

Crossroads

Art and literature by students at Hudson
County Community College

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Candy

Stephanie Miranda

BY THE TIME I WAS EIGHT, I knew what it was like to feel alone. I had my best friend, Jesse, but it didn't matter. Everywhere I looked, caring people suddenly turned their backs on me. My life wasn't anywhere near perfect and it wasn't a typical one, either. I never met my biological parents and by the time I was ten years old, I bounced around six foster homes and seven states in three years.

I never cared that much. I got used to being alone. I always felt lucky that I was never the type of little girl to get sad and upset because the environment around me was constantly changing. I occupied myself with other things, doodling and drawing on the walls, which I found to be entertaining. But after my foster parents at the time caught me and locked me in the closet for hours to make sure I never did anything like that ever again, I stopped.

MY FAVORITE MEMORY was when Jesse caught me eating candy I had stolen from that day's birthday girl.

"Rachel!" she exclaimed when she found me hiding under my bed. "You know Ashley's going to find you scarfing down her favorite candy bar."

I wasn't too concerned about any of that, apparently, as I can remember. "Who cares? She always gets the best of everything anyways."

At eight years old, I felt like I had everyone's life down pat in my mind.

"Well," Jesse started, her hazel eyes getting wider with concern, "candy isn't good for you, you know. You love to have it, but it's just not good for you. You should really stay away."

I shrugged off her comment, knowing the remark was given because I actually snuck candy all the time.

IN HIGH SCHOOL, I trusted my feelings more and more and I learned to live with the fact that I didn't have parents like all the other kids. I took doodling with me into my teenage years and turned it into drawing, then painting. People would stop to look at my work, and that's when I decided I knew I wanted to be an artist. But this focus didn't stop me from living the wild life, either.

When I wasn't making art, I was out with my friends, getting high, shoplifting, and doing other things that we thought were interesting ways to pass time. One night we were out in a car with Jonathan at the wheel, none of us thinking twice about him being drunk. The next thing I knew, I woke up in a hospital with gashes all over my body, one above my eyebrow and most of them on my back and stomach. The doctor told me I was in a coma for six days, and that I'd dislocated my knee. After that, I was stuck with terrible migraines to the point where I was unable to go about my normal, mischievous routine. The painkillers they gave me didn't even help. I was so angry that everyone else was fine, other than just minor injuries. I kept asking myself, why me?

I knew I had to stop the lifestyle I was living, or else it would kill me.

SEVEN YEARS LATER, I was in class, making another painting. The bright red and orange flowers laid across the woman's stomach on a colorful background, and I couldn't be more proud of myself. I signed my name on the painting, and then looked at him. He was six feet tall and had the brightest blue eyes I'd ever seen. We had met a few months back on an internship I was doing one semester in New York. I knew he was the one the moment he talked to me, and from there we started going out. He had the best manners in the world, always making sure that I felt comfortable, and he was never rude to me or anybody in anyway. He always complimented my paintings, and he even told

me he wanted me to meet his parents. I knew I was in love with him. The problem was, he didn't know about the scars. The one above my eyebrow was barely visible now, but the scars remained extremely visible on the upper half of my body. I didn't know how I was going to explain it to him, but he had a right to know. One night we were walking back from a concert, and I decided to get the courage to tell him.

"I know you're serious about us," I started. "And I am too, but there's something you have to know. I was in a car crash when I was fifteen years old." When he looked confused, I let the last part escape my lips. "I have scars all over my body." The look in his eyes went from confusion to surprise, and then disgust. I felt my whole world collapse on me.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I can't do this anymore." He turned back and walked away into the dark alley next to my house. I'll never forget the steps that he took because I counted them, as if I was counting a part of my life away. I felt my legs getting weak and hot tears burning in my eyes. The next morning I left a bowl of dead bees and rose petals on his doorstep. He was rosy on the outside, but dead and ugly on the inside.

THREE YEARS LATER, I'm engaged. I saw him again, after three years. He saw me through a window, he told me. He wanted to apologize for being "such an asshole," he said. He told me that he divorced his wife because she cheated on him with his best friend. Then, he started telling me about how much he missed me, and how good I was to him, and the fact that he couldn't replace what I gave to him. I remembered how I cried for a few nights straight after he walked away from me that evening, but I didn't care a lot about his apology. What he said three years ago didn't rip me up like it used to when I thought about it. He just wasn't good for me.

Some people are like candy, you love to have them, but they're just not good for you, and then when you realize they aren't good for you, you wish you could have them more than anything else.

I wonder what ever happened to Jesse...



Geiko San

Carmen Urbano



Mother
Jason Josiah

The Out

Max Greenberg-Kerwick

HIS HELMET IS HEAVY and the suit weighs down hard as Michael proceeds through the wrecked jungle. He glares around at the fog covered tree tops. Above the fog is only more uncolored mist. It looks so real. The trunks are skinny and blackened, the branches have lost all leaves and the grass below his feet is in the process of decay.

Michael moves forward sluggishly with the institution's military grade armor and pulse rifle. His vision inside the large helmet turns dark blue and as he surveys the area, humanoid red shapes appear all around him. The nineteen-year-old takes cover behind a downed log, large in width but short in size. The wind harshens, slamming against the metallic helmet. Michael has never felt the wind before.

