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In the Ords

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In the Ords

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Author Biographies

Alyssa Herrera

Alyssa is a third year Human Communication major with a concentration in Pre Law and a minor in Business. In her free time she enjoy taking photos while exploring the Monterey area and recently discovered an interest in writing poetry.

Celina Waddy

Celina Kay Waddy is a writer whose passion is reflection, encouragement, and growth.

Jaycee Guevarra

Jaycee is a third-year Humanities and Communications major at CSUMB. She is originally from San Francisco and hopes to one day fight injustices and inequality among her community.

Nancy Smith

I am a kinesiology student working towards becoming an occupational therapist.

Sarah Shine

I'm a third year psychology student with a passion for expressing myself in words that I hope people can relate to.

Yazmin Macias

Yazmin Macias is a second year Humanities & Communication major with a concentration in Journalism & Media Studies. Originally from Modesto, California, she has been creating art since the beginning of high school. In her free time she enjoys taking photos, writing, painting, astrology, and picnics on the beach.

Alaina Joleen

Humanities major with a focus in Creative Writing and Social Action. Aspiring fiction novel author.

Anonymous

I am an HCOM student with a concentration in English Subject Matter Prep, and I am working on becoming an ESL teacher.

Brennon Brennan

I am a young chap who has a passion for military history. I also love to write stories with characters that I create. This story contains two of the very first characters I ever created in 2005, along with some of my favorite people i.e. Edgar Allan Poe and Nikola Tesla. I sincerely hope you enjoy it.

Eric Garcia

A Lakers fan who loves sneakers, just trying to follow his passion in creative writing.

Cheyenne Walkup

I am currently a Junior at CSUMB concentrating in Legal Studies. This is the first poem I have ever written.

Emily Martin

I am a Cinematic Arts major with a minor in Human Communications. I enjoy writing poems about anything and everything!

Anothony Jimenez

I am a student studying Visual & Public art at CSU Monterey Bay. My art themes explore thought, wonder, human condition & social/political commentary.

Diana Zamudio-Garcia

I am a Human Communications major with a Chicana concentration at CSUMB.

Poetry

To Who You Need Me to Be

Alyssa Herrera

No, please, after you
Always putting others before myself
Everyone has their faults, and maybe that's mine
Putting the pieces of someone's life together is nice
Even if I know I'm missing a few of my own
Really, I promise, it's fine

Although, I politely decline the title of Mom Friend
You should still bring that jacket, cause it's freezing
Sure, I carry snacks and a first-aid kit in my purse
What? Don't you do that too?
No matter the time, call me if you need a ride
I'm here for you whether you need me or not

And that cookie-cutter mold of a perfect daughter?
I practically constructed the blueprint for it
A rebellious phase? Yeah, I can't relate
I surprisingly really love my dysfunctional family
But don't act up. Don't make it harder for them
Or else they'll give you a good reason to cry

I shape and morphe and design and rearrange
It's easy to be what someone else needs
Because just like dinner, I don't know what I want
But I'll just Salt 'N' Pepa the issue for now
And Push It to the back of my mind
Until we both figure out who I need me to be

Always Do

Celina Kay

Don't look at me
Like you always do
I smile right up into you

And when you go
Like you always do
I don't know what I'm supposed to do

All I wanted was for you
To see my me just like I saw you
And maybe one day you'll be true
And see the way I love you
Oh, I do

Crumble

Celina Kay

You so tenderly and graciously
let me go
and I couldn't do the same.

I finally see the truth in the whispers
that you can't give me any more.

Even though I heard you
I based it against myself
and how I felt I would handle
my love if I were in your shoes.

In my heart I recognize
that I wasn't allowing space for you
to love me in the only way you knew how to.

I wasn't able to give up my expectations.
Releasing those hopes isn't easy
and that's not an excuse.

It is something that is difficult for me
and I know life often calls for us to relinquish
our tight grips.

You've been so caring through all of this.
Oh, how I would do anything for you.
Through all of my mistakes and failings,
all I want to do is be and give you what you need.

Why can't I receive the same?

If only you could feel just how much I love you

Fullness

Celina Kay

Stop and settle
Slow down the crumble
For I know that if I pause long enough
The destruction will cease in its tracks

Open yourself
Someone out there needs your kindred eye
You won't always find hurt at their hand
You will flourish under their love
And break at their lash

But you will always come around
And see that love is giving
And friendship is receiving
People are faulty and your heart
It won't be filled by them

Discover your fullness elsewhere

Within

Celina Kay

Bravery, there you are
You are much gentler than I once anticipated you to be
Quietly parading around in my heart

It had been so long

To My Other Half

Cheyenne Walkup

I know the world is cruel.
You won't have to face it alone.
I know people don't understand change.
You aren't to blame.

I will always protect you
From the good and the bad.
The misguided opinions and the unavoidable judgement.
I will always protect you.

I will always love you
Every quirk, every smile, every laugh.
Half white, half Taiwanese, 100% perfect
I will always love you.

You are half of me, half of the man I love.
I promise to never force you to choose.
You can always be yourself.
I cannot wait to feel your growth.

Thank you for being you.
Thank you for being him.
Thank you for being me.
Thank you for being my other half.

In Between

Diana Zamudio-Garcia

Yo soy Diana Zamudio-Garcia. Yes, hyphenated; that is the formal genealogy. It is also a costumbre Mexicana to have really long names. Por suerte, mine is not as long, but oh that hyphen. It was given to me at al nacer by mis padres. It was as if they knew that my life as a ciudadana Americana, con padres de raíces Mexicanas would mean being hyphenated, (having a combined meaning) at all times.

I am born.

I am Mexican made

Pero soy Americana by Jus Soli

Or by the Fourteenth.

I am born and I am

the “anchor baby”.

Tengo cuatro años y solo soy Mexicana.

Morena y mi única lengua es Español.

Me baño en el río que fluye con inmensa calma.

Mis mejores amigos son un perro cafe y negro, se llama Coronel

y mi caballo amarillo, alto, y fuerte, Vallo.

Mi unica preocupacion academica es

Colorear dentro de las líneas de los dibujos

Con crayones rojos, blancos, verdes, y melanin.

I am six and I am una Americana entitled to an education.

I am scared. I feel lonely and rejected.

I cannot understand this lengua called English.

My ability to be able is

questioned and challenged

both, intellectually and physically

Because I am a Spanish speaker and disabled.

I am a Quinceñera. I am indifferent about this culturally relevant event.

I am 17. I think white and assimilating to “succeed”.

Ya casi no hablo Español y se supone que tengo que hablar Español en casa.

Instead, dejo a mi Mami wondering about El chisme (in English)

Without realizing that now, I'm making her feel como “the other” en su propio hogar.

I am 20. I am a brown skin mujer with white “male” privilege.

Primera generacion. First-generation university-skilled “Morena”.

I am prieta, prietita, but so culturally white.

I use the labels of “disadvantage” for my advantage.

I have learned to play the system. I am an expert in practicing the Socratic method.

Soy una Mexicana en la universidad with no clue of Michoacan’s location.

I am an entitled Americana with a crushed Mexican soul.

A los 20, sin darme cuenta, me enamore de mi opresor.

“Por amarte a tu manera me olvide hasta de ser YO.”

I am infatuated with the promesa of higher education

Mi boletin para abrir mi puerta a la clase media.

I follow the system; I am doing school on school's terms.
I didn't see its power, nor my allegiance
“I was being colonized and, even worse, I had become the colonizer.”
I am conquered. I am a participant in my own marginalization.

I am 20. I undergo Nepantla. Internally, I feel horrible and ashamed.
Conflicted by my sentimientos & emociones,
I do what I can to numb the pain.
I am in an ongoing battle with myself
And it seems to have no end.
Reshaping my thinking. Analyzing myself from the outside.
I stepped into new dimensions that allowed me to see from a point beyond.
Is this the quantum physics scientists speak about?
Or the spiritual awakening that my mami describes?

I am 20 and I question if I was ever lost.
Has this process called vida helped me return to myself.
Have I been buried under cultural and societal conditioning?
Will I dare leave this comfortable confine?
I fear breaking away from my “colonized gringa” self.

I am 20 y estoy presente.
I analyze the myth of white supremacy.
Veo los límites de las tradiciones Mexicanas.
Empiezo a crear my own space.
Mi propio mundo.
A world where my wants and desires
Match my valores y morales.

I am 21. I am Aztlan's Warrior.
A divine Aztec princess. A Chicana. A border crosser.
I have adventured through fifteen countries,
five states, four continents, lost count of cities,
And through multiple dimensions of consciousness.
I have surpassed multiple physical and spiritual borders.
I am the la mestiza writer who dances, travels, and creates arte.
The interpreter of my raza. A Nahuatl native
y la hablante de Español because of conquest.
An English speaker by form of survival.
La Malintzin, glorified as the rebel
Who defied the norm to help her gente. Herself.
And yet, the ultimate traidora. The accused of betrayal.
Loca by design and by environment for not conforming,
Because I am “too hood for the nerds, and too weird for the thugs”
Even so, “you can't spell scholar without chola.”
Yo Soy de aquí y de allá. Yo soy de todas partes.
Yo soy Diana Zamudio-Garcia.
Yes, hyphenated.

Celestial body

Denis Drachenberg

She had a Celestial body
that felt uncomfortable in the dark.
So she raised her arms up to
where the stars met the moon
and gathered the black sky
with her own two hands.
She wrapped it around herself like a scarf
so it draped over her shoulders.
When she couldn't see herself
in the mirror
she thought she was black and empty
but I see
That your soul has become
a receptacle for stars
I want to say to her,
“Darling you are glowing,
can't you see,
you take constellations with you
wherever you go.”

I Dream of your Words Flowing up to our Glittering Infinite Space Denis Drachenberg

We ventured out
to find new constellations in the sky.
And all a constellation is
groups of stars that form imaginary outlines.
And as I'm finding these Recognizable patterns in the sky; out there
I'm finding these patterns in you too.
Forming these very real outlines here.
Of You; the outline of your body of your face of hands in mine.
Discovering the curve of your smile every once in while
I get lost in it.
You see while we were finding things in the atmosphere,
We may have found parts of ourselves too.
And we joked it's a sign,
But somehow the stars did align
perfectly that day,
to display this rare occurrence of nature.
If the heavens ever spoke -
They did now.
Performing spectacles for us,
Right to us!
As if giving us the twinkling go ahead.
A perfect rendition of orange moons,
and setting moons and,
splattered dancing light.
And yet, there's nothing as intricate as this.
We are like two stars in the same constellation,
that crashed into each other.
Just wait and we'll create gold.
Just wait and we will wobble the universe.

Rising With the Sight of You

Denis Drachenberg

I layed in all
my lonesome and fatigue.
All day, and found myself
Looking out the window,
At the sky,
as if I waiting
for something.
And the longer I waited
the blander the sky became.
I watched it transform,
And watched how everything
else stayed the same.
Except for the silence-
shattered by you.
As you came to look through
the same window-
At the same sky;
And admire the subtleties,
That I had not not discerned.
So we go to the beach.
And the bit of sun
that was left in the atmosphere,
chose to give itself to you.
Its last drops of light;
so that you are illuminated and golden.

I watch you watch the ocean,
The sea shining; blue and silver.
Retracting from the earth,
And wonder if you know that it
rises again with the sight of you.
I rise again with the sight of you,
And in a moment
it's gone.
You
are gone.
I don't know if I'll ever have you in my arms in the same way.
or your fingers entangled in mine the same way,
But it does not matter

The thought is enough-
It is intoxicating to me.
The wine and feel of you-
makes me woozy.
It spins my head clock-words
and counterclockwise.
I rise and can't reach you.

I never understood forbidden love,
Until I met you.

Tint

Denis Drachenberg

The sky is unapologetic.
Filling itself with
all the warm shades
of color imaginable.
Apricots and Blood oranges,
maroon and magenta.
Colors only seen
in scenes from documentaries.
Or dreams.
Or on the covers of magazines.
Looks like it's been injected
with artificial dyes and sweeteners.
But it's real
It's alive
And I feel alive
permeated by vibrancy.
As if my eyes- cold,
were pieced by the color.
And I lay here afterwards,
In the darkness,
Trying to relive
what words can't possibly express.

Hospitality Dictates

Emily Martin

SEX

Do I have your attention?

Wonderful.

This is a Public Service Announcement

For all you creeps out there:

I am not here for you,
My job is not to satisfy your

Barbaric

Behavior. I am here to greet you,

Check you in,

Ask you if I

[we, the hotel, the ENTIRE staff]

Can assist you with anything else.

Asking me to join you in your room

Does NOT fall under my job description.

No where in it did I see:

“Sell your body and dignity”

So, no, sir, I will not be doing so.

Hospitality dictates

I must do everything with a smile

I will decline you

With a polite smile

While all the while I think,

“Pig”

I tell you,
“Have a good evening”
As any hostess would

You tell me,
“It’d be better if you joined me”
Winking at your buddy

I ask you,
“Do you need assistance getting
To your room?”
As you soberly walk.

You tell me,
“If it means you’ll come
with me, yes”
You laugh.

**You think it’s funny.
I think it’s disgusting.**

How proud your
Wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters,
Would be if they saw
What I see.
Men who don’t touch with their hands
but do with their eyes.
Men who tell me I’m so beautiful,
As if I was the object of their affection.
Men who ask me,

A woman trying to do her job,

If I'll join them in their room,
How disappointing.
In case you think these accounts,
Are fake news,
Trying to get the attention of the media,
Tring to be "relevant"
Sit back and relax,
Watch the world around you,
It happens everywhere:

Every socio-economic class,
Every country,
Every hotel,

My workplace

Ask any female guest services agent,
Ask any female waitress,
Ask any female maid,
Ask any female,
And the answer will be as clear as day.

