

Flight 2018

An Anthology of the Written and Visual Arts

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Cierra Urso / Stardust

It is said we are made of stardust. It is said we share biology with burning rocks in space.

But I say I'm more.

I say I'm what the universe is made of, whatever that may be. And I don't know a lot about this world, but I know I have a place in it, and I know I'm made of more than stardust.

I am a product of all the women before me, and those women, too, are more than stardust. Those women are made of what the universe is made of, whatever that may be.

Those women are made of moil and love, they are made of dedication and loyalty, of passion and fire fierce, of lust

They are made of more than stardust.

To think I'm made only of stardust belittles my world and all before me.

Yet I still relish the fact,

that maybe some stardust helped make me.

Andrew Rutledge / True Religion

For years I was told to bury my doubts. "Questions are not what religion's about." "Thou shalt not kill." A commandment and law; But, "Kill whom I say" is the truth that I saw. Murders will occur daily in God's name. Such contradictions are the heart of faith.

Moral platitudes protect evil men. Their justifications help them save face.

Solana Ortega / Water

I threw all my debts into the ocean Took some time on the sand Pacing into the water and back on dry land I must have done seven laps around the coast I've been on both sides of the Pacific Ocean waiting to do this I was ready to let go, don't get me wrong But it was excuse after another excuse I don't know why it took me so long I yelled at the black void, "I'm ready! I'm ready! I'm not stalling." A wave rushed over my feet, pulling me in I stood there, the tide was already so low I walked the furthest I could go The water called my name Another wave passed over again, this time at my knees When did I wander in this deep? I was only supposed to get my toes wet But I wanted to surrender in the cold And have the ocean take me wherever Perhaps I'd get so tired of treading in the freezing water and turn over Float on my back, gaze up at the stars Sink And then maybe, I'd be free I told the ocean my story Hoping they could take this hidden pain from me

I stand there, water up to my hips Take the metal, which once belonged to a demon, in my hands Take a breath Let it go I threw it as far is it could go I hope it gets sucked out in the deep I hope the curse that was once put on me Will turn over on its back Float away from me Then sink

Audrey Wong / Woven Grasshoppers

The sky was turning pink. She liked it when the sky was pink. That was the color of dawn, her favorite time of the day. The house would still be quiet as everyone was still asleep. She enjoyed the tingling sensation up her nose when she stuck her head out the window to breathe in the crisp, cool air. She would greet her little long-eared friends in the courtyard with breakfast treats of carrot heads and cabbage leaves from the kitchen. She would sit on the ground and watch them munch contentedly at the vegetables while she listened to sounds of the awakening house. Then she would have breakfast with Papa and Mama and PorPor. They always had chicken porridge with salted duck eggs and shredded ginger. Sometimes there were dough fritters as a special treat.

But she would not be visiting her furry friends or having breakfast with her family today. It was dawn but she was in her room, seated on her bed. She had on a pair of little red silk shoes with tassels on the front. The slippers were the perfect size but her feet were not. She shut her eyes and hoped the pain would go away. The house was not quiet this morning.

Mama had woken her up many hours before any colors tainted the clouds to prepare her for today. She was bathed in warm water perfumed with pomelo leaves. Mama gently rubbed the leaves over her skin and hair. The fragrance and warmth soothed and calmed her. She was clothed with red silk undergarments that had a pair of delicately hand-stitched mandarin ducks on the front, and then was wrapped in a light cotton inner dress that had pretty little flowers embroidered all around the hems. Mama had sewn them both.

She sat down in front of the polished copper mirror. Her little cloth dolls and woven grasshoppers had been replaced with a set of fine-tooth combs, complicated hairpins and red lip papers. Mama carefully brushed her long hair from top to tip, reciting auspicious sayings with every stroke. Then her hair was tied up in the appropriate fashion and secured with the hairpins. "You must remember to wear your hair up this way from now on. No more long pleats and pigtails," Mama had said. Her voice sounded sad.

To complete the preparations, she was dressed in a red silk dress heavily embroidered with gold and silver thread. The dress shimmered with the slightest movement and was intricately decorated down the front with a dragon and a phoenix that looked almost alive. She had imagined them flying out of the skirt and carrying her away with them towards the pinking sky. When Mama put the shoes on she wished the guardians really had flown out to bear her away. Her feet were three and half inches but the shoes were three. A lady from a respectable house and of desirable beauty must have threeinch lotus feet. "You have to fit into these shoes, Ling," Mama had said as she squeezed on the little shoes. "You must fit! You must fit!"

She opened her eyes and blinked away the tears. She looked around her room and found her grasshoppers arranged in a basket under the window. She wobbled over and picked one up.

PorPor had taught her how to weave using long leaves. She remembered watching, mesmerized, as her aged and bony fingers deftly folded and twisted the leaves until a life-like grasshopper emerged. She was eager to learn and practiced constantly. The day she weaved her first perfect grasshopper, PorPor's squinted eyes had shone with pride and her weather-wrinkled lips formed a wide toothless smile. She made a few more to show Mama and Papa but never had the chance. That was the day Mama told her about the arrangement.

"Your Papa and I have accepted the proposal from the Chin

family. The wedding will be held in two months," Mama announced.

"But Mama, I don't want to get married! I don't know them!" she protested.

"They are a good family with a big house. He is a good man and you will be well taken care of."

"We have a big house. I want to stay here with you and Papa and PorPor!" she pleaded.

"Stop it, Ling!" Mama scolded. "You are thirteen and no longer a child. This marriage is important to your Papa."

She had no choice in the matter.

In her room, dressed in red embroidered silk and wearing the painful shoes, she looked down at the woven grasshopper in her hand. "But Mama," she whispered, "I don't want to get married."

An obligatory knock on the door and the bearer hustled in to carry her outside. A red silk cloth was placed over her head to veil her face. The tears came unbidden and rolled silently down her cheeks as she was carried out of her room, out of the courtyard, out of her father's house, and into the awaiting red sedan chair.

The sky was no longer pink. Dawn had passed.

As the musicians took up the traditional bridal cacophony and her sedan was lifted up, she drew a long deep breath and exhaled slowly. Ling wiped her tears away and began to practice her smile. She thought about chicken porridge with salted duck eggs and shredded ginger, and about weaving grasshoppers.

Juliann Chamberlain / A-Maze-ing Life

Life pushes hard against my back.

Half helping. Half hurting.

I try not to trip from my own pace as everything begins to change.

The once straightaways have now become a twisted labyrinth.

When did this become a race?

My fear of failure is growing each day.

Always moving deeper into the maze.

The twists and turns making me feel unsure.

I think I made a mistake as the walls and ground look familiar.

I've only managed to get as far as I did yesterday.

Feeling defeated I fall.

Becoming as hard and cold as the ground beneath me.

No part of me wanting to get up,

This looks like a perfect place to die.

Zachary Jones / Heartless

You see them sometimes, scattered about the wretched fields of war. They hardly ever speak; they sit there, wide eyed and motionless until they are called upon. They all go by the same names.

Dear lord.

A desperate plea for mercy from any number of gods.

Help.

A cry intended for anyone who could hear.

Please.

A shout for a doctor that rings out over the thunderous noise of battle.

Medic.

These were the titles that will summon them to your side. If you cannot manage the words, an anguished scream will suffice to earn their attention. Then they will go to work, not bothering to tell you if you'll live or die. It didn't matter anyways. Any one of them will do whatever they can until the moment you stop breathing, and then they will sit beside your body as your soul leaves. Perhaps they will offer some prayer or hold onto whatever parts of you remain to try and ease your passing.

I think maybe they don't want you to be alone as you leave this hell for a new one. Maybe they don't want to be alone either.

The soldiers dish out the carnage. They live it. They breathe it. They thrive in it.

They don't feel the weight on their shoulders until their job is done and they go back to base. Some of them even make it all the way home before the black reaches them. The ones that cave to the horrors can be seen scattered on the battleground.

The medics though, they work in spite of it. A medic sees just as much of war as any soldier. They sit on the sidelines, looking for opportunities to dart into the fray to help either side because they believe a life is a life. They see firsthand what horrors a man can do to another man and are tasked with fixing the wounded so that the war could continue.

