meant the following Tuesday but we were assigned this today, Monday. So which is it? Tomorrow or next week?

Unfortunately for him, I asked all these questions. His responses were fueled by sarcasm and a hint of resentment for causing him trouble. I may have been a student of many questions but I was not one for being rude to authority figures (regardless of whether I liked them or not). I respected them and showed that through my work and communication skills. After a handful of questions, he trudged to the board and began to lazily write the instructions. A sketched outline that we were intended to use. Six-page maximum and three-page minimum. A week to curate a rough draft.

Simple enough.

Or so I thought. I spent the entire week designing and researching specific conversation topics. I enjoyed writing topics that made people's skin crawl and their stomachs churn; simple and sweet were not in my vocabulary when defining the style and topics I wrote on. My outline paper started with a title and a few bullet points.

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Devouring Bones

- General Idea: Demons abduct humans as they try to gain the energy lost from entering the human realm
  - They eat human flesh and blood
  - Follows the journey of a demon and his first kill
- Genre: Who knows, horror, gore, maybe some comedy. (Who doesn't laugh at blood)
  - POV: I need a narrator!!
- Words I'd like to use
  - Abattoir
  - Execute
  - Snuff
  - Torture/Torment

These were just a few items that I started listing off that may be included into my story. Monday night, I wrote for hours trying to put images into words and words onto paper. It was a struggle against the clock. I needed some form of rest before heading back to the patriarchy of academics. 2,187 words. The zero draft was around 5,443 words but I wasn't about to have points taken off for doing too much.

As I arrived at class, everyone was laughing, talking amongst themselves, walking around. A few boys were making paper balls. I hoped to get to my desk without the possibility of a paper ball bouncing off my head.

The teacher finally joined the class with a duffel bag over his shoulder and an empty folder in hand. Grumpy and unbothered by the overbearing jokes going on with the class, he sat at his desk. A classmate and I were having a conversation about our assignment. Each of us is excited to receive feedback. One by one, the teacher collected our papers and filed them under each other. We were allowed the rest of class to have peer reviews while he read our papers at his desk.

One classmate wrote from a dog's perspective, a story of an owner who kept trying to feed him these weird pills. A boy in class wrote on social issues with
sexuality and the coming out story of a young boy who dressed in drag. Other stories talked about gang violence or aliens taking the corn from the fields. The class was having fun in their own groups talking loudly until the teacher called out.

“Gabriela Torres?”

“Yes sir?”

“Can you come here for a second?”

The class was dead silent. I approached the desk and peered over to my short story in his hands with a word circled in red. He tried to whisper to me about this word but I wasn’t able to understand him all too well.

“Just because you read a dictionary doesn’t mean you should use words you don’t know the true meaning of.”

“Excuse me? What word was it?”

Rather than saying it, he pointed to the word abattoir. I was confused, I knew the word. I understood the word. I even used it in conversations with other teachers and not once did I use that word out of context.

“I don’t understand, what’s wrong with that word?” Confusion began to well within me.

“I’m just letting you know, I can’t accept work with such vulgar vocabulary. Change it.”

At this point I became irritated, I didn’t care about the word, it was his disregard of my understanding. I did my research and knew the synonyms, the definition, and context that abattoir used in.

“No. There’s no reason for me to change it.”

The class began to sound like a bunch of children echoing the sound of a /u/ as I stood over the teacher’s desk. With the sudden uproar of the class, the teacher glared at me.

“Just because you know a word, doesn’t mean you know all the definitions of the word. One word can mean many things.” His voice became stern, as if he were asserting dominance over the situation.

He pointed to the word again asking, “What does it mean?”

“It’s a place where animals are slaughtered.”

“Oh, this word also means a whore house.”

No. That’s wrong. I wanted to correct him, that’s all that rumbled through my head but then I heard the laughter creeping in.

The class started laughing, only those who sat near the desk heard but everyone enjoyed a good laugh. I felt their eyes on me as shame and anger engulfed my body - he was wrong. He didn’t bother getting a dictionary or checking with Google whether that word really meant what he assumed it did. He was wrong. He was wrong and I’m the one that’s put to shame. My body was fuming, there he sat surrounded by my classmates attempting to humiliate me. Rather than continuing to allow my emotions to get the best of me, I remained silent.

“Make sure to turn this in with corrections.” He handed my paper back to me, glancing back down to the next assignment on his desk.

