

Mont. Royal. June 6<sup>th</sup> 1858.

Dear Sir

2022

I received your letter on the 8<sup>th</sup> and it was  
 a pleasure to hear what you were all well. I received  
 your letter about Monday. If I can sell my furniture  
 I will be glad to come in November I  
 I had heard as there is another  
 of very bad and  
 written to you soon  
 in sending me the  
 on as this comes to  
 I had rec  
 have been out  
 use let me to  
 thank  
 remain you  
 Elizabeth



ANNIVERSARY



# Gallery 2022

A Literary & Arts Magazine  
Vol. 42

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Art Director: MK Vasquez

Prose Editor : Liana Guerra

Poetry Editor: Josias Martinez

Design Coordinator and Marketing Director: Jessi Mata

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**Mission Statement:**

Gallery is an annual literary and arts magazine that aims to highlight the talents of University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Students. It is rooted in a firm belief that the arts play a vital role in the community and that expression through visual and literary forms brings people together. Being a majority bilingual university, we focus on works in both English and Spanish and promote artistic diversity.

**Note:**

Every effort has been made to contact submitters and to ensure that all the information presented is correct. Some of the work is fiction. The facts in this volume may be subject to debate or dispute. If proper acknowledgement has not been made, or for clarifications and corrections, please contact the magazine faculty advisor at [britt.haraway@utrgv.edu](mailto:britt.haraway@utrgv.edu), and we will correct the information in future printings, if possible. The content and opinions expressed in recognized student media do not necessarily reflect the opinion or position of UTRGV, The University of Texas System Board of Regents, or the student body as a whole.

**Editorial Policy:**

Gallery selects its works through a process that masks the identity of the artist/writer, and it accepts all kinds of visual and literary pieces. Its staff is made up of students taking the ENGL-3350 course at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

Gallery Literary & Arts Magazine Volume 42

University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

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Dear Readers,

The works you are about to experience were chosen through group effort by each of our committees.

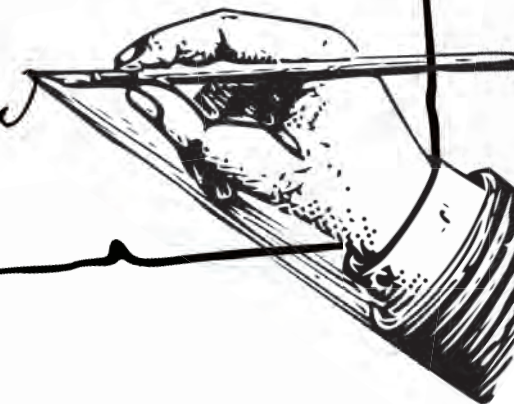
Editors Josias Martinez, Jessi Mata, Lianna Guerra, and MK Vasquez all worked with their own teams in the selection process to ensure that the best submissions be featured in this issue of Gallery Magazine. I'd like to thank the entire staff for the work they did with the magazine, and I'd like to thank all the contributors for sharing their amazing pieces with us.

A special thanks and a steak dinner are owed to our Marketing Director/Design Coordinator Jessi Mata for putting in the tremendous effort to help me bring this magazine to life.

Lastly, thank you to the readers for appreciating all the stages of hard work it has taken for this magazine to be here, right in your hands. It has been a pleasure to serve as your editor-in-chief, thank you.

Siempre Chingona,

*Denisse Zecca*  
Denisse Zecca





**Britt Haraway**  
THE PROFESSOR

**Denisse Zecca**  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

**Jessi Mata**  
MARKETING DIRECTOR

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**Nathan Paredes**

**MK Vasquez**  
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**Omar Monrreal**

Hi! we're  
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**Lianna Guerra**  
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**Diana Esperanza**

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Top Row: (Left to Right): Gabriel Anulao, Josias Martinez (Editor), Maria Villanueva  
Bottom Row (Left to Right): Andrew Neely, Athena Gonzalez, Angie Garcia



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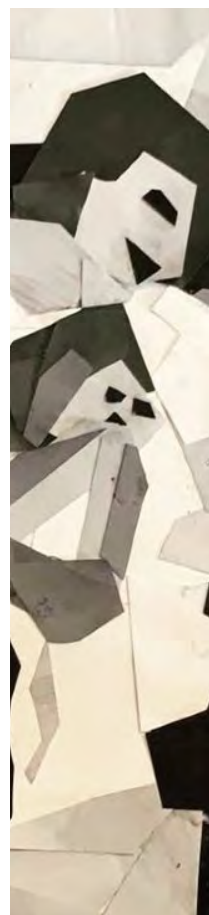
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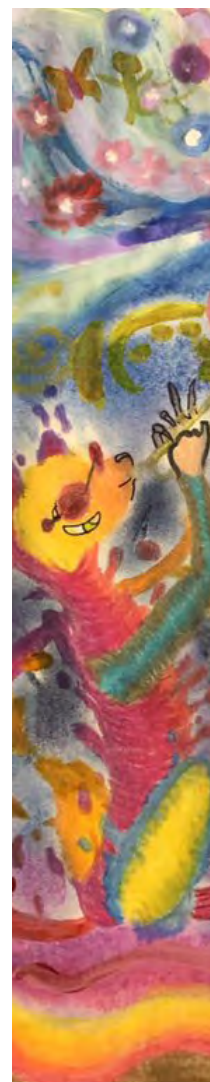
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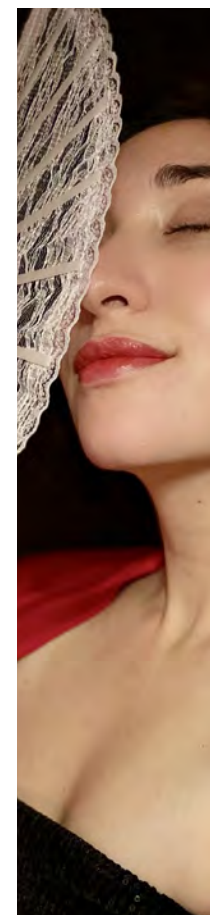
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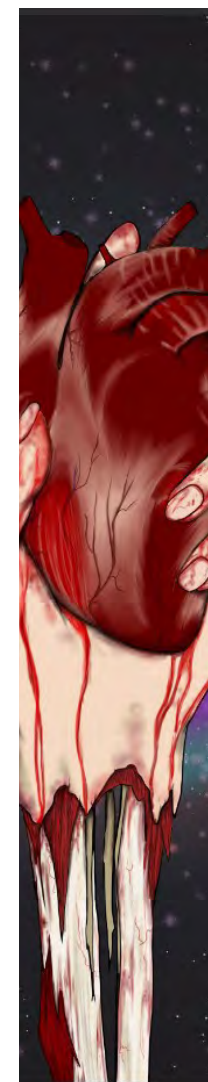
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Jessi Mata

Your hand searched for mine  
in an ancient cathedral  
while we peered down into a crypt,  
marveling at the lovers  
who had not dropped each other's hands for  
over 400 years.  
As if you thought them a shining example of  
what love should be,  
you kept my hand in a vice grip  
for the next eight days.

That fabled long walk on the beach is much  
harder than it looks  
when there are rocks instead of sand.  
We held each other up,  
laughing back at the seagulls  
as we stumbled along.

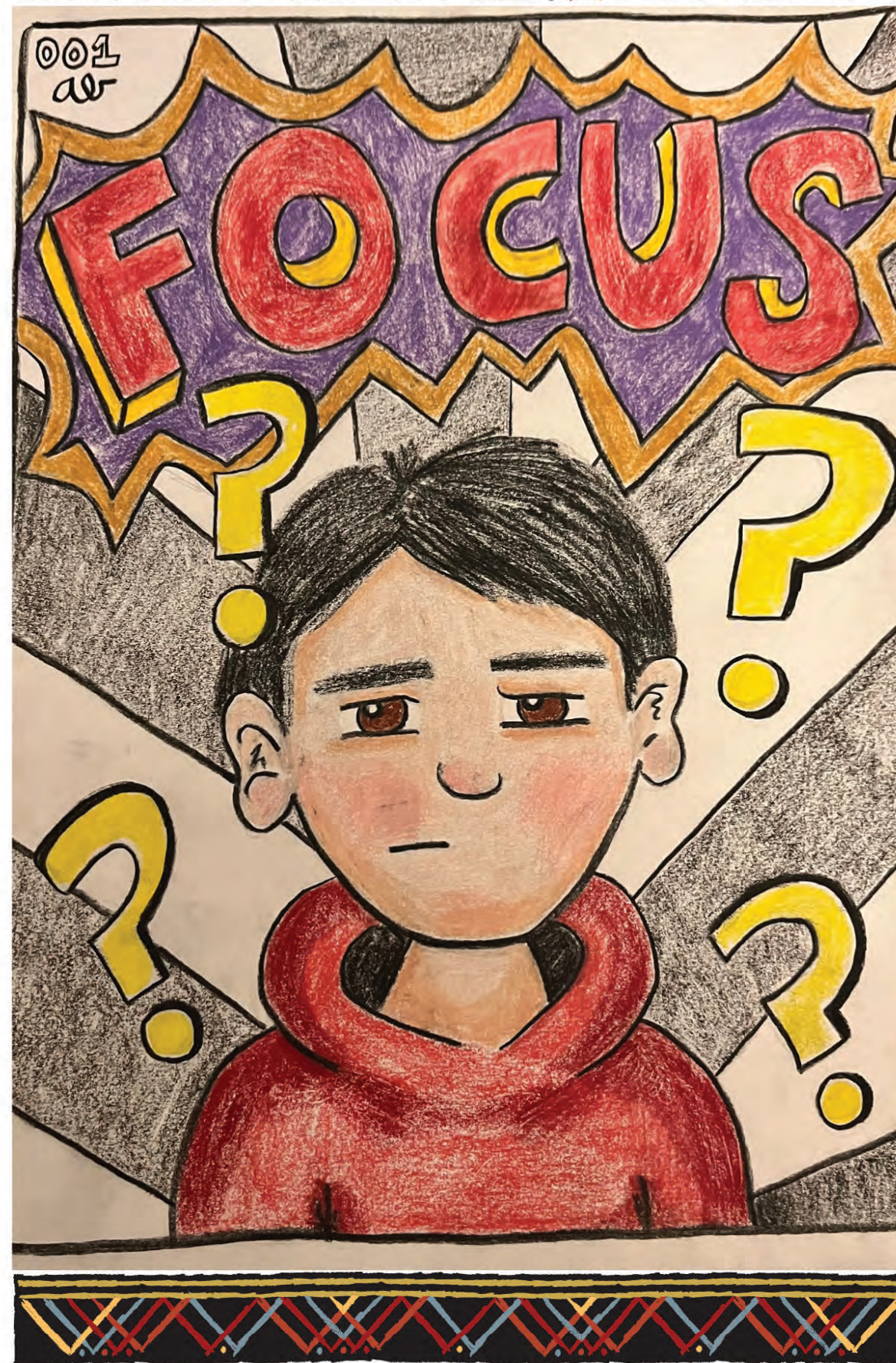
I was unsure if your or your brother smiled  
brighter on the day of his wedding,  
Groupo 5 crooning ironically about  
rhythm in the background  
as we tripped over each other and spun in  
circles and called it dancing.

I beat you to the top of Lake Humantay and  
when you finally caught up you wanted  
Pachamama, Inti, Wiracocha,  
and any other god that would listen  
to hear as you got on one knee  
and told me you loved me.

We were sideways on the bed  
with our hands reaching  
into the same bag of Piqueo Snax.

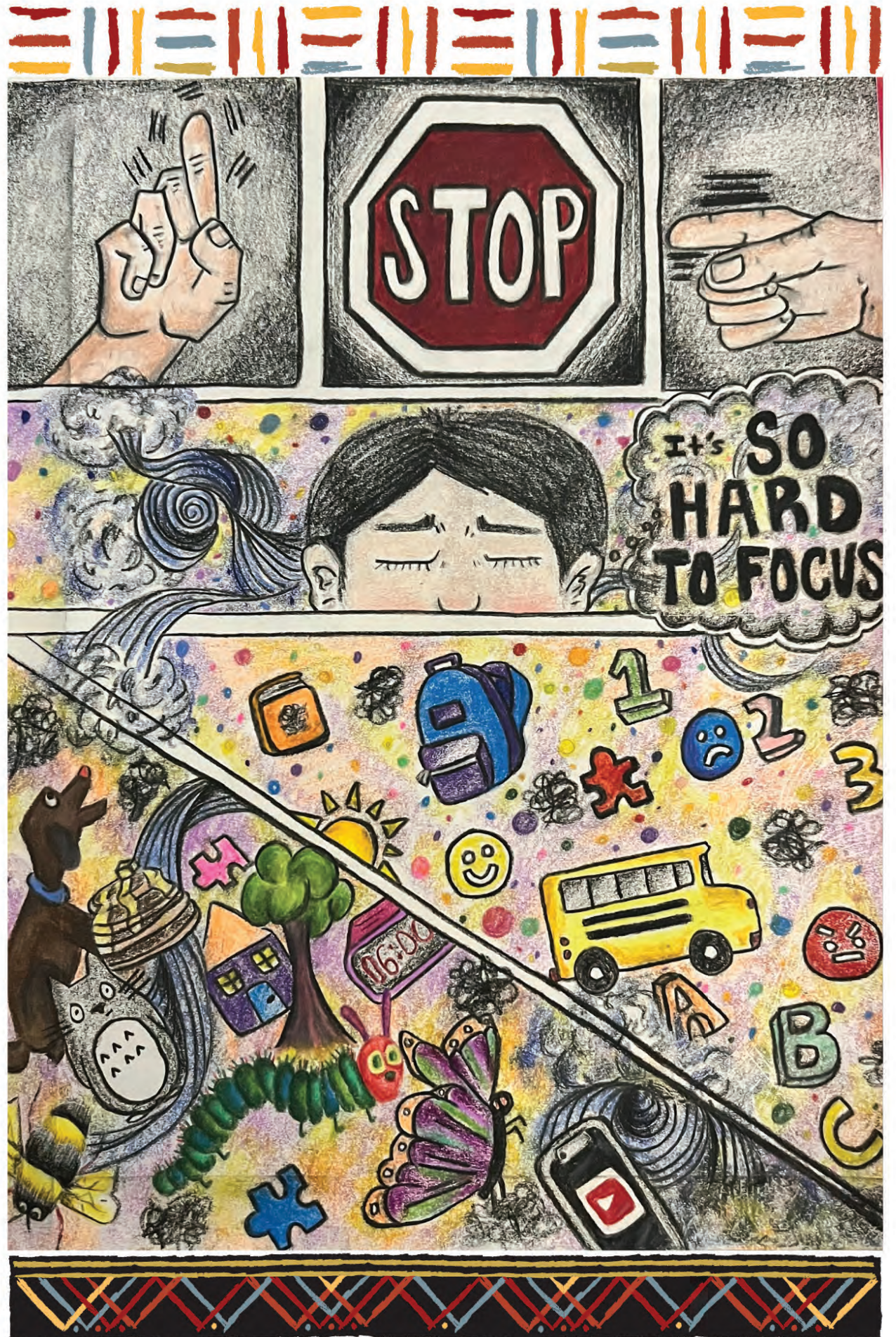
I pulled out and squinted at a Dorito  
in flavor foreign to me.  
Triangular. Steep sides.  
It looked like the mountain we climbed.  
You took it from me  
and handed me a Cheese Tris.

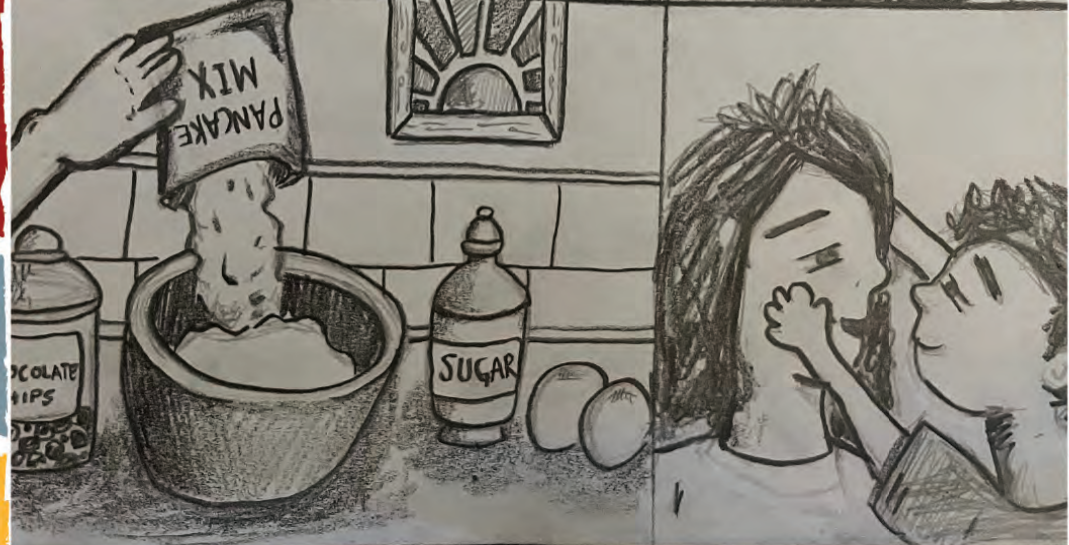
As I bit into it, I decided that love is not the  
willingness to move (or climb) mountains  
for someone. Rather, it is the knowledge  
that you exhausted yourself climbing  
hundreds of steps to reach the top  
of the Inca empire after missing your flight,  
having your hotel cancel your reservation,  
and realizing you do not want to kill them  
when they steal your Dorito.



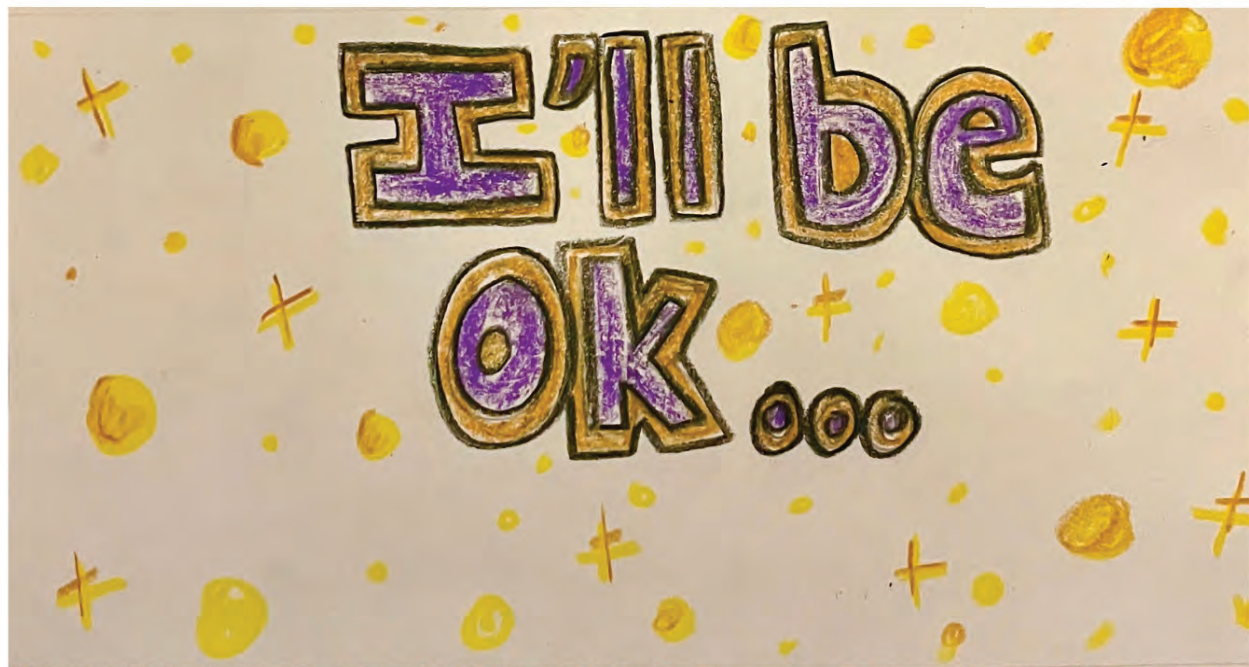
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ALEYA BARRERA

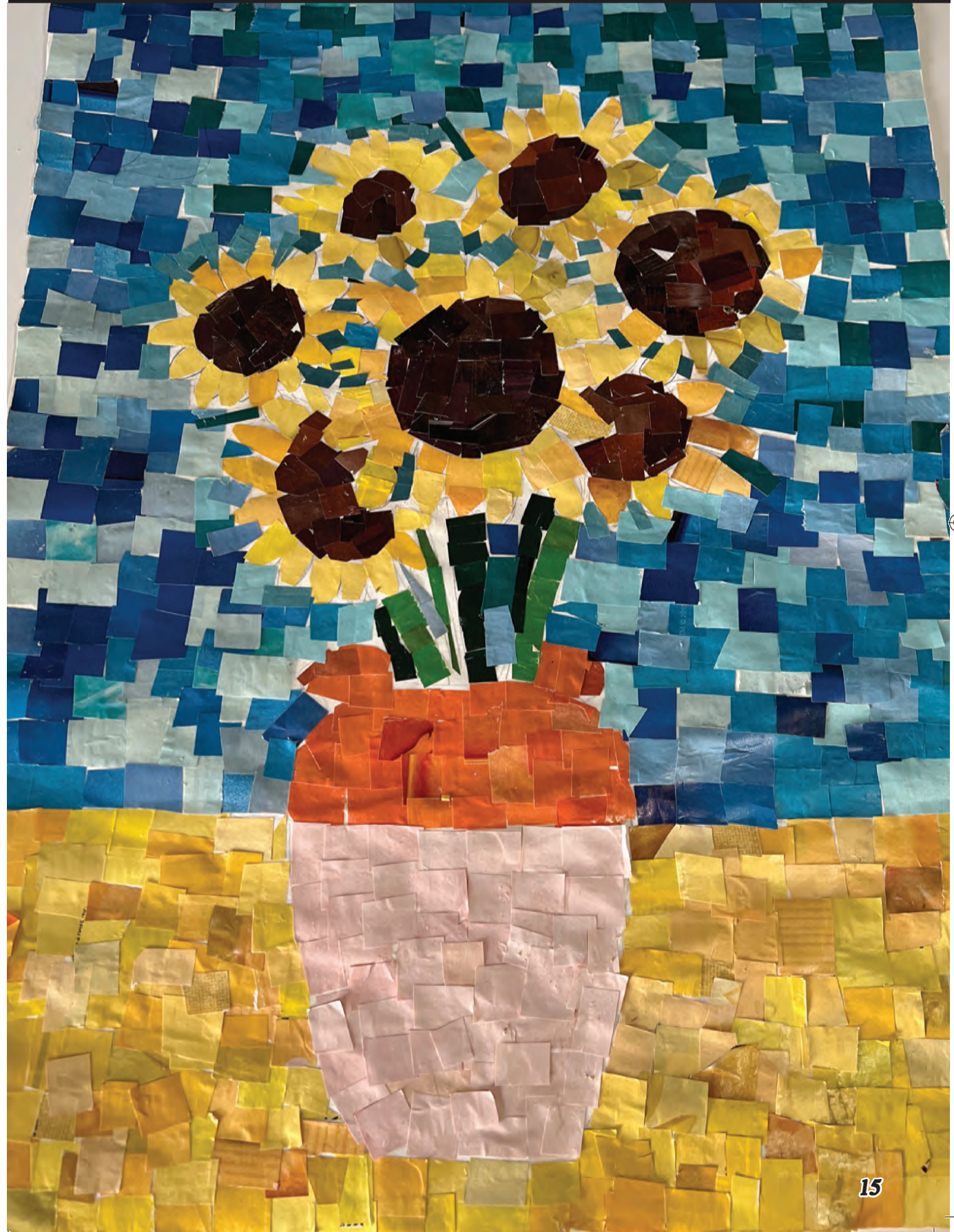








**Sun Flowers**  
Alyssa Cantu

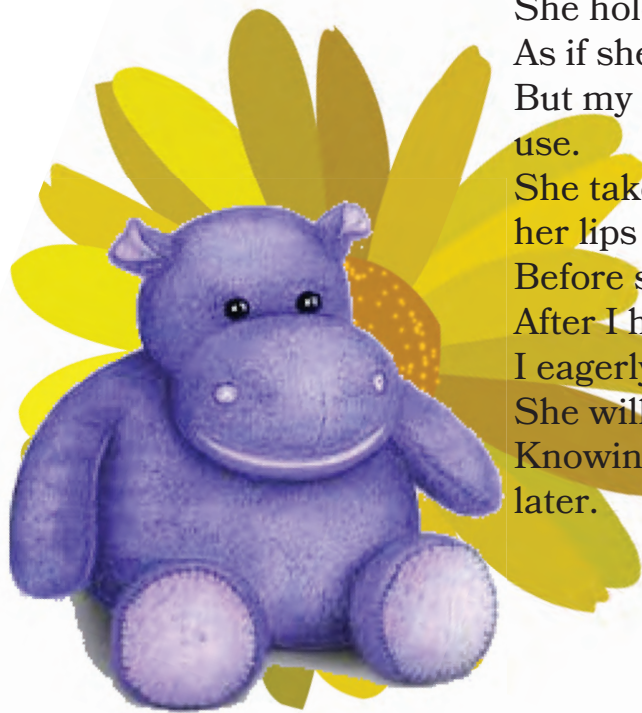


# A N O V E L I T Y

By M. Villan

I have waited eagerly for her to come  
around to me.  
I merely sat there, day by day,  
Unchanging.  
She had always made her choices ran-  
domly,  
But she had never fallen on me.  
I longed for her touch,  
For her fingers to caress me  
As she had so many others before.  
I wish to gaze into her dark brown eyes  
And see the wonder,  
Hatred,  
Anguish,  
Come across them.

Alas, the day has come,  
Curiosity finally gets a hold of her.  
Her eyes gaze into me,  
Its intensity unmatched to her hold  
Which is ever so gentle.  
She holds me  
As if she's trying not to break me,  
But my spine begins to wear down with  
use.  
She takes a moment to place me against  
her lips  
Before she puts me back in my place  
After I have revealed everything to her.  
I eagerly wait for the next time  
She will hold me again  
Knowing it will be sooner rather than  
later.



## WHAT'S MY DEFINITION?

Ramiro Castro Jr.

Burgundy...  
The color of the blood that runs through  
me,  
In my veins,  
As they bleed...  
You see the greed that pours out of my  
sleeve,  
Am I to blame?  
For this little fortune and fame,  
For which I crave...  
Or is it my mistake,  
This path I take...  
Shall we awake,  
One day,  
As the many slaves,  
We face the forcer to be disgraced...  
Break loose these chains,  
We are ones provoked to be insane...  
So let us escape,  
Let us escape,  
I wish to break the silence and escape...  
What's My Definition?  
Ya deja los ir...  
Tal vez,  
Tu puedas sentir,  
Lo que se me fue de mi,  
Hechos de latierra,  
Gente de la sierra,  
Semos los mismos del pasado  
Y aun que todo se acabado,  
Yo ha pensado en ser  
Lo mejor parar mi vida,  
Para que no suenes mas  
Te dijo,  
Abra tus ojos y mira,  
Porque lo que viene,  
Es una vida bonita...

**Palpitaciones de Dolor**

Gabby Casas



## Chapel de la Inmaculada Concepcion

Jessi Mata



## A WAR REFUGEE'S CRY

Ismael Perez

War paralyzes  
Where is reality?  
Where are all those peaceful days?  
It seemed before - there are so many falsehoods in the world  
Now I know also  
A lot of kindness.  
I have not heard so many words of concern  
And the phrase "how are you?" got shades  
Strangers fleeing in droves  
Stranded in a foreign land  
How often do they ask "where are you?"  
They tell me "hold on"  
But who do you hold on to?  
All those close to me told me to go  
How bitterly mother cried that night  
How hard it sounds to say goodbye.  
You don't say goodbye!  
Mom, can you hear me?  
I'm screaming at you trying to find a connection  
I'm so afraid that suddenly you won't get through  
I hope to hug you again.



## Working Man

Brittany Reyes



## Ramiro Castro Jr

It was an evening much like all before, filled with routine hard work just to make a steady dollar, and a great sigh of relief once the day ends. Lupe my grandfather on my father's side of the family, witnessed something unlike anything he had ever seen before. An object in the sky that seemed to travel through the air like a slow-moving cumulous cloud. This is the story that my father has told me growing up, it is one that has shaken me. This made me think of neverending possibilities. An occurrence which I found to be fascinating and awakening in such a way that has driven me to ask deeper questions about our existence and consider all possible outcomes for why we are here. The common question "Are we alone in this universe?" or are there unexplained phenomena that can truly catechize everyone's existence? I think my grandfather might have also felt this way, so very minuscule and lost in time.