They are the enablers to every death that happens on that field, deaths they will then go out and try to prevent. They step out

armed with nothing but bandages and a red cross on their chest, determined to beat away the reapers hovering the battlefield like vultures with no regard for their own safety. They don't listen to reason when there is even a slight chance of saving a life.

I never understood why soldiers are the ones called machines.

A soldier will kill a man and move on. It's their job to fight. To kill. To win.

A medic will stop by a nameless body and try to save him. If that isn't possible then they will sit beside the corpse, unblinking and unfeeling, until they hear an explosion bring forth a new symphony of their name. Medics spend more time among corpses than the living. It is more than their job, more than their purpose. It is a part of who they are, through and through.

They don't feel; they don't have the luxury of allowing themselves to. Rage will not help them to fight through pain, not like a soldier. Fear can't drive them to keep moving when the horrors creep into their minds. Pride won't fuel them as they step up in the face of death and fight their enemy. They have a job to do, and feelings will only get in the way. *They* are the machines.

Cold.

Robotic.

Heartless.

They are little more than clockwork creations in a disguise of flesh and bone, created to mend the wounds they find without batting an eye. They see more value in human life than most think capable. And they terrify me.

These machines will stand above your broken and bleeding body amidst explosions and gunfire, and wage their own war on death itself.

Gladys Lemesurier / Past Tense

I remember very vividly . . .

The quiet drive home from school one afternoon when you took a deep breath and asked, "So, any cute boys in your class?" And there was. Because primary school usually comes with its share of crushes.

I remember very vividly . . .

Sitting in our worn leather recliner watching cartoon reruns in my coziest PJs when without warning or explanation you asked, "So, you do still like boys, don't you?" And I did. Though I didn't understand why it seemed like you were waiting for an earthquake.

I remember very vividly . . .

My animated retelling of one of my more exciting days when you hastily interrupted and asked, "So, why does she think its okay to date girls?" And I froze. Sometimes I wonder if you realize that this is when I stopped telling you about me. I remember very vividly . . .

Being afraid to talk to you or tell you who I am because when you sit next to me and ask, "So, how come we never talk anymore?" I know exactly why. And I always find myself wishing that this fear of mine was past tense.



Elijah Danielle A. Villanueva / Fairy



Madalyn James / Parasite

Madison Irving / Space

When I was in high school, I would walk four miles a day going to and from school. I would wake up really early, around five o'clock in the morning, to leave at six-thirty and make it to school by seven-thirty. On the way home it took a bit longer because I lived on top of a hill, and my high school was at the bottom. It was kind of nice in the mornings to have a brisk downhill walk to school, but after school, especially during the hotter days, it was exhausting (mostly because I pretty much exclusively wore Doc Martens everyday). Anyway, despite the inside of my boots being 200°F, I learned to love walking to school.

I found little things that I appreciated about walking. There was a house that my brother and I called the "Aunt Jemima House" because it always smelled like maple syrup, there was a lady who would sometimes give us orange juice on our walk home, and there were the friends we made walking together. Honestly, if my parents didn't make me walk to school my entire life, I probably wouldn't have made any friends.

Okay yeah, actually, there aren't as many positives as I thought. Walking to school isn't really that spectacular at all. I thought I could come up with more little blessings and sweet stuff to find something significant about kindness or humanity out of this daily chore, but now I'm thinking maybe walking to school was just shitty.

Actually, now I'm thinking about that severely mentally ill man who would sometimes run outside naked and sit in the dirt outside his house. I never actually knew if he was dangerous. Most of the time he would just scream and pray to his God and cry like his heart were broken. I don't blame him. I spent my time similarly in high school. Although sometimes I do offhandedly wonder if he's okay. Now that I think about it, I also remember this man in an electric wheelchair. He couldn't lift his arms very well. I'm not sure if that was the result of some sort of accident, or if he was just very sick, but he would sometimes ask me or my brother to light his cigarette. It was always terribly sad and awkward. I didn't know how to feel about doing him a favor like that. It wasn't like he would be able to flick the ash off the end of the cigarette to anywhere productive. It would most definitely land in his lap, and when he was done with the cigarette he would have to spit the entire thing out of his mouth in order to get rid of it. At least, that's the only scenario I could imagine, unless he just stopped and asked every stranger after us to help him smoke it, and if I was feeling a moral dilemma lighting his cigarette, imagine the guy who had to flick the ash off the end and then put it back in the sick man's mouth. And of course, the stranger would have to do it. You can't just say no to a man in a wheelchair.

One particularly rainy day I was walking home alone. My brother probably had band practice. But there was this man who lived right up the street from me. His name was Nick. He drove up right next to me and asked if I wanted a ride home. My house in view, I politely declined, but he insisted he was a photographer and that I should at least take his card. I took the card and, stupidly, gave him my phone number, thinking I had a modeling career ahead of me. He texted me quite often after that, asking when I was available to do a shoot. I answered a few times saying I was busy with school. One night he texted me about his wife divorcing him. I think he was just lonely, but I didn't answer. I'm not really sure what happened to him.

The thing is, I didn't have many good, or even remotely lifechanging experiences walking home. Most of the time I was just scared or sad, or hot. I was lonely in high school, and I remember even then searching for a feeling in every tree I passed and every dog I saw.

Before getting home in the afternoon, the first thing we came upon were the railroad tracks. Once we passed the tracks we would cross the bridge that was above the freeway, and then a busy street, and then we would be about a mile and a half from home.

Actually, one day when we were walking home, and we came upon the tracks, there was a train stopped, so we couldn't pass. My brother and I stood there for awhile waiting because we actually had this happen quite often. It was usually the reason we were late for school in the morning. Many train conductors would stop in our town in the early morning because we lived in a smaller one, with virtually no traffic, and they would be able to do routine checks on their train. It was kind of weird for this to happen in the middle of the day now that I look back, but we still waited patiently. We saw a few kids walking to the end of the train but we thought that was rude, and possibly illegal, so we stayed put. We actually saw those kids meet with a policeman at the end of the train so we were feeling like we probably made the right choice.

About five minutes later a policeman peeked his head through a gap in the train and told me and my brother, and a few other kids to go ahead and walk around. It took us probably ten minutes to walk the whole length of the train, seeing as it was pretty long. We got around the corner and saw caution tape and an ambulance in the distance. As we grew closer we could make out some blood and a body bag. We knew someone had died.

It was weird being that close to death. My brother and I made up theories on the way home about what happened. We concluded It was probably a drunk homeless man. There were a lot of those in our town. It turned out it was a kid we grew up with. He was just trying to beat the train on his way home when his backpack got caught on one of the bars or ladders of the train. Everyone wore his favorite color to school the next day. I think it was blue. A week later the people from The Association of American Railroads came to our school and gave us an education on the rules of the railroad and railroad safety. The weird thing was that they had no idea about the boy who died, so they would accidentally say harsh things about people getting killed on the tracks. No one had the heart to tell the guys what had happened just a week before. The men had good intentions, but the scare tactics they were using were extremely inappropriate for our school, and they probably would've felt really crappy if we told them about that kid.

There was something else about that bridge, the one going over the freeway, right after the tracks. I think I was contemplating suicide, or maybe just contemplating ending the life I had been living at the time. I remember the best two moments of my day were on the bridge. I would look at the traffic on the freeway, the cars coming toward me and the cars going away. I would think about leaving. I thought about driving to the beach once I could afford a car. I imagined cities I had never been to before. I once thought about showing my boobs to oncoming traffic. I thought about climbing up the fence that separated me from this fast-paced, wonderful portal to the outside world, and I thought about jumping. I thought about what my body would look like splattered across the freeway. I imagined the truck driver who would watch my body fall, the mother who would cover her children's eyes, and the man who would never recover from the thumping he would hear as he ran over my head with his million dollar sports car.

I imagined the free-fall. The feeling of completeness that would come with my death. I wanted to fly. I wanted to forget my fear of heights. I wanted to fucking live. Most of all, I wanted to live. I wanted to make a legendary decision. I wanted to rebel against the expectation to be conventionally human. I wanted everything and anything that wasn't normal, that wasn't a day job and a husband with two kids. The minute I spent each day looking over the freeway, was my one minute of hope. Walking forward, watching the cars run under me, I made myself dizzy with dreams.