His life up to this point has been one of luxury from the world on the surface. No concerns over plague or injury, but no sense of freedom. Michael saw the former flag of the continent once. The red, white, and blue didn't look as good as stories told. The institution's school teachers told their classes that it represented the very thing that he had never felt. Michael knows enough about human nature and the world's history to know it was false, for the most part. But what's the point of caring now? The age of civilization had come to an end centuries ago and all but him have disregarded the past.

The firing begins and Michael zones back to his reality. The weapon in his hands shakes as his palms quiver and the heart rate speeds. "No...No...No..." The trapped feeling of existence is gone, but freedom has a price.

Four raiders descend on the lone soldier. "Oh god...Oh god..." Michael bites down on his bottom lip until blood begins to gush. A single bullet slams against the helmet. A dent is made but the metal stays resistant. "Now or never," he says under his breath. The sudden spring up of life surprises the raiders. In seconds, Michael aims down the sight of his weapon and fires. It takes a short time but feels like slow motion. Each beam of light is directed toward the thief's legs. One by one, they all fall with

burn marks stretching along the outer layer of their legs.

He sees more red figures heading his way. The heat signatures all carry weapons, heavier than the mere handguns held by the last wave. They're all running. They want him dead. So he retreats. The bulky suit makes it near impossible to sprint. Michael trips more than once on a fallen and hidden log. Each time he gets up, his confidence fades further into the darkness. This was all a giant mistake. The heat signatures are closing in. Most of the raiders ready their shotguns and rifles for the kill. "The Out" is too dangerous and now he realizes this. Michael pants and considers his options. "I can't do this."

"Yes, you can," a near voice speaks out over the tree line. It comes from the sky and bellows. The harshness in the voice is disappointment. The raiders are seconds away. One already has taken aim, being careful to keep the teenage soldier unaware. Before the raider takes the shot, the sky dims to black and the trees vanish. The raiders evaporate like rain water and the armored suit goes with them. For a moment Michael stands in the blackness, a puzzled expression on his face.

The room lights back up. This time the ceiling is bright white and instead of an endless forest, Michael is met with four silver-colored walls and a roof. The teenager turns to face a man in a large booth in the back of the room. The man folds his arms and sighs. This twists at the boy's insides and rips away at his heart. "I can do better," Michael insists.

"No, you can't," the man's voice, through the intercom, says.

"Put me back in."



Waking Up
Melissa Vasquez



Shine Into
Cynthia Arevalo

Nostalgia Child
Carlana Hernandez

What is it about the past that keeps coming to you in the
loneliness of dawn?
Or in the glimpse of sunlight escaping from a cloud?
The embrace of the past can be felt when a child is giggling,
Or when the wind is solemnly moving the green leaves of the
trees in the gentle summer.
The past feels like a pain in the chest,
And you have to stay quiet,
No words can come out of your mouth,
They can't escape from your heart,
And no tears can come out of your eyes,
They are indecent,
Someone says in the other room.
You try to let go, but the past decides to stay.
Suddenly it tells you,
My child, you belong to nostalgia...

Diwali Meal Celebration

Uttsav Patel

IT WAS THE SECOND WEEK OF NOVEMBER 2012 when my family began preparing for Diwali. The festival of light is held in honor of Lakshmi, and Hindus pray to this goddess to bring good fortune for the upcoming year. My parents called all of our relatives, including my uncles and aunts, their children, and my grandparents. Everyone accepted our invitation because they knew it would be our family's last Diwali in India.

My father and I purchased different firecrackers, such as sparklers, mini rockets, and mini bombs because we wanted to light up the sky. My sisters went out to buy traditional Diwali foods, such as sweets and raw food from the market. We were so excited to see all of our relatives; we were like toddlers waiting for their fathers to bring candies. The day of Diwali came and the wait of our relatives ended.

Starting at 12 o'clock in the afternoon, each family came, one after another. Many took a train, while others walked to our house. The house was full of people, and it felt like there was discussion going on in an assembly hall of India. We were so loud anyone walking by would have assumed that we were quarreling. Emotions flowed from each of us like a fledgling animal seeing its mother after a long time. My family welcomed all our relatives by feeding them different kinds of sweets, such as Gulabjamun, Mohanthal, and Rasmalai. My grandmother fed me my favorite, Kaju-Katri, with her hands. She made it especially for me, pouring her love into the sweet from eyes as beautiful as flowers blossoming in winter. Long discussions about the lives of our relatives continued for the entire afternoon. After discussions and acquainting, the time came to cook dinner.

Our female family members prepared the food in about two hours. My mother and one of my aunts began cooking spinach and paneer curries in huge containers. Noises from those containers sounded like bells ringing in temples during prayer time in the evening. My sisters and cousins made circle-shaped naan. My father and one of my uncles assisted by cooking rice. The kitchen was packed like a subway car during rush hour.

Food was finally on the tables and two hours of waiting felt like two years. All my family members gathered around the tables like animals gathering at a waterhole. First they prayed and thanked God for food. Their faces were desperate, like a child waiting for its father. They started eating. Every touch of naan felt like petting a fluffy dog. The smell of curries whetted everyone's appetite. Rice smelled like the fragrance of earth after rain. The taste of coriander, turmeric, red chilies, and cumin of daal filled our mouths with Indian spices. Most relatives quickly finished their food in ten to fifteen minutes.

After our delicious dinner, we all sat down on couches and had fun. My grandfather shared several funny memories of his children. To exemplify, he mentioned that my father used to feel shy and became red like a tomato when he wore shorts in public. Also, he was too lazy to finish his homework, so he bribed his friends with money. As a result, all my relatives laughed loudly as if someone released laughing gas in the room. Afterwards, my father brought sweet almond flavored kulfies (ice-cream bars) for everyone for dessert. All the children became so excited because those candies were their favorite. They ate kulfies like a desert wanderer who finally found an oasis. At last, the time came to say goodbye to our relatives.

