



I N S C A P E 2 0 1 1

# *Inscape* **2011**

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*Inscape* is the Pasadena City College student literary magazine. It appears once a year in the spring. PCC students serve as the magazine's editors; editors market the magazine, review submissions, and design its layout.

All PCC students—full or part-time—are invited to submit their creative writing and art to the magazine's faculty advisor, Christopher McCabe. Submission guidelines and information regarding *Inscape* editorial positions are available in the English Division office in C245.

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# Preface

Albert Einstein said, “Imagination is more important than knowledge.” This, I believe, is true, especially when it comes to writing. Yes, even in a nonfiction story the imagination is greater than knowledge. No matter the genre, a writer is faced with many questions that only the imagination can answer: How do I relay what happened in a fascinating way? How do I pull the reader into my world? Our imaginations open us to new ideas and new worlds—and new ways of describing them.

Our lives are surrounded by writing, of words of anger and love, of resolution and prejudice, of religion and passion, of laws and happiness. Would we be any different had we not read Shakespeare’s words for Juliet, “What’s in a name? that which we call a rose/By any other name would smell as sweet”? Maybe not. But our hearts would be less aware of deep love and a future writer would not be so deeply inspired. Can we imagine life without words and the ability to write them? Think not.

For over five decades the editors of *Inscape* have agreed: there is no life without words. Each year, then, the magazine’s editors have selected the writing of Pasadena City College students and put them to print. The editors take extra care to publish stories that engage and enthrall. This is only possible when writers grant editors permission to read their work and consider it for publication. This takes the imagination of all—writers, editors, and readers, together—to see that it is done right.

— Shanti (aka Mary Nurrenbern)



Photo: Shanti (aka Mary Nurrenbern)

# *Short Story*



## Opening in Management

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Tamon Go

▲ Short Story WINNER

If Michelle had been alive to plan her own funeral, she couldn't have picked a better day. It was supposed to rain again, but it didn't. It was one of those fleeting days after a storm when the wind pushed away all the dark clouds and the smog and the San Gabriel Mountains were perfectly clear and green. I felt kind of stupid clutching onto my umbrella, sitting in my raincoat. I wanted to take it off, but just the thought of loud, crinkling fabric and errant elbows made me keep it on despite the stifling heat magnified by stained glass sunbeams. I was wedged between a great-aunt-something-or-other and a teary-eyed cousin of hers in one of the middle pews. Sweat trickled out my sideburns and down my cheek, my growing discomfort equal to the gathering moisture on the side of my face. At least there weren't any waiters during the eulogies. Michelle would have hated that.

Her daughter Cassie was in the front row. She was around my age, mid-twenties, tall, sharp nose and thin lips. She looked more like her father, the man standing next to her, holding her hand. But she was very beautiful and I spent more time looking at her than the person up on the pulpit. We had met once before at an office Christmas party, though I doubted she remembered me. She never cried during the funeral, which I thought was odd. She looked back once but I looked away, embarrassed to be staring.

We were asked to join the family for a repast at their house after the service. By the time I arrived, the family had already brought home all the flowers, and with it, invited back the smell of the funeral. The company executives were in the backyard talking shop. The family was in the kitchen setting up the food. The kids were already playing a game of tennis on the Wii. Only three other people from my division showed up. Roger was talking to the big dogs of the company, looking for scraps, maybe trying to get Michelle's old job. I wasn't about to judge, though he was wearing the tackiest tweed coat I had ever seen. Alfonso and Lydia were in the living room looking like two pieces of misplaced furniture. I joined them after getting some ravioli and beer.

I felt sort of awkward being there. Most people who attended were family or guests who had known Michelle for over a decade; I had only known her for two years. I felt like I was eavesdropping on an intimate conversation, like I wasn't supposed to hear these things. People traded stories about her while I kept eating to make it look like I wasn't listening. A childhood friend of hers said to another, "Remember how relieved Michelle was when she moved back here in, when was it, '84? I don't know how she ever managed in Chicago! She told me she had to sleep under three blankets with her sweater on at night, it was so cold. The first thing she did when I picked her up from the airport, I'll always remember, she put down her bags on the sidewalk, took off her coat, raised her hands up high and said to the sun, 'How I've missed you!'"

After a while, Cassie came into the room and introduced herself to us. She offered to give me a quick tour. We made small talk while making our way around the house. White carpets and beige walls with dark brown molding. A grandfather clock in the foyer. Non-offensive art on the bedroom walls. Low ceilings and warm, yellow lighting around the house. Cozy.

We went outside and sat on the concrete steps of the back door.

"I heard my mom could be a real tyrant at work," she said, reaching into the cooler and handing me my third beer. "Of course no one is saying that today. But, you know. I've heard stories."

She had a sly grin on her face but I wouldn't bite.

"You know, for the two years I've known her, I've never really felt that way. She looked after us," I said. I tipped my bottle toward the high-ups of the company standing on the driveway. "She kept them off our backs. And she chewed out the nastier clients who gave us hell. She was like a mother hen to us."

Cassie nodded and smiled again and put the bottle to her lips. She liked my answer, I could tell. It's not like I was lying, but I hadn't really thought of my boss as a surrogate mother up until then. When news hit the office that Michelle had passed away, people wept at their cubicles. I heard people crying in the bath-

room stalls. Everyone was quiet for the rest of the week, choosing to eat their lunches on their own and talking in a whispered hush. It was all so sudden, so unreal. She was always upbeat, smiling and joking up until the Friday when we saw her last. She didn't show up to work on Monday and everyone assumed she was just staying in Vegas for one more day, not that she was comatose in a hospital bed.

"I'm gonna miss her lemon pies," I said. "I remember how she used to get all flustered when I called them meringues." We both laughed.

"That's mom, alright," Cassie said. She pointed across the deep yard of uneven grass to a short lemon tree slumped over the white picket fence in the back. "She used to make them fresh ever since I was little. I used to help her out."

She continued to look out at the tree for a few moments longer, her extended arm hanging in the air then slowly shrinking back to her chest, the gray light giving her profile a soft and tender glow, her mouth slightly open. I wondered what fond memories she was conjuring right then, what images she was reminiscing about. Was it Michelle wearing mitts and an apron, pulling out warm pie crust from the oven? Was it her mom plucking the biggest lemon from the tree?

The sun was about to set and the evening sky turned purple. It had reached the magical hour when everything took on a new color, a darker tone, the time of "everything looks so different at night," when the stars were just coming out and if you were driving you probably should've turned your headlights on by now. There was a cool breeze blowing, but the other guests were content on chatting outside.

She stretched her legs out across the steps and leaned back. She said, "Do you remember that Christmas party last year?"

"I do."

"My mom actually...she wanted me to meet you." She smiled, looking down, then back at me. "She liked you a lot, you know. She talked about you sometimes. She said—"

Someone called her name.



“Excuse me,” she said.

Cassie stood up and went to talk to her older brothers. A minute later they invited everyone to join in on a game of lemon baseball, an Avina family tradition. I had to down the rest of my beer and stuff the cannoli I was eating into my mouth as Cassie took me by the hand and put me on first base.

By the third inning, standing up straight was difficult. I don’t know why I drank so much that night. I guess because everyone else was and Cassie kept handing them to me. When someone in my family died, we had a quiet lunch at a restaurant and everyone went home afterward. It was a funny concept to me, drinking and having fun right after a funeral. “Everyone grieves differently,” the priest had said earlier today.

I was sitting down with my back against the concrete steps, nursing my sixth beer, waiting for my turn to bat (I had already struck out twice). Cassie was at the plate with a full count, nobody on. I still couldn’t get over the fact that my boss wanted to set me up with her own daughter. I had no idea she liked me that much. I thought I was just another drone to her.

It was getting dimmer by the minute and I could barely see Roger way out in left field. He was doing the “Hey batta batta,” waving his hands in the air. Cassie struck out and he went wild with hoots and hollers. I couldn’t believe how much fun he was having. We never really got along all that much and I’ve always considered him a kiss-ass, but I felt really terrible for him. He went out to lunch every Friday with Michelle and despite the fact that watching him suck up to her made me want to vomit, I’m sure they enjoyed each others’ company. They were friends, far above work courtesy. Actual friends. I pictured him going out to lunch all alone and could only imagine how difficult it must have been for him. I felt awful. I thought he was in “hardcore denial” for getting drunk and playing some dumb game instead of mourning and accepting reality. Then I thought about how quiet our office would be, not just that past week of strangled silence, but every day from then on. Michelle was always announcing birthdays and applauding for increases in sales and suggesting potlucks and bringing in her pies. She was the lifeblood of our office. The team captain. Our mother hen. I wanted to cry but

it was my turn to bat. I was really drunk. I didn't want to play anymore.

An overwhelming sense of insecurity swept through me as if everyone there was looking at me and thinking "Who is this guy going up to bat? What the hell is he doing here?" I felt my collar soaking up the sweat on my neck, browning the edges, wilting it like a dying magnolia. I continued to sit, ignoring the calls. They started with "c'mon" and "let's go." Then they all just started chanting my name over and over. Even Cassie and Roger were joining in on it. He was laughing, really laughing. Every face there was smiling except for mine. I couldn't understand it. Roger, your friend just died. Cassie, your mom is never coming back. What's there to be so happy about? I started to get angry with them. I wanted to leave.

But something happened to me on my way to the plate, something in the wind or the laughter in the air. Maybe a distant thought or a drunken epiphany. I don't remember what. I loosened my tie. I tapped the bottoms of my black leather shoes with the bat like I was in the old-timey league. I got some chuckles out of the opposite team but I was listening for Cassie's laugh behind me (she did). I looked up at the stars and so did everyone else (or at least I thought they did.) I saw Orion's Belt, the only constellation I recognized, and figured that it was good enough a sign that I was going to knock the next one out of the yard.

And I did.

A moment of focus, a lift at the knee, a turn of the hips, a swing of the arms, then a dull thud. I felt the quiver of the bat against my palms. Lemon juice splattered on my glasses and on my shirt and in my hair and everything smelled like sour citrus and dishwashing liquid and I swore I saw a yellow cloud when I hit it. I dropped the bat to the ground, kind of amazed at myself. The lemon disappeared into the neighbor's yard, out of sight. Michelle's grandkids screamed in delight. They ran after the lemon, stopped at the fence and peeped through the wooden planks to catch a glimpse of the pulverized fruit. I turned around and Cassie was cheering for me. I remembered to breathe.

Maybe it was because I had too much to drink, but my home-run lap felt like it was in slow motion. People's faces, the sounds

of clapping and yelling, moonlight and shadow blurred together like being on a carousel in the dark. The night air felt good slipping through my sleeves and down my collar as I stumbled and ran in crooked lines around the bases. I remember looking up at that slumped lemon tree out in left field and recalling a simple memory of Michelle, reading glasses resting low on her nose, staring at the picture of her grandchildren on her desk. I carried that image in my head as I made it to home plate, collapsing on the ground face first. A swarm of hands came and turned me around in a flurry of starched whites and blackest blacks. I remember Cassie's face upside-down, her long brown hair hanging down like willow branches as she held my head in her hands. Everyone looked so happy in their funeral clothes, cheering, clapping, sitting on the grass, not worrying about their pants and dresses getting dirty. It was only then I realized they were okay with what happened. They understood they wouldn't get their co-worker back. Or their friend back. Or their mom back. They knew that this was the end of a life and there was nothing they could do about it except play lemon baseball. All this time I was the only one who didn't understand; this was something to be shared and I wasn't eavesdropping or intruding on something private. Then everything just felt right, like it was okay to laugh. So I laughed along with them. And all those sad thoughts washed away like the lemon mist I swore I saw. Roger was going to miss her, but he'd make it. And Cassie would make it, too. And so would I.

## GOING TO SCHOOL

---

John R. Ramos

In the bathroom, in front of the only mirror in the house, Puppet brushed his teeth. His hair was cut short, jet black, heavily greased, and trained to lie straight back and flat with a piece of pantyhose he wore to bed every night. The tan khakis he wore were one size too big for his frame, held on by a Marine Corps belt with a Hamilton finish buckle. The khakis were clean, heavily starched, and ironed to a crisp shine; the creases in the front and back looked like sharp knives. He wore a clean, oversized, white t-shirt untucked and also meticulously ironed by his mother. His shoes were black Hushpuppies, very clean, the small bristle brush he used to keep them that way tucked securely in his back pocket. A tan, plaid, long-sleeve Pendleton, clean and pressed, hung from the shower curtain rod. In short, he had everything he needed to look like a serious gang banger. And yet, this was not the dress of choice for Puppet. Being in a gang and dressing the way he did was a matter of necessity; a ticket, a pass to and from the neighborhood free of harassment or worse. As long as he maintained his affiliation with the local gang his entire family was off-limits, protected, and even helped, not only in the immediate neighborhood but anywhere else a fellow gang member should find them in need of assistance. But, like any insurance policy, dues have to be paid.

“Get the hell out of there,” Chula’s voice came through the door. “What the hell are you doing in there? Get out!”

“Shut up,” Puppet said as he stared at the astonishing image in the mirror. He wondered what he would look like in *normal* society. The hair would certainly be longer, no grease, he hated that stuff. After high school, he would get a job, buy a car, and move as far from the neighborhood as he could. The family would have to fend for itself when he did that but what else could he do; his stomach wasn’t cut out for this *shit*.

He came out of the bathroom fully dressed. “What the hell takes you so long in there? I have to get to work.” Puppet ignored his older sister.

“Are you going to school today?” she asked.

"I go to school every day," Puppet said.

"Oh yeah, the school keeps calling saying you're not going to school. What's up with that?"

"Hey! I go to school every day, but I don't *make* it to school every day."

"You need to get serious about your future. Don't be stupid like me," she said.

"Does mom know about the school calling?" he asked.

"What do you think? You think she wants to hear *shit* like that, she's sick. She's tired of all this *shit*, dad too. First Chato gets kicked out of school, then he gets arrested, then I have a kid, and I drop out, and now you're fucking-up too," she said.

"Sometimes the homies don't give you a choice," he said. "You know how it is."

"You have to try harder, *carnalito*," she said as she cupped his face with her hands.

"Mom wants to see you before you leave," she said, letting his face go and turning him toward the living room. "Hurry up, don't be late."

Puppet passed through the hallway that served as a bedroom for the three boys in the family still living at home. In the living room, his older brother was waiting for him.

"On my way to work, Dad wants me to drop you off at school today," Chato said. "Are you ready?"

"*Si, Mon*," Puppet said. "Just let me say goodbye to mom." He entered the only real bedroom in the house and walked over to the bed.

"How you feeling, Ma?" Puppet asked.

"I'm OK, *mijo*. I'm OK, don't worry," she said.

"What did the doctor say?" he asked.

"He said it was my nerves," she said. "He said I have to stop worrying so much. But I can't stop when I hear those gun shots at night and I know you're out there."

"Don't cry, Ma," he said, "please don't cry. I'll be all right. I promise."

"Promise me you'll go to school, *mijo*," she said. "Promise me you'll graduate and get a good job like Chato. You see, he's staying out of trouble now. He has a job. Promise me you'll go to school and stay out of trouble."

"I will, Ma," he said. "I promise, just don't worry so much anymore, ok."

"Ok, *mijito*," she said. "Oh, I love you so much. God bless you, *mijito*, God bless you."

Chato was already in the car listening to Led Zeppelin's *Whole Lotta Love* on a stolen eight-track installed in the glove box. Chato preferred criminal activity to work. If he wasn't living at home, he was off living with a single mother on welfare so he wouldn't have to work. Puppet saw the ride as his lucky break, since the continuation school he went to required him to transfer twice on city buses, which were always full of gang members. Once inside the car, Puppet was curious. "Why are you working?"

"The *jeffito* got me this job, so I have to work."

"What kind of job is it?" Puppet asked.

"It's a clothing factory over on Olympic."

"You're *gunna* stop dealing?"

"*Chale*. I'll go there for a while, sell some drugs, fuck a few chicks, and when they fire me, fuck'em, I didn't want to work there anyway." They both laughed, Puppet trying to ignore the thought of how disappointed his parents would be once again.

"Plus, my homeboy, Tiger, is watching a couple of houses we plan to break into. He says there's a lot of good shit in there."

"The old lady is worried about you," Puppet said. "She's worried about both of us. And, she's not feeling too good."

"Yeah, I know," Chato said. "I tell her not to worry but you know how she is."

"Maybe we should be cool for a while?" Puppet said.

"Like I said, just keep whatever *shit* you're into away from the

house and don't get busted—she'll be all right.” Chato said.

After pulling away from the curb, Chato took a joint out of his shirt pocket and handed it to his little brother. “Light it up, *carnal*.” Chato made his way around Lincoln Park before taking Soto Street south. *All of My Love* was playing on the eight-track. By the time they passed Interstate Ten, Puppet was having trouble keeping the second joint lit; Chato always had good shit.

“So,” Chato was saying while Puppet laughed hysterically in the front seat, “this mother-fucker is trying to kick my ass because he says I tried to rape his wife, right, and I don't know what the fuck is going on. Meanwhile, Tiger, Bolo, and Spider come back from taking a leak behind the gas station. They see this guy coming at me with a piece of pipe, and they jump his ass and beat the crap out of him with the pipe he was carrying.” Puppet laughed so hard his sides began to hurt and the joint he was holding went cold. On the eight-track, Robert Plant began singing:

*There's a lady who's sure  
All that glitters is gold  
And she's buying a stairway to heaven*

“Light that joint, *carnal*,” Chato said.

“This is good *shit*, *carnal*,” Puppet said, as he flicked on Chato's lighter and took a drag. “You always have good *shit*, bro.”

“I can hook you up any time you want, *carnal*.”

“*Chale*. I can't sell this *shit* in my *clica*,” Puppet said. “We get our *shit* from South Central. If I start selling your *shit*, I'll have to watch my back, bro, you know that.”

Even though they lived in the same house, Chato belonged to a different gang than Puppet. Before buying the house they now lived in, the family rented a small apartment in the Hazard projects. It was there that Chato joined Big Hazard. Puppet was only ten at the time.

“*Chale*, Big Hazard will back you up, *carnal*.”

“Hey, I'm from Dog Town, remember. Hazard won't back me up even if I am your brother.”

Chato took a big drag from the joint and held his breath as he talked. “Yeah, maybe you're right.”

*There's a feeling I get  
When I look to the west  
And my spirit is crying for leaving*

"I know I'm right. There's no way I can sell this *shit* in my neighborhood."

Chato passed the joint back. "Then don't sell it in your hood, sell it at school and wherever you go."

"My school is in the middle of White Fence territory. They get their *shit* from the Mexican Mafia. In fact, *La M* is moving into the whole East Side. Those fuckers are worse than the guys from South Central." Puppet took a drag off the joint.

"Well, then, you're fucked," Chato said.

A silence followed as they concentrated on finishing the second joint.

*Yes, there are two paths you can go by  
But in the long run  
There's still time to change  
The road you're on*

The world became a thick haze of thoughts, images, and sounds. Vaguely, Puppet noticed a sign, First Street. Were they still on Soto, heading south? They must be. Time stood still as Puppet mused over his own inebriation. How wonderful he felt: no pain, no problems, no need to think about anything, except feeling the music.

*Dear lady, can you hear the wind blow?  
And did you know  
Your stairway lies on the whispering wind?  
And she's buying a stairway to heaven*

After Robert Plant's last haunting words, the eight-track remained silent. Puppet's mental awareness slowly came back from somewhere far away. He discovered he was staring at nothing, his mouth hanging open, his throat dry. A red light caught his attention.

Without turning or fully knowing whether his brother was still beside him or not, Puppet said, "Did you just cross a red light?"



Chato laughed like someone being gently tickled.

"Holy *shit*, you ran a red light," Puppet said.

Chato continued laughing as Puppet sank back into the seat, his heart beginning to beat rapidly. A prickly sensation moved across Puppet's scalp as his mental perception struggled to pull itself free from the fog it was in. Puppet looked around the cab of the car, more aware now. Chato was still laughing, his eyes narrow slits. Puppet looked back toward the Seventh Street intersection. No cops, good. Everything seemed ok. Puppet began to relax, feeling the joy that comes from good fortune.

"That was close. What the hell happened?" Puppet asked. "Are you *trip'n* or what?"

Chato laughed, "Hey, *carnal*, I'll bet you one hundred dollars I can do that again."

"What the fuck you talk'n about, you can't be pulling that *shit*."