The next week I turned in my short story. 7,863 words. I made edits, adding words that were higher than the average vocabulary expectations of a high schooler. I respect my teachers, so long as they respect their students. I ended up receiving a 98 out of 100 for the final grade. One point taken off for general punctuations that I missed. The second point taken because I didn’t change the word abattoir.

We are taught that we need to respect teachers, those in authority, those that work diligently to provide what they can to those around them. Teachers are educators, they are vital to our growth in society. My teacher was a decent human being but a despicable teacher. Teachers aren’t right all the time, much like students, they don’t know everything. I was the smartest student in an average classroom, but I never made my peers feel dumb. This teacher made me feel dumb. Our best teachers aren’t always the ones with a degree. It’s those who put themselves at the level of others to build them up and develop their skills as well as their own.
Why do I write?

What an interesting question
I have little answer to give aside from obsession
A pen on the page fuels my progression
Nothing aside so please pay attention
The ink on the page is a world of my own
Created for me so that’s what is shown
Nowhere to run nowhere to hide
When the voices within no longer abide
By rules set forth in a long-lost time
These bonds that they break
They know what’s at stake
The worlds that we forge could one day be great
So, I think that I write to escape
This world I knew, this world I loved
A place where dreams have come undone
And so, you start this page anew
A world is born just for you.

Forgiving

"don’t do it," he says,
"don’t trust him again."
"but i want to," i say,
"i want to trust again."

he hurt you,
you trusted him
9 months for him.
and he lied to you.
you’re scared to.
you’re scared.
you trusted him enough
to reassure your paranoia your
thoughts. to calm
your anxiety. your attacks.
he’s going to hurt you again.
do you believe that?

i can forgive him
i want to trust him.
let me forgive him again!

let me go
people change.
let me go!

Forgiving

Elijah Medrano
Please don't.

Please stop.

You're scared to.

You're scared.

You trusted him enough to reassure your paranoia your thoughts to calm your anxiety, your attacks.

He's going to hurt you again.

Do you believe that?

Might I remind you about the things he said? The things he did?

It took three things to destroy the trust you had for him.

Yes.

Of you.

He apologized.

You keep us from moving forward. You hold us back.

You're not what I want to be.

I believe in second chances.

Yes.

There was a time when I hurt those I loved.

And they forgave me.

I think it's fair.

Fair to him, he apologized he said he was sorry after 6 months of no contact.

I'll give him the benefit of the doubt. Some people do shitty things for shitty reasons.

I think people deserve to be given the chance to change.

I sigh at the silence I began to leave he grabs my hand and says, I hope you know you're projecting, by forgiving him, you're also forgiving yourself.

I stand at the realization, the irony of forgiving someone who resembled my most hated side. I forgave him and myself.
La Muñeca

Esta es mi muequita que me regalo Rocio
Rocio era mi amiga en primaria
Eramos mejores amigas
Recuerdo muy bien su casita a donde jugabamos con libros de stickers y barbies
Cuando ella fue a Ecuador, me trajo tesoros -
Esta muñeca y una cajita de bronce
Y ahora? Ella está casada y vive en California.

Todavía ando aquí
Aquí donde crecimos y donde viven nuestras padres
La muñeca era parte de mi
Ella es como yo
Rubia, guera, bonita, y importante a alguien

This is my little doll given to me by Rocio
Rocio was my friend from elementary school
We were best friends
I remember her house really well
Where we would play with sticker books and Barbies
When she went to Ecuador, she brought me treasures - this doll and little bronze box
And now? She is married & lives in California

I’m still here
Here, where we grew up and where our parents live
The doll is part of me
She is like me,
Blonde, light-skinned, pretty & important to someone
SURPRISE!
ITS A FLAN

Valentina Munoz
How could you do that do me?
Like a wildflower innocent and free.
My Mother the Earth said it would feel good,
Like sun rays poking through the storm clouds.
My friends the trees said it would be fun,
That I would enjoy every second of it,
Like sprinkles of rain on growing sprouts.
They said I would want to do it again and again,
But the Earth who birthed me and all my friends,
Never told me that as a beautiful wildflower,
I would hate the feeling of my body,
Being uprooted from the ground beneath me.
Him plucking away all my pretty petals,
Stem stripped bare until I was nothing.
My pot of soil is contaminated by his hands,
Wilted leaves shaking with each touch,
That hurts like thorns.