Every woman remembers her first time,
The first time her ass got slapped,
The first time her hair was groped,
The first time the stench of alcohol could be
Smelt from a mile away,
The first time she no longer was a human
But an object.

So, in case you think, these

"Allegations"

Are false?

Think again, because

Hospitality dictates,

I must put these pigs before myself.

Until one piggy becomes too greedy.

Once one touches me,

I will turn him into bacon.

I will fry him up,

Past crispy,

Past burnt,

Until that fat little piggy

Is unrecognizable.

Once it goes "too far" I will make him kneel,

Under my foot,

Under the weight of my pride,

Under a woman,

Until he begs for mercy.

Those nights,

They stumble from the bar,

Past the desk,

To the elevator,

I hope none of them look my way.

I hope I never have to crush a man

They forget I am a person.

I am a daughter.

I am a sister.

I am not a robot there for their pleasure.

Love Evol

Jaycee Guevarra

If I only focus

On

Her physicality

And not amuse or entertain

Her questionable thoughts

I will bore her

She will feel starved, parched

Wanting more than what I have to

Offer

Her Mind

It Puzzles me

Yet her body is of holy grounds

Which I am only allowed to

See

Once every full moon

The way she looks once thrust

There's a devilish grin

That brings me down

On my bruised knees

These bruised knees

Will toy with

The Lips

The Hips

Those of strawberries that

tickle the back of my own throat

The ones that speak of realities beyond my comprehension

The ones that see straight through my lies

Still gullible as a goose, giving

The Hip that I grip

Something beyond compare

With curves of a juicy green pear

She doesn't know her worth

And this is how

I

Play tricks

On her

Questionable Thot

Jaycee Guevarra

Was I only there to please your little man down there? Was I just a joy ride or game for you? And when you got tired of what i got, and some new shiny ass bougie game with an even better console came along, you'd think it'd be easy to throw me out on the cold cement pavement? You think you can get away with stealing all the valuable little chunks of diamonds, pearls, and sterling silver I saved in the back of my old pocket? You? A man of 25 years, a generation? Why do you believe that you're a saint when you only care for your selfish physicality and selfish wants and - Why am I caring so much for someone who doesn't give a damn about the efforts I show? Tell me why sleep is unreachable unless I take a pill every night to feel the numbness trickling down my throat. Tell me why I try so hard to please people who have failed to show up at 5am when I was in the Emergency Room dying of whatever disease I had from the lack of care I gave myself. Just tell me why I feel pathetic whenever I am reminded of the nights we shared together. Tell me why I'm unresponsive but yet I think miles upon miles ahead of everything around me. Oh that's right, this world has forgotten chivalry and has been replaced with someone like you. A questionable thot that has this thot wrapped in see-through wires. Wires that I myself can't get out of. Fuck.

Taken

Nancy Smith

You've lost a battle within yourself
And now you are without a trace.
Who can retrieve you from the rocky shores of the unknown depths in your mind?
I am alone dreaming of your serenity and peace,
While you are stripping away all truths you've laid upon yourself
And submitting to your kryptonite.

The demons taunt you at any false move and a
Gluttonous leech has latched onto your soul.
These rejected creatures allure you into their treacherous estate
Through their hypnotizing melodies of persuasion;
Immediately sculpting you into their playmate.

You surrender to their seductive desire
As they steal any sense of warmth on your skin.
They indulge until your remains are on the ocean floor,
And you have been forgotten from all who Have once known you.

My Heart in Words

Sarah Shine

More Than a Love

Our love was on the moon,
Venus was jealous

Whenever she looked up,
She saw it,
A love that seemed galaxies away,
And so out of reach

She was wrong to feel longing,
Because she had a love,

She couldn't see it when she looked up,
Because it was bigger than the universe

Your Words Water Me

I've been stunted for a while now,
Like a flower that's withered without water,
Because I haven't been showered with appreciation or affection,
But I can feel myself slowly inching towards the sun,
Whenever you speak

You Never Heard Me

I remember telling you I loved you,
While my car stereo played Bon Iver,
And I didn't know it then,
But you were only listening to the song

My Type

I saw my lover in a dream,
But he had no face,
All I could see was his heart

Heavy Tears

Catch the droplet from my eyelid,
And try not to drown

Feel the heaviness pouring from my soul,
And tell me you wouldn't cry too.

Do You Trust Everyone You Meet?

Yazmin Macias

roads. long and winding,
hypnotizing endless curves paved on the floor
we follow them so we don't have to think any more.
we go and go
never really stopping to see,
never really stopping to think.

with both eyes shut,
we continue to proceed.
fear may drive but curiosity controls the speed.
we continue,
keeping an arm's length distance from everyone we pass.
head down and walking fast,
it's easier to forget than to forgive mistakes that become the past.

arm's up, eyes shut,
refusing to see those around.
we refuse to push the gas again,
scared of what we have found.

so we continue wandering aimlessly.
we go through the motions of life,
forgetting to pay attention to the details.
not caring enough to see just how lonely it may be.
too afraid to let someone get close, it's easier to follow a solo road.

Numb

Yazmin Macias

have you ever felt the warmth exuding from a freshly brewed cup of coffee when the rest of your soul has only absorbed the cold winds from outside?

gripping the mug tightly, hoping the small source of warmth will be strong enough to course through the rest of my body and bring back the light I once felt.

the feeling shoots through my body faster than a strike of electricity;
I feel; I don't; back to the cold we go.

Taylor VanZant

According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center,
27% of college women have experienced some form of unwanted sexual contact.

Did I Consent?

I do not consent if I do not say yes.

I do not consent when I agree to go out for a drink or two.

I do not consent when I get in your car with you.

I do not consent when you drive me around for a few.

The bars are closed and there's nothing to do.

You drive around recklessly.

You tell me about you.

“A D.U.I. you say?”

You drive around anyway

“I'm getting tired.”

But you say it's only 2

“Maybe you should take me back to my car.”

It's as if I'm not here at all.

Please let me leave.

You ignore me as if I'm invisible.

Butterflies flutter in my stomach.

I open up my mouth to let them out but they feel safer inside.

At the end of every song

“Please take me to my car.”

At the end of every conversation

“I really want to go home now.”

I can feel your temper rising

“It's so late.”

But

Still no consideration for deliberation.

Just an invitation for acceleration.

The motor roars louder and louder.

The butterflies

turn to birds.

Is he trying to scare me?

My eyes search for savior in the time.

You will have to let me go by the time the sun rises.

We're back to where we left my car.

What a relief.

I get to leave.

And then you ask me where I live

“My roommate is home.”

She isn't.

You just want to drive me home

“I can drive myself, thank you.”

You want to spend more time with me

“It's 3.”

You keep grabbing my face and kissing me

“Please stop.”

You squeeze my cheek so hard I feel them touch inside my mouth.

Maybe he's just being sweet.

Your thumbs as big as my cheek.

I can feel my heart beating in my feet.

Or is that just the feeling to flee?

I laugh and try to leave.

You stop me.

You get on top of me.

You put your hand down my pants.

You ask me if I like it

“I really just want to go home.”

You don't like that I don't like it.

“I'm really tired.”

You pull on my underwear.

You don't ask me again.

I search the windows avoiding your gaze.

Please, anyone, walk by.

I search my mind for other thoughts.

Butterflies and birds in valleys of wild flowers instead of bouncing in my belly.

Maybe if I give him what he wants he'll let me leave.

Your large,

hairy,

heavy

body takes my breath away

takes my voice away.

He doesn't care if I don't want to.

It's just sex.

It's just sex.

“I will not have sex without a condom.”

Don't ask again.

Don't pull my pants down.

Oh but you don't have any?

“Good, I'll just go home then.”

But no.

That's not an option.

You sigh like an impatient child.

You get off of me.

And the birds begin to sing inside of me!

Finally!

I'm free!

I thought.

But the door is still locked.

You go 100 down the 10

You don't look when you change lanes.

Why are you doing this?

*Why **must** we have sex?*

You stop at three gas stations.

Am I not being clear enough?

Why am I scared to say no?

Do I really think he wouldn't let me go?

I do.

Your creepy carcass crushes me again.

Your hairy hands caress me again.

Maybe I want this.

Your fleshy folds are kissing me again.

I have sex all the time.

You are choking me again.

This is my fault anyway.

I made him think I wanted this.

I talked to him in the first place.

I guess, that

was my consent.

FICTION

'Love' - Prologue

Alaina Joleen

The room is filled with aching hearts. One heart not yet fully capable of understanding the truth that lays behind the aching. One heart, completely in two, the reason behind the suffocation in the room.

My mind, that was once soulmates with my heart, has betrayed its life partner. The longing they equally share for one other, is slowly dissolving. As I lay in a hospital bed, with the window at my back, I cannot open the eyes that I've been given to see with; I cannot move the hands that I've been given to write with; and I cannot speak the words that I have been so gratefully given with this life. I am surrounded by the ones that I love the most in this world and I can feel them all. I cannot feel the heart beating inside of me, but I can feel theirs, slowly beating, all around me.

The thoughts in my mind are racing like usual. It's like they're each stubbornly fighting for my attention. One won't let the other finish before another joins the race. They go back and forth, around and around, like an abstract piece of art that only a talented few can deconstruct. I don't fall into this category.

I hear snippets of these thoughts as they each arise in my mind. The decent thing about thoughts, is that they're only obtainable to the individual. Only if that individual decides to keep them resting in the nest of the brain where they were birthed. And because I am unconscious, these thoughts will stay where they are. I don't have to face them.

At least not yet.

It's a wonder how someone can think two truly polar thoughts at once. Like how I'm so incredibly fucking grateful that I am somehow still breathing. But how I am also stubbornly hoping that I don't wake up. Because if I wake up then I have to straighten out this tangled mess that I've made. I would have to somehow convince them all that I'm okay and that I won't end up back in this bed.

My best friend since the age of 5, Jaide, is sitting in a hospital chair to the right of me. Her heart is filled with helplessness. I know that she won't forgive herself if I don't get through this because she believes that she could have done more to make this easier on me or to prevent this. But believing doesn't mean it's the truth, it just means we hope that it is. I'm trying to reach my hand out to her, to give her some hope but the effort isn't enough. Her husband, Niko, is standing somewhere near her, in an attempt to comfort; something I never found to be his strongest suit. His heart breaks more for Jaide, not for me. Because I'm his wife's best friend and he knows that he cannot fill the void of me in her. I'm not sure that anybody could.

Laying on the bed right beside me, lies my sweet sweet baby sister, Rosa. She is wrapped around my left arm. I can feel her tiny body curled up against mine, which is how I know it's her without being able to open my eyes. Although her heart is intact, she is impatiently waiting for me to wake. She doesn't understand how I ended up here, and I hate myself for having a mind that has defeated my heart, forcing my angel of a baby sister to wait for something that may never come. I can hear, in faint words, Rosa ask the same question every few minutes, as most 5-year old's do when they seek something desperately.

"Is she going to wake up soon?" Rosa turns her body over to the left and asks, directing her question to Dean.

Dean is the love of my life, as I am his; I never imagined I could be so certain of anything. He sits in a chair on my left, opposite of Jaide. Each time that Rosa asks him if I will wake up soon, I don't hear a response. I think it's because, each time that Rosa asks him this question, the tear in his heart lengthens until it's almost completely in two pieces. After all, how do you tell a 5-year-old that their 24-year-old sister might not wake up?

What currently occupies my mind is that Dean is going to be the hardest to convince. I can convince Jaide and Rosa, no problem. But Dean knows. He's felt what I'm feeling now because, he too, has been in this bed. He feels what I feel, so he too, is dying inside. But even with my shattered heart and wandering mind, I still love him with every detached piece of myself. If I could just wake up, then he and I would be husband and wife. Together we would live this life, the way a life is intended to be lived.

I thought that being unconscious would stop the racing thoughts, or at least slow the pace. But the shame, the guilt, the regret, only intensify the racing in my mind. The part of me that so desperately doesn't

want to wake, is exceeding the part of me that is grateful to be alive. Even if I could open my eyes or move my body, I don't know if I would. I think I would just lay here so I don't have to answer the questions or even more unbearable, apologize. I can't wake up. I'm no good at apologies, especially if I'm not sure that I genuinely mean it. I think that I would mean it, but that doesn't make it any easier.

What am I going to say? I'll tell them that I'm okay, even though I'm clearly not. Or I'll tell them that I just had a bad day. Fuck. They won't believe me. Or maybe they will.

Fuck, my head hurts.

I can't face them all. Maybe I can convince Jaide and Rosa. But not Dean. Not my mother.

My mother is the furthest away from my bed. She is sleeping in an uncomfortable chair across the room, slightly facing the window that looks out to the cemetery where my father is buried. I think I want to wake up now. I want to open my eyes and walk over to her sleeping body and wake her so that I could tell her, *I'm sorry*. I'm sorry for being the reason behind the exhaustion in her body and the heaviness of her barely beating heart. But maybe it's better if we both sleep; because sometimes the nightmare isn't in the dream, but when you wake. No one knows this better than me. Her heart is the weakest, aside from mine, for being victim not once, but twice, to the absurdness of this life.

Although I cannot see outside of my own mind, I can hear the tears falling in the room. It's achingly painful to not know what is going to happen: or when it's going to happen: or *if* it's going to happen, I think we can all agree. I'm still shifting between wanting to wake and never wanting to. I still don't know what I'll say. I don't know what they want to hear from me to make this all okay.

