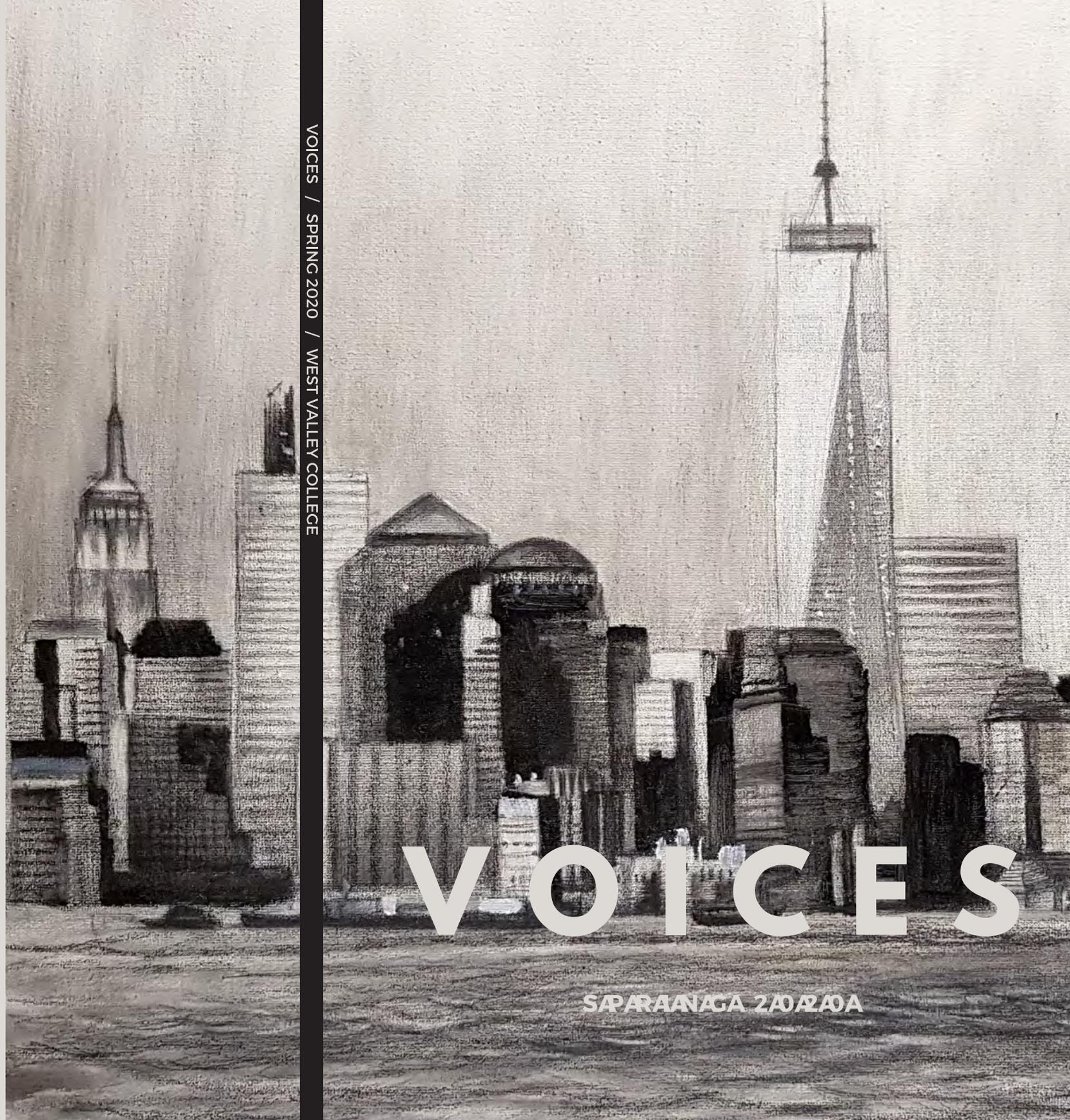


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VOICES / SPRING 2020 / WEST VALLEY COLLEGE



VOICES

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VOICES

SPRING 2020

WEST VALLEY COLLEGE

Voices is a literary and arts magazine that showcases the diverse voices of West Valley College. It is published once every spring, and is produced by the members of the *Voices* staff and English 80 & 81. Current students, alumni, faculty, and staff of West Valley College are invited to submit their works of original fiction, creative non-fiction, poetry, and art for publication.

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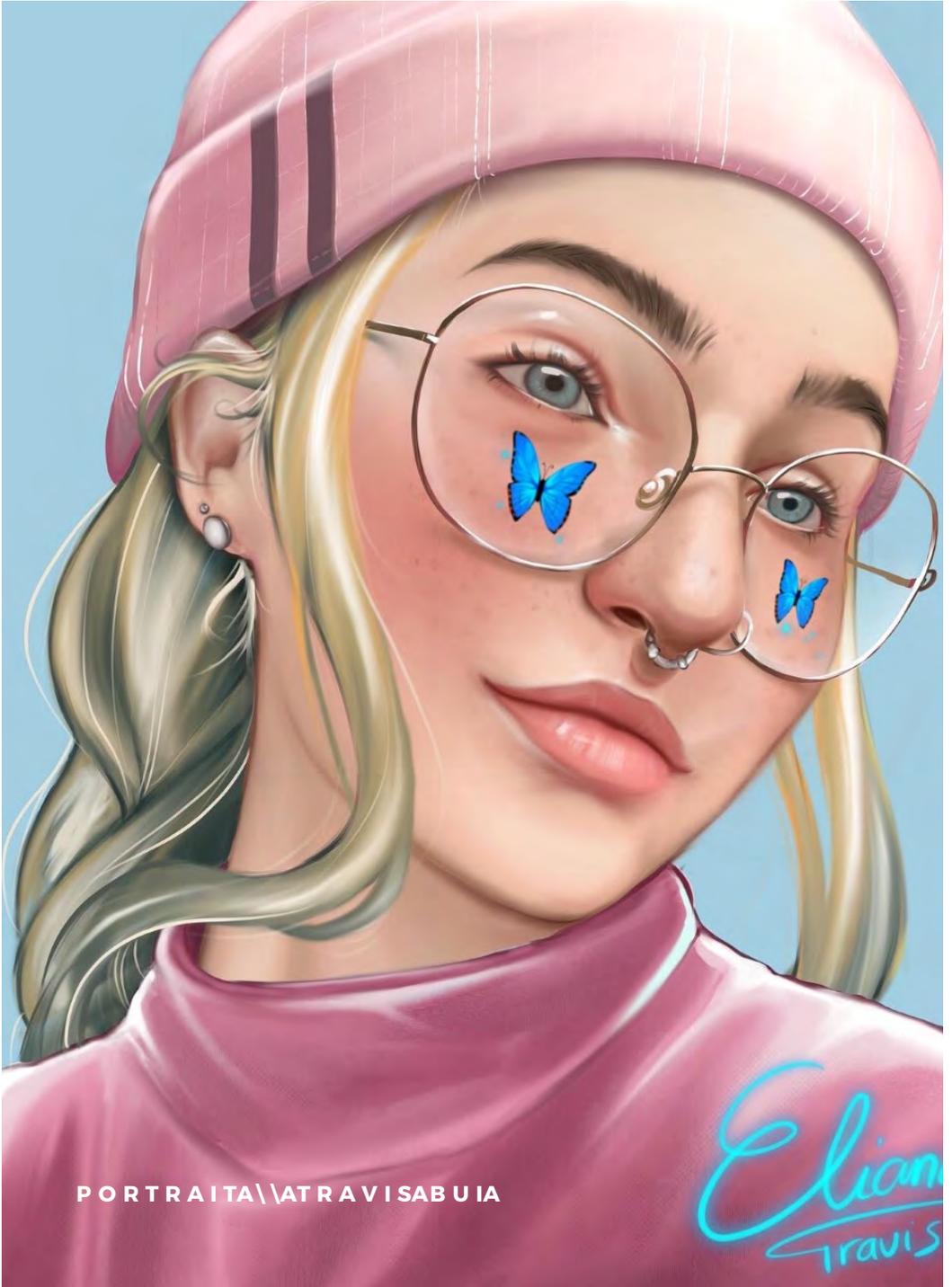
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anu bavra



A LETTER TO FEBRUARY

jessica allegrezza

February-- the edge of a cliff
And I
On feet that I have oiled
But dig my nails in
So deep
It slowly crumbles beneath me
March-- a slow fall
A possible clover-field catch
A more probable needle bed
March-- velocity over time
March needless celebration
until i learn to-- make it
April I will make it to you



PORTAITA\ATRAVISABUIA

Elian
Travis

KING OF DIAMONDS

chloe tuckness

The King of Diamonds sits atop a mountain, overlooking the Valley of Graves below him.

The Valley that bustled with the dance of humanity, always needing to busy themselves.

The dance that rarely left any room for thought between the jarred bodies. The dance so clamorous that it drowned out any sound of compassion. The dance that no one looked up from.

The King of Diamonds runs his hands through the tall grasses of the mountainside, hoping the movement will distract from the tornado of silence in his ears.

Silence that you forget.

Each pocket of air that the city holds has been drenched in pollution and politics, if there is even a difference between the two anymore.

The King of Diamonds pretends to breathe an air superior to that of those in the Valley of Graves.

The Valley where all anyone will ever become, despite their flare of the dance, is a grave.

The King of Diamonds isn't a king at all.

He's hardly of an age where his features match the adulthood he's in. He's only just more than a child.

And he isn't "of diamonds." He could never be.

He tells himself that the shattered glass in the street are diamonds. Not another act of violence.

No.

"These clear, sharp particles are diamonds," he says as he sweeps them. He convinced himself that they're more than a result of hatred born of the dance.

The constant undermining of others success.

The casualties of the dance.

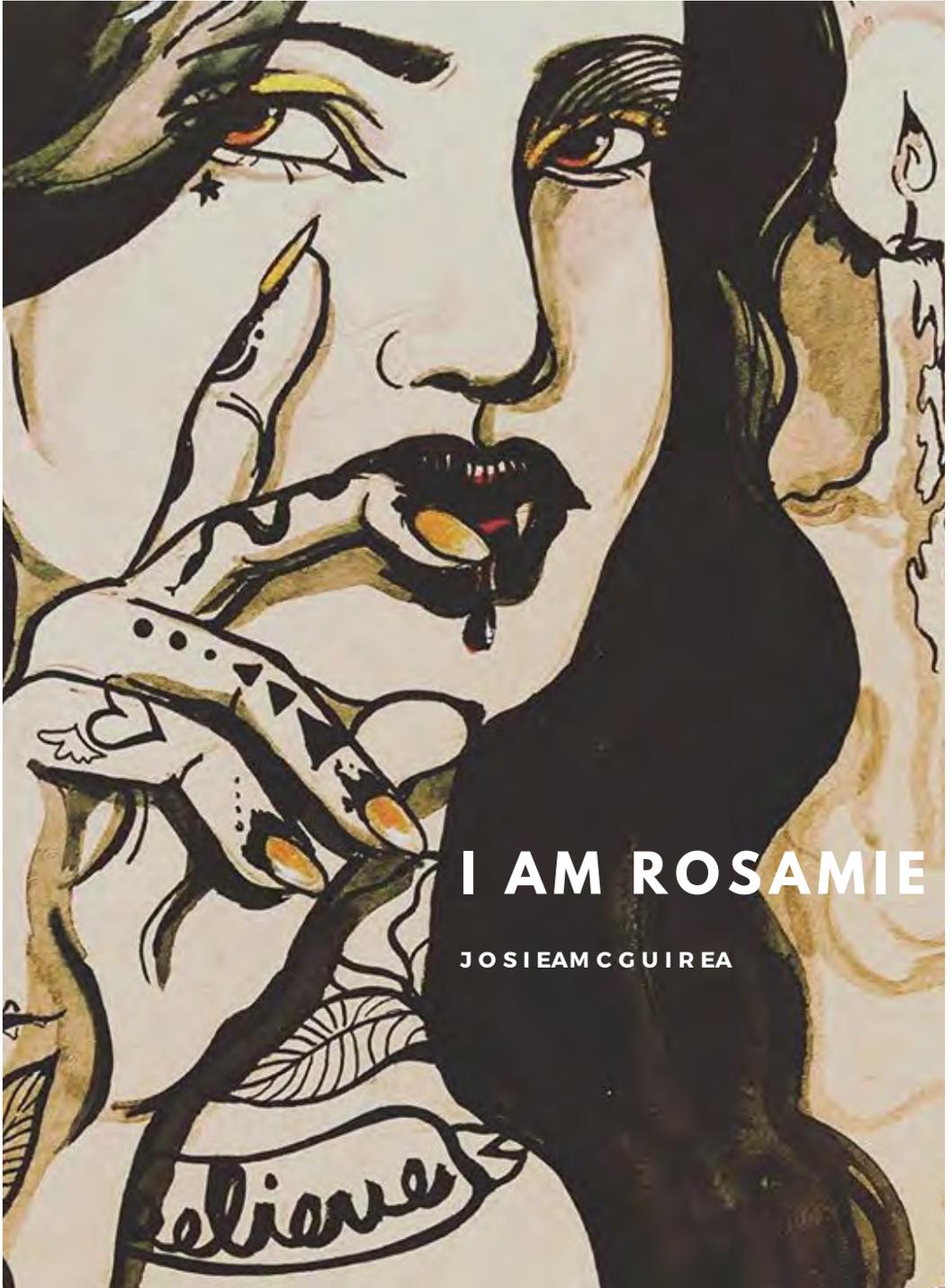
"These are diamonds," he says as he wipes the blood from his heels. "And I am their king."

