

ORPHEUS

ORPHEUS

XXXV


A Literary Journal

California State University, Bakersfield 2018

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Orpheus is a yearly literary journal produced by California State University, Bakersfield. If a student is interested in joining the *Orpheus* staff, please email us at orpheus@csub.edu.

Orpheus accepts submissions of all kinds, as there are no restrictions on the context or form. Submissions must be typed, double-spaced, and on a word document. Use of profanity must be crucial to the context of the work. All submissions are to be emailed to orpheus@csub.edu.

Some of the creative pieces in this journal have been written by our editors. As per the rules of the Betty Creative Writing Awards any winners have the option to publish their winning work in the journal. The winners are selected through anonymous submissions and by staff at the university. This selection has no affiliation to the editorial team at *Orpheus*. Student-contributed artworks are also located on pages 9, 31, and 63.

Orpheus was founded by Dr. Solomon O. Iyasere, Sr. in 1973. Dr. Solomon Iyasere was a professor of the English Department at CSUB, contributing to CSUB's academia for over 44 years. His legacy lives on through *Orpheus*.

Long Live the Vortex and Long Live Orpheus

This issue of *Orpheus* is inspired, visually at least, by Wyndham Lewis' *BLAST* which first appeared with a kerplunk in 1914. Lewis, with the help of his equally eccentric and brilliant friend Ezra Pound, expresses a need of "THE UNCONSCIOUSNESS OF HUMANITY – their stupidity, animalism, and dreams." *BLAST* also asserts that "Intrinsic beauty is in the Interpreter and Seer, not in the object or content," and glories in a disdain of traditional education and the academy. There is a lot about art and the individual, in the early pages of *BLAST*, and a sharp contempt for the hoi polloi, the bourgeoisie, and the high and mighty. The intended audience seems mostly English and male, and they bless and blast copiously.

Among those blasted are Annie Besant, Captain Cook, Galsworthy, The British Academy, the post-office, The Bishop of London and all his posterity, Clan Strachey, the Lyceum Club, and Cod Liver Oil. We sat up at the blast of Besant, since we know of a school in Ojai founded by Aldous Huxley and named after Annie Besant, but decided not to take umbrage. (Blast umbrage anyway). Annie Besant was President of the India National Congress in 1917 (Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was president in 1924). She was a champion of Indian independence, a speaker at the Bloody Sunday riots (1887 not 1972), a champion of women's suffrage, of feminism, secularism, and Fabianism (she was chummy with George Bernard Shaw); she also was an advocate for birth control, and the education of men AND WOMEN – maybe Wyndham disapproved of the wooliness of her Theosophy, but that was throwing out the baby with the bath water we think. Perhaps, after-all, we ought to blast *BLAST* for this blast. Among the Blessed, according to Lewis, are Castor Oil, James Joyce, 33 Church Street, R.B. Cunninghame Graham (not his brother), the Salvation Army, and Cranmer Bing. *Orpheus* blasts no one (though it is tempting), but only blesses. Our thanks, and blessings, go to Kathy "Caddywampus" Hafler for her tireless work arranging the printing of our posters, the reserving of our seminar rooms, and for her general sense of can-do conviviality. We'd also like to bless our department chair, the redoubtable Professor Doctor Steven Frye, and our venerable Dean, Doctor Professor Robert Frakes. Drs. Frakes and Frye have built a sense of esprit de corps among the students, faculty, and staff in Humanities and in English that encourages us to delight in projects such as *Orpheus*. *Orpheus* is, after all, a student edited, production which publishes works of fiction: short-stories, plays, and poetry, and as well as visual art, by students at CSUB. Oh, and for this issue, we also welcomed submissions from students at Porterville College; this we did in an effort to strengthen links between these two institutions, and to encourage students at PC to come and join our family at CSUB. A special blessing, then to the PC advisor for *Orpheus*, Professor Rachel Tatro-Duarte, a graduate of CSUB who earned both a BA and an MA in English here, and who is now (drum roll please) an assistant professor at Porterville College. Please note the excellent submissions by PC students on *pages 9 and 24*.

Blessings too go to Dr. Stafford Betty, for the Betty Creative Writing Awards – the winners of this year's awards you will find published here among the other innovative, bold, and/or beautiful work presented herein. Blessings also to our outgoing President Dr. Horace Mitchell and his wife, First Lady, Barbara. We thank them for their 14 years of excellence at CSUB. And, finally, a warm welcome, and final blessing to our in-coming president Dr. Lynette Zelezny.

-An t-Ollamh Teirlach Mac Guathre & Orpheus

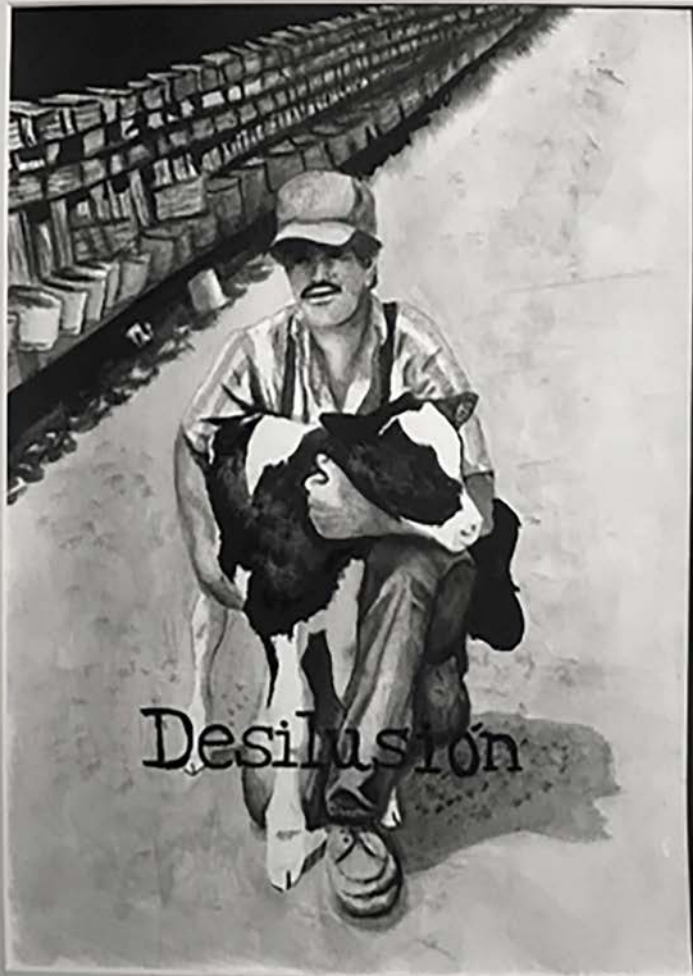
POETRY

Bailey Russell	
<i>Remember Tomorrow</i>	10
Danelia Cordva	
<i>Seasonal Haikus</i>	11
Ella Cruz	
<i>I said stay thirsty</i>	12
Daniel Hampton	
<i>As I Unspool</i>	13
<i>Paper</i>	14
<i>There's comfort I the space beneath a stone</i>	15
Caitlin Wolf	
<i>Precipitate</i>	16
<i>Maternal Inheritance</i>	18
<i>Thrinacia</i>	19
Jamie Williams	
<i>Identify Me in Love</i>	20
<i>Poetry Should...</i>	22
<i>Hands</i>	23
Britney Melson	
<i>Black River</i>	24
Mateo Lara	
<i>Dear M (White Saviors)</i>	25
<i>Got Your Tongue</i>	26
<i>The Letter to Grief</i>	27
Fabiola Madrigal	
<i>*How Many Times Must I Say (Relive) This?</i>	28
<i>For the Greater Good</i>	28
<i>Multiverse</i>	28
<i>Confession</i>	28
<i>Pulp Fiction Novel</i>	29
<i>Time Loop</i>	29
<u>SHORT STORIES</u>	
Shawn Anto	
<i>*Life, Achiral</i>	32
Marc Perez	
<i>*Petty Theft</i>	41
Julia Edith Rios	
<i>*Happy Friday, Beatrice</i>	48
<u>DRAMA</u>	
Jorge Lopez	
<i>*SLOWBURN</i>	64
Kimberly Hernandez	
<i>*Full Circle</i>	81
Anthony C. Hernandez	
<i>* "WE'VE BEEN HAD"</i>	98



POETRY

POETRY



Number 18148
Lisbet Langarica

REMEMBER TOMORROW
BY: BAILEY RUSSELL

*Step outside and take a breath,
Go on, now's the time,
Close your eyes
And tell me what you see...*

*Nestled neatly under
Boughs both broad and bold
She bids farewell
To days of yore*

*Water
Glistens red and gold
To match the trees,
No longer green,
Covered in leaves
Like glowing embers*

*Her wish wavers,
Wanting what was,
His smile gone,
And what is,
Their smiles still here,*

*She has not the slightest
Hint how to hold
Both in one hand
Sunshine then
Now rainbows in the trees*

*Simple, sunny days
Cannot last forever,
Someday they will fade
Like the light
At dusk,*

*She stands to greet
The dawning day
Holding dear what lay behind
Seeing that which waits ahead*

Fall bursts forth

SEASONAL HAIKUS

By Danelia Cordova

Spring

Persephone rise

Spring awakens the dead earth.

Demeter, rejoice.

Summer

Hades flames ignite.

The heat fuels his love for her.

She will be his, now.

Autumn

Sad Demeter, come,

Walk the Earth while your daughter

Dances with her king.

WINTER

A MOTHER'S ANGER

BLANKETS THE EARTH IN SORROW.

PERSEPHONE EATS.

Ella Cruz

I said stay thirsty

If I can choose my people,
I will cling to those who've seen glory.
Peasant victors and cowboys
clawing their stories to the raw floor.
fire pit in the middle.
mimic the stars that guide
the direction of their flames
caution thrown and carried by singing dust
cloudy whiskey
passed around listening to legends old
true liquid mistaken for the reason
there is a burning within.
The sun is too slow to find a hiding spot.
daylight carries unthinkable acts
done when young eyes
still sparkled
writers of the forgotten
spit stories using feathered feet.
Odor of the wilderness gives them ink,
true stories deem well beyond tight placing.
A home, where sweat
meant lungs still drank air
sand statues still
claim bushes to bodies to blood
A piece of cloth, the best shield.
He fights from the tip of his youth.
nature must be angry
to lose by trying too hard
Peel off the flakes.
I want to know how sweet
water can taste my lips
have only known the clean normal.
And should I feel the stony hand pull me in...
I will thank my body for creaking.
Look to the moon with sand behind my ears
and learn how to howl to the light

Daniel Hampton

AS I UNSPOOL:

AS I UNSPOOL MYSELF, I HEAR THE INEVITABLE CALL OF NOSTALGIA, NOSTALGIA OF DAYS SPENT WHEN I WAS CLOSER TO THE WOODEN CORE. MILES OF FABRIC, STRETCHED OVER THE DAYS AND MONTHS. THEIR IMPERFECTIONS REPAIRED BY POOR EYESIGHT, NOW LOOK LIKE A DULL-COLOR DIVISION OF THE VERY HEAVENS THEMSELVES. I CAN NEARLY OUTSTRETCH BACKWARDS AND FEEL THE SWEATY HANDS. THE B-BUMP THAT I HAVEN'T FELT IN SO LONG. THE KNOT SITTING AT THE BACK OF MY THROAT. THE EYES LAZILY DRIFTING OVER AND THEN DARTING BACK AT THE THOUGHT OF BEING CAUGHT. NO DISTINCTION OF THE COFFEE-STAINED MUG AND THE FINE CHINA. NO PROPER AND IMPROPER. NO BEING FORWARD, JUST GENUINE ACTION AND REACTION. A NAKED EBB AND FLOW, BUT THE WATER CAN NEVER SETTLE DOWN. NO BALANCE CAN BE MADE, BUT I KNEW THAT. THAT'S WHAT MADE IT FUN. THERE WAS NO GAME TO IT, NO NEED TO WIN. JUST FEELING AND FEELING AND FEELING. A LOVE SOMEHOW MORE PLATONIC THAN FAMILY. NO POINT, NO TITLE, NO CLIMAX, NO CONCLUSION. JUST A VIVID COLOR ON A DULL STRING. WHEN I LOOK BACK, EVEN THIS FAR AWAY, I CAN STILL SEE IT. JUST SITTING THERE IN ITS LITTLE SPOT, FOREVER.

Daniel Hampton

PAPER:

I WOULD EAT PAPER, IF I THOUGHT THAT COULD HELP ME ABSORB THE WORDS. IF YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT, I'D EAT MY FAVORITE AUTHORS WHOLE. I STUDY THE RECIPE, THE ARCANE COMBINATION OF LETTERS THAT FORM A CLASSIC. I KNOW THE FINAL PRODUCT, AND I CAN DETECT THE INGREDIENTS. IT'S THE QUOTAS, THE RATIOS, THAT I CAN NEVER GET RIGHT. THE RIGHT AMOUNT OF IMAGERY, METAPHOR, OR WHATEVER ELSE. I SLOPPILY TOSS THEM IN THE PAN, HOPING FOR THE BEST. WHAT I GET VARIES FROM EDIBLE TO ABOMINATION. ALL I CAN DO IS SCRIBBLE SOME NOTES AND START BACK WITH AN EMPTY PLATE.

Daniel Hampton

There's comfort in the space beneath a stone:

There's comfort in the space beneath a stone. Where the soft dirt sinks, and moisture is sustained. Where the lumbering mass becomes a shield from hungry mouths and heavy feet. The place the sun itself has never seen. A last resort for the mind, a grave for the body. A tombstone and cornerstone both, never wanted but always needed. A space capable only of decay, but always teeming with life. A space teeming with residents old and new, each with equal appreciation of a quiet life in stale chilled air. For them, the truth has always been clear: It's better to live under a stone than to live under nothing at all.