This waiting is becoming intolerable, because none of us know what we're waiting for. Maybe for someone to come in and say the words that everyone needs to hear to feel slightly whole again. Or that it's too late, and I'm not coming back from this. So, we wait, hopelessly, because it's all we *can* do. All but Rosa. For a child is always the first to see the rainbow after the rain, no matter how long it takes for the rain to stop. To see through the lens of a child is something I often wish didn't part with age.

As the day persists, the state of the room hasn't changed; still suffocating. But I'm feeling more like I might wake up. If I do, then maybe I shouldn't waste my time pretending anymore and just be honest. I'll apologize to them all because even though this happened to me, I did this to myself. *I should have come here myself, but not like this. I'll do it right next time. Fuck, I swear, I will.*

I wonder if this is how Otto Plath felt after he died. I wonder if he feels the same self-inflicted agony that I feel right now for the pain that I've caused on my family. I wonder if he feels at all, wherever he is. *Do we have the ability to feel anywhere other than here?* I wonder if Aurelia Plath blamed herself for not forcing her husband to seek medical care that could have, undoubtedly, saved his life. I wonder if Rosa, Dean, and Jaide will feel about me, the way Sylvia Plath did about her father. Like it was a choice, and we chose to leave, like it could have been prevented. Now, this is the only way I can see this going. *Please, God, don't let me wake. They'll hate me.* The way I hate myself for the way I ended up here. For being a coward. For not thinking of anyone but my own damned shitty self. For giving up when I didn't have to.

The self-sabotage is interrupted when I hear a distinct set of footsteps from what sounds like a mile away.

The sound of each step touching the ground is coming nearer, but the time between the steps is expanding. I know that they are the footsteps of Jaide's father, or S.D., as I've grown to call him. It stands for "Sort-of Dad". I don't think he's figured out the abbreviation yet. Sometimes I'll call him "Mr. Cruz" if I'm trying to be polite. S.D. has recently taken on the role of my doctor. To have his job is one of the hardest in the world because, like most doctors, he wants to save them all. But this job is especially difficult for Mr. Cruz because I know him and because, he knows me. I hate to think that if I would have come to him sooner that I wouldn't be in this bed. Because they say the sooner you treat something the better chances you have at getting through it, and as much as I hate to admit it, it may have been true. But there's no sense in contemplating what I should or shouldn't have done, because it doesn't matter at this point. What's been done has been done, and this, right now, is where it's led to.

Although Mr. Cruz. is, and always will be, happily married to Jaide's mother, he is the closest to a father

figure I've ever had, hence the "S.D.". Everything he did for me wasn't in an effort to take my father's place, but in an effort to give a fatherless child just a glimpse of what it felt like to have one. To relieve me of some of the abandon that I've felt since the day I was born. And I felt it.

I was never looking to replace my father because nobody ever could; from what I hear he was *the* one of a kind out of all the one of a kinds. And although I never met him to know if this was true, I still love him, because he and I are the same; I know this now. He died before I was born so my mother gave me the honor of sharing his name. Skylar Love. Same name, same mind, same heart. Like father, like daughter.

In this case, I wish it wasn't so. Right now, I feel closer to him than ever before. Maybe I'm crossing over.

I hear S.D. approach the room, it sounds like he's stopped just before entering. I don't hear him come any closer, so he is probably standing in front of the door or looking in from the hallway window. Something cues him to walk into the room. I don't have to open my eyes to know that he has walked over to Jaide, grabbed her head and kissed it. This only makes Jaide more emotional. When he is through comforting his daughter, he takes a few steps towards my bed. He grabs my right hand and kneels down so close to me that I can feel his breath on my cheek. I already know what's going to happen. He's going to say something so effortlessly profound like he always does. And it's going to make me not want to wake up, even though his intention is the opposite. I hear him take a deep breath and I know it's coming.

"Skylar... I finally figured out what it stands for, 'S.D.'... You know, even being your 'sort-of dad' means to world to me because, I always thought of *you* as my S.D. My "sort-of daughter". I'm really glad we're on the same page. Speaking of pages, you need to wake up, darling. You need to finish all the books you've started. Nobody, not even the people who know you the best, can finish them for you." He stops for a moment, but I know he's not done.

How did he figure it out? I didn't even tell Jaide. And why did he have to bring up my unfinished books? I didn't even think about my stories last night and how unbearable it would be if I don't get the chance to finish them. I have to write about this. Fuck, I need to wake up soon. I need to write this all down before I forget. If I don't wake up it will all my gone. Everything I've ever written, gone.

Fuck, what have I done?

Mr. Cruz takes another breath, and here comes the rest. He continues whispering so low that I'm sure no one can hear but the two of us.

"I know you're scared, we're all scared, but it's alright. Open your eyes or squeeze my hand, give me a reason to wake up your mother. This can't be the end, not like this." He pleads of me and waits by my side to see if I respond.

I can hear you! I'm listening! The words don't leave my thoughts.

I try to move my hands, because I know it's no use trying to open my eyes. I try and try but nothing happens. His sigh says that he is disappointed, but it's his tear the I feel fall on my right hand that says he is equally hurting. I don't think that he knows that his tear landed on my hand because he doesn't try to wipe it away. I've never seen Mr. Cruz cry before. I caused this, and I feel awful about it. I think he really thought I would be able to respond. I thought so too. He squeezes my hand and kisses my forehead. He stands up and walks away to comfort the rest of the room.

I know what I'm going to say. I'm going to say, "*I'm here. I'm alive. And I'm going to do it right this time.*" Yeah, I'll say that, and they'll believe me because, I'm going to mean it; more than I've ever meant anything.

But what I will say or will not say make no difference, if I don't wake up.

Something causes Rosa to unwrap herself from my arm. She sits on the edge of the bed and faces Dean.

"Dean. I'm cold." she complains. This isn't what I was expecting her to say.

I hear the movement of Dean removing his jacket, the jean one.

"Here, Rosie." With Dean's help, she puts his jacket on that is way too big and heavy for her.

She loves that Dean nicknamed her Rosie. She loves him the way she loves me, the way a younger sibling loves their older.

I hear her tiny footsteps walk over towards our mother.

“Mama,” Rosa gently tugs on our mother’s hand, the same way she does when she is the first to wake up in the morning. “Mama.”

Our mother wakes.

“What is it Rosa, is she up?” She jumps out of her seat too quickly.

“No. But she’s going to wake up soon. I saw her fingers move.”

She felt it. I didn’t know if I got through.

“What?” My mother seems doubtful, I can tell by her tone. “Did any of you see it?” she exhorts, hoping someone will say yes.

But everyone in the room stays silent.

“Rosa. You need to be careful what you say, this isn’t the time to play games.”

“But Mom! I saw!” She tries to defend herself. She shouldn’t have to. I should be there to do it for her.

“Rosa! Enough.”

“But!” Rosa doesn’t give up that easy.

My mother doesn’t verbally respond but I know the look that she gave Rosa and I know it was enough for Rosa to back down. She comes back over to my bed and wraps herself around my arm again.

I’m here baby sister. I’m here.

For the first time today, I feel something that I haven’t in the hours that I have spent trapped in this bed and in my head.

I feel it coming.

The blood in my veins seem to be flowing normally. My heart is beating at a steady pace. The thoughts in my mind slow just enough for me to remain sane for a moment. I feel Dean hold my hand and for the first time, I *know* that I’m holding his back.

“Skylar!?” Dean jumps out of his chair as soon as he feels the movement in my fingers. I hear everyone else do the same.

“Is she waking up?!?” I hear Jaide shout. “What happened?”

“She held my hand! I felt her move! I swear she did!”

He felt me. I think I’m waking up. God, please, let me wake up.

S.D. walks back over to me. “Skylar? Skylar? Can you hear me? Move your fingers, or your toes, anything if you can hear me, sweetheart.” He grabs the hand that isn’t holding Dean’s to see if there is any movement.

I suddenly get the strangest feeling. It’s like I’ve opened my eyes, even though I know that I haven’t. My eyes are closed but I can see everything in the room. I look around and the image before me freezes in my head. I see them all, as if I’m looking at a photograph filled with beautiful and aching people. But they don’t know that I see them.

I’m here. I’m alive. I’m going to open my eyes. I’m going to do it right this time; life.

I inhale a deep breath. I hold it in for what feels like three expanded seconds.

And with the release of my breath and all that’s been trapped inside, I open my eyes.

Escapism

Anonymous

Whenever I don't want to think, I play a little game. Wherever I am, working an 8 hour, stuck in my shit apartment, or just walking down the street, I try to find parts of the ground that stick out. Ones that are shaped different or have a different color, and I try to only walk on those. The adult version of 'The Floor is Lava'. It looks silly and people would always try to avoid me on the streets because of it, but it works. I put my focus into each step, making sure I only walk where I'm supposed to. Where each foot is meant to go. It would take over my mind to the point that whatever I was thinking about before just fades away. I forget it all.

I'll Drive

I want to get up and pace. Find the tiles that are a different color, jump between them and have my mind just go away again.

I was told not to.

"Wait here, we will be back in a moment."

I don't remember their face, but they probably know best. I still feel heavy from the drinks, and if I tried to play the game I would just fall and trip someone. Better to stay sitting down.

C'mon Frank

It's cold here. Like I'm stuck in the arctic in all my magnificent glory. It's a look for sure, like a big fuck you to mother nature, but still not the best for the climate. I can even feel the wind, icy and fast, coming straight for my head. Just me standing in the middle of the blizzard, being torn to shreds by scraps of ice the wind brings with it. It's dreadful.

I take my free arm to pull my jacket closer in to keep warm and take a glance around the area. It's a damn long hallway, and people keep passing through so it must be a pretty big house. I can see it now, out in a hillside looking over their miles and miles of land. Have their own private theater, wine cellar, and even a private landing strip. Able to fly wherever they want whenever they want. That's the dream.

I wish I had something to drink though. To make me feel warm again, if nothing else. But they just left me here by myself, nothing to do or anything. Rude bastards. Or maybe, they went out to get some more drinks, which in that case I'll have to thank them later.

I'm fine man, shut up let's go

They could've turned the lights down before they left. The whole place is so fucking bright, I can hardly

even look up. Maybe I should ask someone to turn them down. I mean people keep passing by me, all in a hurry too, but none of them seem to care. I guess some people like bright lights, but I'm guessing they've never had a hangover either.

I wipe my face of whatever is probably stuck on it, and reach out to another guy that's passing me.

"Hey man, can yo-," I manage to say before he side steps away from me and keeps walking. Damn how drunk am I?

I recline back into the chair, the type you'd see in a waiting room, and I try to get myself comfortable. Right as I get comfy, I get bit of an itch in my ear, so I have to lean forward so my arm can reach and scratch and lose my comfortable position.

My hand feels a little sticky, probably from the booze. I am not the most delicate drinker, never have been, but neither is Frank so I guess we work pretty well together.

Don't forget seatbelts

Speaking of which, where the hell is Frank? That fucker had my keys, and no way in hell am I walking back to our place.

"Frank?" I call out. "Frank, you dumb shit where are you? We need to start heading home."

A group began to slow down as they passed me. I took a look at them and they just looked like such damn nerds, about 3 of them dressed in some white lab coats and passing around a clipboard. I want to tell them to make themselves useful and grab me another drink, but I need to know where Frank is..

"Hey? Hey... um.. do you guys know where Frank is?"

They began to slow down a bit more, and began to whisper to each other like this is middle school. After a bit of that, one of them stepped up to me.

"Franklin Hemirson," they ask me?

I force my head into a nod, "That's the one, where's the son of a bitch?"

Again the group goes back to their little whispers. I guess this is how we're doing things then, assholes. I don't want to look desperate though, so I try to look around all nonchalant. I try to read some of the signs around me, and I spot one pretty close

E---ge-y R--m

"Shit! SHIT STOP!"

Yeah I am still very drunk, I cannot read shit. I turn my head back to the group, and they're all just staring. Yeah, I know I look stupid guys but that is just rude. Didn't they ever learn some manners, god damn.

I shrug my arms at them. “Well? You wanna answer the damn question?”

Another one of the geeks takes a step towards me. “Sir, he is being treated right now, please remain here,” and before I can get another word they just leave. I try to get up, but my arms are almost glued to the chair and won’t follow. I look back down at them and I see the handcuffs.

Frank? FRANK!?! GET UP!

How long have those been there? Who the fuck would think this is funny? I want to get home and go to sleep. I don’t want to be chained up at someone’s place.

“HEY! Someone get these damn cuffs off!”, I scream out. No one listens, they just begin to pass me by faster.

“GET THE FUCK OVER HERE AND LET ME OUT!”

No no no no no no

“Sir, I’m going to ask you to be quiet.”

I look up, and it’s the guy that told me to sit down earlier. He looks pissed off, staring me down like he’s trying to reduce me to ashes. I don’t know why, and right now I really don’t care, I just need to go.

“Man hurry up and get these cuffs off me, this isn’t funny anymore.”

SOMEONE HELP!

He just stands there, staring down at me.

“I just want to get home man, please. I’m tired.”

PLEASE SOMEONE!

“You’re not going home,” he says, almost like a growl. “Franklin Hemirson is dead.”

NO! FUCK DON’T BE DEAD

I stare at him, dumbfounded. He’s fucking with me right? He has to be. We haven’t even left the party yet, unless someone killed him themselves no way he is dead.

“Quit fuc-,” is all I say before he uncuffs me from my chair, but then cuffs my hands behind my back.