My grandfather Lupe and his neighbor Mague, who was also his brother-in-law, had just completed the day working at the Globe Supermarket. My grandfather was head of maintenance, one of three jobs he had as a fa-

ther of 8 children. They sat on the back of the pickup truck and cracked open some cold cerverzitas. They relaxed and spoke about their tough day and listened to some of their favorite corridos, that even to this day are still being played on the radio. To their dismay they witnessed something extraordinary appear in the sky. My grandfather nearly spilled his can of beer as he spat out what he was chugging, he yelled in Spanish, "Ves eso, do you see that?... Mira Mague, look at that light there it's really low to the ground. That's not a plane?" He threw his arm over to Mague as he hit him on his chest to make him aware of the sight before them. Mague's eyes bugged out in amazement for they were witnessing the most astounding sight in their lives! Mague said, "Que es eso, what is that Lupe?!!" My grandfather stared at this huge flat disc slowly hovering overhead them, he said it was so grand it was the size of a football field. As it moved South over them, it created a dark shadow above the fields of cotton that lay below ready to be harvested. The disc carried behind it a long trail of lights he said, it was of a pinkish hue that seemed to blend beautifully into the sunset. This dark object had lights along the bottom and stretching along the sides, it was silent almost as if everything around them had become mute. No sounds, no ambient noises of surrounding machinery, just a quiet moment almost frozen in time.

It was never known exactly what happened that day with my Grandfather





Lupe and Mague, what they witnessed they never saw again. Although, they were not the only ones who experienced such sightings. In the following days that week, various reports of similar sightings were seen and heard about all along the Southern border. Reports of an unidentified craft traveling all along the southern region of Texas and spanning into Mexico. What makes this such a unique experience is that oddly enough for the generations that followed, we would each have our own encounters or witnessed the odd lights in the sky.

My father and uncle saw what appeared to be a falling plane one late night when I was a teenager, it illuminated the sky entirely. They got into my father's car and drove after it thinking that it fell onto the ground and possibly crashed into the fields between the canals. I remember asking to go along with them, but they told me to stay home. My father said as he got closer to the crash site, he saw so many lights on the top of the bordos as if the military have already arrived and had lined up creating a perimeter. He was afraid to find out what it might've been, or if they would be taken captive for witnessing such an event that they then decided to turn back around and head home. When they arrived, I was still outside waiting for them to get back and I was eager to find out what had they seen? It's apparent this surely sparked my interest in the far beyond and unknown for years to come.

I, myself have had multiple sightings in my life where I have seen things in the sky, sometimes alone and at times with family. In fact, just after this event my father had encountered, I too had experienced a sighting lasting an occurrence of an entire week. While in middle school I had been studying the constellations during that month, and while showing my younger brother the differences among them I noticed some of the stars were moving in an unconventional manner. This was unlike anything I had seen, immediately I cried out for my parent's attention, and they too were in amazement at this extraordinary show of moving lights in the sky. That week every night we all went outside and stared at the night skies for this beautiful showcase we were so fortunate to witness, even my neighbors and science teacher were speechless of what their eyes have peered upon.

I hope that I can truly understand the reason why my family and I have been witnessing these unexplained events. Just recently, these same lights I first saw as a child had returned again and this time it was my nephews, my brother, and me who shared this sighting. If you have ever seen such lights among the skies, keep in mind that you are not alone.



Urania –  
The Muse of Astronomy  
–“Searcher of the Starry Night”  
Invocation to the Muse: Sing, in me,  
Urania, of the power that embodies the skies,  
and bear me witness to the sightings that have always  
mystified our curiosity.

EXT. – LATE EVENING – TRUCK TAILGATE

Two men are sitting on back of pick-up truck having some cold brewskis.  
Music plays in background. (Spanish Corridos) Lupe nearly spills his can of beer as he spits out what he was chugging...

LUPE

Ves eso, do you see that?

Points out into field of cotton.

Mira Mague, look at that light there!

It's really low to the ground... That's not a plane?"

Throws his arm over and slams it on Mague's chest.

MAGUE

Eyes bugged out in amazement.

Que es eso?, what is that Lupe?!! (shocked)

LUPE

I don't know? It can't be a helicopter?

MAGUE

They can't be fertilizing right now?..

They stared at this huge flat disc slowly hovering overhead them.

Both men take a drink of their beers again in amazement.

The object continues to head south into Mexico.

BEGIN INTERCUT:

NARRATOR (V.O.)

In the following days that week, various reports of similar sightings were seen and heard about all along the Southern border. Traveling all along the southern region of Texas and into Mexico.

# Ese Momento

Abby Davila

El deseo de seguir soñando  
Pero algo me impide  
Este sentimiento de no poder  
Luchar por lo que quiero  
Soñando seguir soñando  
Es lo que me digo  
Cada momento

El deseo de seguir oyendo  
Las palabras de aliento  
Oyendo seguir oyendo  
Es lo que yo oyó  
Cada momento

El deseo de un día  
Tener lo que he soñado  
Viene muy pronto  
Ese deseo de soñar y oír  
Es de cada momento

El deseo de luchar  
Y poder triunfar  
Aunque me tropezó  
Por el camino  
Se que es ese momento  
En que estoy soñando

2:00 A.M.  
MK Vasquez

2:00 A.M.



*Reminisce*

*Crystal Perez*

# Tranquility

Satinderpal Kaur

The leaves were dancing on rhythms of the wind,  
And her hair decides to join.

Flipping with every stroke of mighty wind,  
Reaching to highest heights every time,  
With gentle hands, she tried to curb them.

Her each failed attempt made her content.  
With every hair that escaped from her hands,  
Her soul also escaped.

From the turmoil of this world,  
Towards an ultimate tranquility.



# Walk

Sidney Carnaco

Reasoning with my thoughts, I fought violently in my mind, an overwhelming disarrangement of fears clashing all about. Nearing the end of Spring Break 2020, I hid from the outside world, afraid and disheartened. The virus spread like wildfire, climbing onto bodies in apprehension, embedding itself on surrounding surfaces. The world, and how people lived in it, changed forever.

The mysterious virus caused a spiraling pandemic all around the world, but the spiral entangled itself not only in my mind, but in my spirit, as well. I contracted the virus soon after in the summer of 2020 and it enthralled me, keeping me captive in one spot. My body, debilitated from the lack of movement and paralyzed by the exhausting and everlasting worry my mind cast, was in no state to go out, regardless as to whether I had the choice to or not; I did not, could not, as the state mandated. The virus clung onto every part of my physical body, devouring all the strength in my muscles, feasting on my limbs, savoring the energy I no longer had. I was bedridden for two months, not being able to stand, let alone cook or clean. Once I saw the vindictive test, tantalizing and captivating, I took the swab with the vigor I hadn't enjoyed in the two months of rest, the deep caverns

of my nostrils strength in my muscles, feasting on itching with anticipation. It was negative.

Although the test was supposed to allow me liberation, what was left was the lingering weight of the virus. My pale and frail legs were dragging along the new world, not allowing me to feel the rhythm of the walk I once had. Along with my physical health came a rope that was strapped onto my mental health, clinging, and gripping with an absolute hold, dragging my mentality down along with my physical strength. Deteriorating of its power, my mental stability was eerily toppling over with little hope in it left. However, once I thought there was no hope left, I prayed.

I kneeled and prayed, fingers from each hand achingly reaching towards one another, eyes shutting determinedly. I begged and pleaded with salty tears for a release from all the anxiety that had conjured up in my mind, body, and soul. My fragile knees were on the cold tile, body hunched over itself, thinking, and believing that someone was listening to me. I sobbed to the Lord, my God, and pleaded for support and help out of such a dark and strenuous place for what seemed like hours. Getting off my knees, I quietly stopped praying while still thinking deeply in my mind, a vast storm of enthusiasm and hopelessness. I knew that the entire world

got swept off its feet and thrown to the ground, so it only made sense that it was going to be laborious to learn how to walk again, but what I finally got to understand was that it wasn't impossible.

To finally be able to haul my almost lifeless body up from such a hard throw to the ground was as much exhausting as it was exhilarating. Making the task look natural was a terrible feat that I needed to practice getting used to again. My once strong and moveable body was hardly able to walk for 30 minutes straight without needing to sit down. The pandemic, treacherous and tragic, caused many to encounter a gray cloud full of streaks of lightning, with no one ever knowing when it would start to strike.

Going through life during the pandemic after suffering with the virus was like walking through a minefield; I was never sure of what the results were going to be. While venturing through this dangerous road, it was important for me to keep in mind the ominous atmosphere the virus had surrounded my life with. Touching clothes on a clothes rack at a department store or picking which watermelon was the best to take home from the grocery store were not casual occurrences after the pandemic struck. Going to the movies and eating buttery popcorn with a sour pickle on the side or seeing one of my friend's bright smiles and giving them a warm-hearted hug after not seeing them for such a long time were not experiences that I could encounter anymore. Training my mind to make positive that I made more room for optimistic thoughts was a task that I absolutely needed to conquer. Moving past the

hardships, I traipsed on familiarly through day-to-day life, an anticipatory minefield loaded with abrupt explosions that could happen at any given time. I just needed to learn how to walk again.

## **Tulips in the Sunlight**

Adeeba Ahmad



## *Alignment*

Darissa Rodriguez

I wish I was the color pink.  
Soft and inviting;  
Skies Right before sunset.  
The color that flushes your cheeks  
After every kiss good night.

I wish I was sweeter  
honey oat milk lattes in February.  
fresh tulips in May.  
Let go of the little things,  
be present in everything.

I wish I didn't say things to hurt you.  
Guard my heart, Watch my tongue.  
Quick to listen, slow to speak.  
Pour vanilla scented words from my lips,  
And soothe your soul with the note of my voice.

I wish I could fix things.  
I always wanted to be a doctor,  
But never the healing kind.  
I know I cannot fix people  
I can't even mend my own mind.

I wish I could go back in time  
Hold your hand a little longer, kiss you a little softer.  
Wipe one more tear and sing that song you liked.  
I would slow my walk to a mear shuffle.  
Be pure as gold, straight from the dirt.

I wish I could be in perfect alignment.  
Everything I've ever wanted to be.  
Not collage of every version of myself,  
I created to be loved  
by anyone but me.

## Para la mujer que tanto ame, pero que no le fui lo suficiente

Cindy Ruiz Zamudio

Hola, mi estimada compañera:

Te escribo lo que será la última muestra de mi afecto en cuanto a amor apasionado se refiere, ya que después de tu abrupta ida, poco a poco esa llama se consumió y ahora escribo con las cenizas de lo que alguna vez fue la relación más hermosa que yo pude tener.

Me hubiera encantado haberte enseñado todos los poemas que había escrito para ti, después de haber llenado hojas completas de mi cuaderno especial para estos, me hubiera gustado habértelos recitado en alguna ocasión. Me arrepiento de no haberte enseñado tampoco, los dibujos que con tanto cariño hice

para ti, que a pesar de que lo único que fue trazado fue con un lápiz de grafito borrable, mostraba a detalle los momentos que hubiera amado compartir contigo.

Me arrepiento amiga mía, de haberte hecho sufrir malos ratos, haciendo que decayeras con lo que mis labios decían, sin que tú pudieras callarlos por miedo a mi ira enceguedora. Lamento haberte obligado a amarme, acorralándote con mi severa y horrible tristeza acarreada durante años completos, además de mis lágrimas y lamentos lastimeros, perdóname lindo ángel por haberte hecho pasar por esos dilemas, en verdad puedo decirte con seguridad que soy un desastre con piernas, que vaga sin un corazón completo solo para causar estragos en los más amables, puros y preciosos.

Perdona por haberte hecho sufrir con tu descontento, peleándonos por asuntos absurdos y sin importancia, que si yo hubiera accedido a aceptar, tal vez nunca hubieran sucedido, pero por más que una desee viajar en el tiempo, al pasado y cambiar todo, no sucederá, y de ahí viene el refrán “Él “hubiera”, no existe”. Sufro por no haber es-

chando tus lamentos, por no haber intentado ayudarte en tu agobiante y triste memoria, quien solo recordaba una persona a la cual abandonaste mientras esta se fue sin rastro, dejándote en la mente un espantoso tormento que añoraba y rogaba por pedirle disculpas, tal vez hubiera sido mejor que en aquella reunión, me hubiera apartado de ti, intentando hablar con aquellas mujeres presentes en aquella cómoda sala de estar bien parecida de su humilde y apreciado hogar.

Con las últimas de mis lágrimas que mi ya incinerado y espinado corazón te puede brindar, te deseo la más grande de las suertes en tu vida mi amor, porque aun si no podemos estar juntas para siempre como en aquellos cuentos de hadas contados por las madres enternecidas a sus hijos, aquí te esperaré en la eternidad, pidiendo con mi fe a mi Dios que por su santa y bendita gloria que acune en sus brazos con protección, y me permita corregir mis errores en la siguiente vida.

Tal vez mi fe no me salve de la dolorosa muerte que pueda atravesar, pues hace mucho escuche a un cantante de tez oscura una frase realmente sabia y que refleja la realidad que todos en algún momento vamos a atravesar: “La muerte no discrimina entre los santos y los pecadores, pues ella solo se lleva.” y aun así, con el dolor en mi pecho en ese momento que fue atravesado por una espina, logré escuchar el siguiente verso de su canto, que

me dio algo de esperanza a pesar de que esta parecía muy lejana: “Aun así podemos vivir, nos levantamos, nos caemos, nos rompemos y cometemos errores, pero si hay una razón por la cual todos a quien amamos tienen que partir, entonces, solo esperaré”, tal vez preguntes: “¿Por qué te parece algo esperanzador? ¡Tu cabeza ya no está bien, necesitas tu medicamento señorita!” pero puedo decirte la razón, tal vez ya mi cuerpo deteriorado me haga ver mal, pero aún conservo mi mentalidad como cuando era una niña.

Esa frase, es nuestro proceso en la vida, cometemos errores que nos hacen más fuertes, nos caemos y sufrimos, pero después volvemos a levantarnos, por más veces que nosotros nos rompamos, si tenemos que esperar para ver la razón por la cual sufrimos, es mejor hacerlo, “una vida sin sufrimiento no es vida” después de todo.

Siento si en algún momento, mi escritura es demasiado pésima, pero mis manos ya no pueden escribir más, mi cuerpo está comenzando a ceder, pero no paro de escribir, porque necesitas saber la razón de mi extraño comportamiento. Lamento si en algún momento fui muy seca contigo mi bella dama, pero los celos y la rabia podían más conmigo que cualquier otra cosa, estaba celosa porque estando a distancia no podía abrazarte, ni besarte, ni acariciar tus mejillas y cabello, en cambio, aquellas chicas podían hacerlo sin que tú te molestara. Las



envidiaba, pero eran tus amigas, y por más pareja que fuéramos, no podía prohibirte tener amigas o amigos, pues tu adoras hacer feliz a los demás y quien mejor que los amigos para ello.

Estoy perdiendo el conocimiento, perdoname, pero ya no puedo más, solo quiero descansar. Hasta siempre Mon Amour. Te a-  
.....

Antes de poder escribir la última frase, despidiéndose, dos papeles y una pluma fina cayeron desde su mano al suelo cubierto de fina decoración, el rebotar de la pluma contra este fue acompañado de un chillido estruendoso, indicando que la mujer que escribía aquella carta de despedida, aquella, la cual ahora su fina y negra cabellera con mechones azules y uno que otro cabello azul reposaba en la almohada en la cual su cabeza descansaba, aquella que alguna vez sonrió con júbilo y que sus ojos igual de azules que el cielo llegaron a tener aquel peculiar brillo de enamoramiento, se había entregado a los brazos de la muerte.

La segunda hoja caída del regazo de la mujer, contenía un poema hacía la persona que se suponía recibiría la carta:

Aquella mañana de reposo  
Vi tu cabello brillar bajo el reluciente sol  
¿Eras aquella que a cual su mano

desposo?  
¿O serás la que desaparezca mi dolor?

Oh amada mía  
Cuanto daría yo  
Por volver a ver tus manías  
Y compartirte mi corazón.

Por desgracia, mantendré mi distancia  
Y observare en la lejanía  
Como tu corazón late  
Por un alma que no es la mía.

Oh amada mía  
¡Qué rabia tengo en verdad!  
Si supieras mis pensamientos...  
Si supieras mi soledad...

## Un deseo despues de de de-estrellar el cielo

Angie Rocha

Creo que a veces puedo escuchar el suspiro de las estrellas  
De noche, de dia. Siempre susurrando siempre preguntan,  
Cuando alguien va a pedir un deseo para nosotros?  
Cuando alguien va a parar de hacer deseos de salvar  
El mundo, y en vez empezar a hacerlo?

Creo que a veces eschuo la tierra tutubear  
Tratando de entender las miles de dolor que le hemos echo.  
Sus lagrimas se escuchan cerro las cigarras en la noche  
Pero por alguna razon, nadie las escucha  
La tierra dice que esta cansada.

Creo que a veces olvido quien soy y olvido a donde voy.  
Me pierdo en la sombra creada por las muchos momentos  
Que no he hecho nada, cuando tuviese que. Tengo miedo que  
Este mundo se la apaguen las estrellas porque no podre pedir deseos.

Las estrellas desaparecieron justo a las 3:12 de la mañana  
No me puedo mover. En verdad estoy perdida, sofucada por  
La oscuridad. Mi hermana a lado de mi no le importa.  
Continua sus sueños que no podria desear nunca ahorra  
Que las estrellas se fueron  
Creo que ahora tendre que ser yo las estrellas. Tendre  
Que cumplir todos mis deseos y dejar de pensar en  
Lo oscura que esta la noche. Creo que ayer en el reflejo de la luna  
Puede verme brillar como una estrella



## South Padre Island

Adeebah Ahmad



# Waiting

Sheila Gomez

Waiting  
you are not always welcome  
yet he uses you to send a message.

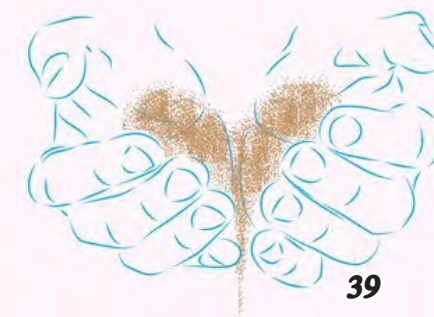
Waiting  
you are not always pleasing, yet he uses you  
to refine me.

Waiting  
you give place for amiss words against me,  
yet his words of me are filled with truth.

Waiting  
you are part of a process,  
Yet I don't always remember it.

Waiting  
you are unseen,  
yet he reveals himself to me in you.

Waiting  
I don't know for how long you will be around,  
yet I am learning to embrace you  
so I can be embraced by him,  
who holds eternity in his hands.



# Where Two Worlds Collide

Maribel Sanchez

When I feel like running away, I go to the beach. It's the furthest place I can go that's the closest to home, meaning it doesn't raise any red flags to concerned loved ones. I don't need to worry about finding a place to stay overnight as it's only two hours away and it's familiar enough to get lost but not get lost because nothing has changed there in over ten years.

South Padre Island is only an hour and thirty minutes from my home. For Texas, that's incredibly close by. It's the temporary home to hundreds of migratory birds, some of which are considered endangered, and permanent home to different turtles, reptiles and fish. What's truly captivating is the sandy shore itself. While most beaches are littered with the sharp, broken shells of various mollusks that nomadically moved from one husk to another, my beach welcomes bare feet. There are still shells along the ripples of the briny, blue water, but they are perfectly settled along the coast, cushioned between the tide and sand. This is why Texas mosquitoes brave the sea-sprayed air and venture to parts of the world that instinct warned them to stray from - it's too beautiful to avoid, too beautiful to escape from - or to.

The relief starts the second I slide into the driver's seat of my SUV and permeates with each passing mile, each passing utility pole - soon there will be none of those, just miles of hot sand and open sea. In the back seat, my son watches in silence as the trees slide across his window.

My ideal departing time is just before sunrise, when the midnight-blue sky is broken by purples and pinks that trace the edges of the rosy clouds, making

them seem closer than they really are. By the time the summer sun makes an appearance, peeking out from beneath the horizon as it lazily starts the day, I am already on the expressway, thirty minutes into my journey.

The first sign of proximity is the inclined asphalt, supported by concrete beams that push it up and away from the dangerous depths of the sharky waters. They grip the sides of the cement that make up the two-and-a-half-mile-long bridge, strong hands that promise to prevent another catastrophe like the one twenty years ago. They beckon for me to continue, to drive along the graves of the eight people that unexpectedly plunged to their deaths. Where the echoes of their screams for their mothers and God are drowned by the sound of a raging sea.

One thing to know about me is that I'm competitive by nature; my immortal mother says she'll croak the day I am not driven by it. So, when the sun challenges me, I do not become discouraged. When the sea threatens to devour me whole, I am not swayed. Instead, I push through and break free.

As I cascade down, waving goodbye to the beams that I swear are waving back in the rearview, the second sign of proximity comes into view: hotel towers that bleed through the salty haze that hovers above the land. They offer sanctuary from the gusts that splash salt into the eyes of the bodies that leave imprints of hands and feet and bottoms. Different imprints than the man-made buildings that interrupt the flow of the land.

I don't know what it is that I'm running away from - my own thoughts? Bottled emotions that are nearing explo-

sion? Existential crisis? Whatever it is, I'll soon find it in a message, rolled and sealed with twine and placed within a discarded glass bottle along the coastal shore.

The soft rolling sound of tires against gravel becomes muffled by the soft sand, the grains of which are too small to retaliate under the weight of my vehicle. Within the black canvas of my sneakers, my toes tingle, anticipating contact with the rippling terrain that has called us here. Every movement from the trunk of my car to the foamy tide is excruciating. In order to make this trip a pleasant one, certain steps need to be taken. Sunscreen needs to be caked on, towels need to be stuffed into bags, toys, shoes, snacks, shade, all need to be lugged to an area that's hard enough to set camp but soft enough to lay comfortably. Finally, after valiant efforts have been taken, my shoes come off and I can breathe.

The soft, pink undersides of my feet embrace the warm, microscopic crystals, soothing beads that smooth out the wrinkles of the tense muscles of my soles. My toes dig deeper, finding comfort beneath the hot blanket of sand, searching for the cool untouched layer. I stand, like a plant, buried beneath the earth and feel the soft, salty specks of the sea spray onto my ripened cheeks, cooling them instantly. The breeze is nice and steady; although the loose strands of my hair flail about in every direction, my body does not fall victim to the breeze and, instead, stays perfectly still, rooted by stubborn feet.

The sun looms above with little mercy and scowls at the ocean each time it reaches for me, causing it to recoil and wait for another attempt. I bathe in it's cupidity, grateful for the warmth I have searched for since leaving the cold, colorless walls of my mental prison. It's embrace is fierce; it pricks at my skin like hot, molten lava but it does not aim to injure, instead it reminds me that there

are no limits to my strength.

"Momma, come!" The silence has broken. My son, seven and curious and courageous, calls for me to meet him at the place where two worlds collide. I oblige.

My legs are heavy at first, reluctant to leave the spot it has become acquainted with, desperate to remain in the zone of its own comfort. It's easy here, standing, unmoving - it leaves little room for disappointment that the unknown has to offer. Oh, how we've been disappointed. But there is adventure to be discovered, there is prospect for growth and new beginnings, and the excitement in my heart blends with the apprehension in my gut and nudges me forward. The tension in my tendons makes my uncertainty palpable, they cause my knees to shiver as I near the shore; the waves are calm and reassuring as I enter the water yet my body goes rigid as it kisses my skin. We are both hesitant, long-lost acquaintances that must grow accustomed to one another again, like soulmates separated through time and space, connected by the thread that brought us here.

Gradually, my body acclimates to the chilly temperature, the muscles beneath the newly formed bumpy skin visibly rolling into relaxation. My legs, tired and worn from constant overuse, are grateful for this opportunity. Finally, their shift is over.

I think, maybe it's not that I'm *running away* from anything but rather that I'm running *towards* something. Out on the sandy shores, where electricity and internet and cell phone service is practically nonexistent, it's easier to admire the different shades of blues that color the sky and sea. It's easier to take the time to notice the shrill call of a White-tailed Hawk that circles above the clouds or the Brown Pelican that glides along the water in search of fish to eat - not once giving any indication of their

endangered state.

Likewise, it's easier to admire the golden-brown hues of my son's skin, illuminated by the sun's reflection off the salty water. The brown hues of his irises like an ocean of decadent chocolate, unique in its flavor, sickly sweet and one I could swim in for days. It's easier to admire the white pearls that shine beneath his parted, oyster smile, a smile that never quite reaches the chocolate I crave. It's easier to admire the heart on his sleeve.

My son was five when he experienced his first heartbreak. His father moved out of the home and promised little change with his departure, a promise that would break over a short period of time. For months, the two of us spent our days mending that broken heart, picking up the pieces, broken shells along the shoreline, and placing them all in a bucket to string together on a necklace - or for him to tape onto his arm. If you needed a piece of your own, he'd strip one from his person and offer it to you with no strings attached, tell you to take your time with it or keep it altogether. He was still willing to share, still willing to give parts of himself should someone need them more than him, and with little reluctance - but never all of it, never again.

And so my escape became his. There were certain signs to look for - a sigh that was too deep, a frown that was too low, a half-hearted, crooked smile - and then I'd beckon him towards me, pull him close and whisper for him to escape with me.

I go out to the sea because I don't have to go very far to feel like you've gone very far. If you stand knee-deep in the water, with your back to the shore, you can pretend, for a moment, as if you're standing in the middle of the vast open ocean. In that moment, time is irrelevant and miles are nonexistent. It doesn't matter that I've never traversed past the

Texas border more than three times in my life or that Monday's work deadline is nearing. It doesn't matter that there is a pandemic sweeping the globe, preventing us all from drifting from one place to the other and connecting with the humans that make us human. There, with the current of the waves pushing and pulling at my feet, I have decided to disown my humanity. Instead, I am the sea.

Around me, seagulls squawk loudly. Their shadows pass over me, shielding my eyes from the sun for the briefest of moments, before dropping to the sand in search of day-old scraps; discarded bits that weren't good enough to eat or pack away for the following day. They seem to enjoy it - grateful for the feast that's been left behind, quick to devour what's been given and eagerly search for more. I frown. Don't they know there are better options out there? "Hey, you okay?" His voice is soft like summer rain, deeper than the one that splashes around us, as he puts his arm around me and pulls me close.

When I feel like I'm drowning, I run away to the beach.

This time is different, though. I didn't run to the beach as an escape but rather walked there, hand-in-hand with someone new, to unveil pieces of myself I hid from the world, hid from myself. Pieces buried beneath the dark sand, wet from the gentle and loving tide.

He is different, though, this new someone. His tennis shoes stay on as he moves about the sand and even further into the water. He fears the ocean, the uncertainty and unpredictability of it, but today he has decided to set that aside for me and my son. Today, he bought his first pair of swimming trunks in over five years and has reconsidered sunglasses, despite informing me only months prior that he couldn't stand them. Today was his idea.

When we feel abandoned, we run away to the beach. You can't abandon us, if we abandon you first.

This time is different, though. My son didn't flee towards the sea, pretending to embark on a journey far from this land, to a place where heartbreak and disappointment are nonexistent. Instead, he skipped there, full of renewed hope. This time, the prospect of going home at the end of the day does not bother him, escape is no longer necessary. Home is home now.

He is different, this new someone. I watch as he takes my son's hand in his, so smooth and effortless like he's just as much his soulmate as he is mine, and trudges forward to wade in the depths that have kept him from this island.

My son hasn't handed him a single piece of the roughly-glued heart but, instead, given it all. He's torn it completely off his sleeve and has placed it in the hands that pull him up and carry him safely above the unruly tide, promising hope. My son clutches him tightly, tiny arms wrapped around broad shoulders, not from fear of abandonment, but for closeness. When my son looks back at me now, with a smile so peaceful, one I haven't seen even in the years after that heartbreak - my heart shatters into a million pieces, pieces that peak out beneath the sand, waiting to be picked and shared.

There will still be days when the ocean will be my escape. My son and I will still flock like seagulls, fly over the bridge that terrifies and excites us all at once, and eat along the bank as day shifts to night. There will be pieces of shells that we missed, ones that we absentmindedly pick up and might directly pass onto him or some that we'll harbor for ourselves, a habit that is hard to break.

There will be days when the sun's rays aren't so bright, when its warmth will die out as summer falls to winter, and the days on the beach will be replaced with dark rooms and fleece pajamas, buried beneath a bundle of blankets. The rooms will be grey, colorless without her gentle 'good morning' caresses to reach through parted curtains - ones we scolded and begged for a few more minutes without.

