Café Cultura
VOLUME V
A falling apple. The fruit’s vertical path shows Newton that gravity is the force of attraction between two objects, and his theory changes the world.

Off in a mythic garden, humanity enacts its first attempt to perpetuate sin and illusion. We can never go home again.

In the forest near Atdorf, William Tell transforms the concept of literary hero when he aims his arrow and strikes clear to the fruit’s core sitting on his son’s head.

Centuries later a succulent bite from an apple was a little girl’s first taste of freedom in her new home in Miami.

Change in all its forms—scientific, spiritual, literary, personal—sparks revolutions of progress, sometimes triumphant, sometimes tragic, leaving humanity suddenly vulnerable. For better or worse, change ultimately brings about partial or total transformation.

Moments of change are a constant around us, outside of us, and within us, experienced day to day, minute to minute. From the most minuscule cell to the most abstract thought, this metamorphic physical and spiritual trip stretches out to the hidden feelings, beliefs, ideologies, and attitudes of every human being. In the end, it marks the moment when the world and humanity accept, without selfishness, the inevitable step into the unknown.

In this fifth issue of Café Cultura our theme was the tilting point in a person’s life. Poets, narrators, painters, and photographers produced remarkable works unraveling their past and present. The Hialeah Campus students told their stories of transformation which we have captured as New Endings/Old Beginnings. Students also documented tilting points in the life of our community, which are featured in our DVD.

Each turn of a page opens into the moment when a life turns and we are redefined—beyond any stroke of luck, of any distant tree or any apple. Like the one that little girl bit upon arriving to the new city and, through that sweet nectar, discovered her life had changed.

Sometimes the most important choice we have is to take a bite.
Do what you want to do...

But do it now!!
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Plunge

ELIZABETH FERNANDEZ

Hands like anchors
Stitch together tears
Eyes sniff out truth
Nose drinks in my fear
Hands like water
Water like silk
Correlation always equals causation
Leaves fall back into trees
She settles into the sea and drowns forever
Special Snowflake never knows
But she will
Time always ends!

Me cago en la hora
Ring kisses my cheek
Anchors like fists
Jorge Cura
Vandalism
He left the water running and let it take its course to the basement. While the carpet soaked, he opened the kitchen cabinets and flung everything to the floor. Thrashed the clock on the table. Shredded the flowers, the frame of the holy trinity, and an image of Jesus holding a golden dove. Threw the candles against the wall. Flipped the sofa across the running water. Wiped the blood off his hands on a white sheet and placed it on the other sofa. He laid the pillows around the sheet. Blasted the light bulbs delicately with a dining room chair, leaving just one. Then smashed the chair to a corner of the room and positioned the rest of them neatly around the dining table. Took off his shirt. Closed his eyes and took a deep breath. Scratched his narrow chest with his nails several times. Grabbed his Spanish folding knife and headed slowly to the door. Just beside the door that led to the garden, watching the blushing orchids flash with the approaching headlights on the driveway, he waited patiently, the necessary time to make his dream a reality.
The dining room floor was an ocean of broken glass and porcelain. Lila treaded lightly through the warzone that was her home. Each step through the debris brought odd crunching sounds, and she could not help but wince. She bent down and gingerly picked up a jagged piece of a broken plate and wondered where her mother could be. She walked toward the kitchen trashcan and lifted the lid, but as quickly as it opened, it closed. Lila grabbed a piece of paper towel and covered the broken piece tenderly, then stored it in a drawer, behind the notepad and pens. She placed her empty hand on her chest and tried to soothe her thumping heart.

Lila hopped through the dining room and up the stairs in search of her mother. She sprinted through the second floor in a flurry of slammed doors and aimless yelling until she finally found her. She was in her bathroom, perched upon the marble counter with a People’s magazine in her hand. Her head shot up, and her eyes stared right through Lila for a few seconds before the spark of recognition lit them.

“Mami, are you okay?”

Her mother slid off the bathroom counter with a grace that reminded Lila of how she once was. She grabbed Lila’s face between her hands and placed a kiss on her nose.

“Of course, nena. I just dropped a few things. I will pick them up later.”