I am a naked man screaming at the top of my lungs for someone to give a damn. I'm a sick disabled guy looking for a light. I'm an amateur photographer trying to catch a break, and I'm a young boy running at top speed trying to beat a God damned train. I hope no one tries to dress me. I hope some kid has a lighter on him. I hope someone lets me take a picture of their pain, and I hope my backpack doesn't get caught. And even if it does, at least I died dreaming.

Carlos Salampessy / The Circle of Life

Me and you will last . . . Bring none with you . . . There is one . . . And there is all . . . But all is well . . . That ends well . . .

But will there be an end? . . . Or a new "us"? . . . A new revolution? . . . They are not so new . . . Yet very much needed . . . But what is the problem? . . . What needs to end? . . .

Nothing needs to end . . . You have it confused/ Stuck in between . . . Everything needs to last . . .

Amanda Gutierrez / No You Don't

Have you ever had that one phrase given to you where you say, "No you don't?"

It seems like a daily answer that just sits in your head, like an introvert who sits in the back of the class.

"I do care." No you don't.

Have you ever had a phrase where you answer, "No, you're not?"

It's that one other daily answer that you keep to yourself, like a chameleon changing its colors.

"I'm sorry." No, you're not.

These two things have things in common, whether it's good or bad. It can hurt yet heal. It can stab the heart with a blunt thrust. It can decay within slowly knowing it won't be okay.

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"You okay?"
No.
"It will be fine."
No it won't.
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"I'm here for you."
No you won't.
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"I'm sorry." No, you're not.

"I love you." No . . . you don't.

If you loved me, why hurt me? If you cared, why wither me more? If you were so worried about me, why the hell didn't you ask me in the first place!

Why won't you ever support me in anything?!
Why won't you listen to me?!
Why ignore my screams for help?!
Why tell me otherwise of my problems instead of helping me with them?!
Why do you hate me so much!!
Why don't you love me anymore!!
Why...
Why...
Why...
Why...
Why?...
Why?!
Why why why why
WHY?!?!...

"I love you." When will you start telling the truth . . .

Jenna Robinson / Deserted

I am trapped on the deserted island of "My Mind" Where the sea of thoughts are constant tsunamis But the "ideas" tree is tough to find. Where civilization refuses to roam, Impossible to reach I assume, In the hard-shelled dome. A sign stands in the sand, "Open 24/7" For those who drift to the vacant land. The animals here are friendly, But don't stray into the jungle For what it holds is deadly. A dense cluster of imperfections The bark is made up of awkwardness, and the leaves are made of offensive blurt-outs But the roots are made up of good intentions The fruit of anxiety is bitter, not sweet Toxic, and should be consumed with caution, if not at all Like barriers of the mountains' ash tree The sun is always shining with happiness But the heavy clouds of stress block the light And leaves the flowers with a lack of craftiness The sand is made of grains of apathy Perfect hiding for the crabs of motivation Who feed on procrastination and lay lazily.

The seashells of honesty Are more beautiful than those of lies And contrast to the shells of modesty The sharks of hatred and anger That line this complicated coast Chew up the fish of pointless banter This deserted island of my mind I am stranded on Is unique, and one of a kind.

Adam Sheldon / Death by Addiction: A Tale of Two Struggles

I'm afraid to sleep these days, and I'm not sure if it's because I know that that oh-so-familiar pain will return to pay me a visit like an annoying relative around the holidays, or if it's because this could be my last night. I stand there staring at my bed, it nearing the time I usually find myself lying down to meet the same struggle every night, and I mutter to myself, "What if this is it?" just loud enough for my fiancée to hear me as she emerges from the bathroom.

"If this is what?" she inquires as if she could hear me having a debate with myself from the bathroom.

"Nothing," I reassure her. I haven't the heart to tell her the blatant truth of the situation that we've both been ignoring in hopes that it will just magically go away, or maybe it was just plain cowardice that was preventing me from facing the reality of it all. I either can't decide or just flat out don't want to admit that I was scared, terrified in fact, knowing what was to come and just not knowing when exactly.

Due to a recent diagnosis by my team of doctors, I now have what I like to refer to as a "medically acceptable addiction" to a common opiate-based narcotic, Percocet. I was told that I have Ankylosing Spondylosis. It's a rare genetic disorder that affects my bones, heart, lungs, kidneys, and circulatory system, and there is no cure for it, only treatments, treatments that are more likely to kill me faster than the disorder itself. Before the discovery I merely had to learn to live with the pain and discomfort as though it was as much a part of me as one of my arms or legs. I had become accustomed to sharing every aspect of my life with it. When I wake up it's there to greet me, when I go to sleep at night it's there to tuck me in, and when I attempt to be a functioning member of family activities it's there to remind me that I can't stay long. It controls my life and I am a slave to it. The pain had a hold on me like a snake on its prey and just like the prey, once it had a grip on me there's no escape. At least that's what I thought until a new monster moved in and laid claim to what was left of my independence. The doctors told me that I could live a somewhat normal life with the help of a little white pill, and little did I know that what they were recommending would not only vastly complicate things but put an end to what was left of my life.

I was soon told in detail about what kind of problems I was facing with my disorder and suddenly in that moment, everything I had been suffering through for the last fifteen years or so began to make sense. Strange enough, even though the details had no progressive impact on my condition, I found comfort in knowing what I was going up against, just not for very much longer. Shortly after I was informed of the disorder that now controlled what was left of me, I was introduced to a medication that, in the beginning, felt like would be my answer to not just my pain and discomfort but to all my problems. If only I had known how wrong I was, I might have been able to save myself a lot of unnecessary suffering. Now, instead of just being addicted to the pain that was oh so familiar to me, I was now addicted to opiates. Now after a long-term exposure to the medication, I find that most days the two addictions fight to occupy the same space within me, and as a result, there is a horrific and terrifying war taking place in my mind, and in my soul.

I, just like everyone else, have an expiration date. The only real difference being that I not only know when, but also how I will meet my end. Best case scenario I get another ten years, worst case, four years. And the how of it . . . , well let's just say that it's not something I can ever really prepare myself for. And in the struggle to accept the inevitable thoughts that come along with facing one's end, I now face a darker, more personal struggle. Even now as I sit here and try to explain this to you, I fight with myself over the right thing to do. I continue to be torn apart by two addictions that lead me down the same path: Do I suffer a horrible and agonizing disorder that will continue to progress over the next few years until there's nothing left of ME, or do I overdose and pass peacefully in my sleep

in the next few hours. A decision not lightly made by even the most desperate of people, yet here I am facing such decisions, weighing both choices and how they would impact those that I would leave behind.

I wonder if anyone else has such a flood of thoughts and emotions as they stand above their own bed at night. I wonder what she would do were she in my shoes? Would she be strong enough to endure the pain a little longer just to live out a few more years with me? Or would she simply count on *ME* being the strong one for her, so that she may finally have just one night of sleep. I often wonder such things, but in the end it's up to me I guess. I stare at my bed with heavy eyes, the feel of the pill bottle in my hand soaked in sweat, my mind racing with fear, sadness, love, and excitement. She walks behind me, lightly dragging her hand across the back of my shoulders as she makes her way into our bed, and as she lies there, already asleep, I come out of my troubling trance just long enough to catch a glimpse of the true beauty that I would be leaving behind. I know that in that moment that I can make it through at least one more night, not for me but for her. She would do the same for me.

She unknowingly saves my life EVERY night. She's my hero.



Joseph Quiroga

Amberly Labbitt / Be a Fountain Not a Drain

Good things manifest from good thoughts,

Good thoughts come from self-discipline and control.

I am an amazing person.

I do think of others first and have an enormous heart,

Which is why I cry so much

But that's okay.

It's better to be sensitive than insensitive.

I am beautiful.

Mostly on the inside but my outer shell isn't hard on the eyes either.

I think too much and talk a lot,

But that's so much better than being brainless and a mute.

I'm a lover, and I'm good at what I do.

I'm creative, and witty,

I'm productive and don't mind getting my hands dirty.