He can almost see the ripples of his words go above the city.

Not touching anyone.

Never to be heard.

Never to change the dance.



I AM ROSAMIE

JOSEAMCGUIREA

EXT. SOUTH CALIFORNIA BEACH- EVENING

The sun has tripped barely below the horizon and the air itself seems to be breathing blue. A hint of stars freckle the stretch of sky above. The palm trees are shadows almost unrealized against the shore. Kind-eyed ROSAMIE, perhaps aged forty-five, perhaps aged sixty, steps dripping out of the ocean. Her hair is black and frizzy with salt water. The woman sashes ashore with her surfboard by her side, heading towards the large campfire surrounded by laughing and drinking teenage boys. CHAD greets the approaching figure.

CHAD Yo, Mama Bautista! Any choka' waves today?

ROSAMIE Yes. It was...good day.

Chad grins as she slowly clambers to her knees beside him. The other boys--JOHNNY, GABE, JASON, and LUKE --cheer and greet Rosamie, crowding around her, white California teeth bright in the blue-lit evening. Rosamie settles in just so. Her charmingly heavy Filipino accent colors every word.

ROSAMIE Bring me my basket, you foolish sons of foolish mothers.

Jason, a broad-shouldered floppy-haired young man with a lazy eye, bows like a knight of old, and presents the basket with a flourish. Rosamie resists a smile, but it tugs against her lips nonetheless. Jason sees it and gives a mischievous look that Rosamie dismisses with a wave of her hand. She unloads a log of pitsi-pitsî on a plate of white and blue china. Johnny, the youngest among them, reaches out a grimy hand, but draws it back at Rosamie's laugh.

JOHNNY Sorry.

Luke pushes up his glasses with a twiggy arm and rolls his eyes.

LUKE Yeah, Johnny. Keep your gross little hands to yourself.

ROSAMIE Shut up, Luke.

The group laughs. Gabe slaps Luke on the shoulder. Luke looks the other way.

ROSAMIE Now. After grace has been said, my horrors, we will eat the pitsi-pitsî. Pray for us now, John.

All bow their heads.

JOHNNY Dear Holy Father, thanks a ton. Bless the pisty-pasty to our bones and help 'em grow a lot. I, uh, thank thee for the gnarly food again, I guess. Amen.

The boys jump on the pitsi-pitsî delightedly. Rosamie looks over the ocean with a melancholy air for a moment before Jason approaches.

JASON Hey. Can I talk to you, Mama? In private?

ROSAMIE In private?

Jason tugs her over to the stack of longboards beside the outhouse.

JASON They found us.

Rosamie clutches her mouth. Her eyes daze over and a flashback begins.

JASON (O.S) Mama? Mama, you okay?

EXT. SHIP- DAY

Rosamie and BENJIE BAUTISTA hold hands on a balcony of a ship sailing on the ocean. Both of them have wedding rings on. They're smiling. Rosamie rests her head on his shoulder.

INT. HOSPITAL- EVENING

Benjie is in a hospital bed, pale as death.

ROSAMIE Benjie, gaga ka. Tanga, tanga, tanga!

BENJIE Call me stupid if you like, but I am right. Do not pay any more for the medicine. Take care of yourself.

ROSAMIE Hindi! Hindi ko gagawin ito! No. She sobs.

EXT. ROSAMIE'S APARTMENT- DAY

The surf gang--Chad, Jason, Luke, and Gabe--are walking past Rosamie's apartment, rowdily shouting and punching each other on the shoulder on the way to the beach. Luke is holding a boombox blasting out Duran-Duran. Rosamie watches out of the window as Johnny struggles to keep up with the older boys. They are all unkempt, straggly, and hungry-looking.

JOHNNY Hey! Wait up, guys! Guys?

The other boys laugh and walk faster.

CHAD Keep up, donk.

Chad snatches Johnny's hat and tosses it to Jason, who tosses it to Gabe, who puts it on. Luke looks disdainful of the entire business. He is the most well-kept of them all.

JOHNNY I hate you!

Rosamie looks over at her homemade chicken adobo and back at the boys disappearing into the distance. She twists her wedding ring.

EXT. CRACK HOUSE - EVENING

Rosamie's arms and hands are covered in blood. She is handcuffed to a radiator. There's a gun in her face.

HOODED MAN Where's Jason, bitch? What did he do with the money?

ROSAMIE I don't know.

The unseen hooded figure slaps her viciously with the butt of the gun. She dribbles blood from her mouth but doesn't flinch. She stares him straight in the eyes.

INT. APARTMENT- NIGHT

It's raining. Rosamie sips her tea sitting in her comfy chair near the window. She pulls her blanket closer and smiles. She then looks out the window and sees Jason and Johnny huddled together under a balcony on the street. She sighs and puts her coat on.

INT. WALMART- MORNING

Rosamie is a cashier. She stares blearily at the customer yelling unintelligible English noises at her. She rubs her forehead.

INT. CHURCH- EARLY AFTERNOON

Rosamie sits in her pew listening to the preacher. The majority of the other church members are white. The ones in her pew shift uncomfortably. Rosamie tries not to notice.

EXT. STREET- LATE AFTERNOON

Rosamie is walking down the street with groceries in hand. She is bumped into by a man in a business suit talking on a bluetooth. She

She drops her groceries and is forced to pick them up. He ignores her and continues past, actually stepping on the plastic bag in the process.

EXT. STREET- NIGHT

Rosamie goes to Jason and Johnny under the balcony.

ROSAMIE Come. It is too cold tonight. I have room.

INT. CRACKHOUSE - EVENING

The hooded man lowers his hood and crouches by Rosamie's side.

HOODED MAN Look, lady. I'm not here to slap you around. Just tell me where that piece of shit is and I'll let you go.

EXT. BEACH- DAY

Rosamie does an excellent boogie on the surfboard while Gabe falls off his board. The Surf Gang looks astonished.

ROSAMIE I have passed your silly test, boys. Now will you listen? You need to go to--

Smash cut to the memories blurring faster and faster.

Gun. Rain. Walmart. Church. Beach. Apartment. Blood. Benjie. Rosamie is faintly aware of Jason shaking her.

JASON Mama! Mama, wake up! We gotta go! Mama, can you hear me?!

ROSAMIE Yes, idiot. Listen up.

Jason blinks. Rosamie steps away and gestures for Jason to take the boys.

ROSAMIE You need to go. Where I told you long time ago.

Jason nods but pauses when Rosamie doesn't follow.

ROSAMIE Take care of yourself.

JASON No!

Rosamie glares. Motorcycles are heard in the distance.

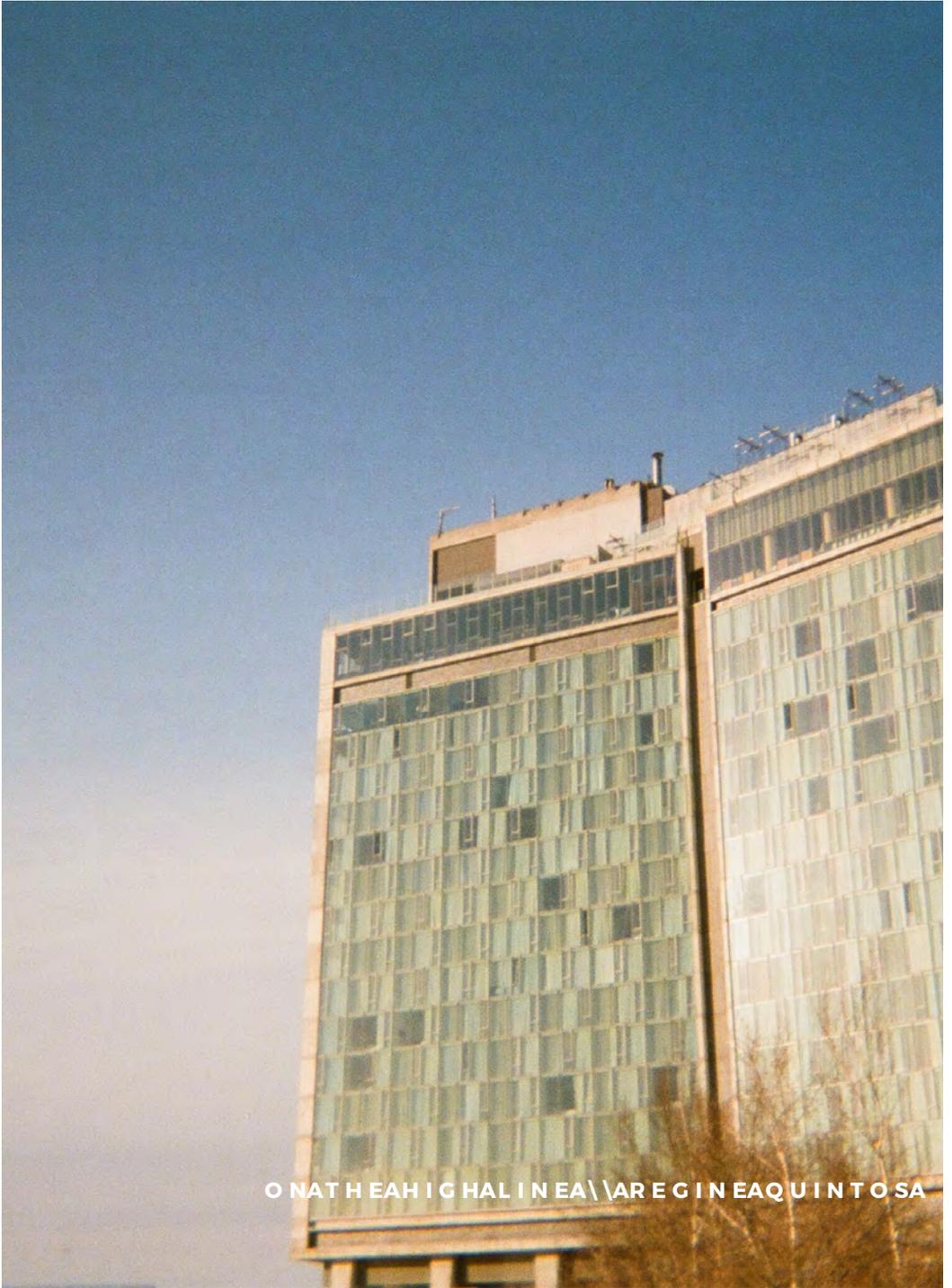
ROSAMIE They come. Go!

Jason grabs the boys and they flee. Rosamie waits on the beach as the Biker Gang roar up to her. The Hooded Man steps off and laughs.