“It’s okay. I’ll get it. Andrew will be here soon. He can help me.”

Her mother smiled and sat on the counter again and continued her reading. There, in the harsh lighting of the bathroom, Lila could see what her mother once was. Her face was still beautiful, but lines and shadows now marred it, like cracks on a broken doll. She had not been the same since Ronnie died.

Lila’s sight shifted to the cold, shiny tile floor, and she closed her eyes. Her mother’s face was imprinted in her mind. She tried not to look back as she left the bathroom, but of course it was useless. Her mother always commanded attention, even before the accident.

Lila meandered through the hall and wondered if she should take some pictures off the walls. Maybe then, maybe then her mother would let go. She stopped directly in front of a photograph taken at a Fourth of July BBQ. There he was. Tall, blonde and sun burnt. Their mother had yelled at them for an hour, screaming about melanoma or something. Ronnie had laughed. Lila dragged herself away from the pic-
ture, down the stairs and into the dining room. Andrew was already sweeping up most of the mess with heavy strokes. He stopped and looked at her.

“What happened now?”
“She dropped some things.”
“Sure she did. “
“She’s just *mal de los nervios.*”
“Yeah, and Castro is just misunderstood.”

She snatched the broom from his hand.

“You look like an idiot when you laugh at your own dumbass jokes, you know? What you should be doing is spending more time with mami. She needs us.”

“What mami needs is a heavy dose of Valium.”

Their father’s study door squeaked open, and they both craned their heads to see if he would actually come out. He did, and his eyes were as swollen and red as they were the day after Ronnie’s accident. Walking over to his stunned children, he kissed Lila’s cheek and Andrew’s head and set his cell phone on the kitchen counter. Andrew rested a hand on their father’s back, the way men do in awkward situations. Lila and Andrew threw questioning looks at each other until Andrew broke the silence.

“What’s happening, pa?”
Their father replied without looking at either of them.

“I talked to Dr. Marquez. He wants to see if we can take your mom by his office sometime. He thinks he can help her.”

Lila’s face turned to worry while Andrew’s turned to hope. She stepped closer to their father and tried to defend their mother in the only way she could.

“Pa, she’s ok. I mean, she needs time. You guys are too hard on her.”
“Hard? I’m too hard?” Her father ripped his glasses off his face.

She walked back and sat on a chair, convinced that her father’s mind was set.

“When are you taking her?”
“I was hoping right now.”

Their father rose and made his way through the house until he found their mother. They both watched their father lead her through the front door, seat her into the car and drive off.

They heard a car door slam shut during the night. Andrew raced to the door and opened it with a vigor Lila thought he had lost months ago. Their mother walked towards them with
their father’s arm around her waist. His eyes focused on her face. Her gaze did not leave the palm trees’ shadows on their driveway. Upon reaching the door, their father handed Andrew a bag, which he threw to Lila. She heard the soft clacks the bag made when she grabbed it in midair and couldn’t help but feel relieved that Andrew may have been right.

“Mami, are you ok?”

Her question fell on deaf ears. Her mother, focusing on the marble tiles, did not acknowledge her or their existence. Clutching the bag to her stomach, she looked at Andrew, who was frozen still with his hand on the doorknob.

“She just needs a little sleep, guys,” their father said.

“I’ll take her to bed, then.” Lila’s hand reached for her mother’s in vain. Her father nudged her towards Lila, and she finally grabbed hold. Even as she led her up the steps and through the darkened hallways, her mother did not notice the missing frames on the walls. Lila took her to the side of her parents’ bed, and Lila’s mother dropped on top of the bedding, all grace gone. Lila reached her hand inside the bag, pulled out the orange plastic bottles and placed them on the nightstand. She made her way to the other side of the bed and mimicked her mother’s actions. She rolled over and laid her head on her mother’s chest. The slow beating heart under her ear brought a sudden sadness and tears escaped her eyes.

“Why don’t you turn on the light, nena?”

“Because you need to sleep, mami.”