Precipitate

By Caitlin Wolf

I have seen ribs hinted
Under twisted folds of fabric –
A skin of grassland stretched tight
Over the mountain's sloped bones.
Slow sunlight dappled down
Dry rapids where, on hillside spine
Written in rusted runes,
Are stains rain has scoured.
It fell once, light lips on skin,
In thin streams that wrote reminders
Where wet vapor from whispers had been.
Traced once in loose-rooted flowers,
Now in dry earth cooled and cracked,
The arid oaths of summer showers,
False hopes that peeled the topsoil back.
I have seen superficial fissures
Splitting you into plates,
The cracks of evaporation
Exposing a deeper, softer place –
A freshly-peeled anticipation

That naively absorbs a mist
Of breathy promises as true sustenance.

These seep into your marrow
And carve through solid stone.

And when they've all dried up,
As they will (you must have known),
You'll pull tight your skin of grassland
To hide your battered bones.

Maternal Inheritance
By Caitlin Wolf

*Our mothers' mothers live the longest.
The weight of matrilineal descent
Presses down through the generations,
Leaving a light stamp of source upon us.*

*Unshuffled mitochondria express
A sequence of laden aspirations
Passed on with the hopeful, guiding caress
Of our mothers' loving machinations.*

*Shaped inevitably to some extent
By the force of foremothers' embraces,
We are bent by the heft of hopes unspent,
To impress them on our children's faces.*

*We curve towards them and plant heavy kisses--
Weighted with our mothers' mothers' wishes.*

THRINACIA

BY CAITLIN WOLF

I REMEMBER SUMMERS STAINED WITH BERRIES,
THAT MIDDAY SUN ILLUMINATED IN ITS SHARP RAYS.
THESE, SO IMBUED WITH ENERGY, LIKE LIVING JEWELS,
WE CONSUMED IN THE SPIRIT OF BACKYARD-EUCHARIST.

BAREFOOT-NAVIGATING THE SHADOW ARCHIPELAGOS:
DARK ISLANDS SPACED WITH PRECARIOUS DISTANCE
IN THE WHITE-HOT WASH OF A CEMENT SEA.
AND THE STINGING COOLNESS OF SKINNED KNEES
FROM LEAPS BETWEEN THE SAFE SPOTS
THAT DOT THE MEANDERING VOYAGE HOME.

ONE-BY-ONE WE DISAPPEAR INTO
THE WAITING BLACKNESS OF OUR FRONT DOORS.
SHARP-EYED SIRENS SHOUT OUR NAMES AND SCOLD,
OUR WOULD-BE SCHOOL CLOTHES SMEARED
WITH THE STICKY REMNANTS OF STOLEN FRUITS
THAT SAT BASKING AS OFFERINGS TO THE SUN.

Jamie Williams
Identify Me in Love

Sanctity was found inside of the
female body before lungs experienced the
rush of oxygen

my mama's uterus
a place held together by
the thickness of deep red bands
a strength beyond understanding

under core of belly
a place of no judgment
i learned that woman is familiar
sacred
soft and welcoming

as my body grew into long limbs
thick thighs
soft brown ass and full lips
women of all colors
shapes
textures

and tastes
began to hunger
my body hungered to be known

a year ago I fell in love with a writer,

an experience touching back to source
was almost too intense
too many thoughts
tingles inside womb
heavy moments of understanding
it was raging in the morning
when the birds began to hum
we were awake theorizing

i fell in love with an activist
down for the cause
always wanting to do more
to be
the first young person to listen to the depth
that spewed from my diaphragm,
and blessed it with understanding

much like myself
she encouraged me to advance
become progressive in action

her fingertips gripped hard on bare flesh

hips growing inward
and reverting
pelvis tilting up and out

vibrating
lips spread open like memories
licking far into temple
eroding all that does not
nurture,

my queendom became a southern groove

way too much jutting bone,
fingers spreading inside
wetness soaking brown skin
we were too sweet
too quickly
too intense
too craving slick
strides across clit

I can tell you a thing or two about gardening
in familiar territory

how the sweetness of understanding
drenches thirsty bodies

colored girls
comfortable in their brown shades
in love with their art and madness
is a coming together of Gods

I am ancient
Living with the freedom to love past
dualism
To plunge into waters that run too deep to
separate soul and gender
This is my journey

I have come along way from girl
I am becoming more of woman
in love with herself

Jamie Williams

Poetry Should...

poetry should cradle the body
the spirit
should move like mama
soft
and carrying the ashes of her ancestors
poetry should hold you like lover
late night
sunlight perched on horizon
poetry should feel heavy on the tongue
should taste like sweet
like bloody
like warmth
should speak like remembrance

Jamie Williams

Hands

Your hands
How they bend
Like tired smile
Trying to build themselves into something familiar
Something less frightening than hands
Something calloused but soft
like what you'd imagine a mother's hands to be
I remember yours
Smelling of lavender and last night's liquor
There are still places in your palms
Where the skin has thickened
And begun to burst
The dried flesh
Dancing its way up your wrist
I am young
And stilling learning and relearning basic lesson
Like not to touch the iron when it's hot
Like how not to spill the milk when pouring
Like how to spell Beautiful
And see it in reflections of myself
When the lights are on
Like mother doesn't always mean obligation
Doesn't always mean here or present or anything really
Basic lessons
Like how the body begins to rebuild itself at the first sight of blood.
Like how, here, anything can be fixed with a good plate of food
I remember watching you and granny
as she tried to bend your stubborn bodied truths into whispers thin enough
To hide beneath the collard greens
Me
black girl
A thick mess of blue baby gel
And nappy pigtails

Black River

By: Britney Melson

*Another mother left
praying for her child,*

*as he trades in spoons full of cereal
for a tar black as night.*

*Replacing visions of God
with dreams of the rush,*

*he thrusts in the needle.
With an instant buzz he becomes*

*nothing but a memory. A plea
to a God that used to exist.*

*A mother's petition against
humanity. His lucky charms*

*now bound to this earth.
No prayer can reverse*

*the poison that flowed like a river,
chiseling through the heart of a mother.*

Dear M (White Saviors)

By Mateo Lara

**Me pierde mucho antes de eso.
But not everything I've been was defensive.
It wasn't like last time.
He towered pale and slender, nightmare with tentacles,
All over the darkness of every setting we fucked with.
You could never save me.
Cut me up when you had your fill,
Pero, gringo escapes my mouth, only when I let him.
Tells me he regrets the warmth of my blood,
Incompatible god on his tongue,
On his dick, upright and pink pulse like engine purring,
All over my life.
Whiplash from ivory dethroning,
My only palace, shattered at his feet,
Tú y yo nunca seremos algo más que esto.
A last ritual, rope burn on my wrist, colonized by green
eyes,
And white teeth, spread bitter truth like disease,
On my knees begging for release from a mind,
Who found other men complying easier with a firm grip,
Tight lipped-blow torch on your skin,
But I'm more masterful and ill-forged,
Than your biggest love, I'll spit fire,
More intense than your hombre fuerte.
And if graduating from college is the end of this,
Then: Dejo aquí todos mis recuerdos**

Got Your Tongue

For Mark S.

By Mateo Lara

Y hemos perdido mucho tiempo.

I let the engine rev up, I let hand go fury,
supplement a wound with red swollen appetite.
There's a moon-pit in your gut.
Now when we speak it echoes underneath.
Our tongues,
Some other organ, some other part of us that dies,
Is a wasp flickering and buzzing through gaps in the body.

And M says I make him feel guilty,
And I understand what he means, but these hollow limbs, just burn in his gaze,
And I do not stutter, I only nod and say: "yes, yes, para siempre"
This is the always we have learned to stomach.
These are magic skulls of curing
Twisting tragedy into strength,
Drips, like blood,
it is the,
Scent of surrender,
And darkness was just a force, buzzing omen in my chest,
Not holding me down like it used to,
Waiting for one swift hand to mouth,
To grab every word and cut it out of you.

The Letter to Grief

By Mateo Lara

Where does your phantom inhabit and inhibit our insides
Making room, snuggling up, kissing scars
Stroking veins, that weigh like guest bags in our home
Slipping in with each breath.
Dust on black shoe, never ready.
What are you good for, if only this?

The only terrifying thought that will ever ensnare me is:
Whose ghost will haunt me when your heart stop beating?
what magic will I leave?
What love will come from me screaming?

And you coo, you moan,
Display stained glass in my veins,
I think of my Papa, his memory vining chest,
Strained through my grandma's tears,
Stretched through my mother who referred to him as best friend,
first love,
All and everything we could not become again.
The one phrase I know so well, aun duele,
Why you come as a knock-knock in my body, I can't help the sting,
the echo, wishing to replace what is gone, you leave, but,
You form a vineyard of what-ifs, what weres, and aren't nows.

Confession

If I love you
It's mainly due to
the inoperable way
you snake under
everything utterly essential
to my structure
to what keeps me mobile
and upright
you are not my bones
or the tendons that grip them
but I sure as hell like you to be

**How Many Times Must I Say (Relive) This?
Fabiola Madrigal**

For the Greater Good

I broke your heart
Only right you
Rip out mine

Just always thought
It'd be
Metaphorically

But that's fine
At least now, I know.
I have one

(A heart I mean)

MULTIVERSE

MILLIONS OF REALITIES
EACH ONE ANOTHER GAMBLE
ANOTHER INSTANCE OF HELLO

MILLIONS OF REALITIES
AND NOT ONE WHERE
YOU AND I

GET PAST LOW BLOWS

Pulp Fiction Novel

I'm sorry
we're Another pulp novel
Tragedy
The Destruction numbered
in people who loved us
In Sales
Bestsellers
the morbid sadness of unhappy Ever After
another Woman pressed between the pages
I'm sorry you Left
I'm sorry I Died
I'm sorry we're another Pair
of Lovers
who when they loved
Destroyed the World
and Each Other

Time Loop
I met her in the in-between
trapped in the pocket of
their hubris
and I was exiled two blocks
shy of her prison
I could never leave
I took what I could get,
how could I, how could I,
atrévida, how dare I,
it's all I got left.
revelled, on trial,
on the rewind,
on the mend,
it's white noise desolate
it's the static I'm hearing
I could never leave her
I could never free her
radio silence,
gurgles of transmission,
erupting, escaping,
it's careening over
each frame
hurdlings over
eyes like asphalt
no I'm sorry
it's my fault
— como lo siento
— como pudiste
— como puedo arreglar—
but it's her
and this is my fall
caught between them
and her call:
"no you can't take her,
what's she ever done,
but be flawed?"



**SHORT
STORIES**



Luna
Kerstin Stokes

Life, Achiral

Shawn Anto

They told him that everyone thinks about it at least once. *They* said the symmetry of someone's life was always off. No one had symmetry, a mirror image was always morphed. Some people can't find proper balance and it is okay. Sometimes the weight of that realization is too grand, so the person decides to end it. And people who go through with it, are not bad people, despite what anyone says. *They* say if there was an option to help everyone, *They* would. But, sometimes, it's too late. But, for Ethan, he still had hope. Ethan held onto that. *They* let Ethan take one last run through his city before taking him. *They* said it could be cathartic, running off the memories of his attempt. Running off the memories of his past, the pain, the pressure. He ran and ran, until, eventually, he knew, he had to come back. After Ethan did come back. he was taken away quickly. *They* took him to the hospital on the outskirts of his city. *They* said the exile phase was the worst part. Ethan had to cut contact with everyone from his past. His parents. His friends. Everything. *They* said the only way to adjust perfectly into a new life was to avoid triggers. The slightest memory could trigger Ethan and he would attempt another end. Ethan had a few days to rid himself of any communication and then he could meet his case-worker.

They assured him the sentiments and sadness would vanish within a few weeks, that he should enjoy his new freedom. *They* assured him to think of it as a chemical change. To think of it as an achiral ridding, ending the bond with his old self, creating a new bond, a stronger one, happier. *They* told him after the exile phase, the relocation phase was the best part. One-way ticket to somewhere someone could only dream of. Ethan would have new clothes, money to spend until he found a job, and most importantly, a chance at happiness. A real chance. *They* said severe depression happened to the best of people and to not let it be a burden. *They* gave him a list of

rules and obligations to fulfill before he could start his new life. *They* told him that the rules were only temporary, and he didn't have to stay away forever. Just until the feeling went away.

Whatever feeling that was.

The night before he was scheduled to board his flight, Ethan found a nice café about a block away from the hotel he had been staying at for the past few months. Ethan decided to break one of the rules and visit the café that night. Ethan was used to breaking rules, was good at it. His sudden rule-breaking triggered images of his parents, their constant weight on his identity, always pulsing behind him. Somehow, the exile phase freed him, but that phantom weight still lingered. Ethan assured himself he should experience one last familiar thing before leaving, before starting new, somewhere foreign to him, and far.

Luckily, it wasn't too cold outside, so he just wore a light jacket, put on some pants that *They* assigned him to wear. When he entered the café, there was the potent smell of coffee and doughnuts. It drifted through the air like perfume, caressed his tired veins. Ethan knew he could only have one cup of coffee, so he waited. Just took it all in. He knew it was comforting and hurriedly walked to a table to sit. One of the waitresses noticed and without hesitation came over to him. She was extremely polite and smiled after every sentence. He sat there, sipping his coffee, really enjoying it, knowing it might be a while before he could do this again. When he looked at his watch, it was one in the morning, yet the smile and the energy radiating from the girl felt so genuine. He found her interesting. He thought to himself *I hope to find others like her where I am going*. Ethan noticed from her face that she looked young but, in her eyes, there was something that screamed: "I'm tired." She was probably his age, probably took this job because she had to pay tuition at some college or maybe she was content with her job, but tired, but, most importantly, still with happiness engrained in her. Ethan thought, *I hope she goes far*.

A moment passed, and Ethan noticed it was raining outside—he decided he should get back to the hotel before his case-worker or *They* came looking for him. Ethan thanked the girl and gave her a wad of money from his pocket. He didn't count how much it was but he knew *They* will give him more. *They* always did. *They* said it was because every person in transition needed stability before beginning their new life. It eased them into a big change. *They* would provide money until a person settled into their new life, and eventually, could get a job then the money would stop coming. Ethan didn't know how long it would take for him to settle into his new life, so Ethan felt assurance in the notion of money until then. It was stimulating. When Ethan left the café, he was transfixed on the buzzing OPEN sign in front of the café. The little hum and the neon colors were comforting. He stood there and closed his eyes. Listening to the hum. Eventually, when he came to, his clothes were drenched from the rain. Someone tapped him on the shoulder. Everyone, everywhere always seemed to be in a hurry. The stranger handed him an umbrella and kept it moving. Ethan felt saddened by that, but he knew if he let the thought fester, *They* would know, and he didn't want to break any more of their rules. He hoped wherever he ended up, that people cared about the moments they were living and didn't let time move them so fast, that the people enjoyed their present.