No no no no no no

“You have the right to remain silent.”

No

“Anything you say can and will be used against you in the court of law.”

Please no

“You have the right to an attorney.”

Please be a dream

“If you cannot afford an attorney one will be provided to you.”

Please wake up

“Do you understand these rights?”

I look back at him, his face is pure anger. I want to tell him he can go fuck himself. Acting all superior like he is and trying to ruin my night. But then I see the blood. Sticky, all over my shirt, jacket, pants, even my shoes. I feel my body jump at seeing it all, but the man holds me back down and I feel a wince of pain on my soles. I look closer and see little shards of glass, stuck in the cracks of my shoes and in between my laces. I feel my breath escaping, and take a long breath to bring it back in. I lick my lips and taste the blood on my face, the iron getting onto my lips and leaving a taste in my mouth.

I look around and see where I was sitting hallway is only 20 feet away from the emergency room. How did I not see this? How could I not notice?

This isn't a joke.

Save him! I beg you please!

I look to his eyes, still piercing through me waiting for my response.

“Where am I?”

His eyes widen a bit, and I hear him begin to berate me before he stops himself. He moves his eyes away from me now, and I sink further down.

“Chicago Lakeshore Hospital.”

“Wait here, we will be back in a moment.”

I feel the tears begin to come. Begin to clean my face of the blood, the dirt, and whatever else is on there.

“Please sir,” I beg. “I don't remember anything.”

The man straightens himself up, and looks down on me.

“Do you understand your rights?”

I'm not dumb, just slow. I can put the pieces together, it just takes a little nudge. Frank is dead. I was the driver, and he was the passenger. I don't have to know the details to know what happened. There are times where your mind doesn't need that weight.

“Yes, I understand.”

Adventures in the Land of the Dead

Brennon Brennan

“I wish I never met you, you freak! I wish you were dead!” Anthony Davis felt his hands pushing his former childhood best friend away from him, pride and exhilaration rushing through his body as he did so. Emily stumbled backwards, coming to an unstable stop in the middle of the road; her face was a mask of shock and pained hurt. She looked like she was about to cry, which goaded Anthony into shouting at her even more; “Yes,” he hissed. “I’ve hated you since we first met, now do everyone a favor and get out of my life!”

Emily’s voice was cracking as she choked out “So that’s it, huh? After all we’ve been through? Be careful what you wish for Anthony, because you just very well might get it.”

Anthony snorted in contempt and deliberately turned his back on Emily, flipping her off and laughing as he did so. That was when he heard it; the shriek of rubber on asphalt as it accelerated towards him, then the horrible crunch of a huge metal object slamming head on with a body at full speed. He tensed his body and doubled over as though he were punched in the stomach, and his body began trembling uncontrollably as sweat rushed out of his pores. Slowly, he struggled to turn around to stare at the gory mess and the broken body that was all that remained of Emily Dale; his childhood friend, whom he had mentally and emotionally destroyed not two seconds before...who now lay dead at his feet in a pool of blood and broken bones. Her eyes were glazed and wide open; a look of terror and angry pain frozen forever on what was left of her contorted grimace of a face.

Anthony felt a sick feeling of heaviness hit his stomach and heart like a battering ram, and he felt weak in the knees. He let out a broken cry as his knees buckled and he fell to the blood-stained blacktop as tears drowned out his senses.

“Anthony!” a man’s voice called out amidst what sounded like a busy train station. “Can you hear me Anthony!”

Anthony opened his eyes to find himself laying on a platform of the station, staring at a creature with the head and hindquarters of a brown and white goat. It had the torso of a female human, black feathered wings and a black torch crown with a glowing pentagram on it. Something stirred in Anthony’s memory, he had seen this strange goat-man before. It was a Baphomet.

Anthony let out a scream and scrambled to his feet before running blindly in whatever direction his limbs would carry him. He did not have time to take in his surroundings before he heard an ear-splitting

DING, DING of a trolley bell. He turned to look into the blinding headlights and froze like a deer before hands grabbed his shoulders and hauled him backwards. Both Anthony and the Baphomet stumbled out of the way of the trolley just as the driver shouted at them. Anthony just barely caught a glimpse of the driver's face and felt his stomach twist in revulsion at the pale green skin of a rotting corpse.

“Watch where you're going!” the dead man yelled as the trolley rushed past them.

Anthony struggled to get loose from the Baphomet's embrace, flinching constantly as the trolley cables sparked in a four-by-four rhythm. “Let go of me, monster!” he shouted.

Immediately the Baphomet released him with an offended huff. “You're welcome, you ungrateful little snip!” it grumbled. Ruffling its feathered wings and straightening its magenta vest, it took on a mildly softer tone of voice. “Come on, Anthony. We need to get to the others.”

Anthony jumped at the sound of squealing brakes and the Baphomet hopped onto the waiting trolley, beckoning him to follow. The boy made his unstable feet move onto the trolley and sat on a wooden seat, trying not to stare at the passengers who, just like the previous trolley driver, were all corpses. The Baphomet sat down across from him, nodding in acknowledgment to the passengers, who were staring at the living Anthony in confusion. “What, never seen two guys board a train before?” the Baphomet asked them, forcing them to shrug and resume their afterlives.

Once the trolley began lurching into motion the Baphomet leaned back and proceeded to groom his wings with his hind hooves and scratching the top of them with his horns. As soon as it saw Anthony staring at him, the Baphomet stopped what he was doing and say “You're staring. Let me guess, you've got questions.”

“Oh, er, yes. Yes, I do,” Anthony shifted uncomfortably in his seat as he tried to think of what questions to ask. “Who are you? Where am I?? Why am I here?!”

The Baphomet held up his hands until Anthony shut his mouth. Once Anthony calmed down the Baphomet gave him a quizzical look. “You seriously don't recognize me?”

“No! Why would I recognize a demon being?” Anthony replied.

The Baphomet flinched at the harsh word before snapping “I am *not* a *demon*!!! You knew very well what my purpose is! And you know who I am, I can see it in your eyes. But for your convenience I'll show you.” With that being said, the Baphomet sat cross-legged, pointing one hand to the sky and the other to the ground. “Your friend used to keep me in her room as a symbol of protection, and she also requested that I protect you as well.”

Anthony was taken aback by the passion in the Baphomet's voice. He searched his memories long

hidden away from when he and Emily used to be friends. Yes, he remembered. He remembered that when they were two lonely friends against the world who had an interest in witchcraft and the occult; Emily had kept an idol of Baphomet in her room surrounded by candles and aromatic herbs. Now this same Baphomet was sitting in front of him, life sized and staring at him intently. “It really is you,” Anthony whispered.

“Call me Baphi,” Baphi resumed to sit in a normal position. “Now, as to your other questions. The answer as to where you are may be a bit scary, but you are in the Land of the Dead.”

Immediately Anthony let out a cry as a jolt of shock and fear coursed through his body, “Am I dead?!”

Baphi rolled his eyes and sighed “No, you’re not dead. Now take a few deep breaths before I continue.” He waited until Anthony calmed down. “As to why you are here in this place, consider it penance for what you said to Miss Emily and putting me out of a job.”

Anthony felt his fear dissipate and be replaced with irritation, “Wait, *I* put you out of a job?!”

“Yes,” The fur on the back of Baphi’s neck was beginning to bristle. “It was *my* job to keep both you and Miss Emily *safe*. But since *you* wished death upon her, you *got* that wish, and I was unable to keep her safe. I couldn’t keep her safe...not even from *you*...”

The Baphomet bowed his head and screwed up his long goat-face in pain as he was forced to relive his failure to protect the two charges. As Anthony watched Baphi’s slow decent into depression, he tried to change the subject in order to save the Baphomet’s mood. “So, is this place where the dead go when they die? It looks just as depressing as I imagined it,” he said as he looked around the dingy tunnels that the trolley was traveling through.

Baphi lifted his head and looked out at the dark dripping tunnel and replied “Yeah, this is where they go, don’t worry about the looks of these tunnels. This place is actually not bad on the eyes kid, just give this rust-bucket a second to exit the tunnel.”

Not long after he said that, there was a bright blinding light as the trolley exited the tunnel to reveal the vast city of the Land of the Dead. Anthony’s eyes widened at the sight, as it contrasted greatly with what he had initially imagined the Land of the Dead to look like. The lights ranged from blues, greens, pinks and golden yellows as the buildings were decorated with marigolds and old Edison-era lightbulbs. He couldn’t help but compare the architecture to the buildings back in the Land of Living, except much older in age. After a while, the trolley’s breaks shrieked, its bell rang, and the cables sparked as it came to a stop, making Anthony flinch and twitch uncontrollably in discomfort.

Once the trolley came to a complete stop, Baphi hopped out and beckoned Anthony to follow. The

two walked through the twists and turns of the city until coming to a stop at an old warehouse with a hotel in the front. “Welcome to the Wardencllyffe Laboratory and Hotel,” Baphi said, spreading his arms and wings to show off the expanse of the property. He pushed open the rod iron gates, brushing his wingtips against the two gatepost gargoyles. Anthony followed him up the hotel stairs as the Baphomet pushed open the two creaking wooden doors.

The hotel’s interior was a stark contrast to the outside; red carpets with golden arches and chandeliers, the very definition of a grand old hotel. Several of the residents waved at Baphi and called out greetings to him, to which the Baphomet smiled and returned their calls. “Hey, Charlie, how’s the skit going? Tennessee, how’s your play going, the actors doing a good job? What’s up Vincent, how is your new painting coming?”

As Anthony looked at the residents whom Baphi was talking to he realized to his immense surprise that they were famous people; Charlie Chaplain, Tennessee Williams and Vincent Van Gough. He stood staring at them until Baphi’s whistle brought him running to catch up as they made their way to the hotel bar. There were three dead men standing at the bar drinking spirits, one of them seemed more inebriated than the other two. Two of the men had zombified, decomposing birds—a white pigeon and a raven—perched on his shoulder. When Baphi shouted at them, they turned around to reveal their identities, and Anthony let out a gasp of surprised and suppressed excitement. The one with the pigeon was Nikola Tesla, the tall man in the middle was H. P. Lovecraft, and the man with the raven was none other than Edgar Allan Poe.

“Hello boys,” Baphi said as he put his arms and wings around the three men, who seemed to take the friendliness despite their discomfort—mainly from Tesla and Poe. “Guess who I brought with me.”

They turned to stare at Anthony, who felt himself flinch involuntarily at their hard, dead stares. Lovecraft was the first one to step forward, his tall, skinny frame towering over Anthony and said in his high-pitched New English accent “Should we bring him to the room?”

The other three nodded and made their way to the elevator with Anthony following in their wake, it seemed, against his better judgment. The elevator operator pushed the fourteenth-floor button, then pulled the lever that caused the cage door to shriek shut, making Anthony flinch and twitch, before the lift moved up the floors. The lift shrieked to a halt, making Anthony shudder and whimper while trying to cover his ears, though it felt that his arms were like lead weights. The hallway was lined with doors, each one lit by an old lightbulb, Tesla gave a look of distain and grumbled in his thick Serbian accent, “It’s quite sad when the lights and electricity being used here is from a no-good thief and talentless hack.”

“Just be thankful that the Land of the Living uses your alternating current and not—” Baphi tried to

begin until Tesla cut him off.

“Don’t mention that name!” Nikola growled.

“Is he talking about Thomas Edison?” Anthony blurted out without thinking about what he was saying.

Tesla covered his ears and let out a cry of anger, which sent his pigeon flapping about. “I told you not to say that name!”

The raven that was perched on Poe’s shoulder began cawing out “Nevermore!”, which made Poe shudder and pull out a flask from his coat pocket and take a swig. “I wish I had done what Van Gogh did and cut off my ears,” he moaned. “Perhaps then I wouldn’t hear this blasted bird!”

“Nonsense,” Lovecraft chimed in. “The voices are all in your head, just like Vincent’s.”

The group stopped at a door numbered 3326, but Tesla, Lovecraft, Poe and Baphi stood back for Anthony to open the door himself. He knocked on the door, which opened a crack, and immediately felt a sense of dread and didn’t want to go inside. He looked at the four standing behind him, but they wouldn’t budge, Baphi nodded his head in acknowledgement for Anthony to move forward. He pushed open the door a little further and went inside.

There were no electric lights in the room, but there was a faint blue glow in the farthest corner. As Anthony stepped further into the room, the glow revealed itself to be the ghost of a ball python...*his* ball python, whom he had named Clyde, who died two years before. Anthony gave a cry of joy at seeing his beloved dead pet and held out his arms as the snake wrapped itself around them. “Oh, Clyde I missed you,” he said as the snake’s ghostly blue tongue flicked in and out of its mouth, touching his cheek.

“Funny,” a female voice said from the darkness. “You’re excited to see your pet that died of natural causes, yet you don’t even acknowledge the one you yourself did in.”

‘*That voice,*’ Anthony thought with dread, ‘*it can’t be...*’ But it was.

Without warning, Clyde wrapped his ghostly skeleton around Anthony’s body, tightening it in a strangling merciless grip which squeezed all of the air out of him. The voice was closer to him now, and Anthony could see a dark shadow approaching him as he struggled to move. “Apologies for Clyde’s behavior, he only obeys me now.”

“Who are you?” Anthony managed to choke out. “What do you want, why are you doing this to me?!”

The voice let out a chuckle that was filled with dirt. “You seriously haven’t figured it out? You really have become stupid haven’t you. Allow me to shed some light on the subject of your idiotic questions.”