Her mother stared at her through the darkness, her hands caressing her head, and played with her hair just like she used to when she was younger. Lila’s mother smiled through her drug-induced haze. At that moment, Lila sensed sunlight on her skin just like that Fourth of July, smelled the sand and salty waters of the beaches they once visited, saw the falling snow from their trip to New York two Christmases ago. Lila put her head on her mother’s breast and wondered why shards always had to be discarded.
Its red temptation slowly kills me. PULL DOWN hastens it.
Its square shape mimics the stops and turns of thought.

Want to pull
Obligation not prank.

Must pull
Like the sweet glory of popping bubble rap.

Need to pull
Like peeling that half-ripped faded sticker.

Can't pull
Fear of the five thousand dollar fine!
The terror of five annual sentences!

Wish to pull
For the strobe to flicker and give slight merriment to these white
Walls and ceilings.
For my wonder if they all will evacuate
Or simply ignore. They'll run for the latter probably.

Able to pull is a reason satisfying enough
To do so.

But a bit of mischief never hurt
Though it can burn.

Damn you, Cerberus Pyrotronics,
How your red squared siren entices me.
I became a new person the first time that I wrote a poem. As I looked outside my window, I witnessed my parents hiding all the pieces of furniture into a UHAUL truck. Destiny began to concern me, and I was taken over by my emotions. Since then I’ve found comfort in a pen and a paper, which allow me to express my feelings. I became a poet.
The walk through customs at Miami International was cumbersome at best. Our first impression of America was unsophisticated and boorish, greeted like unwelcomed visitors to a private party. The bludgeoning of emotional turmoil running through the head of an eight-year-old was enough to establish a vivid memory. The anxiety was intensified as we walked towards the immigration officer.

“Business or pleasure?”
“Neither.”
“Why do you only have one bag if there’s two of you?”
“I travel light.”
“How long is your visit?”
“Permanent.”

The agent looked up, eyes crossed and mouth half open, stopped in her tracks by the answer. My father looked down at me and told me to sit down. I watched as he explained our situation to the agent.

Some time passed, and a second agent came. This one was wearing a suit and seemed to have some type of authority. He took us to an office and began his rounds of interrogations. The experience served as a switch of disillusionment that he quickly turned on. My perception of America was altered by the impersonal nature of an immigration agent. Years later, I discovered that he was once a Cuban citizen who held a similar customs position in Jose Marti International Airport. At that moment in time he was an agent of shattered dreams.

After six hours of senseless questions like “is this your father?” and answers such as “no, he is yours,” we were released to my mother’s arms. We went from a small room of ambulant lies and suspended betrayals to a place of unconditional sincerity and deep-rooted dependability.
FRANK PELLEGRINO
NECESSITIES
Characters:

DAMIEN is medium height and muscular, early twenties
VERA is traditionally pretty, early twenties

Setting:
In line at a packed coffee house

(DAMIEN is behind VERA in line, both look annoyed)

VERA: All these goddamn hipsters are crowding a perfectly respectable establishment.

DAMIEN: I thought you hated coffee shops in general.

VERA: One, you don’t know me. Two, why would I say to meet here if I didn’t?

DAMIEN: You seem miserable is all.

VERA: It’s the stench of thrift shop scarves and Bon Iver records emanating from all these philosophy and theater majors.

DAMIEN: What’s so bad about philosophy majors?

VERA: The fact that they delude themselves into thinking that they have a future. Having a degree in philosophy is about as useful as having a degree in balloon animal making.

DAMIEN: That’s pretty harsh.

VERA: But true.

DAMIEN: So did you think about what I said earlier?

VERA: About coffee shops?

DAMIEN: No. About proposing to Alyssa. I thought that’s what you invited me here for.