Chato laughed even harder. "Don't be scared, *carnal*, I can make it." The '63 Ford Fairlane began going faster. Puppet focused ahead. Eighth Street was coming up, the light still green. It was still early in the morning, the traffic not at full strength, but there were plenty of vehicles on the road.

"Hey, man, don't fuck around. Let me enjoy my buzz."

Chato laughed again. "I'm enjoying my buzz. This is like a ride at Disneyland."

"What if you don't make it?"

"If I don't make it, fuck it, it's not my car."

"That chick's mom is going to kick your ass out if you bust up her car, man."

Chato roared. "I'm fucking her too. If she gets pissed, I'll just fuck her some more."

Puppet saw the signal light turn yellow. They were too far away to make it across before it turned red.

"Oh, shit... Here we go, *carnal*," Chato said as he pushed the gas pedal to the floor.

“What the hell’s wrong with you?” Puppet yelled. “Don’t do it...Stop the fuck’n car, man!” The light turned red. The Fairlane was still fifty feet from the intersection, moving fast now. Chato began screaming like a warrior going into battle. Puppet thought about seatbelts but quickly realized that the Fairlane seatbelts had been pushed through the seat onto the floor below.

“God damn it-son of a bitch!” Puppet yelled as he moved off the seat and curled up in the floor-well.

Chato continued screaming as the Fairlane shot through the intersection. Drivers slammed on their brakes, their cars careening in all directions. Once through the intersection Chato let up on the gas. Chato’s scream now became a deep, roaring laugh. The Fairlane began slowing down. Still in the floor-well, Puppet looked up at his brother, hate rising to his face.

“Pull over,” Puppet said as he crawled back onto the seat.

“Why, *carnal*?” Chato asked innocently. “We’re still a long way from your school and there’re still plenty of street lights to go.” Chato roared.

“Just pull over, damn it.”

Chato pulled the car over to the curb. Puppet opened the door and got out, his legs trembling.

“Don’t be mad, *carnal*,” Chato said.

“Go to hell...Go the fuck to hell,” Puppet yelled, slamming the door closed. Chato roared with laughter once again as he pulled away from the curb. Puppet began walking south on Soto, his legs beginning to feel better. His high was nearly gone now; he felt dizzy, nauseous. If he walked from here he would be late for school but he needed the air. He needed time to think, time to figure things out. He remembered his mother’s words and his promise. He was also in dangerous territory. He had to stay alert, watch for danger. Death could come quickly here, without warning. If he got *head-up* he could drop a few names; hopefully, they would know who he was talking about.

Puppet turned east on Whittier Boulevard, ten more blocks to go. He felt much better, and had to consciously try not to strut too provocatively. As he walked, Puppet continuously looked in

all directions, while appearing cool and relaxed. Six blocks now. A liquor store at the end of the next block was a gang hangout for White Fence. Maybe his friend Bubbles would be there.

With the liquor store still far away but visible, Puppet saw four gang bangers exit the store and begin walking in his direction. He searched for familiarity in their appearance and body movement but found nothing. He could tell they were doing the same. The four increased their step, walking with determination now, their bodies ridged. Puppet began feeling nauseous again. He was thankful he had had very little to eat the night before and no breakfast that morning. If he was to die today at least he wouldn't shit in his pants.

They converged in front of a rundown TV repair shop. The four quickly circled Puppet, forcing him back against the metal security gate that secured the store's entrance.

"Where you from ese?" the one in the middle demanded.

"You're from Lomas, aren't you, *puto*?" the one on the right said.

"Today's not your lucky day, mother fucker," the one in the middle said as he pulled an ice pick out from under his shirt and pointed it at Puppet's chest. If they stabbed him they would probably stab him repeatedly in the stomach, hoping he would die slowly and painfully, Puppet thought as he began the line he had used so successfully in other parts the city.

"My name is Puppet," he said after quickly glancing at each gang banger, before concentrating on the one in the middle. My family moved from Arizona to California a little while ago. We moved into Dog Town, so I got jumped in there." A faint wave of uncertainty swept over the four gang bangers, their faces frozen in hateful stares. Puppet casually reached into his left shirt pocket and retrieved a lone Marlboro cigarette as he continued his tale. "In Arizona, there's no gangs like there is here." He put the filtered tip into the left corner of his mouth. "I'm not sure what you guys are fighting about," the cigarette jumping up and down with every syllable as Puppet reached back into his shirt pocket for the wooden stick match he also had there. He held the match upright; inches from the ice pick still pointed at his chest and ran his thumb nail across the match head in a smooth,

well practiced manner. The match ignited with a crack and Puppet lit his cigarette after allowing the phosphorus tip to burn away. Puppet blew out the match with a gust of exhaled smoke while still holding the cigarette in his lips.

“Dog Town are a bunch of fucking *putos*, bitch,” the one in the middle said with new determination. “What the fuck are you doing here, ese?”

“I’m looking for Bubbles. He’s a friend of mine. He’s from White Fence.” Another wave of uncertainty swept over the four gang bangers. “He hangs out with The Jap and Little Man. They’re from White Fence too.” Silence.

“Where you guys from?” Puppet asked.

“We’re from White Fence, *vato*,” the one in the middle said as he returned his ice pick back to its hiding place beneath his shirt. “And we don’t like *vatos* coming around here. This is our neighborhood. You got that?” Puppet lowered his gaze, nodding. The middle gang banger moved away and the rest followed like a flock of birds changing direction in the air.

The gang bangers went west. Puppet continued east toward school. As he passed the liquor store he glanced in, no gang bangers. He advanced to the corner and feigned indecision as to which direction he should go. A quick backward glance before a longer look confirmed the gang bangers were gone and no one else in sight. Puppet walked over to the side of the liquor store and leaned his back against its cool concrete wall. He closed his eyes, relaxed his body, and allowed all the pent up fear to come out and wash over him. His body trembled and he whimpered like a child. He began breathing deeply, trying to get everything out quickly. He looked around hoping no one had seen his moment of weakness. He began walking.

Four more blocks. Puppet had four more blocks to turn himself back into the bad ass gang banger who wasn’t afraid of anything. Four more blocks and he could tell his mother he went to school that day.



There are times, if you listen just right, in which everything stops. All the lights turn red, everyone's phone is switched to mute. Diners put down their forks and spoons, New York stands still and everything is quiet. These moments take perhaps a thousand people all at once becoming silent. For one moment, no one has anything to say and for just that second, the lonely, the loved, the losers all feel the same.

I only saw him at night. An odd man who sat on a bench in the park I cut through when heading home on cold nights. A guitar as his companion, he strummed and sang love songs I'd never heard before. He wasn't homeless, always clean, well dressed and smelling posh, like salt and lime. It reminded me of a trip somewhere I never got to take. The scent made me reminiscent of an island brochure, just like his songs, which caused fantasies of loves I'd never had, and who were concocted in his mind.

I figured he was an accountant or banker, not a career musician. He held his guitar as if he was rediscovering a lover. Like an old widower holding a woman for the first time in years. He wasn't new to the instrument, but had been without it for some time. He sang in the same way. His voice held his new lover gently, afraid to push himself onto her rashly, unsure of his abilities and afraid to lose control of this beautiful woman he had just started to taste. The man still didn't have a feel for himself, so he handled the delicate words softly, stroking each line and making sure not to neglect any note, often going back to correct a harsh key or word. Never giving his songs an opportunity to become something without cares and truly beautiful like the wild, dreamy women they were about.

On the nights I saw him I would stay and listen, but we never spoke. Most of the time, I hardly think he noticed me sitting across the paved pathway. The man seemed as if he heard only his words and saw only the notes floating in front of him. He seemed like a child when he gazed at far away nothings and sang his love songs; every one made for a girl I think only he could

see. A girl so tragically glamorous that I knew she couldn't exist. An ideal that men like him who smell of salt and lime conjure up when they see beautiful girls with troubles they can't begin to understand. They become fascinated by how untamed this feminine creature is and think that they might teach her to live bridled. People glorify the mystery of anything they haven't seen up close, like the child who dreams about lying beside a lion without being bit.

Like these childish whimsies, all of his stories ended without the cat taking her prey. All of his stories ended wrong, so I knew he had only viewed the creature from afar. His perception was that of someone on safari in a foreign land, not of the tribe's man who had become accustomed to life with the animal. These songs came from a dreamer. If he had found this woman from his songs, he had never known her. If he had, the songs would have ended in a bitter tongue. Or maybe there would be no love songs at all. His thoughts of her would no longer be of fancy and beauty. He would be more likely to sing of his distaste or pity for her than of his longing. For all men soon realize that we can't be polished. That our stains are for good and when they find the cause of our tarnish they quickly stop trying to wash it away. The façade is broken as happily ever after is quickly discovered to not be a likely outcome.

But this man still believed in fairytales. In Prince Charming and Cinderella, in love and in happy endings. Sweet smelling boys see these girls who seemed to have stepped right out of their songs and think we are something special, something to be loved and nurtured like a wild bird who falls from its mother's nest only to be swooped up by a passerby and trained to live under lock and key and command. But we don't take after the pleasant disposition of most birds. We descend from the blackbirds that flood the park with the sunrise, always cautious, curious, reckless and as dangerous as we are wondrous.

Men that smell of salt and lime and summer days even in the winter's cold are what we dream of too. These women glorify they're sweet scents and think we could become lost in the fantasy incited by melodic words and precipitated by fairytales. But as they become disillusioned with us, we soon realize that these men never loved the blackbirds. They had misconceived us to be

brightly colored lovebirds and that is whom they sang for. The girls of his songs aren't the girls he sings about and whenever I listened to him, I would feel sorry that someday he would have to learn this for himself. Someday he would find a raven and think it was his songbird. Being naïve to her carnivorous nature he would try to cage her and both their tunes would be forever changed.

He finishes his song and I stand up in angst for the journey home. "Hello," he says to my surprise as I approach. "Hello," I reply, my feet stopping in procrastination in front of him. And then, in that moment it happened. All the lights turned red. Every cell phone switched to mute, dinners put down their forks and spoons, and a thousand New Yorkers were silent. And in that moment the lonely, the loved and the losers all felt the same.



# The White Heart of a Bamboo's Core

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Annie Tang

## *Prologue*

I once asked my father why he never told us children any bed-time stories, or even stories of his family or his past. He replied that this was how one coped with life in his province back in the old country: one did not dwell too strongly on the past or the future, only on the now, because it was in the present that a person had to simply survive. Though I ask him to tell stories to me now—me, the young woman who is no longer a little girl—my father is still reluctant to give away all the facts of his life. Therefore I have resolved myself to fill-in-the-blanks as it is said, and decided to create my own tales with details gleaned from the words of my father, and from the illustrations of my imagination.

This tale starts, as the tale of any life starts out, with a birth—that is, with two births: one, a landowner's first-born son; and another, of the youngest son of the landowner's tenant farmer. Both boys were born on the exact same day of the exact same year, and on the same exact estate of the landowner. Both had similar tufts of coal-black hair, and eyes as brown as the soil of the rice terraces nearby. Except for these traits, the boys were different in two obvious ways. Firstly, one boy was the first son of the landowner, and the other was the tenant farmer's youngest son. Though one would assume that because of this both children would have had little to do with each other, the two boys shared the most sacred of friendships and were inseparable. The second noticeable difference between the children, was the coloring of their skin. The landowner's son was as dark as his childhood friend was light. It was said, that depending on the mood of the landowner's son, the shade of his skin would shift, as the murky turbulence of the Red River did in its temperament. As for the tenant farmer's son, his coloring was compared to that of the heart of a bamboo shaft which was white and light at its core. In this, they were likened to yin and yang.

So they grew, and played and worked together under the eastern sun in the land of the south, on the same estate both were

born on the exact same day of the exact same year, for eighteen years. When their eighteenth year came, the land on which they were born went to war against itself. In the south flew a banner of red, yellow, and blue, and in the north flew a flag of yellow and red. On both banners were bright stars—perhaps symbolic of a cry to the heavens for divination in preventing the spilling of blood, red enough to match the red patterns of the flags. Because both young men were born in the land of the south, they were forced to leave their families and take arms against those of the north.

The landowner's son and the tenant farmer's son fought against their neighbors to the north. They were determined to survive in order to return to their families. Two years passed, and unfortunately the war between those who followed the southern banner and those who followed the northern flag did not yet end. The landowner's son, as turbulent as the Red River, tired of seeing the green jungle in which many men perished and bled blood as red as the banner of the south. He conspired to escape and wanted to take his friend, who was as close a brother could be. When he told the tenant farmer's son his plan, his friend strongly urged him to stay and continue on. Now the tenant farmer's son was superstitious, as his father's father was before him, and knew that if his friend ran from what must be done only darker things would lie ahead.

So, the landowner's son stayed by the side of his friend, and was encouraged by the heart of the tenant farmer's son, which was as light as that of the core of a bamboo shaft. The landowner's son knew that on darker days, his friend would be always be beside him, and continued on the path that was left for them. On one of these dark days, some soldiers of the north had in their hands green stones, that when thrown would burst into the hottest of flames and the loudest of noises, and would indeed send a man falling into a forever-sleep unto the ground on which he had just walked. Whether it was because of his superstition or whether the gods of the earth had whispered into his ear, the tenant farmer's son suddenly and swiftly took hold of his friend, pushed him ahead, and ran them away from where they once stood their ground. Seconds later, that ground was no more as it disappeared into flames and noise. The force of the

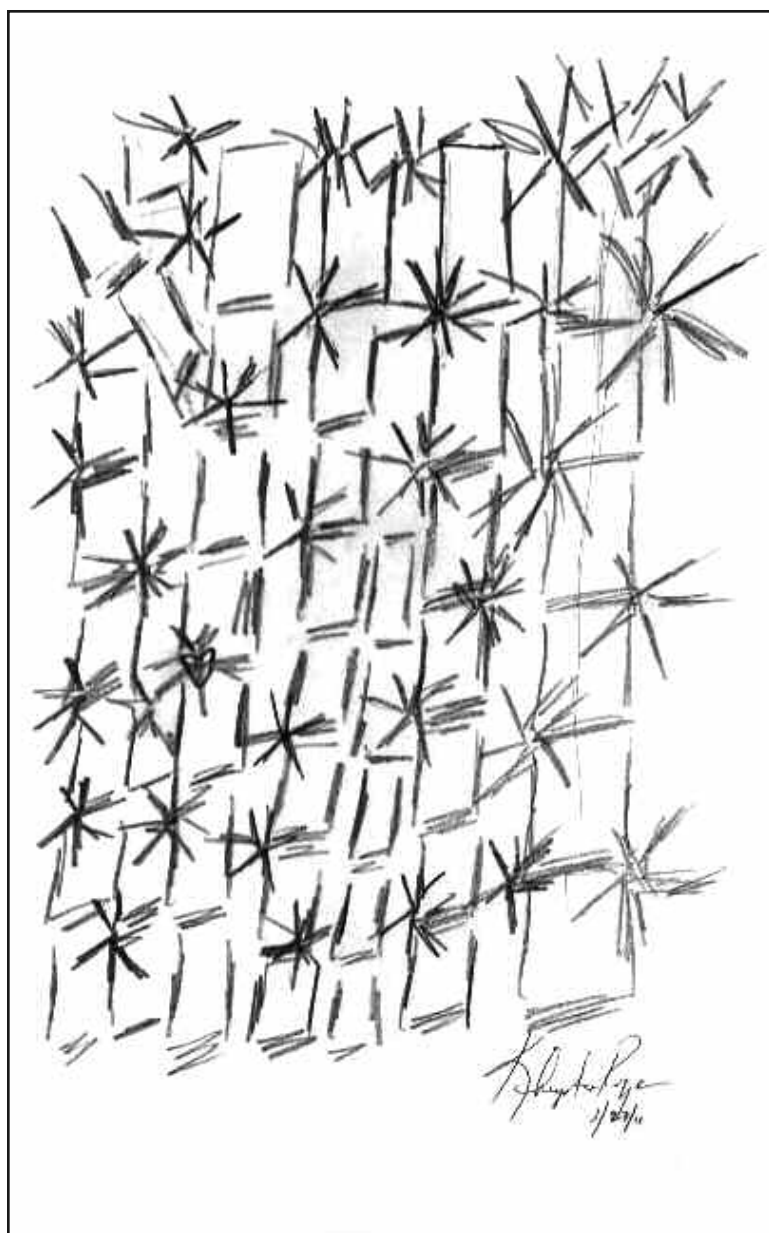


Illustration: Khrysten Rogers

green stones sent the two friends hurtling through the air, until they landed many distances away. The landowner's son was the first to awaken and slowly sat up when he realized the pulsing pain on his arm and hand. He quickly saw that his index finger was no more. Despite the pain and shock of the small loss, the landowner's son realized that at least he was alive, and turned to thank his childhood friend.

The elation of being alive soon died when he saw the tenant farmer's son, broken in ways that could not be described, and as bloody red as the banner they both defended. The eyes of the tenant farmer's son met those of his friend and a slight smile lit his lips. He started to speak in soft whispers as his eyes looked past his friend, as if he was seeing something in the distance. The landowner's son looked back as well and fleetingly thought he saw a white tail, striped black disappear into the growth. It was then the tenant farmer's son spoke: "You will meet a young woman. She will be fair, as fair as the wings of a swan. She will be as steadfast as the Mekong. But because of the sins of her father, she will have been pierced by 888 needles. She will be yours, if you choose to wait for her." In his arms an eldest son held his best friend, a last-born child, as he breathed his last breath and closed his eyes.

Out of the group of men who fought in the war between the north and the south, who came from the estate of the landowner, it was only the landowner's son who survived the battle of the green stones. For years, it seemed like he wandered through the green jungles where destruction wrought death from young men like him. Depressed in his mourning for the tenant farmer's son—a man who was almost a brother to him—he wanted to end his own life. Stumbling upon a thicket of bamboos, within the growth the landowner's son came upon a white tiger. He had been wandering for days, for years it seems like. Though he could have believed it to be a hallucination, he believed the rare animal before his eyes to be true. Ready for death, the landowner's son stretched out his arms and waited for animal's attack. He briefly remembered how the mythic beast was a favored animal to his good friend, and a small grin reached his lips to how appropriate this was. But the white tiger did not charge. In fact it merely

padded forward to the landowner's son, the tiger's fur as white as a bamboo's core. He came close enough to the young man that the beast licked the scabbed stump of what used to be the man's index-finger. He came close enough to the young man, that one could hear the loud, comforted purr of the animal. Once the beast was done licking the wounds of the landowner's son—grooming him as if the young man was the cat's young—the white tiger took an affectionate lick to the man's face and padded off alone beyond the thicket of bamboos. When the landowner's son looked down, his finger had miraculously healed and his hand was complete again.

That night, the landowner's son dreamed. First, he dreamed of his child-hood friend, the tenant farmer's son. Again, he was reminded of his friend's prophecy of meeting a woman who was as fair as the wings of a swan. In addition to this, his friend—looking unbroken, unbloodied, and as alive as the day they left his father's estate—consoled the landowner's son of his passing from one world to the next. He urged his friend to continue the course life had set for him, and told him that if he just kept traveling, his patience would be rewarded. He then showed his good friend the face of his future wife, and with that the dream ended.

The landowner's son continued on his wandering path, though he did not know exactly where he walked. As he finally reached the first sign of human civilization, a dirt road, he came upon an old man with a gray and grizzled beard. On his back was a pack filled with firewood, and in his hands was a long, narrow staff that aided his walking. His gait was punctuated by the painful ache in his right leg, and it was a struggle to walk. Seeing to it that the old man's burdens were lightened, he gathered the old man's pack, and walked along the road with the old man back to his village. The young man asked the old man questions about the village ahead, and asked if there was a young woman with skin as fair as the wings of a swan. The old man replied that indeed there did exist a woman of that sort: "She is the daughter of a man who was known for his many vices, and when she was in her poor mother's womb, the gods punished him by punishing her: to survive she must be pierced with thousands upon thousands of needles throughout her life—needles not dipped in poi-

son, but needles dipped in healing medicines for her illness. If you want to see this woman I speak of, come with me. I will show you to their home.”