When Ethan arrived back at the hotel, he tried to sneak back into his room. When he got to it, there was a note on the door. *They* had left it for him. He glanced over the glossy paper and read it. It informed him that he had broken one of the rules and *They* were not pleased. It instructed him that his belongings were moved into another room in which he would be staying for the remainder of his time before relocation. The paper had the room number and it stated his case-worker would be watching him overnight, making sure he avoided breaking any more rules. Ethan understood. *They* said—at first, it would be hard to follow everything, and people did slip-

up, but if people tried, it always became easier. *They* said his new life had to be started in a pure atmosphere, free from impulse, it had to be pure. After all, *They* would remind Ethan, he only had one more day before the relocation.

When Ethan arrived at the other room he noticed it was significantly bigger than the previous one. There were two big beds and a curtain that separated them. The case-worker would be right there. Ethan didn't understand why *They* didn't trust him, everyone slips up, *They* constantly repeated it. Besides, Ethan completed the program at the hospital, *They* said he was sane enough to start a new life. He had done all the healing he was supposed to, but now he started questioning it. Ethan knew *They* had control over his new life, probably, obviously, more than he did. But, still, he wanted the last few moments of his old life to still be his. That was the reason he wanted to escape this life in the first place, the attempt stemming from wanting the freedom he was lacking. But he knew, eventually, it would be his, his own life. His own freedom. *They* were only helping. *They* assured him.

Ethan undressed and put on the pajamas provided and laid down in one of the beds. Ethan looked up at the ceiling and let his mind run. He was careful to suppress any triggers. Exile the thoughts as well. He listened to the clock tick. About two hours later, Ethan's hotel door opened. His case-worker crossing to the bed on the other side of the curtain and laying down. For some reason, Ethan, as much as he enjoyed being a ghost and not being noticed, as much as he liked the silence, still wanted to engage conversation with his case-worker. Their little chats mostly chalked up to rules of what to do, what not to do. But they didn't really know each other. Ethan didn't even know his case-worker's name. A formality that kept people from getting attached or wanting even the little bits of the past to remain when someone began their new life. Ethan thought this was his last chance to talk to someone considered "the past" before the relocation.

“Hello,” Ethan whispered.

“No conversation. I’m here to monitor, not talk.” His case-worker eventually said back to him.

“Well, it’s hard to monitor someone behind a curtain, don’t you think?”

“No, it isn’t. You breathe quite loudly, and you make a lot of noise. If you were to get up and try to disappear again, I would know.” His-case worker says softly, though tersely.

“I think I should know your name at least,” Ethan didn’t want to sound desperate, but something felt missing and he wanted to see what it was, “What would it matter? I won’t see you ever again. We both know the rules.”

“I have strict orders and rules, like you do. Besides, Ethan, I do not feel inclined to break them like you do. We’ve done all our talking, already. Get some rest.” His case-worker says harshly. Ethan let the silence close the conversation. He didn’t speak for the rest of the night.

The next morning, Ethan noticed the curtain was taken down. The other bed was gone, and he was alone in the room. Sadness began knocking in his body once more, but he knew that it would pass. Ethan knew the interaction last night was the last he would have for a while. When Ethan finally got up from bed, he noticed a note on the floor. In very small, almost-faded handwriting, he sees one word: *Meso*. Ethan knew what it meant. The case-worker knew it mattered. *Meso, what a nice name*, Ethan thought. After Ethan’s shower and getting dressed, he notices another note on the door of his hotel room. The note reminded him that his “New Life” suitcases were waiting for him at the airport and he shouldn’t worry about anything else. *They* took care of it. The note also reminded Ethan that he needed to check out and go straight to the airport, no detours. There was also a small black envelope, which the note instructed him not to open until

he was in the taxi. *They* would be watching. It felt as if Ethan was an animal being herded for slaughter, every delicate move inching him closer to unknown, a death. But a death, of what? *They* assured him, it was just the end of his former self. The new image, a mirrored image, not identical, not symmetrical, but close enough. No shame. No worries invading his mind. And stress, well, for a while, stress would be non-existent. As Ethan rode in the taxi to the airport, he couldn't help but think of images of his past. Happier images, happier times. Images of people, of places, images of who he was, people he loved, wanted to love. Ethan treasured those feelings, those new ones, the new experiences, that warmth, maybe not quite love, but gratitude. For his new friends, his new interests, the girls, the guys, the ones who left lasting impressions on him. He thought until his mind went empty. He was instructed to purge all and every thought of his past and not look back. He must delete the data that was stored for so long. To start new, everything must be new. Ethan remembered the black envelope. He took it out of his pocket and began reading it:

Ethan,

As instructed, if you are reading this, you have met all requirements and obligations we have asked of you. You are now, as of this note, on your way to the airport to begin your New Life. We must insist that you do not attempt to make conversation with anyone, as it will be detrimental to the purity you must maintain for the start of this new journey. Once you reach the airport, you will be given your belongings and given an address, as well as a list of things to do when you get to the location. There will be money waiting for you when you arrive. You will be sent money often until you are settled and have maintained a sense of stability and calm. A doctor will check up on your status every week to see how you are doing. Remember, sadness isn't forever. Sadness is a step toward another version of your happiness, it doesn't have to be symmetrical

and balanced to matter. You must begin this new life the same way all others do: with a sense of ignorance and hope, but an openness to change and growth. We hope your new life treats you the way your old life did not but should have. Take care.

Sincerely, With Faith, Them

When Ethan comes to, he notices the taxi is already parked at the airport. When Ethan gets out of the Taxi, he makes sure to leave money on the backseat, he is careful not to talk or say anything to the driver. He must do as he is told. When Ethan enters the airport, the chaos throws him off. People scurrying left and right, women crying with their children, men crying with their children, women embracing their husbands, husbands with their wives, husbands with their husbands, people all over. People existing with each other, in chaos, but seemingly, happy. As Ethan scans around, he notices a man holding a sign with his name. When Ethan walks up to him, he can feel the coldness, for some reason, it deeply affects him. The man in the suit hands Ethan a ticket. Ethan looks at the man, wanting to ask him something, but just staring in his dark blue eyes. He notices the tired energy.

“Where do I go? Ethan asks. The man just stares, cold and silent. A terrible, sinking feeling starts to infiltrate Ethan’s body. His new life about to begin but feeling some sharp tugging that isn’t going away. Ethan thinks *I don’t want to leave my old life like this. I don’t want to leave it in silence.* For some unknown reason, Ethan gets directly into the man with the suit’s face and stares into his eyes. The man smells of rain and coffee. Ethan feels a pool of tears in his eyes, but turns away, crying was never something Ethan liked to do. He didn’t want to cause a scene, he was about to begin his new life. It was too late to feel it all, now.

“Could you tell me where I need to go? Please.”

The man with the suit breathes in and Ethan can tell from his eyes that the man is contemplating breaking a rule or not. He does.

“Terminal C. You board soon. Now go. Your luggage is already where it needs to be. Someone will give you another note on your landing. Your luggage is fine. Go.”

Ethan stands there for a while, puzzled as the man with the suit walks away. The quick memory Ethan has of his past life, his idea of having two sides. One side always wanting change, the other side never caring. Both fighting inside him right now. Ethan, not caring if his flight will leave him, not caring about the relocation. Not caring if he attempted to end it, again. HE wanted to be everywhere, but here. But then, the other side: Calming. Wanting everything to dissolve, allowing him to start over. Ethan knew he couldn't afford to get sad like last time, couldn't afford to be consumed by the past. He did want to change. The process was going to be hard, be incredibly long. *They* told him from day one. *They* thought it'd be best to be rid of the past events in one swift motion, but it was more difficult than that. Sometimes, running away isn't the only path towards happiness. And yet, sometimes, it may be the only way. Ethan didn't know. But he would find out. These thoughts lead him onto the plane, lead him to his seat, lead him to watch the clouds drift from the window, let the thoughts lead him to his new place, his new dream. Dreaming, right now, purity, a chance at happiness, time conjuring a rebirth from the annihilation of his old self.

And even after a year, Ethan recalls the memories of his relocation. The first days of it. The harshest days of it. The memories of wanting to jump off bridges, playing with knives in the kitchen, almost setting his house on fire three times, the paranoia from too much coffee, the nightmares from his past, slowly, disappearing. Even the new memories, like finding a beautiful

spot by a lake, just outside of the new town he lives in, running, existing. Finally, he is settling into his new life. It's quiet, but it isn't silent. Ethan finds solace in talking to people every now and then, finding true connections, really understanding, he is not alone. Though, sometimes, it will feel like it, but that is part of the process. *They* always said it would be like this.

Sometimes, the voids are never filled, and Ethan realizes he can never rid himself of the past, completely, but time passing, helps. The new life has finally cemented itself and only brief pieces of his old life ever resurface. Sometimes it is blurry and desolate, but the Doctors that *They* send, help. *They* still check on him every now and then, though, the money has stopped coming. Ethan has started a little job in town. *They* assured him he had come far, and it would only get better from here.

Ethan notices the other people. Some like him: quiet, wanting to talk, but sometimes, not knowing how to. He wonders if they, too, went through his program. What predicaments they were in, if they were in any at all. Wondering at some point if they had to leave their old lives for a new one. How many of the people in his town were also relocated. *They* assured Ethan that he was never alone, that people come from the darkness and can get better. The people who ended it, were not bad people and they couldn't get to everyone though they wish they could, so now Ethan makes that list in his head every day when it feels like it's getting bad again. Sometimes it does get bad, but the freedom to be how he chooses to be, is his solace. And that's how it always happens, that little push toward a new existence. A new symmetry and balance. Whether it is the life lived now or the one from a past that still comes, without warning. Learning to adjust to it. Learning to fight through it. The same rules always apply, always learning to cope with the new and adjust. One must live their life their own way because no matter what, we cannot escape the terrible, but life goes on, and so, like, Ethan, others must too.

Petty Theft

Marc Perez

San Carlos, California- I wait for her outside in the parking lot for her shift to be over. She has been working at this PetSmart for a couple years now, which gave her time to build the thought. And oh, how we think alike. It was really her who brought it up, jokingly of course. But I was the one who knew how possible this really is. And we are doing it.

The people in this town live comfortably; most are retired, looking for quiet and luxury. I bet I am stirring up some noise among them. The people here do not think about how others are barely getting by. The water that surrounds them, divides us, keeping those without business here walled out. All of their boats are stationed at the docks. If they aren't sailing, they are probably on vacation from this vacation. She knows when they leave. They leave the eloquent family pet for grooming and their homes vacant. That is when I come in.

I look up at my dash, 4:13. I glance over at the sliding doors for an extended period of time, as if my stare would pull her through the door. The doors part and Laurie walks out. The look on her face is hard to decipher. She used to smile when she saw my truck in the parking lot. Her hair is pulled back. Must have been a long day; that and I know she is always stressed out about me being caught. I should have parked closer.

I reach over and flip the lock on the car door. She opens it and gets up into my worn, dark green truck. The smell of wet dog doesn't bother me anymore. I am unsure if I should ask her about her day or our next host. She then hands me a small folded piece of scrap paper. I know there are details written inside it because she knows my memory is shit. "Can we go home?" I look up at her as she peers at me. Her eyes nervous and anxious.

Turning the car on, I ask, “Which home? Are the Fenn’s still in Malibu?” She doesn’t appreciate that comment. She thinks I went too far.

I stole their Porsche.

I really didn’t intend on taking anything too noticeable when we first started this crusade. It started out pretty small time, just a few electronics here and there. These people had multiples of everything. How would they notice if just one thing was missing? So what if the Blu-ray player in the babies’ room was misplaced? What do I have, a fat back TV and a microwave oven? Oh no, it wasn’t until we hit the Dubois’ residence where I got careless. They had their home filled with big names in American football and baseball, autographs and memorabilia. My dad would have loved that signed Roger Craig football that I took from what appeared to be the only boy’s room in the house. If Dad had that ball, he would have requested to be buried with it. It sits on my mantle next to a picture of him.

She’s still looking at me. “Yeah, let’s go to the house. Put your seatbelt on.” It’s a long way to go, about an hour with how I drive. She sleeps comfortably though. The sun is setting as I park my truck in the driveway. There is no space in the garage with the new addition to our collection. I can’t even drive that sweet silver Porsche without shitting myself. There is no guarantee I won’t be caught and ruin the whole charade. The people in San Carlos know there is a burglar. Those idiots just can’t make the connection that they leave their pets at the same damn PetSmart and leave their homes unlocked and unarmed. “How do they know when we aren’t home?” or “Probably some damn teenagers in the neighborhood.”

We go inside the dark, empty house, filled with others’ belongings. Everything handpicked and pieced together by me. It’s strange how unfamiliar it is to wake up to in the

morning. The highly reflective, silver Rolex loudly ticking in my face on the nightstand when I open my eyes. I would have never thought that I would own one.

But tonight I don't sleep as well as she does, collapsed under anxiety, stress, and guilt. I sustain myself, holding everything up above head as my arms grow weak. I know I am not as strong as her. I can't stop thinking about the Fenn's. How disappointed they must have been to return home from lovely beaches to a bitchin' house, only to find one of their many cars missing. Ah, screw them. But still, that Silver Porsche 991s must have been Mr. Fenn's favorite. When I was in their home, I was only going to go for the Mrs.' jewelry. I would have had something nice to give Laurie for our six months. But out of a sort of tradition that I do, I had to peak in the garage as I do with every other home I intrude. I turned the brass knob slowly in my black ribbed gloves, careful to not make noise, even though everyone including the guard dog is away. I stuck my head in the all-white garage and there it was, next to the red-felt pool table sat the most glistening car ever. It looked freshly waxed under the low glow of luminescent lights. I was lost in a small everlasting trance. I was a little kid again and my dad had rented an old movie that I so pleaded him for, Walt Disney's Condorman. I don't remember much of the plot, but I do remember the kickass cars they had. The good guys, I think CIA, had used the same car model, but older makes of it. My dad and I could not stop laughing at the cheesiest moments, even after the credits rolled.