Harlingen Texas: A city with a population of sixty-five thousand people, where eighty-three percent of said population are Hispanic. My family fled to Harlingen in the Spring of 2003 to escape the war in Palestine. I wasn’t born yet, so my family consisted of just my mother, father, and sister, who at the time, was just three years old. That being said, my father and sister were born in Palestine, my mother was born in Brooklyn, New York but frequented trips to Palestine. Two years after settling in Harlingen, I was born. Stereotypically, Middle Eastern families are huge, and that did not stop at us. I grew up with eight aunts, three uncles, and so, so many cousins. Even though I had this big family, I wasn’t always with them. We are all spread apart and the only family I had in Harlingen, or Texas for that matter was my Khalo (uncle) Muthanna and his five kids. This though, did not last for long because they moved states away when I was ten.

Let’s travel back to when they did live in Harlingen though. I, along with them, grew up Muslim and so being the only Muslims or Arabs for that matter (that we were aware of) in Harlingen, we celebrated every holiday together. I am grateful to have experienced those aspects of my culture with my family, especially at such impressionable ages. I grew up speaking in an Arabic dominated household and would regularly visit the Mosque in McAllen every Eid. I remember the way we would all gather in front of my parents to hear their stories from Palestine, even if their stories were simply about what they liked to do in their free time, we were eager to hear anything about where we came from. I visited Palestine for the first time when I was three years old, and I won’t lie.. I don’t remember any of that trip. But luckily enough, I went again at seven years old and then later at twelve. Leading up to that trip I had developed such an immense admiration towards my country and couldn’t wait to visit. I do remember that trip, and it is one I will never forget. A couple years after that trip was when not only Khalo Muthanna and my cousins moved away, but a piece of my culture as well. After they left, so did our traditions. My parents had my younger sister soon after they left, so it was just the five of us. It’s almost as if all of us had lost our relationship with our culture. We stopped going to the Mosque for Eid, my parents stopped fasting as much for Ramadan, and Arabic wasn’t the language of the household anymore.
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My mom, Muhaya, my baba (dad), Mustafa, and my sister, Sereen all have ethnic names. When I realized this, I asked why I didn’t have a traditionally Middle Eastern name. In reply to this, he explained to me that as a child, she was constantly bullied for her ethnic name and she didn’t want me, a Middle Eastern in America to have to deal with the same hardships. I will be honest, I was sad because it felt like just another thing to unravel my relationship with my culture, and I grew worried that it was my final straw.

“However, despite my parents’ strong ethnic pride and their attempts to make us proud Arabs, my brother and I rejected our heritage. We felt that we did not want to be different from Americans and that, if we asserted our identity, we would never be accepted.”

While these were all factors in putting a distance between me and my cultural identity, I must put some if not most of the blame on myself. Living in a Hispanic dominated city has left me to be comfortable within their culture. While this is okay, I realize that I did not bring light to my culture to anyone. My teachers, friends, etc. Like Mojahid Daoud, I felt so different from everyone else that instead of bringing awareness to my culture, I sat back and camouflaged within the Hispanic culture.

Forgetting Arabic was the beginning of losing love for my culture and going to a Hispanic dominated school didn’t make it better. I remember having identity crisis’ over not only forgetting my native language, but now having to learn Spanish and at the same time, see how most of my classmates had no problems with the class. Why? Spanish was their native language, and they were surrounded by it. Whether it was because of school, classmates, family, etc... they were always around the language, and I envied that. Don’t get me wrong, I love Spanish, and I believe it truly is a beautiful language. I just wished that I too, was surrounded by MY language.

“Language and culture makes a living organism; language is flesh, and culture is blood. Without culture, language would be dead; without language, culture would have no shape.” - Jiang Wenying

This is exactly how I felt. My culture had no shape. I had no shape within my culture. Without my language, I felt like an outsider to my own culture. All of my dad’s side of the family still lives in Palestine and while I’m not super close with them, I still talk to them from time to time via WhatsApp. They’ve lived overseas their whole life and don’t know a lick of English, and of course I don’t expect them to. Because of this though, I always dread our chats, because it usually starts with “Salam Alaikum” (Hello), then “Kifak” (How are you), then finally, “Hamdullah” (Good/thank God). I haven’t completely forgotten Arabic, but those are usually what is exchanged before the other person realizes that I’m not as fluent as they previously believed. Usually if it gets more tedious, my dad will be mouthing what I should say behind the phone. Don’t even get me started on family reunions...those are brutal.