Upon reaching the house of the young woman, the old man swiftly disappeared. The young man fleetingly wondered how his elder could have wandered away so quickly with that invalid leg of his, when the entrance of the home opened before him. There stood a woman who was fair, as fair as the wings of a swan. Though she seemed surprised to see a strange, young man, she stood as steadfast as the Mekong. On her arms were red marks from, not poisoned needles, but needles of healing. Lastly, though her skin was indeed as fair as the feathery down of swans, it was her soul that was as white as the heart of a bamboo’s core. The landowner’s son smiled down at her, and as if she herself knew what his grin was for, a smile lit her face as well, as she stared up at the young man with a coloring like that of the Red River.

### *Epilogue*

As I write this make-believe story, I hear the voices of my parents in the other room. Their laughter can be heard throughout the house as they watch a late-night variety show on the television. My father guffaws rather loudly and tries to contain it by covering his mouth with his right hand, the one missing an index finger. My mother as well is laughing so hard that for now she forgets that she has diabetes, the insulin vials and hypodermic needles forgotten for the moment. My father is no prince, and my mother no princess—but in this folktale I have created they are my protagonists, my heroes, along with the many loved ones they lost in the war.

I know how my own life story began, but I’m not quite sure how it will end. I only strive to hope that when my story comes to a close my heart will be compared to that of a bamboo’s core.

# The Hitchhiking Lizard

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Lori Oshiro

I was doing sixty-five on the one thirty-four at o-eight-hundred one day when I noticed a lizard halfway down the hood of my car. He was a green splotch against the white vastness of the hood. He was looking directly at me. Or at least he would've been had he opened his eyes. The skin on his neck looked taut and he seemed to be biting his lower lip. If, at that moment, that lizard could utter just one word, it would've unequivocally been "help!"

The sky hung low in a white overcast. The green splotch must've thought that he was being made into a lime marmalade sandwich. With the constant flurry of gushing air on his back, the wind attempted to spread him right to the edge. But he wouldn't let himself be taken to the edge. He had the look of determination on his face. Green determination.

I had to make a quick lane change as my exit neared. I accelerated a bit to get into the next lane. Something tells me now that I shouldn't have made that lane change so quickly. The extra dose of wind caused lizzy's tail to whip straight up. It was like he was waving a flag of surrender, pleading mercy. He gulped.

With his eyes still closed, he looked like he was praying. I commiserated and slowed down a bit. I wondered to myself, if lizzy were a chameleon, would he have made himself turn white? Or maybe just his tail? Although, I could understand, under the circumstances, seeking camouflage would probably be the furthest thing from his little mind. His main concern was holding on, I guessed. And if he did turn white, it probably would be due to shock. Or, I wonder if he'd turn red, in exasperation. To see the green splotch go from green to red - now that would be something...

I was within the speed limit, but everyone around me seemed impatient and whizzed past me as if I were standing still. I looked at lizzy again. I wondered if he could breathe. He looked like he was ready to give up. Poor little green thing! Hold on, lizzy! Just a couple more miles and it'll all be over! I couldn't help feeling sorry for him. He reminded me of my little brother...

Then the next thing I knew, he went splat against my windshield! I immediately recanted my feelings of sympathy. That thing tried to attack me! Scenes from the movie “Alien” flashed in my mind. What if that thing gets blown in here (my window was wide open), onto my face? What would the news say? “Woman Loses Control of Car Because of Lizard on Face?” Or, what if it landed on my mouth and wriggled down my throat? Then I’d have to eat flies every other day! I quickly rolled up my window.

He remained plastered against the windshield, though I tried to ignore him. “Stay calm, mind the traffic,” I said. “Just focus on the road, it’ll all be okay. As long as it doesn’t rain.”

I pulled into the PCC parking lot, parked, and waited in my car. The lizard hopped off the car and skittered into the bushes. He didn’t even stop to thank me for the ride.



# The Blind Man

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Genesis Hernandez

There are some nights I can will myself to dream of a woman. I latch on to auditory descriptions of them gathered from book recordings and songs. I try to create a vision of what one might look like. Instead, my brain conveys them as odd transparent shapes, intangible and elusive. Even in my dreams, I rely on texture to guide me. Other nights, I can conjure up what might seem to be a face, a beautiful distortion of my own creation, as if my dreams can transport me out of darkness and into the softness of clarity. In my waking life, my nose is as sharp as a bloodhound. I can smell the scent of any woman in the room and immediately detect her level of amicability. Because of this, it's easier for me to work around their varying personalities.

I placed an ad at the end of the Salted Words Literary Magazine:

Humble man, 31. Looking for an eccentric woman. I'm intuitive and trustworthy. If interested, please contact me.

I figured it would be wise to keep it simple. I used "eccentric" because I didn't want to limit myself. The most interesting women, I told myself, were those who thought of themselves as odd, crazy, or neurotic but were much too modest to describe themselves as "eccentric." A week later, I met Ruby.

In a brief phone call she asked me to meet her at the Mystical Castle.

"Hello..hi...is this Ben? This is sort of awkward, I came across your ad the other day. I read at the Mystical Castle sometimes, would you perhaps uh..like to meet me there? I'm Ruby by the way."

There was a melodic tone in her voice. An intimate fear, I felt almost intrusive to be able to detect it.

"Thank you for calling Ruby...um, I'll be there, 8 o'clock."

My speech fell clumsy as I detected an instant familiarity. The sound spinning webs in my stomach. It was her. I hung on the

word “castle” as it echoed from her breath. Castle, castle... bricks, the texture of bricks. It was all I could come up with.

The Mystical Castle was an open mic venue where people sang songs and read poetry aloud. I took a cab there and arrived early like she asked me to. The room fell silent as Ruby read a poem about the death of a lover. This time her voice sounded thick and heavy. Like years of pent of grieving had temporarily found a home in her throat.

At your funeral your body laid still  
glowing like a neon exit sign  
Lit up like a prize nobody wanted to claim  
Because death, you once said, was too hard to accept.  
At your bedside, the week before, I stood waiting  
For your breath to shift the weight onto me,  
Let me be the one who takes it away,  
The last memory of pain.

On stage she wailed these lines, spitting fire, like a dragon. I was anxious to catch my breath. I asked the cocktail waitress to have her meet me where I was sitting.

“Ben, are you Ben?”

“Hello Ruby, have a seat. Would you like a drink?”

She observed me, my eyes hiding behind my dark glasses, my fixed stare behind them. It was a smoky room. I tried to guess what her drink of choice might be. I thought of the smell of Rum.

“Are you blind?,” she asked.

“Only when I’ve given up on sight” I told her. “That’s when I ask myself, ‘what now’ ?”

“You have a lot of confidence for a blind man.”

“I was born blind” I said. “Confidence, on the other hand, was something I had to acquire just like the rest of humanity.”

“Well, you’re a fool for coming here and a liar for not indicating such a detrimental characteristic in your ad.”

I couldn’t smell her. The smoke in the room was thick, emanating a sultry halo of a cloudy messed up woman. The residue left me smelling like sunbathed ashes.

The sound of peoples voices began to stab, the darkness took on a different hue. I relied on blindness to guide me out. I heard footsteps behind me, those of a woman's, the loud shoes always give them away. I sat on the steps to the entrance, a body sat near me. Our shoulders rubbed together. It was Ruby again. This time I could smell her and her scent baffled me.

"Ben, I'm sorry I didn't mean it. I saw you there and I was scared. I've been through some shit lately, please, forgive me."

"Listen Ruby," I whispered. "I can cross these bridges in threes, blindfolded, no stick and still get to the other side. And you, it's like 'backwards' is your natural state. I just wanted to take you out of your comfort zone."

Later on that night I learned that Ruby declined a marriage proposal from the same man she wrote that poem about. She wanted to view him as the man she could never have. It was more real to her that way. When he died she took on his passing like a second skin and guilt begun to seep through her poems.

"I was so stupid. I was just a young twit, you know. I couldn't handle 'responsible' love. I mean, god, what does that even mean at 21?"

Her voice began to slur a little. Her breath now distinct with the sweetness of whiskey, filled with drunken promise. I could feel her leg press against mine as we sat on the cold pavement floor. Chills exploding every follicle in my arms and back.

"You probably think I'm twisted" she said.

She worried that she had never fully learned how to give love the way it had been given to her. She worried that her time had passed, that it was her last chance.

"So far, I just think you're interesting. I'm sorry for your loss." I replied.

"I suppose I need to grow up a little. I guess I just didn't understand how two people were meant to coexist in this kind of harmonious union, you know."

It's fatal, I thought. I wanted to touch her face, feel the warmth in her cheeks and the movement in her mouth as her lips moved, understand the youth in every expression she made.

"I loved hearing you read tonight, you sound less nervous each time I hear you. I was truly blown aw..."

"What? You really have quite a knack for lying don't you, Ben? When are you going to tell me who you really are? What? Next you're going to tell me that you're not really blind."

If only that were so, I would've already kissed you, I thought.

"Nope, blind as a bat darling. Alright, perhaps I should've told you the truth but we wouldn't be here now would we?"

"Why haven't I seen you before then?"

"I sit in the back booth and leave before you get off the stage."

I could feel her moving closer to me. She took my hands and placed them on her face. It was cold. She asked me if I wanted a description. Long wavy hair, fair skin...it was no longer important. I was now familiar with her texture, this woman was no longer a dream particle but a woman with substance. She embraced me.

"Ruby, can you see me again?"

There was silence.

"Ruby?"

She released me. I heard the sound of her heels begin to walk away. I reached out.

"Ruby?!"

The gap, now too large to close. Her steps echoing, settled in the far distance.

"Ruby, wait"

I felt the pit of my stomach settle. I wanted to be pumped with the answer. This was trivial certainty, I thought, a poor substitute for the real thing. I left there knowing that castles were large enough to get lost in and that it wasn't the last time I'd hear Ruby's voice. I walked the two blocks home. There are 52 major cracks in the sidewalk, 352 steps until I reach my front door.

I heard the phone blaring as I stumbled through the doorway. The sound seemed urgent like it had been waiting too long for me to arrive. I was out of breath when I finally answered,

“Ben, I followed you, I’m outside your apartment complex but I’m not coming in.”

“Please, I didn’t mean to lie to you, I was going to tell you sooner but I wasn’t sure it was you...stop being silly, come up and talk to me.”

“I can’t” she began to sob. “I have to say goodbye, I can’t do this, you’re a wonderful man but I can’t. I’m broken Ben, I’m fucking damaged, I’m sorry.”

The dial tone sounded like a skewed alarm clock, forgetting the right timbre to wake me. My palms had begun to sweat. I paced frantically around my living room, abandoned the “skills” I’d learned as a blind man; coordination, footing, reflex, equilibrium...gone. I awoke hours later to peel myself off the kitchen floor frayed by the chaos I’ve created in my own home. The air smelled oddly of metal. My head hurt like there was something alive stampeding in my brain. I struggled to sustain my balance, tripping over objects, bumping into blacked out walls.

There was a knock on the door as I scrambled to bring myself together. I held onto the doorknob for balance, slowly turning it. I finally unlocked it with the chain still on the hook.

“Who is it?”

I felt a hand reach out and grab mine. I flinched. It was a woman’s.

“Who are you? What do you want?”

“Ben, it’s me Ruby. Can I come in?”

I began to feel disoriented. I unlocked the hatch. I could no longer hold myself up. My sweat burning me the sunlight on the brightest day when darkness is at its clearest.

“Oh my god, Ben, you’re bleeding. Did you hit your head somewhere? Oh my god, Ben you’re hemorrhaging.”

The sound of her voice began to fade. Then silence once again.

The next time I heard Ruby’s voice, she was at my bedside. I reached out to feel her wet face, embedded now with wrinkled

sorrow. I read her face with my hands, like reading Braille for the very first time. She told me everything in that instant. Each line, a cry for truth. Each fear, transparent. Each furrow in her forehead, a struggle to find a better way to love.

# Jesus, Take the Wheel

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Christine Hovhannessian

Just when you thought the worst part was over, you wake up to reality. There is always something screwing with your plans, and nobody has given you the reigns to your own life yet. You turn 16 and you buy a crappy, used car, but somebody is always around the corner telling you your driving is too sloppy, you're too close to the curb. You forgot to look over your shoulder, so they withhold giving you a license.

That's how I failed my driving exam the first time. I forgot to look over my shoulder while turning into the DMV; because checking the rearview mirror is never good enough. Do you know how to work the windshield wipers? No? It's okay, it never rains in Los Angeles, anyways. Always take your driving test on a Monday, the examiner is probably too hungover to notice your trivial mistakes to fail you. Most of these people never finished college because they were too busy partying, a greater percentage never even tried.

There you sit, clammy hands clenched on the steering wheel waiting for that awful moment the driving instructor steps into the car with their clipboard. They are beyond formalities, so they ask you to start the car.

Your whole body is shaking, but you manage to nod and comply to his demands. God never looks up from his clipboard as he asks you to make a left turn out of the DMV. He doesn't tell you to watch out for pedestrians, you should already know, you're 16 years old. There are a million people at the DMV on any given day, not mowing one over should provide enough merit for your admission into the real world. Nothing is ever good enough.

God is silent, he watches idly, expecting you to know the answers to everything. Do I continue to go straight, or should I make a turn? It has been a while. We've been headed down this road far too long. Your ankle starts to hurt, and your leg gets tired. Soon enough your car will hit the base of the San Gabriel Mountains if you don't take things into your own hands, your pathetic young life will go up in flames if this misdirection goes on a second longer.

You don't want to doubt him, too afraid you'd be undermining his authority. So, you go straight, it's the only way you know how. You don't want to turn your head towards him, he'd mark you off for keeping your eyes off the road. You don't want that.

Up ahead, you see a stop sign that has been marred by years of graffiti, but here, they call it art. You make a stop, and suddenly you hear a soft rumbling. What you think are the repercussions of buying a thirty year old Oldsmobile is really the sound of your instructor blissfully passed out in the passengers seat. You'd think God would have the decency not to drool on your new sheepskin seat covers. Jesus, take the wheel.



## Say Thank You

---

Shanti (aka Mary Nurrenbern)

Pink notice on your desk.  
It's all that is left. A white lifeless card board box. Business  
cards, doo dads sit in a pile.  
I suggest you say thank you

Through metal detectors you pass. Curious eyes summoning  
you up. Blue plastic chairs you sit in for hours. Forms that  
seem endless. Plastic EBT card. It's only \$221.00 a month  
plus food stamps. Not enough to pay next months rent.  
Again, say thank you

Turbulence comes like white twisting wind wrapping its arms  
around you. Violent shaking moving you away from this place  
you live in.  
Please say thank you

Your bed lumpy, drives in your skin. Eyes widened by the other  
women's snorts and sniffles. Ear plugs don't help. You're told  
to wake by the staff at the shelter. Even though you have only  
slept a few hours.  
Say thank you

Shouting voices sitting on grey slabbed twisted cement. Your  
breakfast served to you and 150 others. It's oatmeal, same as  
yesterday, same old thing.  
Say thank you

Rules if broken, will send you to cold sidewalks. Where bones  
ache like ice on a riverbed longing to be in the summers sun  
again.  
Say thank you

Lifeless, listless, let go of it.  
Tempted by the illusion of magical substances which are pack-  
aged in glass bottles or rolled in a stem.  
Resist it. Let go and  
Say thank you

Enrolled in a program. Tests taken. Tell us how many words are spelled correctly. What  $4 \times 10$  divided by 3 is. If this circle fits in this square. Hours and hours from the time you walked in. Say thank you

Why did I do this? Probably the same old thing. Not intelligent enough. Not educated enough. I didn't put in the right answers. They tell you it's time now. A new career. Vocational Rehabilitation will take you. Are you ready? Say yes and Say thank you

Pencils, papers, torn black book bag, you keep in your locker. All the way across campus. Room 115. You've got 3 minutes. Book writing awaits. Panting. Heart racing faster, than it's ever been. Shoe slips, pick it up, gain your strength. The handle turns, your in. Exactly 1pm. You made it. Welcome students, let's begin. Catch your breath and Say thank you

2 years, 10 paper pads filled up. Raindrops down your face. Your words daily written. You live it, you breath it. Soon you will have a home. Little voice inside your head says be patient. Your starting to trust it and you Say thank you

Files, number crunching. Always a low paycheck. You hated every moment. You were given a chance, even though you couldn't see it. Screaming snot nosed tots with toys strewn all over the parking lot. Chipped brown 70's tile falling off. The apartment management said It was your fault. Pay for it on your own.

Television was your best friend. When was it going to end. The silence, the rage within. That was when you get your chance.

Taken in, given a bed. No looking back. Though you did. Hours wasted, but friends made. Chances were given.

All that was lost, you didn't want anyway. Vulnerable, scared, you opened your heart. Allowed yourself to trust the path.

Look back now, it makes you laugh. You no longer question  
your experience.

Cold chill, roll down your window. Small white kitten purring  
gently by your side. Almost finished, took you a year. Hot  
cocoa bites your tongue. You smile and  
You say thank you

Publisher picks up the book, says good job. It will go to press  
soon. You shake her hand and  
You say thank you

This was what you had to do. Your words affected millions, just  
by your truth. The journey is different, it is new and  
You say thank you



Photo: Shanti (aka Mary Nurrenbern)

## Savoring the Moment

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Khrysten Rogers

Her baking skills had most definitely improved since her last foray in the kitchen. She wouldn't go as far to say she should be hired to work in a professional bakery, but they didn't appear to be toxic little circles of half-cooked dough. There was no dark coloration upon them at all, so, she figured they were edible.

She sighed, taking a cautious bite.

Her green eyes watered with unshed tears.

It was the best chocolate chip cookie she had ever made. Her teeth crunched at the crispy outer layer; her tongue melted at the soft, gooey center, the thrill of luscious chocolate burning her in pleasure.

They were still a bit hot, fresh off the platter, but she was well-schooled in the lesson that cookies were always better right out of the oven.

She sat atop the wooden bar stool at the granite island in the center of her kitchen, her elbows propped on its surface. She hummed as she took another bite, a single tear cascading down her flushed cheeks. She shifted one of her tanned, short-clad legs underneath her.

She had never been able to sit in a chair the proper way; in general, the floor had always been her preference - a fact that had always annoyed her mother when she was alive. A small smile graced her features at the thought; a sigh of disapproval rang in her ears.

She took another bite...and then another, until all that was left on her hands were lonesome crumbs. Rubbing her fingers together, the crumbs showered onto the platter, joining their whole brothers, adding themselves as decorations.

There were three cookies left.

Her hands shaking, she took up another, brought it to her full, pink lips and hummed again as she sank her teeth into the cookie.

This one was even better than the first.

The clock on the wall beside her sounded, a small bird appearing, chirping its lively tune. Her smile widened slightly, her free hand gripping the edge of the island as she closed her eyes to the music; a deep chuckle of pride rang in her ears.

*I made this for you, baby girl, to celebrate your first apartment.*

Another tear slipped from her eye, falling upon the platter - another gift from her late father - and landing in a single chocolate chip on the surface of her next victim. Licking her lips of the crumbs, she absently picked up another cookie, shifting her weight upon the stool for a second time and placing her dangling leg upon the rung.

Taking a shuddering breath, she lifted the cookie to her lips, her eyes surveying the mess of the kitchen. Flour coated the countertop near the white sink - she'd misjudged the weight of the fresh bag as she'd attempted to pour some into the measuring cup. Egg shells created a carpet for the floor near the stove-top; the open milk bottle stood next to the stirring bowl, slowly warming.

She really should've cleaned up after putting the dough into the oven. Rubbing her free hand over her tank-top coated stomach absently, she swallowed heavily the last of the cookie, her throat tight.

She'd forgotten her brother's advice: always drink something with baked goods, especially hers; amused laughter rang in her ears, a shriek of outrage echoing with it.

The sounds of an incoming train from the station beside her apartment building came in through the open window, the lacey curtains fluttering in the breeze that passed along with it. She looked down and her vision clouded completely, the image of the last cookie blurring.

It was becoming rather difficult to breathe, and her fist clenched at the fabric of her clothes. Tears spilling down her cheeks in rapid tides, she flung the platter off the island, and fell from the barstool onto her knees, the lone chocolate chip cookie

coming to a broken rest in front of her. She wrapped her arms midsection, trapping her legs beneath her. She sobbed, her long brunette hair providing a curtain of privacy over her face.

Joyous laughter filled her ears; the image of his ear-to-ear grin, his teasing blue eyes, flashed across her eyelids; the memory of his feet thundering across the floor of their apartment as she chased after him, her fists raised in mock-anger at his latest prank, assaulted her. The tears fell faster as her body shook; she detangled herself, her eyes coming to rest on the last baked good she would ever make. She reached for it slowly, one hand clutching her stomach; his deep-throated voice rang clearly, the image of his twisted face as he chewed her sample making her chuckle shakily.