Forget the jewelry. I had to find the keys to that baby. And they weren't far, I took a step inside and behind the door was a key ring holder engraved with the family name, The Fenn's. "I'm Mr. Fenn. Don't mind if I do," I said as I grab the keys off the fourth hook. I eagerly got in the driver's seat and started it. The sound of the engine starting was beautiful. It was like a chainsaw designed to swiftly cut through a fully grown cherry tree in one graceful motion. I used

the garage opener attached to the driver's make up mirror. I clicked the button to open the garage door and tossed the opener on the floor, partially paranoid that it could be tracked. I had to leave my truck parked across the street and one house down. I drove away as fast as I could without going ridiculously high over the low speed limits of the area. I checked my rear view mirror every ten seconds the drive home. My heart raced. I felt bad for leaving their home opened to any other like-minded people who had been eyeing their house for some time. I parked Laurie's new car in my garage. She wouldn't be able to drive it. I wouldn't want her getting arrested in some "misunderstanding" with the law. But that didn't matter, it belonged to us now.

I had to take a cab back to San Carlos for my truck. It was a weird experience sitting quietly in the back of a taxi cab after taking a rich man's car. I didn't mind paying the cab driver \$200 either. When I took her home that night and excitedly brought her into the garage with my hands over her eyes, she stopped and said, "I swear if you took a fucking car from the Fenn's, I am gonna hurt you." They are regulars at the groomers, so it was only a matter of time. My hands dropped along with her mouth. She hasn't felt the same about this gig since then, but I convinced her to ride this out with me. I told her that when we decide to have kids, they would be well cared for.

I wasn't lying to her, but to myself. There were only so many opportunities due to the few number of families that took their dog or cat to be groomed at her store. I didn't want prison to split us apart. And I know they won't give up looking for their notorious bandits. How long could Bonnie and Clyde stick it out? As my accomplice, I was also putting her at risk of her job. Maybe they would give her less time if I say I forced her. I reached out at the nightstand and grabbed the slit of paper from earlier, the unread address. I look over at her, her side pushing upwards with each shallow breath. I tear the paper in half. The sound of crisp paper tearing apart

was relief. I then lay on my back, staring towards the ceiling into blackness. Laurie suddenly turns over and kisses me hard on my cheek. A sweet kiss, one I haven't had in some time. I wipe the tears from her eyes. I tell her that tomorrow I will drive the car somewhere and report the stolen car found. After all, in the end of that movie, they had crashed all their cars.

Happy Friday, Beatrice

Julia Edith Rios

i. miel

4:02 P.M.

That's the exact moment every Friday that her heart would perform a backflip, tumble over and crookedly go back into place at the sound of frantic knocking at the front door of her house. She'd smile at the sound and tell herself to "*Calm down, Beatrice! Be cool!*" and take deep breaths to silence the embarrassing blush that she felt was already creeping onto her cheeks just by the warmth she felt starting to surround her. She would hear her *Mamá* open the front door before the sound of tattered up converse sneakers running across the hardwood floors echoed through the house.

"Beatrice, Happy's here," her *Mamá* would yell, but by the time she got her sentence out, Happy would be at her bedroom door, opening it and letting it slam shut behind her as she jumped on the bed, a wide smile on her face that left a white dent on her brown face.

"BEA," she would yell, the name in capital letters always evident in the way her voice stressed out the syllable. BEA, the name sounding like "bee." The fuzzy, little black and yellow insects being noticed by someone would usually produce a yell sounding similar to how Happy would say "BEA." But when Happy would say it, it wouldn't cause a panic or flailing arms or shrieks of "Where?! Where?!" When Happy would say it, Beatrice's pulse would rise and her heart would whisper, "*Again. Again.*" No one could say her name like Happy could.

"Can you believe that Philomena is back together with Arturo? Even after she said last week that she hated him more than anything? I can't believe her," Happy continued, her face getting red with anger as she talked about them. Philomena and Arturo were characters on the

telenovela that they'd race home to watch after school, the two of them the main protagonists that drove the teen soap opera through dramatic turmoil week after week.

Beatrice and Happy would make sure they were in front of a television at 3 P.M. every weekday, their eyes never moving away from the screen for the entire hour the show ran. It had been running for almost two years now, the show serving as the basis for their friendship at first. Beatrice had heard Happy humming along to the theme song one morning at the bus stop near their houses, a pop melody originally composed of barely matured teenage voices, and had ignored the nervousness she felt rumbling at her core to ask her about it. Happy had smiled and started a conversation with her with an enthusiasm Beatrice had never encountered before. It was an enthusiasm that seemed to never fade, even in despite of everything that had happened since then.

"She loves him," Beatrice shrugged, scooting over so that Happy could sit beside her, their backs on the pile of pillows that Beatrice arranged every morning against the headboard of her bed.

"She's so dumb," Happy groaned, rolling her eyes back and leaving her mouth gaping open in the way that always made Beatrice laugh. "And she's like the most beautiful girl ever, she can do much better than Arturo."

"I don't know if she's the most beautiful girl ever," said Beatrice, her voice quiet but sure as she dared to spare a glance towards Happy through the corner of her eye.

Beatrice's *Mamá* would tell her she was beautiful, her skin a soft shade of ivory and wide brown eyes that in the sunlight looked like the glowing embers from a fire. She didn't look anything like Philomena, who had her hair dyed a bright violet color and wore a studded nose ring. She didn't look anything like Happy, who had midnight black hair that fell in perfect

cascaded waves down to her waist, and had freckles that covered her cheeks and the bridge of her nose. Beatrice had learned a long time ago that there were different kinds of beautiful and she was still trying to make up her mind on which was her favorite. But she knew that the idea of beauty always sprouted the images of black curls and brown freckles on top of caramel skin in her mind.

“Yes she is,” Happy said. She took a pillow from behind her back to smack Beatrice with it lightly, the younger girl barely registering the hit before Happy let a coy smile take over her features. She held the pillow against her chest as she leaned back against the mountain of fluff, a desolate smile on her face as she added in a mumble, “The only one who was more beautiful than her was my mom.”

Happy’s mom had died about eight months prior. She knew it was coming, everyone on their street did, the kind, unlucky woman with terminal cancer. They had all occasionally dropped in to see her, sitting by her bedside in stolen chairs from the kitchen as they listened to her tired voice explain how she was feeling. It always seemed to be the same response, nauseous, sleepy, forever cursed with a headache, but they listened anyways. It was the least they could do.

Happy had always been mad at her mom for giving her the name that she did. Beatrice remembered the first time she heard it and almost didn’t believe her.

“Your name is ‘Happy Friday,’” Beatrice had asked her slowly and Happy had nodded seriously.

“I know. It’s a stupid name,” she replied, squeezing the straps of her backpack. “My mom came to America from Mexico when she was eighteen and the first words she heard in English were ‘Happy Friday’ and she fell in love with it. She thought it would mean that everyone would love me, too if I had that name.”

And everyone did love Happy. If anyone else had been the bearer of the unconventional name, they probably would have been cursed to an endless stream of teasing, but it just couldn't be done to Happy. She oozed cool, an appearance that made people her age swoon, an enviable artistic talent, and an easygoing personality that attracted everyone to her like a magnet. Happy was the most well known person at their school, a status that forbade Happy and Beatrice from interacting in public there. Happy was the cool sixth grader who drew cartoons of people during recess and Beatrice was the fifth grader who hid away in the library and ate her packed lunch in between stacks of books.

Still, Beatrice held onto the fact that she was Happy's best friend, even if the title was a secret that only remained between the two of them. Beatrice held onto it just like she had held Happy's hand, fingers interlaced, the night that her mother had passed away. They had sat on the porch swing outside her house, the 10 o'clock night breeze slowly rocking them back and forth as they huddled together for warmth, comfort. It was the only time they'd ever held hands and Beatrice wished desperately every night when she recalled the memory that it would have been under different circumstances. Because holding onto her hand had been an epiphany to her. It was the first time that Beatrice realized that if she was born to do anything, it was to hold Happy's hand. Anything else could be done to her and it wouldn't matter as long as she had the soft fingers, yellow polished fingernails, to fill in the gaps between her own.

"Do you miss her," Beatrice asked her.

"Yeah," Happy said. "All the time."

"I'm sorry."

"It's not your fault."

Happy had a habit of always saying, “It’s not your fault,” even if something was in fact that fault of the other person. It was like she couldn’t stand to let anyone else have feelings of guilt, even for a moment. Beatrice admired her for that, for never getting angry or holding grudges with people. She admired her for a lot of things.

She shifted and caught Beatrice’s attention, her hand reaching into the tight front pocket of her blue jeans to pull out a small tube of clear lip gloss. Happy always carried around lip gloss with her, a habit that her mother had always encouraged as a precaution for impromptu photos for one reason or another. Beatrice had noticed that every time Happy thought of her mom, she would take the lip gloss out, uncap the wand, and swipe a clear layer of the strawberry scented gloss onto her lips. Sometimes it felt like watching the process of her putting it on happened in slow motion, the steady movement of her hand holding the applicator moving across her bottom and then upper lip as she covered her naturally pink lips in a subtle sparkle.

“Do you want some,” Happy asked her suddenly, turning to look at her.

Beatrice looked from her lips back to her eyes and back, her heart race picking up at the idea of suddenly tasting the concoction that was blessed enough to meet Happy’s lips so often. She nodded quickly, swallowing the lump in her throat as Happy stretched the lip gloss out to her, their fingers brushing against each other briefly but long enough for Beatrice to feel nervous. Her hand was shaky as she put it on, letting the sweet, artificial scent of the summer fruit fill her nostrils, and then gave it back to Happy.

“Thank you,” said Beatrice, tucking a stray piece of hair behind her ear and trying not to meet Happy’s gaze as she tried to let her feelings waver enough so she could look at her without being obvious about them.

“Thank you for being a good best friend,” Happy replied, and Beatrice raised her head to meet her firm gaze, a contradiction to the softness in the feeling they seemed to convey.

And in a moment of bravery, Beatrice reached out to grab Happy’s hand. She let her close her fingers on hers and smiled at the familiar feeling she had felt the first time they’d held hands. It felt like coming home.

Beatrice looked from their joined hands back to Happy and her heart once again tumbled at the small smile she wore that matched her own.

Happy was like honey to her: sweet and enticing but holding enough strength to sink her down.

ii. limón

Beatrice had promised herself to never kiss anybody who had a first name as a last name or a last name as a first name, but there she was, breaking both promises. And not for the first time either.

She’d never meant to become attracted to Finley James and she hadn’t been at first. The school year had begun and she found herself sharing her sophomore U.S. history class with him, the first she’d ever seen of him around their overly populated school. She hadn’t thought much of his naturally pouted lips at first, or short brown hair that curled at the ends, or eyes that looked like the marbles she and her mom used to play with when she was younger, a swirl of blue and green. But then he had started sending small smiles her way from across the classroom and weeks later, she found him sitting in the desk right behind hers. He drew a different doodle for her everyday on neon colored sticky notes and passed it back to her before the bell rang without saying a word. George Washington wearing sunglasses and a Hawaiian shirt to mark his retirement. Alexander Hamilton with a speech bubble that said, “Wait, *what* is hip hop music?”

They made her laugh, giggle, and sometimes even embarrassingly snort, and once she had gotten enough for it to be considered a collection, she moved them to a folder she kept hidden under teen magazines and yet-to-be-read issues of her school's newspaper. She only kept them all because Happy wrote for it and guilt would consume her if she didn't at least try to read it someday when she wasn't drowning in essays and tests and sticky notes with reimagined historical figures.

Beatrice had never thought about a boy the way she had thought about Finley James. She'd never thought about anybody that way, all consuming, heart pounding, unequivocal attraction, except for Happy. And even then, it was different somehow. The all consuming thoughts didn't enter her head the same way they did when they were about Happy, and her heart never beat in the same way it did for her, and the attraction she felt flowed through her veins in a different direction. She knew she liked them both, romantically or otherwise, but the identifying patterns varied.

Her feelings for Happy had never faded from their time as children, feelings that Beatrice had started to believe were engrained into her DNA and impossible from erasure. But Happy, she knew, was made out of different genetic makeup. She would never look at her the way she looked at the boys sitting across from her during lunch and she'd never talk about her the way she talked about the cute boy from her math class and she'd never put a picture of her up in her locker, glittery heart stickers surrounding the borders of it. Beatrice tried not to dwell on it so often, but her heart had long ago declared itself a rebellious and betraying party.

Finley was nice and gave her attention, made her laugh and her heart smile, and Beatrice decided that for the time being she would focus her attention on him. Which wasn't difficult when he looked at her like *that*, and made her feel like *this*, and every rational cell in her

body shut down when he got too *close*. He knew, Beatrice had decided, the effect he had on her. There was no way he couldn't feel the heat emitting off her body just by the simple action of being near her. The local weatherman had declared on the news one night that their city was experiencing unusual increases in temperature and Beatrice assumed the guilt.

Nothing, however, could have prepared her for what she felt on their field trip. Their class had taken a trip to the art and history museum a few cities over, a treat for them after a painfully long semester, and he had hovered near her the entire time. On the bus ride, during the tour, standing near her for class photos, she could feel the tension broiling between them and wondered if he was feeling it too. She received her answer when his fingers slipped into hers, his touch delicate enough to make her believe it almost wasn't real, and he stopped her from moving further along with the group. She'd looked at him and felt a tether that pulled her closer and closer to him until not even a breath was shared between them. He had leaned down to press his lips against hers and no, he didn't taste like strawberries, but he tasted like Cherry Coke and smelled like chocolate, and every single sense seemed to have been overpowered by him.

Beatrice was certain there had to be more than five, there just *had* to be.

She'd been pressed up against one of the eggshell white painted walls then, next to an oil painting of a woman yielding a sword, and now she was pressed into the comforter of her bed where a movie poster her mom had gotten her from a yard sale hung near them. Finley had suggested a studying session for their upcoming test and they had been studying, until suddenly they weren't. His mouth had stopped sputtering facts about World War I and had found its way onto hers and Beatrice had never been one to complain about a distraction from schoolwork.