Living in Harlingen has distanced me from my culture for a number of reasons, but at the same time, I can remain blissfully ignorant about it until family reunions. Thinking back to the last time I visited my country, I just remem-
ber feeling so distanced from my culture. Not only did I forget almost all of my Arabic, but the Arabic that I did speak was not the proper form of Arabic that needed to be used in order to communicate effectively with my family. I already do not get many chances to visit that side of my family due to the length of time it takes to travel overseas, as well as how much the entire trip will cost, so getting that chance and not even being able to communicate with them felt like a stab in the heart. I felt incredibly disconnected from my culture and I felt as if I wasn’t experiencing the true essence of Palestine. As Jiang Wenying once said, “If we compare the society to a swimming pool, language is a swimming skill and culture is the water. When both are present, people swim well (communicate successfully). They swim confidently and rapidly when they are familiar with the water (i.e., within their native culture), but cautiously and slowly when it is unfamiliar to them (within a foreign culture). It’s safe to say that I was clearly drowning, and leaving my culture to float above me, away from me.

Whether I am in Palestine or Harlingen, Texas, I feel like a stranger to my culture. Recognizing the connection between culture and language and how without one, there is nothing, has been a shocking discovery for me. Day by day I am continuously working on healing my relationship with my culture and incorporating Arabic into my daily life.
Today I feel anxious
I don't know if it's something in the air
If it's the howling of the dogs outside
If it's the white moth, I see lingering around my room
If it's the covered mirror begin to be exposed to the light, begging for a reflection
If it's the dream of falling teeth o el vestido blanco de la novia
O por qué vi al perro cagando
Life has always felt like waiting for the next shoe to drop
Waiting for the cagada to come trickling down
Good cannot exist without the bad and when life is good, I anxiously await the bad/ the punishment for believing things were going well for once
They must mean something
Something everyone else knows that I don't
A Foreboding future in my wake

It's this squeamish feeling in my chest
My heart pounding harder and louder
What is special about today?

What path will open today?
I don't know if my sudden urge to write has cause this anxiety
A forethought on the back of my mind
With a purpose
A nail being hammered into my skull
Water defining it's barriers and continuing to flow
Constant pounding
Let me out
Let me see the world
Stop keeping me locked in
Stop being afraid of who you are
Open the door to your feeling
To your heart
To whom you are
You who has been taught to keep her mouth sown shut with a needle laced with family integrity and dignity
No se dice las cosas que pasan en casa
From birth we are taught the following:
Good girls o Ninas buenas le hacen caso a sus padres
No le contestas a tus padres o te casiga Dios
Tienes que respetar a tus padres
Las señorita no se ponen ropa corta
Las senoritas guardan su virginidad hasta que se case con un hombre que la conquiste
Las ninas buenas no hacen travesuras, no se vistan como nino, no actuan como nino
Como una mujer tu no tienes los mismos derechos como un hombre
Tu no puedes andar en la calle sola o andar en la noche
Tu no puedes quedarte en la casa de tus amigos- Nos los conocemos y si te pasa algo
Las ninas buenas saben como cocinar, limpiar y escuchar
Se quedan en casa, no salen hasta que se casan

Y si te contest que soy una de las otras
I hated Spanish since I realized it made me feel like an “other”
I didn’t speak well enough to talk to my family across the border
“Abby siempre ha tenido problemas Hablando Espanol verdad”
“Es porque nacio en el otro lado y cuando estaba Chiquita se confundio”
I’m not American enough to be fully assimilated into American culture
Entonces I decided to stay quiet
I was tired of trying to speak a language that continued to reject me and keep exposing my differences
En las reunions mejor habla Ingles since Abby la que nunca puedo hablar el Espanol bien no tenia nada que decirle a las personas que las hiciieron senier como un alien
Abby la Americana/ la gringa que sabe unas palabras en Ingles and other in English