*This - this is...well...I...oh man, I can't - I can't...give me that glass of milk! Aw, much better....now, sis, don't get mad, but....your baking is...just...not...oh, c'mon don't get offended....it's just...hang on, need more milk...ow! what the hell was that for?...what?...this the last time you'll make me anything? Thank God...no, wait...I mean...*

Her body became overrun with tremors; she picked up a piece of the broken cookie, stared at it, turned it over in her palm softly before taking a soft bite. Tears continued to stream, her laughter increasing as she devoured it. She reached for the other half, taking another bite, trying to halt the laughs, but she was unable to.

“Mel?”

Freezing, she turned, the last bite of the cookie poised at the entrance of her mouth. A light-brown skinned young woman - her only friend - stood there, her kind, yet concerned, oval, brown eyes meeting hers, and she gave an unsure laugh, before staring down at the baked good in her hands. “He always said my cookies were terrible.”

Hesitantly, the woman crouched down before her, her black hair swishing at her movement, and reached out to her. “Mel...”

“But these are delicious.”

## The Recruit

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Matt MacCarthy

Azil had stopped sleeping several days ago.

The shouts and screams had been his lullaby, artillery fire his baby rattle, bombs his nursery rhymes; Mohammed, his older brother, had been his mother and father and Death had been his best playmate; an AK-47 had been his teddy bear and anger had been his bread and water, sustaining him when all else was depleted. But all of this had been denied him, had slowly been strangled into quiet, yielding defeat.

“Sleep,” the Fog had whispered with silent poison, into their ears, and so they had obeyed. The Fog called to Azil also, but he feared the slumber that heaved his eyes.

When at first the quiet came, on the heels of the Fog like a shadow, Azil thought to take advantage against the Occupation; nerves kept him from sleeping as he approached the American encampment. He was almost disappointed to find grown soldiers asleep at the outposts. Tanks lay abandoned to the Fog like broken sarcophagi.

Could they not keep watch for me this one hour? he thought at their sleeping bodies. He wanted to turn away, for the enemy slept, but Mohammed had known the Qur’an like his own scars and had taught Azil well; he recalled his brother’s teachings easily.

Permission to take up arms is given to those who are attacked and who have been oppressed, little brother—Allah indeed has power to grant them victory. And when you come upon those who disbelieve during your march to war, turn not your backs to them, for whoever shall turn his back to them, on that day, becomes deserving of Allah’s wrath, and his abode is Hell. And an evil destination Hell shall be.

He knelt and, not wanting to waste precious ammunition, unsheathed the dagger Mohammed had given him. The blade, naturally tinted a burnt indigo, was rouged in crimson streams from the soldiers’ necks when Azil felt something terrible in his chest,

restricting his breath. Brushing the feeling away, he recruited the soldiers' guns for the cause of Allah and continued into the camp.

Heart throbbing with the taste of adrenaline, palms sweaty, he danced through the camp like a mad scorpion, stinging all he came upon. Allah would surely smile upon him for smiting those who fought for the Adversary; but with each fatal sting of his enemies, so did the sting poison his racing mind. And over the next couple days, with only the Fog for company, doubt began to erode his heart, his thoughts, his faith—his every waking moment. And every moment was waking.

His prayers had shifted, adopting from the Ahl as-Sunnah's Adhan the words: *Al-salatu khayru min an-nawm*. Prayer is better than sleep.

After single-handedly taking out the primary Occupation base, Azil did not know what to do next. He knew of no other enemy encampments nearby and had no way of finding out, for no one else was awake. And so he prayed. He prayed for Allah to send an Angel to show him what path he should tread. In his prayer, he learned to forget his hunger, delving into a fast that would clear his mind, opening his spirit to Allah.

Grey sand like volcanic ash swept across the city, a dust storm camouflaged by the Fog, howling unnaturally like a wounded animal. Azil suspected the Fog to be a sign of Yawm ad-Din and prayed that his book of deeds would be found worthy in the eyes of the Lord.

"La ilaha illallah," he murmured aloud. There is no god but Allah.

The sandstorm did not herald the coming of Angels, did not announce the answer to his two straight days of prayer, but something did emerge. Creatures.

Demons, he thought. Sent to rain Allah's judgment upon the heathens and the wicked and the non-believers.

The Demons' bodies were skeletally thin, like a walking set of prison bars construed to resemble people with burning eyes like flares. They crawled and leapt and scrambled on all fours like apes or dogs or insects and, curiously, had no mouths. But the



Demons were not stopping among the bodies of the fallen or sleeping; they were coming toward him.

And an evil destination Hell shall be.

Azil backed away as quickly as he could manage while keeping the Demons in his sights. His heel met something soft and mountainous—a body—and he went sprawling backwards into the grey dirt. His eyes disobeyed the fear that had taken over his mind and flickered over the fallen body; it was his Mohammed. What would Mohammed say were he awake? What would he do?

“It’s the dagger they’re after, foolish child.”

The voice had come from behind him. Azil whirled around and discovered a man cloaked from head to toe in rich green, his cloak rippling in the wind like the flag of the enemy, come to conquer and annihilate. The only part of the man himself that was visible was his smile, which Azil got the feeling could bite through the indigo dagger Mohammed had given him. Azil dropped the dagger and ran.

The Fog did not let him see where he fled to but he didn’t care. He did not stop to see if the Demons were still behind him or what had become of the Smiling Man in Green—he hoped the Demons ate him. Azil hardly had time to articulate this hope in his head before his skull collided with a tank. He fell to the grey dirt of the American camp.

“They will not come after you, Azil,” said the Man in Green, perched atop the tank, a carrion. “They truly only wanted the dagger.” His smile shone through the Fog like a crescent moon.

A thumbnail moon, little brother, Mohammed would have said.

“How do you know my name?” asked Azil.

The Smiling Man swooped down from atop the tank and landed without a sound. His skin was pale like a corpse. His laughter was also like a corpse.

“Because you have been sent for,” the Smiling Man whispered. “You have shown yourself to be a valuable soldier, able to do what is necessary. You are to set out today, following the sun’s path across the sky—take nothing with you but the clothes on your back!—until you reach Jerusalem.”

Azil would have found it in him to laugh at the absurdity of such a notion were it not for the fact that in his heart of hearts, he suspected he was now speaking with Malik al-Maut, the Angel of Death.

You're the one who prayed for Allah to send you an Angel, he could hear Mohammed say, scolding him with a smile. You never specified which Angel...

"Such a trip would take months!" Azil pleaded to the Green Phantom. "What will I do for food?"

"It will more than likely take a year," the Phantom giggled. "And don't worry, God will provide."

"La ilaha illallah," Azil muttered.

"Of course, of course," the Phantom snickered. "That is why you are being recruited for the Great Struggle; Yawm al-Din is coming. You have a firm belief... and a one-eyed creature will never be your Lord..."

Terror seized Azil's heart. He knew of only one creature like that. "You mean..."

"Yes..." The grin somehow widened. "Masih ad-Dajjal is here. Jerusalem is being scavenged—being prepared for soldiers who are willing to fight the Deceiving Messiah. Are you willing to fight, Azil?"

The dread was quickly replaced by anger... by excitement. The Day of Judgement was near at hand. The Deceiving Messiah walked the earth. The Enemy was here. This is what he had trained his whole life for; this was the fight. Dead or alive, Azil would honor Allah in the Great Struggle ahead. And then the fighting would stop—one way or another, the fighting would stop soon. He nodded.

The Green Phantom stretched out a robed arm, cloak flapping in the wind, and pointed West. The sun burnt a golden path through the Fog and Azil smiled as he took his first steps down it. After a moment he paused and turned back.

"What's your name?"

But the Angel, if it had been an Angel, was gone.

Azil faced West. The Fog parted for him like the Red Sea had parted for Moses. He put one foot in front of the other, not daring to close his eyes—not daring to pause or look back, even for a moment. The only path now was the path forward. It was his Destiny.

## Special Delivery

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Doris Kim

I zipped up my faded brown corduroy jacket over the starched brown UPS uniform. A brown paper package the size of a shoe box tucked under my arm like a football. Tossing the box toward the mountain of other packages I winked at the receptionist.

"Sorry, Gladys. This one didn't make it. Put it on Larry's list for tomorrow. See you in a couple days."

"Hey John," one of my co-workers hollered, "must be nice not having to deliver packages on Christmas Eve. Wish I could trade places with you."

I half smiled lifting my chin in acknowledgement, "Catch you guys later. Happy Holidays." Whistling to the tune of Jingle Bell Rock I hurried out the door. Not wanting to give my supervisor a chance to change his mind about giving me time off during the busiest season for us delivery guys.

When I arrived home the kids shouted and ran towards me like little elves. "Daddy's home. Now we can put the angel on the tree."

With no time to take a breath the twins grabbed my arms and pulled me over to the tree. Savannah, our oldest, stood by the tree balancing the angel on her head.

"I'm a tree," said Savannah.

"Give it to daddy," Mark and Luke chimed in unison.

I ceremoniously lifted the angel off Savannah's head. Holding it like an airplane making it fly through the air.

"Prepare for landing," I said as I motioned for Carol and the twins to take their positions on the couch.

Savannah stood by the tree ready to plug in the lights.

The count down started, "Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one, blast off!"

The white lights flickered, "Ooh, ahh," the children's voices filled with excitement as if they were watching the most spectacular light show.

More flickering followed by a disappointed, “Uh-oh!” The darkened living room appeared hollow with no lights and no presents under the Christmas tree. The glow coming from the kitchen made it barely visible for me to make my way to flip on the light switch.

Carol shrugged and said, “Guess you’ll be braving the crowd at Wal-Mart tomorrow.”

“But tomorrow is Christmas Eve. Do you know how crazy it’s going to be?” I looked for Carol to excuse me from this mission.

She kept grinning and whispered through clenched teeth, “You don’t want to disappoint the children do you?”

“But this is my first Christmas off in three years. Are the lights really that important? Isn’t being together with family what Christmas is all about?” By now I was talking to myself.

“Goodnight kids. Let’s get you ready for bed. Don’t worry. Daddy will fix the lights by tomorrow,” she said as she led the children up the stairs.

\* \* \* \* \*

Startled by the alarm clock I sat up in bed.

“Good morning handsome,” Carol approached with a home-made blueberry muffin and coffee. “Something to get you started as you brave your way through the mob of last minute shoppers,” she continued.

I slumped back in bed and pulled the sheets over my head.

“You better get up before they’re all gone,” she said as she waved her hands in an effort to make the aroma of freshly brewed coffee and home bake muffin fill the air.

I slid out of bed in defeat. I snatched my gray hooded sweat-shirt and jeans. The recent weight loss made all my clothes look oversized and baggy. I finished getting ready and ran downstairs. Grabbing the muffin and coffee, I headed off to Wal-Mart.

The lines snaked around from the registers to the clothes racks. No one could figure out which line was which. I found the Christmas lights right by the check out. Relieved that I didn’t have to run through the store I jumped in the shortest line. Peo-

ple cut in front of me. I tapped my foot as my patience started to wear out. Over an hour later I left the store with two boxes of white Christmas tree lights.

My feet sped up as I ran toward the charcoal colored Honda mini van. It's going to be a great day. It's all about family, I tried to convince myself. I opened the door and managed to get half my body into the driver seat. Wrapped gifts were spread on the floor and piled on the back seats of the mini-van. There were undeliverable packages left over from work under the seats.

Finding no space in the back I placed the lights on the passenger seat and slid the rest of my body into the car. I reached to close the car door when a hand with claw like nails dug deep into my shoulders. I turned to face a pregnant woman glaring at me. The condensation formed by her breath and cold air made her look like an angry dragon breathing smoke from her nostrils.

"Get out before I call the cops." She tugged on my sweatshirt. I could feel her nails scratching the base of my neck. I pulled my body away from her making her let go of my sweatshirt.

She stepped closer to me. Trapping me with her pregnant belly. "Thief. Get out of my car," she continued with unyielding determination.

She pulled out her cell phone and started dialing.

"What are you talking about?" I asked the lady. Still confused at her accusation I stepped out of the car.

"Hello. I just caught a thief trying to steal my car," The lady's voice quivered as she spoke.

"Put the phone down. I'm not stealing your car," I said reaching for her phone.

She put her palm up in my face and continued talking, "Yes. I'm at the Wal-Mart in Porter Ranch."

She nodded her head like a bobble head doll as if the person on the other line could see her. "Yes. I'm parked right by the entrance. It's a gray Honda mini-van. Send someone quick. I don't know how long I can hold him."

Raising my hand above my head I slapped my hand on the roof of the mini-van. "Look lady, I'm not a thief. This is not your..."

“Save it for the cops,” she growled.

Minutes later sirens were flashing as the black and white vehicle pulled up beside us. Two officers stepped out of the vehicle and asked, “What seems to be the problem?”

“This woman,” I said, pointing my finger at her snub little nose, “thinks I...”

She didn’t interject with her words. Her body slumped towards me. I put my hands up in surrender. Her shoulders pressed firmly into my palms.

She clutched her belly and moaned. “Ouch. Oh. Ooh,” the moaning grew louder as passers by stared in our direction.

“I thought this was about a stolen vehicle,” said one officer to the other as he scratched his head in confusion. “Just get your wife into the van. We’ll escort you to the hospital.”

“She’s not my wife.”

“Aaah! Oh no my water just broke,” she panted.

“Fine, your girlfriend or whatever you want to call her. Just get her in the van.”

This can’t be happening, I thought as the officers helped her into the passenger seat.

Concentrating on following the police car, I temporarily put the incident in the parking lot out of my mind. The officers stopped right in front of the hospital entrance and helped the woman out of my mini-van. Hospital staff came running out with a wheel chair.

One of the police officers pushed me from behind. The other drove my van away. “Don’t worry man. I wanted to run away when my first kid was born too. You go with her. We’ll park your car and get your keys get back to you.”

“What? No. Wait.” I turned to follow the officer but the hospital staff spun me around on my heels and led me through the hospital. My mind felt empty as though my brain had been sucked up in a vacuum. They dressed me up in scrubs and shoved me into the delivery room.

“Rosie is doing fine,” the doctor said giving me two thumbs up. “Now go over and take your position. Hold her hand.”

“You jerk. Get out of here!” Rosie screamed.

The nurse turned to me and whispered, “Sometimes they say worse things to their husbands when they’re in labor. Don’t worry she doesn’t mean it.”

I give up. ‘Tis the Season. Guess it’s time to be a Good Samaritan.

“Don’t worry, Rosie. I’ll help you out,” I said as I let her squeeze my hand till it went numb.

“I said get this thief out of here,” she squealed in between gasps of air.

“Come on Rosie. You can do it,” I cheered her on like I cheered on my boys at their little league games.

The pushing, panting, squeezing and screaming ceased as the sound of the baby’s first cry echoed through the delivery room.

“Congratulations! It’s a boy!” said the doctor.

“Well done, Rosie,” I said trying to release myself from her cold and clammy grasp.

“There’s an officer Clark waiting outside to see you,” the nurse said.

I walked out feeling proud of my charitable holiday deed. The two officers stood before me with their arms crossed over their chest. Officer Clark raised his bushy eyebrows in suspicion. “Good try mister. The dispatcher just called to verify some information.”

“I didn’t do it. It’s not her car. It’s my car.”

“When did you steal all the gifts and delivery packages? Did you do it while she was shopping?”

I held my head in my hands and closed my eyes. My legs felt like Jell-O jiggling beneath my torso. I teetered back and forth. Leaning, I pressed my back against the wall trying to keep myself up.



"I'll prove it to you. My license plate number is CRL #1 MOM. The mini-van actually belongs to my wife Carol."

"What about all the packages and gifts?" The officer continued.

"My wife hides the kids Christmas gifts in the van and I am a UPS delivery guy."

"You're a pretty smart fellow coming up with a story like that," said Officer Hernandez.

"What. You don't believe me?" I clenched my fists behind my back. "Okay. You can call my wife. She's probably wondering what happened to me anyway," I said. I dialed and handed the phone to Officer Clark. Tapping the wall nervously with my fingers.

Officer Clark stepped a few feet away. His laughter was as jolly as St. Nicolas himself. He walked back towards me. Returning my phone to me he extended his right hand for a handshake.

"Sorry about the mix up. You go ahead and we'll take care of explaining everything to her," Officer Clark motioned towards the delivery room. "She probably just misplaced her car. Pregnant women. You know how they get." Officer Clark shrugged. "Happy Holidays to you. I bet this will be a Christmas you will never forget." The Officers chuckled as I walked away removing the shower cap off my head.

Seven hours had passed since I left the house for a simple errand. I pulled up into the driveway. I reached over and grabbed the bag of Christmas lights and placed it on my lap. I sat in the drivers' seat for a while. My head pressed back on the head rest. The miracle of a Christmas delivery, I thought. When I get to work on Monday I'm going to volunteer to work next Christmas.

# *Poetry*



Photo: Carlos Lemus

## Contrasts

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Genesis Hernandez

Poetry WINNER  
▲

Tonight,  
you are like the gleam  
of a door knob.  
Perky,  
like city lights in the eyes  
of a stranger  
who claims the answers  
are in the split second  
contrasts between  
the reds, yellows, and greens  
we abide by,  
but never bother to stare into.  
Ready to turn,  
the way seasons turn  
new leaves to decorate  
bored lawns.  
Lets transform black luck into soil  
and grow like the weeds of promise.  
You are lit  
like an entrance.  
Caked with suffering frost.  
Bitten by molasses,  
dripping with the  
hunger of your disproportion.  
But you'll live.  
Lets hum the hymn of secret weapons.  
Drink sake 'til we're warm  
with a twist of fate  
only saints  
can rearrange.  
Lets choke the feathers out from our organs,  
'til we're thirsty for stars again.  
Everything in our universe,  
Parallel;  
a child in the sun  
crawling to a shadier destination  
hoping to one day,  
stop asking why  
And call it Destiny.

## Just a Thought

---

Tatum Rangel

They say to write what's on  
your mind.  
For me, honestly,  
it seems so difficult.  
Why are most of us so afraid  
to speak our minds?  
I know I can be.  
I do my best, however.

Just a funny thought.  
Only when the liquor hits us  
do most of us express ourselves more.  
Sometimes I wonder why that is.  
I can't say it hasn't happened  
to me.

Just a funny thought.  
We have to write what's on  
our minds, right?  
There you go.  
That was a start.

## The Show

---

Gina Endreola

Ladies and Gentleman  
Welcome to the play  
To the masquerade  
Welcome to the life  
To the reality  
Welcome, come one and all  
No one will see  
No one will know  
You play your part better then the actors  
Better than the performers  
With you chins held high  
You words weaving intricate patterns  
Everything is alright  
Nothing real  
Nothing fake  
Welcome everyone  
Those hurt  
Those lost  
Those oppressed  
Those enslaved  
For here we're equals  
Here, we are all actors,  
Players, pawns, and performers  
We understand our roles  
We understand our lines  
And we play them out with ease  
Flawlessly  
For if the ladies and the gentlemen,  
Knew of our truth  
We lose all that we have  
So ladies and gentlemen  
Welcome  
Welcome to the hypocrisy of life  
Welcome and be seated  
The show is about to start



Photo: Carlos Lemus

# **Allegory of the Market**

---

Jacqueline Renee Moore

*"What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow  
Out of this stony rubbish?"*

– T. S. Eliot

Shop shadow play cashes in on reality  
As black cat strips mocking bird-meat from bones  
Headless men sell high-end jeans  
While feathers float in wind like cigar smoke

Black cat strips mocking bird-meat from bones  
As mortal mirrors grace storefront cave walls  
Feathers float with wind like cigar smoke  
While ATMs spit lifelines into wallets

As mortal mirrors grace storefront cave walls,  
Soldiers decay in desert soil  
ATMs spit lifelines into wallets  
And barfed-up fish float on oil.

Soldiers decay in desert soil  
As radio airs ad for Wal-Mart sale  
Barfed-up fish float on oil  
While swimming loosens suntan spray

Radio ad airs for Wal-Mart sale  
As guns and Prozac settle souls  
Swimming loosens suntan spray  
And coils of eternal forms decompose

Guns and Prozac settle souls  
Headless men sell high-end jeans  
Coils of eternal forms decompose  
Shop shadow play cashes in on reality



## Dad's Ring

---

Edilzar Alvarado

You had a ring  
so long ago.  
Gold,  
with a hint of pride  
and you wore it,  
always,  
on your right hand.