VERA: (VERA sighs heavily) Don’t do it.
DAMIEN: *(surprised)* Why not?
VERA: I don’t like you.
DAMIEN: What does that have to do with Alyssa?
VERA: Everything.
DAMIEN: I know you don’t like me, but you can’t possibly hate me that much.
VERA: I don’t hate you, per say. I hate what you represent.
DAMIEN: *(insulted)* What do I represent?
VERA: Alyssa’s love of mediocrity.
DAMIEN: I’m sorry?
VERA: She only likes you because you’re the best she’s had so far.
DAMIEN: How is that not a good thing?
VERA: Because she’s comparing you to men who’ve hit her, spit at her, and called her things I refuse to say in public.
DAMIEN: I love her, you know. She makes me happy.
VERA: That’s the problem. Isn’t that supposed to be mutual?
DAMIEN: She’s told me she loves me, that being with me makes her happy.
VERA: I’m guessing she’s told you she likes your friends too?
*(DAMIEN is silent)*
VERA: She’s only trying to be nice.
DAMIEN: You’re wrong. I see her with my friends; she laughs and jokes around. She’s told me she likes them.
VERA: She’s also told me that they have the combined IQ of dirt.
DAMIEN: I don’t believe you.
VERA: Of course you don’t.
DAMIEN: If all of this were true, you’d never tell me. You’d never betray her trust like that.
VERA: Drastic times call for drastic measures.
DAMIEN: Why are you so against me proposing?
VERA: Because she’d say yes.
DAMIEN: Why don't you want her to be happy?

VERA: Because I know that she'll be happy when you propose, she'll happy when you’re both standing at the altar, she might even be happy when you have your first kid…. But sometime down the line, she's going to wake up and hate her life. She's gonna roll over see your ass fast asleep, snoring beside her, and she’s going to cry. Alyssa is going to wonder how she ended up there, in a life she knew she never wanted.

DAMIEN: You are such a bitch, Vera. You really are. Nothing you're saying is because you care about her. Everything out of your mouth are your own pathetic fears.

VERA: Pathetic? Let me tell you about pathetic. You know I hate you. I go out of my way to avoid you… Do you know how hard it is to avoid your best friend's boyfriend for four years? Really hard. And knowing this, you still call me and ask me how you should propose, what you should say, what you should do… If you knew her so well and loved her so much, how come you can't come up with all of that yourself, huh? If you know her heart like you say you do, all this should come easy.

DAMIEN: She's a complicated person, you know that.

VERA: No, she isn't.

DAMIEN: Yes, she is. She flip-flops, she likes things she hates and she hates things she likes. Nothing is ever good enough, but she never has expectations. One day she's telling me how much of a douche Mickey Rourke is and the next she's telling me how funny he can be. She says she only likes intelligent movies, yet Anchorman is a national treasure. It takes her a good hour to decide between a McChicken and a cheeseburger at McDonalds.

VERA: She likes BigMacs…

DAMIEN: That's not the point!
VERA: That's exactly the point! You say she hates things she likes and likes things she hates. Why don't you put yourself in that category? Why can't you see that she cares more about you knowing she likes BigMac's than the fact that I hate you? I can call you an imbecile till I'm blue in the face and it still doesn't get through to her. But the moment you forget she likes steamed dumplings, not fried and it's a daggar to her heart. She cares about the little things, not the big things. That's why she can forget you're an asshole when you buy her lunch.

DAMIEN: I'll never know how she can care about you so much.

VERA: Because I'll never bullshit her. She can smell it on people and that's why she doesn't like anyone.

DAMIEN: She likes me. She loves me.

VERA: It's temporary mental paralysis and I'll be there for her when she snaps out of it. *(She finally reaches the front of the line).* I'll take a medium caramel frap, extra caramel.

DAMIEN: I'll have a large, same as hers. Put them on the same bill.

VERA: Don't.

DAMIEN: Alyssa would kill me if she knew I didn't.

*College-wide winner, One-Act Play* League for Innovation Contest 2012
Sadiel “Speedy” Ruiz

ALIEN
He stared at the papers, a weary look on his face. His head throbbed; the numbers and the words were starting to jumble together. He laid the papers down and rubbed his hands over his face. He slumped back in his chair. There was a rumbling sound. He put his hands on his stomach.

The picture on the corner of his desk caught his eye. A smiling, brown-haired woman was holding up a newborn child. He wasn’t in the picture; he’d taken it himself. He continued to stare at the photo. His stomach still felt empty.

“I can hear you all the way down the hall,” said a voice that he knew well. He swiveled his chair around to face her. A blonde-haired woman was staring at him with green eyes and a tight smile. “Here,” she went right next to him and bent slightly over, her hair brushing against his cheek. He felt a slight tingle. She placed an apple on his desk right next to the photograph. Righting herself, she walked back toward the way she had come into the cubicle. Almost out, she turned back, still smiling: “I hope that can hold you over, until lunch.”