She wrapped her arms around him, a desire to have him closer to her pulsating within her, especially at the way his hands felt pressed at the small of her back, his fingertips grazing

the exposed skin where her t-shirt had ridden up, in a way that was driving her crazy. But just as she was beginning to truly allow herself to lose herself in the feeling he put her in, Happy came in to stop her, just like she always seemed to do.

“Leave, James,” Happy said sternly, her voice cold, making her presence known to the couple who quickly jumped apart from their embrace.

“Happy,” Beatrice coughed, taking in the sight of her friend with tear stained cheeks as she tried to fix her own mussed hair. She stood up from the bed and walked to her, trying to put an arm around her, but was only shoved away. Beatrice tried not to let it hurt her. She had felt delirious a few seconds ago only for her mood to change into distress at the sight of Happy.

“What’s wrong?”

Her eyes began to brim with tears and she looked away from her to look back at the boy still sitting on the bed, concern evident on his face, before she directed her voice to him again.

“Leave.”

“I’m going,” Finley nodded once, putting his hands up in defense before he started to gather the scattered notecards he had brought over. He stuffed them into his backpack, slinging it over a shoulder, before walking towards the two girls. He leaned down to place a kiss on the cheek of the shorter one, whispering a “call me if you need anything” and only waiting for her confirmation before he left and closed the door behind him.

“Who studies on a Friday,” Happy asked Beatrice, her voice feigning a playfulness that Beatrice could easily detect.

“What’s wrong,” Beatrice asked her again and didn’t even see it coming when Happy threw her arms around her, her body quaking with sobs. She held onto her, worry filling her

more and more with every passing second that Happy chose not to answer and continued crying, leaving her neck soaked with wet and salty tears.

Ever so quietly, Happy finally answered her.

“I’m pregnant.”

Beatrice knew what it felt like for the world to shake; it did every night at 8 and then at 12, sometimes in the morning at 9. The train outside her window vibrated the entire house, sent her steady to feel the pulse of the locomotive across the tracks. Her feet stayed on the ground as the train blew its whistle and its wheels’ zipped on the ground, its force a comfort that let her know the world was still awake. So Beatrice knew what it felt like for the world to try and knock her off balance, and knew how to stand her ground regardless. But this shake, Happy’s, managed to throw her.

“What,” Beatrice asked, pulling herself away from her to see her best friend’s face. She’d dreamed about that face so many times, longed for it to always be near her, but looking at it the way it did then, red swollen cheeks accompanied with a never ending stream of tears, she knew she would give it up forever just so that it’d never have to look like that again.

“Wally Romero,” Happy hiccupped, moving away to go and sit on the edge of the bed. “I...we had sex like six weeks ago at that New Years Eve party I went to. I didn’t think anything about it--.”

“Why didn’t you tell me about it?!”

“You don’t like Wally!”

“I don’t like most boys,” Beatrice argued, going to sit down next to her. She put an arm around Happy’s shoulders and asked her the only question that she knew mattered then. “Are you going to keep it?”

“I don’t know how to be a mom,” Happy exclaimed, choking on the last word as a sob snuck out of her throat. “I barely had my own.”

“What does Wally think,” Beatrice asked her, thinking about the red haired boy then. She couldn’t ever see him being a dad, his attitude having stunted him to be a perpetual third grader, but this wasn’t about what she saw. It was about what Happy did.

“He doesn’t know,” she said. “I don’t want him to. His parents are more Catholic than your mom and if they knew, they’d make us get married. I’ll never be happy, that’s a life sentence.”

“You never know,” Beatrice tried to suggest positively. She twirled one of Happy’s curls around her finger. “You could have your little Chucky doll baby, get married, move into a white little starter home at the end of a cul-de-sac, and be in love.”

“Married people who live at the end of cul-de-sacs are never in love.”

Beatrice chuckled, looking back down at Happy before she moved her hand to wipe the tears away from her face. Happy smiled a tiny smile before it faltered, her back straightening up and she took a deep breath.

“I need an abortion,” she said, and Beatrice knew that she was serious. Her mind had been made up before she had even walked into her bedroom. Had been made up before she had even seen the two little pink lines that damned her.

“Do you have the money,” Beatrice asked her.

Happy had worked at the library every summer since the eighth grade, and even though she knew she had said she was saving up, she also knew she splurged often on trips to the mall and dates.

“I have about two hundred dollars,” Happy answered, her body shuddering and her face came to rest in the palms of her hands. “I need at least two hundred, maybe three hundred, more.”

“Okay,” Beatrice said simply. She got up from the mattress and crossed over to the bed chest on the other side of the room, opening the top drawer and taking out a pink envelope. She walked back over to Happy and offered it to her without hesitation. Beatrice would never hesitate to help her. “Take it.”

“What is it,” Happy sniffled, looking up from her hands to take the envelope from her. She opened it up to find twenty-dollar bill after twenty-dollar bill in there and with shocked eyes looked back to Beatrice. “Bea, you can’t-.”

“I can,” she cut in. “It’s my *quinceañera* money and I can do what I want with it. And I want you to be okay.”

“Why are you so good to me,” Happy asked her.

Because I’m in love with you, Beatrice wanted to say, but she stopped herself. The last thing Happy would ever need to hear would be that, especially then. And she had learned a long time ago that putting lemon on a paper cut would never heal anything.

iii. fresas

No one had ever told Beatrice how strange it would feel to be an adult standing in her childhood bedroom. She slipped out of her sandals and stood on the worn out carpet, brown and stained with different colors of nail polish and spilt soda and smelling of traces of floral perfume. She looked around at her lilac painted walls, noticing the cracks by a corner or two, and thought about all the posters she used to have, long gone since she went away to college. Everything and

nothing had changed since the time she would look forward to crawling into bed under her butterfly print covers every night.

She stood then as a college graduate, prepared to enjoy her time back home with her mother for a couple of months before she went away to graduate school. She'd been lucky enough to have been given scholarships and financial aid throughout her schooling, and looked forward to the same amount of luck for the next few years. It allowed her to take a break from internships and jobs, the reasons she'd only ever come home for Thanksgiving and Christmas and spring break. Beatrice had to admit, standing in the space she'd spent most of her life in, that she felt a little out of place. It felt like the room almost didn't belong to her.

She was about to move away, to go lay down on the bed and rest after a long four-hour drive, when she heard the soft rasp of knuckles on the other side of her bedroom door. Beatrice raised an eyebrow and moved to answer it, opening the door to reveal the one person she had tried, and failed, not to think about while she had been away.

"Hi, Bea," Happy smiled, the same bright, white grin on her face. Her freckles had faded, her curls now cut a short length above her shoulders, but it was still her. Beatrice needed only to be near her, to feel that same familiar feeling, to know it was her.

"Since when do you knock," Beatrice teased, pulling her into a hug. She tried not to linger near her, but it was impossible not to when she had missed it, *her*, so much.

"Since I started teaching five year olds the importance of being polite," Happy answered, laughing a bit before she finally walked into the room that she had never had any trouble coming into before.

"Being polite has always been a little overrated."

“Don’t let my kindergarteners hear you,” she told her, sitting down on the bed and patting the empty space next to her, inviting Beatrice to sit with her. “Did you just get in?”

“About five minutes ago.”

“Oh, you’re probably tired! I should go,” she apologized, trying to stand up from the bed but Beatrice grabbed onto her arm and stopped her.

“Stay,” she told her, a rosy blush creeping onto her skin and suddenly she felt ten-years-old again. She let go and tried to shrug as nonchalantly as possible. “It’s good to see you. I missed you.”

“I missed you, too,” Happy whispered and Beatrice couldn’t believe that something so soft had the strength that it did to make her feel so much.

“Tell me how you’ve been,” Beatrice told her, crossing her legs and turning to face her, excited to change the subject and hear about every little thing she had missed.

Happy mirrored her and started telling her about how her dad had gotten married a few months ago to a woman he used to know in Mexico and who he had run into a year ago, chalking it up to destiny. She laughed about all the bad dates she had been on recently, talking about how some people never changed from who they were in high school. She told Beatrice about how much she loved being a kindergarten teacher, about how good she felt when her kids learned something new about the world because of her.

“Your mom would be so proud of you,” Beatrice told her earnestly, feeling pride herself at the way her friend seemed to glow just by talking about her life and how happy she was with it.

“I’m sure your mom is proud of you, too,” Happy smiled.

She reached for her purse, unzipping it and putting it on her lap to look through it, until she let out a frustrated groan and turned it over so that all its contents would spill onto the bed. She rummaged through the items, gum, pens, earphones, receipts, until she finally found what she was looking for. Happy smiled as she picked up the lip gloss and went to put some on, and Beatrice looked at her for only moment, recognizing the familiar movements from seeing her do it a hundred times before, before she looked back down and noticed something.

“Why do you have stickers,” Beatrice laughed, picking up the thin sheet of silver and gold star stickers.

“Because I teach children and try to be prepared,” Happy answered matter-of-factly, screwing the top of her lip gloss back on and putting it into her purse along with the rest of her things. Beatrice handed her the sticker sheet but Happy didn’t put it away. Instead she moved close to her, an unsure smile on her face that made Beatrice feel nervous and excited all at the same time. She took one of the stickers off of the sheet, holding it on her fingertip as she locked her gaze on to hers, before she inhaled and let out a whisper with her exhale. “Do you remember when you said you wanted ‘stars’ on your face like mine? And I made my dad drive me to the store and I bought stickers and put them all over your cheeks?”

“Yeah,” Beatrice whispered. She would never forget that. She didn’t think she ever could.

Happy moved in even closer to Beatrice and slowly raised the finger still holding onto the sticker and brought it to Beatrice’s cheek. She placed it gently onto the center of cheek, rubbing it gently as she felt the gold colored adhesive over her soft skin. Without looking away, she went to grab another sticker, putting it on her other cheek, and then again until Beatrice’s cheeks formed their own versions of a clear night sky.

All throughout, Beatrice had tried to hold her gaze, every bit of her instincts wanting her to close her eyes, to savor the feeling of Happy's soft hands on her face as they met her cheeks over and over again. Her insides felt like warm lava, erupting and spilling hot feelings all over. She never wanted Happy to stop, but then she did, her hand halting on her cheek and Beatrice felt all of her focused on her.

"Did I ever cross your mind," Happy asked her, hesitant and unsure, her face looking surprised as if the question had escaped from her lips without her permission.

"Only once when I was nine," Beatrice answered honestly, letting her hand come up to rest over hers. "And you just never left."

That was all it took for Happy to close the short distance between them, and finally, *finally*, Beatrice knew exactly what the lip gloss tasted like from her lips. Their lips moved against each other, soft and slow, before it transformed into confidence. It gave way to a familiarity that Beatrice had no reason to have recognized before, but she did anyways. Because just as she had known for years, she was meant to be with Happy. Fate, DNA, luck-- whatever it was, it just made sense.

Happy's lips were sticky and sweet and Beatrice couldn't help but smile against her mouth, her entire being illuminating, and soon Happy began to laugh, too. Neither of them moved away from one another, instead pulling each other closer, hands roaming, exploring, mouths still fused together.

Kissing her felt like the past and future all at once; like lost opportunities and new possibilities. As she stayed in the moment there with her, she let the feeling of happiness overwhelm her being, and drank in the knowledge that she now knew that joy tasted like strawberries.



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Gentle Doe
Olga Ramirez

SLOWBURN

By: Jorge Lopez

Characters

CHAVES: Young Latino man. Scarlip is his only friend.

Scarlip: Man, who has a scar on his lip. He's a con man. Chaves is his only friend for now.

Eva: I don't understand her.

Guard 1: Guards the cell. Doesn't know how to use a gun.

Guard 2: Guards the Door.

Scene: Curtains rise, and we see our main character, Chaves, sitting alone surrounded by shapes made from different material (wood, Styrofoam, ect.). He sits on a cube middle of the stage adjusting his black shoes. Chaves is dressed in all black. We hear a struggle stage left.

Scarlip

Unhand me! Do you know who I am?

Guard 1

Yes, we do.

Guard 2

That's why we're taking you back.

Guard 1

Scarlip.

Scarlip, Guard 1, and Guard 2 appear on stage. Guard 1 and Guard 2 have restrained Scarlip with his hands behind his back. Scarlip is wearing a dress, wig, and lipstick to appear as a woman. The guards are dressed as samurai.

Guard 1

(points at Chaves) Back away prisoner.

Scarlip

I am Madame...uh Adam, no Winston.

The guards untie Scarlip and push him to the floor.

How dare you push a lady!

Guard 2

The next time you try to escape-

Guard 1

We'll have your head-

Guard 2

Since you don't use it.

Guards exit off stage left. Chaves goes to help Scarlip.

CHAVES

How far did you get this time?

Scarlip

Just to the kitchen. This damn place is so confusing.

CHAVES

Chaves: They have a kitchen?

Scarlip

We'll they have to eat sometime... I think.

CHAVES

Did you steal any food at least?

Scarlip

Oh Chaves, they had this amazing, scrumptious, juicy chicken.

CHAVES

My mouth is watering.

Scarlip

Damn well it should be. Had you seen this chicken Chaves, you wouldn't be able to contain yourself.

CHAVES

Well where is it?

Scarlip

Where's what?

CHAVES

The chicken.

Scarlip

I ate it.

CHAVES

You ate it?

Scarlip

Yes.

CHAVES

Why didn't you steal it?

Scarlip

How do you think I ate it?

CHAVES

What about me Scarlip, I haven't eaten in days.

Scarlip

Days? They don't feed you here?

CHAVES

No, they don't. Scarlip you've been here longer than I have.

Scarlip

I have? I don't think that's true.

CHAVES

It doesn't matter. How'd you get caught?

Scarlip

By stealing the chicken.

CHAVES

Oh que la Chingada.

Scarlip

Wait! Chaves, I did save something.

Scarlip reaches into his dress and pulls out a wish bone.

CHAVES

Was that supposed to be my piece?

Scarlip

No, it's a wish bone. Think of a wish while we both pull. If the bone breaks evenly both our wishes come true.

CHAVES

And if it doesn't break evenly?

Scarlip

I think the one with the longer piece gets their wish... no wait, maybe the shorter? I'm not sure.