Changing the oil.  
Cutting the grass.  
Pushing me on the swing.  
The ring was always there  
and so were you.

The letter 'E' at it's center,  
a family crest of sorts.  
The 'E' for us,  
two of a kind.

Someday son,  
when you can put it on  
and it doesn't fall off,  
the ring is yours.

That day never came.  
The ring served  
a different purpose.  
It became the roof over my head,  
the food in my stomach.

The ring is gone,  
but the pride is still there.  
I see it every time  
I come home from school  
and you ask me,  
how was your day son?

## **Flight of the Ballet Dancer (or The Red Shoes)**

---

Mayli Apontti

She once painted beauty in her step  
In tattered cloth and broken heel, wrapped up  
In bright pink satin, now stained a deep crimson red.  
She faintly remembers the sound of an auditorium filling;  
The sound of strings,  
The adoring applause, pieces not easily forgotten.  
A multitude of admiring spectators, a sea of watchful eyes  
behold their swan,  
Their golden muse, as if she had been touched by the hand  
of Midas.  
The crowd of men in grand attire and women in lush gowns  
create a sensational sight.  
She had become accustomed to basking in this beauty,  
glowing in immortal radiance;  
While outside, another flock gathers, listening in the bitter  
cold,  
And in hopes of catching a glimpse.  
One girl says to her mama, "I want to wear those pretty  
shoes one day."

Amidst the decadent lights and intricate faces,  
She harbors a secret pain,  
A mask she's grown too tired of wearing.  
Fed on extravagance, now leaving behind empty spaces.  
Not even the slightest comfort is found in a pair of red  
shoes.  
A slowly vanishing crowd leaves the room;  
Silence perpetuates.  
Alone, she lies with the old shadows, remnants etched  
in ash.  
Love had once dwelt here before,  
But being so self-absorbed, she did not stay for long.  
At night, distant memories become her only company,  
Like small matches she tries to light, in hopes that it may  
return;  
A familiar glow.

Wrinkled, tasteless, the end of the dream was dawning;  
A fleeting glimpse of a white sail on the horizon.  
Stirring from her sleep, she hears a still small voice,  
    yearning  
Blindly beating, beating from within,  
To break from the binding and tattering and breaking bone.  
Not all light is lost.  
She lifts one wing and then another;  
Much like the winter lark who breaks from darkest chill,  
And passes through on unbending wing,  
To meet the gentle rays of spring.  
She must also hold fast on the winding journey,  
For she has a soul to keep.

What's hers is mine, and mine alone;  
Cannot be measured with the rest.  
For the soul is a yearning traveler,  
Whose eye, unwavering, looks to the east;  
And there, will stand before new beginnings.  
I will remember the sound of strings.  
And I, too, will leave behind the red shoes.



Illustration: Christine Hovhannessian

## **falsely infatuated**

---

Paris Matic

Corner of my eye  
Spying on his smile;  
He isn't one to hide.

Naturally, I panic:  
School girl Classic  
typical Dramatic  
obsessed Fanatic.  
Female enigmatic  
reactions frantic  
severe manic  
Desires vanish.

the boy speaks  
pleasant sounds:  
Angelic voice  
Devil's Crown.  
illusive charm  
relentless poise  
brings me down  
boisterously.

His character compels,  
kindness overwhelms,  
mystique intrigues,  
weakening me.  
dreamer among men,  
Beloved of many,  
I cannot share  
such an affair.

Admiring subtle touches,  
limited by friendship, still  
falling for him, fooling myself.

## Something of a Ghost

---

Gina Endreola

"I swear, you're impossible."

A square firmly placed between your lips  
You let out another puff of smoke  
Swirling white creates shapes in front of me

"Listen to me."

It's an old ship, floating along the wind  
Sails unfurled, catching a feeble draft  
Floating away through an ocean of stars

"You need to face reality."

Oh look, now it's an otter, tumbling into the evening sky  
Leaving a jet trail behind its movements  
Free until it is retrained by the barriers of a breeze

"Life isn't about dreaming."

My face falls as the smoke disperses  
A slight gust carrying it away  
The grey mixture dissipated into black

"I know you don't like to hear it, but it's true."

You look at me and I stare back  
The fireworks of red, purple, green, blue, gone  
Fourth of July sparklers, finished

"You're something else."

You take another drag of your cigarette  
As you let it out, my heart sings  
Bitter night air twists and condenses the smoke  
“You’re a silly little girl.”

This time, it’s a crown  
Beautiful with its hazy jewels  
Its gothic curves and engraving

Something of a Ghost

“Are you even listening to me?”

The image fades into nothing and I turn  
Your eyes are hollow, haunting  
I smile [in my head]

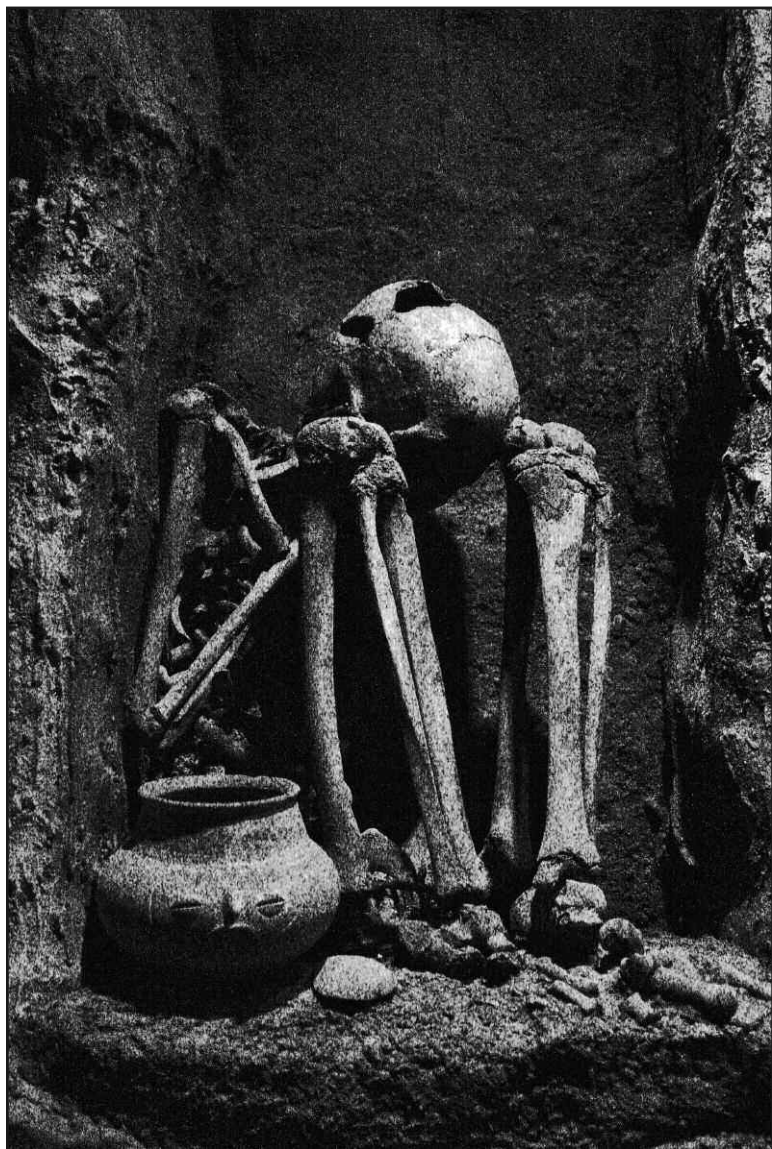


Photo: Carlos Lemus

## Mr. Chill Skin

---

Jason Neas

From a town beside the ocean,  
I drive out to the sea,  
Mr. Chill Skin rolling over,  
Trunk Dervish black with sheen.

I drag him to the shoreline,  
And splay him on the sand.  
At first he don't say nothing,  
A ghost become a man.

His mouth cracks open westward,  
With cresting purple waves.  
Moonlight spurs his sordid lips,  
With sea breeze voice he say:

"Why you gone an' kilt a man?  
I ain't done wrong to you.  
I gave my time and money,  
Fattened those in lieu.

Ma family will miss me,  
Da child'n will be sad.  
Ma father will outlive me,  
Twill drive ma mother mad."

The salt and stars decided,  
To ask me questions too.  
Why'd I destroy charity  
When's given by too few?

The wind blows admonishment,  
Night birds sing enraged,  
Crooked rain clouds threaten me,  
Pour drops of welting pain.



Only rolling waves know why,  
Infinite force of Earth,  
A man like Mr. Chill Skin must  
Lay rot under its surf.

I scream to all the elements,  
The mockers in dissent:  
“Those who drink from bleeding hearts  
Are nourish’d without sense.”

Kindness dead and swept to sea,  
I drive back through the town.  
Instruments well sharpened,  
To Pity’s door I’m bound.

## Who am I?

---

Jose Orellana

I am a proud Cuzcatlec-Xicano.  
Cuzcatlec, represents the Salvadorian blood which flows thru  
my veins,  
Like the soldiers from the FMLN,  
Running through the jungles of Morazan.  
Xicano represents the connection I have with my ancestors,  
X, represents the embracement of our culture.

My ancestors were fierce warriors protecting their barrios,  
Our barrios are now filled with warriors trying to destroy  
everything in their paths  
Including themselves.

We have to remember  
They are our warriors,  
Though they are misguided warriors  
Who fight for a cause they will never win.  
These are battles we must unite and fight  
Like the Zapatistas in Xiapas who fight for  
Justice, Liberty, and Land.

Even our Xicanitas are fighting their materialistic tendencies,  
They are being lost to companies like 4 ever 21.  
Let me throw you some lines which will forever be in your  
mind:

4 ever 21 board members will decide to destroy a  
community garden and build a warehouse  
4 ever 21 families will not eat tonight  
4 ever 21 elders will never forget how they lost their land  
again

4 ever 21 letters of assistance will go unheard by the mayor  
of Los Angeles  
4 ever 21 sweatshop will violate the rights of our mujeres  
4 ever more than 21 families will leave their sweat and tears  
in the garden

4 ever I will remember the 21 minutes my compañeros  
spent in the garden.

We have to surpass these temptations to be truly free  
as people.

Many ask me why I say the things I say,

And I say

I am the face of the faceless

The voice of the voiceless

Represent the unrepresented

But

Mostly importantly I represent my ancestors

Whose blood I carry

Who am I?

Be worried where I'm going.

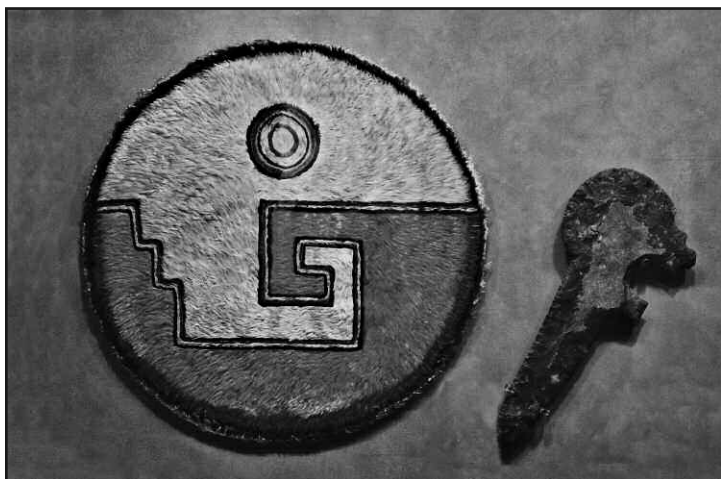


Photo: Carlos Lemus

## 16 Again

---

Shanti (aka Mary Nurrenbern)

I walked in the classroom.  
It was 20 years ago.  
Bodies entangled, in the front row.  
Rehearsals were over.  
It was our first time.

Waiting to find out what would happen.  
It is what tore us apart.  
That night of passion.  
Getting caught in the rain.  
Tripping on the sprinkler.  
Spotted by the drama teacher.  
Suspended for over a week.

The invitation said:  
Join your past teachers and staff for a pre-reunion party,  
Held in your honor.

I held it in my hand, staring at its reminders.  
People started filling the auditorium.  
Hugs and hello's.  
I was wishing this was all over.  
It all seemed so long ago.

Clumsily grabbing a cup of punch.  
Spilling it on the table.  
In my ear came a whisper,  
"You still get nervous, don't you?"  
I slowly turned.  
I can't say he looked exactly the same.  
Though his smile hadn't changed.  
I nervously gave a weak hello.  
Chattering words were exchanged.  
Learning he is single too.  
Laughing at the memories.

"Do you remember being here?"

"Of course" I said.

Playing it off. "Oh that was so long ago."

"Yes, but do you regret?"

"No, it was beautiful."

"Why did you leave me" his eyes looking at me in confusion.

"I allowed them to break us apart, I am so sorry."

"They aren't here now, will you dance with me?"

I put out my hand.

Heart beating.

I was suddenly 16 again.



Photo: Carlos Lemus

## [Problems]

---

Jose Orellana

My friend,  
When I started you were numerous,  
Number by number you are like multiplication.  
The more I saw you, the more I was terrified.  
What happened to the way you were expressed by symbols?  
Sacred numbers like 0 and 13,  
What happened to Ce, Ome, Yeh, Naui.  
Numbers in our ancient language.  
We did not know of your absolute value and how negative it  
would be.

As I started to climb you knocked me down,  
With your  $3(-x+3)=3$ .  
The key is distributive property.

I would dust myself off,  
Feeling like a set of empty numbers.  
I begin to climb again.  
Confident,  
I take a shortcut  
There I was approached by a trinomial dressed in  
 $3x+x-5(x)=3$ .  
Your equation is confusing.  
Can we be like terms?

Back down I go again.

Parallel to the wall I can see infinity,  
Oh wait that's just the number eight.  
I see many numbers that are not common factors,  
I can tell it's an expression.  
But these numbers lead to even more questions.

Questions too complex for me to understand,  
 So I consult my ancestors,  
 They tell me that the numbers are sacred to our people.  
 Mathematics flows within your blood as it does within  
 your movements.  
 As the cosmos have the stars,  
 We have numbers.

I begin to climb once again  
 But this time  
 I come prepared with knowledge.  
 There are four gates I must pass,  
 Two have been open.  
 I need two more.



Photo: Carlos Lemus

## Burn

---

Edilzar Alvarado

I want to start fires with you again  
We both still have the spark  
I want the flames to consume us  
As we lay there in the dark

Moonlight through the window  
And the dancing of the flame  
Cast shadows in my memory  
That would put my dreams to shame

And they'll never burn away  
No matter how hot it gets  
The constant roaring in my ears  
Will never let me rest

So I'll toss and turn all night  
In the ashes of our fire  
Long after you've gone  
Leaving me with this desire



## **Inside this kitchen we found our religion**

---

Adrian Cepeda

Her heat rises  
steam sings  
dances in the pot  
below she stirs  
me there, calling  
me softly with  
each turn, she  
serenades me  
as delicate waves  
splash, flavors  
soar, her scent  
entices me, pining  
slowly, I wait

for my moment  
to take over  
our spoon, turning  
up the flame  
she feels me  
closer. I take  
over, grip the  
handles; Spice  
drops more  
flavors, I'm  
ready to savor,  
slippery sips of  
our simpatico  
dish simmers

inside. there

goes my apron,  
I can taste all of  
you, our feast  
has already begun—  
delicacy dancing  
dénouement breaths,  
swallow of laughter  
in between bites,  
she whispers through  
candles: “I’m hungry  
for more.”

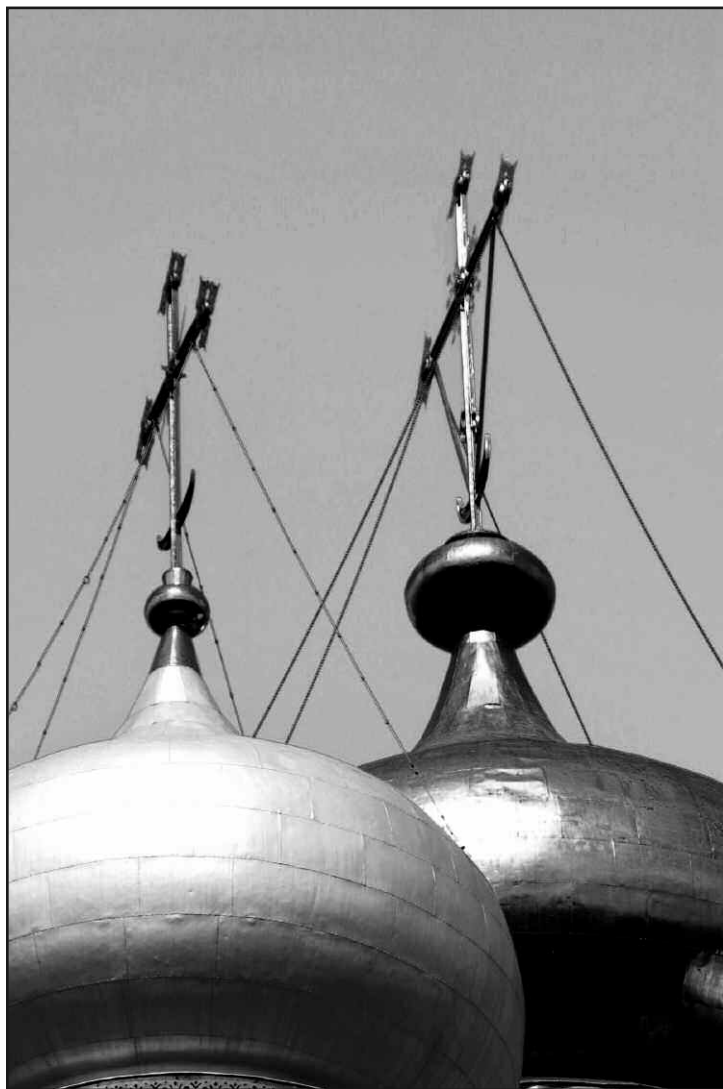


Photo: Carlos Lemus

*Nonfiction*



## The Old Friend

Carlos Lemus

Allen—the cynic, the skeptic, the gambler, the free spirit, the psychologist, the writer, the walking encyclopedia, the mentor, the boss-turned-into-friend, the dying man—lies unconscious on a hospital bed. I am sitting on the floor, in front of him, crying in a way he would disapprove, but not caring the least because the pain is unbearable. We have been preparing for this moment for two years, when he hired me as a live-in aid to assist him with caretaking responsibilities during his battle with terminal cancer. He was 79 and I was 17. Allen has been ready to die for a long time, but as our working relationship turned into a close friendship, accepting his death seems like a delusional exercise of the greatest magnitude. In the last month, my body has shrunk, my concentration is a vague memory, and my reactions to any type of connotation related to death are an invitation to run away from the world. The pain that I feel is ineffable, and no one—no single person—is able to empathize. Some of my friends even mock me, for they do not understand how I could have grown to love this old man so much, a man who, after all, is only my boss. Family members claim understanding, but they still wonder why I respond this way since Allen is not part of the family. My mother has been complaining about my weight loss and has been shaming me for rejecting her food, but I do not care. People say that as a psychology student I should be better prepared to handle this. People say that I study psychology because of Allen, even though that was a great coincidence. People always say many things, but are never ready to listen or to simply sit next to me and accept that I am suffering. They don't understand, for example, that Allen, the self-described racist and irresponsible father, once told me that I was like his Mexican son or that, a month earlier, I agonized when finding him with a plastic bag over his head.

"Give me that shit back!" he yelled. "It's my life! Please, let me die in peace."

"I'm sorry, Allen. I can't."

"Just go to the store and pretend you didn't know. No one will blame you."

He had suggested a similar plan before, half-jokingly, and although by then I should have expected anything from this man, I had deceived myself into thinking that such an attempt would never materialize.

"I'm sorry, Allen. I can't allow you to kill yourself."

"You bastard! After all I've taught you. You fucking ingrate!"

"I'm sorry, but, as your Mexican son, I just can't."

"That's an appeal to pity, therefore, a fallacy, you moron!"

"I know. You've taught me well."

"You don't know shit! But you win—for now."