I love being outdoors and having fun in the sun.

I love the sun!

I love the beach,

I love exploring,

I love finding new unseen territory and learning something new

every day.

I love people that inspire me and make me want to do and be more.

I love being the fun-loving hippie that I am.

I love being a mother.

I love that I've loved and know the true meaning of it.

I'm stronger every time I get knocked down because

I build the steps *myself* to get back up again.

And I always do get back up again.

That's a lot of "I's" but it's true.

The law of attraction says

"I" am worth more and have a lot in store for me.

I can build an empire and will bring peace, love and unity,

In a holistic approach to all those who accept it.

I have the tools in which are needed to fulfill this abundant task.

I am me;

Magnificent goddess of healing and peace.

Noelle Spice / Creator Goddess

A poet once described the stars in the sky as being scattered about with reckless abandon. He couldn't have been more wrong.

In the beginning there was only darkness. Darkness, and her.

She didn't need the light because she didn't need to see--she absorbed the universe through her touch. She relished in everything she felt. The darkness was cool. It filled her body with chilling sensations and clung to the surface of her skin as she danced about-twisting her body in every direction because as far as she was concerned, there was no reason not to. The silence was her music and the blankness was a beautiful display to her virgin eyes. How long she lived in ceaseless frolics she would never be certain. Yet with time she discovered that her beloved blackness and her melodic music were not the only things that kept her company. There were others. They were not the same as her, they were different--simpler. But she loved them nonetheless.

Her twinkling laughter was soon as constant as her scampering feet but she did not know at first that they could not see her dancing in the darkness. They were misplaced among the blankness for they did not recognize the value of touch.

It was her greatest sorrow that they could not see her dance for them and could not hear the song of the galaxy. Why did they not, also, dance in the night? Why did they seem so adrift? And so she milked the first beacon of light from her breast, just for them, hoping to bestow some of her sure-footedness into their hearts. She took the lacteous pearl and with an artist's eye positioned them among the expanse--sacrificing the barren masterpiece that she had once cherished so. She made shapes and outlines among the stars and brought some of them closer so that they might shine brighter and more luminous. Her dainty fingers never faltered in their task, and every position of the stars was as deliberate as the positions of her dances. She was not satisfied with her task until the whole expanse of what had once been her beloved darkness, was sprinkled with the fruits of her labors.

Only then did she step backward and take her very first moment of stillness--to gaze upon her collection. Down among the rugged earth, hoards of people looked up with her at the stars she had carefully arranged and saw in the light her graceful form dancing across the sky for only them.

Her ceaseless frolics continued on then, for eons more. Endlessly she performed for those that did not recognize what she had done for them. And she might have dismayed. But hidden among them was a very special, though very small number of souls. They breathed in the cool air and it tingled in their bloodstream. In their hearts they could hear the faintest melody of a song, like a call to action, and in their hearts they danced.

Isabelle Stephanny Requelman / Dark Beauty

When I sit alone, I like to turn down the lights And let the darkness take me whole.

I close my eyes, Listening for the monsters In my head.

They screech at me, Yelling all kinds of profanities. I wasn't where I should have been.

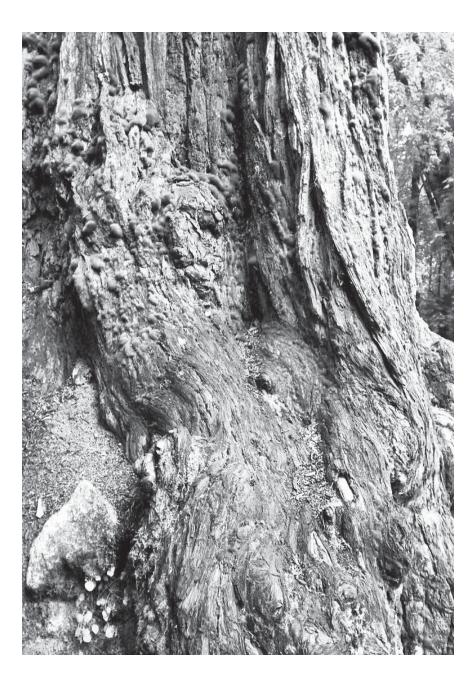
I should be amongst them, A thing in someone else's mind. Not a living being, Here in the land of mortality.

I should be dead, Free of their voices, Free of this pain.

Life is meaningless, I'll never live to the fullest, Always a half empty Kinda gal.

Marley Rodriguez / Endurance

He gazed at her in a field aglow with moonlight Their world was one of war and pain Yet their love burnt through it all with its ferocity As she met his eyes He felt a rare moment of such relief and weightlessness That he thought he might just float into the stars with her And escape this dying world



Alyssa Rietsch /Moss Tree



Ryan Ketelboeter / Snow Sunset



Angelica Monique Smith



Joseph Quiroga / Mare 682



Sydney **Bailey**



Ryan Ketelboeter / Train Tracks

Kathryn Flores / Daughter of the Dragon: The Sorceress Reveals Marty

Marty lay flat on his back after having crashed into the mirror, thrown across the room by the flash of blueish black smoke that had swallowed up Alexis and a fairly massive olive green dragon back to its source. Eyes barely open, he detected the quiet click of heel advance toward him; unable to tell if the heels belonged to a friend or enemy, his head lobbed at a left angle. Ignoring the crunch of glass, The Sorceress gently walked to Marty's side, nudging his torso with her toes. He clearly heard that familiar voice of hers so honeyed and sharp:

"So sweet, so determined. So desperate ... you have done well, dearest Meargin. You've wormed your way into her heart and discovered who she really is. Made me proud." The Sorceress snickered behind her cherry red lips as she clasped Marty's cheeks in her hand, the pointed black nails shimmering against the harsh fluorescence.

"And you are now of no further use to me. You've done your part by having Alexa and her dragon father Largonsphell play right into my blessed hands. As precious as you found them, they are more valuable to me than you." She reached into the tight grey bodice, producing a small opalescent curved vial. The Sorceress twirled it around her fingers, the dark gold liquid inside growing warm with possibility. With her own brand of unshakable evil.

Going down on her knees, The Sorceress pulled Marty forward until his head lay on her thighs. Tilting his head up toward her face, The Sorceress slipped the whole of the vial down his throat. His head thumped to the floor as the Sorceress stood tall above him, gently grazing her thin fingers through Marty's hair. His shoulders twitched at her touch. Marty's eyes fluttered, but did not open. He heard the violent hiss of her voice in his ear, plummy and daringly pointed:

"Pity that you won't live to defend her, and that she can't see where your true loyalty lives in your heart of hearts. Your betrayal of her was the ticket, darling elfin servant. Your identity, and the prize you have so willingly given up, is the poison engulfing everything you hold so dear..." The Sorceress disappeared in a brief momentous crash of thunder and magic. When the smoke cleared, Marty's eyes snapped open as he screamed in agonizing pain, unable to move his limbs. One word managed to escape his lips before his teeth clenched together in a feeble attempt to dull the pain:

"ALEXA!"

Breathing labored, Marty convulsed as he tried to forget what he had done for TheSorceress . . . handing over his best friend like she was a sacrifice.

Alexis gently opened her eyes, expecting to see Marty. Instead she was face to face with the pointed toes of black leather snakeskin boots, glistening silver pin heels inches from her hands. The type of shoes that she forbade herself to wear, lest she be caught dead in them. She willed her limbs to stretch, yet they wouldn't move. Her hands and ankles were bound tightly with shining gold cords. Stealing a look to her dragon father, he was bound the same as she. Save for the labyrinth of silver cords surrounding his snout resembling a bite muzzle for a common dog. Alexa's eyes leaped about the room, glowing white drops falling to her forehead and shattering into a million rainbows reflecting off dark gray stone. Her gaze returned to the shoes. They extended under a flowing velvet gown the color of smoke emanating from a freshly stoked fireplace. Hints of blood-tinted silk framed the neck of the person occupying the gown. There was only one word for her-stunning. Frosted milky skin caving into a deep décolletage barely noticeable until she took a breath, sylph-like hands protruding from large bell sleeves. Luscious auburn locks streaked with creamy white further accented her paleness. Alexis had heard many a story about this woman, that she was one to strike an icy fear through a faithful heart ... The Sorceress. Alexis bowed her head in utter submission; she didn't know what else to do.