It was difficult to say goodbye, especially for my family, because it was our last Diwali in India, and we knew that we would not see all our relatives together again. After 12 o'clock at night, each group of family started to leave, one after another. Everyone hugged each other and wished my family a better future. Tears were flowing down like rain on the windowpane. My heart scattered, and I felt numbness in my body. Watching my grandparents felt like I was watching the final Harry Potter movie, knowing that it would be my last time with these people. All our relatives did not want to depart from our home. The gravitational force was pulling them back to the home. We took some group photographs of all families. My aunt and uncle said "we will miss you" to my family in soft voices.

In the end, everyone left. Our home was like an empty highway. That day was unforgettable, a meal that left me with the unique taste of India before I transitioned to the United States.



Sea Turtle
Julian Millet



Macao Beach in Dominican Republic
Griselda Paulino

Porcelain Doll

Nazareth Mendez

ONE CRACK, TWO CRACKS, THREE CRACKS, FOUR.

Artificial beauty, face full of shame, this porcelain doll was born into a society where words were sharp daggers that seemed to be thrown by blind soulless monsters that were not afraid to attack.

Life was like traveling through a maze of knife-filled walls that were closing in.

This porcelain doll was running out of patches to cover the cracks that were engraved by this society.

They wrote with a typewriter all the rules and regulations of being considered acceptable on her forehead.

Around her belly they tattooed a measuring tape and marked the size that was considered beautiful.

She was scarred; she was used as evidence of a plan to create brainless Barbie dolls, the all American woman.

With the boys, they inflated their arms along with their egos and called them men. Filling their minds with disrespectful phrases and Lust.

Now this porcelain doll breathed in every word, and mirrors became enemies, tears became best friends, solitude became a family member, and self-hate became her shadow.

Her surface was about to shatter along with her hope for a simple world where the stars played with the clouds and the sun conversed with the moon.

She gave up and she broke.

Leaving behind her pieces, everyone gathered around her crying and hoping she would come back. People she had never spoken to, enemies that threw the first daggers at her, wept.

Now, after she was gone, they noticed how gorgeous she was; now her worn out pieces were becoming lovely petals, now she was appreciated for the lovely rose she was.

Society brainwashes us and makes us hungry for power, but once we see someone fall, we shed our snake figures and transform into innocent butterflies and forget the kicks and punches we served to these fallen angels.

Parents only realize something is wrong when they find the blood spatters on bathroom walls, rope marks on necks, when their all-star player is 6 feet under breathless.

Masked and artificial we have become, fake outlines, this is the sad truth of the human race.

Now all I ask is for us to be the deal breakers, together we can bring up our white flags and form an alliance to stop watching our peers being buried alive by simple punch lines and the sinister lies in magazines. We can make scales belt out beautiful and the word strong will only refer to a man's will.

Let's change our ways and create equality, something that has long been missing



Female Figure Studies

Ailyn Lopez



Untitled

Melany Mayorga

The Beauty of Language

Sua L. Mendez

ACCORDING TO MY MOTHER, it was an early Tuesday morning when I was born in the Parroquia, a parish district, Bolivar (Sagrario) in Guayaquil, Ecuador. It was September of 1993 and only a few months after my mother had stopped attending a nearby university, where she had been pursuing a degree in Spanish Literature and practicing English on the side. One of my aunts had moved to the United States a couple of years prior to my birth, and another portion of my family had been there for even longer. The next four years of my life in Guayaquil would offer me few memories that I would later vaguely remember before we too packed up and moved to New York City in 1997. With only a brief knowledge of the Spanish language and fading childhood memories to remind me of my original nationality, my journey towards discovering my newfound Hispanic American identity had just begun.

It was during this time, in the process of moving, that my earliest crystal clear memories were molded into shape. Perhaps it was the excitement I felt at seeing and being on an airplane for the first time. I remember big airplane seat belts and tray tables on which toys rolled around during slight turbulence. Large brick-walled apartment buildings, and strangers who weren't strangers, but actually family, and cousins who spoke words I couldn't understand. After a small gap in my memories, I can recall living in a one-room apartment in Brooklyn with my mother where she found work and attended ESL classes at a local community college. There was a daycare center directly across the street, and when I turned four, my mother took me there to learn English and the basic education that I would need before starting first grade. I regret not being able to pinpoint the exact moment I picked up the language, and only somewhat remember a brief feeling of loss and confusion on that first day before I suddenly found myself consuming new words and books insatiably on a daily basis.

English was everywhere, and it became my everything; my main speaking language, dreams, and thoughts. An overall

oblivious but happy child, I settled into it, choosing instead to speak to my mother in mostly English, and essentially allowing it to usurp my first language. Spanish became more personal, customary, only spoken at home or at family gatherings where aunts and grandparents would sing and dance, reveling in each other's wild laughter, before being tucked away until the next party. Without realizing it, my personality had been cut in half, and the Hispanic side of my Hispanic-American identity was slowly being stripped away. Later, in 2004, my mother and I would officially become naturalized citizens of the United States. By this point, American culture and the English language had devoured us both almost entirely. Primarily, we spoke in English, read in English, did everything in English. The few times we shared stories in Spanish were brief, and I relished the moments my mother would read to me from the old handbound journal she had brought with her from Ecuador, its pages filled with classical novel excerpts she had cut from newspapers herself.