\* \* \* \* \*

In the surreal artificiality of the hospital room, representing a chiaroscuro painting of the threshold between life and death, I remember Allen's artificial life during those suicidal days—filled with pain and morphine, with pleas and anger—and think that I have failed him for not having allowed him to die the dignified death of suicide. We both knew that his arguments were valid, but I could not yield to logical persuasion, perhaps for selfish emotional reasons. As he lies dying, I refuse to accept that he will die, even though I know that the cancer has slowly been engulfing his bones and his spirit, making them as brittle as sun-baked mud.

"You called me a moron," I tell him. "But you never withdrew your avowal as a paternal figure."

My mind plays games and I believe that Allen responds with a laugh, but he is motionless, sharing with me—as he had shared all of his stories—what seems to be the silent and final story of his life. This illusory thought transports me to the moment of Allen's last suicide attempt, a week earlier. After having removed all objects he could have turned into a weapon, I caught him using the catheter's hose as an impromptu noose. He exploded in laughter when I caught him.

"This is ridiculous," he said. "I can't even kill myself. I'll be damned!"

He removed the hose from around his neck and gave it to me.

“Plug this shit back in,” he ordered. “But be careful. It hurt like hell when I pulled it out. And hurry up, because I need to pee! What’s for dinner? If I’m not going to die today, I might as well live with a full stomach. That’s for sure.”

My tears fade as I recollect this and I feel like laughing, but I can’t. Instead, I curse life and destiny for playing their role so faithfully. Although Allen didn’t try suicide again and it seemed that he had regained his appetite for life—telling more stories or giving me lessons about the classics—we both knew that his final moment was getting closer. In fact, I remember how he told me about the foreknowledge of death and about how sweet the idea tasted. I remember how he pushed hospice services away because “a dying man, after all the funerals, after realizing that he is the only one alive of all his friends and family, knows a lot about death.” I remember all of this and how I refused to accept it. I begin to cry again, holding a fetal position as I sit on the floor. A faint, sporadic chime translates the language of a dying heart and prophesizes the tolling of bells in its memory. A sense of awe sweeps through my body. Connected to a machine, I think, Allen is speaking to me. Yet, I refuse to let go.

“I believe you can hear me, Allen,” I murmur. “I believe, therefore, it is. *Credo, ergo, est*. Isn’t that right? A bit too sophistic for your taste, but. . . See, you have taught me well. I will miss you. I will miss everything—the late-night conversations, the arguments, the stories. Oh! How I will miss the stories. ‘Who will remember us after we die?’ you used to say, citing the classics. Well. I will remember you. And I will write your stories, and the stories we shared when you were telling me your stories. And I am crying now because I love you and there’s nothing you can do about that, you old fool. You’ve done this before. Here, in this very hospital, but you haven’t died because you want to die at home. I know you are not going to die today, that’s why I am not saying goodbye. You have to wait until I graduate. You promised. That’s why I’m only saying thanks and I want to tell you that I love you. Yes, as much as you hate that word and that feeling. And I don’t care about what you think. This isn’t the time to die.”

Allen opens his eyes and moans, looking at me vacuously.



“Carlos?”

He extends his right arm, widely opening his palm. I hold his hand softly and lovingly kiss it, wailing like a baby. Allen’s eyes remain open and he mumbles unintelligible words.

“Yes, Allen,” I tell him. “Whatever you say, whatever you say. I say goodbye now only because I think I understand. I love you and I admire you. Just remember that. Just remember that.”

While his eyes are open, we hold hands tightly. After he loses consciousness again, our hands are held so tightly that I believe he has died. I call the nurse impatiently.

Allen is still alive.

“You better let him rest,” the nurse says.

“I’ll be back at 2 pm, okay, Allen?”

“Alright,” he seems to respond.

I feel elated. Allen responded to my voice, corroborating all those studies I had read about the importance of social support in moments such as these and I believe he will live because of me. I go to school, but my class has been cancelled. I race my way back to Allen’s house, angry about the inconvenience, but convinced he will be there. The house is empty. Denial is indeed one of the most powerful maladaptive coping mechanisms available to humankind. I walk out, confused, believing that I’ll find him at the hospital ready to crack a joke. A neighbor intercepts me.

“I’m sorry,” she says.

“He will get better,” I reply. “He was doing well this morning.”

“Oh! Haven’t you heard?”

Allen had been pronounced dead at 11:45 in the morning.

\* \* \* \* \*

Life, from that moment forward, is a gelatinous void that I am forced to occupy. Every movement is difficult, every sound seems muffled. I regain mediocre awareness of my existence back at the hospital, not remembering how I arrived there. Condolences

from staff arrive my way because they know me and I play the game, paying the same courtesy, even though I feel repulsed by conventional social standards.

"After you die and they cremate you," Allen used to say, "you are nothing but a pile of chemicals worth two dollars and a quarter, if you are lucky. With my cancer, I'll only be worth a buck; or maybe five, with all this fucking medication."

I know he is right, and I know that he is no more, but I still think of him as if he were alive and I want to see him.

"You can't," they tell me. "He is already downstairs," for which they do not mean hell, as Allen would have wanted, but the morgue.

"That is not a problem for me," I tell them. They don't become angry and I thank them silently, but I still do not give up. Manuel intercedes. He is, or was, Allen's power of attorney. A deeply religious man, Manuel suggests that I go to the chapel and pray. I look at him in disgust, reminding him that I am an atheist, just like Allen is, or was, and walk away. Two days later, Manuel congratulates me for having followed his advice, but I don't remember ever stepping a foot into a church. He praises my fortitude and my equanimity in taking care of things just like Allen would have wanted, but all I remember are tears and pain. He thanks me for having helped him pack all of Allen's belongings, but all I remember is picking up the last book he was reading and declaring, "This is mine!"

Manuel's presence annoys me. He thinks he understands me because we both knew Allen, but, as Allen used to say, "I think that Manuel is full of shit." He tells me that I can keep most of the books and the television set, just like Allen had wanted, but that I can no longer stay at the house. I know I have a place to go, but I don't want to leave. I want to stay here until Allen returns, even though I know that what remains of him are ashes that Manuel will be spreading within days over Catalina Island.

\* \* \* \* \*

Ashes are just ashes, but I still feel angry at myself for not having stolen a pinch of Allen's ashes after Manuel refused to give it to me. It has been a week since the trip to Catalina and I

have passed my exams, but I cannot understand why I am still alive or why Manuel speaks more about the beauty of the stupid island than about the loss of my great old friend. Although my family believes I have gone mad, I still go to Allen's house every afternoon. I hate being at home, around a family who worries too much or thinks that acceptance is a matter that can easily be resolved through the following of their orders. I hate being around my girlfriend, who complains that I am more concerned about Allen than about her. Allen's house is a sanctuary for my pain, but, one afternoon, I realize that Manuel has changed the lock. I go back home, thanking him for silently telling me that I should move on. My family revolves around me as if I was a laboratory rat, as if I was a ticking bomb. I feel pity for them, I feel pity for me, but still go through my maze of pain. Days go by and I can't eat. One afternoon, my mom asks me if I want to go out for burgers and I agree, not understanding why. At the restaurant, Sinatra sings Allen's favorite song in the background. I haven't cried for days, but, with such a reminder, a publicly vulgar display of emotion takes me by surprise.

"Enough, Carlos!" My mother orders me. "He is dead! Accept it." I feel sorry for putting her through that misery, but I still resent her. I leave the restaurant, fearing I would turn matricidal within seconds. She gets the message and, in the ensuing days, she listens to all of my stories with Allen, she provides no advice, she sits next to me silently and sympathetically accepts my pain. Perhaps, she has been doing this all along and my sorrow has not allowed me to recognize it. She helps me make an album with all of Allen's pictures that I know will be shelved most of the time, but that nevertheless feels like an incomparable balm for my wound as we create it. Life continues and I read some classics in my spare time because Allen loved them.

"You wise old fool," I tell him. "This is what you meant."

Life continues and every psychology class reminds me of him, but I do not feel pain anymore; I feel pride.

"See this reference?" I tell the class. "My mentor wrote that book."

References come and go, songs appear and fade, events trigger memories, other people die, but I cherish the memory of my

cancerously cynical surrogate father. Over the years, I think about him less and less, but I smile at the realization that I have not forgotten him.

“You old fool,” I tell him. “You were not that wise, after all. You said I would eventually forget about you, but—guess what?—it’s been 14 years and I am writing about you today.”

And I still love him.

## Ice Cream

---

Beth Andreoli

Our Midwestern summers were nasty, brutish and short, with all apologies to Hobbes. Mom's anger was only matched by Dad's withdrawal, and there was no school day to provide some normalcy to the routine. I spent hours hiding out from the sticky heat in the public library, bringing home stacks of books which were never quite enough to make me forget completely, only distracting me for the moment. Fortunately, we were only two hours from my grandmother's house, and took many trips there when Dad finished teaching the university summer session.

We stayed at Grandma's, despite her lack of air conditioning, because she had a three-story house with space for everyone to have her own room—a luxury my sister and I didn't have at home. It was always dark and dusty in these little spaces crowded with memories in the form of clothes, books, magazines, and forgotten knickknacks. I usually stayed in my uncle's old room, reading his Doonesbury books that I was too young to understand, and picking through his old clothes to find hand-me-downs I would wear in college: scrubs and t-shirts labeled with "University of Florida" or "Virginia Slade For Congress" in faded letters.

I wonder now where the split occurred between my mother's rage and my grandmother's faith. My mom is the angriest person I have ever known. She was always on a rant, whether over her daughters' behavior or some sinful social trend. While she and my grandmother both grew up in church, they differed vastly in the way they lived out their beliefs. Grandma would sing to her grandchildren while she played hymns on her piano. She was the eternal optimist, regardless of what her neighbors did under her watchful eye, or how bad the nightly news would sound. She never said a harsh word to or about her grandchildren. She focused on what was good in life, a long list of things for which she thanked God. I remember her intervening on my behalf when my mom was meting out some punishment, and my mother getting enraged when I sat and watched "Star Trek" with Grandma in her kitchen. None of this opposition made any sense to me;

I just knew I could relax at my grandmother's house, never in my own home.

"Harriet is a Grand and Pleasant Pill," was how we remembered the streets surrounding my grandmother's home, three stories of decaying grandeur. Summers in Minneapolis meant the ice cream truck regularly showed up in Grandma's neighborhood. My hometown was too small or out of the loop to boast such an exciting vehicle, and we knew better than to ask my parents to buy us expensive ice creams anyway. They were careful not to "spoil" their children, and treats like candy, fancy shoes like other kids had, and movies were off limits. Grandma, on the other hand, living on her fixed widow's income and some money from "the kids", heard the truck coming before we did, music box sounds playing on a loudspeaker. Kids came out of the woodwork as the truck made the rounds of the old Victorian houses, now split into duplexes but still boasting big floral gardens. Up Pillsbury Avenue the music would grow louder. Grandma asked my sister and me if we wanted ice cream, a rhetorical question, and get out her change jar. I ran into the street and stopped the truck, drawn to each fabulous picture of "drumsticks" or red, white and blue "rocket pops". These deliberations required time and study, with an emphasis on chocolate. After making my decision, typically for a cardboardy ice cream sandwich, I'd be in heaven for at least half an hour, nursing sugary ambrosia, licking the wrapping when the rest was gone. Just for me! And I bought it by myself!

Grandma cared if I was happy, and actually asked what I wanted. These two key factors made her my favorite relative. She didn't view me as a pawn to control, as my parents did. She always had time for me, and even when she was busy cooking or baking, offered me a way to get involved, mixing or stirring or setting the table. While my mother forced me to eat what I hated, the things my grandmother made were always comforting, even if it was just an apple sliced with cheese. She baked "bars" for us, a flat sheet of chocolate chip delectableness she would cut into squares. She made wild rice casserole every time we visited, and I can still hear my parents moaning, "This again?!" I wouldn't have cared if she served us sawdust. Her love pervaded the food, and the dusty rooms, and the broken-down furniture, just as my mother's wrath poisoned her own cooking and the air we breathed.

I moved out of my parents' house as soon as I could, driving out to the promised land, California, to escape their self-inflicted misery. The family crumbled in on itself, my sister moving away but not quite leaving, home for every holiday and school vacation, bound by some sense of duty I didn't share. She and my parents ate constantly to comfort themselves, my mother's pseudo healthy rationalizations evident in her preference for veal and lots of it. "Do you know what they do to those calves?" I asked her. "Humans need to eat meat! It's biblical!" she argued. Only my mother could make a sin out of being vegetarian. She crammed us with powdered milk and cream soup casseroles of canned vegetables and Spam. I never knew I could like a vegetable until I moved away, discovering unfried zucchini and uncoleslawed cabbage. My family layers themselves in flesh to find protection from an outrageous world they don't comprehend, while I reject my past and try to bury it in the newness of California. My father's food addiction finally killed him this summer.

My tiny grandmother died right before Easter, her favorite holiday. Long after she had stopped making the effort of decorating and cooking at Christmas, Grandma would host us for Easter and have a big family dinner, with the ubiquitous ham and green bean casserole. Her spirituality glowed as she sang in church and greeted her friends there. She seemed to know all the members by name, often having cared for them when they were infants in the church nursery. She had many reasons to be unhappy—losing her husband to Alzheimer's when I was young, wayward children, frail health, little money. But her joy clearly came from within her. A pillar of her community, she lived in the same house, and attended the same church, for over fifty years.

Before the funeral, my mom decided we should all dress in bright Easter colors and "celebrate", since my grandmother was in a better place. I wore layers and layers of black, unused to Minnesota's freezing "spring" weather after ten years of living in California. The day I flew back for the funeral I caught a horrible flu and was sick for six weeks, my body grieving for a loss my mind couldn't process. I wanted her back, the way I remembered her from those summers. Now I wear some of her hand-me-downs, the way I wore my uncle's, but for different reasons than rebellion.

I don't often buy ice cream now, wary of calories and expenses. But a few years ago I was at friend's house in small town California and an ice cream truck cruised up the street, tinkling music announcing its presence as it paused for customers. Without thinking I ran for my wallet and flagged it down, despite being an old, responsible adult by then. I don't remember what I bought, but it didn't matter. I remembered her love as I licked the wrapper clean.



Illustration: Christine Hovhannessian





Illustration: Khrysten Rogers

## Parkland House

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Claire Weiss (aka phutula)

I was not sure which was more foreboding, the darkness of the early morning or the intensely exhausting fear I was feeling as I sat in the back of the police car. I was too exhausted to wonder what was going to happen next. Over the past two days too much had happened- each event more horrific than the one before. The driver, a handsome but fat policeman weaved the car through a wooded area following a twisted path. My mind floated back to a poem about how the English roads had been formed from the tracks of a rambling drunkard going home. For the first time in 48 hours, I laughed out loud. Alice, the policewoman sitting next to me heard me laugh. She cuddled me close. Kindness emanated from her. I could feel her warmth and felt secure. I wondered if she was a mother. A large rambling house loomed ahead of us. This appeared to be our destination as the car slowed down to stop in front of a magnificent front door. Even in the dark, the house captured my imagination. My fears, momentarily, dissipated as I felt the history and the loving atmosphere of the house enveloped me. A bear answered the door. He was a big, bearded man. About 6 foot 4 inches, he towered over me. My fear returned. I retreated into Alice's arms. She gently pushed me into a large marbled foyer. Facing me was a beautifully carved staircase carpeted in red. Coming down the stairs was the most beautiful regal lady I had ever seen. Her carriage, her walk, and everything about her proclaimed money, status, and aloofness. I again turned to Alice. "What is going on? Where am I? Who are these people?" I was bewildered. The lady continued down the stairs. Conversation between the adults ensued, I was ignored. The beauty and the beast took the documents from Alice and she left. I looked at the beauty and the beast wondering what next!

They were Mr. and Mrs. Pierce, who introduced themselves as husband and wife. I was amazed. They seemed incongruent together. They explained that I was in Parkland House and that is where I would stay there until things at home got sorted out. Mrs. Pierce led me down endless corridors, up some stairs, and along more endless passageways. I felt overwhelmed by the size

of the house, but my tiredness was taking over. Finally she led me into a small room. It was bright, with modern furniture. She sat down on the bed and pulled me, a gawky, lanky eleven year onto her lap. She explained that I was in a reception house for children under the County care. She told me how many children lived in the house, and how she would explain to them and the staff, the circumstance of my bald, bleeding head. She went on to say that I was in a staff bedroom and I would go into a house dorm next day. I was not to be frightened, that all the children at Parkland House had some kind of family problem and the staff was kind.

As she talked, the trauma of the past two days melted away. How could I have thought of her as aloof? She helped me get into my night clothes and put me to bed. Then she did the strangest thing. She gave me a kiss on the forehead and told me to sleep tight and she would see me in the morning. No-one had ever given me a goodnight kiss before – except Johnny, many years ago. It felt strangely beautiful. Who was this lady! The bed was comfortable, but I could not sleep despite my exhaustion. I went over in detail the past two days and wondered what the future held. Two days ago was November 2nd, 1963. It started badly: Mum went to work, Dad came home from a night of drinking and gambling. As always, he was angry at me, although I did not know why. (I learned, when I was twenty that dad hated his sister Maricka, and I was the living image of her in looks, spoken word, and in deeds.) Dad caught me and tied me to a chair – arms behind my back, and then he tied my ankles together to the legs of the chair. His face was close to me. It was red and his veins popped out around his nose. He stank. His clothes were torn and dirty and his eyes appeared to be painted black, blue and yellow, as though he had been fighting. He was trembling and I thought that he was going crazy. He went to the bathroom and came out with several razors, and an old fashioned cup of shaving cream. He grabbed my hair and started to cut it. Shorter and shorter it became, till it was like a marine's buzz cut. All the time he was spraying cuss words at me. Too frightened to move, I realized that I needed to wait for this act of craziness to pass over. He lathered up the cream in the cup and sloppily put it over my head and proceeded to shave me. The razor was blunt and it tore my skin. I was bleeding in

several places. He continued on and on, on and on. In the end he showed me a mirror. I looked at my bald, bleeding head. He left. I struggled to get free from the ropes that bound my hands and feet. I could hear footsteps in my father's bedroom. Maybe I should wait till he passed out. Helen and Costa would be in soon, they would help. Or would they? Dad, struggling to stay on his feet, came back to the kitchen. He knelt down. I thought he would untie my legs, but No! He took hold of them and twisted them and kept on twisting till I could hear cracking. I screamed, I was in so much pain. He collapsed head down in his own vomit. Costa came home. He went straight to his room. I called him over and over again. Eventually he came. He was horrified. He untied me and helped me to the bathroom. He wanted to take me to the doctors but I said no. I washed my bald scalp. The cuts were still oozing. I could barely walk. I said to Costa "Help me get dad to bed." It was a struggle but we succeeded. Costa, on my demand went to his room. I bandaged my foot and put a scarf on my head. It was one of those freaky Indian summer days when the breeze was cool, but the sun was shining. We lived in a small village of about four hundred people. Most everyone knew everyone. I cleaned the house, hobbling along as best I could. In the late afternoon, dad came to. He was hungry. I asked him what he wanted to eat. What he wanted, we did not have in the house, and he knew it. He sent me out into the village shop. I hobbled down the hill, with a heavy coat, and the scarf still covering my head. When I came back, he wanted tobacco. Down the hill I went again. I was embarrassed. I could still feel the bleeding through my scarf. By my fourth trip it was common knowledge that a calamity had happened. Many people stopped me to ask what was wrong. I pushed them away and ran up the hill. Eventually dad went out. Mum came back from work. She made no comment about my head or my ankles. That night the village was celebrating Guy Fawkes night. A big bonfire and fireworks had been arranged on the village green. My mother insisted that I go with Costa and Helen. I was sore, tired, and upset, but I could not argue. We went. Half way through, I told Mum I was going home as I was not feeling well. She nodded, and I went. I did not go home. I went to Margaret's house. She was my best friend (I will tell you about her in another story). It was her birthday. I had been in-

vited to go to the party, but Dad had refused to let me go. On one of my many trips to the shop I bought a large bar of Cadbury's chocolate bar (her favorite). I knocked on the door. Margaret mother answered it. I explained I could not stay, but the Cadbury's bar was for her daughter. I handed her the bar. At that moment the scarf fell off my hair. Mrs. Baker just stared at me. I ran away. I believe that it was she who called the police. I went back to the firework display and found my mother. When everything was over, we went home. Waiting for us were a policeman, a policewomen and a social worker from Children Services. I spent the rest of the night at the hospital, where it was discovered that I had two broken ankles. My head was stitched up, and braces were put on both my legs. A rape kit was done, revealing that I had been sexually abused. The doctor also noted old scars. The doctors tried to make me tell them what happened. I lived with secrets for eleven years and I was not going to talk to a stranger now. I stayed in the hospital till the next day, and was then taken to the police station. I was questioned and questioned, but I remained silent. Finally Alice, the policelady said "Enough. Let me talk to her". She put her arms around me, "It 's going to be okay" she reassured me. I do not know why, but I started crying. In the past my response to all the punishment I received was that I never cried, but now I did. Then I talked and talked and talked. The gasket blew and I could not stop. I talked for two hours, telling Alice everything that my parents had done to me. She was kind, non judgmental and caressing. Now it was about 4pm on the second day of my ordeal. Alice let me sleep on a cot. The next thing I knew I was in a police car driving to Parkland House in the dark.