He stared, for a moment, at the empty space where she used to be. Then he slowly turned around back to the photograph. The smiling, brown-haired woman was still holding the baby, but something was different now. Her eyes. They were glaring right at him. His stomach rumbled again.

He extended his hand forward, near the apple, but instead he leaned past it, towards the photograph. He grabbed it in the top-right corner. He paused. Then, quietly, slowly, he lowered the picture frame until it was on its back.

With that same hand, he picked up the apple. He spun it around. It was a perfect, flawless, delicious-looking fruit. His emptiness cried one last time. He chomped down.
Peel orange like skin. Fingertips

Trace the valleys and

Hills of the bitter rind.

Citrus tongue

Sticky.

Plunge teeth into Pulp.

With schoolboy

Lust. Sweet juice

Diving down chin. Divine

Distilled nectar.

Glorious infusion of

Body and fruit.
2007

The first time he hit me, I knew then that I was willing to put up with anything.

I still loved him.
Yolande was daddy’s little girl. Wherever he went, she was on his heel like the straps on a pair of sandals. He was a farmer who worked from sunrise to sunset. Their family lived on a remote island outside Port-au-Prince called La Gonave. They lived in a small two-bedroom wooden house on the coast. The small home had no windows, only ragged cutouts draped by handsewn curtains fluttering in the breeze, and was surrounded by a makeshift fence.

Yolande was ten years old and the oldest of four children. Her father would tell her that she reminded him so much of his dead mother. Yolande had the most beautiful dark-skinned complexion as if her skin had been kissed by the sun. She had high cheek bones, a signature feature of her Haitian heritage.

Yolande loved going to the fields with her father. Her eyes lit up whenever her father would allow her to accompany him. They walked along the shore, the cold water tickling their feet, on their way to what their father called the Jardin de la Paix.

“Why do you call it that, papa?” the young child asked her father.

He replied, “When I come here, I feel the presence of God. He is allowing me to provide for my family and that gives me peace.”

The garden was beautiful. It had every vegetable and tuber you could imagine. They handpicked fresh green plantains, yams, corn and fresh spices. That night her mother cooked her favorite dish: beef stew mixed with okra and boiled plantain.

Four years later, during the summer of 1963, Yolande’s father suddenly died. Her mother could no longer afford to support all four children. Being the oldest, Yolande had to move with her Aunt Charity.

She quickly learned that her life would change. Instead of going to school in the morning, Yolande had to go to the nearby river to get water for Aunt Charity’s family to shower. She would also have to get the kids ready for school and help prepare meals. Whenever Yolande did not meet her Aunt Charity’s expectations, she would be subjected to physical and verbal abuse. For example, one of Aunt Charity’s favorite punishments was to have Yolande kneel on a bed of rocks for about forty-five minutes to an hour. Aunt Charity would call her names like “stupid” and “useless.” It had been three years since the
death of her father. She missed him so badly that sometimes she would cry herself to sleep. Yolande resented her mother for allowing her to be mistreated. Her mother would often stop by to bring her gifts, but material possessions could not fix her broken spirit. Yolande learned to cope with the realities of her life. She felt that God wanted her to be a restavek, “a child slave.”

One day a young man named Issac approached her. Yolande was used to being hit on, but threats of being kicked out if she ever became pregnant, didn’t allow her to ever date. Where would I go? She often thought to herself. But Issac was different. He was the only person who showed her how to love and be loved beside her father. Issac was the only person the would celebrate her birthday. He would write songs for Yolande and buy gifts. He would tell anyone who would listen, that he was in love with Yolande. She ran away with him and he later brought Yolande to the United States of America. Yolande had two beautiful daughters, Fernande, and my sister Marie. My mother still to this day talks about being a restavek.

When I read the story to my mother, she remembered the horrible feeling of being away from her mother. My mother told me that she carried that resentment for over forty-five years. I asked my mother how her situation affected her as an adult.