Mejor busco refugio en el Ingles- la persona que ellos crearon, a la gringa
Pero esta gringa es la misma que tiene la sagre colorada y de todos colores
La misma sangre de mis ancestors que vinieron a trabajar en el campo, los mismos ancestors that were galloping in horses, the same ancestors who founded this land
Esta gringa tuvo que aprender a vivir en muchos mundos
Esta gringa carga the intergenerational chains and traumas of my ancestors . . .
I’m una de las otras en the way that I have never belonged
I got my period at a young age and my body started to develop
I felt immense shame of the hidden secret that I wasn’t a little girl anymore
I had to keep my pads hidden in my bag
I glanced over the fact that I needed bigger bras
I always had a hoodie on
I had to pretend to act shocked when I learned about my period from a prehistoric video
I remember stuffing the pad kit into a draw and never interacting with it again
I still feel shame when it comes to my body
I have always been in-between
I have always had a manlier side
I started growing a small moustache in the 3rd grade
I remember feeling the cruelty of boys when one commented on my hair
Girls shouldn’t have hair on their face
Girls shouldn’t be picked as the tallest in the class to help the teacher carry chair and help erase the board
Girls shouldn’t have arm pit hair or hairy leg- I took a rusty razor and carved it into my skin to remove the signs of the hair, I was too scared of telling my parents how their little girl wanted to shave
Girls should play with other girls, not have crushes on them. Girls must have a crush on a boy, doodle little hearts with their initials inside, and think constantly about what their crushes were doing. I have to be the best and perfect little girl. One who is obedient, gets the best grades, is loved by all, has many friends, and has a school crush. I doodle mine crush on the inside of my binder— a secret only we shared. Until my binder unraveled the secret to the eyes of another. The other told the crush. The crush looked at me with disgust. Lesson 1: Boys like him don’t like girls like me. We keep real crushes to ourselves, we lie to others by giving fake crushes, we protect ourselves from getting hurt again.

...
I'm from Brownsville, Tex, and I'm currently doing my master’s in English. I took a course on Gloria Anzaldua last semester and it opened the flood gates of wanting to write poetry. The poetry was part of a final project were I want to incorporate images, sounds, and words to push against pedagogical ideas negating Spanish as a real form of writing, thinking, studying, reading, existing, etc.

I'm getting my bachelor’s degree in fine art with a concentration in Studio Art and a minor in All-level/Secondary Education. This photo is 1000 x 750 pixels f/29.1/20 sec. ISO-100 and taken in 2022.

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This digital design represents the many career paths available to Texas students. It was originally created for a contest several years ago and was recently revamped. Finch Cantu posts art on Instagram and Tumblr under the username QuestforYellow. (“Ode to a place that never changes but changes always, always”) expresses their desire for the RGV to become more accepting of the LGBTQ community, especially toward nonbinary people like them.

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Sugar.

Ash Gomez
“Growth”
My work usually consists of self portraits. Since the pandemic my focus has been on the idea of self image and identity through prolonged isolation, depression and grief with dark surrealistic themes. My goal is to push the boundary of portraiture to make an almost grotesque and horrific image to show uncomfortability within one’s own skin. Trees have been a constant throughout this theme, representing growth through grief and the pain associated with it.

Cristian Gonzalez
“Capitán”
“Downtown colors”
“epic bird”
“one eyed cat”
I found this cat in the street while taking photos; the cat only has one eye. This is my first quality work back in high school, I had just bought my camera, and I went to the local park to take pictures.

Viviana Infante
“The Getaway”
I am currently a Junior majoring in English with a concentration in Creative Writing. I have had a passion for writing poetry since the start of the 2020 pandemic. The pieces submitted are a reflection of my experiences and what I have learned from each, and I hope you find comfort in my writings if any speak out to you.

Jasmin Lopez
“Human Nature”
I am a psychology major that enjoys photography in her free time. I believe there is beauty and art all around us, but most of the time we forget to step back and genuinely appreciate it.

Luis Cameros Luna
“Beauty and Pain”
Luis is a political science major who wishes to share his drawings with people. The blade represents the pain and hardships of life while the rose represents the beauty and innocence of it.

Dulce Mata
“Una rosa”
Dulce Mata is a graduate student at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley pursuing a masters in Spanish with a concentration in creative writing. She was born in Coahuila, Mexico, and raised in McAllen, Texas. Her work concentrates on social issues and has been published in several literary magazines.

Karina Martinez
“Generational Heartbreak”
I am a senior at UTRGV majoring in English with a concentration in Creative Writing. I seek for my work to talk about both real and fictional situations that can create a conversation through adding a bit of myself and the world around me.