CHAVES

Fine, I wish-

Scarlip

Shhh! Don't say your wish out loud Chaves, it won't come true.

They break the bone.

They stare at each other.

Well that was fun. Where are my clothes?

CHAVES

(Points a pile of clothes in the corner) Over there.

Scarlip walks to his clothes and picks them up.

Does that mean my wish or yours come true?

Scarlip

I don't know. I'm going to wash this make up off me, does the sink still work?

CHAVES

No, use the toilet water.

Scarlip

How could you say that to a lady!

CHAVES

Callate wey.

Laughing, Scarlip leaves off stage.

Chaves rotates his cube, so the audience can see a bunch of tally marks. The top says, "Failed attempts." He takes out a marker and tries to draw another tally mark, but his marker is out of ink.

CHAVES

Pinche pluma. (Chaves tosses the pen)

Eva

Here, you can use mine.

Eva, who has been sitting in the front row of the audience, stands up and tosses a marker on stage.

CHAVES

Gracias...wait who said that?

Eva

I did.

CHAVES

Ay wey, you're stuck in the wall.

Eva

No, I'm not.

CHAVES

A ghost? *Un Fantasma? Mi abuela?*

Scarlip

Scarlip enters dressed as a tramp.

Who are you talking too Chaves?

CHAVES

A ghost, stuck in the wall. She's my grandmother.

Scarlip

What?

Eva

My name's Evalyn. I'm not a ghost.

Scarlip

Odin's beard!

CHAVES

No, Evalyn.

Scarlip

Don't worry Evalyn! We'll get you out of that wall!

*The begin to look for something to break the wall with among the shapes. They find a yoga ball.
Guard 1 and Guard 2 enter.*

Guard 1

What is going on here?!

Guard 2

Trying to escape again Scarlip?

Scarlip

There's a girl stuck in the wall over there.

Guard 2

Prisoner, drop the weapon! (*Points at Chaves who has the yoga ball over his head.*)

CHAVES

It's a yoga ball.

Guard 1

Keep your hands above your head! (*Guard 1 pulls out a pistol.*)

Scarlip puts his hands up.

Scarlip

Chaves, I don't wanna get shot again.

Guard 2

Drop the Weapon! (*Reaches for his sword.*)

Guard 1

Keep your hands up!

Scarlip

Chaves listen to them!

CHAVES

Which one!

EVA

Stop, Stop...

Eva jumps on the stage in between the Guards and Chaves/Scarlip. She is dressed for the occasion.

... they weren't trying to...

Both Guard 1 and Chaves scream. Chaves throws the yoga ball at Eva's head while Guard 1 shoots her. Eva falls to the ground.

Scarlip

Oh shit.

Guard 2

Who is she?

Scarlip

(Points at Chaves.) His grandmother and you just shot her.

Guard 1

He hit her with the ball.

CHAVES

Mi abuela! How could you? Oh, she's alive.

EVA

(panting) I'm alive.

Eva checks her stomach.

I'm not dead?

Scarlip

A good thing too. Dying sucks.

EVA

You've died before?

Scarlip

Thousands of times.

Guard 2

Stop talking to the ghost.

EVA

I already said I'm not a ghost, my name's Eeee uh

Guard 1

That doesn't sound like a real name.

EVA

It starts with an E. Don't you remember?

Scarlip

I can only remember my name.

CHAVES

Ev, Eva. That's it. Eva, *yo creo*.

Guard 2

Do you have a last name?

Eva

I can't remember.

Guard 2

Eva I can't remember, you are under arrest for breaking and entering.

Eva

You're arresting me?

Guard 2

Yes, and since you're already in jail you've made our jobs a lot easier.

Guard 1

You could say that again.

Guard 2

And since you're already in jail you've made our jobs a lot easier.

Guard 1

You could say that again.

Scarlip

And since you're already in jail you've made our jobs a lot easier.

CHAVES

You could say that again.

Eva

I want to speak to a lawyer, or someone other than you four.

Guard 1

No, you have no rights.

Eva

What?

CHAVES

You have no rights in jail, it's a known rule.

Scarlip

Or out of jail.

CHAVES

He's right.

Eva

This is a mistake, I'm not supposed to be here.

Guard 1

Then why are you here?

Eva

I don't know. I don't remember.

Guard 2

We need to inform Big Boss.

Guard 1

Good idea

Eva

Who's Big Boss? Maybe I can talk to him.

Guard 2

Not a good idea.

Guard 1

Big Boss doesn't talk to anyone.

Guard 2

Not even us.

Scarlip

If Big Boss doesn't talk to you, do you even know where he is?

Guard 1

I think so.

Guard 2

He could be...

Guard 1

We'll maybe...

The Guard move closer to each other, so they can whisper into each other's ears, but they instead put their ears side by side.

Guard 2

Oh, that's right.

They move away from each other.

Guard 1

Of course, we know where he is.

Guard 2

Now stay here while we go find him.

Guards exit stage left.

Eva

I can't believe I'm in jail.

CHAVES

That's a bad thing?

Eva

Yes, well I think it is. I remember jail being a bad thing back home.

Scarlip

It's not that bad here.

CHAVES

Boring.

Scarlip

But not bad.

CHAVES

Sometimes we play games.

Scarlip

Great idea Chaves, let us calm our nerves with some cards.

Chaves and Scarlip find a cube to use as a table. Scarlip pulls out a deck of cards from his jacket. Chaves motions for Eva to sit as Scarlip begins shuffling the cards.

Eva

So how long have you been here Scarlett?

Scarlip

Scarlip.

CHAVES

It's the only name he likes to go by.

Eva

Oh sorry.

Scarlip

Its ok. I would say about...a few thousand years.

Eva

Thousand?

Scarlip

Okay, its closer to ten thousand. A man's got to worry about his image you know.

Eva

That's impossible.

Scarlip

Oh no its possible. I've counted every day I've been here.

Scarlip begins to give two cards to each person sitting at the cube.

Eva

And you Chaves?

CHAVES

About thirty-five years.

Eva

Thirty-five? How old are you?

CHAVES

Twenty.

Scarlip puts three cards face up on the cube.

Eva

Jokers? You're not supposed to play with Jokers.

Scarlip

Why? They're my favorite card.

Eva

Eva looks at her cards.

Are they all jokers?

Scarlip

Yes.

Eva

This game isn't helping me.

Scarlip

It's supposed to help you?

Eva

Yes, I'm supposed to be...be doing something.

CHAVES

Leaving, I think you wanted to leave.

Scarlip

Or staying, I think you wanted to stay.

CHAVES

It could be staying.

Eva

I don't think I'm supposed to be here.

Scarlip

Then how'd you get here?

Eva

I don't remember... I walked in. Or jumped in, for some reason.

Scarlip

That doesn't sound right. Right Chaves?

CHAVES

No, it doesn't.

Scarlip

The only way out is that door over there. And the guards always keep it locked.

Eva

I didn't use a door. I walked through a wall, or did I jump?

CHAVES

Really? Which one?

Scarlip

You can't walk through walls Chaves.

CHAVES

Maybe she went through a hole. This could be our way out Scarlip, this is exactly what I wished for.

Eva: Wished for?

CHAVES

The wish bone earlier today, don't you remember Scarlip? I wished for a way out.

Scarlip

No. I don't remember.

CHAVES

Which wall did you come through?

Eva

Eva looks around the room.

I can't remember, they all look the same.

Scarlip

We should focus on the game.

CHAVES

Maybe the guards remember. Guards! Guards!

Guards enter.

This girl here. Why is she here?

Scarlip

She's a criminal Chaves, like you, like me.

Guard 1

Quiet. All of you. Do you remember?

Guard 2

I remember. She was arrested for the same crime Chaves was arrested for. Breaking and entering.

Guard 1

There you go.

Guards leave off stage.

Scarlip

You see, there we go. Eva is just like us. Like me. Now can we please focus on the game, all this talk about remembering is no use. This is who we are Chaves, Eva. We are prisoners.

Eva

It just doesn't feel right.

Scarlip

Then let us play a game! It'll make you feel better, I promise. You just need time Eva, Chaves. To forget, like I have. This feeling of uneasiness will go away with time, I promise.

Eva

Maybe just one game couldn't hurt.

Scarlip

No, of course it wouldn't. In the meantime, you can be friends with Chaves and I. We've always wanted another friend.

Scarlip leads Evaly- I mean Eva, to the cube to play with the cards.*

Scarlip

Won't you join us Chaves?

Chaves looks around a moment. Trying to remember.

CHAVES

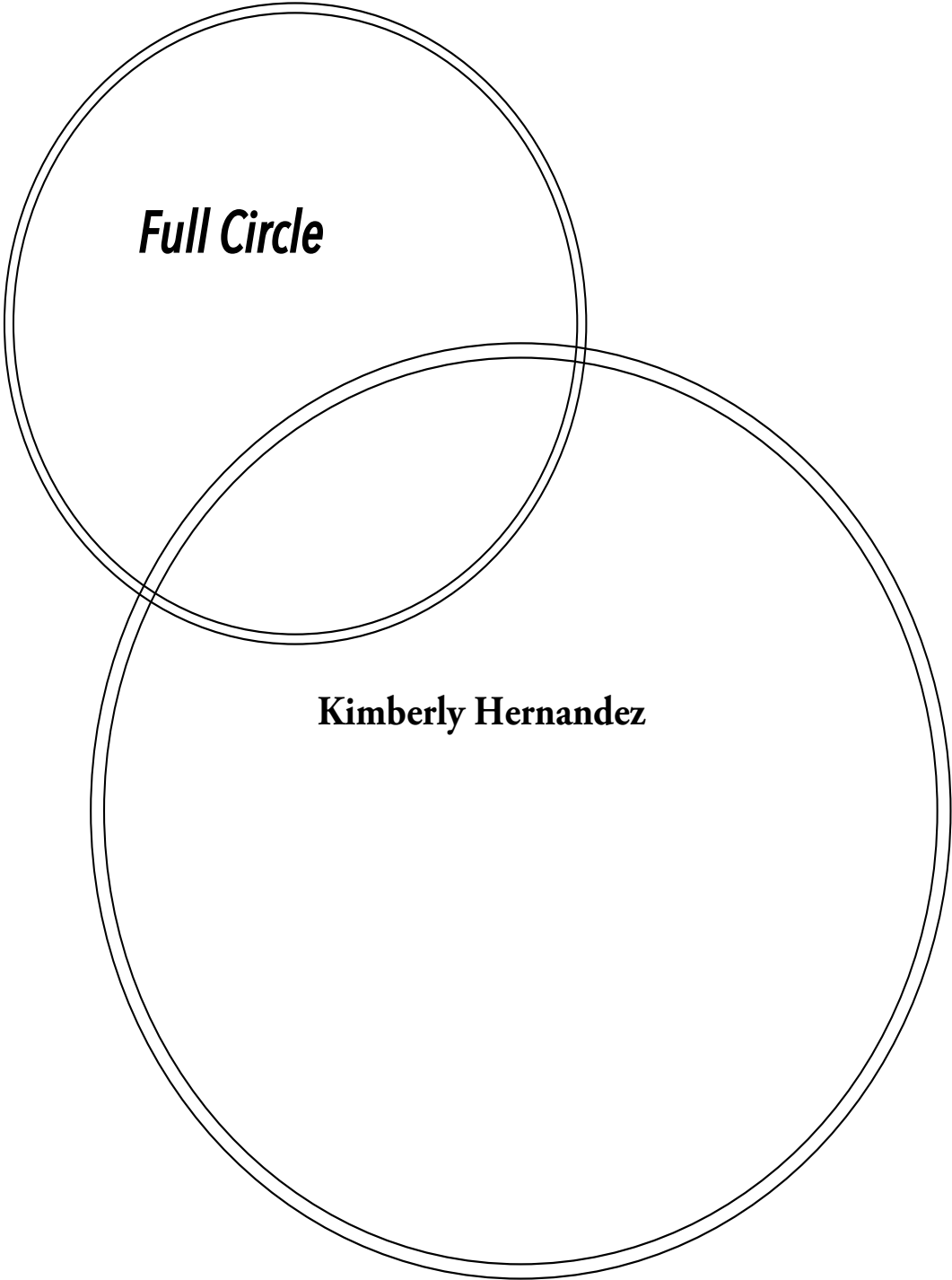
Okay.

He sits beside them. They play a game of nonsense with the cards.

Eva

I'm hungry Scarlip. Do they feed us here?

End



Characters:

Leonardo

Mamá Consuelo

Señora Anna

Gustavo

Matt

ACT 1

Scene 1

(The stage opens to reveal a shabby kitchen. The appliances and furniture are old, the kitchen itself is tidy. Against the side of the wall there is a small corner table. On the table there is a picture of a dark-haired woman in a white dress. There are burning candles surrounding the picture. Hanging around one of the candles is a black bead rosary. A grey-haired woman sits in a chair sipping coffee. A young man, Leonardo, enters the room.)

Leonardo: *(Walking over to give Mamá Consuelo a hug):* Hey, abuelita.

Mamá Consuelo: Hola mijo. How was work? I thought you would be out earlier.

Leonardo: Good, I picked up some overtime.

Mamá Consuelo. Que trabajador. You're such a hard worker Leonardito.

Leonardo: The overtime money is going to be a help for us. A full-time position opened up and I want to be the one to take it. *(he takes a seat)*

Mamá Consuelo: I love that you are a hard worker mijo but don't forget about school. You need to dedicate time to your studies too. I know that with everything that's been going on you haven't been going to class lately. I hope you'll be able to catch up.

Leonardo: Don't worry abuela, it's only my first year in college, I can always catch up in the future. Right now, my concern is making sure we are okay. I'm thinking of maybe finding a second job too.

Mamá Consuelo: A second job! Estas loco!

Leonardo: Just for the meantime, we could use the money now.

Mama Consuelo: *(hesitantly)* What kind of job?

Leonardo: I don't know yet, maybe the first one I can find since I want to work soon

Mamá Consuelo: Ay, Leonardo, two jobs are a lot to handle. What about school? With what's happened I feel you should be taking some time off not adding more work!