My mother told me, being the one to leave her home and become a restavek, a child slave, made her feel unloved, like her life would forever be filled with hardship. My mother was extremely overwhelmed by the memories of her story. She told me that as a restavek, you often don’t have a voice. You can’t complain about feeling tired, having a cold. A restavek, is like a forgotten one. My mother is story teller; her words painted visual portraits of her memories of being a “forgotten one.” I believe that my story just scratched the surface of the horrible treatment a child slave receives.

Today there are more 300,000 child slaves in Haiti. It is an epidemic across the world as well. My mother is living proof that God has bigger plans than what our minds could ever imagine.
They’ve sailed off and gone away,
Now it’s mine on this great day,
I am now lord of this Fair Isle,
Of every tree and sandy pile.
I no longer live in fear,
Of cruel Prospero’s mocking sneer,
He and his kin have all departed,
And though I’m hardly broken-hearted,
He threw away his magic, though,
What that means is--I don’t know,
How to harness all the power,
That he used to make me cower,
And so as ruler something lacks,
I cannot match dear Sycorax.
Ah, my dam! You knew the spell,
That first enchanted Ariel.
Where have he and his kind gone?
This isle’s free from spirits’ song.
I am alone; from power free.
But at last, the king is me.
Cupido y sus Quehaceres
DANIEL ALVAREZ

Tanto han cambiado los tiempos hoy en día
que hasta en el ministerio del amor
llegan los recortes salariales
como un despertar cada día.

Todo es afectado debido a la situación económica mundial
Ya el tiempo dedicado al Amor y la Amistad
Se ha reducido diminutamente
A como nos habían contado nuestros padres.

Cada día menos horas, mal salario y sin seguro
Ya Cupido está pensando en cambiar de profesión,
Lo mismo limpia un baño, arregla un piso o vuela un avión,
La economía ya está mala hasta en el más lejano rincón.

Las flechas destinadas al amor cada día cuestan más
Limitando afortunados en el ciclo del amor.
Qué trabajo tan difícil, qué apretada situación
Ya las horas son bien pocas para la comunión del amor.

Menos flechas, menos horas agravan la situación,
Porque casi ya no hay tiempo para escoger con razón.
Las flechas son al azar, con apuro y sin medidas,
Sin levantar la mirada te flechan el corazón.

No hay reglas en las parejas, ni sexo y menos pudor,
Ya las mezclas son abiertas sin barreras de tensión.
Se ha formado un revolico, nadie entiende donde está,
Solo tengan bien presente que el amor es libertad.
I was arrested at 17. My life changed. At that moment, I had an epiphany. The change was dramatic because one of the guys I got arrested with had a large amount of MDMA and was later deported and murdered in his country of Nicaragua.
It was October in those years when, in order to live in Cuba, one did not need to ask God for dollars or chavitos. It was a sunny afternoon. Kids were playing in the school courtyard. The teacher said, “Tomorrow each of you must come with flowers; we’ll celebrate the hero Camilo Cienfuegos’ death another year.” Lazaro raised his hand, “Teacher, where could I get flowers?” The young teacher answered, “You could take one from some neighbor’s garden.”

That morning at Lazaro’s room, light came through a broken window, splashing a rainbow of color on the wall. Lazaro woke up happy. He thought of nothing but arriving to school with flowers. His eyes closed, and he pictured a beautiful white orchid. He knew where to find one.

Next door, Doña Evelia’s garden swelled with beautiful roses. But the prize was her two white orchids, which she displayed in a Chinese porcelain pot.

He snuck out his back door and slid through a gap in the fence. He slinked through the labyrinth of roses and crept toward the orchids. He pulled the tallest flower from the Chinese pot and then he heard the sound of laughter nearby. He froze for a moment; his heart sank. Then he bolted out of the yard, his legs almost buckling underneath him.