Suddenly a light flashed on revealing the ghost of Anthony’s past in all of its decayed glory; Anthony

felt a cold chill of shock and dread creep down his spine when he saw who was standing before him. It was Emily Dale, or, at least what was left of her. The right side of her face and body was like that of the other zombie's faces; pale acidic green, though much more decayed. The left side was that of a skeleton with a crack in the skull with grey matter showing, and her naked ribs were exposed through her torn purple shirt. Her eyes were black and soulless with pale yellow pupils and her mouth was a permanent grin, yet Anthony could see that despite the smile she was not cheerful. Her voice was much different then it was when she was alive; it was now hard and accusing, filled with bitter dirt and venom. "Hello, schmuck."

Anthony was riveted to the spot in horror at the obvious changes in Emily, both physical and personality. She was no longer the bright, shy girl who was by his side through thick and thin, but cold, cynical, accusing, and sadistic. He was so terrified that he was unable to respond save for the gurgling in the back of his throat. "What's the matter?" she asked with a wicked smile. Suddenly she shoved a bony hand into Anthony's mouth and pulled out his tongue, holding it between her dead calcium fingers so he could see it when he crossed his eyes. "Karma zombie got your tongue?" She let out an unearthly cackle as Anthony struggled in disgusted discomfort.

Anthony wailed in terror until Emily released his tongue and turned around wiping her hand on her moldy shirt. Anthony managed to choke out a sentence, as well as dirt and bone-dust. "Emily! What happened to you?! Why are you doing this?!"

Emily jerked her head in his direction with a snap of her neck. Her eyes were cruel dots filled with hatred and pain, her voice was like a cold hiss of steam. "What happened to me? What *happened* to me?! *YOU HAPPENED TO ME YOU MORON!!!* You were my one and only friend, until you started growing some I guess...then you started treating me like garbage. To top it all off, you wished me dead!"

"How was your death my fault?!" Anthony said, goaded by his indignation at the accusation.

Emily grabbed Clyde's throat and yanked the ghost snake hard, which tightened its hold on Anthony's body. Her voice was an unlovely shriek "*YOU SHOVED ME INTO THE STREET, RIGHT INTO THAT ONCOMING VEHICLE YOU PIECE OF JACK-TRASH!!!!*"

The timely intervention of Baphi, Tesla, Lovecraft, and Poe saved Anthony from becoming a permanent resident to the Land of the Dead. The ruckus from outside of the room forced the men to break down the door and rush in to break the potential revenge-murder up. "Emily," Baphi put his hands on Emily's tense, shaking shoulders in an attempt to soothe her. "Calm down, it won't help anything by killing him. That's not what you really want is it?"

Emily's teeth were grinding in fury as her trembling hands still sought to keep a tight grip on Clyde's head. As Poe and Lovecraft tried to disentangle the snake's body from Anthony's, Tesla looked at the white pigeon upon his shoulder and said in his thick accent "Three my love, would you help us out?"

The pigeon—Three—started to coo in a bell like voice, a tune which Anthony recognized as "La Llorona", or The Crying Woman. He remembered how Emily's grandparents—namely her grandmother—used to sing it to her when she was little. Then her grandmother died when she was ten, followed by her grandfather when she was twelve, which devastated her. That was when Anthony began to associate with the popular crowd and joyfully tormented Emily for her loss. The pigeon's rendition of the song seemed to work, for Emily's grip on Clyde's neck loosened until she finally let go.

Once free of his former pet's suffocating grip, Anthony was hoisted to his feet by the three dead men. Once he was standing, the cold dead grip of the men's hands made him flinch, and without warning, launched himself at Emily. He bowled her over and tried to choke her, feeling horrified when her neck vertebrae came apart and her head launched itself at him, burying its teeth in his arm. He was so shocked that he sat up trying to pry her jaws loose from his arm, allowing her headless body to push him over and start slamming his head into the floor multiple times.

"Come on you guys!" Baphi cried out in protest. "This isn't what we planned! It wasn't supposed to be like this!"

"Lay off goat," Poe said, his depressed attitude lightening up for the first time that night. "Let them speak their pieces first." The raven upon his shoulder crowed the word 'Nevermore!' again, leading Poe to shout at it "Shut up!"

Anthony and Emily rolled around on the floor, hands on each other's throats, shouting insults at each other.

"I hate you!" Anthony yelled.

"I hate you more!" Emily shrieked back.

Poe started to chuckle uncontrollably, leading the other three to stare at him in slight reproach. "Leave them," Poe hooted, "this is the best reunion I ever attended!"

"What is the point of doing this to me, you're dead it shouldn't matter anymore!" Anthony shouted.

"Dead or not you are a low-life piece of scum who treated me like garbage when I was alive, then aided in me getting killed!"

"What have I done that was so bad?!"

“You seriously don’t remember? You pushed me into a locker, mocked me by using my grandmother’s name, tried to throw basketballs at me while I was swinging, and tried to choke me with the swing chain!”

“I was a stupid kid then—”

“You’re a stupid kid now for what you’ve done to me when I died!”

As the two previous friends scuffled on the hotel room floor, Baphi let out a sigh of exacerbation and stepped over their bodies until he was standing next to their heads. Bending over he grabbed both Anthony and Emily by the scruffs of their shirts and shook them none too gently and chiding “Alright that’s enough you two, you both got to have a go at each other, now knock it off!”

The two crawled away from the Baphomet, massaging their necks and glaring in hatred at each other. “Now,” Baphi said in a deep authoritarian voice. “Emily, this isn’t what we planned. Our plan was to bring him here to stay and that’s *it!*”

“Why would you want to bring me here? What makes you think I would want to *live* here?!” Anthony shouted.

“Because this is your penance for treating Miss Emily like garbage along with wishing her dead, and you’re going to stay here where we can keep an eye on you,” Lovecraft said in a stern voice.

Anthony could see that he was not fully telling the truth, but before he could call him out on it, the ground started shaking. Anthony was terrified as the tremors got more and more pronounced and the entire room began to sway. The others; however, seemed to pay the earthquake no heed, merely swayed with the motion. When Tesla noticed Anthony’s look of confusion, he patted the living boy on the shoulder, making him flinch. “Don’t worry,” he said, “this happens all the time.”

The tense silence became heavy, and Baphi eventually stepped forward and said “I think that we should all at least turn in, hopefully tomorrow we can start over.”

Everyone nodded in assent and Anthony was hustled out of the room by Lovecraft, Poe, and Tesla, with Clyde wrapping his coils around his body in a restraining embrace. As Lovecraft and Poe left for their own apartments, Tesla beckoned Clyde to drag Anthony into his room. “You’re staying with me tonight young man,” he said in his thick Serbian accent. Tesla took out his key from his pocket and unlocked the door to his room numbered 3327. The room was small and cramped, made even more so by the giant pile of letters and inventions.

“My apologies for the mess,” Tesla said as he cleared a space on the bed. “You can sleep in my bed, I rarely use it.”

Clyde, with his ghostly coils still wrapped around Anthony's body, slithered over and laid the boy down on the bed like a mummy in a sarcophagus. Anthony was forced to look up at the awkward, smiling, zombified face of the Serbian inventor as he said in his thick accent "Good night Anthony, sleep well."

The night wore on slowly, and as Anthony sadly realized, was sleepless. Tesla only nodded off for two hours before his inventions and desire to tinker with them took control of him and he worked the rest of the night. The noise of the city activity combined with the screams of Poe and other residents also kept Anthony awake for most of the night. Clyde's tightly bound coils prevented him from getting comfortable, but it did succeed in muffling his cries.

The moon's light glowed brighter as the twelve hours of night gave way to the reflection of the daytime; Anthony opened his sore red-rimmed eyes to see Tesla slumped over his desk, feeding Three and stroking her white feathers. He tried to rise, but Clyde's ribs poked his body and the snake's coils tightened their grip. Finally, noticing that his former master was awake, Clyde loosened his hold on Anthony, permitting the boy to sit up. Tesla noticed the movement and perked up with an awkward smile "Good morning Anthony, sleep well?"

Anthony gave him a reproachful look but did not answer. Tesla did not seem to notice the look and continued to speak, "How's about a spot of breakfast?"

Clyde perked up and floated over to the door of the tiny room, dragging Anthony with him. He followed Tesla down the hallway to the lift, before they stepped inside Anthony dug his feet in and stumbled over his words, "Er, can't we take the stairs instead?"

Tesla gave him a look and opened the door to the lift, but said nothing, forcing Anthony to step inside the small cage. The door shut with the sound of nails on chalkboard, the noise forcing him to make an involuntary flinch as the lift jerked slowly down to the main lobby. Tesla led him through the giant lobby to the dining room where many of the hotel residents—famous and average Joes alike—were sitting eating what the kitchens had to offer. The people still cast shocked stares at Anthony, but he did not give them the satisfaction of reacting to their stares.

The trio joined the table where Lovecraft, Poe, Baphi and Emily sat taking breakfast, with two extra leaden plates for the new arrivals. As Anthony sat down Emily turned her head away from him, her broken neck vertebra cracking as she did so. Anthony didn't care, as he was still bitter about his reunion with her the night before, and decided to turn his attention to his breakfast. He had the much smaller bowl, filled with oatmeal that looked and smelled more like the result of food poisoning. He looked at the plates of everyone

else, and was slightly perturbed at the much more higher quality delicacies they contained. Anthony shuddered and managed to close his mouth over a spoonful of the foul mush, but was forced to spit it out in a choking fit at the smell and taste.

He gave a pleading look at the others, but none of them seemed to notice his situation. He didn't notice Baphi give Emily a small nudge with his black feathered wing, but a few seconds later, she had pushed her plate of food over to him. He looked at her in surprise, but she wouldn't meet his eyes; instead she rose to her feet and disappeared to go up to her room. Anthony turned his attention back to his new plate of food, and was nearly moved to tears at how good and refreshing it was for real sustenance to slide down his throat for the first time in what felt like months. When he and the others had finished their breakfast, he gave Baphi a look, asking for silent permission to take his leave. The Baphomet gave a slight nod, handing him a key. After putting the key in his pocket, Anthony took his leave with Clyde floating after him.

When he was gone, Lovecraft asked "You really think this is going to work?"

Baphi narrowed his eyes and gave a smile before replying "Oh yes, it's going to work."

Anthony turned the key in the hole and opened the door to the dark room, stepping in with renewed purpose in his gait. He found Emily on the balcony staring at the lights of the City of the Dead. She didn't even turn around to look at him, but said in her usual hard voice, "I never found them you know...my grandparents..."

Anthony didn't say anything as he went to stand beside her. She continued to lament as though he wasn't there. "My folks...I can never see them again, except maybe for a few hours on the second of November. If you ask me, that isn't enough time. To tell you the truth, I don't even know how my parents are doing now, and because of you I will never know."

Anthony felt a bitter sting of indignation rise up in him, but he forced himself to choke it down. Instead he managed to say "I should have been there for you when you needed me, but I wasn't...I'm sorry Emily. I don't ever expect you to forgive me—and frankly I can completely understand if you don't—but there wasn't one second after what I said to you that day that I don't regret, and I will always regret it to the end of my days. I'm so sorry..." As he said this, he genuinely felt saddened at the fact that he did so many terrible things to his friend, and he wanted to make the most of his apology now that he had the chance to do so.

Emily was silent, staring straight ahead of her, glaring her yellow-pupiled eyes in a hurt expression. Finally, she responded "I will never be able to forgive you for what you did and said to me...but the apology is appreciated."

Anthony felt himself droop at the opportunity of forgiveness being dashed, but then Emily let out an unsettling chuckle. She asked “Remember when we were kids, and we used to watch movies and fantasize what the Land of the Dead would look like?”

“Yeah, and you thought that it would be a cool and ironically lively place whereas I thought that it would be like the River Styx in Greek mythology...” Anthony couldn’t help but smile at the memory.

“I win the bet, sucker,” Emily chuckled in her unsettling dirt-filled laugh and gently punched Anthony’s arm with her bony hand, but he found great enjoyment in it.

“So...” Anthony began, “this is where you live now...not a shabby place.”

“Yeah, but it would be nicer if I could find my family members.”

“I know that you won’t forgive me for what happened,” Anthony said, “but I would like to help you find them.”

Emily stared at him, her permanently grinning mouth growing slightly wider as she said “Thanks, schmuck.” Suddenly she perked up, “Hey, let me show you around my new digs! Come on!” With that she grabbed Anthony’s wrist in a vice-like grip with her skeletal hand and dragged him down to the lobby where everyone stood waiting.

The day passed by like a blur for Anthony; Emily and the gang showed him all of their favorite places to visit, dine, and drink. They went to the theatre and watched Charlie Chaplain’s and other actors’ small skits and explored Tesla’s laboratory in Warden Cliffe, marveling at his Teslacoil. Anthony could not remember how long it had been since he had had that much fun, especially with people whom he idolized in his youth. As the day came to an end and the gang returned to the hotel, Baphi bought Anthony his own room, much to his delight. They all stood in the hallway talking about the day and which parts they enjoyed the most.

“I rather enjoyed my work,” Tesla said.

“You would,” Lovecraft grumbled, “I for one, enjoyed the theatre.”

“I liked the bars,” Poe lamented as he took a swig from his flask.

Eventually Poe took the moment of silence to head to his room, “Good night all,” he said. The raven perched on his shoulder crowed out “Nevermore!”, which led Poe to start sobbing in despair.

Lovecraft and Tesla left to their respective rooms next, then Baphi, leaving Emily and Anthony alone in the hallway. “That was rather fun,” Anthony broke the silence. “I greatly enjoyed today, heck I enjoy being here more than I thought I would.”