In the Spring of 2008, and after a happy surprise, our family grew in size with the birth of my brother, Matthew. His very existence became like a gift that brought change and life back into our family. Born with a birth defect that meant his right foot was twisted inwards, we doted over him constantly and focused all of our attention on getting his foot aligned via surgery and therapy so that he could walk and run easily later in life. Up to that point, our main form of interaction with each other had involved a mix of English and Spanish, and when we spoke to Matthew, we did the same without really considering how it might affect him. He was three years old when his doctors told us his language development had stopped, limited to only one or two words at a time, in Spanglish, no doubt. We were assured that his speech delay had nothing to do with our way of speaking but were still encouraged to find a speech therapist to assist him.

Finally, after three long years of school and speech therapy, Matthew was speaking in full English sentences. We were ecstatic. However, my joy would be short lived, and I began to experience an overwhelming sadness for my beloved first language, which I now realized was spoken even less at home, if at all. Suddenly, my assimilation felt like abandonment, and I

noticed for the first time, as I watched other children chatter with their families in perfect Spanish, how ungrateful I had been. My beautiful language, along with other aspects of Hispanic culture from my childhood, had been tossed aside in exchange for acceptance and shiny new customs. Family members had grown apart or moved away, and I wondered how my brother, who still struggled with Spanish pronunciation, would suffer because of it. Somehow, along the way, I had allowed myself to appear less Hispanic-American and instead had begun to present myself as more solely American on the outside. I shared these sentiments with my mother one day, and we had a conversation about her adolescence in Ecuador. Together, we discussed the hardships she had faced there, as well as her favorite pastimes, which had involved frequenting a Spanish literature and poetry club. After our conversation, my mother ended up deciding that we should seek out old friends and visit book readings similar to those she had attended in her youth. We shared stories with my brother and celebrated with both new and familiar food, as well as vibrant music during holidays the same way we once had before.

The journey I had begun in 1997 had now come full circle. I had spent such a large portion of my childhood and adolescence assimilating to American culture, and in turn, neglecting my first nationality. As I arrived on North American soil, with only a few toys in one hand, and my mother's hand in the other, I carried the small number of Spanish words I had gathered as a toddler. By allowing my new American identity to surpass what would become my true Hispanic-American identity, I would lose sight of the importance of maintaining those values and principles. Today, we still attend gatherings that are beyond inspiring and have helped me recognize that my appreciation and devotion for the Spanish language and my family has always been a part of who I really am, and together we've promised that we will never let it go again.



Untitled

Yashminie Singh



Untitled

Angela Seibert

You're Not Alone
Kissarne Averill Pang

You're not alone.

You always think of killing yourself because the monster in your head is eating you alive.

You always hope that there will be no tomorrow in your life that is full of rejection and sorrow.

You are terrified of facing your problems because you always think there will be no solution.

Well, you're not alone.

You always think you're a huge disappointment to everyone in your life.

You always choose the wrong things and you don't forgive yourself.

Instead, you regret it in every single day in your life.

You don't give yourself a chance.

Instead, you're trying to waste your life by choosing more bad things.

You don't trust yourself enough to pursue the things that make you happy.

Instead, you're staring in the blank page and think that there's no way you can do it.

You complain, but you never thought that sometimes the problem is YOU.

You are the problem and you know it.

But you never liked yourself anyway -- that's why you don't wanna become a better person.

You lose hope.

You always want to end your precious life, but I know you can't because there's a reason you feel isolated.

That's because you isolate yourself

You're not confident enough.

That's because you don't push yourself hard enough to strive for something you always wanted to be.

You always see things as difficult.

That's because you always wanted to miss the chance to understand.

You're stuck in what you call your "miserable and pointless life"
because you don't keep moving/going.

You wanted affection, but you never give some.

You wanted respect, but you never respect yourself.

You feel worthless.

That's because you don't see your worth in yourself

You always have an opportunity to grow, to learn and to accept
things as it is but you always turn it down and you
always lose hope.

But let me ask you something: why are you still here on this
chaotic world?

The world that made you feel that way?

It is because you have a PURPOSE.

Your life is worth living for, and you are NOT alone.

Tea For One
Valeria Morales

PERHAPS SOME PEOPLE were born to love the wrong person. We were born to be the one standing in front of the unreachable, watching how it moves in front of us without including our presence in its movements.

We are the bags of tea for people who prefer to drink coffee, and they don't understand the pain within it. How can I find a tea lover when all I have is one mouth to want, one cup to crave and one tongue to taste? I can be water or grass; I can be smoke or ice.

The world seems perfectly made to connect certain faces, to create emotions based on a smile, a tear or a word. I am the unspoken invisible figure in a corner, too obvious to be noticed by the eyes of lovers.

All the lovers seem too perfect to me to be rejected. I could love any of them, how can they not love me? Why can't they try some tea before saying they dislike it?

Perhaps it is my face, or my voice. The melody coming from the living heart incapable of being loved, the same one that keeps me alive: This heart follows the rhythm of each step every person makes when they walk away from me. This heart full of hope might be yours but not mine.

The problem with us, the tea bags, is that we are not allowed to love ourselves. All the love and magic we have inside our souls is being carefully saved for that one person willing to accept it.

Our problems are static and it's all an infinite cycle. My breath is still perfume for the ones willing to smell the unbelievable. Yet, no one is ready to believe the unknown, the unknown or even more simple, in me.