Ryan McBride
“sons-daughters-things”
I’m an English major at UTRGV. This poem is very personal to me. I wrote it amidst the anti-trans bills that are being proposed and discussed across the country which threaten trans people, particularly trans youth. As a trans man who cannot medically or legally transition at the moment, writing this quickly they turn to seed, and I wish they could stay in bloom just a little while longer, so I can savour the sweetly scented nostalgia more. In turn, it led me to think about how fleeting the best things in life can be.

Eljiah Medano
“Forgiving”
“I Why Do I Write?”
I am an English major with a concentration in creative writing. I write mainly novels and “Forgiving” was my first poem. It’s the thought process of how someone with paranoia could go through forgiving someone that hurt them. I wrote “Why Do I Write?” with the intention of focusing on the levels of reasons that I write. I am a fiction writer and I can express why I do this with this piece.

Klaus Mireles
“true-blue”
I am Klaus, an anthropology major, and English minor. True-blue is a collection of short poems looking in on unwavering loyalty, and the human need to feel complete, even for a moment.

Victoria Montes
“a study of street fashion”
V. James is a poet and writer, and currently a Junior at UTRGV pursuing her bachelors in English with a concentration in Creative Writing. A lover of fairytales and adventure stories, V. James has spent the last decade reading and writing poetry in a wide variety of genres. V. James’s lifelong love of the Pacific Northwest and walking the paths of the rainforest inspire her poems everyday. She hopes to make a career out of being a vagabond. She is a devoted reader of fantasy, space operas, and feminist retellings of fairytales.

Valentina Munoz
“Surprise! It’s a Flan!”
I am a graphic design major with a minor in film production. This is a digital drawing.

Jordan Naud
“Mountain Laurel”
I am an anthropology major/history minor and almost everyday walking to class, I pass by a pair of Texas Mountain Laurel trees. They remind me of my childhood as there was a tree on my grandparents’ property where I grew up. However, every time I pass by the trees, I’m saddened by how quickly they turn to seed, and I wish they could stay in bloom just a little while longer, so I can savour the sweetly scented nostalgia more. In turn, it led me to think about how fleeting the best things in life can be.

Crystal Perez
“The city of dreams”
I enjoy taking photos of what I find to be beautiful.

Melissa Ponce
“Center of Faith”
The vices of reality are at full force, and one either crumbles or endures. All relies on the center of faith.

Alondra Ramirez
“Ojos de Miel”
“Lover Trees”
“RGV Chica”
“Wake up”
Photos taken on an iPhone camera Location in Mission. Lover trees growing together till eternity. The Latina girls from the valley inspired the poem.

Angie Rocha
“El Ritmo de las Generaciones”
“La Chuparosa Es Mi Corazon”
This poem was based on real events, where I had realized that there was a huge disconnect between my mom and me and I wanted to be closer to her like I was back when I was a child and spent my nights dancing with her in our front yard. Through this dance, I hope to bridge that distance and acknowledge that, though we have grown to be two different people, we are still connected through blood and spirit. This poem is for any girls, women, mothers, or grandmothers who feel disconnected from their children, parents, etc, and want to be closer to them. It is a poem meant for generational healing among the bloodstream of women in hopes that we can decolonize these toxic relationships of mother and child and re-introduce the sacredness of these relationships and bring back the power we hold together.

Ann Sanchez
“New Horizons”
I am a studio art major. I took this photo during a trip to New Mexico in 2019. It was my first time there and the first time I ever visited mountains. This photo was taken on Independence Day that year and it was during the sunset that evening.

Damian Uribe
“voyager on fire”
I am a mass communications major. This was shot from a broken film camera, a Fujifilm superia film roll and developed chemically in a restroom.

Mars Vai
“Does God Love Robots Too?”
Mars Vai shares that his graphic story is Pen on Paper.

Cindy Ruiz Zamudio
“Hinakahi Disease”
“Hinakahi Disease” I wrote it while investigating different types of fictional diseases created by the fictional community of different platforms. It re- minded me of all the time I spent every minute I fell in love with the wrong person, that they either corresponded me by in a fake way (meaning they intentionally said “yes” to date me, but with the purpose of manipulation) or they didn’t because of personal reasons (they didn’t liked me back, they used to liked me but someone else appeared, etc.). Every time I heard a rejection, or I suffered because of people that wanted to hurt me, I felt the flowers growing up in my throat to cut my air away.
GALLERY 2023 STAFF

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