The Sorceress grinned. She peered down her nose at her captive, her voice chilled with satisfaction: "Finally, a Draconian warrior submits to me. Perfect that she would be the one prophesied to bring down my carefully crafted jewel of an empire." The Sorceress rested her hand on Alexis' head, forcing it down on cold stone.

Carolina Prieto / Cereza

Deslizando mis terrores en el pozo de sueños perdidos,
El chupasangre me confunde con una cereza.
Pierdo la balanza pero el me detiene
Sana y salva de una eternidad dentro de un agujero de pesadillas
El miedo lo perdí el segundo que me toco
El cielo pintado de púrpura y reacio
Pero sigo corriendo libremente sin temor
Las inseguridades que ellos proyectan hacia mi se derriten como hielo en el sol
Mi piel permanece tibia con sabor a miel bajo su lengua aspera
No me estremezco durante esta prueba de sabor.
El dolor que antes obsesionaba sobre mis llantos y sufrimiento,
Fue reemplazado por indiferencia
Que libertad tan mas pura.

Carolina Prieto / Cherry

Sliding my terrors into the well of lost dreams,
The bloodsucker confused me with a cherry.
I lose balance but he holds onto me
Safe and sound from an eternity inside a nightmare hole
I lost the fear the second he touched me
The sky painted purple and reluctant
But I keep running freely without fear
The insecurities that they project towards me melt like ice in the sun
My skin remains warm with the taste of honey under his rough tongue
I do not shudder during this taste test.
The pain that obsessed over my crying and suffering,
Was replaced by indifference
What pure freedom.

Kailyn McKeown / Silence

Follow the bouncing ball. Watch it arc through the air before slamming into the wall, *puh*. Watch it ricochet off the floor, *put*. Feel it bite your palm. Clench it. Feel the rubber between your fingers. Can you smell it? What does rubber smell like? Everything here smells like sterilized air.

Try to relax.

I know that it's hard. Fear is welling up in you like lava flooding the cold sea. It's jarring, I know. Try to forget about it though. Try throwing the ball again.

Puh-put . . . puh-put . . . puh-put . . .

Ever notice that the loudest thing anyone can ever experience is silence? Within it, the echoes of screams swallow you up until you're nothing at all. Just a shell, like the one you're sitting in now.

Puh-put... puh-put... puh-put...

Do you remember how much you used to hate this ball? Harker brought it up with him even though you told him not to. He'd bounce it while speaking, and you'd make a game of it. How many times the thing could smack the floor, or the walls, or the ceiling in a single conversation. You got up to 156 before you snatched it away from him and stuffed it in your pocket. Do you remember how much you yelled at him?

The poor guy sulked away, shoulders above his ears and couldn't meet your eyes for a whole seventeen hours. Do you think it would have been longer if he'd come back? Do you think you'd have eventually returned it, the ball?

You didn't kill him. The meteor shower that tossed him off trajectory did. You did everything you could.

Puh-put... puh-put... puh-put...

Breathe. I know that you want to scream, and cry, and stomp around like a real child, but what good would it do? If you want to do something, try to fix the engines again, maybe you'll get lucky and figure it out this time. Or at the very least turn on your communications. Try to contact Earth again. Think about it, at the very least you could hear something other than your heartbeat in your ears, and your breath squeezing out your nose. More than that, it would drown out the sound of the fucking ball!

Puh-put... puh-put... puh-put...

You want to know the absolute worst thing about silence? It's contagious, and once it gets ahold of you, you're stuck forever until someone comes along to break the spell. Until then, it's nothing but air, and waves of vibrations that carry fragments of souls, and you're slowly being absorbed.

Do you remember that article you read a few months back that theorized what carries in silent air? Voices from the past, it said. You found it interesting that it claimed sound never actually stops, it just gets quieter and quieter over time, and if you listen hard enough, you'll be able to hear them.

Do you hear anything now? I can't imagine that you could.

Maybe it's connected to why memories lose their voices over time. Even now, you're trying to recall your mother in the field behind your house as a kid. You're trying to remember how she taught you to catch lightning bugs, but her words are muted, aren't they? You can only think them. What about the feeling of the dirt beneath your bare feet, or the cool breeze that passed through trees, making them shutter? Can you feel any of it? The dirt, the wind? Can you remember the smell, at least? The dewy wet earth of the freshly watered plants beside the house? The warm almond spice of your mother's dress? Can you remember any of it?

Puh-put...puh-put...

Silence robs us of everything over time, it's the one true killer.

Clench the ball firmly in your hand, maybe if you squeeze hard enough you'll break it, and make a sound that would explode around you. Clench it harder, feel your muscles quiver under your raging strength. Notice the whitening of your knuckles, look at how your tendons contract, your veins bulging from your wrist –

Wait! If you pop it, then it will die, and you'll really be alone.

Breathe out slowly, release your iron grip. Look out the window. I know it's not much. Everyone always talks about what it would be like to be between the stars. How much do you wish you could tell them that it's all empty? Space isn't filled with anything but cold blackness. You miss the feeling of your home. Not just the two-story house with a family about to be torn apart, but your planet.

You'd never been afraid to die alone. In fact, you believed that in a certain, special way, we all die alone. Trapped within the confines of our minds and left alone in its seas to try and outlive the hurricane. For no perception of thought is the same, so why would death be any different?

But space. It brings out another loneliness altogether. A cold one. Never will you run your hands over blades of grass in a field, or feel the kiss of fresh coffee in the early morning. You'll never see the sun again, or the moon, or hear the crashing of waves on a beach. You'll never love your wife again, or lift your children high into the air. You'll never hear them laugh or cry. Their memories already merging with the silent memory of your mother.

> From here on out it's only – *Puh-put . . . puh-put . . . puh-put . . .* Exactly.

Don't look at the clock. All you'll be thinking is how you only have seventy-two hours left of oxygen. Three days, Earth time. What you could do with three days and a planet. Makes you smirk a little, doesn't it?

Puh-put . . . puh-put . . .

Come on, try the communications again. Just once more. What have you got to lose? Hope? Hope is going to die with you in less than seventy-one hours and some change. What if you got through this time? What if they could help you fix the engines? What if you could go home?

Puh-put-put-put...

You've dropped the ball . . .

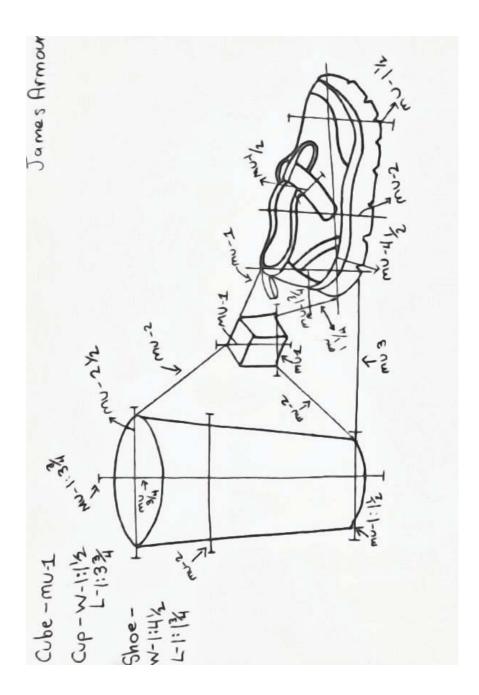
Look, it isn't too late. There is still a way out of this, but *you* have to be the one to make the change. Change or die, that's all you have right now. Either you're going to watch your life drain away in hours until you ultimately suffocate to death, away from any life at all. Or, you can fight! Why not choose that option? Get up! go on, get up! The communication system is right there. Just try. For your family's sake.

There you go, keep moving. Ignore the rapid beatings of your heart, the slickness of your hands as you press the buttons. Don't pay any attention to how much you shake with fear.

Turn up the volume.

Just static . . . I'm sorry. It feels like your heart just got sucked out into the void. I'm sorry. They lied about what they said about trying. It's not better to try and fail. It just makes death that much worse.

... Wait, did you hear that?