“Glad to hear it,” Emily said in a short voice. “Well I had better turn in, as should you. See you

tomorrow schmuck,” with that Emily disappeared into her room.

Anthony and Clyde went into their own room numbered 3325, slightly depressed at Emily’s sudden short demeanor. He let out a sigh and an involuntary shudder as the room started to sway again before laying down on the bed with Clyde wrapped around him. As he stared at the ceiling, he was lost in thought; he managed to come to terms with the fact that the Emily he had known in life was gone forever, being replaced by a more bitter alter ego. He hoped that he could be able to help Emily find her grandparents, earn her forgiveness, and perhaps return to the Land of the Living in the end. With Clyde’s coils wrapped around him in an uncomfortable, restraining embrace, Anthony managed to drift off to sleep despite the loud noises of the city and cries from the denizens.

Meanwhile in her own room, Emily stared at a mirror depicting what was going on in the Land of the Living, her dead brow furrowing as she stared into the glass. She looked at the door while running a bony hand through her moldy, matted hair, her fingers brushing against her exposed brain. “Yeah, you’d better enjoy it here, because it’s far better than up there.”

“How is patient number 3325 doctor?” a nurse asked as she followed a tall man dressed in a white lab coat.

“He does not seem to be responding to any of the treatments, but these things take time after all,” the head doctor responded. “What have we got scheduled for him today?”

“Well, he is due for another session of electroshock therapy, and another dose of his medicine.”

“I heard that he wouldn’t take his medicine, not even when we put it in his oatmeal,” the doctor commented as he waved for two more assistants to help with moving the patient to the electro-therapy room.

“Well, we will have to inject him with it,” the nurse said as she stopped outside of the solitary confinement door where the patient simply dubbed Number 3325 sat.

“Very well,” the head doctor said. Peering through the single window into the tiny cushioned room, the doctor was able to see the young straight jacket-clad teenage patient sitting in the center staring ahead of him with a vacant, thousand-yard stare. Looking at the clipboard outside the door, he looked up the patient’s name and the required medicine. With a smile, the doctor said in a silky voice “Good morning Anthony Davis, it’s time for your therapy.”

THE END?

El Sacrificio

Diana Zamudio-Garcia

El atardecer estaba soleado. It was a victory for the blue sky. Huitzilopochtli must have woken up in a good mood. I had passed my mathematics test with a C and I was happily walking back home, to tell my mami that my grades were finally getting better. Caminaba with my carnalita down Williams Road in East Salinas, el camino we regularly took. Suddenly, three shots fired. The banging vibrations propagating the audible sounded like when my carnal, Pablo, opens up a cold Coronita and bang, the cap falls off. Then, the once trapped, white, non-transparent vape comes out to freedom.

Only these shots were much louder.

Ohh the damage that opened Corona will do.

Especialmente a mi brother.

All this rushed through my head, but I knew I needed to protect my hermanita. The shots where in that same street, I had to take cover. Le dije:

“Nancy, metete abajo del carro.”

And with tears balling out her ojos negros, she threw herself to the floor and crawled under the gray minivan. I followed. More shots were fired and we saw how the other students ran.

Pendejos, porque no se cubren.

It was too painful to watch. I held on to Nancy, covered her face, and told her:

“No mires, niña, you are too young to see this.”

We were under la ven for what felt like an eternity, when we finally heard the sirens de los Puercos y las ambulancias. It was too late once the authority was there. The vagos were gone, and so were some students.

Once Nancy and I got home, mami and papi were not there. They were still working en el campo, but the house phone had over thirteen missed calls. Mami's voicemails were all the same:

*“Miguel, cuando lleguen a la casa, me llaman.
La escuela me llamo. Se que paso mi niño.
Cuidaste a tu hermanita? Vamos en camino m'ijo.
Por favor llámame y dime que estan bien.”*

I knew mom was being brave, but I heard how much more her voice would break with every voicemail she left. I could not bring myself to call back. I was processing what had happened, and I thought about what I would say if I called. Nancy ended up calling mis padres y avisó que estábamos en la casa, pero que teníamos mucho miedo.

Since that day, I never recentered. The next day when I went to school, mi amigo, Danny, was not there, and I did not see him since. More shootings took place that year. I was triggered all the time. I was constantly on alert and I always went by my day ready to duck down and cover, como mis papis cuando ellos cruzaron y se cuidaban de La Migra. My grades dropped and I began to look for protection in the hood and la escuela. Mi carnalita and my homies started walking to school and home together. Nancy did not like this. Mis “amigos” le chiflaban and asked her to be their hyna. My mom hated them even more, me decía:

*“Que ya quieres andar de Cholito en pandillas,
O que chingaos.
No, nos venimos p'al Norte
pa'que termines con esas pendejadas!”*

Mami, nunca me entendio. Recivia mis cinturonzos y chanclazos once in a while, but this lifestyle worked for me at school y en la calle. I was no longer stressing, and at times, I was a little too relaxed in class. Maria Juana became my best friend and Perla became my hyna. Todo estaba bien and then reality took a shot once again.

I was 17, just learning how to live life. Hell, I was still a child myself. How was I to raise my son when I was

just learning to raise a boy, me. I was scared.

She was affiliated with the thirteenth letter of the alphabet, La Eme. Los azules, Los Sureños. Y yo, pues everyone knew my homies were de Nuestra Familia. I was never one of them, but Perla's crew knew, and associated me with los Norteños. Nuestra historia de amor was like Romeo's and Juliet's.

That's if I remember correctly or

I was probably too high in my English class

and I got that love story all wrong.

Era amor prohibido, como el de Selena y Chris Pérez, el guitarrista. It was as toxic as Diego's and Frida's relationship. Even so, we went against all odds and decided to raise our child in a non-broken home.

This fantasy only lasted a while. My mom would always shun her and call her Puta for opening her piernas. My mother wanted her nieto, but she did not want my son's mother. My sister isolated her. I was given an ultimatum. Not by any of these three mujeres that I lived with, I placed this on myself. I had to choose between la madre de mi hijo y mi madre y hermana. I chose my mom. Perla did not last long. She grew tired of the abuse from my familia and from me. I was living in Mictlan and I drowned myself in Pulque. So she left, took my son, and demanded child support.

If I was already doing bad, this just threw me off. I turned to the streets. El Barrio became my escape, mi apoyo. Simultaneously, El Barrio was also biologically killing me. I was dealing merca local to pay of the child support, but I got caught by a pig near the Swa'mi. The burdens felt heavier than the weights from the gym in Juvie, but I got lucky that mi mami did not like seeing me there. My parents and siblings bailed me out, but it wasn't that long before I went back to my routine. The pesas I carried, outweighed me again, and soon I was not just dealing, I was also consuming. I don't recall todo lo que me metía, I just knew it felt good being away. At least mentally. This then got me in trouble when the Boss noticed that the numbers did not add up. He threatened me. He demanded his money and said:

"If you don't get me my money by next week,

No la vas a contar, cabron.”

Pero donde iba conseguir yo, that kind of mula.

I was terrified and decided that I was not going to return. Se me hizo facil nomas no volver. Then, one night en la cual Coyolxauhqui brillaba intensamente I was walking las calles de Salinas a la casa de Perla para ver a mi hijo, Chuy. De un instante al otro, the bright night dimmed pitch black and suddenly, I became extremely cold, my goosebumps se alteraron. Me entró un escalofrío. My unbuttoned flannel shirt and my gray tee was no longer enough. I finally understood why mami yelled:

“Ponte un suéter que hace frio.”

A gang of five vicious guys came at me like when Hernan Cortés and his Spaniard colleagues went after Moctezuma and his Aztec empire. I froze in time and prayed:

“Padre Nuestro, que estás en el cielo...

Haz de tu voluntad en la tierra como en el cielo.”

Then I ran. I ran as fast as my feet could take me. I ran like a cheetah, a Nagual, and my heart beat started raising and beating like the drums in the danzas de los Aztecas. I was running out of breath, and suddenly, I heard my bro’s cold Coronita again. Bang! I felt the bullet penetrate my chamorro like a Tepoztopilli wounding me. The adrenaline enabled me to run a few more steps and then the pain became unbearable. My leg had failed me. I was rolled up in pain, holding me leg.

Tengo mucho dolor, y tantas ganas de seguir corriendo.

Pero el miedo me paralizó.

They caught up to me and forced me to face up and I saw once again the clear, dark blue sky, and the bleeding Coyolxauhqui. They weren’t Spaniards or Hernan Cortes, they were mi gente. They were my Aztec warriors getting ready to pull out mi corazon and offer me to Quetzalcoatl. I felt the Macuahuitl, the hungry wood,

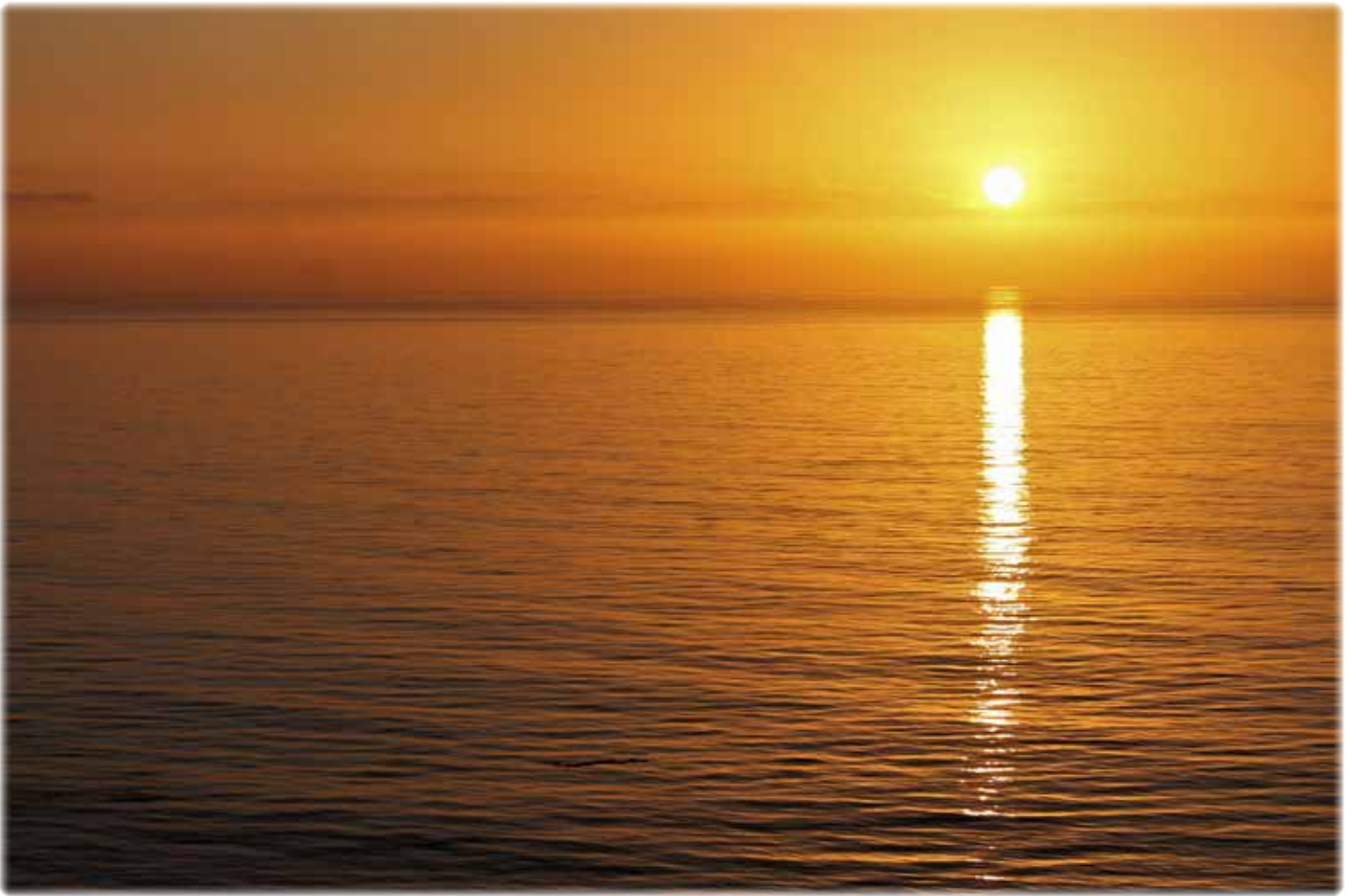
jabbing near my rib, and the sturdy kicks with los Cortez. I got punched on the face several times and all the teeth were knocked off. They took them for their victory necklace, and I was left there. I was bleeding out and I wanted to save myself, but I did not have the strength to move. All I could do was think of mi niño, Jesus. Mi Chuy. All that I had to teach him, all that I needed to thank mis padres, carnales y carnalitas for. And all I could do was rezar:

*“Tonantzin, ruega por ellos y por nosotros,
Los pecadores. Ahora y en la hora de nuestra muerte,
Amen.”*