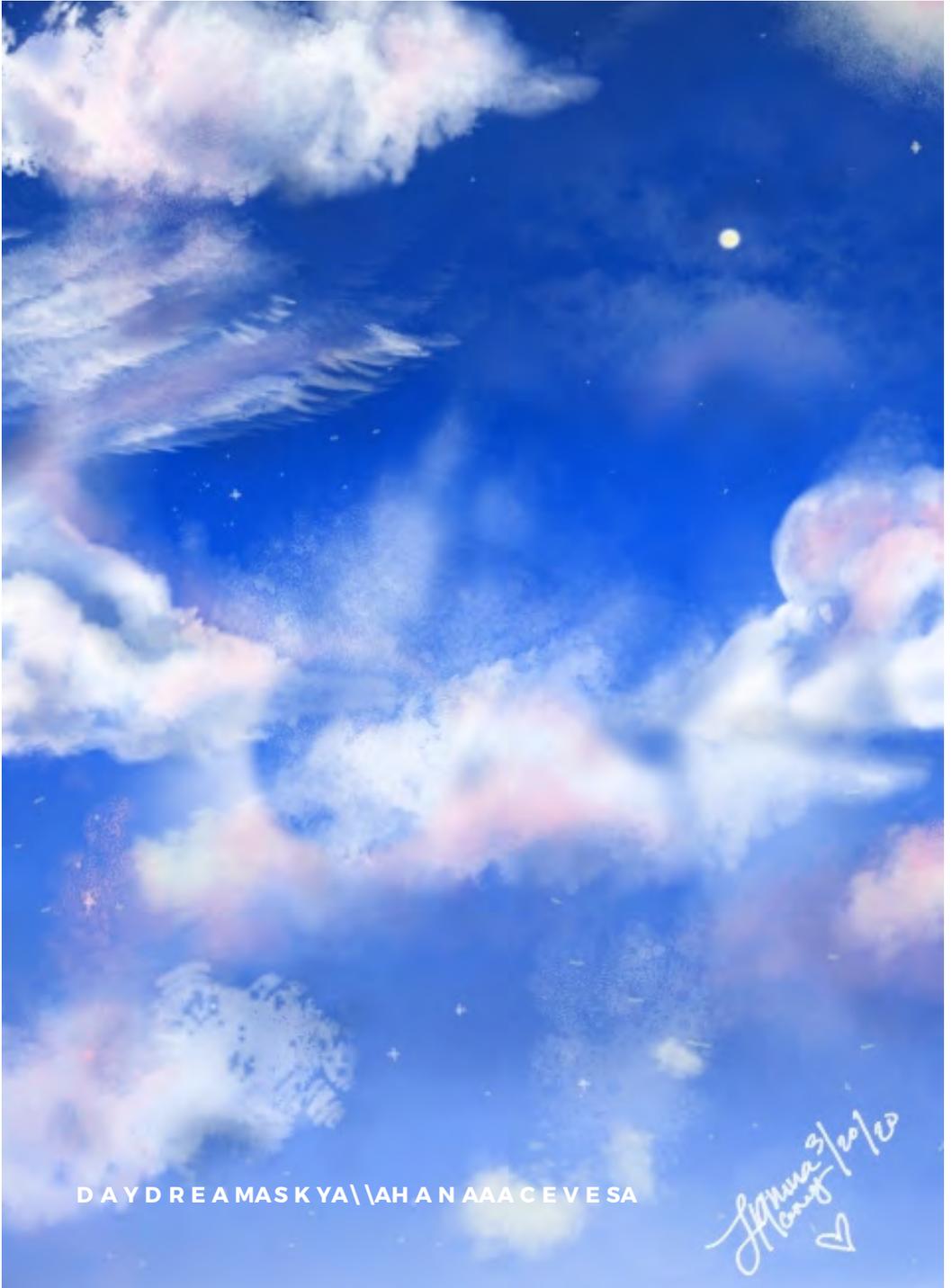
HOODED MAN Who even are you, lady?

ROSAMIE I am Rosamie.

FADE OUT.

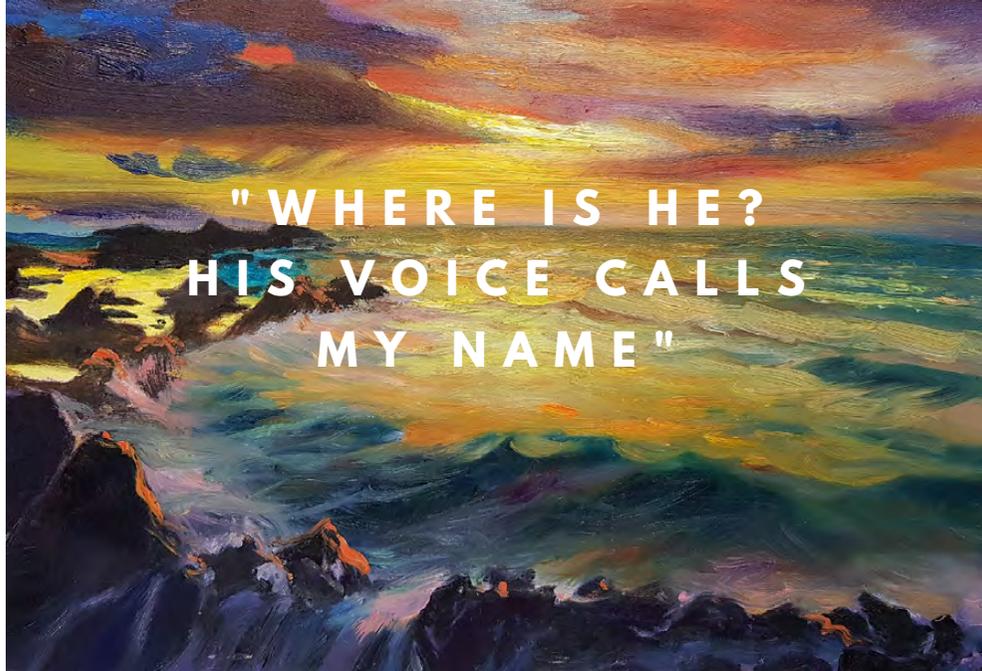


ONATHEAHIGHALINEA\AREGINEAQUINTOSA



DAYDREAMSKYA\\AHANAAACEVESA

Amma 3/20/20
Love
♡



" WHERE IS HE?
HIS VOICE CALLS
MY NAME "

THE KISS OF DEATH

nova cire

The frantic beating of my heart is the only sound in the darkness.
Visions of fog draped graves,
Growing healthy in the lush grass, emerge before my empty eyes.
Where is he?

I wait for his figure, clad in a raven's wing to appear.
His voice, the echoes of damned souls, calls my name.
His eyes, like mist veiled moonlight, pierce my core.
His lips, ageless and frozen with winter's first frost, caress the hollow of my throat.

My breasts flush with the warmth of hellfire as he gathers me in his
wasting arms.

My breathing grows ragged and harsh,
Then quiets and fades, carried away by the wind.

My soul unravels into his hands and I extinguish,
Billowing fragments of myself rise and reach for eternity,
But dissolve before they are able to touch the innocent light of dawn.

ARC

noah cooter

Once,

I had a family,

I took a chance,

a tangle of children,

and that felt good.

But nothing is forever,

at least not that.

Then,

I had a chance,

I took the drugs,

the other children and I,

and that felt good.

But nothing is forever,

surely not that.

After

I had the drugs,

I took a lover,

like children we loved,

and that felt good.

But nothing is forever,

certainly not that.

Now,

I have a lover,

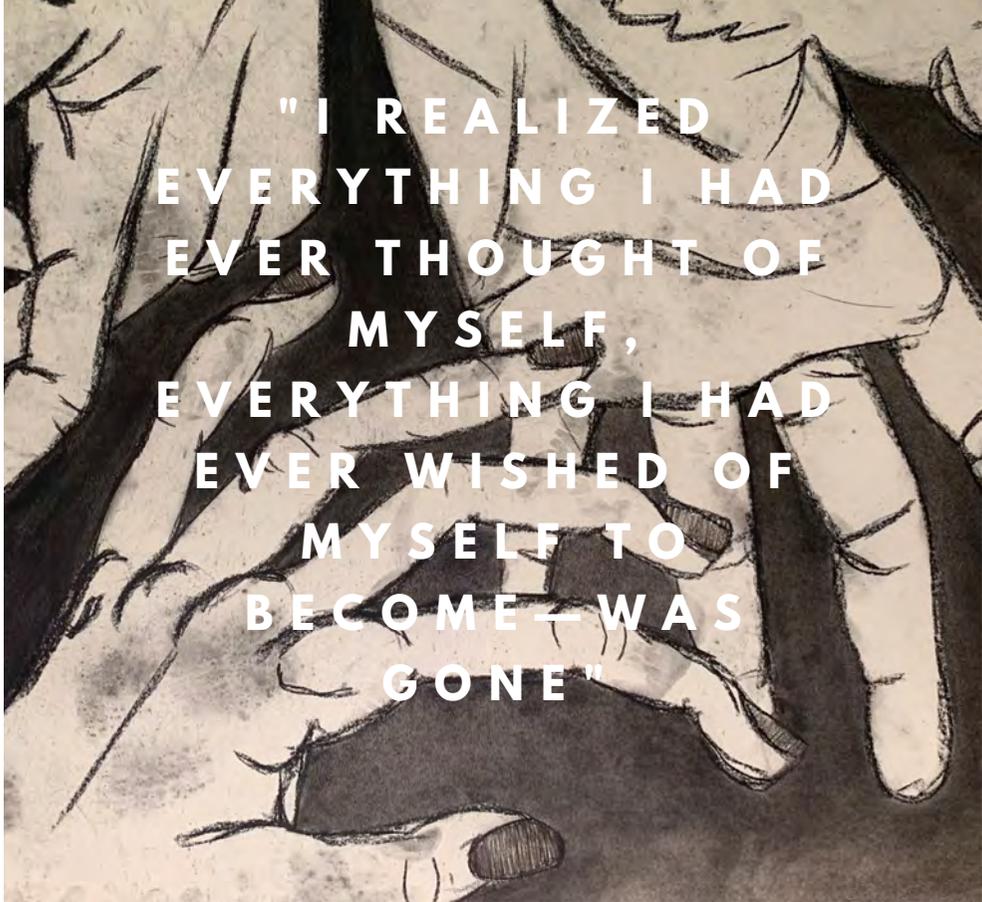
I take a breath,

the children have grown,

the feeling is gone

and nothing is forever.

In fact, nothing is the only thing
that is forever.



" I REALIZED
EVERYTHING I HAD
EVER THOUGHT OF
MYSELF,
EVERYTHING I HAD
EVER WISHED OF
MYSELF TO
BECOME— WAS
GONE "

FOCUS ON THE LIGHT

madison hoffman

The blinding white, fluorescent lights overhead flickered as I walked in. It was dark, and then light, and dark, and then light. The flickering seemed to increase in speed as my uncertainty grew. I stared, eyes open wide, trying to focus on the lights that made it difficult for me to see clearly. I cupped my hands over my water-filled eyes and stood, in this small dark room, and waited for the flashing to stop. They flickered like the Halloween strobe lights one would find in a maze. As I stood, a blonde, curly-haired, seven-year-old, with my tiny fingers tucked over my eyes, I thought back to the time where I had seen lights like these before.

It was a weekend in October of 2005: rainy, muddy and cold-somewhere in Half Moon Bay. The orange pumpkins littered the hay-covered ground. Little children ran with each other. Scarecrows stood and watched. The trees in the distance swiftly let go of their orange and red leaves. The sky was a light gray. I held the little pumpkin I had picked out in one hand and my dad's pinky in the other. I could still taste the sweet orange, pumpkin-shaped sugar cookie I had just eaten minutes before. I could feel the warmth of my dad's hand as the cold wind blew open my pink raincoat. My older brother wanted to go through the maze in the barn, which required a parent for those under the age of sixteen. He begged and pleaded, his voice sounding like breaking glass under the harsh rain. I then noticed the barn; it was red, with white borders, and windows barred shut. The big wooden barnyard doors were propped open and I could see flashing lights inside. I heard screaming and yelling, and loud banging sounds, as if someone was smashing pots and pans against the wall. My dad let go of my hand and walked with my brother toward what looked like a fake, pretend barn; one without the hay and horses or the cattle and sheep, just darkness. I watched them as they slowly disappeared into that darkness that lay ahead.

Seconds later I felt the need to join them. I could feel my heart beat in my throat as I struggled to ask my mom to come with me. "Are you sure?" she kept asking as I continued to stare at the flickering lights inside. My white rain boots were now the same brown color as the mud. I could hear the rain pound against the barn roof as we approached the entrance. I could feel the worker look me up and down; his chiseled, dark beard looked like he had hundreds of splinters around his chin and mouth. I then saw his gaze return to my mom as she calmly responded with "I have her." And for some reason, that made me feel less afraid. Someone was there; someone 'had' me. I felt warmth amid the coldness. I felt my mom's hand press tight against mine, so much so that her wedding ring dug into my skin. I didn't mind.