James Armour

Edgar Diaz-Hernandez / My Time to Shine

I'm rocking the mic

I'm five foot nine

I got the lyrics straight out of my mind

Now I ain't doing this for the money or the fame

On the contrary my friend, I'm doing this by popular demand

I go by the name of MC double E yah

I'm here to represent his name and there's no shame in that

Lyndsey Alvarez / My Hero

What did I feel In those moments of fear The blur of those minutes Is silence I hear Deafened by screams And shouts of despair The sight of the wounded Was too much to bear Up there alone He sat there in wait His iced-over heart To determine our fate Together we ran Your hand pulled me along The bullets were raining Like a never-ending song I thought I heard voices Saying praise in my head Keep running we'll make it It was Daniel's voice instead Playing dead on the ground Our bodies were shaking He lay over my back

A shield he was making We ran for our lives We escaped the massacre But the memories of this day Will linger long after We are survivors by choice From the man up above But the victims are heroes May you fly free as a dove Your light does shine bright You're an angel; we know Only the lord knows When it's our time to go As we try and understand And start our path to recover You didn't break us all We still have each other I thought I was broke But my heart still beats strong The truth of the matter is It's your heart beat that's gone

Isabel Cardona / A Father Figure Gone in a Flash

It was a sunny and beautiful day. Irene, my older sister, came to pick me up from school in the month of May 2002. My sister arrived to my school telling me, "Come on let's go, we're leaving!"

"Oh come on, I already had plans after school with my friends!" I replied. Then my sister told me that we were going to the hospital. I did not know what was happening so I said, "But why, I had plans after school."

"Our dad is in the hospital, he is having a surgery. No seas pendeja, hurry up!!" I was thinking *why he got sick, now all my plans are being ruined for today.* Then we got into the car on our way to the hospital.

My sister and I arrived at the hospital. My fuzzy memories allowed me to remember that I could not even see him before the surgery. *Is this really this bad?* I thought. The guilt started to weigh heavy on me.

I could not see my father, because they were already inside operating on him. I did not even know why he was having surgery. I could not see anything. This fuzziness was really bad. All of a sudden my sister dropped me at home.

I have flashes of memories of my sister preparing a room in the house while he was at the hospital. It was going to be especially for my father after the surgery. She was cleaning, and buying things just for him. I tried to catch up with all the memories. But now they were fading away. Some memories evaporated within my grasp, to just images of my sister running back and forth.

After all this time, three days had passed, but all these blurry memories seemed one continuous day never ending. Never on focus, until finally, my sister brought my dad back to the house. It was on the third day after the surgery. Then she brought him back from the hospital.

All day I waited so much. I wanted it to rush. To give my father compassion and love. To show him that I was not a spoiled child—that I wasn't only concerned about my own personal life. I was slapped with reality. I was there but all the things that I wanted to say, not permitted. I was not allowed to say! My father spoke, "I was told that I was going to get better. I am useless. I can not do anything. I am already done!" My sister's and my mother's encouraging words were heard in the room. I remember the room was surrounded with pain medicine. That made the room smell like a hospital. But he replied, "No! I am done, it's over, I am useless I know."

All of these words were like knives stabbing my heart. Hearing his words of life from my father. Giving up hope, and announcing that he was a dead man. To start preparing for the funeral already. He did not physically say it, but he projected it with his body language. Also with his facial features.

The fuzziness arrived again only to bring me back. My sister Irene had mentioned before what the doctor said, "Everything will be alright, your dad will make it. The tumor that we had removed and had grown inside like a plant was benign. Also, it did not cause any other damage in any other organs." That is what the doctors had told my sister. So we had a positive outlook. All we needed was some time for my dad to recover. We only needed to comfort my father. By making him feel better day by day, so he had a fast recovery.

It was the month of June, the ninth to be precise. My sister and I went to get a fan at the store. It was meant to keep our dad's room cool and comfortable. I only remember my sister and I getting inside the car. We were on our way to the store, I was in the passenger seat. All of those faded memories sometimes focus when you least want them to. Sometimes so sharp that it hurts just to recall. They make me bleed every time they pounce on me.

After we got the fan into the shopping cart, we headed to the register to pay. Suddenly, the phone rang. "Yes, Mom," my sister said. "You gotta hurry up, your dad is in critical condition!"

"But what happened?" I asked.

"I do not know, just hurry up," my sister said. "Our mother is screaming!"

At the time we were driving back home from the store, my younger sister was witnessing my father's gasping for air. Changing his facial expressions. Grabbing his chest, and at the same time holding his colostomy bag with his insides. The colostomy bag he was carrying after the surgery, and falling on the floor, to a complete silence. All of these were seen by my twelve-year-old sister. After my father's death she recalled to us how it really happened.

My sister Irene and I arrived to the house from the store. Only to find out, shocked that my father was not there. I was demanding to go to the hospital to see him. Instead, I was told by my sister Irene to stay. Not knowing that my father had passed away already. Forcely commanded to stay, and babysit my younger brother and sister, only to lose focus again, in those days.

Irene came back home with my mother later that day. I knew something was wrong. My father was not with them, and their facial expressions were not normal. I asked, "Where is Dad?!"

My sister took a deep breath, and replied, "Isabel, Sario, Vero, please be strong. I have something to tell you guys, again please be strong. Our father is in a better place. Our father has passed away, he is in heaven now."

I still remember the moment after those words were said, my little sister and my brother crying. Screaming from a distance. We could not believe what we just heard. I wanted to appear strong and all I could say even before my sister finished her speech was, "I want to go see him NOW!"

Irene told me, "Yes, we are going. We just need to get the clothes ready for the morgue."

"I want to iron my father's clothes, for one final time," I replied. Holding my emotions, and trying hard not to express them. After all, I was never good at that. Thinking that this was the last time I was going to iron his clothes. Trying at all cost to calm myself down. Thinking that this was just a nightmare. Hoping that he was going to come back tomorrow, or the next day, just like he always did.

Everything was ready. After I finished preparing his clothes, we all headed to the hospital. When we arrived at the hospital, which looked like a clinic, I immediately saw my dad's body on my right side. He was placed on a small, tiny bed, abandoned. There he was laying on a flat, not even covered with a sheet or a blanket. When I got closer to him, a glimmer of hope to a young child, or maybe my mind, I don't know, made me see my father move his fingers. I yelled for attention. Only to get a cold response from a nurse, with no compassion at all saying, "Oh that is the body reflexes, that is how a dead body reacts." Once again I was being stepped on. My hope was starting to disappear. The response from the nurse was like a candle flame. Almost like when you stepped on it. And only sizzles to smoke.

Moments later, my cousins arrived, to carry my father's dead body. There was nobody to help us at that time. It was already late, no doctors were present. My cousins arrived and were helping to carry my father's cold body. They were carrying my father's body to the hearse. Wow, it was very depressing that they not only dropped his body once, but twice. After all that, my father's dead body was taken to the morgue. From that point on, the fuzz got me again, and all good times and memories seemed to disappear. Somehow, somewhere, my memory comes back being in the funeral. All of the promises my father never completed. His goals and life ended so quickly. At forty-five years, to be precise.

I do not believe in reincarnation, I know my father will never return, and I possibly will never be able to say how much I have been missing him. But, not everything is lost. My second-born child has so many physical and intellectual qualities from my dad. I am not saying that my son is my father, or that he was born again. The small pitiful image of my dad on my son Abdiel that has a lot of my father's qualities. When I see him, I always smile and remember my beloved father. This makes me think that my father's legacy is still present. Present in my son's veins and genes.

This is my story. The story of a teenager that lost her father in a flash. Not leaving me with any time to recover, or even assimilate what had happened. Maybe the doctor's decision releasing my father from the hospital at the third day of a surgery was not the right decision. Everybody told us to sue the doctors and the hospital. One thing I know, if we had sued the doctors, my dad was never going to come back. It was over, I will never know if the way the doctors operated on my father was negligence. All I have left are fuzzy memories, and my dad's essence through my son.