The Afterlife

Stephanie Miranda

I STARE OUT AS I SEE PEOPLE GATHERING AROUND. I hear and see them screaming, crying, and in shock. I try to walk closer to see the debris falling down from the sky. Only it's that I *think* I'm walking now. I know I'm not physically here. I just know it. Nobody sees me, nobody even looks my way. I try to walk past the crowd and before I even realize it, I feel myself taking off, as if I'm swimming through the air. It is the best feeling I have ever had. Not even the time that I saw all the lights in New York City for the first time, or when I got my own car, can compare. Now I'm somewhere else, not here. I know it and I can feel it. But the feeling doesn't stop me from observing the living, so I know I'm not done just yet.

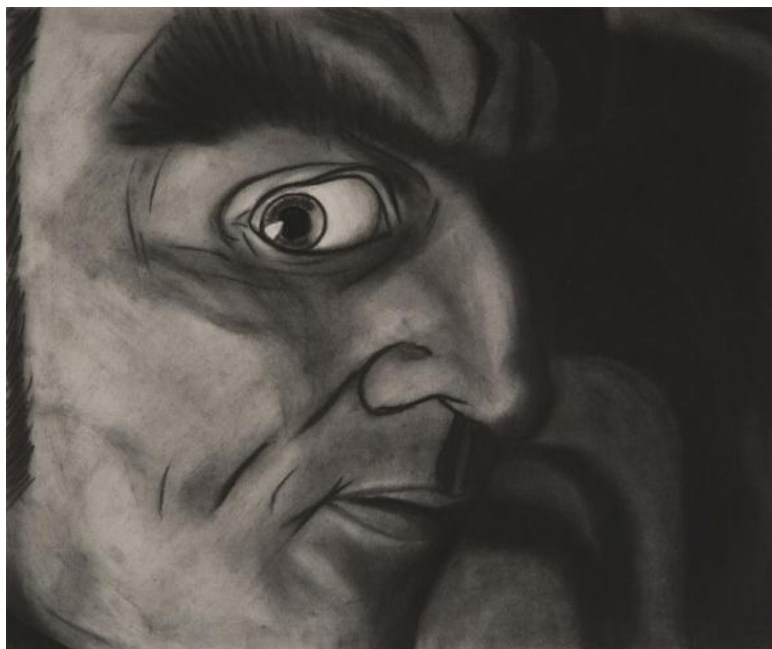
The smell of the fire and the smoke reminds me. I was covered in soot, breathing in the smoke from the fumes all around me, and I knew I wasn't going to see anyone ever again. And then I see it. . . my body, covered in black dirt and horrible burns. I'm bleeding from a spot on my head, making me remember that blow I felt before everything went black. I know now what I am. I am what everybody told me didn't exist. I am a ghost.

I look down and see even more people gathering around each other, their faces showing how scared and shocked they are. They cry, they cover their mouths with their hands, and one guy climbs on the trunk of a car and calls out a woman's name, maybe hoping she would hear him. Hundreds of police cars and firefighters parade the streets, not realizing they're too late. I try to keep myself from falling until I remember I'm not falling. I'm flying. I don't have a body anymore, it's all in my mind. My body is stuck somewhere under all that soot, under all that debris, and eventually it will turn into bone, if they never find it. The light that I see is enough to make my eyes dart away. I wish I could tell my parents and my friends that they were wrong, there is an afterlife. Whatever I am feeling, I know I'm not in the world anymore. I am gone, and it's too late to bring me back.

I can't remember how I got under all that debris that crushed

me, or how and when the building collapsed, but I remember my age. I was only twenty-six years old. Most people have just started their lives at that age. I married my husband two years before, and I don't even remember what the last conversation I had with him was about. I just remember him in that blue t-shirt he loved so much, handing me a bouquet of roses and calling me "Mac," my nickname, instead of my full name, which I didn't like that much. I still feel like I'm floating, not flying up into the sky like I heard many people say would happen once we die. The smoke around the city was getting to be too much. It makes me relieved I left without feeling a lot of pain. People are running now, others are on the ground. The ambulance tries to help them get oxygen while they can. Others hug each other so tightly and cry until there aren't any tears left. It feels strange. I don't have any of those emotions anymore.

Months later, a memorial is built for the Twin Towers. I like looking down at it every now and then. Children cross the street while their mothers hurry behind them. Two lovers kiss by a mall window, and taxis speed down the street. The city has moved on. I hear thousands of people's names being called, the ones that died, I guess, and then I hear my name: Mckenzie Denise Haughton.



A Chilling Glean
Lissette Kylene Villalta

Keep It Moving

Kamau Asphall

I change clothes like seasons, for no rhyme or reason.
My mission this evening, is killing these heathens.
Got a friend, call him Steven, said his father lives in Sweden.
Hasn't seen him since he's 5 - does he wonder if he's breathing?
This world is unattractive, with all the facts redacted.
Spending for tomorrow, cause you're addicted to that plastic.
Killing all the bees in the land of milk and honey
But you can't knock the hustle, so go ahead and get your money.
My race is human being, my ethnicity is earthling.
You're new to the regime, so consider this your birthing.
I want them all to hear it so I'm limiting my cursing.
Wandering through life, pondering what I am searching.
It seems hard at times to live our lives as we design.
My mouth is "Ummm?" My brain's saying "I'm fine."
Bill Hicks is on my shoulder telling me it's just a ride.
But I'm blind to the shine that they're telling me is mine.
Is it my passion or my skill that keeps them so intrigued?
Or the oceans of emotions translated as my creed?
Maybe I'm just poetic for the average to conceive.
Too kinetic for pathetics whose hobby is really greed.
I'm too hardcore, too mainstream, with no plans for pipe dreams
Cause they're mad that my team goes so hard and wins clean.
The truth and so they fear it until my next appearance.
My legacy's the energy they're feeling when they hear it.
I'll just keep it moving.