Likewise, the sea will be missed, too - the sweet push and pull that rocked us into blissful tranquility, relinquishing all thoughts of fear and insecurity; the rocky caresses of the waves serving as gentle reminders that love exists and we deserve it. It will all be missed. Fortunately for us, the summers in Texas are long.

## As Always, Lookin On

Luis Quintanilla



BOX

JESSI MATA

When I started working at the warehouse, they warned me the boxes were heavy.

Each was 60 pounds.

Full of glass encased lights.

Fragile.

But I knew that I could do it. No burden was too heavy.

During the first few weeks, I dropped a lot of boxes.

Over and over, I had to open the boxes to check for damage.

My knuckles quickly grew dusty and bloody as they scraped against the concrete floors. I didn't mind. They finally matched all the hard work I had been doing for years.

So, I continued lifting boxes.

Over and over, I lifted boxes of lights from the floor to a table that sat as high as my waist.

Labeled them. Stacked them on pallets. Sent them to live the rest of their lives in someone's ceiling.

After a month and a half, I had grown strong enough to stop dropping them. For the most part.

When I checked, the lights were always intact...except for the last box.

I won't ever forget that box. It was on its way to Oklahoma, and I had to repackage it with an ache in my chest.

I swept up glass for what felt like weeks after that.

Eventually I got good at lifting that much weight, until I stopped dropping the boxes.

Over and over, I lifted boxes of lights from the floor to a table that sat as high as my waist.

Labeled them. Stacked them on pallets. Sent them to live the rest of their lives in someone's ceiling.

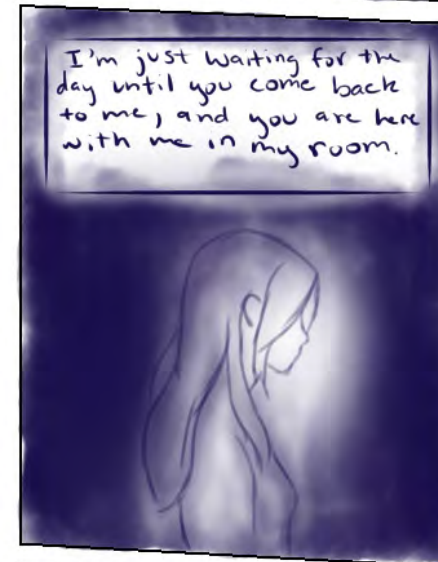
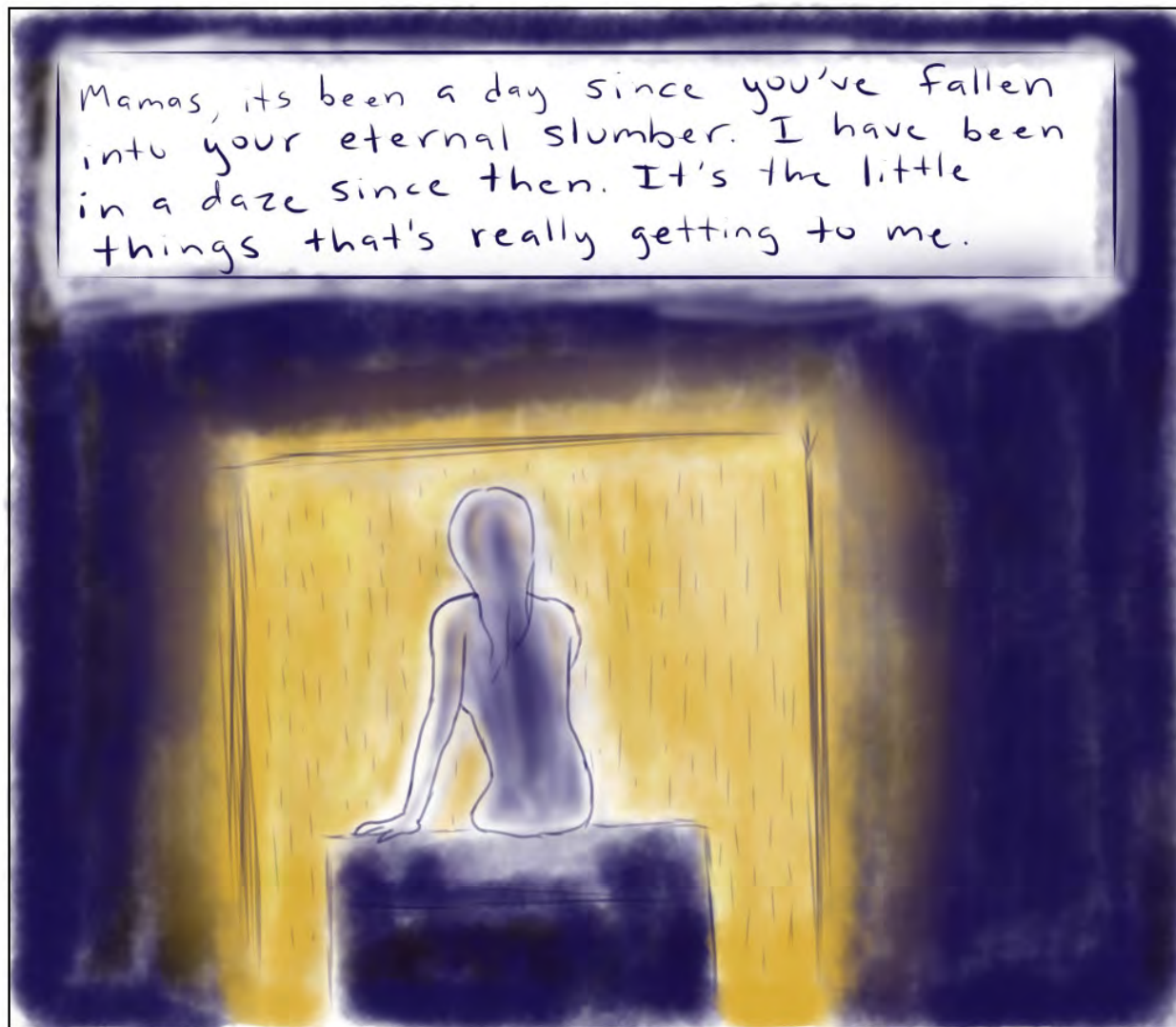
And each time I did, I thought of you. I thought of how over and over, I lifted you from the floor, into a wheelchair whose arm sat as high as my waist. Wiped the blood from your forehead. Reassured you that everything would be okay.

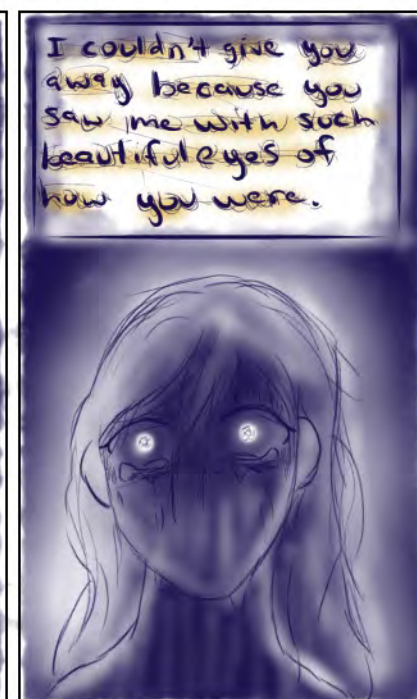
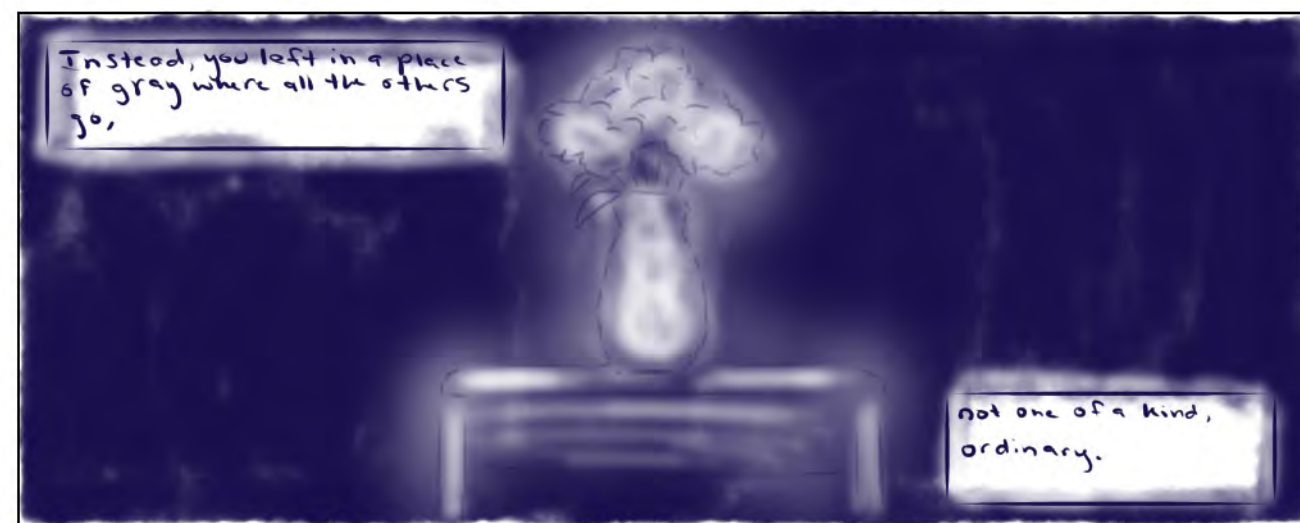
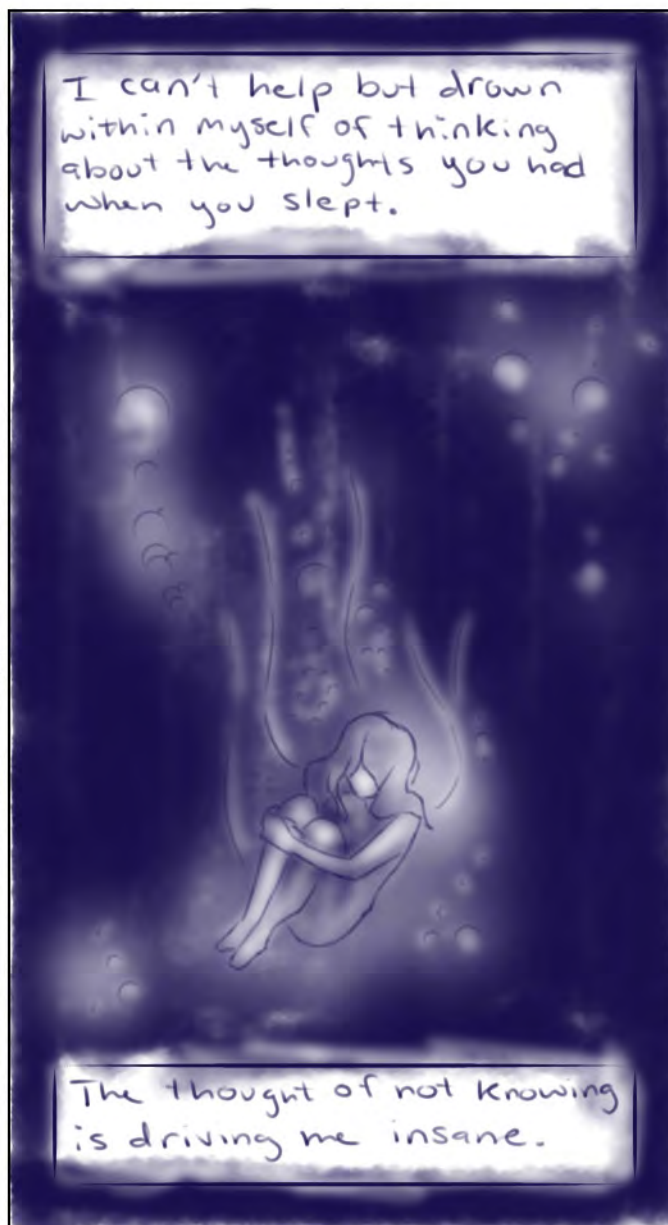
Until it was my turn to lift a box with you inside of it from a hearse and lower it into the ground.



# Chiquita

Sonia C. Garza





It was as though  
you were you  
again.

Since the moment  
you turned 10, I  
knew that Death  
will come and  
find you.

It was a matter  
of time...

time.

Every time I looked at  
you,

I always wondered when it  
will be the day where you  
are not here, beside me.

I can't breath  
in this **SILENCE**.

I'm afraid to change the  
blanket because all of you  
will be gone...

Forever.

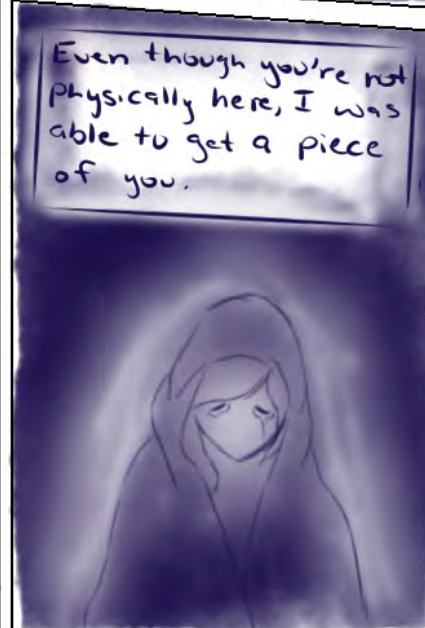
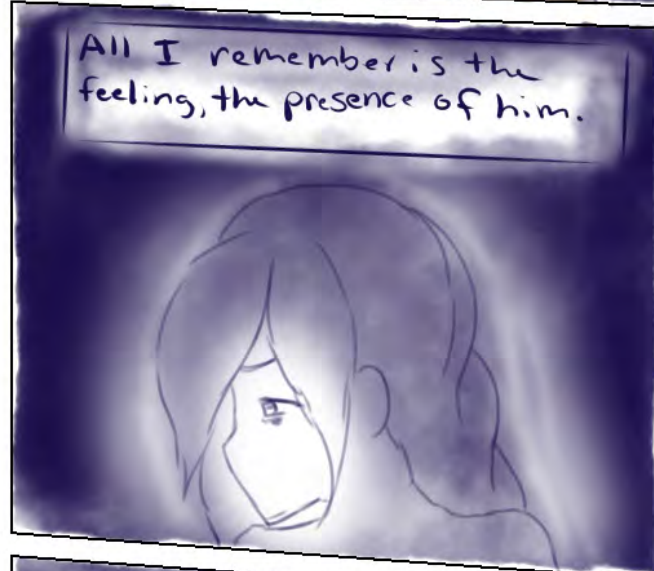
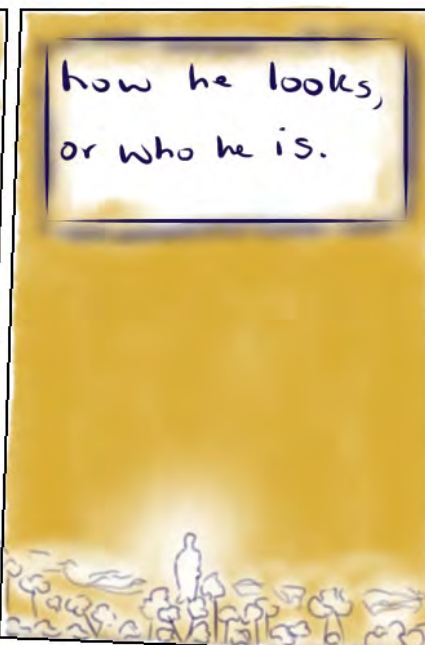
It still hurts.

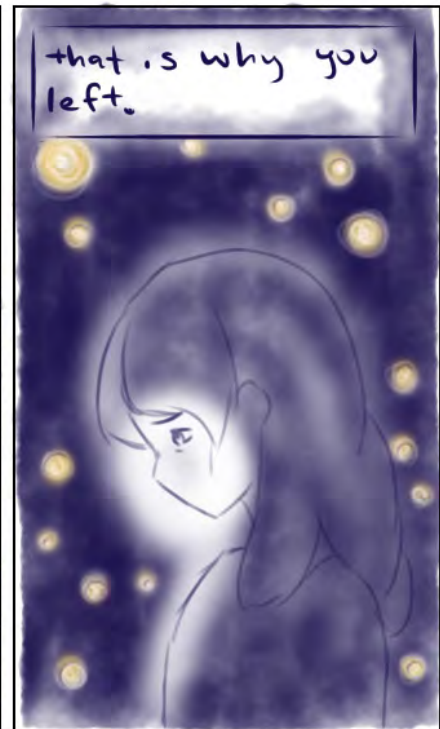
The pain comes  
by as

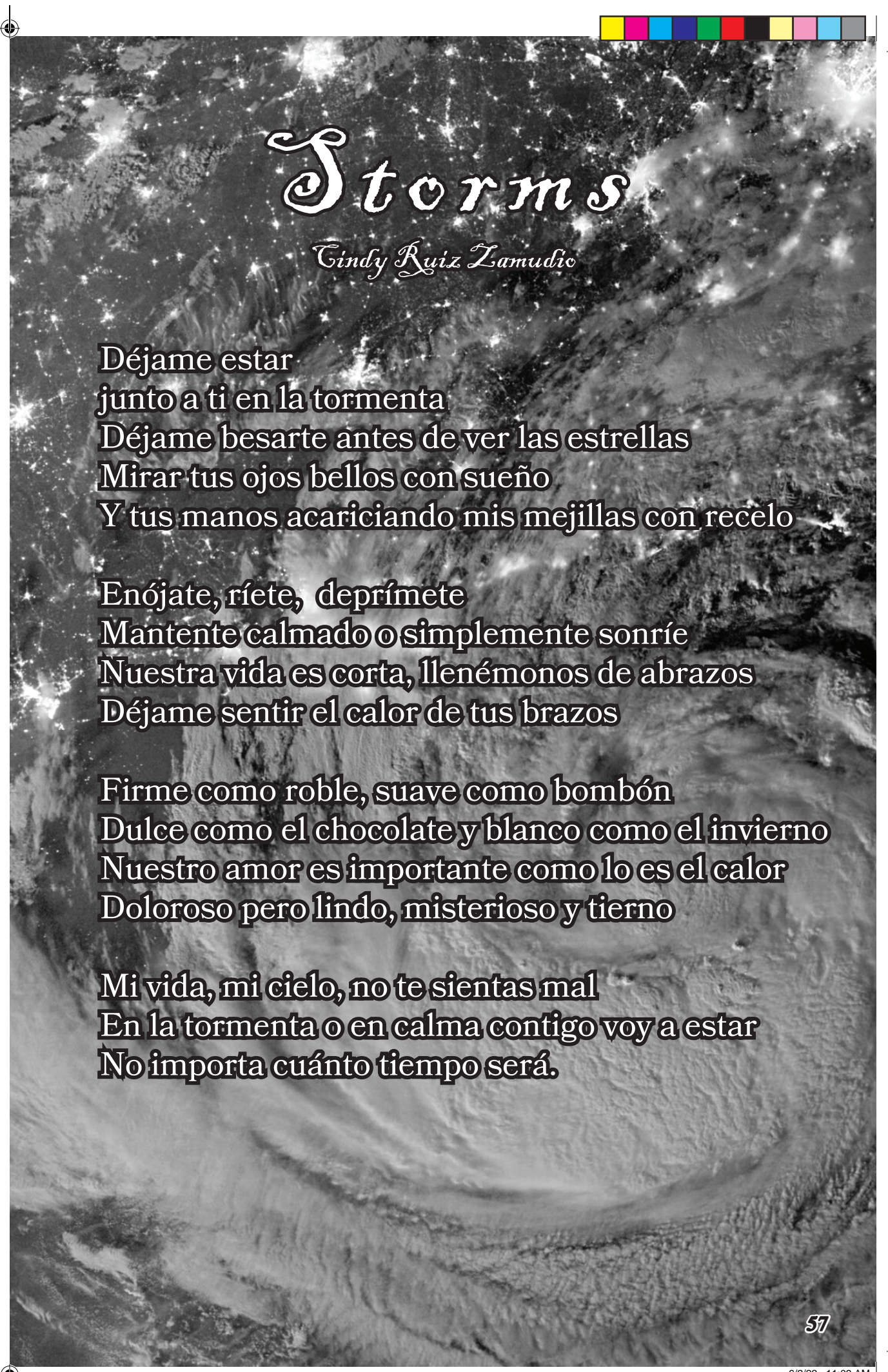
Waves.

One  
moment

I'm  
good.







# Storms

Cindy Ruiz Zamudio

Déjame estar  
junto a ti en la tormenta  
Déjame besarte antes de ver las estrellas  
Mirar tus ojos bellos con sueño  
Y tus manos acariciando mis mejillas con recelo

Enójate, ríete, deprímete  
Mantente calmado o simplemente sonríe  
Nuestra vida es corta, llenémonos de abrazos  
Déjame sentir el calor de tus brazos

Firme como roble, suave como bombón  
Dulce como el chocolate y blanco como el invierno  
Nuestro amor es importante como lo es el calor  
Doloroso pero lindo, misterioso y tierno

Mi vida, mi cielo, no te sientas mal  
En la tormenta o en calma contigo voy a estar  
No importa cuánto tiempo será.

2003

Daynara Gutierrez

The inseparable group of four that were once considered to be family, were not only strangers to the public, but to each other as well.

**November 8th, 2002.**

Xavier and Laney were walking down the hall to meet Andi and Tobey for their next class together. They were talking about how awful Ms. Jensen was and that she ought to sober up from the divorce at some point, it was basically the end of the year and she was still miserable, meaning their lives were just as miserable Tobey, being his jockey self, came bounding down the hallway at full speed to am into Xavier yelling, "YO"- his typical greeting. The hallway was full of laughter and the four walked side by side, basking in what was the best year of their lives.

**November 8th, 2002.**

It was Homecoming season and the four were ready for the night to come. Andi and Laney had gone shopping weeks before to find their perfect dresses. Of course the boys were dragged along on that adventure. They rolled their eyes at every dress the girls brought out and Tobey would shout "Just pick one already!" The girls would laugh, and Laney would hear Andi shout back, "Shut it before I shove you into one of these dresses." These were the memories Laney liked to look back on. She was slipping away slowly, and the thought of not having these three by her side anymore always brought tears to her eyes. She wiped them away and continued to reminisce on her favorite memories as she was getting ready.

**November 8th 2003.**

And i had enough of bottling up everything she was thinking, feeling, and experencing, she needed to talk to someone and there were only two people in the world she trusted enough to speak to. However, those two people were currently strangers to her considering they hadn't spoken since the last police visit, which was back in May. She tried so desperately to look into the eyes of the boy's who had come to be like brothers to her, but all she saw behind their eyes was sorrow, regret, and emptiness. The feelings were so overwhelming they swallowed hewhole and she vowed to not look into their eyes again. Andi knew she needed an outlet and soon,

or else the once four would be down to two.

**November 8th, 2002.**

Homecoming ended and the group decided to go out to eat, this would be the perfect end to the perfect night. It was then while they were eating their much too pricey pasta with sleep- deprived waiters begging them to leave, that Laney decided it had been the best night. They ended their festivities, and Xavier proceeded to drop everyone off. Laney was the second to last to get dropped off. She was trying her hardest to soak in these last moments.

**November 8th 2003**

Tobey had the same thoughts running through his mind day and night ever since the incident and it was driving him to insanity. What could he have done differently? Why did he not see it sooner? It was all his fault. He could have saved her. She deserved so much better. These thoughts were devouring him and it took every ounce of strength to not give into the intrusivethoughts that were begging for his victimization.

**November 8th, 2002.**

Tobey had been in love with Laney since freshman year. Laney of course knew this, but chose not to say anything. Tobey came from a background where his parents were together and very much in love, his siblings were his world, and he gave his all to everything he did. Laney came from deceit, lies, and corruption. She thought she would never be good enough for someone like him. Although she did hear Xavier say once that Tobey thought he would never be good enough for her. She laughed it off, assuming it was a joke. In no world would Tobey ever not be worthy of her.

**November 8th 2003.**

There was a black hole burning so deep in Tobey's chest that he was sure it was unfixable. The pain, the torture, the nightmares. It was all too much. What he wouldn't give to go back to that night and change the course of time. November 8th, 2002. Xavier had a lonely childhood, being an only child, and he was always too "nerdy" to belong to any of the groups at school. This somehow made him perfect for the friend group. He was the most reliable and knew what to do in every situation. Laney recognized that she, along with Tobey and Andi would fit perfectly with someone like Xavier. He would be the calm to their storm. Laney had asked the biology teacher, the class they all shared together, if they could work as a group for the school year. They instantly clicked, and Laney was more than proud that she was able to make someone feel special in a way she never did.

**November 8th 2003.**

It was insufferable coming to school day after day. Xavier had never experienced what it felt like to have his heart shattered a million different ways. In such a short period of time, he lost the people who served as his rock in life. He had vowed that day in biology, when they all first met that he would do whatever it took to keep these friends. He had never felt more like a failure.

**November 8th, 2002.**

Laney had been fighting demons for years now. Things got better when Xavier and Andi came into her life. She didn't have to face the ruthless empire that was her father. She finally had a reason to be out of the house. Everything was so picture perfect to the public, but no one ever knew what happened behind closed doors. It's always the flawless families that are flawed the most, is what Laney thought to herself at every event her family attend-



ed. She was brainwashed into believing that if she muttered a word about what her dad did to her, and how her mom turned a blind eye, that worse things would come her way. No one would ever know how her body held the marks of hatred singed onto her by her own father. No one would ever know how her mental health was practically non-existent thanks to the dehumanizing comments that were thrown her way. And nobody would ever know that the only reason her mom would turn a blind eye is because she had to endure the branding of loathing from her own husband on her body. But alas, her friends made her days decent and her nights bearable. Unfortunately, she never had the heart to tell her friends it still wasn't enough.

**November 8th 2003.**

Coincidentally, Andi, Tobey, and Xavier had a good amount of classes together senior year. This was not a good thing in their eyes of course. They all felt anger towards each other for not knowing what was happening with one of their best friends, but behind it all they were all broken souls that needed each other to keep living. By some miracle when Tobey walked in that day, he sat next to Andi and waved hello. She was shocked, but taking advantage of this moment, waved back. Once Xavier walked in, he surveyed the scene and decided to sit behind Tobey, acknowledging both Andi and Tobey. Class ended and they filed out of the class together, and without even realizing it, Andi had tears streaming down her face. She needed these boys more than the air she was breathing if she was going to make it another day. In unison, they all decided it was time to talk.

**November 8th, 2002.**

Xavier dropped Laney off and Tobey walked her to the door. He made the motion like he was going to tell her something, but then decided against it. Laney looked at him with pleading eyes, begging that he would say something, anything that would make her reconsider her choices. But then again, how was he supposed to know, she thought as her body shook with guilt. He looked at her with admiration in his eyes, and she knew this would be the last time she would see his face. Laney soaked in every one of his features and etched it in her mind hoping to never forget. He gave her one final hug and took off back to the car. Her heart went with him that night. As soon as she walked through the door she saw her father waiting in the chair, angrily staring at her. She knew what was coming. She could smell the alcohol, soaked into the walls. A permanent scent. Laney knew that day was her last. She had enough. She wanted her dad to suffer seeing her body, regretting every decision he made. Hard to believe he'd care enough though, her brain whispered to her. With tears blocking her vision she escaped into her room. Laney's pick of poison was the one she thought would be the easiest to clean up when her body was found. Bullet to the head. It would be quick, she was thinking, It would be painless. She waited until she could hear her dad's horrid snoring, and snuck downstairs to grab the gun from his study. Laney was glad she would leave with the happy memory of Homecoming and the three other people

she loved most. "They'll be alright", she whispered, walking back up the stairs. "I'll love them forever". She changed into her favorite pajamas, crawled into bed, put her back against the headboard, and pulled the trigger. That night she knew the angel of death would sweep her up and take her away.

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**November 8th 2003.**

After Andi finally calmed down, Xavier was the first to speak. "How have you guys been?". They all looked around at each other already knowing the answer. Tobey spoke next, "Did you guys know it was going to happen"? "Did she give you any indication that she wanted that?". There was a pleading in his voice, although Xavier and Andi couldn't tell if he wanted them to say yes or no. Xavier and Andi shook their heads violently, thinking to themselves that they would've never expected it. Andi was the last to speak, "She was the sister I never had, she made me feel as though everything was going to be okay, even in the darkest of times". Then the stream of tears started up once again. This time Andi wasn't the only one crying.