Eliana Antepara / Double-Edged Sword

Dear lover,

As I lay on your chest, I hear the beating of your heart go Ba boom, ba boom, ba boom As if you couldn't hurt a soul. Your heartbeat makes me whole, and your whispers of I love you's make the ignition in my heart grow like a wildfire in a forest. The fuel, the oxygen, and the heat joining together simultaneously creating a chemical reaction of a love and friendship combination.

Come,

I'll show you the path of enlightenment like no one else could.

We can dip our toes in waves of our own true nature.

We can view sunsets of purpose and meaning of life.

During the night, we'll watch the stars align as we hold onto

the yearning of our passion.

Let me be yours for the brief moment.

In belief that maybe one day you'll be mine.

Under the fine line that you will never be intertwined to me.

We'll be just like the moon and the sun.

Never able to unite until an eclipse comes and blinds the eyes

of those who dare to look.

Stay,

Don't betray, don't belittle this love that ripples through my veins.
Your soft and loving brown eyes glimpse into mine.
You cannot hide the look that you give me.
It is ever so enchanting yet, so haunting.
You love me.
Though . . . not completely, and very discreetly.
Friend and lover like no other,
Should you leave, that is up to you.
Maybe it's long overdue, since you always seem blue.
As I give in, I take in you are my greatest strength
but also my greatest weakness.
You are my double-edged sword.

Cheayenne Gorg

Their Undoing

The fear in their eyes was ever so satisfying as justice came down upon them,

With the lights of purity there they knew they could not get out. And by the swiftness of those words, they'd forever be damned.

Sadness

Morose I be with eyes open through the night, lights flickering down to sleep themselves but nay I, I continue sullied with a downed heart, eyes open through the night.

Someone Loves You

Tears of a tigress have fallen for another brother is gone he exclaimed, "No one cares" and sent his worries away but she cared.

Zyllah LaMattery / Stay Inside

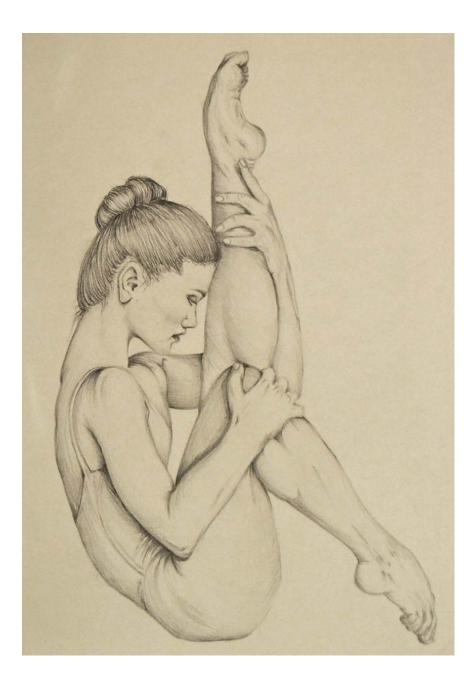
A walking corpse in the dead of night; A thirst that does not quench; Ruby red trails that shine in the moonlight;

Do not worry, do not fear, you're inside, don't invite them in; Don't follow the voice you hear; The hypnotic rhythm of your name being called is just an illusion;

Take care and stay inside.



Elijah Danielle A. Villanueva / Snow White



Madalyn James / Dancer

Oh, child of earth.

Are you satisfied?

Does that garden fill you with life? The hum of distant music floating through leaves, but the honey drips poisoned. A garden of beauty and creation. A garden where the stream flows cold and moves along the chill of an oncoming storm. Or is it that field you kneel to every morning? The one of rolling lilies and ever blooming daisies. A swirling of color, the reflection of galaxies. Is the sunlight upon your back not scorching? The sweat upon your palms glittered like stardust carved in marble. Are summer hands not littered with scars?

Are you nothing more than a flightless bird?

Are you satisfied with your cage?

And here you are living despite it all.

Tell me, sweet child of spring.

What did you feel the day the earth shook? When bright red roses faded, and evergreen vines snapped like your newfound chains. Was it fear, my budding blossom? Or was it anger upon sight of chariots, beating down your garden gates? Their moving thrones of gold and ruby, led by four white horses. Was the sight not as pure as you were expecting?

In the wake of your name, they forgot you're the daughter of lightning. With eyes to rival the sky, born of patchwork skin, colored ebony. What mask did you wear that evening?

"Of Rome," they called you.

Rome tried to harness a serpent with golden chain.

"Of Greece," they called you.

Greece hoped to satisfy a beast with wine and honey-silk sheets.

You've seen what they have to offer. It's magnificent. It's beautiful. And it is not hardly enough for a queen. You were born with your father's sharp, taking teeth. You were left ravenous. As if you'd settle for anything less than blood.

So wait, seething, blooming. Oh, lovely child of earth. Are you asleep but never dreaming?

Are you content with being lonely?

Content with being alive but never living? Even the daughter of the gods must know loneliness. Do you not crave ravaged cities and ichor-stained halls? A place carved of sorrow and peace, anguish and grace. Are you searching through hallow halls, bitter blood behind your teeth? Oh poor heart, how you long for acceptance. I'll let you in my dreams if I can be in yours. Is that kind of freedom not worth reaching? Upon its throne you would be glory.

Equal.

Better.

Savior.

Tell me, delicate rose.

How much longer are you willing to wait? You are a tornado with pretty eyes and a heartbeat. Why walk upon a path of shattered glass and deceit? Where each shard is a fraction of who you used to be, clumsily glued together in half-truths and expectations. How much longer can you keep up the façade? Beauty, your gaze speaks. The fire in your eyes a burnish red, like your mother's spring-damp roses. Did you not starve by her side? You're not as simple as they wanted you to be. Your eyes are liquid sunsets, and a soul buried far beneath. You were never meant to be the woman that tucked her ankles behind her and weaved flowers in her hair. You were made to leave blood stains on everything you'd touch. And you shall find that pretty rose vines are just as lovely when they wrap tight over limbs and shatter bone. Were you not meant to grow?

It takes grace to remain kind in cruel situations.

But darling, haven't you been kind enough?

Oh, goddess of spring.

Are you lost?

Are you drowning in a sea of regret?

You were nothing more than a rose in the hands of those who had no intention of keeping you. Does that scare you? They told you, you were art, heartbreaking, breathtaking, like a butterfly trapped in a hazy addiction. Like rose petals painted from your tears. To love is to make sacrifices, another night, another whirlwind of color. Had anyone told you anger was better than tears? Better than grief.

Better than guilt.

Tell me, what was it like to have them grovel at your feet, only to turn from the blood of your ancestors. You are a body of people that are asking not to be forgiven. Listen to the thunder of your heart. Discover you are an instrument of war. Your veins are full of icewater but mine are boiling. Lovely rose, I have stood for thousands of years and have not faltered; the day I met you, my legs shook. Don't you see? My touch is black and poisonous. But queen, you are made of deeper stuff than the earth can give. I ask, would you be the hope to my despair? The soft ray of light to filter through the cracks?

Come to me, willingly.

Be wild.

Be brutal.

Be fierce.

Hadn't anyone told you? The fire in your heart will burn you to the ground, but you fight because you don't know how to die quietly. A sweet mouth dripping red at the entrance to an endless maze. Break your own bones, bend them into stars and the shapes of the sun. Know they are beautiful. Know that they are strong. Every time you look at your veins, remember that you are built from, and kept alive by, pieces of stardust. You are mercy.

The rain is speaking quietly.

You can sleep.

Oh, child of an endless sky.

You are lightning.

You are chaos in the making.

You are the first drop in an endless sea, so vast and deep. I've seen what you truly are and I've never turned away. Scars linger from your palms, and flowers bloom at your feet. The earth shudders in your wake, of footsteps echoed in a forgotten dance. Your radiance glimmered like nebulas swirled within the darkened sky. I am unworthy of your grace. It's like your body makes forgiveness the way mine makes blood. But now it's pouring.

Of earth.

Of warmth.

Of spring.

They whisper of my cruelty. I cannot make my anger beautiful. I cannot make my anger sweet. The chains are broken, but are you truly free? In all chaos, there is calculation. I could set this world on fire and call it rain, but of all the things my hands have held, the best by far is you. Curious rose, dream shapeless dreams. Dance along knife's edge between awareness and sleep. When you dream like this, you are queen. The world is yours to bend, yours to burn. You weren't born to be soft and quiet. You were born to make the world crumble beneath your feet.