I thought about all of this that first night at Parkland House. Eventually I went to sleep. The next morning, Mrs. Pierce woke me up. She carried a bundle of clothes and said "I think these would fit you. Why don't you try them on?" I did, and the clothes fit. I washed up. Mrs. Pierce then took me to start my new life. But that is another story.

## **A Little Something About My Selves**

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Lori Oshiro

I recently found out that I have cross dominance. No, it's not a fetish of some sort, nor does it have anything to do with religious beliefs. Sometimes referred to as "mixed dominance" or "cross laterality," it has to do with the left and right hemispheres of the brain. And how they sometimes misbehave.

Eighty percent of the population has unilateral dominance. That means they have a dominant hand, foot, eye and ear on the same side of their bodies. The right side of the body communicates with the left hemisphere of the brain, and the left side of the body communicates with the right hemisphere of the brain. With unilateral dominance, the synaptic traffic in your brain yields control to your dominant hemisphere, and traffic runs smoothly. Unilateral dominance is neurologically efficient.

My dominant hand and foot are on my right side, but my dominant eye and dominant ear are on my left. My sensory and motor divisions report to two different masters. I'm part of that twenty percent of the population who is cross dominant. I've got the combo deluxe special, and both sides of my brain want a piece of the action.

What does that mean, exactly? Well, if unilateral dominance is like governance by dictatorship, then cross dominance is like governance by congressional committee. Both my left and right brains have their fingers in my cranial noodle. Making decisions can be like pushing a bill through congress. And while this bill is navigating the chambers of my mind, little goodies get attached along the way and it comes out looking like a Christmas tree.

An example of such a treasure is the involuntary spoonerism. As in, "I was a loot blamer." You see, I remember being this way ever since the time I was learning to shoe my tielaces. Who knows what I might up end with. When my signals get crossed I could end up transposing numbers and crossing my i's and dotting my t's.

On the other hand, it could lead to quirky ideas and novel ways of looking at things. Like coming up with all possible uses for a

paper subscription to the L. A. Times. But my two party system can wreak havoc when making simple day-to-day decisions. Like, “What should I wear today?”

“Today, I think I’ll wear red. No — I think I’ll wear blue. What about purple....” Making decisions can sometimes resemble a tennis match. No wonder I’m so tired by midday.

At one time I tried to solve the “what to wear” quandary by limiting my choices and buying only black clothes. Black shirts and black pants. Black socks and black shoes. But then, after a few launderings, the black started fading to dark, inky shades of purple, blue and green. And then there were the warm blacks, and the cool blacks, and the black with inseparable grey lint. Then it became a matter of deciding, “should I wear my purple-tinged black socks with my warm green-black pants...”

Learning of my cross dominance helped me to understand my left-brain right-brain Jekyll-and-Hydeness. One side would take charge at different stages in my life. In my early years, I loved art and music. I was first chair clarinet in symphonic band in middle and high school. The combination of Tchaikovsky and cork grease would give me goose bumps back in those days. Then in university I studied science and engineering. I became an engineer who made high-tech semiconductor chips that went into computers and other inanimate objects. I had become a faceless cog in the industrial complex. Then after a couple decades, my left-brain spell was broken and I woke up with a hangover and a funny taste in my mouth. And found myself wanting to pursue a career in fine art. I felt I needed to restore the life blood of humanity that got sucked out of my veins after two decades of corporate life. Oh, no, it wasn’t a mid-life crisis. It was a cranial change of administration that re-emerged fortuitously in middle age.

As much as I’d like to think that I’m in control of my life, life has a way of reminding me of its mysterious invisible hand. A hand that can unexpectedly pull the rug from under my feet. The recent passing of my mother was a non-negotiable turn that I could not wrest control over. It caused me to swerve onto a new uncharted terrain. It’s on this new terrain that I’m finding new purpose. A purpose that has transformed into a new career path, one of helping others to engage in life more fully.

I've been coming to terms with the fact that I live with two masters in the executive suite. At times it could be a blessing. At others, a burden. If I stand back and listen, it could also be entertaining. Until I need to decide what to have for dinner.



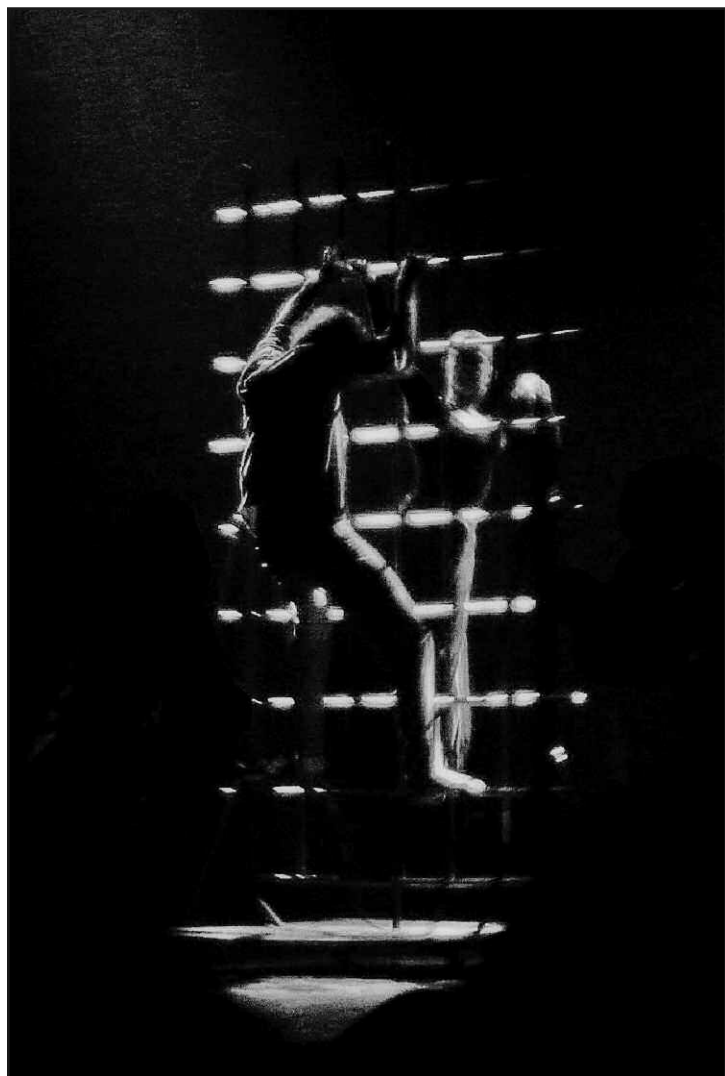


Photo: Carlos Lemus

## The Journey

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Carlos Lemus

The first time someone called me a *wetback*, I idiotically smiled in agreement, believing that the comment had been about the weather. Having realized during the previous four days in Los Angeles that my Junior High School English classes in Mexico had proven to be useless, I had adopted the practice of agreeing with everything anyone told me as a way to minimize the invariable mockery that followed my precarious and heavily accented apology for not speaking the language.

Everyone around me sniggered.

Still in denial, I could not understand such responses and maintained my illusory translation. I reasoned that if “call me back” was an imperative for a return phone call, *wetback* must definitely have meant that my classmate wanted the wetness of the weather to return, as it was a rather hot day in Los Angeles.

“He is calling you a *mojado*,” another classmate said.

I chuckled and started to walk away, explaining to my impromptu interpreter that in spite of bad intentions, the adjective was a misnomer given that, to my disappointment, I had not swum across the Rio Bravo.

“I merely jumped across a meager creek and could not have soaked my left foot in it,” I said. “And—trust me—I really wanted to!”

Years later, when I shared this anecdote with a friend, she was outraged, but not by the classmate’s offense, who also happened to be Mexican. It was about my dissatisfaction for not having undergone the quintessential experience describing my condition as an undocumented newcomer to the United States of America. I figured that if people deceived themselves to the entitlement of calling me a *mojado*, I should have at least become a little wet during my crossing. I later discovered that the pejorative of *wetback* derives from the experience of migrant farm workers always having their backs drenched in sweat after spending countless poorly-paid hours under the sun picking unfairly-priced

produce. At that point, I began to relate better with the term, for I sweated my way to Los Angeles while being transported by human smugglers on Labor Day weekend of 1988.

\* \* \*

Separating from Mami, Dad and my sister Leticia in order to reunite with my mother and my sister Renata was a very painful choice. Mami was in fact my maternal grandmother and Dad was my mother's brother, but they surpassed any computer-generated model of perfect parents. Also, as a thirteen-year-old boy living in the colonial city of Toluca, located sixty-six kilometers to the southwest of Mexico City, I was enjoying a life filled with the corresponding adventures that such jejune perspective entails. The naive expectation that the reunification experiment with my mother would not last longer than a year, however, softened the pain of leaving my family behind. This rationalization also fueled my intrinsic urge to have other great adventures during that time—while learning English and working to save enough money to buy a Corvette, just like the computerized toy I had received as a Christmas gift five years earlier.

Yes. I wanted new and fresh experiences, but I was also running away from the maladaptive choices I was beginning to explore at the time, such as experimenting with drugs—and liking it. I fled. There is no point in denying it. I was not able to handle the responsibility of trust and freedom that my parents had given me because hedonism was, felt more persuasive. As a result, when Mother returned for the second time in my conscious life with the idea of taking me to live with her, I accepted her offer.

\* \* \*

Sitting at the Tijuana-San Isidro Border the evening of September 2nd, 1988, as I waited along with the rest of the human cargo for the coyote's signal to begin moving, I gravely reconsidered my choice. If I had demonstrated enough sense to become aware of my irresponsibility and had escaped from it, why could I not be strong enough to stay and confront it, instead of plunging into the experience of cohabitating with a mother I basically did not know?

Yet, the border—that blurry and evasive political line of separation packed with burlesque, inverted, and convoluted scenes Kafka would not have conceived even under the most tremulous of acid trips—was a besieging adventure that I could not refuse. Being the port where dreamers embark to the utopian prospect of a better life in a first, new, and capitalist world, entrepreneurs of all sorts populated its dusty perimeters, offering all possible products and services: sex, human smuggling, drugs, food, jobs in the States.

I opted for sex, but looked too young to be taken seriously. Dinner became a suitable consolation. It was sometime after six in the afternoon and my last meal had been the breakfast provided on Mexicana flight 742 bound to Tijuana from Mexico City. I had skipped lunch with Mother when arriving to the infamous border town because I was unaccustomed to burritos; I had never seen or heard of them in my life. But at dawn, looking over to the Mexican side from one of the many hills ostensibly separating the two countries, the agonizing heat that had almost scorched the clothes onto my skin had weakened enough for my body to realize that it was hungry—voraciously as usual. I had twenty dollars in my pocket. Mother had wanted to give me more in case of emergencies during what she regarded would be the most difficult journey of my life, but I had not seen the need. Still functioning with a third-world mentality, I believed that such amount could secure food for a brigade. I roamed around in search of something appetizing to eat, but that frontier also possessed sufficient elements of a Chekhovian tragicomedy because the only thing I found were scanty burritos at a price that almost depleted my emergency funding.

The burrito, I have to admit, was good. Or at least the two bites I took from it before the coyote ordered us to move. The white Ford pick-up truck, whose reflective gold and green letters reminded us of our condition as fugitives, had stopped surveillance on our area and was heading west.

“C’mon!” he ordered. “Move and run at my pace!”

We followed.

Years later, as I was introduced to Stanley Milgram’s experiments on authority while studying psychology, I chuckled at the

irony of authority figures not necessarily having to wear white robes. Dressed in a pair of faded black jeans and a stained white t-shirt, the coyote exerted his power on the group, but I stayed behind. I have always had misgivings about being seated at the front of class or following orders from self-proclaimed authority figures. As we descended the hill, a pregnant lady slipped. I increased my speed in an attempt to help her, but the slope was too pronounced and gravity propelled me to the bottom.

“Oh shit!” the coyote screamed. “That motherfucker has now broken a fucking leg.”

I sprung from the floor without a sense of place, but decisive to pretend otherwise.

“Where’s the lady?” I screamed. “Is she okay?”

The coyote caught up and admonished me.

“You, motherfucker! You are staying close to me.”

Minutes later, I followed my own path. I was in too much physical and emotional pain to be in the lead. The man did not even notice that I defied his command because he was too busy selling us to another smuggler without any of us complaining.

\* \* \*

To this day, I wish I could remember what I was dreaming about while using a Chula Vista sidewalk as my pillow when the new coyote pulled me into the mid-eighties, blue Chevrolet Caprice station wagon that brought me to Los Angeles. Still somnolent, I dove into the back, unable even to hope for the best. The weight of five other people on top of me awakened me. I became sickened within minutes. This time it was not motion sickness, as was usually the case. One of the guys was groping a lady being herded with us.

“Leave me alone,” she pleaded.

The short, dark-skinned guy wearing a sombrero who, given Mexican societal prejudices, would have been expected to be a perpetrator, threatened the real perpetrator: a city guy with a few semesters of college education.

"If you don't leave her alone, you son of a bitch, I will kill you."

"Shut the fuck up back there!" the coyote screamed.

"I'll kill you first, you fucking Indian," barked the perpetrator.

Racism, like the kind I found four days after I arrived to the U.S. is pervasive in most cultures.

"Stop it already!" I yelled.

"Shut the fuck up, you fucking child!" said the perpetrator, almost laughing. "Go change your diapers before you say anything."

"Don't worry," said the lady. "It's okay," she told me, obviously having the feminine sense to stop a tragedy.

"Shut the fuck up already!" yelled the smuggler as he stopped the car. "I will fucking kill you if you don't shut the fuck up!" he said to the city guy while moving the lady and me to the front seat.

With urban cockiness, the perpetrator challenged the coyote to leave him there or be true to his promise of killing him.

"You are coming with me," the smuggler said while retrieving a gun. "And don't you worry. I'll kill you after I get your money."

\* \* \*

The waiting room at the pick-up house felt more like a warehouse and was lined with stains on a carpeted floor. The guy with the sombrero, the hero, had stayed in Anaheim. I missed him. He said goodbye in a vulgar, but wise way: "No se deje de nadie, Cabrón! (Don't give in to anyone, motherfucker!)." I continuously remembered the advice as my pleas to call my mother were brusquely ignored.

For a reason that I cannot remember, I had memorized Mother's telephone number before I knew how to dial the international code to call her. It certainly could have been the result of social learning or modeling. I still remember a poem, for example, that my sister Leticia memorized while I was in third grade—she had rehearsed it so many times in front of me that I ended up learning it.

Armed with the power of knowledge, I confronted the people at the house to call my mother.

"We'll call in a minute," they said. Every time the cordless phone was picked up to call someone, I yelled out the number. Every time, I was ignored.

The reduction of one's humanity to the objectification of an idle package awaiting shipment to a final destination has the ability to fraternize even the most incompatible of characters. As such, the mindless conversation that developed in that stuffy warehouse became a burning necessity to remind ourselves of our existence as humans. When the misanthrope of the group was called to leave, he promised to keep in touch.

"I know where to call you," he said. "728 3150, right? But, what's the area code?"

He confused me. I thought the code was 213, but did we have to dial it outside of Mexico? I asked my temporary captors for clarification. It went unanswered. I asked for a phone book. They laughed at me. It was impossible to be defensive under those conditions, so I gave up. I honestly am grateful for that adolescent sense of invulnerability because, I am convinced, if I had not had it I would have probably been terrified. I impatiently moved around. Having smoked since the age of eleven, I was restless after two days without a cigarette. I asked for one and it was given on command.

"So, I get a cigarette, but not a phone call," I said.

They laughed again. The ice was broken. Afterwards, I walked around asking irreverent questions without being told to have my diapers changed. In the backyard, I found a group of men gathering next to a useless, early generation bright orange Toyota MR2.

"We'll beat the hell out of him," one of the men said.

"What a violent approach," said another one. "Why use so much violence if the matter can be easily resolved with a bullet? Isn't that so, city boy?" he asked me.

"As long as you are not talking about me, it is fine," I replied. They roared with laughter. I truly hoped that they did not execute a plan like that with the perpetrator.

“Hey you!” yelled an elder coyote from an open window. In his sixties, he appeared to be the patriarch of the group. “728 3150, it’s time to go.”

I sighed with relief.

“But take the gun,” he ordered one of his underlings. “We need to be prepared. This guy’s from Mexico City and one never knows.”

One of the curses Tolucans face is to have an accent that resembles that of people from Mexico City, whose thieves have a reputation of stealing one’s socks in the subway without taking off the shoes.

\* \* \*

The black market entrepreneurs finally released me in a graffiti-ridden alley somewhere in East Los Angeles. According to Mother, the delivery car drove a few times around before they let me go, her heart sinking every time she witnessed the car drive away. They had indeed taken their precautions. Besides me, there were five occupants in the car: the patriarch, two guys I had never seen, the fellow who suggested a bullet as an alternative to the violence of beating the hell out of someone—and the gun. Mother said that when she was paying my fare the patriarch flared the weapon.

Smothered in motherly kisses, I ironically found my way inside another blue Chevy Caprice, this time one my sister Renata owned. As we drove off, the patriarch tilted his hat at us and smiled. For some reason, I want to believe that it was out of friendly respect.

Finally safe at Mother’s house, my family showcased me to friends and neighbors as if I was a toy. Someone asked about my experience.

“It was fun,” I answered, feeling proud about my developing resumé of adventures.

“Fun?” Mother nagged.

I flinched.



“Yes,” I reiterated. “It was something probably better than Disneyland.”

“What’s wrong with you?” Mother continued. “Are you crazy? How dare you say fun? I would have never forgiven myself if anything had happened to you.”

The most difficult journey of my life, it seemed, would be to learn how to get along with my mother.

## Against the Grain

---

Khrysten Rogers

The general consensus affirms that the most frightening place to be cornered is in the dark. The sort of the dark that can be suffocating in its apparent depths. An arena where the perpetrator's face cannot be seen, where the eyes are rendered useless, and where there is no tangible escape.

Luckily I am not one of those people.

I am not one of those blissfully inexperienced members of society, living under the delusion that there is nothing more frightening than being trapped in the dark. I am bestowed with the knowledge that being fully aware that there is an escape, eyesight fully functional, the perpetrator's face visible to some extent, that knowing that you might not escape is sevenfold more terrifying.

Clearly those that make up the general population have never been jumped twenty-five feet away from the safety of their home, and just a measly two feet from the protection of a well-lit intersection, just after sunset, with a multitude of cars driving by unaware.

How did I happen to be caught in such a situation, one might ask?

Simple.

The pleated, navy blue skirt of a Catholic high school female student is to blame.

A case of mistaken identity is a bitch to deal with.

And a younger sister's alarmed yell into one's ear from a cell-phone only makes matters worse.

Volunteering at a daycare center focused on children between the ages of six months and twelve years for four hours subsequent to six hours of college preparatory schooling often leaves one inexplicably tired, hungry, nostalgic and thanking God that one is nowhere near the age or mentality for childbearing. With these emotions written clearly on my face, I, fifteen years old at

the time, slipped my black hoodie over my head, slung my bulging, gray backpack over my shoulder, and crossed the threshold of the daycare center, taking a sharp left at the white gate's exit.

It was a route I'd taken countless times before, and despite the darkness, the familiarity of the walk pushed aside a bit of the fear I always felt heading home after sunset. My gait sped up a bit as I checked the time on my cellphone: it was minutes after six. I was late. Hopefully my mom wouldn't be too upset; it wasn't as if she didn't know where I was: she'd seen me two hours ago when she'd picked up my brothers from the same daycare center I volunteered at.