The children marched by the malecón habanero clutching white flowers. Lazaro gazed upon his orchid; he thought it to be the most beautiful. The waves splashed against the rocks. He watched the play of the water come alive with fantastic shapes. The teacher gave the signal. Who was Camilo? he thought. Lazaro released his flower over the seawall; it landed gently on the surface. He stared at the water so clear that even the smallest pebble could be distinctly seen at the bottom. He lost sight of his orchid among all the other flowers that began to go under.
The pasty eye-booger holding my eyelashes shut, sluggishly cracks and dully tears into flakes as my eyes begin to open. The pull of hairs adds to the pain inside my skull, an unwanted effort to operate my eyelids. Through the parting slits, stinging light quickly shuts them back. The exceedingly slow opening of my eyes is again agonizing. I wince at moving the flesh covering my eyeballs; the pain paralyzes my nearly exhausted body. The thought of my body barely moving fucking hurts! I ask myself, “Is this what child birth feels like?” My brain cramps at posing the question. No response. I sit like a zombie for some time as my heart pulses needle pricks inside out through every pore. Disturbingly, I meditate on nothing but the acute piercing intensity as it lessens periodically until it becomes the faint oozing of blood. I feel my body as a weathered shell, slightly accustomed to the present abuse.

Without too much discord, my eyelids slightly separate to test the response of blurred refraction. I almost forget the pain. When my vision starts to focus, my eyes see lines that form a room. I am surprised at how well I’ve adjusted to the pain, so I continue the separation of my eyelids until they stop halfway. The droop eye-shape I’ve developed slowly over the years takes hold. Ideas erratically shift inside my mind. Dim gray-yellow rays of light angle diagonally through a window midway up a wall. More light shines through the adjacent window. The light illuminates gray specks drifting lifeless throughout the room, creating a dreary sense of rank moisture. Smoky thoughts form: Am I sitting slouched and a door is on the left? The thoughts scrape as glass shards in a blender.

When the anguish from thinking subsides, dull gray shadows around the room reveal the peeling walls. Bugs, garbage, and human excrement saturate the perverse serenity of the moment. I move my eyes downward, ignoring the pain. Roaches of different sizes overlap each other while crawling over me. A syringe with its needle still sticks out of my left arm. Half the mixture is still inside the syringe. I watch the blood from my arm unemotionally dancing with the needle. The blood doesn’t mix with the drug. I know what will happen if I depress the plunger, flushing away the promises of living. I have a newfound strength to finish the injection. My arm moves. I start to depress the plunger. Heat immediately rushes through my body. I feel strength returning as I continue pressing. Finally when I press all the way, I welcome the black void. Eyelids slowly close. Body relaxes. Vision hazes. Colors become darker shades of gray as they finally become black, and I sink back into nothingness.
I let go of the door to the psychiatrist’s office. My mom held my hand, and I remember everything outside being white and light. I can’t tell you if there was any wind. My mother’s hand was sweaty, and the pearls around her neck reminded me of pulled teeth. Her phone rang. “Yes? Well, no. The doctor couldn’t tell us what is wrong with her.” I listened and pointed up to absolutely nothing.
Bed sheets
Under my back
Scratch and tear at skin
Sickening words
Whispered in my ear
On any other occasion
Would be exactly what
I like to hear.
This is not him.
Fabric rips.
And elastic snaps
Tormenting hands
Claw at every inch of me.
A bloody terror seizes my heart
And spreads on the sheets.
The pain is superfluous
But remains overlooked.
Stolen dignity, though,
Cannot be ignored.
A shriek rises
And dies in my throat.
Quise creer en el Amor.
Sembré el verso de raíz a sus orillas.
Vendaval de pétalos.
El yin y el yang en la simbólica dinastía
del ala y la flecha.

Quise creer en el Amor.
Compilé ascensos y caídas
en ofrenda a la filosofía de dos en uno
y en los confines del invierno terrenal
la rosa fue dádiva y abrigo.

Quise creer en el Amor.
Experimenté ambos lados
de la energía en el cenit de un beso
(arco y lira en paradójica alianza,
devotos a la polarización).

Quise creer en el Amor.
Viví una luna en todas las fechas
que cifró la araña en el ecuable laberinto,
como ofrenda y desafío
al éxodo de soles.

Quise creer en el Amor,
entre cambios de estaciones,
con la perentoria sinfonía de las alondras
y el verbo de rodillas
de espalda a la luz.

Quise creer en el Amor;
y plegada al énfasis de un dogma,
en el que el horizonte me seguía,
fui tentación del afrodisíaco tentáculo
que redime al imposible.