The Ride

by Kadian Vickers-Hinds

I'VE ALWAYS FELT GOOD taking people wherever they wanted to go. Truth is, I had no idea where my life was going. It's a thing I had in common with some of those people.

You see that stoplight up there? It's the other stoplight after that. No, make a turn here. I don't think this is it. Let me call my brother. Oh no, I can't reach him. They turned his phone off. Here. Here.

"It's 20 dollars bro."

"I only have 10. I think I told you that."

Damn these customers. Last month at Broad and Market Street, a man stopped me. He was panting. He wanted to get someplace quick to see his son. Irvington, he said. He only had 15 dollars. I thought I had seen his face on one of my Springfield Avenue runs. He had a heavy bag with him. He stopped me at the end of 16th Street.

"I think my phone fell out," he said. I turned on the light then.

"I don't see it, man. Don't know where it's gone," he said. He aimed his bloodshot eyes at me when I suggested he look under his bag.

I got out of my seat and went around to him. All I wanted to do was get home to my lonely bed. A left jab greeted me.

"You money-loving scum," he hissed through clenched teeth. Fists were raining down on me. I punched but caught only the air. I lost my balance and fell. He kicked me then. It felt like fire in my side.

"You almost run me over yesterday, you piece of crap, and had the nerve to cuss me out." He was kicking me harder. No one was around. I was losing consciousness.

I woke up. My eyelids felt like planks. I could hear the booming voice of an officer speaking.

"Got a call about 00:30. Guy said he was a bum, but I've got an ID. Victor Mendez. Taxi Driver from Orange Street."

The man was gone. So was my car.

The Stones Beneath My Feet

Aisha Jamal

I AM THE ELDEST OF FIVE SISTERS. I grew up in the northern village of Deska, Pakistan, dreaming as I ambled through the roads and up and down the mountains, shoeless and fearless. I would be known in this village as the first person to leave and go to university. What would make it even more exciting is I would be the first woman to be educated!

I did not share this dream with anyone. I felt if I should utter my secret to another soul, the whole village would put formidable obstacles in my path.

To make my dream come true, I had another secret - I made jewelry and sold it to the tourists and people who visited the nearby Hindu temple. I hid the money and, although there were times I could have used it to help my family, I considered the money to be an investment.

In my dream, I planned to work in New York City in the United States and send for my family. We would all live comfortably. While I made my plans, my parents made theirs.

Summer of 1992

I WAS THIRTEEN YEARS OLD. Every day I hid my earnings. I thought of ways to tell my parents that I was leaving to be educated. There was talk of marriage between my parents and the parents of my cousin, Malik. I wanted to tell them that I would never marry Malik, but it was not the time.

One evening after dinner, my father gathered the family to inform us that he and my mother were going to America. I would have to leave school to care for my sisters and brothers. The only expression that surfaced, my only way of communication, was through the tears that flowed down my face like the River Nandibur near our home. I was thirteen and a mother to five children ages six through eleven.

Autumn of 1993

I had defied my parents and tried to stay in school while caring for my siblings, but after six months, I knew I could not continue. My heart ached as I prepared meals, dressed and took them to school, cleaned the house, shopped, cared for our garden, washed clothes, helped with homework, and took them on outings.

In a year, I felt as old as my mother. I had no more time to weep or bury myself in pity.

Winter of 1994

THE COLD AIR WHIPPED THROUGH OUR HOUSE and froze my heart. I had taught myself to no longer ponder on that childhood dream. It was the dream of a child who now faced the harsh brutal wind of reality.

My parents had both found work and regularly sent money for our needs. I scrubbed floors and knew that this was my life. For how long? For as long as my parents wished. I still made jewelry and taught my sisters how to make beautiful necklaces, bangles, earrings, rings, and pins. We marched to the temple area and always sold everything we made.

One of my sisters was a natural designer and soon people came to search for us. I shared the profits. I always added my earnings to the money I had saved years ago. Despite my negative feelings, a voice told me to be prepared, just in case.

Summer of 1995

THE YEARS WENT BY SLOWLY. The children grew as I shrank inside. The adventurous girl who had big dreams now thought of nursing colds, buying new shoes for the children, planting seeds. My world was small. I had not stopped to wonder as I once did what was beyond the mountains. I had no time to read a book that took me beyond Pakistan. I knew that when my parents returned, if they returned, I would be married to Malik and my life would continue in this restrained manner. After all, many of

my friends were already married or planning their weddings.

Although I knew my fate, that little voice told me otherwise. It warned me that there was a fight ahead to get what I wanted. It told me to add courage to my characteristics and prepare for battle.

Summer of 1996

MY PARENTS RETURNED. They left the two youngest children with me and took the older three to America.

Summer of 1997

MY PARENTS RETURNED with a visa for the youngest two children. They did not apply for a visa for me. Instead, they made arrangements for me to marry Malik and do so before they returned to America.

I looked at them with disappointment. I realized that my parents had never been concerned or even thought about my feelings or what I wanted. Did they even realize that I could dream? Did they care? Why did they think that I could be happy locked into a marriage of children, cleaning, and cooking? No!