Visual Arts

Alyssa Herrera





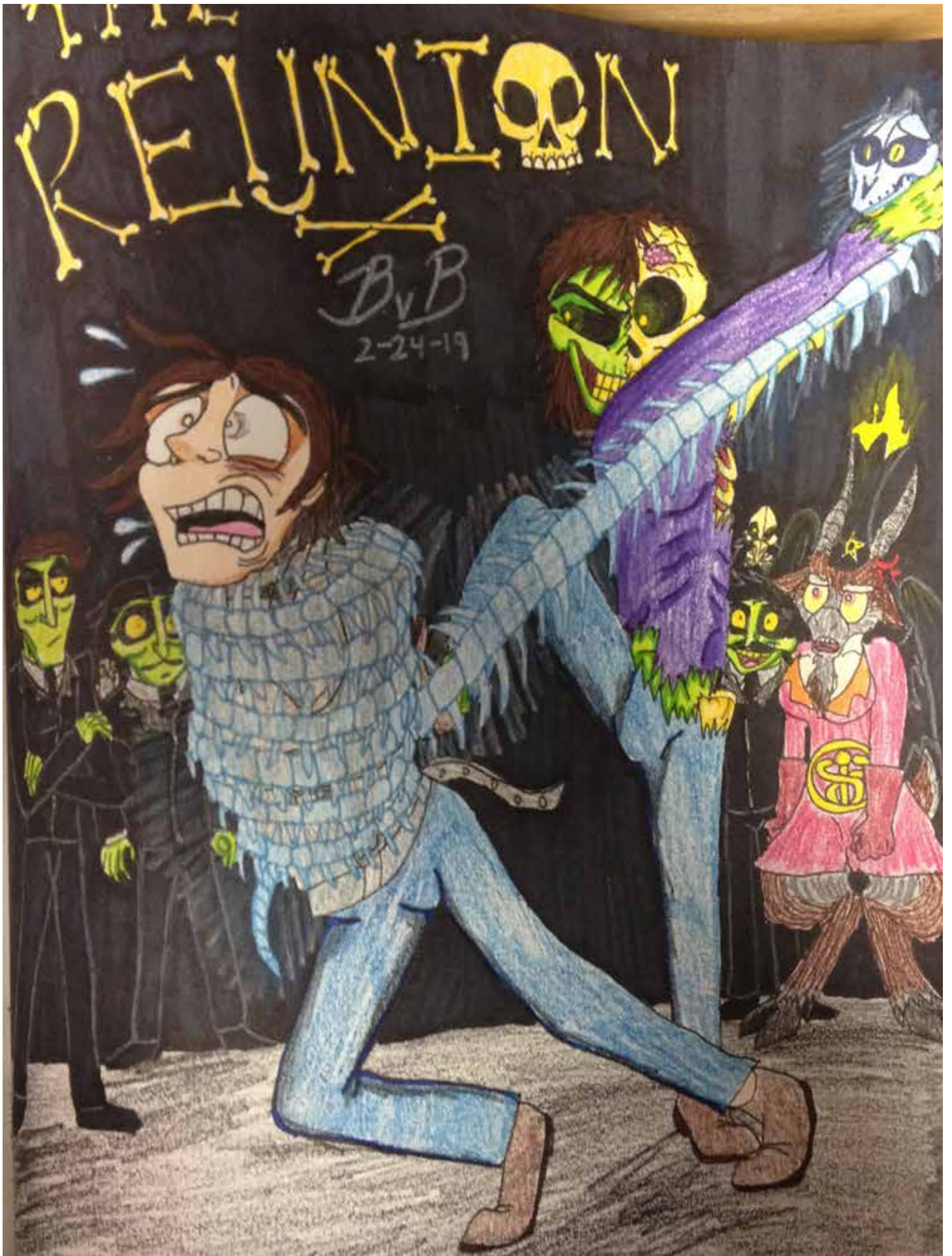
Anthony Jimenez





Brennon Brennan





Nancy Smith





Yazmin Macias





NON-FICTION

In Memory

Anonymous

Let's be completely frank, movies are full of shit. Whenever someone dies, the people around them are complete emotional wrecks, and the weather is raining and storming. It looks like the world feels the pain too, like this death meant something to more people than that person could've ever realized.

But this doesn't happen. We aren't special, the world doesn't bend over backwards to cry for us. Countless people have died before us, and countless more will follow. Good people, bad people, leaders, tyrants, lovers, and enemies. Not one person gets special treatment. I have become painfully aware now that the world simply does whatever it pleases.

It is getting close to three years now since she died. While it does sound like a cliché, nobody had any idea. We all came into class that day, pulled out our textbooks, and began slogging through another day. Once that class was done, we moved onto the next and the next after that. With every hour that passed we all remained blissfully unaware, and we were all just waiting for the next lunch period.

That was a weird lunch. They told us right before, our teachers I mean. We all knew something was up, as the principal and counselor had been pulling teachers in and out of classes for the last half-hour. It started off slowly at first. Around 11, I went down to speak with the school counselor but couldn't find her. When I asked some of the people at the front desk, most of them had no idea. However, a few looked like they were ready to pop. Their faces were flushed, but their eyes were drained of life. They tried not to look at me, afraid they would let loose the secret. Honestly they were almost just teasing us, building anticipation.

Most of us, myself included, had assumed there was another school shooting in the area. We had already had one at a college nearby, and I think another at an elementary school, but that could've been later in the year. So by the time we had already closed the blinds and locked the door they finally worked up the courage to tell us. Sarah Sun was dead.

If I was told the day before that she was going to die, I wouldn't have believed it. May have even laughed in your face. She was the ultimate stereotype of the perfect high schooler. She was the top of her class, was the Student Body President, was even active in sports. Yet she was still kind and caring. She was absolutely hilarious with a sarcastic humor I greatly appreciated. She was relatable, and able to help anyone out with their classwork, stress, or just to vent with. She was great at so much. She was great at too much.

Stress really is an unforgiving bitch. Looking back at the day before I can see how stressed she was, but at the time I couldn't be bothered. I think I had a paper that was due two days before, and I had to think up a way to guilt trip my professor into an extension. She asked me for help with something for a school event. I like to think that I took some time to help her, that I was able to give her a little relief, but I don't know. It's probably safer to say that I told her I'd do it later. That is a hard thought to swallow.

I don't remember much that they said when they told us. As our teacher began to speak, I began to see tears come down her face. As they continued to explain, the room just became a vacuum. It was so unbelievably loud, I couldn't hear a thing even if I wanted to. Yet, no one else was talking. We all just sat there and listened in complete and utter silence. I was afraid to even move, that just one small turn would break the silence and the world would implode or something. I would've been ok with that actually. At least then I would be able to hear again.

I didn't even notice when the teacher finished speaking. They just stood there in silence with us. They probably didn't know what to do, they probably wanted to let out all of the tears they were failing

at holding, but they had to look strong.

Eventually she broke the silence. “If you need to step out for a moment please feel free.” Once she finished speaking, the silence returned. I looked around to see if anyone else wanted to be the first to go, and met some others looking for the same in everyone else. I was desperate to get out of the silence though, so I rose from my seat, pushed in my chair, and quickly made my way outside.

I had known Sarah since the sixth grade. We both attended the same private school, yet we had very different lives. Even then she was still popular, and I was very much not. I half-assed about everything I did, was excessively rude, and just generally reclusive. I disliked most everyone because I didn’t understand them, I didn’t understand why they did things or why they acted how they did. I’m still confused by people, but I try to be more curious than resentful. However, back then, I really hated her.

I’m pretty sure I said this to her face back then too. “I don’t like you. You’re so cold-hearted and mean. How do you even have friends?”

I don’t know how I didn’t get bitch slapped, but she simply turned and looked right at me. She showed no fear, and after a moment she began to smile and even laugh at me.

“What makes you think I’m so mean? You don’t even know me enough to like me.”

I hadn’t prepared that far, and before I could even think of a comeback she turned back to her friends and moved on.

I hated her even more. I felt stupid and pathetic, and slowly began to wobble myself off to some corner to sulk. I just thought about what she said, “You don’t even know me enough to like me.” She was right. I knew nothing about her. She worked hard every day to be who she was, and I didn’t see that. I simply saw something I wanted to be, and got mad I couldn’t be it.

The moment I left the classroom I think it finally hit me.

“Sarah was dead.”

“She was dead.”

“Just dead.”

“How is she dead?”

“Why?”

“I don’t understand.”

“How?”

“Please!”

“What is this?”

“Please, no.”

I heard someone call my name to my left, and before I knew it I was hugging one of my friends. They were inconsolable. I don’t know if they said something to me, and I don’t know if I said something to them. How long did I hold them? Why did they let go? Did I push them away? I don’t know. I just knew I had to leave. I needed to hide. I needed to get these feelings out of me, and get back as soon as I could to help everyone else.

Maybe I was wordless, or maybe I explained that I had to go, but I found myself walking away from the main building of my school. I saw my classmates around me. Some were silent, others very much not. It wasn’t quite anymore, but I couldn’t hear a damn thing. This silence was infective, almost as if my whole body could no longer make a sound. With each step I took, I heard nothing. Just a silent ringing in my head.

I don’t know why I wanted to go into Student Body, but I just did. All of my friends made fun of me, but it was something I wanted to do. To at least say that I tried to do something to make things a bit less shit.

I still ran in a very undesirable position. “Club Coordinator”. I think the only reason no one wanted it is because you did nothing. I ran unopposed, and began working the week after. I didn’t know who was involved in the position before and I didn’t really care. I just wanted to be a part of something.

I went into the meeting room to see many people that I've never spoken to before. I knew no one. That's always a fun feeling in a very un-fun way, so I tried my best to soldier on and find one of the few people I did know, Hannah.

Abbey had just been elected as the secretary, so she should know what I need to do, or which direction to go to find out.

"Hey Hannah! So what exactly do I do as the Club Coordinator?"

She looked up to me with a massive smile.

"Hi Charlie! You can just talk to Sarah about what to do, she was Club Coordinator last year."

I became afraid. I don't know why, but I knew how I remembered Sarah, and maybe I was just afraid of how she would remember me. I turned to see where Hannah was pointing and saw Sarah getting some paperwork gathered.

I shuffled myself over, trying to hide how awkward I felt. Before I even got to her table, she looked over to me.

She smiled.

"Hey, Charlie! How are you?"

I hope I did not look as startled as I think I did, but as I remember it I was a deer in headlights.

"Hi, I'm doing good! I was told to talk to you about the Club Coordinator position."

I hadn't even finished the sentence before she went shuffling for my specific work folder. She opened it up and explained it all to me. How each form is written and where it goes, how she thinks best to organize everything, and even inviting me to ask her for help anytime. The whole time I felt worse and worse. I had hated her. I did hate her, yet she was being kind and thoughtful. She treated me as best as she was able to, and I knew that if the roles were switched I probably wouldn't have been as good. I really hate myself.

I kept moving forward. Past every building, past every distraught friend. I just kept walking.

I walked to the grapefruit grove right outside our school, and went right in. I began to walk slower. I had to step around all of the massive grapefruits that had fell and splattered on the ground. I stepped over the ones that fell recently, the guts still pink and juicy and the rind a golden yellow. I stepped over the ones that had fallen a long time ago. They were now fly food, rotten on the inside with a broken and crusty skin.

With each step further and further in, I tried to take my mind away and focus on the grapefruits. Feel the wind on my skin and through my hair. Listen to the leaves crinkle with each step, and the birds chirping in the trees.

I can hear.

I could no longer hold it back now. I leaned up to a tree and just began to cry. The birds kept singing, and the sky shone beautifully through the leaves of the trees. The grapefruits left a sweet smell in the air that the wind continued to just roll around me.

I hated her.

I didn't know what happened, but I knew in the back of my mind the truth of it. It didn't make it any better to swallow though, so instead I just decided to hate her.

Halfway through the year, the student body president decided to quit. Sarah was the vice-president at the time, so she then became the president. Hannah was a very good friend of Sarah's, and later got elected as vice-president to help her out.

Sarah did not care for the position, but took it on anyways. I don't think she saw it as a choice, but a responsibility that she was obliged to carry out. She put as much as she could afford into her work, and it clearly showed.

The whole time, I don't think I saw her relax. Not a single time.

Actually, that is a lie. There was one time I remember where she looked purely happy. It was at a dance we put together. Some dumb, "we're halfway through the year so why not celebrate" kind of dance. It was country themed too, so I was already dreading it. She still put everything into it.

When the day came, there were obviously a lot of little hiccups. First the speakers weren't working, then

half of the decorations hadn't gotten put up, then we ran out of tables. With each hiccup, she took it upon herself to find a solution.

"Call Stanley and ask how they are configured."

"Everyone let's get together and get this all done."

"Can a few of you go and borrow some tables from the classrooms?"

She knew what to do every time, and helped in every single part of the event. Eventually the sound started working, and the decorations got up, and we brought more tables in, and made sure everyone was getting the help they needed.

Once the dance started, the tension died down and everyone began to enjoy themselves a bit more. Sarah was still staying on top of everything. Refilling refreshments, checking people's tickets, taking out the trash. Only near the end did she finally start to relax.

I was sitting at the entrance just relaxing and enjoying some instant-mix gatorade. She and her boyfriend went onto the dance floor and began to do a slow dance. She looked truly happy. She had a massive smile as she danced, a damn contagious smile. I had a massive grin just from seeing her happy. It was really wonderful to see.

I really tried to hate her. I wanted to hate her for being cruel. For being selfish. For leaving all of her friends and family like this. Broken and in disarray.

But I couldn't.

I was so mad at everything, but I just wanted her to be back. For this to be some sick joke that we can all laugh about years from now. Or maybe that our teachers made a mistake, and that she was just a little bit sick but not gonna die anytime soon.

Maybe this was a joke? Maybe she was already back at school laughing it up with everyone. I wiped my eyes of all my tears, blew out my nose and cleared my throat as best as I could before I started to walk back.

It wasn't a joke. Everyone was scattered across the school. I starting circling around cause maybe, just maybe, she was in some corner.