**November 8th, 2002.**

Xavier and Tobey hadn't left yet because Tobey felt as though something was off. He explained to Xavier that there was something in Laney's eyes that felt wrong. Then the sound that would carve itself into his brain forever, echoed through the neighborhood. Tobey dashed inside without a care to her parents, and found her body lifeless and damaged, slumped on her bed. No words could describe his pain at that moment. His scream was blood curling. Xavier guessed what happened, and he knew then that one of his soulmates in life had just been ripped out from under his feet.

**November 8th 2003.**

After school, the three friends continued their conversation from earlier. There was still some uneasiness in the air. They hadn't talked to each other in so long. There was no telling that they would be the same as they once were. No promises were made. There was only hope of what could be





*So Many Times I Wanted to Check Out*  
*AJ Warhall*

So many times I've wanted to check out  
Of this hotel I've turned to black from gold  
So many faces; of both familiar and new  
Who stop by with paintings to show me

Yet, I still look out the window  
The tree I planted; now weary and old  
With so many arms wearing flowers on end  
And each hand holding a bird that sings

Some who stay and some may go  
With a flower clipped,  
and with a flower to hold  
So many times I've wanted to check out

I look down at this hotel book  
With so many names telling so many stories  
And yet mine was never written  
Of this hotel I've turned to black from gold



*Sola*

Emmelinn Flores

Over the course of years,  
I have faced what seemed to be my greatest sadness.  
Great punishments have been dealt to cause these great tears;  
All I wish to do now is hold and caress  
myself from days gone by in isolation.

Me he sentido sola sin saberlo.

Mi familia son mis amigos  
and you have put them out of reach

You have slowly removed  
them from my life while I  
watched yet failed to notice.

Esto es lo que me has impuesto.

This is what you teach.

Por que me he acostumbrado  
to what you have done,  
y a todo lo que me has quitado?

There are doors you have locked  
behind you I wished to use  
to have access to you  
but you have barricaded them with your body  
and told me

Vete de aqui.

Taken away from others,  
even yourself

I truly had no one to talk to.

If I tried to speak with family,  
they couldn't understand me

and I couldn't force the words out of  
myself to make them understand.

Maybe it is best I can't express myself in my mother tongue  
because my mother would not appreciate the words  
that I would scream at the top of my lungs.

Even so, I think you would have misheard  
me and I would be left

sola

once more



## **This Plant has Passed**

Luis Quintanilla



# The Visit of a Lifetime

Alexia Tijerina

I know if death came knocking at your door you'd open up without even checking the peep hole.

you would invite him in and pour him a glass of wine.

you would smile at him with your lively brown eyes

and take his coat and hang it on the rack

you would make him feel welcomed

just like it said on the mat

he walked all over

and as he was about to leave you

he would ask you to join him

and in a heartbeat,

yours would stop.

# Egg Head

Denisse Zecca

My vagina was cut open to my anus at an angle to ease the birth-giving process. My daughter was born weighing 7 pounds and 14 ounces and despite me being sliced open at the taint she still came out with a cone head. It seemed cute to me, but only because I had done enough research to know it would take a while for her head to relax back into its natural shape. With the epidural I received, I felt absolutely no pain and was able to push her into the world within fifteen minutes. I held her in my arms and stared at her pointy little

head and couldn't help but fixate my thoughts on trying to figure out what special Adam Sandler referred to himself as an "Egg head" in. As they cleaned her off, I was sewed back up with dissolving stitches. The stitching was done quite nicely. I, a vagina expert, can't even tell there was stitching to begin with. All women are experts in this, if you think about it, and if you are a woman who isn't a vagina expert then perhaps you are lucky.

Perhaps not being as conscious of the organ that can warn you of malfunctions in your body, birth children, and cause orgasms as an expert is, is the key to being content. . A vagina becomes more complicated with age, and by default makes your life more complicated. There is a stage in your vagina's life that is quite blissful, usually it's pre-pregnancy, when you can still use it to your

advantage. That specific moment in your vagina's timeline can flash before your vagina's eyes. Before you. The next thing you know your vagina is pushing out an entire human. Considering this, it may be that knowing how to wipe front to back and how to masturbate is the right amount of consciousness required for self-care and survival.

After giving birth vaginally, you have to show the nurses you can pee, so that they know you are functioning well enough to leave the hospital. It was rough, but I managed to fill my measuring cup after many long moments in the restroom throughout the night. My sister-in-law had told me about the time she dropped one of her newborns onto the floor after falling asleep in her hospital bed. I tried not to carry Sofia so much during my time there. Instead, I lurked in the darkness surrounding the toilet I sat on as I tried to fill my cup. Watching my husband sleep on a couch that was entirely too small for his broad shoulders and long limbs, and watching her as she slept silently, swaddled up inside of a plastic container. Usually, my eyesight wouldn't be able to make out something at such a distance. But my new mom superpowers had set in, and I could see her laying still through the plastic tub. I could see when she would close or open her eyes. Her eyes couldn't see me at this distance, and no matter how hard they moved around all they saw were the lights above her little coned head. Sitting on the toilet, I just glared back and forth between the light of my screen and the contents of the brightly lit room.

The day of your release they make you take a parenting class. Out of ten other women, I was the only mother who had delivered vaginally. I know this

because they ask you to share the process aloud despite the fact that you don't know, or ever will know these women enough to discuss something so personal. No, I didn't know them, or their sleepy husbands, but upon sharing this information they became my sisters.

That morning I woke up and asked Nefi to hand me the mirror they had given me to stare at my post-partum vulva. I hadn't stared at it though, but I did determine it would be an excellent mirror to paint my face in and get ready for my release. I took in my entire make-up bag and a low-cut dress to accentuate my newly engorged breasts. Not being pregnant anymore was a relief and I celebrated that by dressing the part of my former self as soon as I got the chance. As I stared in the mirror meant for my vulva, I imagined it to be grotesque in several ways. Wiping had indicated that it wasn't a bloody mess down there, so I crossed that off my list, but not off my mind. I was certain though that my labia was now struggling to maintain composure. Certain that after I put it through childbirth it was filing for separation from me and so it was starting the process by stretching itself as far away from my vulva as possible. Squeezing Sofia cone-first out of my canal, I pictured the aftermath was a shriveled and wrinkly hole surrounded by meats and fats, horrific to any spectator, including myself.

I glanced across the room and saw tangled buns atop pale, exhausted faces. My sisters in motherhood, all cesarean, looked like crap. Throughout the hour I would see them shift in their seats uncomfortably, burying their faces in fuzzy blankets. They took turns groaning like they were passing an invisible hot potato around the room, and I was the only one who wasn't asked to play. My eyes

shifted between them and car seat safety presentation in the front of the room, I sat on my newly sewn vagina without the slightest discomfort and wondered how my husband didn't faint at the sight of my sawed-up taint.



Arriving home after being discharged was not as relieving or comforting as I expected. I stopped to take in a breath of the outdoor air and walked around to meet my husband on the driver's side after pulling into our driveway. I stalled a bit, distracting Nefi as he unlatched her car seat. I tried to joke with him knowing full well that this would be her first time existing in our home. I made him laugh, and before we walked down the sidewalk, he playfully smacked me in the stomach. He continued walking, but the emptiness behind my abdominal walls sent an explosion of discomfort bursting within me. The crevice which had previously been holding a child and placenta was now thirty pounds short of the weight that I had grown accustomed to. My organs had been rearranged by those thirty pounds, so when I finally evicted them, I was left with a gaping hole inside of me. My abdominal muscles were also reorganized so that the space between them was wide enough to leave me vulnerable and out of breath when the back of his hand met my stomach. So, I caught my breath and balance and rushed behind them to cross the threshold into our home. The emotions that failed to reach me at the hospital confronted me as soon as I carried my daughter in through the front door.

For the next few weeks my body dedicated itself to its new purpose. Cradling her, feeding her, and crying. My very existence was being liquified and suckled out of me by my infant and my mental state. Yet, everything about this baby compelled me to physically attach myself to it. While my husband was out at work, I sat alone with her and cried to demonstrate how much I had fallen for her. Continually crying and milking to validate the alliance we formed while she was in my womb. To re-establish

union I betrayed when I was scrolling through my phone at the hospital instead of holding her in my arms. My breast constantly in her mouth, her soft baby skin against the stretchmarks of my loose stomach, her petite wrinkly fingers wrapped around mine. The sensation of our bodies together taught me a language I never knew existed. The vessel in which she was formed had managed to evict her, but it refused me as its sole owner even after the fact. So, I became hers, even with the full intention of being the same independent woman I was before. My purpose became greater than myself for once, and I could not dismiss the urge to become one with my daughter.

Immediately after birth they encourage you to hold your baby. Skin to skin contact creates a bond that is vital to small children. It also encourages the production of milk in lactating breasts. So, we did just that, both shirtless laying in our messy home. We did this while I ate whatever junk I craved, while she drank her milk, and I watched Trash TV all throughout. Six weeks of skin and trash and then I awaited the inevitable in room number 3 of the Woman-kind Clinic. I stared at the neatly folded jeans in the corner chair of the room and tried to keep warm under the thin layer of paper that covered me from the direct blow of the air vent that pointed at me. Six weeks is the standard allotted time to resume sexual intercourse after childbirth. The reason being is that your vaginal walls are still recovering from the birth, and they need time to heal and shrink back to normal. I stared at my baby sleeping in her carrier in the corner adjacent to my XXL high rise briefs. Her in her zipper onesie and unicorn themed cushions in a perfect slumber. Then, I looked at myself. It had finally been six weeks and now my doctor walked in. She placed my bare feet on the stirrups causing every hair of my unshaved legs to rise in defense mode. She stared at the walls of my womanhood for a few seconds and said,

"You're good to go."



I arrived back home, baby in hands, and for the first time since having her I was forced to view myself as more than a mother. I didn't feel my skin was my own anymore. I stared at my stripped-down reflection and saw a bloated, yet hollow belly, a second chin, and matted chunks of hair resting against my shoulders. I hadn't brushed my hair in weeks. I had managed to shower every few days and although I was somewhat clean, I had been too distracted to maintain my usually long, semi curly hair. Now, it was balled up in thick, uneven sections, and looked like a nesting ground for small critters. I stared for a long time while Sofia slept in the bassinet just outside of the bathroom. The incandescent light accentuating my dark nipples, dark armpits, acne covered face. My nose still swollen from pregnancy and secreting oils that spread well onto my forehead and chin in contribution to my hormonal acne. I picked up my handheld mirror, the one I used to tweeze my chin hairs, and inspected my "good to go" vagina. That, of all things, looked the same as ever, at least from what I can remember. There were no stitches, no blood, sagging labia, or warped hole. There wasn't even a single scar visible.

Being a first-time mom, it is entirely common to worry about delivering a baby vaginally. I tried to avoid it by asking my doctor for a cesarean. Her response was,

"I am not going to perform a surgery on you when you have a perfectly able vagina". She sounded annoyed.

Most C-Section moms will talk about how hard the recovery is. How physically demanding it is, then follow up by saying things like,

"At least the goods are untouched".

So, I was surprised to find, even after being in a constant state of paranoia, that my vagina didn't change much through the pregnancy, except for my cervix dropping during the later months. Still,

it is nothing in comparison to the nipples, the skin, the hair, the nose, the breasts, and the stomach. A vagina, however, will push out an entire living creature, make you responsible for it for the rest of your lives, and go back to its normal sexually active self after only six weeks.

The idea of having sex was a turn off in more ways than one. When Nefi came to slide Sofia out of my arms and place her in her bassinet he looked concerned.

"Take a break. Go ahead and take a relaxing bath. I'll be here," he said.

He put his hand on my shoulder and in a smooth motion slid it along the nape of my neck to engage me in some sort of romantic connection. But I did not feel connected. Instead, the haunting hollow of my belly began bursting again. Sending waves of disgust and guilt throughout my body and into my brain. I imagined the possibilities of what could go, or what already was wrong. These ideas were endless stream of dread in my paranoid mind. I considered the chance of getting pregnant again, which is significantly higher once you've had a previous pregnancy. I thought about something bad happening to Sofia if I left her unattended to go satisfy someone else's needs. Something worse if it were to satisfy my own needs. And I was certain that despite the given evidence my vagina was not done healing.

I stared at my reflection often, each time unable to understand why pregnancy caused such drastic changes in me. My hair growing more and more tangled. My vagina seemingly more and more normal. I was in awe of its magnificent capabilities, yet its image haunted

me, because it was not a reflection of me, really.



Finally, I washed and deep conditioned my hair and laid Sofia beside me. I watched Trash TV and cried as I brushed away at the matted mess of hair I created. Cried, because it had already taken hours, I was only half-way done, and my tender scalp was throbbing at each stroke of my brush. I moved my eyes from the TV towards her at every slight movement and every subtle coo. I saw her looking straight at me, tiny-wrinkled forehead concentrated just enough to lift her head a bit on her own. Her eyes widened, neck stiffened, and she let out a slight grunt of exertion as she discovered another one of her body's capabilities. The small cluster of hair sticking straight up at the top of her still pointed little head.



## Me and Mom and a Doll

Kaylee Hernandez



Was it '03, maybe '04  
As an only teddy bear,  
I was held by her outside his home  
At first they bantered, then they yelled, then they fought  
Over whom to play with me

"You had him for New Year's", he said  
"You had him for Thanksgiving and Christmas", she said  
This isn't fair, I thought

He pushes her down  
Scraping her knees and showered in soil  
He picks me up and walks away  
She walks towards us and grips my arm  
With his on my other

Pulling tight on my limbs like a tug of war  
I am from soft fur to a withered rope  
An object no longer tangible  
As I'm ripped apart so are their hearts  
For now they only own me in pieces

*An Only Toy For  
Him and Her*  
Anonymous

**Swoon**

Victoria Pope



# CONQUISTABLE

JESSI MATA

Todas las formas en que le he enseñado a mi cuerpo a dormirse no funcionan porque ahora sé la diferencia entre mis brazos alrededor de una almohada y mis brazos alrededor tuyo.


No hay reemplazo ni sustituto para el calor de tus brazos a mi alrededor, sosteniéndome contra tu pecho, donde me siento seguro.

Puedo aceptar el desafío uno a uno, y algunas batallas son más difíciles que otras.

Pero las batallas que peleo contigo... hacen cualquier cosa conquistable.

# Rot Girls on Twitter

Krista Olivarez



Rot Girl  
@authorname

Sometimes I wonder if I'm ever gonna make it out of my bedroom. I mean, I leave, sometimes, but only sometimes. I saw someone make a joke about Rot Girl Summer, about how girls who rot in their bedrooms will spend the summer (rotting, in their bedrooms), and I retweeted it because yaaaas, or whatever.



Rot Girl  
@authorname

I look at other retweeters and see all the Rot Girls who also plan to rot in their bedrooms this summer. This one's for you. To my fellow Rot Girls who take their meds before bed and their vitamin gummies in the late afternoon, keep sleeping in. Stay listening to the playlists you made full of shoegaze and dreampop. To my Rot Girls who dance with tears in their eyes and listen to songs that remind them of their daddies, it's okay.



Rot Girl  
@authorname

My sisters, my kin, let the Talking Heads swing you around your room, jump around in your underwear with the lights off. Then play FKA Twigs and cry again. It's okay. To my Rot Girls who look so attractive in the eyes of men and do not know what to say other than, "I haven't slept," or, "I just woke up," or, "I'm literally having a panic attack."



Rot Girl  
@authorname

Vampire angels, zombie bitches, goth and glam, glitz and gallows. Caffeine, nicotine, Vitamin D and Zoloft. When you stand up too fast and your body reminds you that it's Tuesday and you haven't had any protein, fuck it! Bellydance to the kitchen and grab a slice of deli meat.



Rot Girl  
@authorname

You're gonna be okay, baby. Angel baby. That's what your friends call you, but you're no angel, right? You wouldn't dare call yourself that.



Rot Girl  
@authorname

Post a pic! Let them know you're alive! Tweet something funny so they know you're okay! Don't answer those boys in your DMs, leave 'em wondering, they're not him! Don't forget to feed the cats, brush your hair, dance, please, dance some more, don't EVER forget to dance, angel.



Rot Girl  
@authorname

To my sisters who sleep all day and meet a boy to drive around at night, to my girls who buy the good concealer to hide their history, please do not forget the power that lies in throwing yourself a party of one. May the bass of your bluetooth speakers shake your ribs. May your body move however it wants to.



Rot Girl  
@authorname

And when you're with him, may your body move however it wants to. You do not always have to rot. You do not always have to be dead. Just because you look like hell-like Winona Ryder in Heathers when she killed her boyfriend, yeah, that scene—doesn't mean it's over.



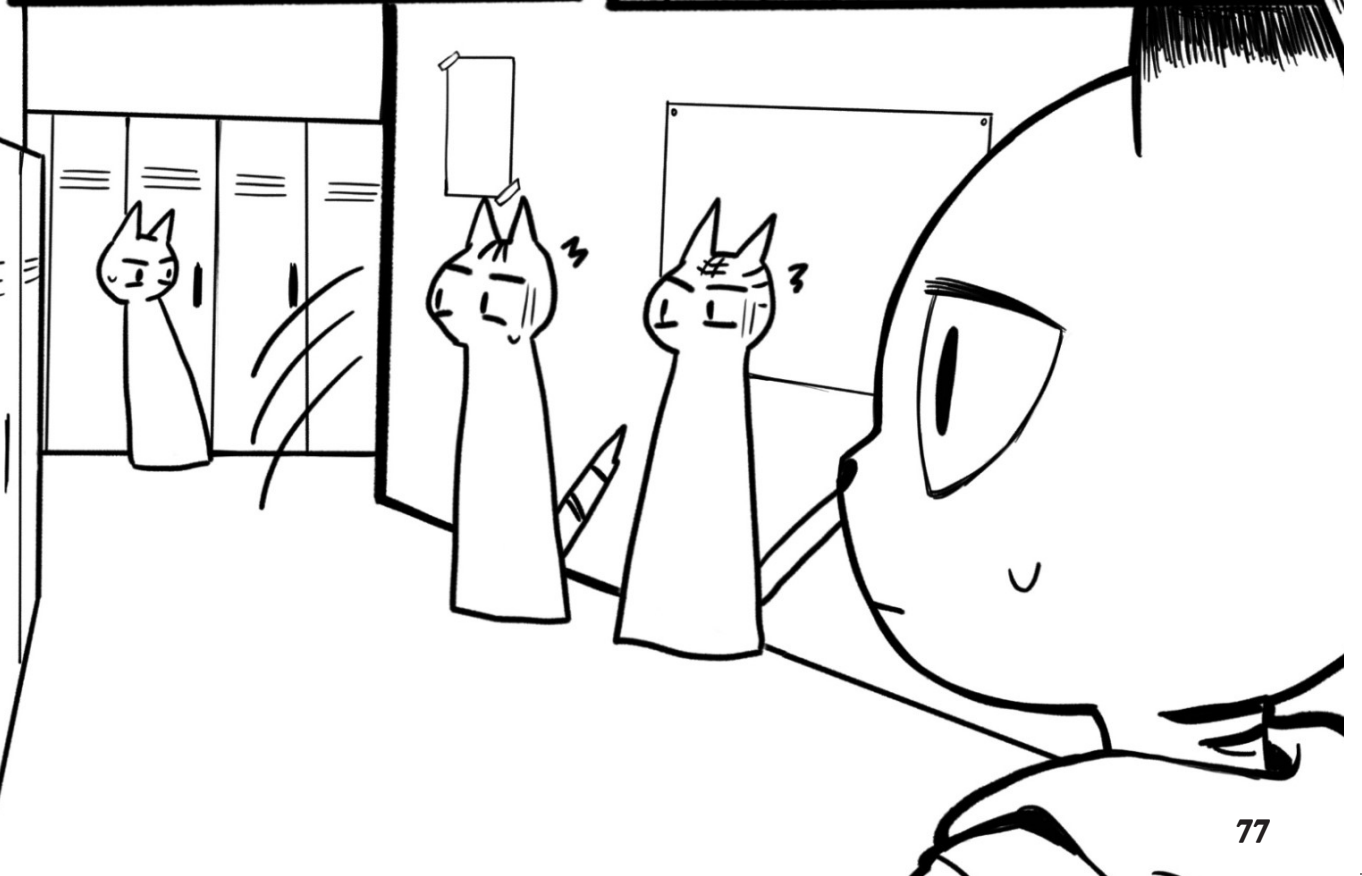
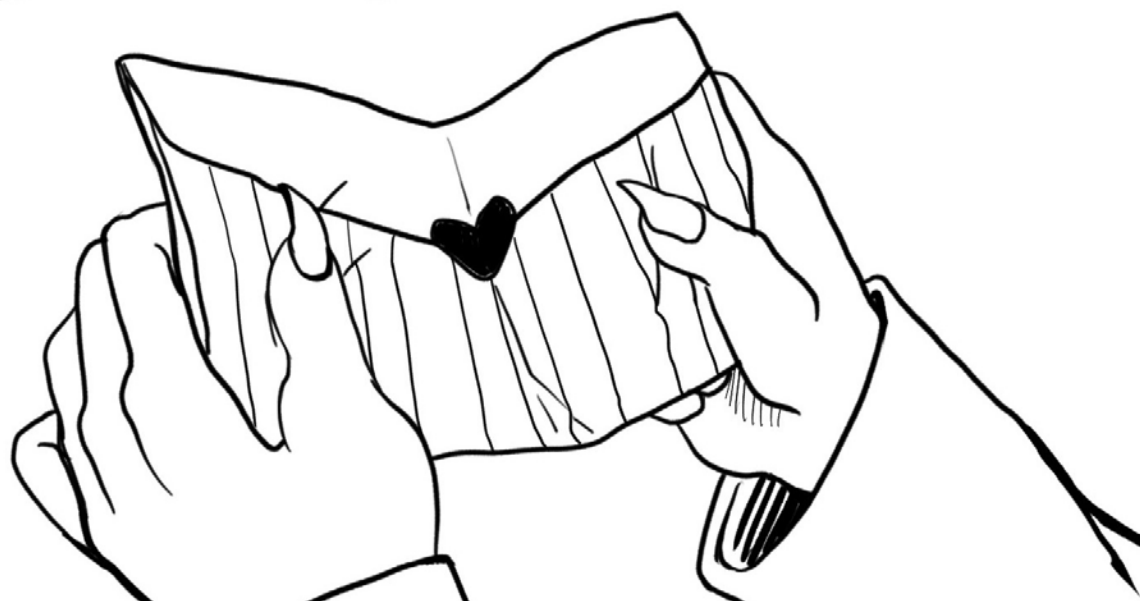
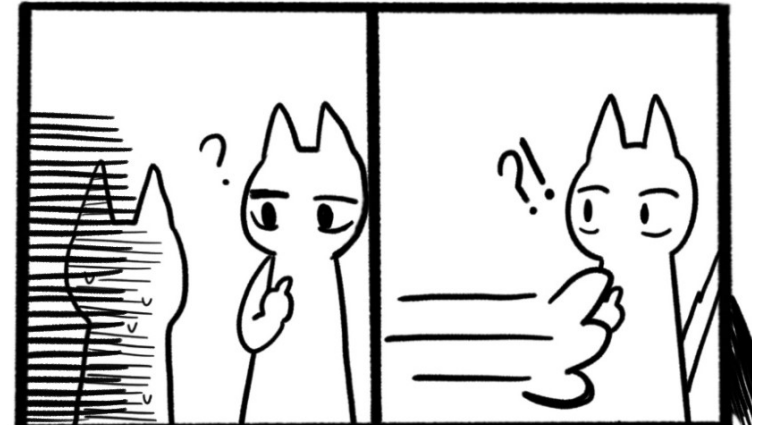
Rot Girl  
@authorname

Yes, and don't forget to dance in your room. Like Mother Mother said, like Frank Ocean said, like The All-American Rejects said, like they all told you in secret when you just wanted to leave but couldn't, please, Rot Girls, don't forget to dance. Dance, please.



Catfession

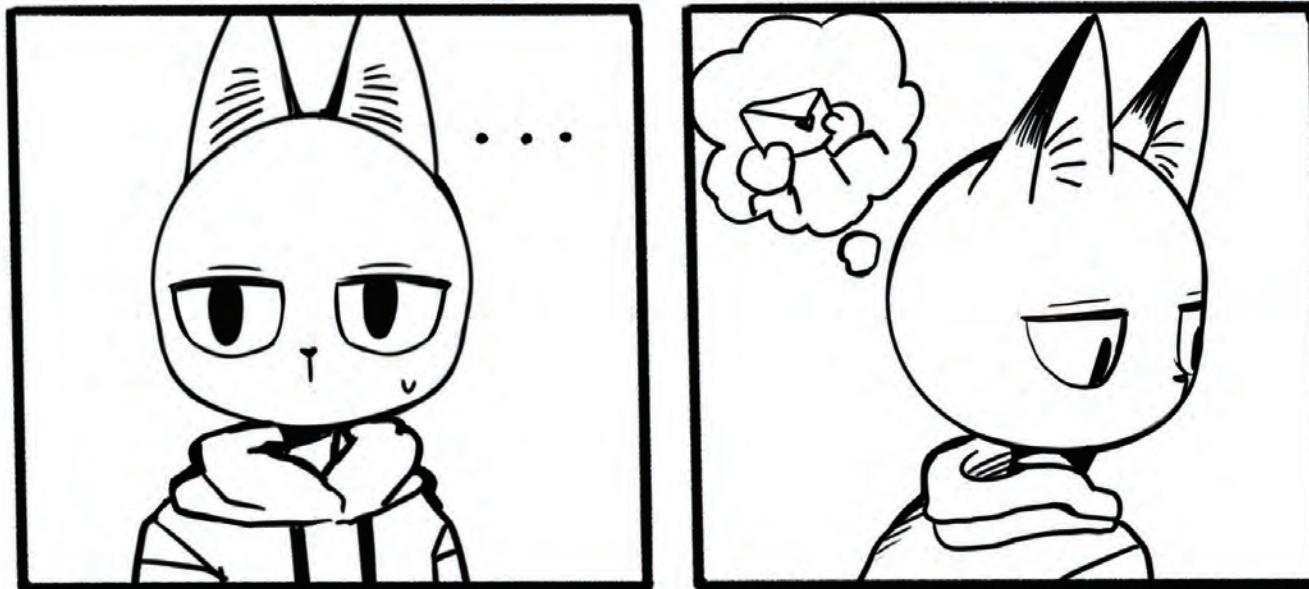
Gesselle Mendez





# The Angelic Rosie

Gabriella Garcia



In 1941 there was so much that you were not allowed to do,  
Then you went and helped make that glass ceiling shatter  
As you went and fought for what you thought truly mattered.  
Women were forced to stay, but you said "We Can Do It To"  
Because your heart bled red, white, and blue.  
And so, you went far away to help fight in your own way,  
When you joined the brigade, you weren't doing it to get paid,  
But because you had to stay while the men went away.  
And now look at all the things that you helped change,  
All because you chose to be brave.  
An airplane machinist, something uncommon for women in those days,  
Who was a part of the brigade  
A Rosie all the way.



Fat on Be

Faten

Alexia Tijerina



Hungry. I cannot think. I have never been this hungry. The hollow cave of my gut clenches and tenses as the rumble of my stomach lining quivers and shakes me to my core. Resources are slim to none. *Our* hoard is grim and greedy; for they do not care who devours the last bite, as long as they do not rest when night falls with an empty stomach. We are predators. It has developed our DNA so violently that we are far superior to *our*

prey, years and years of evolution have taken a toll on our abilities, but in the root of primal instinct, it is and has always been eat or be eaten. It is us versus them. And we cannot feel sympathy. Their young and vulnerable are so easy to catch: doe eyed and helpless as we take what is given, as if it is mother nature's way of sending appreciation for keeping these barbaric animals in check. But the real treat is the ones in their prime. They have

aged so lusciously and are the most fulfilling because they put up the most fight. I could stalk them all day or night long. I will trudge and wait, for when their frail bodies are hyper aware of their surroundings, their heads swinging from side to side in an anxious frenzy, as their heart-beat pitters and patters like the delicacy of their steps on white forest snow. A snap of a twig or the rustling of the leaves cause their ears to perk up and twitch. Well, at least I could just shadow my pursuit until I need to answer to my famished host. *Our* calculations must be committed in a swift, permanent and life altering second. My time may end if I do not end theirs. We are not built with empathy anymore. My life is more important because I am the one living it. And I need to eat. So, I pounce. They flee and run with fear in their eyes. Their hind legs extend and fold when in motion, making the malleable meat on their brittle bones so firm and tender my hunger begins to grow. With this animal so near to my grasp, groans of malnourishment escape from the lips my tongue has moistened. So their meat can fill my body with the strength to hunt more of them. And I will. The chase has divided the trees in the ferocious forest, and my brethren are on my trail. A race against my own for a chance to fill my belly with

a seductive substance that will haunt my conscience until I am fed. The hunt has left the foolish creature cornered to the beginning of a body of water. Silly animal, I thirst for a taste of *you*. I do not need to drink anymore. And lucky for me, *you* do not know how to swim. *My* prey is best served when fresh. No need to stoke a fire or turn on a stove. The sun can cook it enough to suit my taste buds. Their dread deathly seasons the limbs I will tear into. Stupid cotton fabrics clothe the body my teeth sink and rip to shreds of flesh and blood and life that ends in a matter of seconds; all done from my hands and my mouth. Their desperate screams for their next of kin begging and borrowing time until it plateaus from my own pleasure. I am losing their meat and organs to the bank of the river, swallowing red liquid like it has been dying to savor a sliver of who is *mine*. *My* meal has brought me to my knees and I glance up from *my* prey as our herd begins to dig in with a vicious spray, and a reflection of a decaying corpse's cold dead eyes stareback with a slack jaw and a full belly, what have I become?