A month before the first day of the wedding festivals I uttered the speech I had practiced so long ago. "Ammi, Abu, my name is Salma. I like to run, explore, and see new things. I want to learn about the world outside of Deska."

"My child," my father said. "You are just tired from these years of helping care for your brothers and sisters and preparing for your wedding. When you marry, you can rest. Now, go lie down and your mother will prepare dinner."

I lay down, but I was hurt that my father did not care about who I was.

The next morning I told him I wanted to go into Lahore to shop for wedding goods. I gathered the money I had saved. My mother and an uncle accompanied me. Instead of shopping, however, I slipped away from them, bought a bus ticket to New Delhi, India and enrolled in Patila University.

The River of Books

Nabor Nava

I saw your undemonstrative countenance between the sun and
the moon.

I drowned in the river of books and I still couldn't find a single
word to say.

The clouds of flake white are moved by the busy traffic of wind.
The sky becomes desolate and your eyes are suddenly revealed.

Exemplary, faultless, side by side, your eyes are prepossessing
eclipses that stare into me as I struggle to tear the pages.

I'll never experience that moment again, your warming stare.

I know it's over.

Yet, I reread the last page of our book at sunrise, over and over.

Untitled

Nabor Nava

Women are like flowers.

Some, older with fallen petals,
rotten at times, though disintegrate
into something better.

Others are the peak of romance.

Picked by the gentlemen, into new homes,
they bend like ballerinas into a vase of eternity.

Lastly, there are those,
the ones who have not blossomed;
Innocent infants fed by tears
and nurtured by the silk of the sun.

I Am 200% Female

Anthony Wetmore

THEY SAY THAT YOU CAN only be one complete whole thing. One hundred percent, comprised of flesh and blood and bone and electrical impulses. I am the exception.

When I was very small, as in, the womb small, I sought to make myself more than any other being.

When I was womb small, I was not alone. My sister was with me, through all of the kicking and craving and fluid. We swam short laps and slept a lot. It was nice for a time, truly peaceful.

The doctors said it was impossible. It was a thing that was out of logic and removed from modern medicine, but I did it.

One day along the third trimester I became antsy, strong, determined. I don't remember what happened next, but I do know this one very real truth: I absorbed my dear swimming partner.

We are now one.

As I grew, they didn't really notice the differences within me, not as I did. You know the tickling at the back of your throat just before something goes wrong? Or when you feel and know in one moment that you are definitely going to throw up? This was my wavelength. I thrived on the constant verge of a mess in my lap and light-headedness.

Sometimes, I feel her at my fingertips, what I can only describe as a blood-tinged tickle. Not uncomfortable enough to be considered pain, but not quite a warm embrace.

We travel together, slowly, carefully. We are always waiting for the signals that no one else can pick up. There are things we feel that others can only hope to notice in time.

So my father sent me to a battery of doctors. A gaggle? A murder of doctors? I was sick, but I was not ailing, and they will never know. I can never tell them.

There is so much more to me than what can be seen.

The doctor with one blue eye gave me some pills. They're fun to play with, but that's as far as it goes. I bet I have at least two drawers full now, all pretty colors, but mostly blue, my favorite.

I'm not sure why I am relaying all of this information, I suppose I just need to put it somewhere...safe. Somewhere quiet and dark. Like it must be for her.



Hearts on Fire
Julian Millet

Color Wheel

Angela Seibert

I am in second grade
 I have the biggest crush on my teacher
 He is kind and nice
 In my seven-year-old eyes he is the smartest person
 When he asks us to color in a picture with our favorite color
 My page is covered in greens and blue and reds and-
 I use every crayon in the box
 My teacher comes over
 He frowns and asks me to pick one color
 I tell him I like all the colors
 He tells me every color can't be my favorite
 He is the smartest person I know
 He must be right
 My little teddy bear heart breaks

I am in sixth grade
 We have to interview each other
 One of the questions asked
 What is your favorite color
 I happily answer all of them
 My partner frowns at me
 You have to pick one
 I tell him I like all the colors the same
 On the paper he writes down blue
 Says I can borrow his favorite color
 It is kind
 But still feels like I am lying
 Good intentions
 It still feels like something is being stolen from me

I am in eighth grade
 We have to write an essay about who we are
 They ask us to include our favorite things
 Including our favorite color
 My paper is perfect

At least to me
 It is twice as long as asked to be
 I'm sure my teacher will love it
 When she reads it she frowns
 Hands it back
 Tells me I did it incorrectly
 I have to pick one favorite
 I grow tired of people frowning at me
 I sigh and write down blue
 I guess I'll share that color after all

I start telling people my favorite color is blue
 Less explaining that way
 Less fighting to validate myself that way
 Less people frowning at me that way

Fast forward to college
 It is pride week
 Rainbows litter my vision
 I already know who I am sexuality wise
 Here I am allowed to like all the colors
 We fill out a forum
 To introduce ourselves
 Under favorite color I write color wheel
 They smile
 Ask me if I meant rainbow
 Without meaning to they are still asking me to pick

The rainbow doesn't have all the colors
 Seafoam green
 Golden brown
 It doesn't hold the color of sunlight reflecting on grass
 Doesn't have the color of clouds against the moon
 I try to find the words to explain this
 I can't find them
 So I cross out my answer and write rainbow

I was taught to pick
From an early age
I was taught only certain shades mattered
I was taught that people who could pick were better
Pick a color
You can't like them all

I've been trained to pick
I've picked until I lost myself
Not anymore
My favorite color is the color wheel
I will not pick I will not give away parts of myself
Because not only do I like all the colors
I am all the colors

Blog Post

Reyhan Lalaoui

RUDY'S INNER MONOLOGUE sounded a lot like a rusty complaint from the fire escape outside his bedroom window. His dad was a firefighter, so he did the safety inspection for their house every year. He'd jump up, pull the chipped, black ladder down, and it always gave a "Hit the snooze button and wake me up in thirty years" worthy groan. That was what the inside of Rudy's head was like. Constantly.