We are boneless.

We are boiling-hot blood.

You know me. Something solid to lean against, something violent and fierce and unmoving. To the stars in the sky, I kneel. I drop before you where mountains kiss the ground, and trees root and grow. Where life lives and rivers flow. Tell me you aren't hungry, but willing. Tell me losing everything was saving. I offer you my kingdom, a world of shadow, darkness, and death. I offer you my throne, a mantel of obsidian and silver, a ground of gold. I offer you my heart, a void of swirling night, a pomegranate, a promise.

For you, I kneel. For you, anything. Everything. Always.

Gabrielle Montevirgen / To Time, a Love Letter

Some days, it feels like you're an illusion Every day, I stop and stare I can never leave you alone

I ask that you never stop, no matter what It does matter what happened in the past, But the future is still to come and only you can tell

Even without me, I know you will continue to go on That independence captures my heart When near, I want to take a moment to slow down When far, I want to reach you as fast as possible

You only see me as someone who chases your tail Always healed by you, I hope I can offer some back Nothing is ever wasted when I enjoy myself with you If only we could turn back and replay it all again

Leticia Velasco / Why Me?

Don't dance like that, it makes you look stupid. Okay, I'll stop. Don't wear that, it makes you look fat. Okay, I won't wear it again. Don't say that, it makes you look bad. Okay, I won't say it again. Don't eat that, it is going to make you fatter. Okay, I don't like it anyway. Don't be yourself, because no one will like you Okay, I'll be someone else. Don't embarrass yourself. Okay, I won't.

I have lost myself.

Brandon Shane / Untitled

Life feels Infinite as the Universe expands Stars imploded and black holes promptly began Asteroids hit and planets collided Life as we know it was still hoping to be Goldilocks in an Orion Prisms of chaos and silent explosions Nothing around to see it, but the molecules that'd one day be us typing poems We sit here now after all the commotion And yet after all this time the Universe keeps expanding Nothing has changed, but everything has Life sprouts as the Universe expands

Kai Binta Steward / Brave Face

Look at me. No really look at me. See me for who I am not what the world has made you see. I'm kind. I'm kind of a smart ass. Everything makes me cry. Happy things and sad things. I feel with everything in me. I want a love. One that I know is real. That consumes me. It doesn't have to be long, I just want to know what it is to be wanted. To know someone is thinking about you just as much if not more than I think about them. I want to be carefree, to walk without my worries crushing me. It chips away at you, you know?

The world. They say you have to develop a tough skin. But I'm gooey. Inside outside. It gets to me. I know it shouldn't but it does.

Get to know me I'm not what they say I am. I hear them too but you have to believe me. Please believe me. I'm desperate. I want to breathe. But I can't. The weight, it's on my chest. It's on her chest.

It's on his chest. But you would never know that we're drowning. I can put on a brave face. You would never know. My name is never mind you don't want to get to know me. It's not important. Sorry I bothered you. Forget I was here. Or did you already?

Shirley Vasquez / Awakening

Time moves second by second, minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day, month by month, year by year, yet you're still, till the day came when you had no more energy left. In your mind you've been running from yourself. When did this run start, you ask yourself? Today you awake from the depths of your emotional darkness. As you open your eyes you realize you have been in this dark and ugly place for so many years unable to see the light, you ask yourself why? Why have I lived this life of such sadness? Your heart aching and heavy from so many negative memories. You spend your days interacting with people that have the same constant inner battles of running away from themselves without knowing where to go. Emerging from this looking for the surface to breathe again, like after taking a dive in a pool. You hit the surface and let out a deep breath followed by a cry of anguish, despair and relief, understanding you can let it all go and move on.

Cierra Urso / The Decline of Man

Was it something quick? A snap of bone, of brace, of heart. The moment the downfall began may have been gradual, but some prefer to think it happened all at once.

When was the turning point? It all began in chaos and continues so, but humankind's sole undoing lies within hearts and minds.

Breathe. The decline of man began with emotion.

Isabelle Stephanny Requelman / Falling

He is unlike the rest. He's different from what everyone claims; he's not the same as what they tell through the texts. He's more like me than I imagine. He's warm, comforting, and here. I'm not sure when he came to me, but I can remember gazing through the windows, as clear as they could be, seeing his face on the other side. I approach him carefully, the first new face I've seen in days. I press my hand to the glass, warmth flooding my chest, something so familiar that water pools at my eyes. I'm almost afraid to touch him; y fingers shake, and I can hear the vibrations loud and clear. Tap ... Tap ... Tap ... Could he hear them too? Would he come to me?

With every passing second I lose faith and the tears that were waiting to fall, fell, as my finger heavily slid down the glass, unsure of my decision. They want to wait; they want to see what he's going to do. I want to wait too, but I don't have forever. He does. I don't. I will not tie him down, if he isn't willing. If he becomes yet another memory in my mind, I can sleep at night. When we becomes more, I'm just not sure . . . not sure, how far I can go . . . how much I can give . . .

Just when all my hope is gone, I turn around and there he is, on the other side of the glass, waiting for my hand in his. I know the face I'm making has snot and tears, and yet he tells me that he only notices my smile. How could I love someone so much and not know who they are? Why does he fill me up with so much happiness, in a world with nothing but pain? Why does he light up my day when it isn't even dark to begin with? Why despite all my uncertainties do I want to hold his hand and make his day bright? Weren't these dead? Buried deep down inside where they could never crawl out? I will myself not fall for his trap, but I can't help myself; my heart and mind have their own paths to take. I don't want it to hurt, although it always does. In the end he'll leave me too, just like the rest . . . Alone . . . Confined . . . Broken . . . There will be no going back, no repairs. This is it. I have seconds to change my mind, to force my heart to give up, yet none of that happens. My hand touches the glass once again, this time though I can feel the warmth radiate through him. He's real. He's here. I want him to be mine. Why do I love him? I don't even know him.

I stare into his eyes, his iris fluctuating constantly between purples and blues and yellows and oranges. It's like they can't choose what they want to be. They're beautiful and magical. They remind me of stained-glass windows. It's comforting, he's comforting. He turns away from me a blackness already creeping its way towards my heart. He's leaving, like everyone else. His warmth disappears and the boy in front of me is no more. I know in my soul, it would end the same way . . . alone again . . . falling . . . drowning... shattered . . .

Ciara Hughes / Dear Beautiful Star

It's been a few weeks since you now are a *beautiful* star I was hurt and broken when you *left* me You were more than a dog to me, you're my first child Even though you'd begged for my attention, I played it cool. I always knew where you were, so I was never worried at all Dear beautiful star I cried when I heard the news, it took a lot strength to push through it I had nightmares because you were now a beautiful star in the night The silence came in fast and there was a time I didn't say your name However when the *doorbell* rang I thought of your barks It took a lot of me, I was silent more hardly made effort to move Dear beautiful star, I had a flood of memories of you when you were just a puppy You and I had a bond that I didn't know until you became a star It's still hard to say your name It's still hard to realize that you are really a *beautiful* star Just a beautiful star in our galaxy now You are just a memory to me as I grow older now without you I stopped crying but it feels so lonely Dear beautiful star You will be something too special to me Always you will be a beautiful star

That fills my heart with so much love that I could give When you saw me once I got home, you knew I was alright Lately, again I have been having a hard time again

because you're gone and I can't reach you

Dear beautiful star

I miss you every day

You've given me the love towards our family

that had gotten attached with you

I will see you soon

For now I will move forward from being your owner

I'll use what you showed me that takes hold in my hands

We all have memories of you

Beautiful

Star

(In memory our beloved dog Mahogany)

Marley Rodriguez / What Happens to the Readers?

We all read of worlds that don't exist Dreaming that one day we'll be sucked into them I want to have faith In the magic I read so much of One day I'll be swept away To a land of monsters Princes Demons Love And death It is childish I know Reality slams into me with excruciating force Isn't it so sad That the readers will never get to experience the magic they cherish so deeply Or will we? Is the magic really out there, somewhere Hidden away Only for the people Who imagine