**Bearing still to the emersion of brain**

Mar Huerta

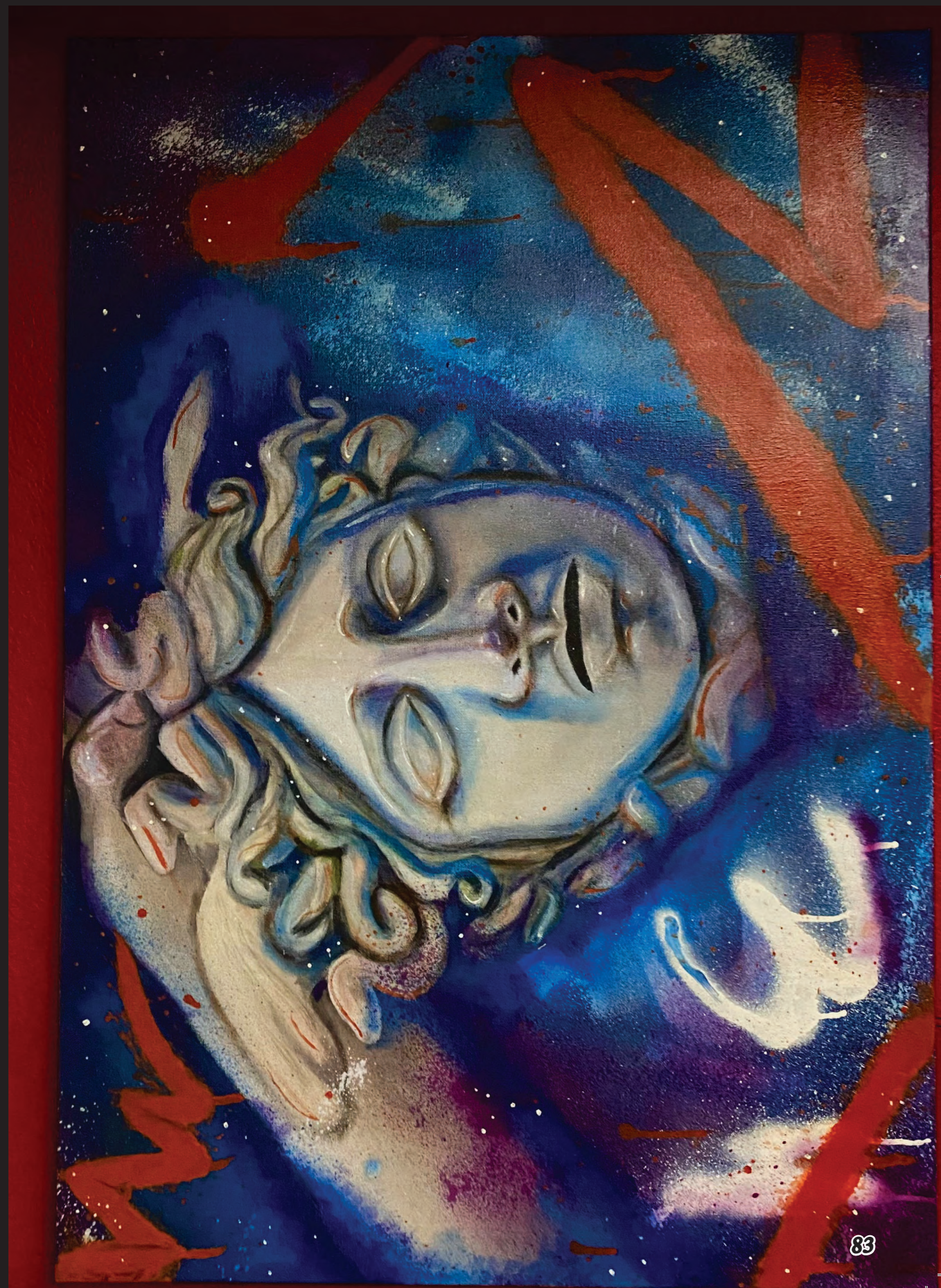


contest winner

**Chaotic Beauty**



Ximena Muniz



# Open Wounds

Alexia Tijerina

May our careful feet be weary enough to guide us  
through our next year's resolution.  
For **our generation** is not local.  
Global **catastrophe** and vocal **agony**  
might just be their place of power's **red-letter** defector.  
But with an **iron fist** and a bitter **hunger** may we bite off  
the head that has **chewed** us out for longer  
than they have ever had the pleasure of being **full**.

Our feline whims no longer at the disposal of  
**unwilling begrudging owners**.

We must be the masters of our own **fate**.  
And may our **blood** shed dilute the pools in which we  
will bathe our young  
So they will not live out our **scars** that have once stung  
Our songs in streets of shell-shock soldiers  
That look just like you and I but their **souls** are far far  
**older**.

## Protect With Your Life

Graciela Vela





# Shower Routine

*Anonymous*

- 1) Turn the shower handle towards its inferno position
- 2) Strip off all your clothes
- 3) Point the shower head towards the back of the tub  
to ensure that your body does not  
touch cold porcelain when you step inside the shower and  
sit down with your back against the tub
- 4) Now point the shower head towards the tile wall  
preventing the water from touching you  
until you are ready
- 5) Step inside the shower and sit down
- 6) Watch the water shoot against the wall  
streaming down past your leg
- 7) Some of the most aggressive droplets  
splash against the tiles  
hitting  
coolly against your body  
even though you angled the showerhead  
away
- 8) Realize that you fill this tub completely  
you're bound to get wet
- 9) Thank God for limescale
- 10) because when you move towards the shower drain  
sitting cross-legged in front of the bathtub spout  
you're going to need a place to rest  
that heavy weight  
on your shoulders

and limescale is going to prevent the bathtub spout diverter  
from depressing

11) Rest your head on the bathtub spout diverter inches away  
from a patch  
of black mold

12) Stay resting until the world disappears

13) Stand up when the water  
begins to freeze your balls

14) Lather yourself in soap and shampoo  
preventing people from wondering what that  
strange smell is  
whenever you enter the room

15) Rinse

16) Turn off the shower  
stepping out into the bathroom

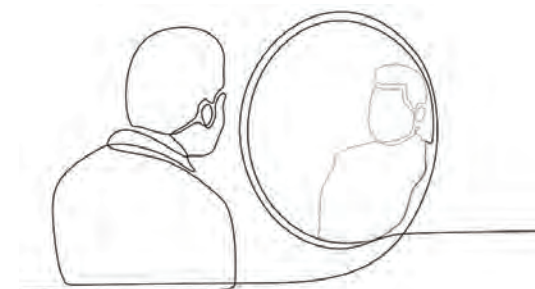
17) Thank God For steam

18) because when you exit the shower  
you'll see that steam covers the mirror  
preventing you from seeing your own  
reflection  
the only time you see a pair of eyes  
carrying what you do  
and you realize you're all alone

19) Dry yourself off

20) Put on the same clothes you were wearing before  
but change your underwear

21) Do this twice a day for the rest of your life



## Orchids for my Mother

Adeeba Ahmad



contest winner

# BRUISES



Cynthia Ortegon

Layer by layer, I take off from my body.  
From my blouse to my blue underwear  
making my character disembody  
The acting role that was once my welfare  
Stripping down to my last layer  
disposing of the forced smile facade  
transforming to the one who is flawed

I stare at myself in the mirror.  
Ashamed from the **purple marks**  
seeing them a little bit clearer,  
tracing the scars like landmarks.  
I cover my eyes to save them from excuses  
Trying not to cry, tracing my **bruises**.

How can someone love all of my scars,  
If I am repulsed by just a sight.  
How can someone take me to the star,  
Filling my space with satellites.

Will I ever get to know love with my **purple stains?**  
Stains that are filled with pains  
Pains that are locked by chains  
Chains that are withheld by veins  
Veins that will be left by my remains.

At what point will I love myself  
In what scenario will I protect my body in vain  
In the end, I have to stop neglecting myself.  
I have to start shielding my **purple stains**.



# SWIM CARE

Hope Young

Sitting at the bus stop, you watch a swarm of ants pick apart a dead bird on the pavement.

You worry you will never know a closeness like that.

The trees are stoic sentries in the still evening air. The occasional passing car kicks up dirt that rips into your skin. You feel the dust in your lungs as you inhale; can feel how the stale air coats your teeth. You twitch. Your skin is full of pockmarks where oils and dirt congeal. You feel it, writhing beneath your skin. At night, two inches from the bathroom mirror you squeeze open pockets of oily pus until your face has gone red. It doesn't help, but that's not why you do it.

You watch the ants move methodically across the strips of flesh that hang off the mangled creature's bone. They work together to carve a place into the carcass and hide there. The black mass shifts as one and you're hypnotized by their pulsating, rhythmic movements.



You get on the bus, you go to work. Your feet still hurt even in the cushy soles of your service workers' shoes. You spent all last night picking at the calluses that cover your feet. Digging into your flesh with a single-minded determination. Your mother asked you why when she caught you in the bathroom late at night, hunched over the

bathtub like a pitiful creature, applying bandages to stop the flow of blood from your ripped apart feet. You wish you had a satisfying answer. You've sped past logic and have entered the fantasy realm of pure compulsion.

You go to work; the birds have migrated back to your southern town with the coming chill. Their cries are deafening as hundreds of them fly above your head and perch on the powerlines. Seeking the warmth and security of these man-made structures. Black feathers and white feces litter the pavement below. Instinct and compulsion guide their movements. Much like the ants that swarm their corpses. Much like you, picking at the skin on your hands, your lips, your feet. There is no area of your body you haven't attempted to pick clean, like those ants who diligently clean the bones when they feast on rotting flesh. You peel away a layer on your lips and reveal the fresh pink patch underneath. You swipe your tongue over the tender area knowing the skin will soon replenish itself. You never seem to run out of skin, never seem to be able to dig far enough inside yourself to excavate this sickness.

You go to work. Your coworkers ask how you are doing.

You do not say.

"I spent 15 minutes trying to carve an ingrown hair out of my leg last night."

"No one has ever loved me the way those ants love that bird."

"I really think I need help."

You do say.

"Have you noticed all the birds here lately?"

When you were little, your mother warned you against chewing your hair. "If you keep doing that worms will grow in your belly." Your hair is shorter now and you know she was wrong. The squirming feeling in your stomach didn't go away. If you stare at your naked reflection long enough you can see the shadows of things moving inside your body. Alien sensations invade your mind and you dig at your skin with a panicked vigor.

There is a wasp nest in your building's laundry room. It scares you, but you have to wash your clothes so you steel yourself. They won't bother you if you don't bother them. You edge past, keeping a careful eye on the gray paper-like hive. You know that the material of the nest is made of wood fibers mixed with wasp spit. The creatures chew the wood supports of the building and regurgitate it back to form their colony. Another cyclical act of destruction and creation. You find yourself watching them with the same fascination you devoted to the ants. The wasps move in and out of the shadows above your head, calling to you with their melodic humming. They disappear into the clusters of dark holes punched into the nest. There are interesting swirls in the porous material. The patterns move and shift under your scrutinization until you wear you can see the hive breathing. Swear you can see the hive breathing. Moving in time with your expanding lungs. You feel the buzz of the wasps deep in your bones.

You've seen dead animals before. Carcasses litter the street as

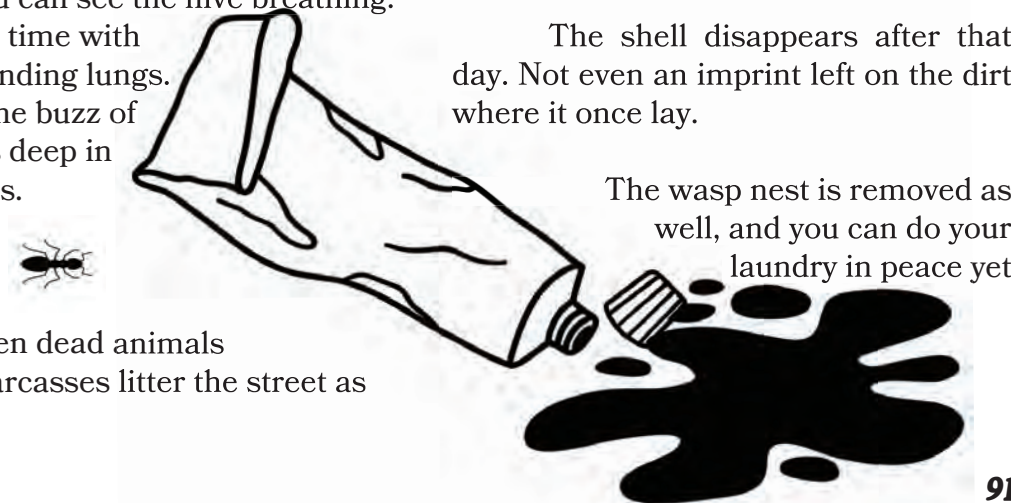
you walk from bus stop to bus stop. All in varying stages of decay. Most there one day and gone the next in a vanishing act.

You saw a turtle once, long dead. Only its weathered shell remained a few paces from the canal it presumably lived in before it crawled out to die on the sun-bleached earth.

The turtle's shell is a bone, attached to its spinal vertebrae and it functions as part of its ribcage. This shell must have been here a while it had been picked clean. The scute, the hard keratin substance that forms the patterns and colors of the turtle's shell, had started to fade and flake away. Leaving only the yellow-white bone of the shell underneath. On what was once the head, you presume, the decomposition had left it nearly unrecognizable, was a dry, tough, leathery, patch of discolored skin still fused to the shell. The air reeks with the stench of stale old decay. You watched a spider, a little black dot, scuttle across the surface of the carcass and disappear into the shell. You bent down and could catch the hint of the gossamer web constructed inside the shell glistening in the late afternoon sun. The spider sat, hanging from the remnants of the creature's vertebrae. An opportunistic creature, finding a home amidst the rot.

The shell disappears after that day. Not even an imprint left on the dirt where it once lay.

The wasp nest is removed as well, and you can do your laundry in peace yet





again. You think about the nest and the shell once again when looking at the nickel-sized hole you picked into your hip. You see layers of skin come apart and distantly remember diagrams from your anatomy class. Stratum lucidum, stratum granulosum, basal layer; without the assistance of a microscope it just looks like flesh. You are decaying, your skin is as ashy and broken as the wasp nest. It has become difficult to sleep. The soft bedspread rubs against your sores. Scabs begin to crack and bleed. No one in their right mind would make your body their home.



You resolve to at least try to stop.

Your friend carries a first aid kit, as is her thoughtful nature. She stocks it with bandaids that are cute in an age appropriate way. They have little patterns of stars or tie-dyed colors. You cut your fingernails as short as you can and she wraps your fingers in the bandages. She puts some on your face to where the scabs are the most noticeable. You look like you've been in a terrible fight when she's done. The idea that someone else did this to you is almost comforting in the face of the truth. It's less shameful.

Your mother even splurges on you. Buying you a ten-dollar tube of acne cream. You know she can't afford that. You squeeze some of the paste onto your fingers and cake it onto your face. Squeezing your eyes shut you take deep breaths as you feel it sink into your skin. Settling in with the grime. You apply it to your face regularly and your skin soon dries out. You peel flakes of dead skin off your face after rubbing it raw. Your mother tells you to moisturize and stop touching your face so much. There

always seems to be an extra step. Something you are doing wrong. Your skin requires a level of care you cannot provide.

Still, you try.

The bandages and cream feel flimsy. Fragile, useless little safety pins that keep you together. You are terrified one day they will slip and your skin will finally slough off, baring your insides to the world. The black mass of your intestines and the throbbing and bleeding of your sick heart. Pus and oil and spit and blood and fat, it squirms and seethes and oozes and cries out in pain.

This rot is not just skin deep. It's in your bones. Your soul.

You can't stop.

You see rich and beautiful people online demonstrating their twelve-step skincare routines. You know it's fake, of course, it's fake. The evolution of technology can be traced through the development of flaw erasing software. And while the thought of makeup makes you sick you understand the appeal. People buy hundreds of dollars worth of products to smear on their faces. Desperate to be clean. To extract the filth that hides from our naked eye.

You put cream on your face. Band-aids on your fingers.

The itch worsens.

The birds' screech.

The wasps' buzz.

The ants pick.

Pick.

Pick.





## I Found You

Ashley Banda



94

# Love is Madness

Andrew Neeley

My problem has never been with love,  
Or the woman whom I have fallen in love with.  
My problem is what love does to my mind.  
My complete uncontrollable infatuation,  
Evident with every breathe.

I must be mad to continue to allow myself to succumb  
To the barbaric actions that always seem to follow.

You can call it passion

You can call it lust

You can call it loving embrace.

But I call it madness.

The familiar trenches that my mind always wonders to  
When I find myself falling deeper and deeper in love,  
Are always devoid of rational thought.

My heavy heart takes control over my mind,

Every time I am gifted

With the sweet taste of love.

When I am without it,

Like I find myself now,

I am at my most rational,

My most coherent.

But that craving never seems to leave my tongue.

It makes the most sense to live a life of celibacy.

Maybe then I can finally live within the confines

Of a clear world view.

But I need to love

And I need to be loved.

They always have me at, "Hello"



95

# Big Bellies

Jackie Orozco

I counted the people in front of me as I nervously stretched out my shirt, making it look looser on my body. Three more people and I was next to check my weight for our school's PE discussion about BMI, or Body Mass Index. It was meant to determine how "healthy" or "unhealthy" you were for your age based on your height and weight. We had our heights checked the previous day, and I was 4'9 – taller than most boys and girls in my grade. As my friend Justine got off the scale, she sat with our friend group on the brown gym floor next to my feet.

"I weighed seventy-four pounds," she said as our friends chatted, stating their own weight.

Seventy-nine pounds, eighty-two pounds, seventy-one – they went on, comparing these numbers that were all so close by and within the same range. I was only in third grade and I knew there were obvious differences between the bodies of the girls my age, and mine. I had looked just like all my friends, all "skin and bones" as my mom would say, up until the start of this year when I started puberty.

I had gotten bigger over the summer, and now I was the only girl in third grade who needed to wear a bra and was taller than most boys in my class. Everything felt embarrassing. I was growing faster than my young mind could understand, and what made me feel the worst was my stomach growing along with every other body part of mine. I had been used to my flat stomach that I lived with my whole life, so when I developed my "belly", it was the end of my world. I feared my belly because I had been taught that it meant something bad. My aunts and mother would always call themselves "fat" and go on diets to get rid of their bellies. Trying the infamous "Jenny Craig"

and those "healthy" meals that make you lose twenty pounds in four weeks. This showed me what I needed to know about how awful having a bigger stomach was. They made it clear that they needed to "lose weight" as soon as they could because of their big bellies, and this started my fear of knowing my weight and getting on a scale.



There I was, eight years old, making eye contact with my greatest enemy – a scale. I removed my Twinkle Toe shoes and placed them to the side, stepping onto the scale. My coach squinted as she read the scale, and told me, "Jackie, you are ninety-two pounds."

After freshly hearing all my friends speak of their weight, I realized that I was way over their weight, about fifteen pounds heavier than them all. Ninety-two pounds, when all my friends were all in the seventies and eighties pound range. Stunned by the large number, I silently sat back down with my group of friends. Justine asked me curiously,

"How much do you weigh?"

I sat quietly because I was embarrassed to admit that I weighed ninety-two pounds. Finally, I quietly said, "I didn't hear the coach correctly when she said it."

Then, the subject changed, almost as if they knew of the mask I was putting on. It was easier to not ask or push for a real answer, and as third graders, we all knew that. Perhaps it was the bothered look on my face, or the voice of someone who wanted to cry, but thankfully, they continued as if I had given the perfect answer.

As the hour for PE was coming to an end, my coach projected a graph that had a bunch of numbers to represent height and weight. She told us,

"Look for where you land with your numbers and the words on the bottom will tell you about your health."

As I awkwardly scanned my eyes,

the bottom, the words, "OBESE" were written. I looked away immediately, out of shame and humiliation. I had heard this word when my mother had gotten after my father for eating after 9pm. She would tell him, "You're on the verge of being obese, and eating at night time will only make you fatter."

My father had the biggest belly I had ever seen, which only made me feel more nervous about my body. The word "OBESE" echoed in my ears as we began to exit the gym and return to class. For the rest of the day, during our math section, the only numbers my mind could focus on were "ninety-two". I think the worst part was that I was alone with these feelings and issues, or at least to myself I was alone – I was too embarrassed to even ask anyone else. I had overheard others and the only other people who shared similar weights to mine were the boys in my class, which made me feel even worse. I remembered what all the women in my life had told me about weight and how girls were always a certain weight and "smaller" than boys, whereas my male cousins were "normal" for being heavier. At that moment, I felt like a boy and that was the worst thing ever to my eight year old brain because I felt isolated from my friends and the other girls in my class.



When school was finally over, my mother picked me up.

"So, they checked our weight today in PE," I said softly.

"That's good, how much did you weigh?"

"Ninety-two pounds." I looked down to my stomach, wanting to scream and curse at it, it was its fault I weighed so much. I felt so angry at my own body, I hated my body at that moment. I didn't think there was anything that could ever make me feel different about my newfound opinion, this felt like the end of my world.

"Oh, that's fine, you're a healthy weight," my mom said, optimistically.

The anger I felt slowly boiling over me, stopped and dissolved – like moving a boiling pan off the stove with the bubbles following down. Her words, so simple, yet all my anxiety and embarrassment from the day had paused. The one woman in my life who meant the absolute most to me, told

me that everything was okay. Even after the diets and all the times I would hear her distaste for her own body with a big belly, my mother told me my body and belly were fine.

"There's this BMI scale that said I was obese," I replied, softly, admitting my embarrassment.

She paused, then laughed. "Don't worry, you're not obese. You are a growing girl. You are blooming right now, of course you look different from the other girls," she said, her words seemed so wise and truthful, they seemed like a prophecy to me.

I felt like I had been holding my breath all day, and could finally release it. I trusted what my mother said more than what a picture of a graph said, and she said it with such love and with what I assumed was the knowledge she naturally had, being the grownup I was closest to.

At the time, this was only the start of the tough relationship I would have with my body, but I wish I would have known immediately and for the rest of my life that my mother was right.

My stomach may be big, I may have a belly, but I am living and healthy – whether then at eight years old, or now at nineteen. Going through this as a child, my early puberty did not help me at all, but I truly was just a growing little girl. I have the genetics of a family all with big bellies and big bodies, and I was blessed to look like that as well. My stomach is its own character in my life, and I love it. I only came to this realization shortly after turning nineteen and learning about body neutrality - a movement to neutralize the idea of body image, but when I reflect on my relationship with my body, I think first of my stomach – of knowing that my larger stomach correlated to the larger numbers on a scale. My first fear wasn't the dark or monsters, it was having my weight checked and hearing the word, "overweight".

# Young & Sweet

Laura Martinez

Talking about old cemeteries and bonded dreams  
Tell me how sweet that would be  
To walk me down memory lane  
Hand in hand with the pain in-between  
Nothing ever turns out as it seems

Temporarily seeking what used to be free  
Desperation at only 17  
You led the way willingly  
Digging my grave so lovingly  
Yet twisting the dagger so snug onto me.

With pretty persuasion comes false reality  
You're reaching insanity and blaming it on anxiety  
Pathetic on what used to be a fantasy-filled brain  
a reflection from the vanity.

My body fell through the windows of inception  
A glass case sealed with my innocence  
Is now 6ft under me  
A thick red consistency delicately consuming me  
or what used to be  
At 17.



# SNAKE RIVER

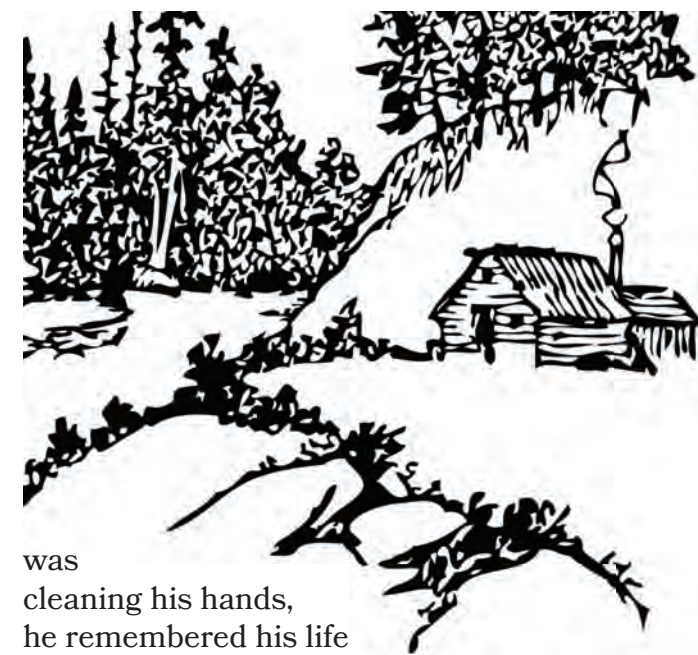
AJ WARHALL

His home could be seen on the hillside near the small town of Rupert, Idaho. Nothing but scattered houses, shops, and bars that made the community, along with the only railroad to enter and exit the town. On the very end, just miles away from Snake River was Ben's old homestead he built himself. The paint had been chipped from harsh winter winds and melting snow.

*Today could be the day, he thought.*

Ben rose from his twin sized bed and walked over to the dresser which sat across beside his small work desk. He lit a match and pressed its flame to a hanging candle to examine himself in the mirror. Ben noticed another wrinkle that tired his eyes in its claw. His teeth decayed from poor care and looked more yellow after a meal. His hair was dark, close to black and grew down past his ears. His hair was dirty and dry, some parts were tethered in dreads. And his beard was months old, seasoned with salty white strings.

Staring at his hands he saw how there were outlines of dirt around his fingers and immediately stepped over to pump water from his faucet till the stream ran. Grabbing a bar of soap, he began scraping and scraping vigorously against his skin. Digging into the rims of his fingernails to rid of the rot that have contaminated his nails. While he



was cleaning his hands, he remembered his life in the trenches, how it all began there. The Spanish Flu, and how it quickly took away some of his friends fast like an enemy sniper. Only this was an enemy he couldn't see. Closing the faucet, he rests his hands on the sink and bows his head down. Takes a deep breath and looks at his hands that are clean and dry, yet bloody red.

Ben pulled up his navy-blue corduroy trousers and rested both suspender straps upon his shoulders. Shuffling through his pile of clothes, he sniffed out the least grotesque sweater he could find then put it on.

Now suited for his venture, Ben checked every known thing with him to ensure that everything is and will go precisely. Ben checked his deep-water overalls, his sailors bucket cap, his bucket of bait, a fishing pole and his bowie. All were cleaned and prepared one-night prior. Swinging his old trench pack around his shoulders, adjusting the shoulder straps tight enough so it doesn't slip. Afterwards, he begins walking downhill towards the brush that led to the river and blesses himself for good fate. Ben took a puff of his wooden carved pipe. He tried not to stumble and trip for how steep the hill gradually became.



He even dropped a couple crumbs of his tobacco after catching his step. He cursed lightly then lit the pipe once more. The day looked different, but not unique. Ben felt warm in his belly as he caressed it, not from the whiskey but from the golden feeling that reminds him of his early years. Trying to grasp the thirst of positivity that's left tangle in this world. To his attention, he reached towards a floating pine needle that floated down like a feather. Missed, by the sudden gust that took the needle away. He stopped to watch it leave him as he blows smoke towards the sky.

Arrived at last, his usual spot of the river. The sound of the raging river is what filled Ben's days of euphony. The flow of "Snake River", the people of the town had told Ben it is so loud that you can't hear anything else for a few miles out, but that's enough to compose him.