On the first rotation, I saw everyone still mostly silent. Even though I found my sound again, I guess most people were still having trouble. Most of the girls were sitting and crying while the guys tried their best to comfort them. But for the most part, people just sat in silence. They had nothing to say, and didn't want to say anything. Their heads were already loud enough.

The second rotation, people had begun to move around. But only pacing. Back and forth. Back and forth. Back and forth. The silence was starting to fade now, but only little whispers were spoken. The air was still delicate, and if someone raised their voice then the sky might fall.

The last rotation was the worst. The girls had finally gathered themselves and had begun to comfort each other. The guys took this chance to go into privacy and silently bawl their eyes out. That is one of the most defeating feelings. Seeing someone that was so strong not long ago reduced to tears. It makes your heart just sink.

I can't take it anymore, everyone's faces, tears, and whispers. I walk into the main office to see if I can leave for home.

That's when I hear Hannah.

I didn't see her, but I could not escape her screams and crying. She was in the counselor's office, with the door shut, but you could still hear her throughout the building. I liked Sarah, but she was Hannah's best friend. I don't know how she felt, but from those cries I'd say it was close to a knife in the heart. Over, and over, and over again.

I can still remember the screams.

The next few days are a blur. I didn't go to school, I hardly even left my room. I just laid on my bed and tried to find things to take my mind off of her.

They were all in vain though.

Each day after that I could only think about what I could've done differently the day before Sarah died.

“Maybe if I gave her a hug...”

“Maybe if I gave her a call that night...”

“Maybe if I noticed how she felt...”

“Maybe if I told her how much she meant...”

“Maybe if I just paid attention...”

“Maybe if I didn’t focus on myself...”

“I could’ve saved her.”

But eventually, I got myself back to school. Back into class, and back to trying to get through another day.

When I returned, I was greeted by silence once again. People were talking, and moving, and going on with their life, but there was still a delicacy with everything. The ice was still thin, and we all had to tread lightly. I sat down at the front, and ready to move on.

“Welcome back class,” our teacher said. “How is everyone doing now after the weekend?”

I don’t know what possessed me to say this, but without thinking I said with a smile “I cried the whole time.”

Why did I say that, who knows, but it was the truth of it. I had been living on a water bed for the past few days, and I just needed to get that off of my chest.

The teacher gave me a sad look, like I said what was on everyone’s mind, but then moved on with the lesson for the day.

“Are you okay?”

I look to my right and see a girl I have rarely ever spoken to looking towards me. She had a sad look in her eyes too, and probably like me had been crying until that morning, but she still forced a smile.

“Yeah,” I say. I look at her in the eyes, and give a smile back. “I’m ok.”

This gives her some relief, and returns another smile back to me before returning to the lecture.

Later in the day, she hands me a little note before heading to her next class.

“Everything is going to be ok, and I’m here for you.”

It’s the last day of school of my Junior year. Sarah Sun died on April 14, 2016. It hasn’t been easy to adjust, but somehow I think we all have managed.

The week after she died, I started to work on a small memorial area with the girl that gave me that note, Lucy. Lucy got a bunch of small plants and ornamental rocks that she decorated, and planted them all on a small square of dirt right by some of the school. I built a large garden ornament in metalshop in the shape of a sun, and put it right above Lucy’s small memorial rock. “Sarah Sun, 1998-2016.”

Everyone is celebrating the last day of school, and the summer break so close that we could taste it. Everyone in the student body helped put together a little carnival for our last day, with a cotton candy machine, bouncy house, and a homemade slip-n-slide kickball game.

It’s a nice and sunny day, the same as the day we found out Sarah died. Everyone seems to be enjoying themselves too, able to cool off from the heat and enjoy the diabetes on a stick we were handing out.

When it was all over, and I began to head off home, I made my way towards the small memorial we made. The flowers had established very well in the ground, and Lucy has been taking amazing care of them all.

I look down to the little memorial stone.

“We miss you,” I whisper. “I really wish you were here with us, and I’m sorry I couldn’t be there for you. I keep thinking back on the day before, and wonder what I could’ve done differently. Maybe it would’ve helped, but then again maybe it wouldn’t.”

“It’s just so hard sometimes, to keep going. To find that way forward. It hurts. To move each foot forward, one in front of the other. But I want to keep trying, I want to keep going. I want to become better.”

I stood there, listened to the wind, the trees, the cheering and fun screams in the distance. It was really a beautiful day. Just like that day, with the sun shining down, the wind riding through, and every bird singing in the trees.

The world was trying to show just a small reflection of her, of Sarah. Trying to remind us of the the

wonderful person that we had lost. Show just a smidge of the beauty she had. Maybe this isn't the case at all, and it was just a sunny day, but I like to think otherwise. That maybe we do matter, maybe we mean something, and maybe the world feels with us. I like that thought.

I look back down at the stone, with Sarah's name written boldly on top, staring at the sky.

"See you next year man."

A Wake Up Call

Eric Garcia

I wanna to say that I “had a sense of style,” but honestly, I’m in desperate need of some vans. Mom wouldn’t buy me them though, not until my non-brand air force 1 posing shoes bit the dust. I look down at my feet. Nope, not even dirty enough to persuade my parents I need new ones. Maybe I’ll run around the soccer field after work to make them seem beat up. They’re so white so it shouldn’t be that hard. Man, I wish my job actually paid me, so I can buy my own shoes.

Last summer, the manager of the day camp I went to asked me if I want to volunteer. At first I was unsure, since it will take away time from my PS3, but mom said it can lead to a future job. Plus, she wants me out of the house, so to her the stars seem to be aligning. Which leads me to walking in the blistering sun to the community center. Luckily it’s only five days a week, and since I’m doing something productive, video game time increases significantly on the weekends. What sucks is I have to wake up at 8 in the morning, it’s like going to school all over again. Actually I take that back, school is worse.

I finally reach the CCC (Campbell Community Center) and stop to take a break by the small skate park that sits along the track. I lean against a bench and watch kids practice their skate moves, doing kickflips and ollies. Keeping my laughter to a smirk as they lost balance and fell. I can’t help it, it’s funny to watch. Like those fail videos on youtube but in real life. I check my watch, oh shit 8:55am, I have to be there by 9. My dad always told me, if I wasn’t 5 minutes early, I was five minutes late. I run across the parking lot towards the small gym next to the public pool. I jump up the steps and head in through the door. As I thought, I’m the last one.

“You’re late Sprite!” Tank sarcastically yells at me from the other side of the gymnasium.

“Still got two minutes” I reply as I walk towards the folding table at the center of the gym. He shrugs and goes back to shooting a basketball. He was a tall and muscular dude, it’s easy to imagine him riding a Tank, so I’d say his name was right on the money. At the day camp, we didn’t use our real names for some reason. When I first started here I had no idea what my name would be until my friend pointed to my sprite bottle next to me, so I thought why not.

There are four other counselors that work here, and then there’s me, the runt, the Robin to their Justice League. They are all older than me, seniors in high school or college students. I’ve got like nothing in common with them. We sit on our phones and wait for the kids to arrive. Well, they do, I on the other hand pretend like

my phone can access Facebook. The campers start filling in slowly, and after 20 minutes of flying balls and occasional screaming, they all are here. We did the usual day camp activities; play games, water breaks, kids asking if my blood is soda, bee stings, and lunch. Before I knew it, the day is almost done. There's a Laker summer league game on live TV in a couple hours so I couldn't wait to get home.

It's 2:30 p.m. now, and the stragglers are finally clearing out. I look at Tank, who checks his watch and gives me the nod. I wave a quick hand in goodbye and head out the door. My dad said he would pick me up, so I immediately scan the area for a silver Ford Explorer truck. Instead, I see my tita's black SUV, with her standing outside waving at me. I start heading toward her, which is a little odd. Maybe dad was caught up at work again. She seems stressed, not her usual happy self. Her typical sunglasses were gone, her hair all jumbled up like she just got out of bed, and her signature Giants shirt is nowhere to be seen.

"We have to go," she said, her tone much more different than at family gatherings.

"Why?" I asked, my anxiety rising as if I was having an allergic reaction.

"It's your dad. He had a heart attack, c'mon get in the car."

Heart attack.

Those words hang in the air. A phrase that I only hear in Grey's Anatomy or read in a magazine. Not in reality. We climb into the car and drive off. The Laker game feels like a dream now. My face couldn't even make an expression and my smile was definitely not volunteering to change that. I felt worse than dying right before I could get the nuke in Modern Warfare 3. I sat with my head to the window, staring at the open road watching the cars fly by. When we reach the intersection, I wish that she would go straight towards the direction of my house. Like it's a normal day. Without any music to cover the uneasiness, we turn right.

As we drive down the freeway, I think about how my dad would lecture me on the ride home after monthly haircuts, telling me about how chores aren't connected to allowance, and how it builds character. I didn't enjoy them much, but right now, I yearn for his rambling. After what felt like an eternity, we arrive at the hospital. I hop out of the car and gaze up at the massive white building. It felt ominous, or maybe that was just me. My tita gives me a nudge and we go through the sliding doors toward the the secretary's desk. Tita asks for my dad, "Rolando Garcia." Hearing his full name, sent a chill down my spine. It was similar to when my mom sharply hisses my name when she would see unwashed dishes after a long day at work. The nurse points down the left hallway, we said thank you and head off. Not too long after, the corridor opens up into a big room with chairs lined up row by row. Like a graduation, but far from the same feeling. Straight in the dead center, was my

family. Cousins, uncles, and even close friends were all together. My twin cousins trying to keep the atmosphere lively while my aunts sat down to pray. Normally, I would want to go and say hi, but now all I want to do was walk right by them. My mom stands in the middle of them. Her short curly brown hair in order, business casual, like she just got off work. But the brown in her eyes were unusually dull and glassy, making it evident that everything was a facade. When we made eye contact, she flashes a slight smile as she walks over, pulling me into hug.

“Hey,” she said calmly, just like how she says it when I come home from school.

I look up and ask, “Where’s dad?”

She purses her lips, “Come on, he wants to see you.” With that, she takes my hand and we head to the hallway labeled “Emergency rooms.” I glance over my shoulder as the doors close, barely catching a glimpse of my family as they settle into place. I turn my head back around to the doctors running in all sorts of directions as we pass them. I get a pat on the head,

“You okay?” My mom asks me,

“Yeah.” I answer back. Which was the only word I could think of. I don’t know how I felt, it was all happening so fast, it didn’t seem real to me yet. I barely understood algebra, so this was way too much to process. We stop. Room 1152 is shown above, my mom hesitates at first, hand clutching the doorknob. Then, she opens the door and it hits me all at once. Lying in a lonely room, with machines all around him, is my dad. Every limb on his body, tubes circle around them. Up his nose and in his mouth as well. He looks like Goku when he was severely injured. I can’t speak, I can’t move, I can’t even think. I just stare.

“H-H-Hey” He croaks, it was so weak and frail. Not the strong and firm voice I knew. It was different from how he would hiss at me in the middle of the night for making too much noise. His voice sank through my skin and into my bones. I want to cry, but I’m in shock. I don’t know what to do. The doctor came in soon after and starts talking with my mom.

“We have to do a quintuple bypass surgery.” The doctor tell my parents.

I don’t have any idea what he was talking about, but I knew surgery was a big deal. They continue to discuss details that I can’t keep track of. I just kinda awkwardly stood in the corner not knowing what I should do. I look up at the clock on the left hand side of the room. It’s 4:30 p.m. and it definitely did not feel like it. I shook my eyes off the clock and saw the doctor getting up ready to leave. My mom gestures me to come over to her, I walk over as he left the room.

“It’s time to go, we’ll see dad later,” my mom told me. Like the “heart attack,” the “later” made me feel

uneasy, like standing on pins and needles. I look at my dad, he gave me a small grin,

“I’ll see you later bud.”

“Love you” I silently blurt out. It was all I could muster.

He raises two of his fingers as if to wave. Mom went over and gave him a kiss on the forehead, and we head out the door. I try to glance back, but unlike before, the doors had already shut.

Eyes of a Table

Eric Garcia

目 (Me)

As the rain trickles down from the sky, you stand in between the crowd waiting for the light to flicker green. With each dot vanishing from the sign, you waver, unsure if you are to continue onward. Then the crowd moves, so you do as well. Tired from the day of pacing around the city, snapping memories for later, you search the streets for a place to rest. Out of the corner of your eye, a cafe appears. With nothing else but restaurants and stores, you enter.

At the table of the coffee shop with no name, sits a man. There is nothing particularly special about this man. He is neither tall nor short. Not thin and not wide, but nevertheless you stare. Across the room in the corner against the window, your eyes cannot move away as he continues to sip his coffee just as you sip yours. Neither of you are that much different, but in between the sips of coffee, your eyes dart back towards the man.

However, unbeknownst to you, the man also stares at you. With each flip of his newspaper he takes a glance. Back and forth you go, up and down just as a seesaw does, but like a seesaw, the wood will never even out. The exchange continues on until the last drop. You look into your now empty cup, but with a different twinkle in your eyes. You hear the sound of a chair scraping across the floor, your eyes veer upward, and the man is folding his newspaper, preparing to leave. You watch him walk to the door, and as he disappears from your line of sight, you decide it is time to move on as well. Before you depart, you stare back at where the man was sitting, still unable to avert your gaze. Then, you notice something else. You shift your vision to a girl sitting at the next table. Again, she does not stand out, much like the man that had left. Just as your eyes seem to meet, her eyes move. As if her eyes just happened to pass by yours. A small smile appears on your face.

The rain has stopped.

Thanks for
reading!