I dragged my white boots through the entrance. I zipped up my jacket and put on my hood. I didn't look up. The ground lay festered with dirt and glass; the charcoal-colored pavement was uneven. I could feel the sweat and humidity inside the barn. I heard the moans and groans of the people inside. It was dark. I continued to hold my mother's hand as we walked through. I began thinking to myself, "This isn't so bad," yet just as that thought focused in my mind, I heard the faint pitter-patter of footsteps in front of me. The sound was coming closer. Pitter-patter, pitter-patter; the footsteps becoming heavier. I bravely looked up and saw what appeared to be a monster coming my way. I felt my jaw drop and my eyes widen, as I tried to focus on this creature. It looked like he was missing limbs; his face dripped with blood. His eyes were bloodshot and I could see his rib popping out of his skin. His tattered clothes matched his gray skin and didn't cover him properly. He smiled at me with yellow, crooked teeth. He had several cuts and bruises all over his face. I could see his skull and part of his brain. My heart pounded. My hands began to sweat so profusely that I began to slip from my mother's fierce grip. The lights began to flicker. For two seconds at a time, my world was dark. Each time the light came back into focus, the man inched closer. Dark and light, and dark and light. I could no longer feel my mother beside me. I felt my eyes fill up with tears. They dropped one by one, like the rain. I stood frozen, crying, a five-year-old without her mom. The flashing continued. The man inched closer. I was scared and couldn't see clearly. I cupped my hands over my eyes and waited for the flashing to stop.

There was a loud, abrupt knock on the door. Before I had time to think, a tall, slender woman, about the age of fifty walked through the dark-brown wooden door. She fidgeted with the light switch and the flickering ceased. "Sorry about that," she responded. My vision was restored and I found myself to be in what looked like an office. It was painted an eggshell color and there were cactus-like plants in the corners of the room. Pictures of flowers and rocky shores and abstract

murals were scattered around the four imprisoning walls. I noticed the strong smell of lavender that seemed to be coming from outside the open window. I felt the cool breeze and thought about how pretty the white curtains looked fluttering in the fragrant air.

There was a loud, abrupt knock on the door. Before I had time to think, a tall, slender woman, about the age of fifty walked through the dark-brown wooden door. She fidgeted with the light switch and the flickering ceased. "Sorry about that," she responded. My vision was restored and I found myself to be in what looked like an office. It was painted an eggshell color and there were cactus-like plants in the corners of the room. Pictures of flowers and rocky shores and abstract murals were scattered around the four imprisoning walls. I noticed the strong smell of lavender that seemed to be coming from outside the open window. I felt the cool breeze and thought about how pretty the white curtains looked fluttering in the fragrant air.

The woman was carrying papers, several stacks of them, on which were blank spaces next to words that read "D-KEFS TEST," "DESIGN FLUENCY TEST," "TRAIL MAKING TEST," "TEST OF ATTENTION," "NELSON DENNY READING TEST," and other bizarre terms that I knew nothing of. The woman must have noticed me observing her seemingly confidential papers, as she quickly turned and sat at her desk. She motioned for me to sit in the chair beside her. She then went on to calmly explain that I would be taking a series of tests, some of which she insisted eagerly, were "fun." The woman opened a drawer of the desk and put on a pair of grey glasses, which seemed to perfectly match her greying hair that she had put in a high, messy bun. Her fair skin was beginning to wrinkle in the corners of her eyes—the color matching that of a cloudy sky. She wore a dull red color on her lips, some of which I noticed smudged on the edge of her white coffee cup. When she began to speak I noticed her gleaming, white teeth, being nearly perfect, except for the one front tooth that hung lower than the other.

I was given a pair of headphones. They didn't fit my head and irritated my ears. I put them on and listened. The headphones were connected to some type of cassette device. I saw the woman push down on the play button and I heard it click. The voice that spoke told me I would be given a series of words, of which I was supposed to remember and repeat back to the woman in the same order. The first series of words were easy. "Cat," "Animal," "Green," "Burger," I repeated back confidently. She smiled her nearly perfect smile while the grey plastic earphones continued to rub annoyingly against my ears. The second round had begun, but I had missed the first word as I was trying to adjust my uncomfortable earphones. I was trying so desperately to think what the first word could have been that I missed the remaining ones. When the voice stopped, the woman looked at me with those cloudy eyes and I told her I didn't know, I couldn't remember, I had missed them. I felt embarrassed. Her tone was calming and sweet, like the voice of a mother trying to comfort her child. "It's okay, let's move on to the next round." I missed the next series of words. And the next. I didn't know what was wrong with me; I was distracted. I felt so humiliated, my face turning a hot red. I began to notice the sweat burrowing at my hairline. When the woman looked at me for a response, I began making up a series of random words. I had no idea what the voice was telling me—I couldn't make out the words. I felt panicked and scared. And then I began to notice the flickering lights.

I heard myself bawling; I heard my violent scream and felt my warm, wet tears fall peacefully down my cheeks. I gasped for air, mouth open wide, eyes still closed. My palms and face were wet; I was unsure of where both the monster and my mother were. My hands were still cupped over my eyes when I felt someone's hand on my shoulder. I recognized the feeling of her ring and knew it to be my mother. I slowly looked up. The lights were on and the flickering had stopped. I focused on my surroundings; I was in some sort of maze, with people—actors—dressed up as monsters and ghouls. People had come in the barn to be

scared—for fun. The monster who had been chasing me looked down on me with sorrowful eyes and drooped shoulders; he offered me a bloody, bone-exposed hand. My mother held me in her arms; I could feel her heart beating, nearly as fast as mine. She had saved me from the darkness, from those flickering lights. She had simply fidgeted with the switch.

My head throbbed. I put my hand on my forehead and felt the boom of my pounding pulse. I heard gibberish through the headphones, like someone was speaking to me in a foreign language. I searched frantically for something to focus on. I scanned the room, hoping to find my mom, hoping to find the monster with the sorrowful eyes to help me focus on the light. But all I saw in those few seconds of light were my uncomfortable styrofoam headphones and the cassette player. I continued to hear the voice speaking to me, in a tone that seemed to grow agitated, mean. It was not until I heard the woman say “Let’s take a break” that the lights began to calm. I began to regain my focus as the woman got up and walked out the door. She came back with Skittles and Twix and a glass of cool water. I could tell it was cool before I drank it because of the white, cloud-like condensation that frosted the glass.

I went on to complete a series of those tests. After each one began, the lights in the room would flicker, I would become distracted, I would sweat, and my vision would blur from my tears. Each test I felt embarrassed, red hot, like I had just eaten the spiciest jalapeno in the world and was unable to calm down from its heat. The process continued for about three hours. Words and numbers jumbled around on my paper like the letters of alphabet soup, unclear and without meaning. I completed the last of the tests without a sense of reality; I was in a daze, staring at a white paper. I wrote and read and listened, not that I knew or had a sense of what I was actually doing.

As I finished up, I noticed the woman once again walk through the brown wooden door that separated me from life as I knew it to be. I thought she was going to get some more candy, maybe a Snickers this time; but, she did not return quickly. I heard her speaking to my mother in the other room. Their voices were faint; they were whispering. Their muffled sounds concerned me. After what seemed like hours, both the woman and my mother returned.

My mother sat down in a plush, gray chair beside me. She sank into it without looking me in the eye. The woman was again carrying those papers, except this time, there was writing on them. Big red letters, some of which I caught: “ANXIOUS,” “DISORDER,” “LOW-AVERAGE INTELLIGENCE.” Moments went by and no one spoke. I felt like I was suffocating, like there was smoke in the air, and I couldn’t breathe, and yet I had to. The woman spoke and my mother looked at me with her rainy-blue eyes. They drooped like the monster’s arms did in the maze. As the woman and my mother stared at me, their mouths opened and the remainder of my life was handed to me; what I would do, what I would accomplish, who I would become. My life, as my innocent seven-year-old self knew it to be—waking up every morning, playing with dolls, eating ice cream, and going to sleep with my pink, fuzzy blanket—it had changed. It had changed in a way I never thought to be possible; in a way where I had no control over my own life, where I had no way of focusing on the light. Instead, all my wants and hopes and dreams had been decided; this was no fantasy, as I was told, this was a painstaking reality that kept me hidden away in the dark. It had killed me; it left me lightless and I realized everything I had ever thought of myself, everything I had ever wished of myself to become—was gone. I, as I knew myself to be, had died.

I lay there in the darkness and after several years I awoke in whiteness. Pure, non-artificial, beautiful, gleaming, bright, white light. Lights that didn’t blind me, but instead, made it easier for me to see.

There was no one around me; I saw no walls or other people, but there was a handheld silver mirror on the ground. I noticed it was engraved with strategic, abstract designs as I picked it up. I looked at myself. I was older; my face was vanished of baby-fat, my cheekbones more pronounced, my face slimmer. I noticed my hazel-green eyes, those big eyes I used to focus; I noticed my fair, pale skin and I noticed how calm I looked. My eyes were not watery, I noticed no under-eye baggage, nor redness in the face.

I felt at peace in the light. I felt at peace because I had finally realized that those monsters of the dark, the ones I was so desperately afraid of, weren't real. I began to understand that I, myself, was the real monster. I ultimately was the one who placed myself into the darkness; I was the one who allowed myself to fall subject to the effects of the flickering lights. So, there I decided, in that light, white room that I would never again allow anything—not myself, a psychologist, a teacher, a peer, nor anyone for that matter—throw me into the dark. I was to be in control. I was to be in control of when I would be scared in the darkness or prosper in the light. I didn't need anyone to save me; instead, I, myself had the potential to take my darkness and fidget with the switch and return to the light. It was up to me to decide my future; it was up to me to decide who I was, to decide my hopes and dreams. And so, I focused on the light.

LIGHT AT NOON

jen rocha

Let us not get up.

Let us not give up the firmness of this bed,

Mad electric roots holding us down

like leafless trees ringed by scattered barks—

Let them spark!

Our essence encapsulated in a pocket-sized cosmos

as we admire

The light at noon lazily waltz into your room,

and soon, we reminisce the bliss.

But let us first open our eyes,

Interlace our bodies like perplexed suns, and kiss.

Let us take our time under these covers—

arouse zephyr from the modest movements

of your clever hands.

Let us awaken the elements that captivate us, peruse Neruda

over coffee and tea—

the light moves through your lashes so feathery.

Let us stay this way, this way on a Sunday.

Let us not leave until

The universe thieves

the timelessness of our light.



EVERYDAYALIFE \ AZOHRHASAFDARIA



THEAPETA\IANO AASIGALA

ART

lauren oliver

When I met you
a little butterfly nestled its
way into my heart,
and I still feel its wings beating.
It jostles me awake in the dead of night.

Sometimes it wraps itself so tightly
around soft things hiding in my chest
that my lips quiver too much,
and I can't organize or explain it.
I can't put into words
the fluttering wave of wings,
which smash themselves against my insides,
paint them a million colors
that are bright and dark and deep.

And you'll never see it,
but I wonder if vision divine
could penetrate my skin,
traveling deep enough
inside me
to notice its little antennae,
watch this butterfly dance and leap and fill my blood
with screaming song.

I wish you could know,
and with rapid heartbeat,
I imagine your butterflycarving my name
on your heart,
and imagine myself
scrawling every color and melody
inside you.

IN FALL

josie mcguire

In
Fall.

Shed your
pretence

let the leaves, those serpent scales, drip slow

You must rub it raw;
nothing's

stickier than a lie.

Death blooms sallow on your naked
frame

But fear not, friend-- (In
fall you will arise.)



UNTITLED A \\ AMICHELLE AZAJACA

WALLACE

chloe tuckness

Wallace has never tried to stand up straight. He bends at the elbows, feet slightly ajar as he waits for a barista at the cafe on the 5th day of the month. Wallace only gets coffee on the odd-numbered days, and ties his ties lopsided rather than a square knot.

Rather than maintaining symmetry, Wallace keeps only one arm on the table during meetings, and his coffee cup on the edge of his notepad opposite his dominant hand. His other hand hangs down. Hangs anywhere.

Once a week, he mismatches his socks. His office has framed paintings of horizons not entirely horizontal, but never dramatically slant enough to really notice.