It drowns out the seared noise of artillery and multilayered screams that often wake him at night. Ben edged close towards the water, then took a deep breath and let go a dispersing cloud that joined the mist. Stepping in, the water chilled him in a cold shock. He opened his eyes and looked down the stream. Vast in its width as well as its body that stretched for miles. Below the shallows, were pebbly rocks that made its grounds. Some were large enough to be visible above the surface. This made it easier for Ben to place his steps when roaming the river.

Ben rested his gear and supplies at a nearby log that sat near the tree line. Blessing his hard-sweat covered arms with water that felt more refreshing to touch than to drink. Purging the pudges and soot from days without bathe. It's been a warm enough morning to work a sweat off his forehead, but Ben felt good. He had forgotten everything that

clouded his mind, the war trauma, the battles before writing, the repeating thoughts that circled his head for days. It was all left behind now that he can see himself in the mirror of the river.

He steps out and sits by the log where he rests his things to finish his smoke. As he's watching the river passing, he can see the hopping trout swim just as wild in the air like they do below. Then losing its shadow as it soars downward. Ben feels the feathered grass, it is soft just like a bed should feel. He feels a tickle on his finger and lifts his hand, to find a worm wrapped around his thumb. He looks down and sees a few more. Luring his curiosity, Ben stands and turns the log over to find it to be a home of several hundred worms and grasshoppers.

He rolled the log back and carved it to know where he could get live bait if he ever needed more.

Ben begins assembling his fishing pole. Out of his beaten brown leather case and jointing it together. Tending thereel and threading the line through the guides along the joints.

It's a heavy, double tapered fly line type of rod. Ben held it by hand-to-hand or else it'll slip back by its weight. After assembling Ben picks up his buckets of bait, a sackmade of deer hide which was empty, then enters the river towards the shallow ends, his sack sinks and fills with fresh water the more he enters. sinks and fills with fresh water the more he enters.

He blesses himself again as he looks up: *the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost*, he thought.

Ben pulls the line just behind his shoulders and casts out the baited hook out ahead into the fast-dark water. He watched it float by in the flows of the river, then the weight of the line pulled onto his bait. Ben held the rod with full

grip in his right hand, letting the line run through. Then there was a long tug forced by him.

He can feel the line of the pull, he dragged as he took a step back, reeling and reeling, but realized he needed to let it slack before the leader breaks. So he let it drag then steadily reeled and tugged.

"Damn, ya son of a bitch", Ben cursed.

As he fought with his catch, he decided enough and tugged once more like he did before. And the line became faint, then soft pulling by the river.

Ben reeled in the line to see what had happened. The line was close enough for him to pick up himself, he lifted the hook, only to find what was left of a trout's eye that had been caught by his hook. He sighs but dips his hat as he unhooks the eye and flicks it towards the water. Walking back to his bucket of live bait, he baits up his rod again and returns to his spot.

Resting his rod on his knee, Ben examines the hook once more to be certain of its knot. With luck, he blows on the bait then positions himself for a deep cast. As he's about to pull, he stops and eases back. Resting his rod over his shoulder, he looks around across the river. Shielding his eyes from the sun, he looks afar to see if he found a spot. There seemed to be a shadowed area covered by the shade of a tree that



hangs just over. Not too far, maybe 10-15 feet away, he positions himself towards the direction, pulls back his fly rod for a long cast and lashes out.

Landing his bait on the edge of the shadowed water, it swims towards the center from the carry of the current. Ben stands stillwatching it dance with the waves. He walks a little closer and closer, reeling the line slowly, watching the bank for any holes. And stops to wait patiently for a bite.

As moments pass like the wind, Ben begins to wander off in thought. Remembering the night before when he sat before his typewriter at a blank page. The eye of the fish brought him back to that, and he was thinking again, thinking of what to write and how to write it if it came. The night before he had been trying to begin his first novel, but what about? He didn't want to write about the war nor his life because there were too many all the same, and he didn't want to revisit the trenches and let it live forever in writing. No, Ben was trying to write something bold yet true. So, he was left drunk and unproductive as he kept staring into the blank page, sweating out all the ache that pulsed around his head. Ben believed in the notion of clear thinking, by doing something to search for inspiration, so he mustered the urge to come out and hunt for trout.

Ben closes his eyes in thought: *Fish for thought*, then opens them wide. As he is focused on the line, he feels a light pull. Ben reels slowly, and tugs gently to lure him in. A sudden strike of force brings him to a yielding halt on the line. He swings the rod against the pull. Feeling the fight in the waters, he can tell this one is feisty as well. So Benwon't lose this catch, he leads the line towards the shallower waters. Once he positioned himself in the shallow bay, he begins working the catch upstream,

forcing the trout to work and grow tired into submission. He tugs and tugs as he reels in the line, he let him drag a foot then tugged for ownership of the trout. Ben can feel that he is tired and is reeling in gently. The shadow of the trout grew larger, yet it looked odd. As he pulled the line towards the lit shallow waters his face let down. The trout looked smaller than he had hoped but laughed in surprise at its fierce fight against him.

Ben removes the hook from the poor trout's mouth and sets it free. It slithered hastily through the flowing current; he lost its shadow in an instant. Un-jointing his rod, Ben returns to his stone pool and gathers his supplies and leaves the river. His trousers drenched in water; you can hear his feet mush in his boots as he walks in the tall grass. Ben rests against the log where the rest of his things were. Looking at his hide pouch to where he holds it before his eyes, then closes it in his fist as he buries the pouch in his face. A heavy sigh blows from his breath.

*No catch today,* he thought.

As the sun sets Ben wallows in disappointment while he is reorganizing his supplies to make his leave. Putting on his trench pack and wiping away leaves and grass from his wet trousers,

Ben looks towards the river. Narrowing his sight towards the shallow ends then looks at his hands, they are soiled in mud and crumbs of the earth. He looks towards the Snake River, raging in mocking cacophony, then towards his dirt covered his hands. Rests his hands aside and walks in the direction of his home from the river with his head down, and his hopes even lower.



The night grew a blowing chill the

next day. Ben kindled a comforting fire to warm his shackling home. Through the beats of crackling wood, Ben also hears his typewriter snapping away, his fingers dancing across the keyboard then to a sudden halt. A searing tear, ripping off his papers from the paper guide and carriage to crumble together then tossed into the fire.

"The only use of my writings is firewood." Ben said in a sour tone.

Explosively, he erupts from his rocking chair, knocking it over in the moment. He paces back and forth from his desk to his bed. As he strokes his beard, he is muttering thoughts, gibberish and nonsensical things to himself like an engine is kicking to start.

"Maybe this? No-no-no-no-no-no, that's contradicting." Ben muttered.

"Maybe a story of brotherly rival between an Indian scavenger and hunt—"

Ben stops in the sight of his flask nesting surely in his coat pocket. He takes it and opens it for a quick shot. It ran empty.

"God—Dammit!" Ben shouted, flinging the flask against the ashes and soot in his fireplace.

He sits back on his bed, wailing his arm, lasso-like to disperse the smoke his action created.

*I need a drink,* he thought, *and I need to write... but I need—*, Ben sees his fishing gear that slumped near his desk.

"There had to be a snowstorm tonight." he said, combing his hair back with his fingers.

Ben nestled layers of coats, sweaters and extra socks for warmth before heading out to the town of Rupert. The snow was enough, but not as heavy as the recent winter that blew through. Rupert is a perimeter town of a small population of mostly travelers, hunters

and neighboring Native Americans. Ben never visited the town unless he ran out of one thing: whiskey.

"Josie's Posse Saloon" is the usual bar he went to, which is where he'll find his only friend of the town. The owner himself. Ben enters the saloon and removes his trench coat to hang. The bar looked darker than usual in this hour, with candles and lanterns placed all around for some visibility. Ben wrinkled his nose to familiarize his smell of sweat and blood and alcohol that filled the room. The tables all accompanied by towering men with their lovers and wives held at their love handles. Sawdust and peanut shells peppered across the floor with stains of human fluids from spilt drinks to bar fights. Josie looked at Ben and immediately began fixing a drink for ben.

"Well what the fuck are ya here for now?" Josie asked.

His face looked like a brick, with a strong jaw covered in a shadow beard and a bushy mustache. His build looked sturdy too with his rolled-up sleeves, he needed to look tough for jackass drinkers that occasionally came by. But he always had a mounted shotgun just below the bar for emergencies.

"Howdy there, Jos." Ben replied while sitting in front of him. He pointed to the glass in question.

"She's yours my frien'." Josie says with a smile.

Ben smiles back and raises the glass to him before a sip.

"How the hell are ya?" Josie asks Ben, wiping down freshly washed glasses.

"Oh, you know me Jos. Still huntin', fishin'—"

"Drinkin'?", Josie interrupted.

Ben smirks as he takes another sip, this one was a shot.

"Heh, I hear ya, Benny." Josie

bends down behind the bar to place the clean glass.

"So, are ya still workin' on them stories? Abbey hasn't seen ya much around to catch a readin' to her."

The shot was coming back up, it made Ben take a moment to retract it back down. Josie peeks his head above the counter and lets out a barbaric laugh.

"Now c'mon there, I know you a drinkin' man." He teased.

"Been mostly fishin' Jos, that's all." Ben let out a relieving burp.

"But when I have a story, I'll bring it around like always. You know I love how your wife handles my work."

A drunkard wallows passed Ben and bumps the corner of the bar, making glass fall on top of Josie who snarls and pouts. "Ohhh, you som' bitch."

Ben chuckles then takes another shot, "Now don't whip out your dukes, Jos. It wasn't me, but let the man take a piss too."

Josie rises from below, "But fishin' mostly? Huh..." he sighs as he rubs the side of his head. "No luck?"

"No... no luck." Ben replies with a frown. He taps for a refill and Josie happily pours him another.

"I've been tryin' and tryin' but... I don' know. I tried the shallows, the deep ends, the shadows, down to the bait and can't catch a God damn thing."

He smacks down his glass and pours himself yet another. Josie watches the glass fill half full then to his weary friend.

"I'm sorry about that there." Josie pours himself a glass to join the next shot, Ben had quickly taken another shot, his fifth so far. Going down easier as they are coming. "An' I'm sorry for sayin' Benny... but ya' look older than ya sure was when you arrive here in Rupert."



Ben can't help but give a half a smile. Looking at the glass filled with that smokey substance he's drowning in.

"Well... I guess you can say, melancholy has bitten my bones, and spit away my youth."

Josie rests his arms on the padded edges of the bar, pondering in thought. "Well, I know you catch some-thin' for sure."

"Yeah, maybe." Ben takes a sip of his free whiskey then looks down in his pocket holding his flask. Then Josie patted him on the shoulder.

"Be careful with them som' bitch there fish, ya see now." Josie said. "Men been talkin' bout how that infection comin' about in Snake River."

"Infection?" Ben narrowed his brows, "What infection?"

"Well Benny, talk is if ya don't dip yer hands in the water before touchin' the fuckin' thing you'll rot it dead."

Josie's attention shifted from another man's request of a glass. He walks away towards the gentlemen but still directs his advice to Ben. "But I know you one of them freaky clean type Benny, so that should be no problem, ya see now."

Ben nods his head in compliance, but the words of advice hissed in his ear and slithered out the other from his drunken state. The whiskey had worked its course, making everything hazy for Ben and now the clouds fading away like fog.



The storm had passed with the two days it carried. There was snow that remained in clumped bodies around Ben's home, but the day's sunshine seared through the scattered clouds to purge it away. The storm had passed with the two days it carried. There was

snow that remained in clumped bodies around Ben's home, but the day's sunshine seared through the scattered clouds to purge it away.

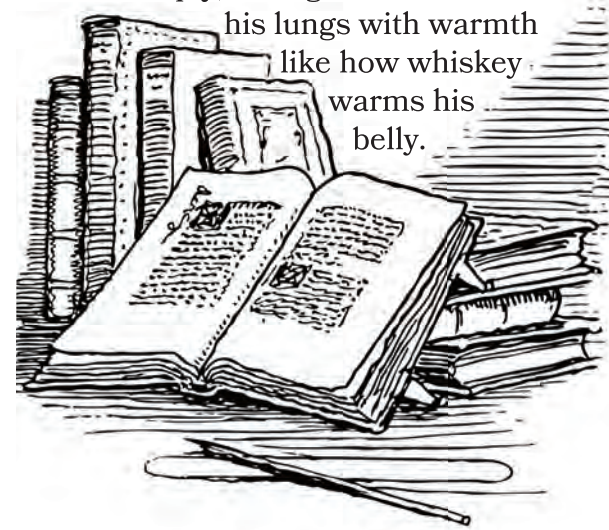
His home looked cleaner than before, there are clothes hung to dry from by a meat rack in front of his fireplace; now smelling like burnt oak and chilling brick. Ben reaches for his clothes and begins putting them on immediately for warmth. He looks at his ticking clock that rest next to his typewriter, surrounded by a bed of crumbled papers and books. *8:22 this morning*, he thought, *If I begin travelling to the river now, I can make it by noon. And there's fresh bait under that log.*

While gathering his gear and with what's left of his fire, Ben rests two biscuits with sliced ham on a pan to heat up for lunch. *Today could be the day*, he thought, *I pray it is.*

Before leaving his home, he puts out the fire then grabs a small pocket journal with a carved pencil and places it in his coat pocket.

Ben takes the same trail he did days prior back to Snake River. This day felt like the one before, only now he walks with his chest puffed and back straight like how they constructed him during his time in the army.

Marching proudly, he trails among the forest. Lighting his pipe and inhales deeply, letting the tobacco fill



Ben exhales an excessive amount of smoke, it even crept from his nostrils like a dragon. Smiling proudly, he lifts his paperboy cap to ruffle his hair, letting flakes of white wall below him and his coat like snow.

Arriving to the river, Ben halts and stands to look the streams while smoking what's left of his pipe. Walking back to where he had found the log, he felt the sturdy oak and ran his hand across to where it ended with his carving, then sat. As he finished smoking, he stretches his legs while straightening his back on the log. He felt at ease, felt peaceful, he took a deep breath of fresh air this time. Ben searches his coat pockets for his pocket watch to look at the time, it read 12:07. Not too long has the day gone by.

Placing his watch back, he searches his coat once more, scavenging. "Damn, where are they?"

Ben stops and looks in the pocket he was feeling for. He removes his trench pack and opens it to scavenge like he did his pockets and brings out an iron coffee pot. Looking around, Ben began gathering sticks and dry pieces of wood. Assembles it to a small mound of a campfire and lights a match to kindle it. A few sparks and crackle sound faintly, and Ben drops down to blow and blow to grow. Uproar it did and the fire became enough for him. Afterward, Ben removes an iron skillet and a stand to place the skillet. He places it over the fire, and watches it burn the flat base of the skillet till it faded black below.

He shuffles in his pocket and takes out a cloth that's wrapped. He unravels to find his biscuits, places them on an iron skillet. The fire had reduced to ashes with bits of firewood still left to burn, Ben watches the biscuits heat up.

He inhales the smell of smoked ham and cheese sizzle being crisped fr-

m soft buttered bread that burns golden brown by the minute. As he lets his lunch continue to warm, Ben walks towards the shallow waters and dips his coffee pot into the water. The wind blew hard, taking the current with it, Ben could feel it's resistance as he filled the pot. Then he rests the coffee pot aside back at the campfire and places the warm biscuits in an iron plate while he places the coffee pot of water on the skillet to boil.

Ben reaches behind him for more firewood which he had placed next to the log. He lights another fire once more. The fire flares up and Ben watches once more too. Waiting patiently. He has nothing left in this world but time, time for patience and time for peace to not defeat him again. He continued to watch the fire blacken the bottom rim of the coffee pot, letting the fire sear into his mind like a growing headache. Ben started feeling for his journal he had brought with him and wanted to take a chance to write something before beginning his task.

With journal in hand and pen in the other, he began to spit out any potential ideas for a story.

Ben sat on the log with back arched and his head below in thought: *I could reminisce that story I was thinking of before I saw Jos. A rivalry of two Indian brothers, one a hunter and the other a scavenger.*

"It is still not enough; I may need to spend some time with the local Indians in town," said Ben.

He scratches his head and looks to the coffee pot; it begins to shake nervously. He looks back to his journal, *Maybe Jos knows some of them and can introduce me to the tribe that lives here in these lands—*

A piercing whistle blows from the mouth of the coffee pot. Ben skipped a heartbeat from the moment but imme-



mediately removed the pot and began pouring it into a netted filter for the coffee grounds. Ben smelled the roast of the coffee as it poured into his cup. Some of the grounds slipped through and smudged his hands. He wiped them clean with the sleeves of his coat.

He picks up his platter and cup of coffee then sits back on the log. Taking bites of his biscuits that spill juices of the ham in the corners of his mouth, then washes it away with sips of his black coffee. Ben lets out a sigh of de-  
 vourment. Watching the water like days before then all around. The flow of water that soars like the passing wind. Making the branches of tall oak whistle. He wipes his hands clean with the cloth then places it back in his coat pocket.

Drinking the remaining drops of coffee, he begins preparing his gear to head into the water.

Once more, Ben rolls over his overall straps, ties his boots tight and assembles his fishing pole to venture his longing task. *Today will be the day*, he assured in thought, *but first I need fresh bait.*

Ben turns to the log and tries to lift it up for fresh grasshoppers and worms. The snow had melted and wet the dirt underneath the wood. Sinking the wood deeper than before. He bends lower for momentum and pushes his feet deep into the earth trying to untick

the log for his lucky bait. It snaps up,



almost hitting his chin which he chuckled out of embarrassment. But looks down and is startled, for he threw the log to his side, smashing some grasshoppers, worms and other crawlers.

“Fucking hell.” Ben said wearily.

What startled him was a glistening white snake. It had made the log its home among the crawling creatures. It slid onto the log and headed towards Ben, crawling slowly and cool. He didn’t like snakes too much, but Ben couldn’t help but watch it edge closer and closer.

“White,” Ben said, “You’re white as snow, aren’t you?” he said with a light smile.

The snake hissed as if saying “hello” to Ben with a greeting tongue. And he felt happy, happy because of the new friend he made. He felt no clouding only thought immensely. As if the almighty omnipotence had planted a seed of thought: hope. Ben couldn’t help but laugh. *Today...*

He walks towards the muddy grounds where the grasshoppers and worms squirmed. Picking each he thought would be great swimmers. Ben places them in the bucket he brought, filling it half-full. Rolling back the log, Ben watches his new friend glide away, splitting the blades of grass towards the forest.

Ready enough, Ben holds tightly to his bucket of bait as well as his pole. Entering the shocking stream again, this time he didn’t feel as cold as he did before, though his trousers shrunk tight to his legs with each step. He waves with the current. Ben can see the hopping trout in the distance, mocking his awkward stance as he is hanging the bait bucket on his belt next to his deer pouch.

Assembling his line, Ben grabbed a grasshopper, a green one and blew on it for good luck before sticking the hook

in its fragile body. He lowers the line behind steadily, then lunges it forward with a gentle pull after hitting the water. Feeling the line with his fingertips as he lets the line release slowly, he can feel the grasshopper trickle the line faintly. Ben rested the base of the pole on his thigh, letting the current divide from his stance.

Ben was starting to clear his mind but felt a presence there that he’s been searching for ever since he began living in this state. He can see everything coming to fruition like fruit of labor, harsh labor he has been searching for and now it is tangible.

*The Indian rivalry*, he thought. *It should be about two brothers who is a scavenger and one, a hunter.* Still pondering, Ben began to look at the wind by watching it make the trees dance. *One must each present something to become a true warrior for the tribe*, he continued, *but both battle their inner weaknesses. I don’t know what yet, but both must suffer in polarizing ways.*

Ben reels slowly as the current is taking some slack from his line as if he’s caught something, finally: *And each brother must learn a lesson from their spirit animal.* He lures the line of thought, *the older, hunter brother, must learn how to be selfless from the eagle. While the younger, scavenger brother must learn humility from the turtle. Both some of the oldest creatures of the earth who speak—*

A tug on the line interrupts his flow of thought. From intuition, Ben pulls against the taut line. His first bite and he did not want to lose it. He can feel the current weighing the fish’s strength so, he plants his feet deep in the ground below the water and jerks backward. Reeling slowly but with a firm hold onto this bite. Ben could feel its strength gr-

ow; *It must be a good one.*

In order to not let this one go, he let it slack then he pulled hard to assure his dominance. He felt it drop in weariness and tiresome. Ben smiled as he reeled it in. He pulled more and more, leaving the pole stuck between his knees and holds the line with the whopper flapping, gasping in air. Ben lets out a barbaric yell, laughing away as he un-hooks the trout with his *dry hands.*

Placing the fish in his deer pouch and lets it fill with water so it can remain, Ben assembles another bait, this time a worm. He doesn’t blow on it this time for he feels a sudden change of wind. It blew south now.

He lowers the line behind him and soars it toward the same spot. Ben waits for the trickling to stop. His attention on the rippling water that creeps towards his bait. He feels another tug and he yanked it caught. Catching another trout, this time it was smaller than his first catch, but he didn’t care. He lifts the line and unhooks the catch to release it into the pouch.

Ben finds himself remarkably lifted, baiting, hooking and catching multiple masses of trout with each line he casts. He caught a handful of 9 in total and is hungry for more. *If this can last me till October, then I’ll be forever grateful.*

He looks toward the sky and closes his eyes; he felt the calm wind tickle his beard as it blew. Then another tug. Ben muscled the usual pull and let it tire itself out against the current. Lifting the catch above the water, he caresses the wet trout with his fingertip, feeling the smooth, mucus covered scales then brushes up to feel the friction.

Ben had finally looked down to find his deer hide pouch drifting above the water. Ben lifts an eyebrow and opens the pouch.



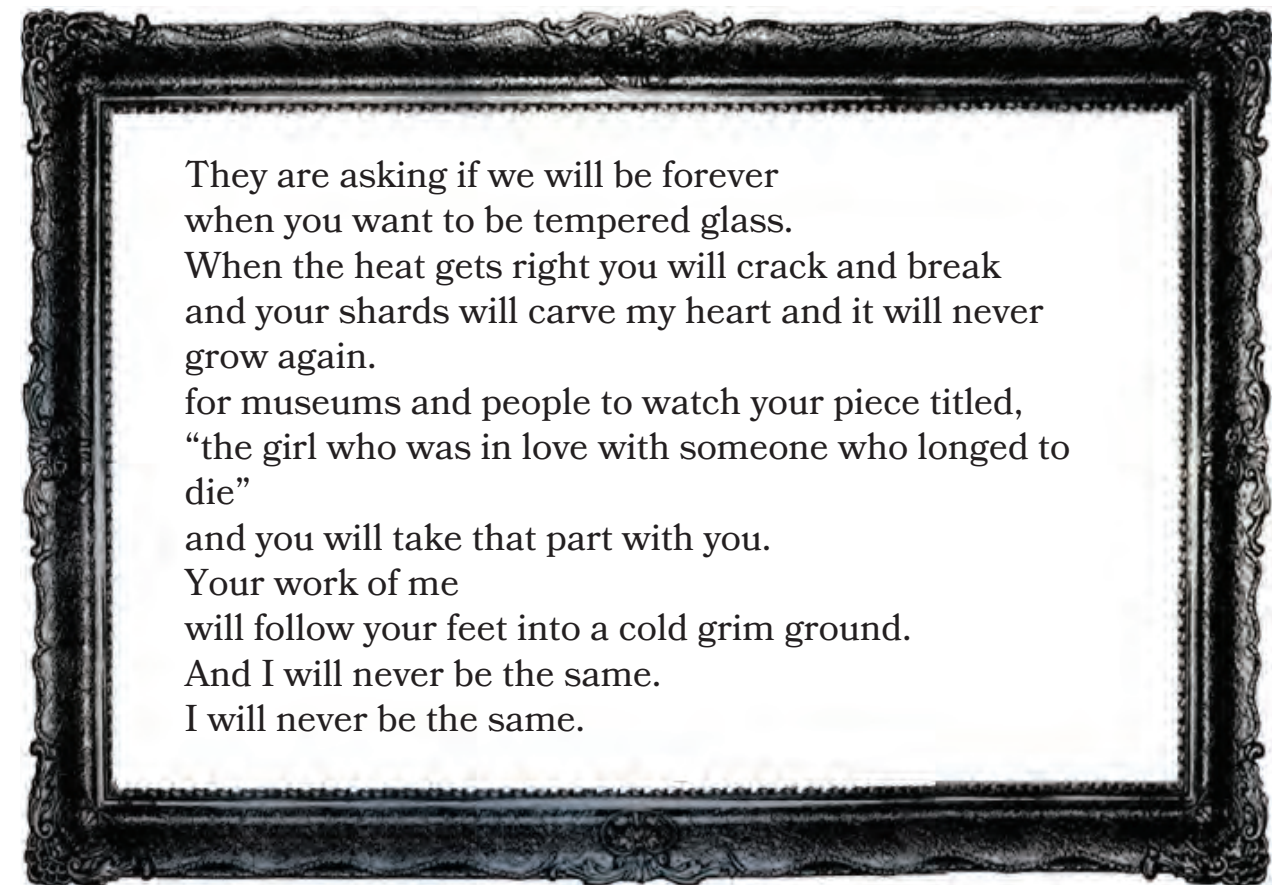
“No... no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no...” He puts the last trout in the bag of white fungus covered fish and seals the opening tight.

Continuously saying “no”, he leaves the water and walks towards the log.

“No... no, no, no— no!” Ben shouts, beating the pouch against the log, “No! No! No! No!”

He looked at the deer hide pouch, drenched in blood and slippery substance then flings it towards the brush. And takes out his journal where he began his story idea; his one catch he thought he had and rips it apart from the spine.

Dropping to his knees, Ben bawls in melancholy as he questions, “Why?”



“The Girl Who Was In Love With  
Someone Who Longed To Die”  
Alexia Tijerina



## Piece of Mind

Ximena Muniz



## Why Do I Write?

June Alaniz

To preserve my identity  
To feel static electricity

To make sure my heart's still beating  
To allow my mind to keep breathing

I unleash my soul  
I shatter ceilings and windows.  
I immortalize my human skin of flesh and bone.

In a hectic world, words make me feel less alone.

I find my purpose. My art is my treasure.  
With each sentence and stance, I travel.  
I touch the fluid realms of reality.  
In this, I am happy.

# LANDMINES

June Alaniz

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...  
Fresh...  
Iron.  
But soon it fades to cooper.

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.



# Effigy

Nathan Phillip

Mark many times over the day of my dying  
let it be written indelibly in the hills  
chisel my name into the mountain walls  
and build on the beaches of my birth  
a most wondrous fire:  
a mourning pyre  
to remember me by.  
let the light of it shine  
from coast to wicked coast  
and let the smoke of it  
choke the redwood forests  
let my dying mark the world  
so that in ten  
times ten generations  
when they gaze in studied awe  
upon the lone and wondrous ruin  
of old mother Earth  
they will not need to wonder who did this awful thing  
or for whose sake it was done  
because my name alone  
will remain  
writ into the bones





# Dancing With the Devil

Michelle Silva

It was all so exciting... up until it wasn't.



Bianca had lived under the watchful eye of her tightly-wound Catholic mother. Her mother kept her under lock and key, overprotective to the point of resentment. Of course, like any other daughter, Bianca loved her mother, but there wasn't a day that passed without her feeling like she was enclosed in a small box her mother intended to keep tucked away in a safe. It was hard maintaining lasting friendships when she couldn't leave the house, and don't even get Bianca started on the woes of having a completely non-existent love life due to a meddling-mommy, but Bianca managed to keep up one friend.

Vanessa's picture came up in the dictionary when you looked up the word intimidating. With her long, blonde hair that cascaded down her back and nails so sharp they could rival a blade, Vanessa was the most elusive girl in school. She was gorgeous, with silvery-blue eyes that watched other students with a glassy glare, and glossy lips that sneered at every teacher who demanded the assignments she didn't do. She was exactly the type of girl Bianca's mother hated, and that was the exact reason Bianca was desperate to keep their friendship alive. There was an unrivaled thrill that flooded her bones when she saw her mother's lip twitch when she mentioned Vanessa's name, and Bianca would do anything to continue her antics.

Anything, apparently, including sneaking out of her bedroom on a Saturday evening to go to a nightclub with Vanessa. They had been friends for a year at this point, but this was the first time Bianca was going to see her outside of school.

"Aye, Vanessa, no se. I don't want to get in trouble," Bianca mused nervously, eyes flitting to the slit under her bedroom door as if she expected to see the shadow of her mother's feet.

Vanessa smacked her gum loudly through the phone.