Seated in the basement at 2am, linear equations laughing up at him from his unfinished math homework, he couldn't help but wonder when his phantom tollbooth would arrive. He really didn't want to think he was the protagonist of that book, but it was how he'd come to look at himself since he'd read it. Milo, with all his middle-class ennui and broken toys and rushing to get to places he was in no hurry to get to, was Rudy. And Rudy was Milo.

Rudy slammed his pencil down on the desk and leaned back in his office chair, exhaling sharply through his nostrils. He wanted to ask questions, but he wouldn't get any answers from anything – not himself, not his math homework, and not the mounds of stuff piled around him in the basement. Shuffling his shoes on the ground, he did a slow 180 in his chair, examining everything in the tight, wood-paneled space. Why did they have all of this? Why did they *need* all of it?

His family had moved to Suburbia eight years ago, but Rudy still remembered the comfort of their old Washington Heights apartment. The rooms were small and the family was closer. Now, the house was so big that nobody ever seemed to see each other. His mother and father seemed to have a desperate need to fill every corner with stuff, as if a little bit of emptiness was a bad thing.

Enough exposition, Rudy thought, blinking the nostalgia out of his eyes. *Stop procrastinating through metaphors.*

The office chair shrieked as Rudy stood up. He stretched lazily, trying to make the sleep slip out of his bones. He had school tomorrow and his homework wasn't done. No amount

of *Perks of Being a Wallflower*ish self-reflection could change that.

He glanced back at the homework on his desk. "Algebra, you've got to stop asking us to find your X," he whispered, running a tired hand through his hair. "I don't think she wants to talk to you." Yeah, he stole that joke from Tumblr, but whatever.

The stairwell to the kitchen beckoned and the promise of late-night snacks seemed to call his name. Rudy shrugged and decided that finding five hours of sleep was worth much more than finding any more points of intercepts.

Before he could even touch the banister, a shrill, frantic beeping noise burst forth from in back of him. He whirled around. The noise was a rather ordinary electronic whine, but its hysterical pace and the unexpected intrusion into the quiet night sent Rudy's heart banging against his teeth.

It seemed to be coming from behind a stack of boxes filled with his mother's old scrapbooking material (before her craft room had been turned into her own personal "yoga studio"). Rudy wound his way across the basement floor, tripping and stumbling. He pushed aside the boxes and discovered the source of the noise – an old cable box.

It was for a cable service company they'd quit years ago. But now, the button on the side was blinking red and the whole machine was shrieking like a robot with a stubbed toe.

He debated calling his father. Something about the box seemed to belong in Wonderland. It wasn't anything physical about it – just a feeling. But then, Rudy remembered how, a couple of weeks ago, he'd sent his father out to the backyard to see the fairy ring that had grown there. The well-meaning man had crushed it under his sneakers in search of the thing, and so Rudy quickly decided that he wasn't the best man for this delicate task.

Asking his mother for help was out of the question, too. She'd just call the cable company and yell.

Rudy settled on the task of investigating it himself. But before he could get any closer, a blue light melted across the wall in front of him. He turned and discovered that the television that had sat, functionless and sulky, was now flooded with color.

It started to speak.

ROLL UP YOUR SLEEVES AND JUMP INTO THE STARS.

The boy stood frozen in place, staring.

PUSH YOUR WAY BETWEEN THE PLANETS AND TAKE A ROAD TRIP TO JUPITER.

I have no idea what any of this means, but I'm in love with all of it. He didn't realize his nails were digging so hard into his palms until he tore his vision away from the television long enough to glance at the stinging indentations they'd made.

FIND POETRY IN ROAD BLOCKS AND RESERVOIRS.

And then, all at once, the words became hysterical and scrambled.

ARE YOU BORED YET? I'M TIRED. STOP BITING YOUR NAILS. YOU'RE GONNA BE LATE. WOULD YOU CALM DOWN? NOW'S THE TIME! WHAT HAVE I BECOME? I'M SORRY.

The walls buzzed and the wood panels glowed a violent, neon hue. Rudy felt the hair on his head and arms stand straight up, as though he'd just touched a plasma ball. With a final WOULD YOU JUST GO OUTSIDE ALREADY?, the television screen exploded in a shower of magma-bright sparks.

Rudy dropped to the ground and covered his face. When everything seemed to be momentarily settled, he glanced up cautiously. The spots on the floor where the sparks had dropped were now sizzling craters and steam rose from the hollowed out television. He shivered slightly at the quiet of it all. One minute, everything was on fire and the next, all he was left holding were soggy ashes.

Within moments, his parents groggily found their way to the basement, where they proceeded to simultaneously scream at their son for what had happened and thank every deity for his safety.

Rudy just sat there throughout it all, huddled on the couch in a soft afghan, grinning. This was how adventures began. This was just the start.

If there could be magic here, it could be anywhere.