Wallace hates the points of day when he walks the grid-system of downtown streets. The stale linear trajectory makes him anxious, there isn't room for him to pit himself against the boxy society in all of the concrete, blocks, bricks, squares. No asymmetry to hide behind. No one would know if he zig-zagged along the streets, going out of his way just so he doesn't feel trapped in the corporate school of fish, either looking down or looking ahead.

They never look up.

This is the one thing that interrupts Wallace's routine of deviation. He cannot put himself in a box away from the rest of the men and women in slacks, cradling paperwork, making love to their office trinkets, mass produced to give the consumer a false report of uniqueness.

Wallace makes himself a schedule, a routine, a set of rules in order to stand out among everyone else.

Wallace fixes his singular cufflink - one cufflink means that it's Thursday and watches his co-workers, managers, and bosses.

They never look to notice Wallace's deviations.

They're too busy looking down, looking ahead.

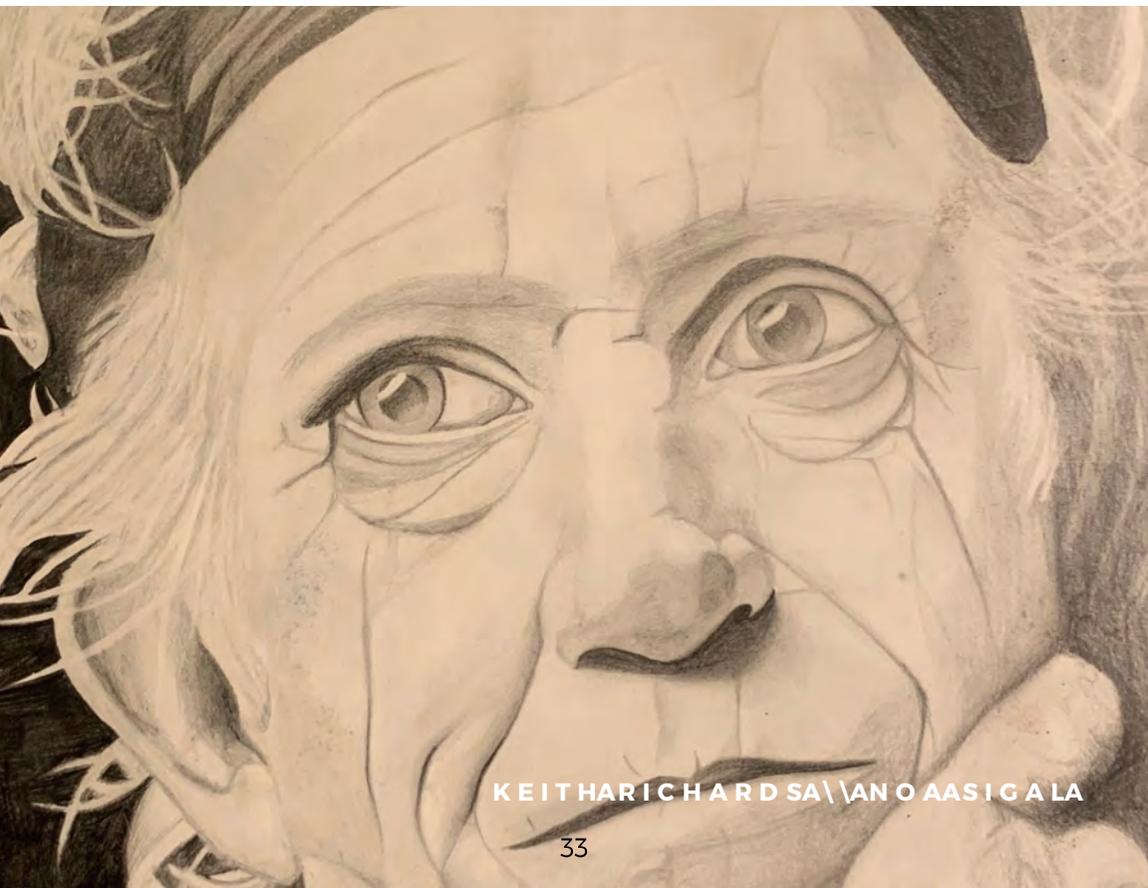
When will they look up?



VITOACORLEONEA\\ANUABAVRAA



BOTTLE \ ANO AASIGALA



KEITH RICHARD SA \ ANO AASIGALA

SIRENS

evan brown

The cries of law again. When patterns
make you remember, then forget.

The cocktail bar made handsome
profit last night, yet they may never fix

the sign that flickers Morse code out to
forlorn cab drivers and empty store windows.

The morning keeps apologizing
for having come so soon. Droplets

of people, as if from pipes
of copper, trail out slowly from tall doors

as resinous as their eyes. Collar-stay commands
come from uniforms, fall flat

and are therefore lost—but one man
turns his head so quickly

that he must hear a sound
like his name. The light

shuffles coyly through tree leaves,
ashamed to even be there. I can tell

that the feet of the man
are now ineffective, his focus

heaved upward at the fleet
of hotel rooms whose windows

glare fiercely, throw the cycles
of clouds into the wholes

of his eyes while the crowds are left
laboring to get going.



BOYCOTT

jessica allegrezza

These aren't stairs

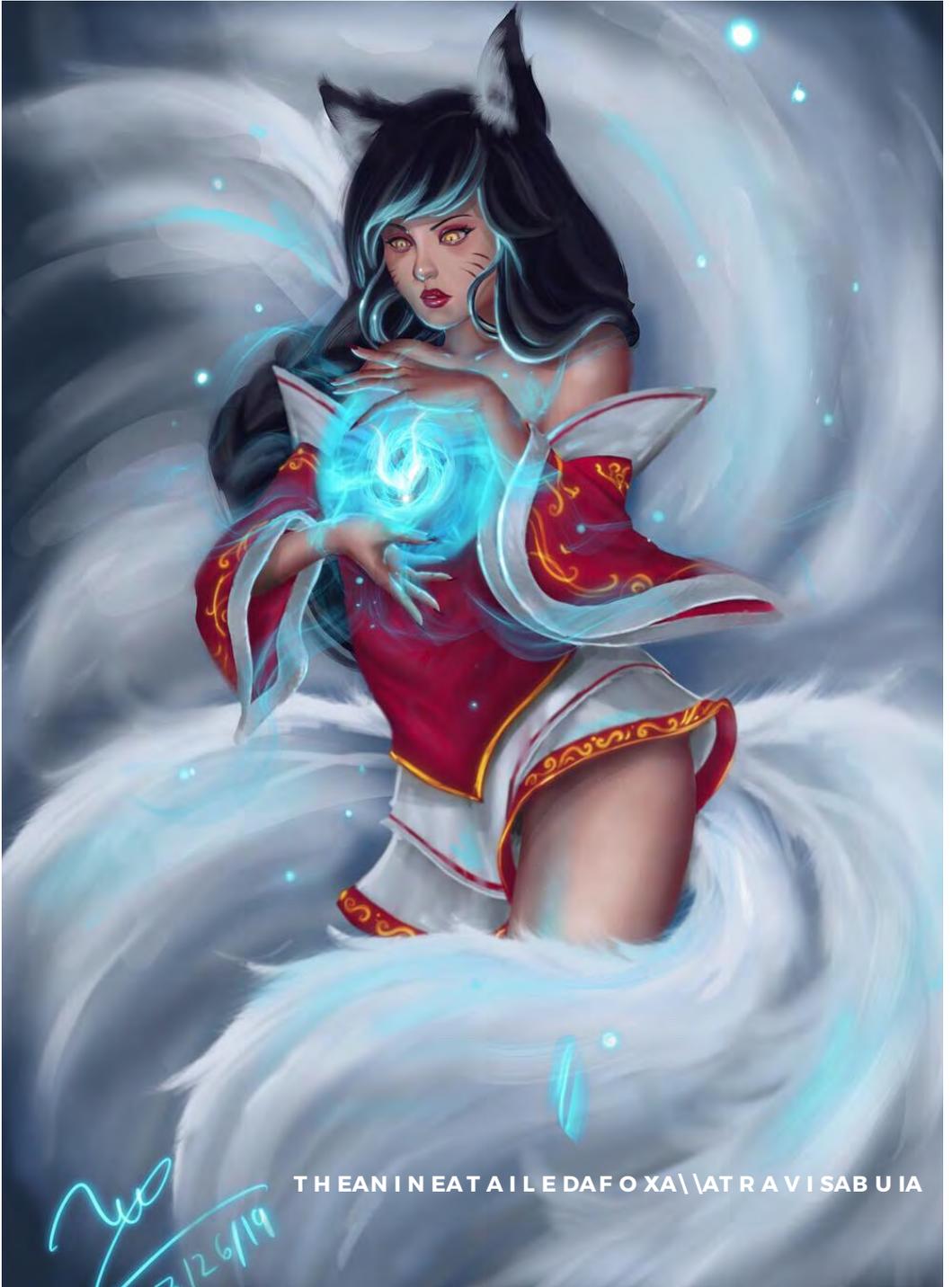
They are tall blocks pretending to be
Small

And a climb to the gate
Where i can wait
10 minutes for my next lover

That's not a stare
It's a gaze
That your mum so beautifully instructed
When she told you to look away

No. that's not a jacket
But it's three fourth up a zip
And it does what it is supposed to

This is not a poem
But an observation
Of how things are metaphors
for what they're supposed to
And make sense of why
Things are the way they are
& why i would even let that in

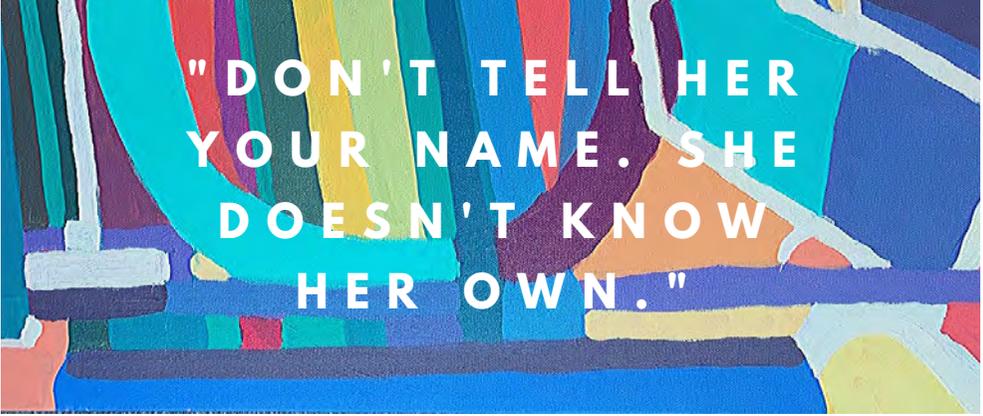


THE AN INEAT A ILE DA FOXA \ATRAVISABUIA

Zuo
7/26/19



AABOW LAO FAPOMEGRANITEA\AMAH DOKHTAKALANIA



"DON'T TELL HER
YOUR NAME. SHE
DOESN'T KNOW
HER OWN."