"Don't you dare flake on me, Bianca. I would literally never forgive you. You won't do this one thing for me?"

Bianca sighed softly. Vanessa always demanded so much, but considering Bianca had a spine made of paper, she knew her best friend would fold so she continued to ask. Tonight was different; tonight Vanessa wanted Bianca to go with her to meet a man she had been talking to online.

Yes, a man. Both girls were high school juniors, yet Vanessa had started talking to a man much older than both of them, old enough that it made Bianca shudder with discomfort when she saw the explicit texts Vanessa showed her during homeroom.

"Pues, okay, Vanessa. I'll be outside at one."



The time couldn't have gone faster if Bianca wanted it to. Before she knew it, she was

tip-toeing down the carpeted stairs and sliding out the back door. Bentley, her snooty little dog, raised one ear at her passing, but then rolled over unceremoniously. Bianca closed the door, slowly and silently, and slumped over in relief at the lack of noise, both from the house and her pet. Her mother would never suspect a thing. She rushed to the gate, high heels in hand, waving down the car cruising down the block.

Vanessa pulled up curiously, skidding to a halt in front of her house. Bianca slipped in without a word, and the girls sped away from her sleepy little neighborhood.

"Oh my god, I can't believe you snuck out! This is going to be so fun, I promise," Vanessa grinned, her white teeth looking extra sharp under her matte red lipstick.

Her outfit was sexy, and much more adult than the lilac dress Bianca wore.

"I hope I get home before mami wakes up," she said.

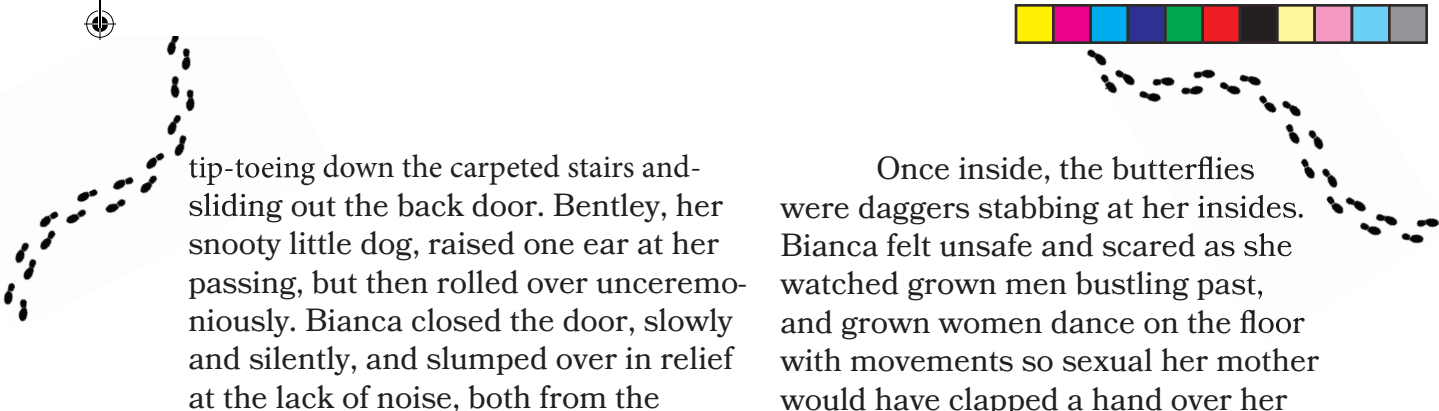
Vanessa rolled her eyes, slapping the turn signal with annoyance.

"Ya, forget about her. Tonight is just us."

"Us and your boyfriend, no?" Bianca teased, laughing when Vanessa smacked her on the arm.

"We're close."

Bianca felt the butterflies in her stomach flutter into a frenzy and she regretted having such a hearty dinner. She had never been to a school dance, much less a nightclub with real adults. They parked, and Bianca shuddered when she felt the cool night air brush over her exposed skin. Vanessa remained stoic, as if the breeze hadn't just sent her curls flying past her shoulders.



Once inside, the butterflies were daggers stabbing at her insides. Bianca felt unsafe and scared as she watched grown men bustling past, and grown women dance on the floor with movements so sexual her mother would have clapped a hand over her eyes if she could see it all. There were so many people packed inside the club it was hot, and Bianca could see the sweat already forming on Vanessa's neck when the green strobe lights flashed over them.

"He's over there. And he brought his friend," Vanessa had to shout.

Bianca followed the pointed finger her friend extended until she saw two men at a booth right by the dance floor. They were dressed in similar black button-ups, their beards dark and belt buckles glistening when they reflected the light.

"You didn't mention he would bring a friend," Bianca replied, a frown nestled on her face.

She didn't want to approach either of the men, but Vanessa was already dragging her across the dance floor. Her body felt numb when they stood in front of the men, and the heat in the room disappeared when the man to the left looked up and down her figure. Bianca's skin was icy.

"I'm Dominic," the man said.

"H-Hey, I'm Bianca," she stammered, feeling very much seventeen as she noticed the drink in Dominic's tattooed hand.

She hadn't noticed the swirl of ink on his skin across the room, but up close she could see he was covered.

Dominic noticed her stare. "You want a drink?"

Bianca shook her head wildly, her brown eyes wide as she rejected the offer. She felt a cool hand on her wrist and saw Vanessa holding out a

shot glass to her. Her eyes were like an owl as she peered right into Bianca's soul.

"We're going to drink," she said.

Bianca swallowed. She had never drank before, her mother didn't even allow alcohol in the house out of fear of her daughter becoming a floozy degenerate. The thought of her mother sent anger flooding through her veins; she had been nothing but the perfect daughter for her mother, so if this is what she feared Bianca would become, it was destiny now.

Bianca snatched the shot glass out of Vanessa's hand and drank it quickly, chest burning as the drink simmered down her throat. Vanessa cheered, and everything went black.



Amid the hazy night, Bianca had shots of Tequila, two margaritas, something else Vanessa had given her, and she drank a beer with Dominic as they danced, bodies grinding together in the cramped club. Her sweat soaked skin was glistening in the light, but Dominic didn't seem to mind. His hand was heavy on her hip, and Bianca flourished under his touch. She never wanted this moment to end.

Vanessa spun her around right as the DJ changed the song to something much faster, the tempo rushing and the bodies around them began to move quicker, sexier, hotter.

"Vanessa," Bianca slurred, "estaba bailando! Lemme go."

Vanessa's eyes were dark as she glared at Dominic. "No, si quieres bailar, we can dance together. Dancing with me is more fun anyway," she said, winking.

Bianca shrugged, eager to continue the best night of her life. Vanessa

moved her body with so much more skill than Dominic, and she encouraged Bianca to quicken her pace. The girl were like lightning on the dance floor, their high heels clacking against the floor in sync with the rapid beats blaring out from the speakers.

Vanessa was touching her all over, feeling Bianca up much more intimately than Dominic had. Unlike earlier, her skin was hot, almost burning as they moved. Bianca felt her forehead beading up with sweat as they continued to roll their bodies together. It was getting so hot.

The song never seemed to end, and Bianca could feel the ache in her feet as she panted, tired of moving.

"I think I'm done, Vanessa," she gasped out, a painful stitch in her side wringing her body with pain.

"No, let's keep dancing!"

Bianca sighed, dropping her head, noticing a drop of sweat rolling off her head. She opened her eyes, and her heart stopped.



Vanessa's feet were gone, and instead she saw a hoof and a chicken foot. Bianca raised her head and Vanessa stared at her with black eyes, a devilish grin spread across her face. Bianca felt heat flood over her skin, the spots where Vanessa touched her burned like hell.

"I said we're going to keep dancing, Bianca," Vanessa said solemnly, her tone sending fear right into Bianca's heart.

"I shouldn't have come." Bianca cried, tears rushing down her face. She couldn't stop moving her body with Vanessa's, even despite the smell of smoke rising off her skin.

"No, no you should have listened to mommy."

## Movement into stillness founded by god

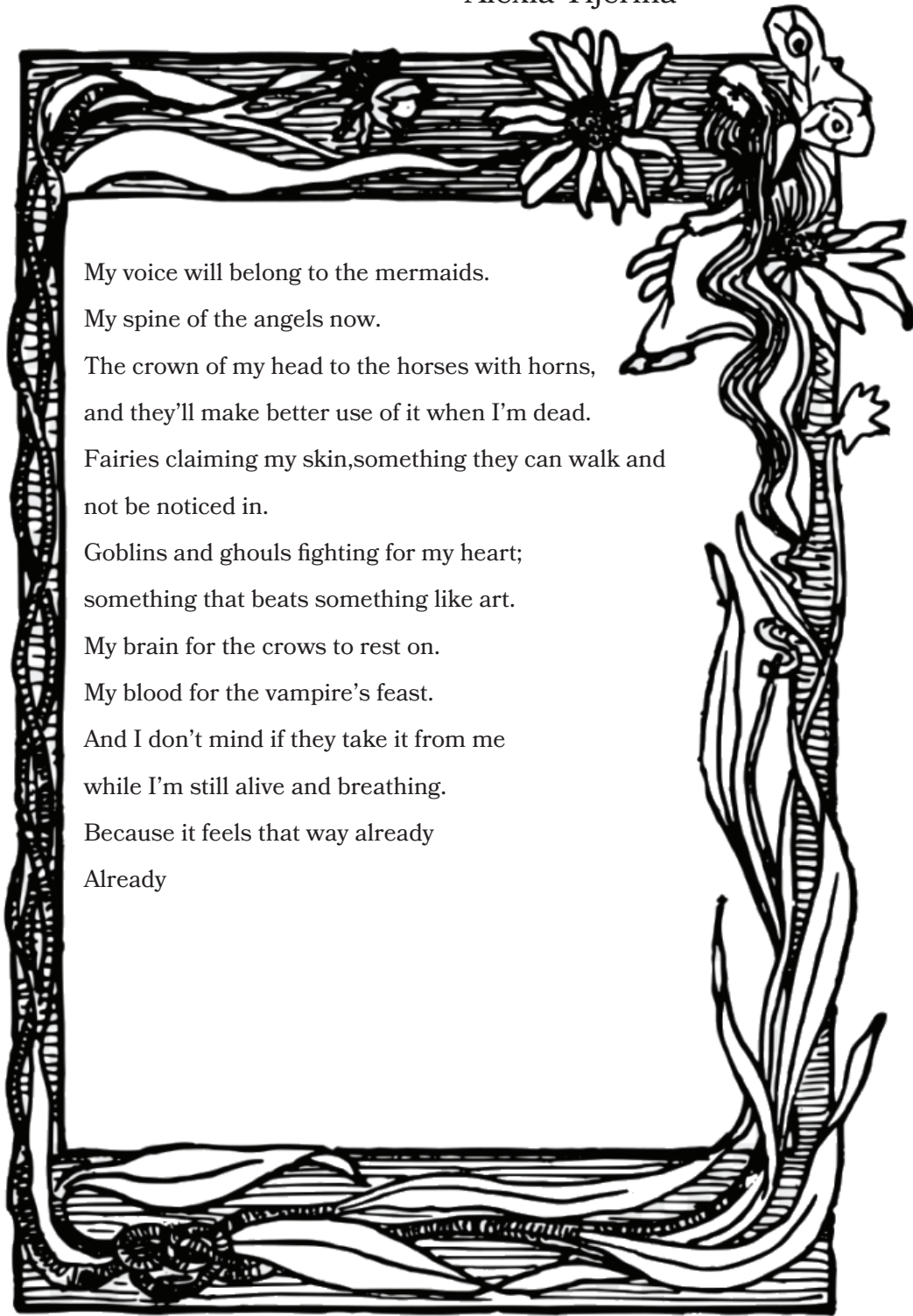
Mar Huerta



# Fairytale

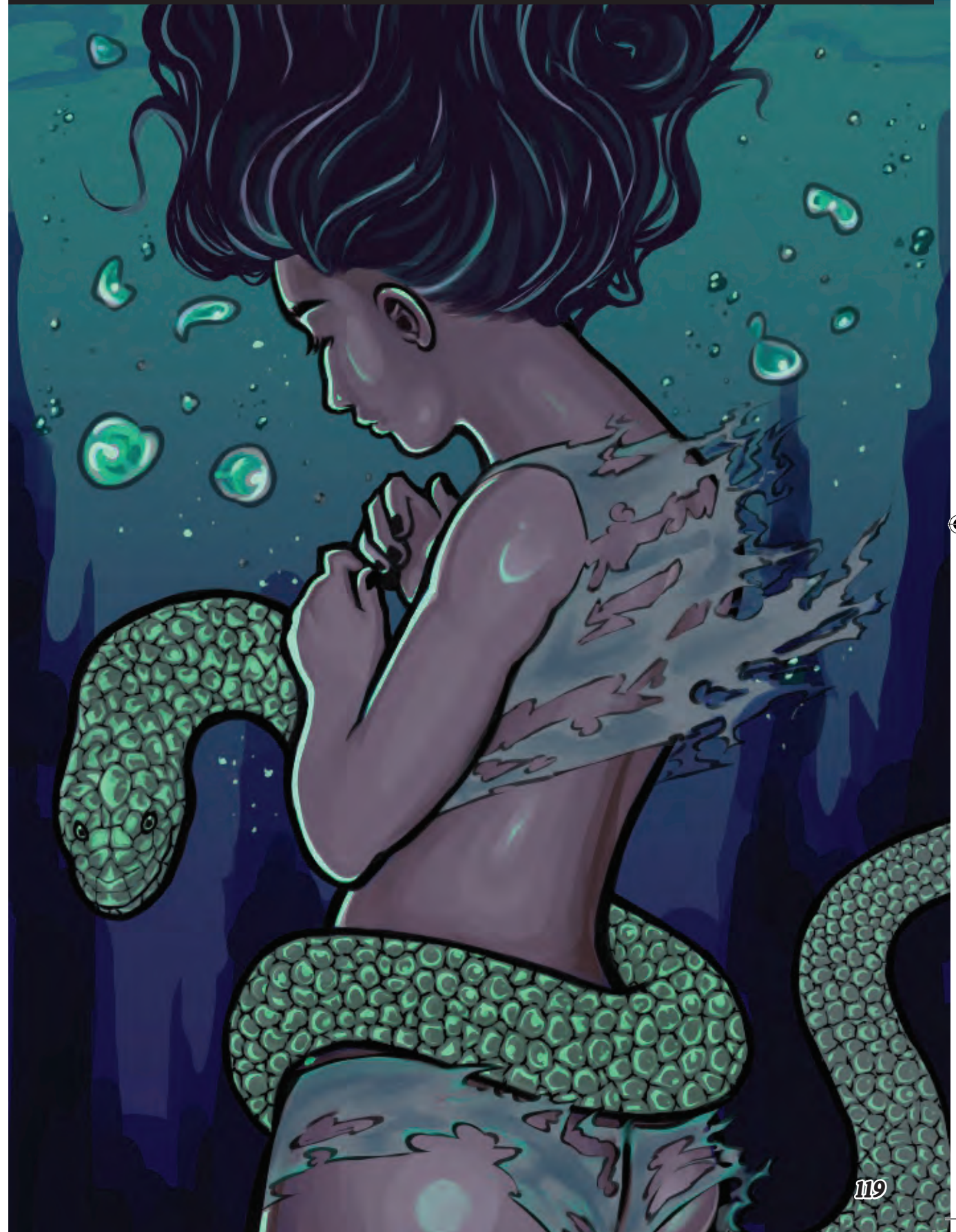
Alexia Tijerina

My voice will belong to the mermaids.  
My spine of the angels now.  
The crown of my head to the horses with horns,  
and they'll make better use of it when I'm dead.  
Fairies claiming my skin, something they can walk and  
not be noticed in.  
Goblins and ghouls fighting for my heart;  
something that beats something like art.  
My brain for the crows to rest on.  
My blood for the vampire's feast.  
And I don't mind if they take it from me  
while I'm still alive and breathing.  
Because it feels that way already  
Already



## Empty Waters

Analexty Galvan Galvan





# Like the Leaves of Autumn

Harmonica Car

As the winds start to howl and the trees lose their leaves,

From the calm forest green to the bright sunset yellow,

Till it **burns** with the color of passion fruit,

And even as they whisper their final breath as they become a shriveled brown,

Know that just like the many different colors these leaves can change,

I will too

But just as how a leaf will *always* be a leaf,

No matter how much I change over the years,

I am still *me*.

So don't be alarmed if I go by a different name or if I take a different face,

Because I'm still human

And isn't that the most important detail of all?



# The Comeback of the Season

Alexia Tijerina

writing from the pain  
no longer deemed "insane"  
what do i do with that  
what do i do with that  
the monsters have left the bed  
no peeking through the drawers  
i don't know who i am  
if i am not yours  
i don't know who i am  
if living isn't a chore  
cause living ain't a chore anymore  
Anymore  
commitments to the living  
my heart still has some giving  
behind the shackles of my weight  
of my faux pre-determined fate  
who am i past all the gray paint  
offering up my offerings  
and that is more than enough for me  
cause it has to be enough for me  
and maybe next season  
when the weather stills  
ice on all of your window sills  
my mind will change with all the leaves  
as all my lovelessness flees  
i will still have this moment  
of clean thoughts  
and hopeful mouth  
of clean wrists  
and helpful ground  
cause i'll finally make a sound  
i know i'll make it out  
i know i'll make it out





## Icicles

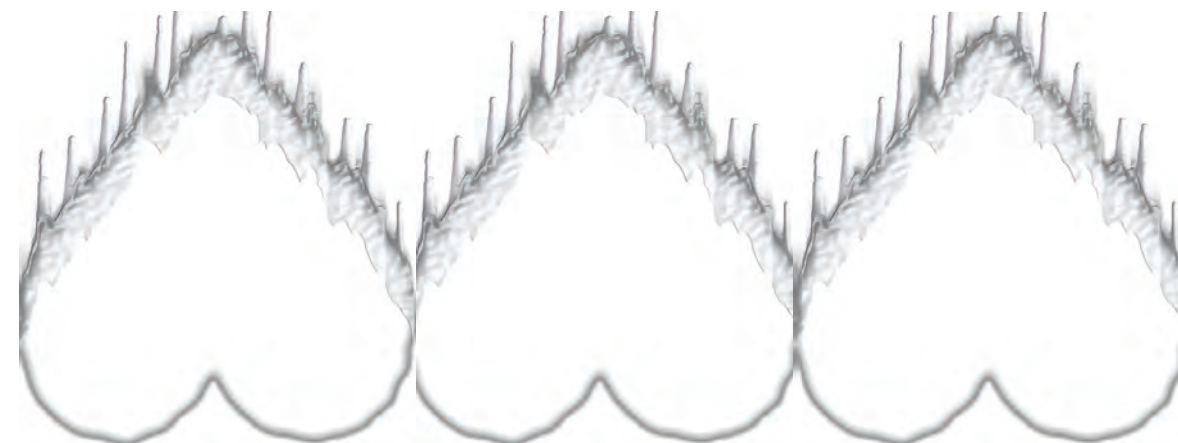
Laura Arellano



## COLD

Alexia Tijerina

I am holding you  
whilst having a bare back exposed.  
Baby, it's freezing and I don't know how much longer  
I can pretend not to shiver,  
because you need me to be warm and happy.  
Even though deep down,  
we are both cold.  
Frozen shoulders aren't the only thing that we can muster to give  
each other  
when we both just want heating.  
It's not healing but it's helping.  
Is your heart still beating after our hypothermia has caused our love  
to stop bleeding? For our souls to die retreating for one another  
until I can no longer feel the tips of your fingers tracing my bones?  
Can I love you enough to shield me from my own lack thereof?  
If I fail to hold you  
Will you lie about it too?



# Yuletide Parade

Kathleen Salinas

## Yuletide Parade



I bought you the pair of gloves you wanted. Soft with felt, light to the touch. But they ran out of Chartreuse again, I hope you like Scotch.



Past attempts, birthdays, and romantic gestures always end with tight lips, and latched doors...

A gilded tiara seemed like a good choice for you. As it reflected all you held dear.



I don't know what else to offer you. Christmas always seems to give you something more...

Something unattainable.



But not long after, I found myself stepping on shattered stars. Drenched in tears.



Pacing from indecision, I remain in-between aisles. And yet, I can hear the drums banging. I can hear the crowd cheering. And the sound, the sound of the music is so nice and inviting.



Perhaps, you might like a parade this year.

It might just make you happy.



But instead, I choose to remain...here.



Choking on the pungent fumes of rancid cologne and stale perfume. Would you be offended if I said it reminds me of you?

Yes..

It just might...



# Ace of Hearts

Laura Martinez

In a city full of lights tell me why one can be so dull  
not feel anything but feel everything all at once  
tell me why I keep digging for, searching for, something that gives me a reason  
but always comes up empty-handed.

does anybody want to tell me why I was dealt this hand?  
maybe committing treason was a heavy hand  
you played my life and I played anti-depressants.  
does that ring a bell?  
"my reputation matters" over "your made-up illness"

the house shaking back and forth  
with a not so sweet sound of my parents expressing their feelings

bruised.  
forced to scrub off the pain from the beating  
I got that day  
if I had breathed wrong or wailed too loudly I'd get the hand I was dealt.  
with a heavy heart, velvet tears would trickle down my soft rosy cheeks.  
my brother fully aware or maybe oblivious to the sound of rapid shaking of the house.

static electricity played as a lullaby  
my face colorless while the TV spewed out every color that I could never be.

I was dealt with a heavy hand and with it came a heavy heart  
one that I would use to mend the wounds of others who walked the same path.  
doing anything and everything for people I'd put before me  
still getting stabbed in the back.

your words struck me across the face  
stripping me of the last weapon I had, the last part of me that I could recognize  
if I could just have the chance to play my  
cards right, but I know that's a dream I could possibly never reach.  
because of the cards, I was dealt.





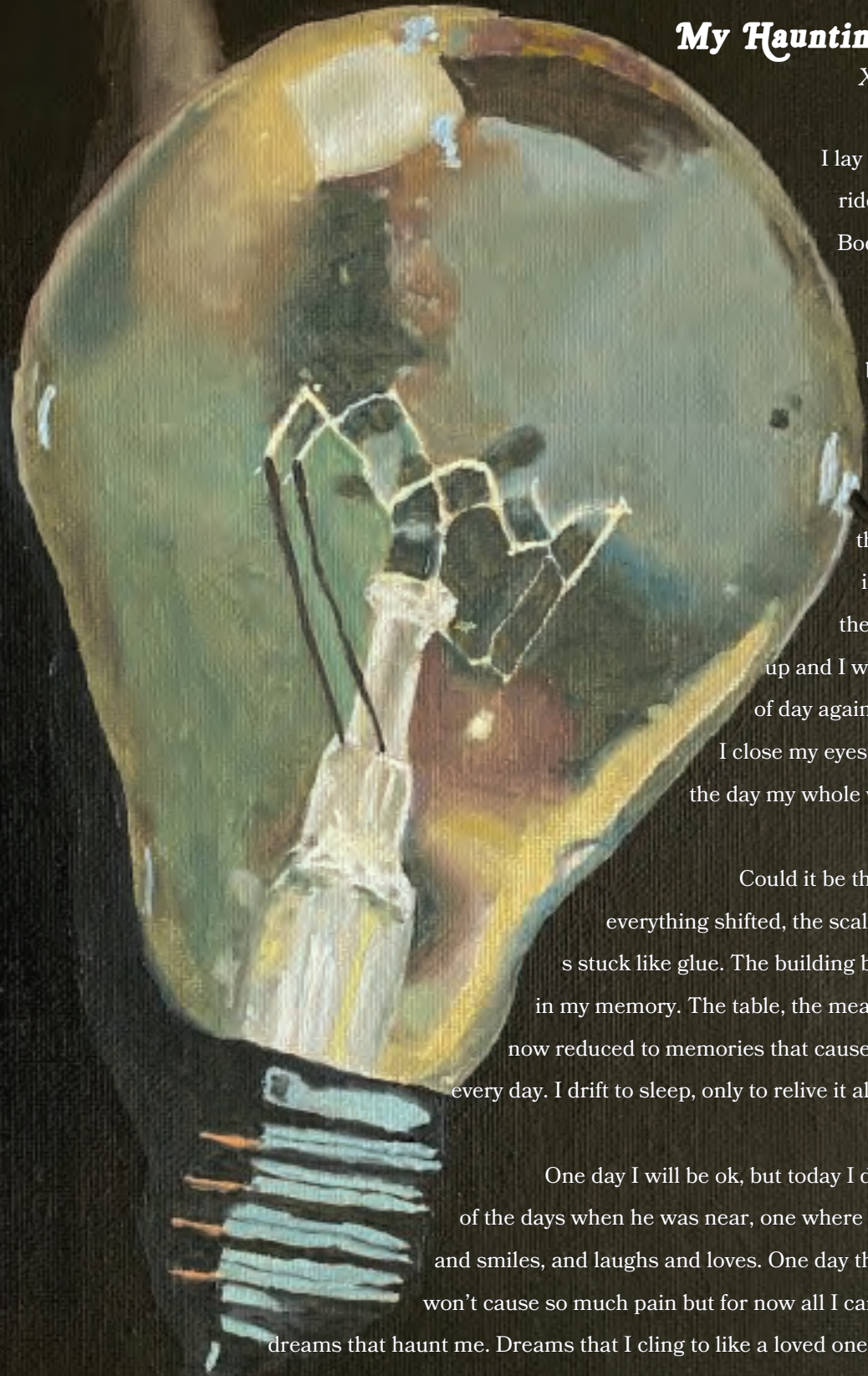
# Mellow Monolith

Luis Quintanilla



## A Study in Light

Adeeba Ahomad



## My Haunting Dreams

Ximena Muniz

I lay awake at night  
riddled with guilt.  
Body still, covered  
in mountains  
of blankets,  
breathing shallow,  
“in and out,  
in and out.” “Everything  
will be ok,  
in the morning,  
the sun will come  
up and I will see the light  
of day again”, I tell myself.  
I close my eyes, remembering  
the day my whole world stopped.

Could it be that in my anger  
everything shifted, the scales over my eyes  
stuck like glue. The building became clearer  
in my memory. The table, the meal, the laughter,  
now reduced to memories that cause me great pain  
every day. I drift to sleep, only to relive it all when I wake.

One day I will be ok, but today I dream; I dream  
of the days when he was near, one where he looks at me  
and smiles, and laughs and loves. One day these memories  
won't cause so much pain but for now all I can do is wait for  
dreams that haunt me. Dreams that I cling to like a loved one, dreams I welcome  
with open arms. Dreams that make my day just a little more bearable.

## Sunny Day

Yatziry Morales





# What Do You Look Forward To?

Paulina Longoria

It was a Thursday night of November 2020 when I considered that the world would be better off if I wasn't in it. I was very lucky that I wasn't alone, as I was at my boyfriend's house that day. I was working from home as the Spanish reporter for the university's newspaper. My job was to translate news stories into Spanish, and then edit it on a phone call with the copy editor and the student media director. My anxiety started overwhelming me, and just after I finished the call, I started crying. I felt like I couldn't continue with my life. I had just started therapy to get better, but I couldn't see a future for me anymore.



I was seeing a counselor from Mexico who was helping me to overcome my anxiety and depression. One of the things we wanted to work on

was improving my self-esteem, which was very low. I didn't think I was worthy of good things. I thought I deserved the bad things in my life like a bad relationship with my family, stress, and depression. She told me that I needed to focus on better perspectives and leave aside my negative thoughts. I had to get out of my self-destructive bubble. So, as a therapeutic exercise, I had to ask my loved ones to write me a letter of the things they like and didn't like about myself. This was supposed to make me reflect on how the people around me perceive me. My friends, sister and boyfriend wrote very nice things about me. But I couldn't believe them. I just focused on the bad things they had to say about my personality.

My younger sister, Norma, told me she admires me for my independence. She doesn't like that I get angry easily, but she loves me because she has a companion that doesn't judge

her and makes her laugh. I mean a lot to her, but sometimes I push her away. My roommate, Marianne, also told me she admires me because of my responsibility and discipline. She described me as a very joyful person and fun to be around with. But she added that my impulsiveness is a negative trait that I possess. My friend Javier told me he has always thought I have a lot of potential to succeed in my professional career. He said he believes I'm an intelligent woman who always tries everything to reach her goals. Javier also wrote that he thought I am the one who deprives myself from being happy because I am too focused on my insecurities. My friend Astrid did not want to say anything bad about me, so she instead wrote that she liked that I was resilient and ambitious.

It shocked me that all my loved ones felt admiration towards me. They also were happy knowing that I was seeking professional help to get better. It felt good to know that I had their support, but I couldn't believe anything positive they said. And that made me

feel even sadder. The depression and intrusive thoughts were blinding me. I couldn't see past the hate that I felt towards myself. My boyfriend was the only one who had not finished writing his letter. He was right in front of me, but he couldn't tell me anything because there was nothing that could make me feel better in that moment.