Leonardo: I won't stop going to school. I'll take online classes, they offer classes like that for people who are busy. We need the money. Besides, I'll go crazy if I don't keep myself busy.

Mamá Consuelo: *(in a gentle voice now)* Well, let me fix you something to eat. You're going to need to eat if you're going to be working so much. *(She walks over to the pots on the stove and fixes a plate of food. She places the plate on the table, they both sit as Leonardo begins to eat.)*

Mamá Consuelo: *(hesitantly)* Leonardo?

Leonardo: Que paso?

Mamá Consuelo: Your dad called again.

Leonardo: Abuelita, please, I'm eating, and he's not my dad.

Mamá Consuelo: I just wanted to let you know that he called. He asked about you.

Leonardo: He's not my dad.

Mamá Consuelo: He sounded worried.

Leonardo: You shouldn't have answered that man.

Mamá Consuelo: He is your father. He's a *descarado*, but he still gave you life.

Leonardo: Yeah, well, that's all he ever gave me isn't it?

Mamá Consuelo: He said he wanted to make sure you were okay.

Leonardo (*sarcastically*): I'm fantastic.

Mamá Consuelo: I think you need to talk to him Leonardo, you're going to need him now.

Leonardo: (*agitated*) I don't need him, especially not now. Next time he calls, tell him that I don't want to talk to his gringo-ass.

Mamá Consuelo: Leonardo-

Leonardo: I mean it grandma, you tell him that or, better yet, don't answer if he calls again.

He's the last person I want to hear from right now.

(*there is a long pause before Mamá Consuelo starts*)

Mamá Consuelo: Mijo, it's just me and you now. Imagine *(her voice begins to break)* Imagine something should happen to me-

Leonardo: Abuela-

Mamá Consuelo: Leonardo, please, I am 70 years old. I don't want you to be alone.

Leonardo: I'm not alone abuelita, I have you.

Mamá Consuelo: Leo, please.

Leonardo: *(he pauses for a few seconds, chewing his food)* If it will make you feel better, I'll talk with him.

Mamá Consuelo: *(hopeful)* You will? That does make me feel a little better. You never know, he might want to help.

Leonardo: I will talk to him but, please don't get your hopes up. I've only ever spoken to the man for a few seconds every few years.

Mamá Consuelo *(Ignoring him):* I wrote down his number, it's right here. *(she hands him a small piece of paper)*

Leonardo *(stares at the paper for a few seconds):* I'll look at it later. *(He sets the paper down and walks his plates over to the sink)* Did you call the flower shop?

Mamá Consuelo: Yes. Three arrangements. Two medium ones for the church, one large for the burial.

Leonardo: Sunflowers?

Mamá Consuelo: Si.

Leonardo: Her favorite. Did you tell everyone?

Mamá Consuelo: Yeah, only bright clothes to the funeral, no black clothes.

Leonardo: That's going to be the brightest funeral I've ever been to. (there is another long pause)

Mamá Consuelo: It's what she wanted.

Leonardo: (*quietly*) I know.

Mamá Consuelo: She wanted it to be a celebration of her life. Su vida.

Leonardo: The last few months were no vida for her, grandma.

Mamá Consuelo: (*sadly*) I know, those were the worst moments of my life.

Leonardo: Mine too. They were almost as bad as losing her...almost.

Mamá Consuelo: It was rough, but that's why we have to celebrate now.

Leonardo: I guess so.

(*Mamá Consuelo walks over to Leonardo and takes his hand*)

Mamá Consuelo: She's not in pain anymore. We have to be grateful.

Leonardo: I know, abuelita. It's just hard to understand sometimes, she was so healthy before.

Mamá Consuelo: I know. She used to love going for her walks at that park on Manchester, remember?

Leonardo: Yeah, she would always ask me to go with her but I was always too busy with school and work. Excuses.

Mamá Consuelo: You were busy making sure you were doing well in school, there is nothing wrong with that.

Leonardo: People should never be too busy for their families. I wish I would have known that.

Mamá Consuelo: You made her proud, that's what matters.

Leonardo: *(attempting to change the subject)* Were you able to reserve the mass?

Mamá Consuelo: *(suddenly)* Dios mio! I forgot to call Father Miguel!

(Leonardo walks his plate over to the sink then walks back and gives Mama Consuelo a kiss on the forehead)

Leonardo: Don't worry, abuelita. You've done enough with the flowers. I'll call the church tomorrow. I'm going to try and get some rest, I have to be up by five for my shift. buenas noches.

Mamá Consuelo: Buenas noches mi niño.

(Leonardo exits. Mama Consuelo walks over to the table with the candles and the picture of a woman. She reaches for the rosary then she murmurs a prayer that is inaudible to the audience. She blows out the candles and exits the stage.)

Scene 2

(It is the next day after work. Leonardo enters and sets his lunch pail on the dining table. He walks over and touches the picture of the woman.) Thank you for getting me through the day.

(He kisses the picture. The phone rings, he picks it up) Hello? Hola Teresa, como esta?

We're...hanging in there. The funeral is on Saturday. At noon, yes. Mamá Consuelo? She isn't here right now, she went over to the neighbor's house, but she should be back soon. Do you want

me to take a message? Oh, well, thank you. I will. See you Saturday. *(He sighs and hangs up the phone. He reaches over and picks up the paper with the number scribbled on it from the day before. Then, he picks up the phone. He lets it ring a few times before he slams the phone down. He puts his hands in his face and stays that way for a few seconds. Then he picks up the phone again and dials)* Hello? It's Leonardo, Leonardo Gomez. How are you father Miguel? I'm okay. You have? I appreciate that. I wanted to dedicate a mass for her. In the morning. I appreciate it. Thank you, Father. *(He hangs up the phone then picks up the piece of paper and throws it in the trash. The doorbell rings and Leonardo opens)*

Leonardo: Señora Anna, come in.

(Enter Señora Anna)

Señora Anna: Leo, my boy, how are you?

Leonardo: I'm okay. Would you like to take a seat?

Señora Anna: *(taking a seat)* I just wanted to bring you some food: chicken mole.

Leonardo: Wow, thank you.

Señora Anna: How's everything going with the planning?

Leonardo: It's going. We were able to get everything she needs to be sent away.

Señora Anna: I was really sorry to hear about the insurance. I really thought they would have paid for her medical bills.

Leonardo: They did pay but only a percentage. The rest I'll have to figure out.

Señora Anna: I'm so sorry.

Leonardo: It's okay. She had money saved. She was always a saver. We've been digging into the savings to pay for the funeral now.

Señora Anna: I wish I could help you.

Leonardo: It's okay, we are going to be fine.

Señora Anna: How about I help you with the food? I can cook whatever you'll need that day.

Leonardo: No, Señora Anna, I couldn't ask you to do that.

Señora Anna: *(sternly)* She was my best friend. Let me cook the meal for that day.

Leonardo: Okay. Thank you, it means a lot.

Señora Anna: *(getting up to leave)* No need to thank me. Leo, I know it was just the two of you and your grandma, but you are not alone. If you need anything, *anything*, call me.

Leonardo: *(walking her to the door)* Thank you so much.

(Señora Anna exits. Leonardo follows)

End Scene)

Scene 3

(It is later that afternoon; the phone is ringing) Restricted? *(he answers)* Hello? Who is it? *(in a darker tone)* What do you want? How did you even get this number? *(pause)* Yeah, well, you shouldn't have bothered. I know you called, I just don't care. Save your breath, there is nothing you can say that would make me want to listen to you. I have to go, I have a *funeral* to plan. Oh, you know? Good for you. Do me a favor, don't call again. *(he slams the phone down)* Pathetic. *(He begins pacing then grabs a dish from the counter and breaks it on the floor)* Pathetic! *(The*

phone rings. He rushes over and picks up the phone) What part of don't call back do you not understand? *(pause)* You want to come? Really? *(angrily)* For what? *(sarcastically)* Ha! Ha! Please, you couldn't even come see her in life. You're not welcome here. No. *(Almost yelling)* Help? No! I don't- we don't need anything from you! I am calm! *(he stops, listening for a few seconds)* Why would you do that? She wasn't anything to you. *(pause)* You can't make up for what you did. Things aren't going to change. I'm not a kid anymore. *(he takes a deep breath)* Fine. But you can't come here. You can't be at the funeral either. She deserves better. *(He pauses, listening)* I know where that's at. Let's see if you actually show up for once. *(He hangs up the phone and begins cleaning the shattered plate*

End Scene)

Act 2

Scene 1

(The light shines on Leonardo's bedroom. He is kneeling by his bed.)

A girl came in at work today. She was nothing like you. She didn't even look like you. It was her name. She had the same name as you: Maria. It's kind of dumb really because I bet there are millions of women named Maria. But, for some reason, after I spoke to that girl I could not stop thinking about you. It's only been a few days since you left but I feel like you were gone way before that. *(sighs)* I don't know if you can hear me. Sometimes I don't even know where you could be, but I bet that wherever it is, you're not in pain anymore. People think I'm crazy, they keep asking me if I'm okay. What kind of stupid question is that? I keep telling everyone I'm okay. I've been using that word a lot lately: okay. I feel like telling everyone "My mom died! Obviously, I'm not okay, idiots!" Because the truth is, Mom, *(his voice begins to break)* I'm not

okay. I don't think I'm ever going to be okay again. *(crying silently)* I miss you. I miss you so much sometimes it feels like someone punched my right in the gut and I can't breathe. But I have to keep going, like I promised you I would. Just give me strength, please. Guide me. *(He gets into bed)* I'm going to need extra strength and guidance tomorrow.

(End Scene)

Scene 2

(there is a knock in the door)

Leonardo: Come in!

Mama Consuelo: There is someone here to see you, Leo.

(enter Gustavo)

Leonardo: Gustavo!

Gustavo: Primo!

(they share a long embrace. Mama Consuelo exits.)

Leonardo: I thought you were working?

Gustavo: I requested a couple of days, so I could say a proper goodbye to my tia. Speaking of working, Mama Consuelo tells me you're still going to work?

Leonardo: Yeah.

Gustavo: You're still at the warehouse?

Leonardo: Yup.

Gustavo: Why didn't you take any time off? I know you're not okay.

Leonardo: The first day after mom died, I went numb. I stayed in bed all day. I didn't sleep, I just lied there. I didn't eat. I didn't shower. I didn't brush my teeth. *(pause)* I couldn't even cry. But the day after that, I felt guilty, like I had disappointed her or something. She spent her last few months in a hospital bed. I know she would have been working if she had been healthy. So, the second day, I went to work. At the end of the day I still felt broken but at least felt like I had done something that she would have wanted me to do.

Gustavo: You're right.

Leonardo: So, I'm taking a day for the funeral and then going right back.

Gustavo: You're strong, cousin. I don't think I could do that.

Leonardo: I'm even thinking about getting a second job.

Gustavo: Really?

Leonardo: Mom brought in most of the money so now it's up to me.

Gustavo: Well, heck, then things might work out for you.

Leonardo: What do you mean?

Gustavo: The place I work at is hiring drivers.

Leonardo: They are?

Gustavo: Yeah. All you would need to do is get your class A. It's not too hard, I can help you out. I can recommend you to my boss.

Leonardo: *(smiles)* Me? A truck driver? I don't know.

Gustavo: It's good pay, especially if you're willing to drive out of town. You wouldn't need a second job.

Leonardo: That would be great. You think they would hire me?

Gustavo: Heck yeah! You're pretty young but if you get there and show them you're a hard worker, they'll love it and give you plenty of hours to work.

Leonardo: How do I apply?

Gustavo: I'll show you before I go back.

Leonardo: Sounds good.

Gustavo: Hey, um, not to be a chismoso or anything but, Mama Consuelo told me about your dad.

Leonardo: You are chismoso. What did she say?

Gustavo: Just that he keeps calling the house saying he has something important to tell you.

Leonardo: He offered me money.

Gustavo: What!

Leonardo: He offered to pay for the funeral.

Gustavo: You're kidding!

Leonardo: Nope. I didn't even want to hear his voice until he offered to pay for the entire thing. He asked to meet up.

Gustavo: What did you say?

Leonardo: I agreed

Gustavo: No way.

Leonardo: I hate they guy but we need the money.

Gustavo: When are you seeing him?

Leonardo: I'm supposed to see him tomorrow.

Gustavo: Supposed to?

Leonardo: Yeah, I might not go. I don't know

Gustavo: I thought you said you need the money?

Leonardo: Yeah but he's an ass.

Gustavo: You don't have to love him, just take his money.

Leonardo: Ha! I just feel bad paying for my mother's funeral with money that belongs to the man that abandoned her.

Gustavo: Makes sense. So, what, you're just not going to show up?

Leonardo: I don't know.

Gustavo: Are you going to let him know if you decide not to go?

Leonardo: No! If I don't go he can finally feel what it's like to be left hanging.

(Mama Consuelo calls from the kitchen for them to go eat)

Gustavo: You can tell me more about your dead-beat dad later, I'm starving.

(They exit)

Act 3

Scene 1

(A man sits alone inside of a coffee shop. He checks his watch, takes a sip of coffee then checks his watch again. He taps his fingers on the table then checks his watch again. His phone rings)

Matt: Hey. He's not here yet. He said he would show up. It's been almost an hour. Yeah, I guess. I'll see you soon. *(he gets up to leave but as he is walking towards the door, it swings open. Leonardo enters)*

Leonardo: You can leave if you want.

Matt: *(stuttering)* No- I just- I thought you weren't coming.

Leonardo: *(taking a seat)* I'm here.

Matt: *(taking the seat across)* I'm glad you did come. *(silence)* I'm sorry about your mom.

Leonardo: Yeah.

Matt: I found out through an old friend I ran into. I didn't even know she was sick.

Leonardo: I wouldn't have expected you to know that.

Matt: I'm sorry. I know you don't want to hear what I have to say but I really am sorry, son.

Leonardo: Don't-

Matt: Please, listen. I am so sorry. I'm really *really* sorry. I know you hate me and I deserve it but take this money to help you out with the cost. *(He hands over an envelope)*

Leonardo: I don't want your money.

Matt: It's the least I could do for you.

Leonardo: Why?

Matt: (*confused*) What?

Leonardo: Tell me why you did it?