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR GRANDMA

angela poo

1. Cross your legs

To have open legs is to welcome any stranger to enter

2. Pour her tea

It is disrespectful to allow the elder to serve herself

3. Sit up straight

You look like a shrimp
Everybody hates shrimp

4. Smile

Your smile will soften the blow of your presence-
She doesn't know your name

5. Don't tell her your name

6. She doesn't know her own

7. Give her your age

She will sing a song about your fertility
Regardless of how young you are

8. Her name is Sy-Chi Chen

She used to live next to the sugar factory in Taiwan

Her husband worked at that sugar factory

Your mom can't bear to look at her

She is her daughter and you

Are her granddaughter

9. Do not disclose that you are her granddaughter

10. Try to forget that she is deteriorating right in front of you

Try to forget her life she can't even recall living

Try to forget that forgetting is a privilege

But for her

Forgetting is the only burden she can remember

Try to forget that she is your grandma

And she sits right next to you

And you talk As complete strangers

11. Ask her how she is

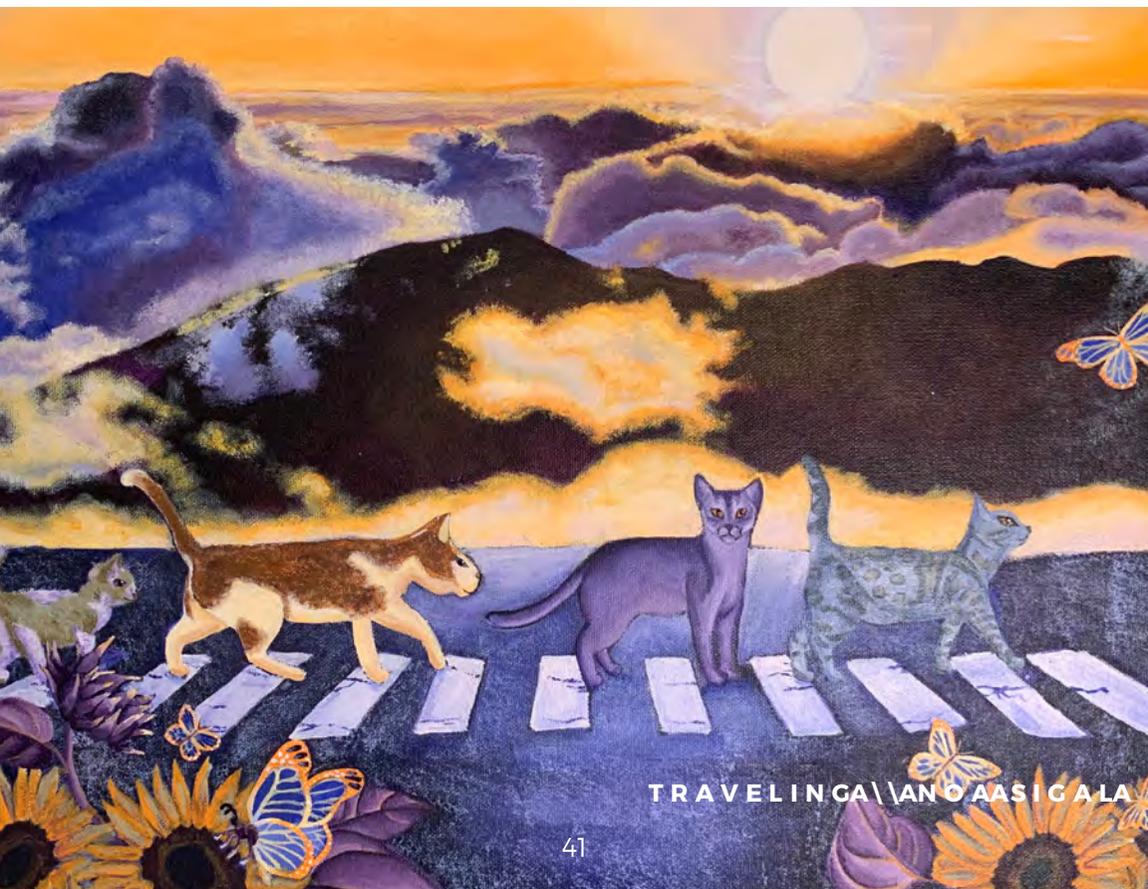
Bits of her old self may slip through the cracks of her palms

Hold them tight while she searches for the bits she lost

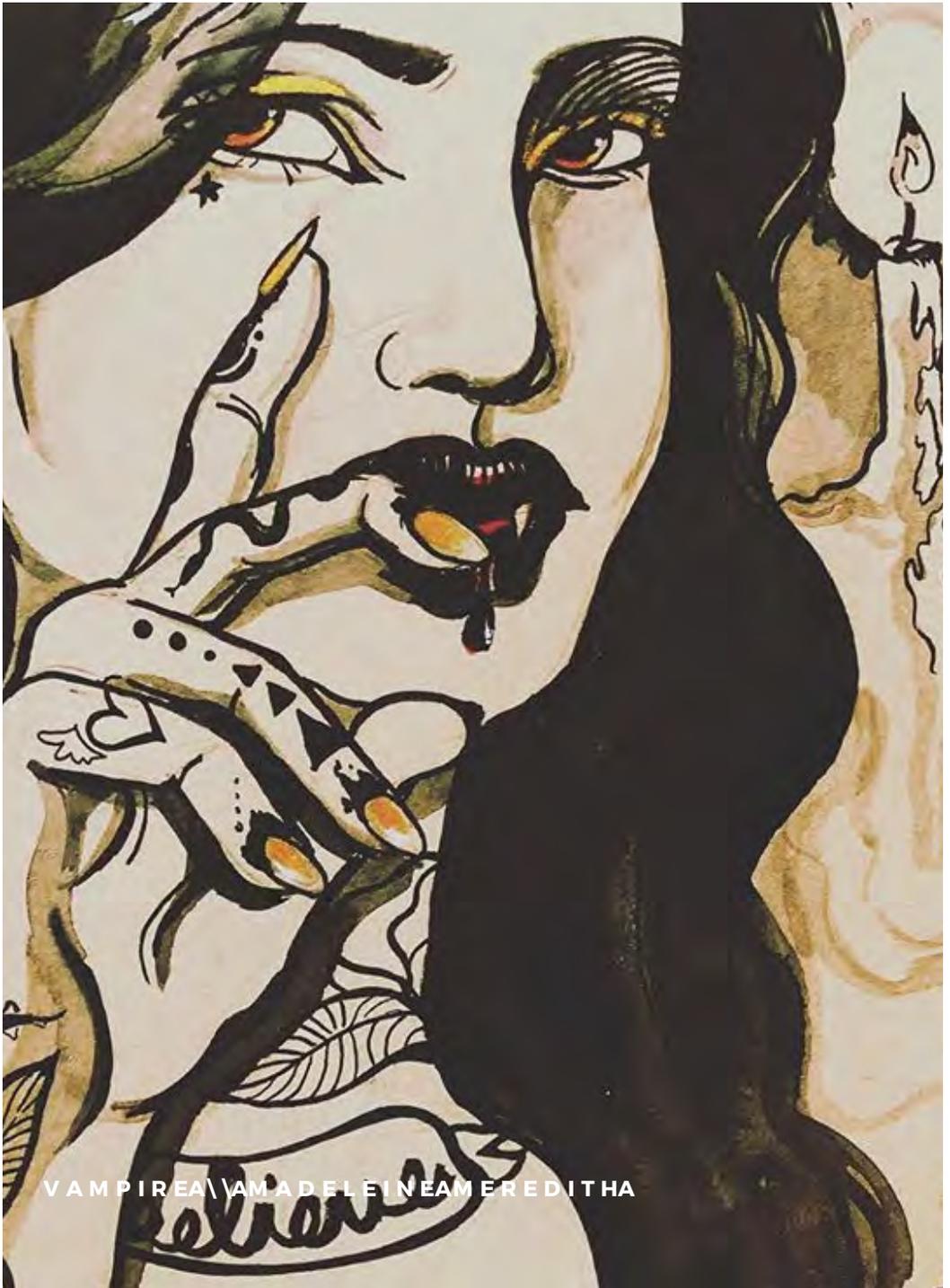
Do not let go



STRANGERATHINGSA\AANUABAVRAA



TRAVELINGA\ANO AASIGALA



VAMPIREA \ VAMADELE INE AMEREDITHA



TOO MUCH SKY

jakob silva

On the floor of Mars, far from the facility I had just started to call home, I am recumbent under the non-lethal but disabling weight circumstance, detachedly viewing the annoyingly far away sandstorm.

Years ago, in elementary school, and a few hours after school had gotten out, I played on the school's central playground before laying down on my back to look up at the unobstructed blue above myself. Around me was an itchy white school imposed polo shirt above a pair of orange corduroys which my mom had to coax me into, and below those a pair of epicly worn but still functional laceless vans, crimson.

The playground smells like tires.

Everyone else, all the students at least, had left, but a few teachers walked from the giant central building, house of the laminator and the big copier, with big stacks of fresh and warm paper to their for-once quiet classrooms, and if any noticed me they ignored; they knew my dad worked here, and that my mom worked long hours at the salon, and that they let me find my own fun.

At four o'clock the sky has gotten darker and deeper than when I looked up earlier, at noon. Sky blue is a misnomer. The sky is, at this hour, like a drawing curtain, revealing a show behind it – the moon the lead, all the stars the undeserved supporting cast – which filled me with spirits I would only decipher later. The sky goes on forever, and as it shifts to dark it's like an infinity piled onto another infinity.

On Mars, the suit feels too small even though I know better. The Red Planet has been painted with a restricted pallet of grey, orange, yellow, and, of course, red. At the poles, which I guess I won't get to see up close, these colors are interrupted by white. I think about the lacuna for the middle between mono and polychromatic, existing in the same place as non-virgin.

I know that I might get out of this one alive, that I am still in the realm of non-zero chances, but I also know that I won't; that the whims and feelings of those back at base will kill me, and not this rock or that storm.

Another day in elementary school, I was inside, contained by brightly decorated walls and tinted windows. I was impeded in the completion of my assignment by other children talking around me. I told them to shut up too mutedly for them to hear, so I told them again but still too quietly. For myself there was very little in-between betwixt whispering and shouting. Those two students stopped interrupting me, and started to stare, and looking around I realized that I must have been much more than audible. My class stared as if hearing the name of a demon. My teacher, Mr. Lewis, previously leaning over a desk, came over, stern, and dragged me by the arm to his office; the commotion of the classroom continued, jaded.

Sitting down in the chair, I looked around the room, not for the first time: like my dad's office burgeons with binders and instructional documents and low-calorie snack foods, along with a dozen personal nicknacks from disneyland; pictures from vacations where everyone wears sunglasses; and tiny metal figurines. Mr. Lewis sat me town in a chair, and himself in one across from me. I sat straight, I didn't think about anything but the room or notice things like my hair.

It has taken, due to several annoyingly avoidable delays on the ground, much longer for my journey to complete, and only now can I see a tiny red dot in the umbral naught. Inside the spaceship I can breath, but what I breath is not silky like on Earth; I fool myself into tasting the regurgitation of the O₂. Alone, I stopped shaving, and for this opportunity felt much more grateful than anything else on this journey, the O₂ and the H₂O feeling like givens, things I absolutely needed and of course wanted, but still at the same time nothing new. Not having to shave was the true blessing of going to Mars. My face feels coarse and prickly, and I think of what my crew members might be like, but can't think of anyway they won't hate me.

"Now Nicholas," said Mr. Lewis. "We've talked about this sorta stuff before, right Nicholas?"

"Yeah," I say, elongatedly, syllabalizing the word in two.

"Okay. And what did we agree? What did we say in the end?"

I looked here and there, coyly trying to avoid guilt, before stopping at one spot and, not looking at Mr. Lewis, saying:

"But that other time was different."

"Is it? And how was it different?" This seemed obvious to me, the difference between the two events, and his apparent lack of understanding irked me. Nevertheless, I tried to explain.

"Well, what I did then was wrong, since you, you shouldn't hit people with big books when you're angry. You said I need to use my words, so that's what I did."

Mr. Lewis sighed, beleaguered, the years in it.

"You're right. What you did was better, but you could do even better by not... speaking so loudly at people."

“But they couldn’t hear me.”

“Yes, but you can’t scream at people to do what you want. You just can’t. Do you understand, Nicholas?”

I didn’t understand, or really believe in, the wrongness of my actions, but did comprehend that they would be punished, which I imagined was his real question.

“Yeah, I get it.”

Finally on the dead burning ground, I meet my two new associates: Dr. Gloss and Specialist Miranda. Both wear baggy APEX mission fatigues, and greet me, as I step out of the airlock, with reserved warmth, like they need me but don’t really want me. Gloss and Miranda have been here for years, and only recently lost the person I’m replacing.

They introduce themselves and we shake hands, and I realize I never got around to shaving.

“Hello, I guess you probably know my name already, yeah?”

Dr. Gloss nods tentatively, expecting something more direct probably.

“Well yes,” she says. “We’ve... known for months actually!” The two of them laugh politely. I don’t really see what’s funny, and anyway can’t think of something to say back. Both of them stand, smiling like puppies, waiting desperately for a reply that doesn’t come.

“Well, shall we show you to the barracks?”

“Yes.”

In a record store, still in my hometown, I absentmindedly parosed the shelves of my workplace. A year earlier, I graduated from MIT, before returning back home, clueless as to how to apply my new brain. Working at the record store fell on my plate because of a family friend, and I took it to support myself for a month or two while plotting my next move. That month turned into six, and then a full year.

Walking through the store, Gary, the manager and family friend, flagged me down.

“Nicholas, I’ve been looking for you. Do you think we can talk?”

“You are the boss.”

“So Nick.” He says, insisting on a pet name I hate.

“Look, bud, I hate to have to ask you this, but as your, well, I like to think of myself as sorta your mentor, y’a see?”