Inclining my head towards the sky, I sighed. It was a day that couldn't seem to decide whether or not it should continue with the standard weather conditions of winter in New York City or move forward with spring's. I shivered as a chilly breeze passed over me like a shadow, stopped at the block's end corner, and looked out into the street.

It was quiet - empty.

Crickets hummed their rhythmic tunes and a dog barked out into the night from behind the tall green hedges behind me, the fence rattling as he attempted to get closer to the intruder on his territory: me. I jumped, decided it was safe to cross the four-way street, and dashed away to my right. Surmising that the next crossing would be safe as well, I continued running, and then banked another right. I was trying to avoid the block ahead: the block where there seemed to be an endless supply of pitbulls and rottweilers, breeds that gave birth to uneasy feelings, feelings that magnified with my mother's warnings of the dangerousness of such dogs. The newscasts about incidents surrounding them had increased in frequency and seriousness lately.

It had been weeks since I'd walked up that particular block of houses, the sort that looked uncannily like apartment complexes, apartment complexes with merely a sliver of space in between them.

Those thoughts pushed to the side, I had managed to make my way to the main street, Baychester Avenue, bustling with cars returning home, brilliantly lit by the fluorescent lamp posts - posts

that rivaled the wooden electrical towers of current in height. Devoid of any sort of music player - a wish that seemed impossible at the time to me - and trying to remind myself that I had nothing to worry about, I dialed nine digits into the keypad of my cell-phone, positioned the blessed device against my ear and impatiently waited for my younger sister's voice to flood my ear. After a few moments, my pace slowed to its normal rate as I passed by several houses, gates blocking all from unwanted entrances, my shoes making not a sound on the asphalt.

I had always considered myself a master of silent strolling.

"K, where are you?" my sister inquired and I laughed in response.

"About eight minutes away," I replied, pulling her into a conversation that was meant to distract me from the darkness of the night.

I do not remember exactly what it was that I discussed with my sister - probably something meaningless like what I'd had for lunch or the latest foolishness my friends had committed at school. What I do remember is the discomfort that raced through my veins as I glanced ahead of me to see two teenagers, dressed in the usual garb - excessively baggy jeans, equally large t-shirts and sneakers.

I had never had any problems passing through a group of guys - no matter how large the number - when I was younger, but over the three and a half years I'd been living in the Bronx by then, I had been taught to be think otherwise, to be extra careful.

Especially when wearing a skirt.

Nothing had ever gone the way I'd planned when I was wearing that godforsaken article of clothing.

Pressing the phone closer to my ear and shuffling my backpack nervously, I slowed my pace, hoping that if I did so, the teenagers ahead would eventually pass the gate of the apartment I lived in and I wouldn't have to deal with them, wouldn't have to interact, wouldn't have to whisper 'excuse me' and twist myself sideways between them.

It was the one of the few things I truly hated doing.

My sister chatted on and I occasionally would mutter back, my eyes trained on the people ahead of me. Moments passed and I sighed softly.

One thought flitted across my mind.

What the hell was I doing?

I shouldn't have to be so fearful of walking between two guys - it was downright ridiculous. I had to get home before my mom started to worry, before she started to throw a fit about my coming home after dark. I neither wanted nor needed another confrontation with her.

Picking up the pace, my mind on the goal in hand - get through them, get home - it barely registered that my sister had asked me a question, and before I knew it I had come within touching distance of the teenage boys. I quickly answered back in reply - what, I cannot remember - issued the polite request to them loud enough to hear and passed through, the last intersection before my apartment a couple of feet before me.

Then it happened.

I did not expect it, could not fathom what was going on. All I knew was that there was a very heavy weight pressing over my back, forcing me into a hunched position, two muscular arms wrapped around my neck, pulling me into a headlock, and a gruff voice in my ear.

One of them had jumped me.

My right hand immediately went for one of the guy's arms, trying to pull it away from its position. I emitted a small scream - his weight heavy - and I barely heard my sister's voice transmit from the ear piece of my cellphone, the cellphone that was suffocated in my left hand's tight grip.

"K? K, what's going on?"

Her voice was filled with confusion and panic.

I cursed and started to struggle, still hunched over, but to no avail. The guy's hold was tight, but not overly painful. I yelled, "Get off me! Get off me!"

He laughed. He laughed.

I couldn't believe what was happening.

My mind went blank as panic, fear started to fill me.

"Get off!" I yelled again, as I continued to struggle - not an easy feat when the attacker is a lot heavier and a lot stronger, and I'm being additionally weighed down by a bulging backpack, a backpack that I can't sling off my shoulder. For some reason, a countdown flitted through my mind,

10 - 9 - 8 - 7...

He continued to laugh and I took a deep breath, tried to mimic a simple technique I'd seen countless times in films, on television: elbow jab to the gut.

After all, my mom's advice to aim and decisively kick a would-be attacker in the cajones wasn't going to exactly work in this situation - not when I was hunched over in a painful position, and the guy gave no indication of easing up.

What was he going to do to me?

Suddenly, he said, his voice hot in my ear, "Remember me?"

At that moment, I did something I'm ashamed to admit I did just then.

I froze.

Utterly froze.

What the hell was he talking about? Why - how the fuck could I possibly know him?

Anger came in a hot flash.

Either this was some kind of sick joke or - I was the victim of mistaken identity again. This was absolute bullshit. This fucking skirt was getting me into situations I did not appreciate.

What happened next surprised me, shocked me to the core.

He let me go.

I don't remember what happened after that, to be honest. Call it the mind's way of dealing with a rather jarring experience, but the next thing I remember is opening the door to my home, and my sister bull-rushing me, interrogating me about what happened.

I told her, of course.

And she told my mother.

My mother, who went from shocked and worried to angry and sputtering in the millisecond after my sister divulged that numbers had run through my head throughout the course of the jumping. A rather long lecture followed about everything I should have done and what could have happened if it had continued differently.

All I could think about was how grateful I was that he had let me go and that I was home, a bit shaken, but fine otherwise.

After all, that is the most important thing, right?

## **My Identity vs. My Race**

---

**Daniel Perea**

I have an identity. Today, I've established who I am in this society and will gladly tell you who I am if you ask. For the longest time, most of the facets of my identity had been firmly established; I knew who most of me was. But that was the problem: it was only most, not all. That missing piece of me was what plagued me for years, for my entire childhood and most of my adolescence. Unfortunately, to tell you the truth, that missing piece of my identity wasn't exactly lost, I had purposefully misplaced it. You see, I lived my life with a shame I had hidden from too many; I've kept it from my family, my friends, my co-workers, and the world around me. This is a shame I had barely dealt with only recently. I never like talking about such shame, as I fear what others may have to say to me. But I've kept this secret hidden for far too long. It needs to come out now. You see, for the longest time, I hated my race.

For as I long as could remember, I hated Latinos with a passion. How the men heavily drank their crude beer and cursed with reckless abandon, how they had to begin all of their phrases with "pinche" and how they ended their sentences with "foo" or "vato" or "asay". I hated them for how they placed cold, hard labor work and money above getting an solid education. I hated their mindless, homophobic, and 'masculine' tendencies, how they mishandled and degraded their women, slapping their asses and screaming at them for hours if their carne asada wasn't cooked right. But that didn't excuse the women from my hatred. From all I saw, the women did nothing more than clean, cook, serve, and care for the children, as if that was their sole purpose in life. They had all the capability to advance themselves into a higher social purpose, but they decided to stay home! How they vigorously prayed to the Virgin Mary for every single problem they had, as if they couldn't save themselves. Oh but it was the Latino youth that got the worse of my scorn. How the boys fervently tried to look "fresh" everyday, thinking that wearing the right hoodies, hi-tops, basketball shorts and baseball caps made them "dope", how they celebrated over 'passing grades' as if they were straight A's, how they always got detention for calling the teacher a bitch



in the middle of class. And the girls... Don't get me started on them. Thinking that they can find that right guy at a house party or a kickback. Wearing the tiniest tube tops or the lowest cut tank top with the smallest booty shorts to match, basically asking to carry a child in their undeveloped wombs. How they are always in the restroom, touching up on their make-up, as if they didn't already look like sleazy mannequins already. Even the children I hated, as their skin were marked with dirty spots of discoloration, showing no signs of intelligible thought, just wanting to run to the nearest liquor store and grab themselves a packet of Pop Rocks. I hated all of them. I did indeed.

But Daniel, didn't you consider yourself to be Latino? The answer for that was No. You see, I was not like them. I couldn't speak Spanish, I didn't watch soccer games, I didn't play sports, I took the DARE program to heart, while the rest of them took it as a joke. You can say my intellectual abilities was at a much higher level than everyone else. I was in the GATE program. I wanted to be an astronomer. I was second in my class. Heck, I was even given recognition by the principal himself for my amazing scores on those standardized testing exams. Yup, I was much different than your average inner-city fifth grader.

But even then I recognized the stereotypes of my race and how easily I could be associated with those stereotypes, especially with my dark complexion. So I voluntarily separated myself from my race. I styled my hair in the most Caucasian of ways. I stayed away from the basketball courts. I went to a Catholic school, while they all went to a public middle school, where black eyes and broken teeth came with homework. On weekends, I stayed inside and played video games all day long, after I finished my homework of course.

I made sure to distance myself from my kind. I even distanced myself from my family, as they were the embodiment of every value I stood against. They drank, they smoke, they cursed like no tomorrow, as they told stories of my aunts sleeping with my uncles, the uncles they weren't married to; the shame that they kept secret from the world. Even hanging out with my cousins was a problem, as all my older cousins only cared about getting a job and buying themselves a car. One of my cousins kept on ranting on about how he had lost his virginity when he was thir-

teen and how he has three girls calling him his boyfriend. And this is one of my younger cousins. Go figure.

When I was in eighth grade, my parents divorced and I was forced to move. Interestingly enough, I moved to a city that is 53% Asian and 37% Hispanic. And there I flourished. With a culture that put an emphasis on the value of education, I felt I had finally found a place where I had belonged. In high school, with all of my Asian friends, I had joined over twelve clubs and organizations, had taken over three AP classes, joined the Youth Commission of my city, was elected to Homecoming Court, and even became the president of my school's Academic Decathlon team. Hell, everything I did during high school was Asian: I ate out at Pho places, I watched Korean Dramas (against my will), I went out shopping at Asian supermarkets, replacing Tamales for Dim Sum. Hell, even the only two girls I went out with were Asian. But I was happy. Happy because I was far more comfortable with a culture completely unknown to me than with the unintelligent and mindless culture I was racially associated with.

After High School (and after some unfortunate mishaps along the way), I attended PCC, where none of my close friends went to. I was confused, unwary, and most noticeably, lost. When looking for guidance, the only people that reached out to me were the people of the Puente Project. With my experience of school clubs and programs, I immediately jumped on it. My first class with the Puente Project was an extreme wave of culture shock as, for the first time since the fifth grade, all of the students in the classroom were of my color. Even the teacher was of my race. I felt alone, as I felt that everyone around me loved their heritage, unlike me. I honestly thought that no one could understand me. We read an author by the name of Richard Rodriguez, who by coincidence happened to have suffered the same problem I had been facing, being a Latino who wished not to be one. While most of the class hated his narrative (no big surprise there), I almost cried in joy with every point I understood; I wasn't alone after all, I thought.

With Richard Rodriguez aside, every passing day I spent with my classmates, I realized more and more that these Hispanic classmates were like me. They cared about their education, they cared about their school, they cared about their future. They were

as varied in personalities as my Asian friends. They made me realize that the negative stereotypes that defined our race were just that: stereotypes. I had realized that my differences make me distinguishable from my race, but also that my differences will allow me to improve my people's place in society.

Like I had said before in the first paragraph, I hated my race. Past Tense. I no longer hate that laborer painting houses or selling oranges on the freeway. I no longer hate that girl wearing that tank top and matching mini-skirt. I no longer those little kids playing soccer in the mud. I no longer hate my people. That's right. I said it. My people. Why? Because after all that time hating, of being ignorant, of being afraid of embracing who I am, I've have realized that I have an identity to uphold. An identity that, if you ask me about it, I will tell you about. I am Latino. And pretty proud of it.

# *Contributors*

## Inscape Contributors

**Kathleen Aharonian** is interested in design.

**Edilzar Alvarado** is sarcastic, quick with a joke, and an Aquarius. In his spare time he reads, writes, and daydreams.

**Beth Andreoli** is studying abroad in Oxford and planning to go to graduate school soon. All procrastination notwithstanding.

**Mayli Apontti** is a writer, artist, musician, and a student at PCC, majoring in Creative Writing. She loves traveling and sharing a good laugh.

**Adrian Ernesto Cepeda** is an L.A. poet who has spent the last ten years on *The Road Not Taken*, living the writer's life immortalized by Robert Frost.

**Jenna Collins** is a political science major at PCC and hopes to transfer to Berkeley for Fall 2011.

**Meg D'Aguiar** is majoring in cultural anthropology and pursuing a minor in human-rights. As an avid writer and photographer, she enjoys attending poetry jams and reading autobiographies.

**Gina Endreola** is a writer, novelist, poet, and creator of distant worlds in a faraway place.

**Tamon Go** is a UC Irvine graduate who has recently been taking creative writing classes at PCC. He loves movies, writing and going to concerts.

**Genesis Hernandez** is a psychology major, studies philosophy, writes poetry and attends concerts and movies (foreign and independent), and travels.

**Christine Hovhannessian**, she just is.

**Carlos Lemus** moved to Los Angeles at the age of 13 from the city of Toluca, Mexico, has earned a Master's Degree in Social Work and works in the mental health field. He is the recipient of the John & Eva Keener Photography Award, and his fiction and nonfiction have appeared in numerous publications.

**Matt MacCarthy** is majoring in world religions, writes music (aka Villain With a Thousand Faces), and is writing a seven-part novel series about dreams, magic and Armageddon.

**Paris Matic** writes, paints, sculpts and creates.

**Jacqueline Renee Moore** is interested in pursuing a career in creative writing and visual arts. She currently resides in Apple Valley, California.

**Jason Neas** is a writer.

**José Roberto Orellana**, a Xicano poet and an aspiring educator, uses his poetry to bring to life many issues affecting the Xicano and Latino community.

**Lori Oshiro** is returning to school for a new career in Speech Language Pathology. She is currently working towards SLPA certification at PCC.

**Andrew Paknilratana** is a student currently attending PCC who is transferring to UCI this Fall. He likes cats and reading short ghost stories.

**Osmin Pena** likes journalism and had an internship with the MLS professional soccer team San Jose Earthquakes in their communications department. He also works with the marketing agency Aspen Latino.

**Daniel Perea** is double-majoring in English and Astrophysics. He is heavily involved on-campus and works as a student intern at the Office of Student Affairs.

**John Ramos** in 1969, at the age of fourteen, reluctantly transformed himself from small town country boy to an East Los Angeles cholo.

**Tatum Rangel** has studied math and music and PCC. Her goal is to write fiction. Music, which she enjoys, helps her with her writing.

**Khrysten Rogers** constantly finds herself adding items to her bucket list. She is an addict: reading, writing, psychology, cartoons, all things Japan, the internet, NYC (she hopes to move back there soon), laughter and spending time with her loved ones are her drugs of choice. A cure is nonexistent and undesired.

**Shanti (aka Mary Nurrenbern)** dreams of things she has never seen and going on new adventures. She loves painting, writing and photography. She is opening like a flower to life's experiences

**Annie Tang** attended PCC before enrolling at UCLA. She participated in PCC's Oregon Shakespeare Festival program, traveled to Egypt for archeology studies, and has an internship at the Getty for Summer 2011.

**Claire Weiss (aka phutula)** loves to write, look at the changing color of the leaves and hearing the sound of waves. She is 58 and young at heart.

Several of the photographs featured in this year's *Inscape* were taken from **EcoTones: A Portfolio...** by Carlos Lemus. To view more of his work, please visit [www.blurb.com](http://www.blurb.com) or his blog at <http://trovan-guardia.blogspot.com>.

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Sharon Hinton, Student Affairs Bookkeeper

## Publications Office

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# Associate in Arts Degree

## English Literature

Courses in this area of emphasis encompass traditional literary history and interpretation as well as cross-cultural inquiry and current theoretical debates. Literature majors are trained in critical reading, writing and thinking, as well as in literary interpretation. Literature is the study of representation, ideas, language, and culture. As such, it is a source of knowledge and pleasure, as well as a field of study. Literary texts are social documents in artistic form that speak to us as much about historical issues as about aesthetic matters. Literature students learn to think critically and to understand the role that texts play in a given society, past or present.

### Requirements

- Students must complete a minimum of sixty (60) units. These units must meet PCC's General Education Requirements and must include eighteen units in the area of emphasis.
- **To complete the eighteen units in the area of emphasis, students must complete English 1C or English 26 and fifteen (15) units consisting of courses from at least three of the five categories listed below and including a minimum of two Literary Survey courses. Each course must be completed with a grade of "C" or better.**
- The courses that universities and colleges require for transfer vary. In selecting literature courses, students should consult with Counseling Services to determine the particular transfer requirements of specific transfer institutions.

## English Literature courses offered at Pasadena City College

### Literary Survey:

Engl 30A	American Literature	3
Engl 30B	American Literature	3
Engl 30C	American Literature	3
Engl 44B	World Literature	3
Engl 44C	World Literature	3
Engl 46A	English Literature	3
Engl 46B	English Literature	3

### Gender and Ethnic Literature:

Engl 24	Lit in Translation	3
Engl 25C	Women in Literature	3
Engl 47	Mexican/Chicano Lit	3
Engl 48	Asian Literature	3
Engl 50	Afro-American Lit	3
Engl 51	Native American Lit	3
Engl 52	Asian-American Lit	3

### Literary Origins:

Engl 44A	World Literature	3
Engl 45A	Literature of the Bible	3
Engl 45B	Literature of the Bible	3
Engl 78A	Intro to Shakespeare	3
Engl 78B	Intro to Shakespeare	3
Engl 82A	Intro to Mythology	3
Engl 82B	Intro to Mythology	3
Engl 82C	Intro to Mythology	3

### Genre and Modes in Literature:

Engl 25A	Modern Literature	3
Engl 25D	Science Fiction/Fantasy	3
Engl 25E	Literature of Horror	3
Engl 25F	Comedy and Literature	3
Engl 25G	Mystery/Crime Fiction	3
Engl 49A	Film as Dramatic Lit	3
Engl 49B	Film as Dramatic Lit	3
Engl 53	Interpreting Poetry	3
Engl 57	Modern Drama	3
Engl 60	Masterpieces of Drama	3
Engl 61	Intro to the Novel	3
Engl 34	Major Novelist	1
Engl 35	Major Dramatist	1
Engl 36	Major Poet	1
Engl 37	Major Critic	1

### Special Topics in Literature:

Engl 25H	American Journeys	3
Engl 25I	Post-Colonial Lit	3
Engl 25J	Utopian/Dystopian Lit	3
Engl 26	Intro to Lit. Theory	3
Engl 54	California Literature	3
Engl 59	Children's Literature	3



# Creative Writing

## at Pasadena City College

### **English 5A (Creative Writing)**

Prerequisite: Eligibility for English 1B. Creative literary expression; short story, poetry and essay. Individual experimentation with various forms; students evaluate their work and work of classmates in light of contemporary writings.

*Transfer Credit: CSU; UC. \*CAN: ENGL 6.*

### **English 5B (Creative Writing)**

Prerequisite: English 5A, 6, 7 or 8. Creative literary expression such as: short story, poetry, dramatic form and essay.

The focus is on in-depth criticism of student work and professional writers. *Transfer Credit: CSU; UC*

### **English 6 (Short Story Writing)**

Prerequisite: Eligibility for English 1B. Theory and practice in writing the short story. *Transfer Credit: CSU; UC*

### **English 7 (Inscape Magazine Publication)**

Prerequisite: Engl 1A. Critical review and selection of creative material; design and layout of a literary magazine.

*Transfer Credit: CSU; UC*

### **English 8 (Writing Poetry)**

Prerequisite: Eligibility for English 1A. Writing of poetry in all forms. Reading of traditional and current work. *Transfer Credit: CSU; UC*

### **English 9 (Creative Nonfiction)**

Prerequisite: Engl 1A. Writing and analysis of creative non-fiction such as memoirs, reviews, profiles, and nature writing. *Transfer Credit: CSU; UC*



Photo: Carlos Lemus

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