Matt: Why I left you? I was young and stupid-

Leonardo: I want to know why you treated my mom the way you did.

Matt: What do you mean?

Leonardo: You lied about having a wife. You told her you left your wife, that you were divorced. But you weren't, were you?

Matt: You were just a kid, I didn't expect you to know.

Leonardo: I was a kid, but I remember how sad she was, how she would try to hide it from me. I know the whole story.

Matt: Your mom was such an incredible woman.

Leonardo: She is.

Matt: But I just couldn't leave my family.

Leonardo: Your family?

Matt: Yes. My wife was pregnant. I couldn't abandon them. It was a stupid mistake.

Leonardo: You chose them.

Matt: We're divorced now. She tooks my kids. I realize the mistake I made, Leo

Leonardo: I see. *(takes a deep breath then looks Matt in the eyes)* Honestly, your personal life doesn't interest me. I am not going to say you deserve it, but you know what you did. I came here because I wanted to know the truth. But now I know there is no truth in anything you say. I have spent my life hating you but tomorrow I am going to bury my father and my mother, because she was both to me. You and I are not family. I was raised to work hard, you didn't teach me that. Most importantly, I was raised better than to ever do the things you did. I am going to find myself an incredible woman someday and be an excellent parent. That's because I had an excellent parent. I will be the man you weren't. Anyway, I wanted to tell you in person that I'm done. There is no room left in my heart for you, not even for hating you. Take your guilt money. I have to go.

Matt: Leo, please.

(Leo gets up and leaves. Matt grabs the envelope and sits before putting his head down in his hands)

End Scene.

“WE’VE BEEN HAD”
“WE’VE BEEN HAD”
“WE’VE BEEN HAD”

By

Anthony C. Hernandez II

FADE IN:

Title Card against brown background: Chapter One: Nicolas

INT. THE CASA LOMA HOTEL ON FILLMORE STREET (SF)- NOON (FRIDAY)

22-year-old Leon Valdez lies awake in his bed under the sheets with a man of average build who looks to be in his early thirties who sleeps. Their backs are turned from one another, Leon's back faces the windows of the room, and the man faces a chair near the door of the room. Leon gets out of the sheets of the bed grabs his glasses from the nightstand near his bed and walks to the chair near the door of the room. He sits in the chair puts on his glasses and looks at the sleeping man. His face conveys annoyance and then indifference.

CUT TO:

The man has finished getting dressed and sits in the chair near the door, he puts on his shoes and begins to tie his shoe laces. Leon lies in bed writing in a brown notebook. After tying his shoes, he begins to speak to Leon across the room.

MAN ONE

Are you sure you meant what you said last night?

LEON

No one is ever entirely sure.

MAN ONE

You really don't want to see me again before you leave?

LEON

I don't see a point. I am leaving on Monday, and I like the idea of meeting people and never seeing them again.

MAN ONE

That's odd.

LEON

Not really.

MAN ONE

Have a nice day.

LEON

Okay.

The man leaves without looking at Leon.

TITLE CARD (Written on a piece of lined paper): LABOR DAY, 2017

INT. EN ROUTE TO THE CASTRO THEATRE – EVENING

Leon sits in an Uber. He asks the driver if he can roll down the windows, the driver obliges. Leon sticks his head out of the window and looks at the streets of San Francisco as they head to the theatre.

CUT TO:

INT. THE CASTRO THEATRE – EVENING

The driver drops Leon off across the street from the Theatre. Leon crosses the street. A sign reads that LAWRENCE OF ARABIA 70MM is playing. At the entrance of the theatre, a few elderly men wait for the venue to open. Leon walks to the box office and buys a ticket. He waits at the door near an older man with glasses and a fedora. The man smiles at Leon and Leon smiles back inauthentically.

CUT TO:

INT. THE LAST CALL – NIGHT

Leon sits in a bar drinking a vodka tonic. The bar is not full. Billy Idol plays in the back ground (Eyes Without a Face). A slightly older man sits at the back of the bar and watches Leon. Leon pulls his brown notebook out of the pocket of his coat and a pen, and begins to write. He gets his phone out of his other coat pocket and starts to text someone. He finishes his drink and leaves the bar.

INT. OUTSIDE OF A HOUSE NEAR LAST CALL – NIGHT

Leon walks down a street near the Last Call. He sees a house and walks to the entrance, knocks on the door. He sends a text message. A short moment later a man with messy black hair and hairy arms dressed in a shirt and boxers answers the door and leads Leon into the house.

INT. THE LIVING ROOM OF THE MAN'S HOUSE – NIGHT

The man lies sweaty in his boxers as Leon begins to dress. Leon finishes dressing. The man smiles at Leon, but Leon seems indifferent to him. He walks out the door of the house. He says goodbye.

INT. THE CASA LOMA HOTEL ON FILLMORE STREET– NIGHT

Leon gets out of an Uber and climbs the stairs to his hotel room. He opens the door to his hotel room and begins to undress to his underwear. He looks at himself in the mirror on his closet. His face conveys sadness. He walks to turn off the lights and gets into the sheets of the bed and goes to sleep.

INT. MEL'S DINER ON MISSION STREET – AFTERNOON (SATURDAY)

A man in his late forties of average build dressed in a brown corduroy suit with pink fingernails sits at a table near the entrance of the diner drinking coffee. Leon walks into the diner and sits down at the table with him.

NICOLAS

Do you want anything to eat or drink?

LEON

I am not hungry.

NICOLAS

Did you eat already?

LEON

No, I am just not hungry.

NICOLAS

Neither am I.

LEON

But maybe I will have some coffee too.

NICOLAS

When did you arrive?

LEON

I came yesterday. I know I told you I was coming this morning, but they were showing a film I wanted to see at the Castro.

NICOLAS

What film?

A waitress comes and asks Leon if he wants anything he orders a coffee. She refills Nicolas's cup.

LEON

Lawrence of Arabia.

NICOLAS

That's a very long film.

LEON

I know. I didn't get back to my Hotel until like 2 in the morning.

NICOLAS

What did you do after the movie?

LEON

I went to the last call, and I went to a stranger's house for research.

NICOLAS

Research, is that what they call it now?

LEON

I am trying to write again. I am writing from a different perspective that I have no idea about. Didn't I tell about my concept of method writing?

NICOLAS

You probably did. I forget about the mundane details.

LEON

All the details are mundane. How are you, Nicolas?

NICOLAS

I'm in a sea of loneliness.

LEON

I am sorry.

NICOLAS

It's not your fault. Do you want to leave, go to my place?

LEON

Okay.

INT. THE LIVING ROOM OF NICOLAS'S HOUSE (MISSION) – LATER

Leon and Nicolas sit on the couch.

NICOLAS

I haven't been able to write. I'm afraid my lack of inspiration will continue to hound me, until my eventual ruin, or collapse into mediocrity. I don't know what I am trying to say as a writer. Sometimes I still get an idea for a story and then I have it all planned out, and I begin to write, and then I realize how pointless it all seems. At least one of us is writing.

LEON

It's not like I write anything particularly good. Mostly, I just end up writing about myself. It's egotistical, and I sound so stuck in my head.

NICOLAS

That's most writers. At least you seem to have passion.

LEON

Passion doesn't get people anywhere, talent does.

NICOLAS

You sound like a bitter old failed writer.

LEON

Eventually, I will become one.

NICOLAS

You strange, beautiful, cruel boy.

LEON

Your strange, beautiful, cruel boy?

NICOLAS

What do you want with me? This is our third-time meeting. I know we have our correspondence. I find you attractive and your boyish crush on me flattering. But this charade, nothing will come of it.

LEON

Don't say that.

NICOLAS

What I mean is eventually you will tire of me. Space and time will separate us. You will find someone else.

LEON

Maybe. But you told me you could only be my friend and my mentor; I wish you could be more to me.

NICOLAS

I can't help being bitter and jaded. You're young and idealistic in ways you cannot help.

LEON

I am not as idealistic as you think. I'm just holding on to my idealism as long as I can. Eventually, I will become bitter and jaded as well.

NICOLAS

I know you will.

LEON

Why can't we make love? Why can't I even kiss you?

NICOLAS

Because that would be torture for me. Because I would either feel nothing at all or I wouldn't be able to let go of you.

LEON

Then don't let go.

NICOLAS

You're diabolical.

Nicolas smiles at Leon who seems close to tears. He caresses his face and tousels his hair. Leon looks at Nicolas and kisses him on his nose.

NICOLAS

What are you doing?

LEON

You have a beautiful nose.

NICOLAS

You're such a weirdo.

LEON

But you like me, don't you?

NICOLAS

You're okay, I guess. Are you hungry? Do you want me to make us something?

LEON

What?

NICOLAS

How does pasta sound?

LEON

I am not hungry.

NICOLAS

You mean you're bottoming tonight?

LEON

If you want to know I am supposed to meet someone later tonight at 11 at Last Call. There is a strong possibility we might fuck, but it shouldn't matter to you.

NICOLAS

What if I went to the Castro with you tonight beforehand and we walked around and made fun of the parasites. Would you like that dear?

LEON

Could we pretend to be together?

NICOLAS

If that's what you want.

LEON

That's what I want.

NICOLAS

I am going to take a nap. I'll meet you at the Castro at 9. Meet me outside that bookstore near the Castro Theatre.

INT. THE BOOKSTORE ON CASTRO STREET –

Leon walks on Castro street; he sees Nicolas and approaches him and holds his hand. He leans on his shoulder.

NICOLAS

(In a transatlantic accent)

Where do you want to go, Mildred?

LEON

I don't know Miles. Just take me anywhere.

Nicolas points to a club with a sign that reads 440 with bright neon lights and escorts Leon in. The club is overcrowded. Young twinks and daddies mingle and dance. Leon and Nicolas walk to the back of the club. They watch the scenes that go on.

LEON

My dear where have you taken me?

NICOLAS

I don't know Mildred. Maybe you'll find a young man here to your fancy.

LEON

I prefer older men that's why I married you. But tonight, I might make a change. (He looks at the people dancing. He unbuttons his shirt a few buttons down.)

NICOLAS

Mildred don't make an exhibition of yourself again.

LEON

I don't belong to you.

NICOLAS

I don't like the tone you take with me, woman. Come on, let's go. (He pulls Leon's arm, and they walk out of the club together.)

NICOLAS

That place was terrible. Nothing but twink and jocks.

LEON

It wasn't that bad. I wouldn't have minded dancing a bit.

NICOLAS

You're not old and ugly like I am.

LEON

But I will be someday.

INT. TWINK PEAKS – NIGHT

Leon and Nicolas sit at a table. The bar is overcrowded. Leon drinks a vodka tonic and Nicolas drinks tonic water (Soft Cell-Numbers).

LEON

You didn't tell you didn't drink anymore?

NICOLAS

It didn't seem necessary.

LEON

I just didn't want to bring you into an awkward situation.

A song by Sioux Sie and The Banshees begins to play (Kiss Them For Me).

NICOLAS

You picked this song.

LEON

I did.

NICOLAS

Your presence in my life is awkward enough. Some silly little boy from Bakersfield who is in love with me.

LEON

I am not in love with you. I am very keen on you though.

NICOLAS

But you could be if you saw me every day?

LEON

Or I would grow indifferent.

NICOLAS

I have a hard time believing someone like you could become indifferent so easily.

LEON

I get bored with people quickly.

NICOLAS

It's a good thing we don't live in the same city.

LEON

I told you I am not going to live in Bakersfield forever.

NICOLAS

No, please don't. It's almost 11 pm. You should finish your drink, and I will take you to the Last call.

LEON

Okay.

Nicolas and Leon hold hands and quietly walk to Last Call. They arrive at Last Call. Leon is visibly upset.

NICOLAS

I'll leave you here. Call me tomorrow? Okay?

LEON

Why are you pushing me away?

NICOLAS

Have fun.

LEON

Okay.

Nicolas hugs Leon tightly and kisses him on the forehead. Nicolas begins to walk home. Leon watches Nicolas till he can no longer see him in the distance. He walks into Last Call sits at the bar and orders a vodka tonic. A young man with blond hair sits next to Leon and smiles at Leon. Leon hesitates for a moment and then attempts to smile.

INT. A ROOM AT CASA LOMA HOTEL ON FILLMORE (SF) – MORNING
(SUNDAY)

Leon lies in bed with the young man from the previous night. The young man from the last night gets out of bed retrieves his clothes which he has folded neatly on the chair near the front door. He begins to dress. Leon looks at him as he dresses. He dresses quickly and leaves without ever saying goodbye.

CUT TO:

Leon in his underwear sits in a chair and makes a phone call to Nicolas.

INT. NICOLA'S KITCHEN – AFTERNOON

Nicolas and Leon sit at the table together. Nicolas eats a sandwich and Leon drinks a cup of coffee.

Did you have fun last night? NICOLAS

Obviously. LEON

Good. NICOLAS

I don't understand you. LEON

I don't understand myself. NICOLAS

I would have left with you. LEON

I am sure you survived. NICOLAS

I would rather have been with you. LEON

That didn't stop you from sleeping with your gentleman suitor. NICOLAS

You like to hurt me. LEON

Maybe. NICOLAS

I love you. LEON

NICOLAS

What does that even mean?

LEON

I don't know.

NICOLAS

You're going to break my heart.

LEON

I hope so.

INT. NICOLAS'S LIVING ROOM. – DAY

Leon and Nicolas sit on the couch together. Leon rests his head in Nicolas' lap.

LEON

I can't promise you there won't be others.

NICOLAS

Neither can I.

NICOLAS

We won't end up together.

LEON

Most likely not.

NICOLAS

Why are you so keen on me?

LEON

Maybe, I am just lonely, but when I am with you, I don't feel alone.

NICOLAS

You amuse me. This situation is amusing. I want you to leave now.

LEON

You sound bitter.

NICOLAS

I am just trying to prevent both of us from getting disappointed. I do like you very much, and I want you to know maybe If I weren't so cynical things would be different.

INT. THE 440 CASTRO

Leon sits in the back of 440 Castro on bench drinking a vodka tonic. The club is packed, mostly older men.

LEON

Okay.

Nicolas hugs Leon. Leon gets up visibly upset and leaves. Nicolas sits on his couch for a moment. He gets up and leaves his living room.