“Yeah, I guess.”

“Cool. Well, as I was trying to, ah, say. Look, Nick, you’ve been working here for um, a little over a year...”

“Just until I figure something out.”

“Well yeah! That’s, um, that’s it kinda, kinda what I want to talk about is that, ‘figuring it out.’” Gary seemed to want something out of me, but I didn’t know what to give. He waited, and I with him.

“Yeah. Well, I gotta say, Nick, and I don’t mean to dis you or something but I just think that someone like you needs to apply themselves to something, you know.”

“Well, I guess that’s why I went to college, right?” I said, with what I suspect an inappropriate amount of facetiousness. It was about the only way I knew to connect with someone.

“Ha,” blurted Gary. “Okay, I’ll just say it. You’re wasting yourself here Nick. You have all the smarts, skills, and... potential you need to do something big and, as much as I love this place, you won’t do it here. So here’s what I want to give you. Nick, I happen, through a few Stanford friends of mine, to have an avenue into a new NASA program: Advancement Progress Exploration, or APEX, aka, Mars. The Red planet Nick. The brand new frontier. Nick, pardon my french but, shit like this doesn’t come along often, and I can only get you in for so long. So what do you say?”

I sat in my chair, greasy hair on my head. It wasn’t the idea of travel and space that got me. It wasn’t the idea of discovery either. It was the idea that on this far away planet, with only so many Mars bases at one time, I could finally be alone that got me to, for once in my life, give a wholehearted yes to the offer.

Training took a year, and two more until the right alignment of the planets and the right skill set needed to warrant sending me off. By the time launch day came, my family watching from a distance, voices buzzing in my ear, I was 28, and during my training had become, as much as someone like me does, if not more social at least

more open. During it all, I started to care about the work itself more than I expected; sometimes, bedrock deep in a math or design problem, I would forget why I had started in the first place. My escape had turned into absorption.

My first day in the ship, my first day out in space, looking at the receding Earth, I missed something for the first time in my life.

Our tiny base has no windows, only titanium white walls, and in my bed it has started to get to me, even more than the others. They haven't said it outright, I haven't asked, but the two of them are together. It's understandable. Both are very attractive; Dr. Gloss has electrically blonde hair and somehow still looks tan inside this mountain, and Miranda's built like a hunk of steel and has a jaw that could decompress his suit. Besides, they used to be the only people on the planet.

Meanwhile, I still haven't shaved — my baby beard persists — and my skin is as pale as when I left Earth. Both of them have clearly gotten used to living by themselves these past few months; the walls help, but I can hear them in the kitchen. She's a squealer.

It's dinner, and we're eating the NASA equivalent of MRE's. The two of them are talking on one side of the table, turning sideways to see each other, and I'm searching for an opportunity on the other side. Their discussion centers on some broken equipment outside base, and how best to repair it with our limited supplies.

"The problem is that the thing's so specialized," says Dr. Gloss. "We'd need special machines just to make special machines"

"Les, we can figure this out," says Miranda.

"Like, what's the closest thing we have? Is there something we can substitute it with?"

Gloss thinks for a moment. "Well, I suppose some of the moisture pumps in the botany lab might work..."

In this I saw my gap. Out of nowhere,

I said: "With the way you two go at it, I'm surprised you haven't used those pumps for clean up!" This was meant, I assure you, to be a joke. It was not, I also assure you, received that way. The stares they

delivered brought me back to the times I had forgotten. Them looking at me, I thought 'Well, time to die now.' I looked at one then the other, smiling, before I realized that their reaction had already come.

Miranda, with a turn of his head, said, "What the fuck did you say?" "Uhhh," was more than I could muster. I couldn't comprehend just how many levels I had breached just then. I said 'Uhhh' for a little longer, before Gloss told me "You should go."

So I did. I went to my bed and didn't sleep. They didn't do anything either, but I think they talked. Morning came, we ate breakfast in silence. Tiny noises drifted through the air: crunching, clink of metal against bowl. Louis broke the non-silence when he said "Hey, Nick?"

I looked up swiftly, like my mom had caught me. "Yes, what is it?"

"Leslie and I figured out a suitable replacement last night, and we want you to go out and fix the equipment."

"Yeah, sure. I'd... I'd be happy to." I was desperate for reconciliation. To survive, I would need these people. So, after breakfast, I suited up, the two of them gave me the parts, and out the airlock I went. In our rover, equipped with a small but ample crane, I drove to the source of our trouble. Getting off, I didn't look behind me – why would I? – and thus couldn't see the rock hurtling towards me. It's beige facade struck me and forced me down into the dust, and fixed me to the ground.

So here, one death in the distance, one closer to home, Mars starts to look sweet and alive. I wonder which will kill me first: the radiation, the storm, or oxygen deprivation. I don't keep my hopes up. Despite the storm, I can still see part of the sky, and looking at it I feel like a kid again, surrounded by just too much sky.

THAT THIRD CUP

jordan zachary ellis

I think about my dreams almost
as much as I do reality.
Ironically, the third cup of coffee
in my hands is telling everyone that will listen
just how much I avoid sleep.
That dreamscape holds a rough landing, slamming into my heart
with the weight of lost memories,
those that were forgotten
as new ones took their place.

The first cup of the day is a welcoming,
reality's way of reminding me that
I have a life that needs living.
The second cup is the one
that actually wakes me up.
My third, however, is always special.
More than coffee makes a
home in that mug, comfort
mixes in as well,
a good mood as light hearted
as the liquid.

That last cup of java is
what jerks me away from my daydreams,
what keeps me grounded
when I don't feel the ground beneath my
feet. It's that warm feeling
that coffee fills your throat,
and then your soul, that I need.
I need it to feel free from a reality
that has shackled me to my own
delusions.

At the bottom of my empty cup
the light side of a brown moon swirls
at the edges, different phases of the same day.
At the very least, it gives me the energy I need
to make it to the end of the day, the energy I
need to make it back to my own little world.



STILLALIFEA\AALMAARASHIDIA



WARMAANDACOLDA\AALMAARASHIDIA



DREAM OF A FEMALE PLAYING VIOLIN \ AMANDA OKHTAKALANIA

PROGRESSION OF TIME

michael celso

Maybe it will rhyme
Letters on a page
Scrambled to mean something
Only understood when interpreted through our own cultural lens
Cave drawings
Shapes we recognize
Johnny Cash's tribe had in the past called written language
"The white man's talking leaves."
Our hearts do more than just pump blood.
It's been raining a lot.
It might soon flood.
Thank you it's fine, it's ok not to care.
It's not written in the rules.
We were animals once, too.
Now we wear clothes.
We drive fancy cars.
We don't run from snakes.
The water is too far.
We all have egos. It's a second-hand existence.
We are aware of our thoughts but we think within a system.
We are a herd on stampede.
Too busy to help one another.
We have no natural predators.
But people are starting to stop and turn around
And face the almighty dollar.
Kindness is free.
The lizard said to the sun.
My child, I will keep you warm.
The sun is lonely you know.
That's why it burns so brightly.
It has been hurt before and it cries wildly.
Someday it will settle and so will we.

This time we spend together is only eternity.
It will someday close its eyes.
And rest from its slumber.
A world of lifetimes, to dream in comfort.
Yes, you held so many in your warm embrace.
There was a great deal of suffering.
But you should not feel disgraced.
You may be asleep now.
But there will always be faith.

BUTTERF(LIES)

bobbi cabral

butterflies,
the high staying up late brings
it makes my bones feel hollow,
and at the same time so heavy
makes my head spin
my anxieties dwindle
so I can console them with absent reason

(it's the closest I've gotten to endorphins since I quit)
(but I don't dare say to say that out loud)

that misty peripheral consuming my vision
tunneling
swimming
falling
in that sweet sickness

(this lust, I realize, is metamorphic)
my scars are used cocoons
(I realize, my killing of self syndrome)

they aren't butterflies



"MAYBE I DON'T
NEED TO
REMEMBER TODAY"

THOUGHTS ON A DAY

logan holley

Night.A

MyAnemoriesOfAodayA

WillBeAswiftlyForgotten,A

GoneToThebarrageOfAlaysA

SimilarToAt.A

IvokeApAired,A

DidAnothingOfAmportance,A

AndAventAoAbedAate.A

'tilAomorrow,A

IAieAnAwait.A

Morning.

Afternoon.

My head feels heavy

God, I feel tired.

And I can't focus on anything.

But the funny thing is,

Part of me wants to run a lap

I feel like I could run a mile.

Or go on a diet.

Maybe if I ate healthier,

Things I know I can't do.

I could.

My focus shifts.

There's a knock at the door,

And all I can think about

Two faces I recognize.

Is the black tar abyss that lies in wait.

Missionaries from my church, come to say hi.

What am I doing with my life?

Part of me wonders

I don't have anything to do at home.

If I should go on a mission of my own.

And outside of home?

That experience I claim to lack,

Nothing.

It's within arm's reach.

Maybe I could write a novel.

I could always start writing again.

Evening. Maybe I should reel back to something

If only I could get over myself.

Of course, I say that

Who knows, maybe one day

I'm passionate about.

I will! But, until then

And I know I won't.

I'll find something

Maybe I'm just numb to it all.

To distract myself with.

I could always make that movie,

Maybe I shouldn't, though.

Sucks to admit nothing makes sense anymore.

Maybe something else should fill that gap.

But I don't trust myself to.

I miss her.

I shouldn't miss her,

I don't know why I miss her

I'm Over Her. A

When she will never miss me.

It's a waste of my time.

I had such good conversations with her,

Although, I do miss our little talks

I wish I could talk to her again.

It's Hardly The End of The World, Anyway, A

Apologize for the dumb things I've said, check in.

But, I'll find someone like her again eventually.

Really clicked in a way

It won't be easy,

I blame myself for it.

I Don't Know Why I Think So When I Get So Tired. A

And they blame me, too.

But it isn't impossible.

I haven't with anyone else.

Maybe I Don't Need To Remember Today. A

It's A Shame, A Know. A

But I'll Lie With A Head A

Full of Missing Memories, Anyway, A

So What's A Matter If I Miss A Day? A

More Time I'm Spending A

Awaiting Any Inevitable Demise. A

And I'm Moving Every Second of It. A

Probably. A



GALLOPING HORSE // AM AHDO KHTAKALANIA



BLACK DOG // MADELEINE AMEREDITHA



BLUEAFORAYOUA\AREGINEAQUINTOSA

FRAME OF REFERENCE

jordan zachary ellis

I consistently refer to my body,
as I walk through my quarter-
life crisis, as old. Not like old milk
left in the fridge too long, I've yet
to go bad, but the kind of old where
standing up comes with a soundtrack.

The mountains around my eyes that
form with every smile I make show
that the paths I have walked, both
near and far, experienced just as much
sun as they did storms; I've learned to
always keep an umbrella handy.

The whiskers that fall from my chin
present a life that has been lived, each
inch of hair containing its own memories.

When I look in the mirror each morning,
a live painting framed by the mist forming
at edges of the glass, I look at each stroke
that the brush of life has left on my canvas,
and I stare into my own soul with only
one question: is this the same frame
of reference that the rest of you see?



MYAJOURNEYA\AJOYCEATUA



SEAA\ADARIAASAVCHENKOA

MOTHER

mary ann vergara

Times like these

I want what I wanted years ago

The warmth of your hands

The whisper of love in your voice

The warmth of your dark brown hazel eyes

Meeting mine

When I felt most vulnerable

When I felt powerless

When I just wanted you physically near me

To hold me in my darkest of times

I was a kid

You would tell me everything's alright

Who knew you would vanish from my sight

You taught me to love unconditionally

You taught me to keep pushing

Even when I wanted to give up

Even when I wanted to do nothing, but broke down

The whisper in your voice

Taught me to keep fighting

To keep going

MASK OF STEEL

francesca torres

The masks we wear upon
our faces,
cover the eyes that
recognize,
the signs that we have lost
all traces,
of the selves we've left
behind
The firecrackers drown
themselves
Quick to put out their own
wicks
Gunpowder plays as dust on
shelves, whose clouds serve just to
make them sick
And shaking earth sits still
now,
Somehow afraid of sun and
shade
It was scarred, we don't
know how
We only see the wound it
made
We can't make out each line
or word
Courage we need is all we
see
So we let the carved out
edges blur
Yellow fear with red bravery



" I WILL FEEL LIKE
I CAN GO
THROUGH
ANYTHING AS
LONG AS THE RAIN
KEEPS COMING
BACK "

RAIN

allan velasquez

I grew up in a more fortunate situation compared to the majority of people who live under the poverty line in my country. Seeing people sleep on the dirty streets and not being able to do anything about it filled me with a sense of guilt. People begging for money or left-over food is part of the scenery in Tegucigalpa, constantly being exposed to the pain that the lack of money generates has been a great contributor in my drive to do everything I have to do to live comfortably because deep inside I always feared the thought of ending up in their situation making it easier for me to become a victim of a violent crime. I feared a lot during my childhood; I feared poverty, I feared crime, I feared new people and I feared my family separating but most of all I feared change.