"Leonardo, I don't think I can do this anymore," I hopelessly said. He was the only one who knew about my suicidal ideation, and he had always shown me support. He was always trying to make me believe in myself, and that I could overcome my depression. No one truly knew how I felt besides Leonardo and my counselor, who may remain nameless. I had not realized that he was also suffering while I was drowning in depression. He started crying with me that night.

"If you can't, then me neither," he responded. I couldn't understand what was happening. I had spent every day buried in my head. But the thought of him not being okay had not crossed my mind. He told me about how he never talks to me about his problems



because he is afraid that I would get more depressed and that it's just going to make me feel worse. I felt guilty. Leonardo didn't deserve to go through this. I felt more of a burden to him. He was going to drown with me if we stayed together. I told him to just let me go, that he shouldn't keep me in his life anymore. But he didn't want to do that.

"We are going to get through this together." he reminded me. Leonardo told me that if I didn't have any motivation, I could get better for my loved ones. So, I promised him that I wasn't going to attempt against my life, and that I was going to keep fighting to be myself again. I have been in a relationship with Leonardo for almost three years, and he is the most important person in my life. So, I trusted him when he said that we would overcome this together.



My journey battling with a mental health illness had barely started in late 2020 since I was diagnosed

with depression in December. And the beginning of 2021 was not easy. The worst part was feeling dissociated from reality. In late January, I was having breakfast with my mom and listening to music when suddenly, the music seemed to be playing deeply in my head. I felt like I was in a movie and Taylor Swift was the background music. I started crying because of my constant thoughts of not being good enough to keep living. My mom got scared and started talking to me, but I couldn't hear what she was saying. I felt so lost in my head that I didn't think it was real. I felt sort of like in a dream, and I wanted to wake up. I have felt this way several times, and it made me realize that it's a warning of an incoming panic attack. With the time, I was able to understand my triggers and how to regulate my thoughts and emotions.

I ended up changing my counselor because the one from Mexico could not help me anymore with my condition. Now that I was talking to a clinical therapist from my university, I felt more hopeful. The therapist and

psychiatrists that I was seeing recommended that I shouldn't be left alone, so I was always surrounded by my family, friends, or boyfriend. But then I started taking medication, which had to be changed several times until I could find a dose that helped me with the depression symptoms. I remember waking up very confused after one month of being in medication because that is when you start seeing improvement from it. I suddenly had a lot of energy, and I experienced joy for the first time in a while. I felt a rush to get up and exercise. Then I took a shower while listening to music, and I was singing. Those things were very hard for me to do since I stopped doing it when my depression hit.

Exercising helps me to connect to my body, but it was tiring to complete a workout at the beginning. Maintaining good hygiene is important for me, but there were days in which it was very hard to get up and shower. Singing has always been a passion for me, but I had stopped feeling pleasure by doing it. Once again, I felt alive that Saturday; that I had experienced hap-

piness. Which is why I will never forget that day. I sang and danced with my sister. I completed a lot of homework for my English classes. I felt motivated and told all my friends and family that there was still hope for me. I had been feeling so sad that it was very different for me to experience some joy and have more energy than usual.



In my worst days, I tend to feel like nothing has ever been OK, like I have felt depressed all my life. These days are more draining because the intrusive thoughts tell me that all my progress is gone. I told my therapist about these thoughts during one session, and she said that that's how it feels battling with a mental illness. She explained that the progress will not be a straight line. I will move forward, and I may move backwards, but the important thing is to never give up. A year has now passed since that Thursday night when I wanted to give up on my life, and I can say that my journey with depression is not over. I have learnt





the hard way that it will probably continue for a long time, but not forever. My therapist once asked me, “What do you look forward to?” And I replied, “Going to sleep and waking up the next day.” And this is what I will keep doing.

# WHEN WE GET TO THE WEIRD OF US

Kaylee Hernandez

I used to think I wanted to be “cool”  
 But I’m not  
 I don’t think I ever was  
 I was always too smart, too fat, too nice to be cool

I’m taking these books off the shelf for a class – and I realize – how weird I’ve always been.  
 My favorite books are about offbeat people who feel like they don’t belong.  
 Stories that are painted in bright colors and told with pictures and words, always pictures  
 The pictures bring the light  
 There’s always light

My favorite books have always been weird, unforgiving.  
 I feel like that’s fitting.  
 Me, too.  
 I’m pretty unforgiving these days. You either like me or you don’t. I don’t mind.  
 It’s not really on my mind or on my radar to be cool anymore  
 Because when we get into the weird of us  
 When we dip into that sauce, it’s the true essence  
 It’s what makes me  
 And I wouldn’t change that for anyone.  
 I wish I could tell 13 year old me to embrace those weird books and bands no one else listened to  
 Because now, it’s what I love about myself most  
 It’s what I make art about  
 The weird is where I find my light.





CORTE DE PELO

Kaylee Hernandez



Scissors blind me for a second, gleaming in the fluorescent light  
I close my eyes.

Romeo Santos, Pitbull & Shakira blaring behind me  
I kind of hate coming here.

I sit calmly as my hair is moistened, then cut.  
I can feel some of the cold water on my neck.  
Sometimes the ladies won't talk to me at all  
If they do, the conversation is always the same  
"Yes, this is my natural color...si, es natural"  
"No, I've never dyed it...no, nunca"  
"Aww, thank you so much"

"Yeah, I know it's really thick. My dad's hair is real thick, too"  
Always complimented on the color - I guess a **dirty blonde** shade  
that isn't too common around here. I've always told people it  
came from my mom, even though her hair is white now...

Haircuts always make me anxious - it's a pretty intimate space  
you share with someone you don't know for longer than a bank  
line conversation

Maybe it feels so intimate because someone is touching your  
head and your hair.

Who else besides lovers and family, maybe children, who place  
their hands on your head.

After all, the head is a keeper of the brain, a few layers of skull,  
skin and hair between others and your innermost thoughts.

I'm swiveled around to face myself in the mirror, although  
blurry until I replace my glasses - held tightly under the plastic  
chair cloth. I always feel like a ghost in a sheet until it's taken off.

Looking at myself I can see me, "a fresh 'do, a new you?"  
But I feel the same.

# OUR FIRST TIME

Angelica Garcia

I kissed you slowly that night  
Do you remember?  
You were nervous  
And shaking in my arms

I told you I didn't need this  
But you told me you did  
You needed this to be the first time  
Someone loved you for you

So I held your hand  
And told you I'd be gentle  
Then I stripped you bare  
Of all your walls and all of your  
fears

I held you close  
And whispered sweet nothings  
Under the moonlight  
Fully clothed



## Orange in Bloom

Kaylee Hernandez





# HATE IS A VIRUS

Gabriel Anulao

The year is 2020, the start of a new decade.  
We reminisced the past few years,  
All the wonderful memories made.  
We had great hopes for the future,  
And everything it had in store.  
But all hopes were blown away by the breeze  
When the virus brought the world to its knees.  
The plague spread like wildfire,  
Claiming millions along its path.  
The fire was further fueled  
When China became the object of Republican wrath.  
These bastards are so damn obtuse.  
Ignoring protocols and mandates,  
They focused on their prejudice and abuse.  
With no regard as to who lives or who dies,  
"Red-blooded" bigots were dead set on their mission,  
Preying on those who happened to possess slanted eyes.  
Thousands of innocents came under attack,  
Riddling communities with fear.  
Even the weak and elderly were forced to watch their back.  
The bad news piled endlessly around me,  
And every minute of every day,  
I'm greeted with "You goddamn ch\*nk! Go back to your country!"  
For too long, my people have suffered.  
Exclusion acts to internment camps,  
Such terrible fate can only be expected in a nation  
Where discrimination seems to be its bread and butter.  
To that I say, enough is enough.  
It's time to raise our voices louder.  
It's time to right all that is wrong.  
It's time to end this vicious cycle,  
And show them we are just as tough.  
This "American Dream" shit will just have to wait.  
At least until we finally finish the fight,  
To eradicate the virus known as hate.

## Fight for Creativity

Jazmin Salonga



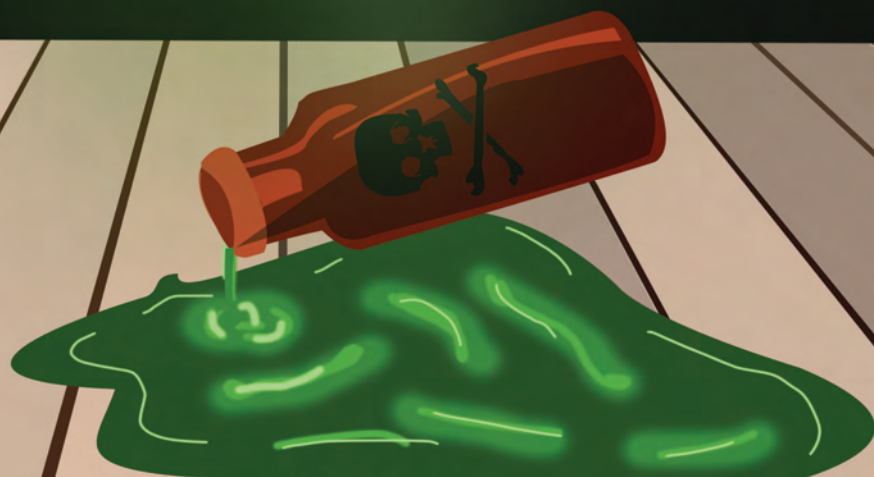
# TOXIC

Sofia Pena

I have no control over my emotions but I control my actions.  
I failed to acknowledge your feelings while you poured your heart out to me.  
Despite hurting you I can't seem to stop.  
But then I question.  
How can someone feel at ease knowing the person they love is drowning?

Back and forth with my own self  
Too proud to admit my faults.  
I crave to be wanted.  
I crave a reaction.  
You say you're mad, but I know that will never last.  
You say you hate me, but I know you never will.  
I know you love me.

Maybe that is the reason I didn't utter a sound.  
That night your voice cracked when you spewed words left and right.  
Addressing the neglect you felt while I pretended I was in deep slumber.  
Maybe I do this because you have nowhere to go.  
No one to call home but me.



\$5

# \$5 DOLLAR LOTTO

Andrew Neely

5 dollars  
5 dollars  
5 dollars  
5 dollars is all he has in his  
Wrinkled and stained pockets.  
Bills are paid, some of them at least.  
Cold water never bothered him,  
Neither did darkness,  
Just gives him a reason to go to bed earlier.  
But with this last 5-dollar bill  
he buys his ticket to paradise.  
Will he win anything?



Probably not,  
But it's not about winning,  
It about the illusion of winning.  
The illusion that with this cheap lottery ticket  
He can eat something other than potted meat  
And stale bread.  
The illusion that with this cheap lottery ticket  
He can get around this broken town  
In something other than his blistered toes.  
The illusion that he might live in a home  
Where mice don't scurry the walls as he sleeps.  
The illusion that he will no longer have to work in that  
Greasy old diner flipping sausages  
For all the other miserable fucks of this town.  
5 dollars  
5 dollars  
5 dollars  
5 dollars is a small price to pay for paradise.  
He scratches the card hastily  
CHERRY, CHERRY, CHERRY!  
He won!! He finally won!  
The grand prize: 5 dollars.

**Chorizo**

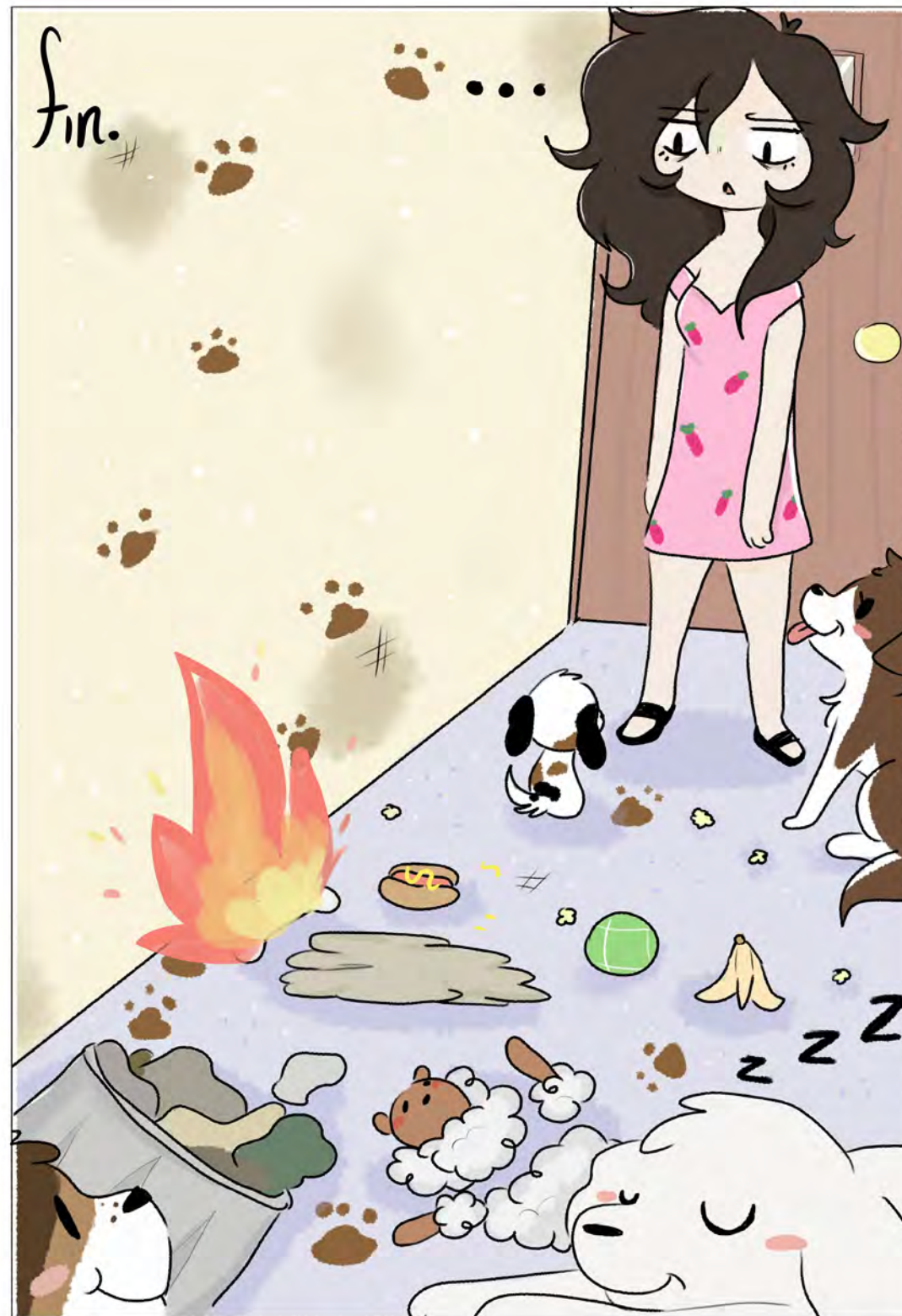
Jessica Thompson



**What Dogs Do When You Leave**

Kimberly Gonzalez





# Acoustic

Maribel Sanchez

Bound  
cradled

closer,

glide

gripping;  
pressing

on his lap

at the waist,  
pulling

mee

no haste  
His fingers

Up  
up,

down  
down  
down my neck

the spots  
that turn  
moannns  
into  
melodies

Thummbing,  
drummming,

Strummming,  
fingering

shh aa k i n n g g ,

Sweet  
a a  
t c o  
s c t b r e a t h s

Verse one ,  
Chorus next.

He takes me from

Body alto to Soprano

From the  
vibrato.  
Now

On  
to  
verse  
two.

Sofia Pena Sofia Pena Sofia  
Pena

# Contributors' Notes

**Abby Davila** is a graduate student studying Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling. She writes, "I wrote my first poem in Spanish back in High School during my senior year. I knew then I enjoyed writing poetry and expressing something so meaningful to me on paper. I could express myself so easily with poetry and I love how the words just flow while writing in the moment. My poems are a story of my life and the experiences I have encountered. I hope you enjoy reading just as I enjoyed writing them."

**Adeeba Ahmad** lives in Mission Texas and works primarily in oil colors. She is pursuing a major in biology and recently switched her minor to art. She is documenting her art journey on Instagram (@noorsartcorner) and dreams of sharing her art with the world.

**AJ Warhall** is a English Major with a concentration in Creative Writing. He comments, "I never really understood why divorces are so complicated, especially for the true victims who suffer."

**Alexia Tijerina** is a sophomore and an english major who says, "this story begs the question, What or who is the narrator? Spoiler, I recommend reading it first and then checking: The speaker is a ...."

**Aleya Barrera** writes, "Here is a comic that had trouble with our site..."

**Alyssa Cantu** describes the process: "I created this piece in art class using tiny cut out square pieces from a magazine. I first picked a famous painting I wanted to recreate. I chose Van Gogh's

sunflower painting. I first drew the picture. After drawing the picture, I had to look through tons of magazines and look for pages with the color I wanted to use. After, I cut the little pieces into squares and pasted them onto a piece of paper to create a vase with sunflowers, Inspired by Van Gogh's painting."

**Amanda Victoria Vargas** is English who says, "my dream is to be an English Professor and an Author... Although this piece is about my life, I hope it motivates other individuals in following their dreams."

**Analex Galvan Galvan** writes, "I'm majoring in Integrated Health Sciences, and this artwork was inspired by loneliness."

**Andrew Neely** simply writes "enjoy."

**Angelica Garcia** is pursuing an English major with a minor in Film. She writes, "I began writing poetry as a way to escape from certain issues occurring in my life and create a safe space. This submission is by far my favorite of all of the things I have written. It was written in the mindset of someone who knows, through personal and shared experience, what it is like to only be wanted for one's body and so it was written from the perspective of someone who knows that feeling and never wants to inflict it onto someone they love."

**Angie Rocha** is an Environmental Science and Art Studio Major with a Minor in Film and has a high interest in combining the artworld with the environment in hopes of creating love

to blossom within my audience and a respect for Earth Mother. She writes, "in this poem I speak about my anxiety of not being able to contribute to the solutions to environmental issues and find myself wishing upon stars for myself to take action, hoping that somehow these wishes would take form with my inaction and magic. However, I realize one day that I can only be part of the solution if I actually take action and stop living in my dreams and thoughts; that is the moment I look up and see no stars because they have died and been exhausted from my wishes and inaction to help Earth Mother survive. It is a cruel punishment and consequence of my love for them, but not love enough to protect them. It is then I become the star I always wished upon and begin to finally take action to protect the Earth Mother I always pray to, wish to, and yearn to be a part of in a star-quilted night sky."

**Anonymous** writes, "Hello, this simple tutorial is one that people can follow if they desire to feel cleansed. Hopefully, it's a piece that makes people feel uncomfortable about a setting where they should feel comfortable. Thanks for reading."

**Ashley Banda** writes of the piece: "One moment was me, and then it was us. Now your love is a vine, tender and firm, and luscious with grapes. There are sparks in our eyes and the space between us is love at the brim."

**Cindy Ruiz Zamudio** comments that "this is an old letter I wrote to someone that I don't really have good memories anymore."

**Cindy Ximena Ruiz Zamudio** writes "I want to state in first instance that

this is an old letter I wrote to someone that I don't really have good memories anymore, it was really good relationship before I knew what happened with my friends and with me behind my back, I got audios, I got screenshots, that was a nightmare I didn't thought I would pass through."

**Crystal Perez** is an Art major pursuing a teacher certification with a minor in biology. She writes, "This photograph was taken with my first camera and I remember taking this photo because It just reminded me of a warm amazing feeling or good memories before and after that picture."

**Cynthia Ortegon** is currently a creative writing student at The University of Rio Grande Valley. She says, "My poetry focuses on themes of self-acceptance and toxicity, which are universal experiences that I believe many readers can relate to and understand; however, self-acceptance is also a personal experience."

**Darissa Rodriguez** is currently a junior majoring in biology and minoring in dance. She writes, "For a long time, I have used poetry as an outlet for my thoughts, but it wasn't until the fall of 2019 when I lost a family member, that I really dove into it. I feel as though poetry has been my way of processing difficult emotions, especially love, loss, and grief which a lot of us have experienced in these past couple of years. I hope that through my words, at least one person can feel understood, even in the most isolated moments :)"

**Daynara Gutierrez** is a sophomore who recently switched to being an English Major and is excited for the

change.

**Denisse Zecca** comments her piece Eggheads is a story about motherhood and identity.

**Emmelinn Flores** is a sophomore at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. She currently aspires to gain her bachelor's degree in English, certification in teaching, with a minor in French. She writes personal poetry both in English and Spanish and is working on writing a collection of short stories. She plans to be published online for her experiences as a Hispanic woman.

**Enrique Aguillon** went for the UTRGV logo, anime style.

**Gabby Casas** dedicates this acrylic paint on canvas "In loving memory of my father."

**Gabriel Anulao** brings our attention to the following: "The COVID-19 pandemic situation in the US has been particularly hard-hitting for the AAPI community, who have been on the receiving end of racially motivated attacks. This poem is both a recollection of my personal experiences and a call to action against the ongoing violence. I implore all who read this poem to approach it with open eyes, open minds, and most importantly, open hearts."

**Gabriella Garcia** is a 20 year old majoring in a mass communication major at UTRGV. She says, 'The Angelic Rosie' is inspired by my grandmother Angelica Garcia. She was part of the Rosie the Riveter brigade during World War II, where she worked as an airplane machinist, helping to build airplanes, and make uniforms for the

American and Allied forces during the war, alongside other women."

**Gesselle Mendez** is a senior at UTRGV majoring in Studio Art who says, "I made this comic digitally on my Ipad on an app called Procreate. It is my very first comic."

**Graciela Vela** says, "The purpose of this piece is to express the lengths we will go to keep ourselves from being vulnerable emotionally and physically with others."

**Harmonica Car** says, "Created from the thought that no one ever stays the same and that's okay. Is also a supportive piece to the LGBTQ+ community. You are seen, and you are valid, it matters not how you dress or look, because behind it all is a feeling, breathing, human being."

**Harmonica Car** writes their piece is "created from the thought that no one ever stays the same and that's okay. Is also a supportive piece to the LGBTQ+ community. You are seen, and you are valid, it matters not how you dress or look, because behind it all is a feeling, breathing, human being."

**Hope Young** is an English major at UTRGV with a concentration in English Composition and Rhetoric. She says, "This piece is an exploration of my own anxiety and self-harming behaviors, specifically, my struggles with dermatillomania or excessive skin picking. This is a deeply introspective piece as I try to examine what could have possibly possessed me to do this to my body. I pride myself on being a logical person but the truth is anxiety often makes us do things that do not make sense. This is my attempt, to be

honest with myself. Perhaps it doesn't make sense or logically coalesce but we don't all make sense or logically coalesce."

**Ismael Perez** writes, "Who I am may not matter, but what I hope to achieve is to give a voice to others that may not be heard. The poem was inspired to give a voice to refugees fleeing from war or violence."

**Jackie Orozco** is an English major with a concentration in Creative Writing, and a minor in Gender and Women's Studies. She says, " 'Big Bellies' was originally a piece written for my Creative Non-Fiction course about body image as a growing girl in the early 2010s. I think body image is something many young individuals struggle with, and I have had a long journey with self-love and body appreciation."

**Jazmin Salonga** provides an elaborate backstory for this character: "Meet Aeron of Songbird, the Oddity Circus's own music composer. He's responsible for leading the orchestra to play the needed tune for the appropriate song. Usually assisted by little fairies so small, that from afar, they appear as dots of lights, who help work some of the instruments. His music also takes physical form when played with enough energy and passion. He can't take off the mask as it's become a part of his face, which he's fine with given his self-esteem issues regarding his past. This including being rejected by big time music critics who preferred an amateur's own piece than his. Which is what led him to joining the Oddity Circus after he decided to make an attempt on his life by jumping off a high place. He was talked out of it by

the ringmaster, Octavia. She offered him a job and he accepted, becoming more bird like in appearance so if next time he jumps, instead of falling, he'll rise."

**Jessi Mata** is an English major and soon to be Creative Writing Graduate student who loves to write performance poetry. She has a special place in her heart for Perú and all of its snacks.

**June Alaniz** writes "I wrote this piece as a means to understand deep emotions that were haunting me. I tried to understand them by writing in the style of a short story. I hope you enjoy it."

**Kathleen Salinas** is an English major with a teacher certification for 4th-8th grade. She is "an avid writer and illustrator, who loves to write short stories and poems, and then occasionally illustrate them. This is a short comic depicting a poem that I wrote a few years back."

**Kaylee Hernandez** offers this 12x12 Mixed Media Collage and also offers work featured on the cover of Gallery 2022!

**Kimberly Gonzalez** is an English Major here at UTRGV.

**Krista Alexia Olivarez** is a 21-year-old senior English Creative Writing major here at UTRGV. She says, "I love observing pop culture and referencing it in my writing as well as music, as you'll see in this poem. I find anthems, as a subsection of poetry, beautiful because they make people want to get up and yell and be themselves, embracing who they are."



**Laura Arellano** writes of the photo: “Taken in Anchorage, Ak. This photo was taken at -15 degrees, icicles only moments to stay strong.”

**Luis Quintanilla** comments that “My dad’s tractor and machinery is featured, and our leafless tree cutting a big line. She never grew any leaves back since that one drought, so we cut her down. Probably for the best.”

**Mar Huerta** offers this painting and the observation that “Nothing sister Mary can do to keep me here with you.”

**Maribel Sanchez** (McAllen, Texas, 1992) is currently enrolled in the MFA Creative Writing program with the University of Texas - Rio Grande Valley. She dabbles mostly in non-fiction essays but has other unpublished works in fiction and poetry.

**Michelle Silva** is a Latina English major hoping to become an author in the near future.

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**MK Vazquez** writes, 2:00 AM can be interpreted two ways. Either you can’t sleep or thus get frustrated at having seen that you spent god knows how many hours trying to sleep, or you suddenly wake up at an ungodly hour having realized that you only spent about one to two hours asleep. Insomnia works in different ways.

**M Villan** is an English major with a concentration in Creative Writing and a minor in Secondary Education.

**Nathan Phillip** is a writer, poet, and student here at UTRGV.

**Paulina Longoria** is an English major with a concentration in Creative Writing. She loves to read and write in English and Spanish. As a person who has been diagnosed with clinical depression in the past, Paulina uses her writing to raise awareness and break the stigma on mental health.

**Ramiro Castro Jr.** writes, “This is a poem written as a spoken word piece when I spent 16 years of my life in San Antonio, Tx. and during that time I was in a band performing at various venues as a percussionist. I wrote this in hopes to perform it in a slam poetry setting, this piece really resonates with the uprising of our ancestors towards the ruling colonists that stole their land and freedom. A time in history that left a vile stain on the soil of this country.”

**Satinderpal Kaur** observes that “Tranquility is one of the beautiful words in dictionary. It’s meaning is much more complex than it actually seems. The fact that makes it complex is that its meaning varies from person to person as well as for one person, its meaning can vary according to different situations.”

**Sheila Gomez** is an English major with hopes of becoming an English high school teacher and published writer. Waiting is an open form poem and inspired by a season all human beings go through at some point in life.

**Sidney Carranco** writes, “This essay is about my struggles through the pandemic and how it struck me personally. I was learning how to walk again

through a whole different life with struggles that the rest of the world was going through.”

**Sofia Pena** is currently attending UTRGV in hopes of graduating with a Bachelor’s Degree in English. She writes, “I aspire to become a teacher, so my concentration is education, grades 7-12. One of my hobbies is writing and reading poetry. Expressing my emotions can be challenging, so I seek therapy in writing. I wrote this poem about toxic relationships and showcased the mentality of a narcissist. Showcasing my work through the Gallery would help me receive exposure since I plan to publish poetry in the future. Thank you.”

**Victoria Pope** is a Graduate student at UTRGV for Educational Leadership. She writes, “I have always had an interest in art and the different ways in which it is expressed. Art has continuously been a part of my life and has recently become more pronounced. This piece was taken with the intention of showing someone coy and expressive simultaneously- a reflection of myself. I’m currently preparing for a performance with the theater at UTRGV called Coriolanus by William Shakespeare. I have found inspiration in working through the show which pours on to other parts of my life like photography.”

**Ximena Muniz** offers a graffiti-style Greek statue painting.

**Yatziry Morales** writes, “This photo was taken two years ago when she lost hope for the future. When she took this picture it changed her world and began a hobby and a soon to be profession as a photographer.”





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