One of my first fears arose when I was involved in a robbery as a toddler with my family. Barely being able to understand anything about the world, this experience became ingrained in me as a vivid reminder that it could happen again, and we could end up losing more than just a couple of watches and a few Lempiras. This fear only escalated as political situations in my country came to their worst when the then-president was overthrown by the military causing instability and economic distress which generated suffering for everyone including my family and escalated insecurity throughout the country making crime one of the only options for many people to survive. The following years the increasing economic distress within the country was taking its toll on my family and arguments between my parents created an air of tension. It was not until I was in seventh grade when my mom, brother and I came back home after our yearly Semana Santa trip to find our belongings sitting outside the house and the front door locks changed. We ended up moving to a small apartment with my aunt where we lived for a couple of months before we were able to move to another house. In this stressful period of my life, I started to turn inward.

In Tegucigalpa the rain comes about every summer and as the sun begins to be covered by dark thick clouds, the warm surroundings left by the daylight cool down to a comfortably melancholic air. Soon after, the rain comes crashing down onto the metal roof and produces a deafening sound that isolates me in a small bubble. In it, a deep sense of being protected by the great walls of water that have been sent from the sky. For a moment, I was relieved from fear. I am fortunate and grateful to have been able to attend a private school throughout my childhood at the expense of my mom's limited income. Five days a week I was surrounded by my best friends, supportive teachers and a sense of structure. It provided me with enough stability to help me go through this period in my life where it became harder for me to be open and bring myself to talk to anyone new. I didn't want any more change I felt comfortable with the people I already knew. But this situation caused a dramatic change in our relationship as a father figureless family. My brother became more hostile towards me, my mom increasingly became critical of my brother and his lifestyle and I

began to keep to myself and rarely communicated with them. As my brother began to indulge in various vices and began to neglect schoolwork his grades tanked, my mom angry at his failing grades and life decisions scolded him ruthlessly which in turn made him turn his frustration and pain to me as an outlet. It left a mark on me in my self-esteem and self-image. Not long after I was labeled the quiet one in the family, it was always remarked how similar me and my dad are, but I always rejected this and didn't want to be like him because I didn't want to be the quiet one but no matter what I couldn't bring myself to be as outgoing and talkative as them and I internalized this label and I was, in fact, the quiet one.

During this time, I didn't talk to anyone other than my friends at school, on summers, weekends and when the school day ended I spent my time inside my head and would constantly have dialogues with myself, I thought a lot about my life, questioned my belief in Christianity and as a result I began to stray away from Christianity because it didn't provide me with any form of spiritual fulfillment. At the disapproval of my mom I managed to disconnect from what was left of my family, I didn't go to mass with my mom, I avoided all contact with my brother and didn't want to reach out to my father. And this caused me to go into a world of my own where I would try to find answers and connect the puzzle pieces of my life, but it always ended in frustration with the same dead-end answer that I will never truly know. But when the rain came about always at the same time, those feelings of stress, fear and uncertainty just faded. I felt cleansed and as the rain ceased and the sun began to peek in from the clouds and warm me and the land with the humid soft caressing scent of damp soil, I felt like new. The rain is going to come eventually, and I will feel like I can go through anything as long as the rain keeps coming back every summer.

We were then able to move back to our house where we stayed for a couple of months until my mom introduced us to a new man she was going to marry and move us to California. I then arrived at a place two thousand miles away from my friends, family, school, mountains,

and tropical rain. Coming to the US was a jarring change for me, but I felt numb to it at points just going in auto-pilot mode. going through so much change was stressful enough and I found that keeping a straight face and letting the flood carry me was less painful than going against it and drowning. When I first arrived, I was afraid and lonely. I found it hard to find people I could call my friends all through my first two years here, I didn't know anybody outside of my family at this time. It didn't bother me much because I was stable going to school then coming home doing homework without much worry for the future or what it held but I was aimless because I managed to retreat into myself so much that I lived inside my head and I was disconnected from the real world. Then 11th grade rolled in and I began to allow myself to let go of the past and I recognized that leaving my previous life behind allowed me to change myself to someone I always wanted to be and free myself from the labels I was assigned so I took the chance. Gradually my anxiety slowly alleviated, and I managed to be more open to new people without being afraid of them calling me out or labeling me. I made my closest friends and started to get out my shell little by little. Then I got a sales job where I am forced to interact with hundreds of people a week. I felt a sense of freedom I never felt before. freedom that allowed me to become whoever I want to be and do whatever I want to do. When I first experienced Winter rain in California I recognized and loved the feeling of the clouds going gray and the leaves falling. But the rain was light, not enough to darken the whole sky and produce constant thunder that pierced through my body giving me a jolt of energy and making me feel alive. It didn't cover my senses and it didn't protect me; it just wasn't the same. I felt something was missing, I needed that feeling but had no way of experiencing it. I miss my school, I miss my friends, I miss the mountains, I miss the rain.

I had my own money, a car and growing curiosity in the world. This newfound freedom opened the door to experimenting with different states of consciousness. I tried alcohol, I hated the feeling it gave me, but this opened the door to even more curiosity on how there are different ways to experience the world and alter one's perception. Drugs and substances other than alcohol were taboo and no one in my

family even talked about it, I knew of the existence of various drugs and substances, but they never really piqued my interest. During this time, lean was a popular drug extensively rapped and sang about in my favorite songs and my favorite rappers did it. While I didn't have access to lean which is something that probably helped me avoid lots of trouble, I tried an alternative that is a common household over the counter drug. When I consumed this substance, it made me feel even more free than before I felt like I could finally be anxiety-free and just be myself without fear. When I consumed this substance, I felt a huge relief, I felt more able to assess my problems and be more introspective about my life, I experienced a feeling of euphoria that gave me a break from reality. Then expectations about college and questions about what I'm going to do with the rest of my life hit me suddenly. I was so close to graduating and I had no plans up until 11th grade. I was in stress and my grades started to tank as a result of this. My abuse of this substance just further contributed to my aimlessness, it changed my perspective for an extended period of days even after not using it, it made me careless and it made it easier for me to ignore responsibilities and not care about school. I always cared about school, I had a lot of pressure on me regarding grades since I was a child and I was deathly scared of getting bad or even average grades. I abused this drug because it made me feel safe, isolated in a small bubble with a feeling of deep spiritual connection protected by the great walls of brain fog that allowed me to observe my life and its surroundings at a safe distance.

During this time, I would analyze all of the circumstances and things that I have gone through and examine the pain I had. I would go back and forth to try to find whose fault it is for my painful experiences. First, I blamed my father for what he did to us, then my mom because I thought she caused the divorce, then my brother for the way he dumped all his hate and frustrations on me. In my search for meaning and a proper explanation for what I went through I was introduced by chance to Alan Watts' work, his books and lectures introduced me to the teachings Zen Buddhism has to offer. When I further researched and learned about the topic, many things resonated with me and completely changed my perspective of the

world because it all just made so much sense to me and I could deeply feel the greatness of nature and unity of the universe and all the organism living on our planet, these Ideas comforted me. In this journey I discovered a lot about myself and my existence It opened my eyes to the inherent value inside everything whether something is categorized as good or bad, it is there for a reason. The universe is one and everything inside it is just a part of the whole, everything is as important as everything. After much thought and introspection, I applied these ideas to my life and realized that it isn't productive to try and find someone to blame for anything, everything that happened was because of endless events that started since the beginning of the universe, I believe that with everything that happens in one lifetime there is no way or need to fight against what I have already gone through. The proper response for me is to ride through it and be prepared to go through the good and bad things that will happen. I Believe that good and bad are nothing without each other because good defines and contains bad and vice versa, there is no absolute.

After months of abusing this drug, I couldn't sleep, I was delusional with racing thoughts and theories about the universe, grandiose beliefs and feeling like the top of the world while still feeling disassociated from my identity. I started to feel emotionally unstable, hopeless and worthless. With rash decisions and interests going back and forth with no real reason or structure. I then recognized what this drug was doing to me and after the bad effects of the drug began to outweigh the good, I had no choice but to stop. Entering 12th grade, I was still emotionally unstable and hopeless I experimented with other drugs out of desperation and purposelessness. But as I lay off everything for a couple of months, I did get better. As 12th grade ended I started feeling less and less unstable and picked up my grades a bit but I knew that my grades weren't going to cut it, so I just applied to a couple of colleges without expecting much and I didn't get accepted into any of them.

Feeling hopeless and disappointed in my failure, one time after school I decided to go to a view spot I often went to because I enjoyed the long winding road and distancing myself from everything, at the view spot there is a gate that opens to a hiking trail but I never thought

anything about it. I was curious to see where the trail would lead me, I was already aimless, and I didn't feel like anything mattered this day, so I entered the trail. The day was cloudy and the clouds were below the view spot, as I descended into the foggy trail, I felt completely lost, but out of nowhere felt a rush and faint feeling of purpose. So, I went deeper down this mountain trail and a feeling of unity was lingering in the back of my head. It made sense to me now, the things I had read about being in a state of consciousness called nirvana in Mahayana Buddhism, the isolating and sensory deprivation allowed me to understand the connection I had to my surroundings at this time. I recognized the feeling of isolation, disconnection, and coming to a solitary headspace where everything outside faded. As I hiked back up and started to come out of the fog, I felt the refreshing, renewing warmth of the sun and the smell of the damp soil. I climbed in my car and on my way to my house I felt a peace I hadn't felt in a while, this feeling is something I wish could last forever but as I learned, as long I want it, it is not going to come back.

I went back to Honduras for summer break and remembered all the feelings about the familiar environments I revisited and could observe them from a different point of view. I felt a sense of disconnection from everything but at the same time, I recognized the past and my precious memories there. I visited my family and friends and remembered all the good that happened here along with all the bad. After three and a half years of no communication, I saw my father, friends, and family and was grateful to find out they were all well. I didn't have the chance to re-experience a heavy bout of the tropical rain, but I knew it was still there and it will stay there. Throughout my journey of unexpected turns, I have learned the good that comes from change and how it is essential to life. I have learned how understanding allows one to avoid unnecessary pain. I understand why my mom was frustrated and acted as she did, I understand why my brother was frustrated and acted as he did, and I understand what my father did and why he did it. I like the rain because of its constant cycle of change and that no matter how unstable everything in my life is, I know the rain will always be manifesting itself in different forms wherever I am.



LITTLE SPIDER SA\ \ AN O AASIGALA



MANHATTANA\ \ ADARIAASAVCHENKOVA



DRAGONA\AZOHREHASAFDARIA

NAKED WOMEN

susan lomasney & juliana meduri

Heroically nude,
a stray bare breast and occasional bare feet
Amazon warriors
battle, bathe, and live beautifully,
both naked and in armor

Bathing Beauties,
diving in to wash,
Covered in water,
they are completely exposed
Is it simple, or is it sexual?
Is her bare skin for us to see?
Or just a trite image?

Heroically nude,
a beautiful image,
Amazon warriors
fight and die side-by-side.
Naked men jab and slice,
but the women still entice.

A beautiful death
is what she may face.
Bleeding, dying
but still glorious in their fight.
A titillating cameo
of the moment before death
reminds that every rose can wither,
no matter how sharp her thorns.

Keep her close,
keep her armored,
watch her back

They will take her life,
they will claim her image as their own
See the Heroine, she is glorious,
and so much more.

CURLS

jakob silva

Before I met you
I never knew
Why people wore masks
And liked to dance
Real fast.

I never knew not
Getting someone
Could hurt so much.

Pain never followed
me around —
gnawing at my leg
like a dog —
the way pain from
:you did:

 You parked
a car
 in my heart
and left it there;

 it sat there, lights on
long after the battery
 ran out.



PUNKASKULLA \ \ AANUABAVRAA