Quise creer en el Amor.
Burlé el ego del acento en las agudas,
acertando prólogo y epílogo del mito,
en pretensión de la profecía
de una historia por contar.

Quise creer en el Amor,
en la auténtica dispersión del polen
en los conductos del aire
y la enajenada simetría de los opuestos
en el lienzo surrealista.

Quise creer en el Amor
y una memoria es alegoría;
tiene cuello y patas de flamenco;
picotea en el agua
corazones verdes.
Devora Perez

VISION OF THE UNIVERSE
I would celebrate holidays like Valentine’s Day when I was dating even though it was a taboo subject. Growing up in a family of Jehovah Witnesses, they never celebrated what they called “pagan holidays.” I never embraced my parents’ religion, but at the same time I never celebrated any of the holidays in their presence. My father took it hard that I would not embrace his religion; instead I ran away. I ran so hard, so fast, I ran right into prison.

It was early that morning when Tati and I had started our workout in the cage. We were an hour into our routine when the guard we called Mini Me, a female guard who stood five feet tall with a temper and disposition of a Gorilla, approached us. She looked at me and said I had to go see the chaplain. My world warped into slow motion and anger welled up inside me. I remember her speaking to me, but I was no longer listening. The same thought kept invading my mind: my father who had cancer had passed away.

Tati hugged me before I was escorted out of the cage to the walkway. The endless chain of fences and barbwire now seemed to open up as if on command for me. No one in the entire facility ever wants to see the chaplain during the day. Seeing him during the day means bad news, and for me it was exactly what I had feared since the day I walked into that institution. My escort knew this too, and I was not hurried or spoken to during my walk.

I finally arrived at the chaplain’s office, and I was let in with no escort, another bad sign. The chaplain sat behind his desk and looked at me with the eyes of a father who only wished he could take his son’s pain away. He told me to take a seat and to call my mother. My mind was racing. I hadn’t even noticed I had dialed the number home and was brought out of my fog when I heard my mother’s voice on the other end.

My mother was crying when she picked up the phone, and that was all I needed to hear to confirm that this truly was the worst day of my life. I cried… the only time a grown man in prison is allowed to cry without anyone thinking he’s gone soft. She told me that my father had
looked up at her after his breakfast that morning, smiled, then closed his eyes, and he was gone. My father was gone, and I couldn’t go home for the funeral. My mother made me promise not to blame God or myself.

I was taken back to my cell immediately after the phone call. I sat feeling regret and anger for not being there for my father at the end of his life. I would never be able to say, I’m sorry. I would never see him smile at me, hug me, laugh with me.

Six years later while writing this and reading it to my mother, she asked me why I had left so much out of my story. I really did not know what she meant until after hearing the detailed accounts from my mother. For the past six years, I had buried the accounts of that day. I told my mother I felt the importance of the story was to remember my father. She told me I was wrong. She told me the importance of the story is to heal my broken heart and forgive myself. She said, “I know you have never stopped thinking about your father, but you have never forgiven yourself. Your father always loved you. He was proud that you were his son. It didn’t matter about the choices you made, right or wrong. Even when you were an alcoholic and ended up in prison, he never stopped loving you. All he ever wanted for you was to be happy with no regrets.” I know now her words to be true.

I had chosen not to remember the last moments of my father’s life, hiding from the pain of guilt and shame. Today I forgive myself for not being there the day he passed away.

When I first started the journey of writing this story, the last thing I thought would happen was the realization that I’m not the man I used to be, but I have become the man my father wanted me to be. Today I no longer drink, and even though I still do not embrace my father’s religion, I do accept God into my life. I believe he has forgiven me. Today I forgive myself, and I am proud to be my father’s son.
Early in the A.M. New Year's Day 2012

So what are you studying?

The language of drawing stories.

Well what can you do with that?

I've been thinking that same thing. I can draw portraits and realism. Stories at our Columbia Club.

There's always somebody who wants to tell a story who doesn't know how to draw.

That's great.

I have talents and I do stories under each name.

One of those names is called P.O.V. And that's...

...you're driving.

Suddenly somebody cuts you off.

What would you do?

Would you react?

and/or

What do you say?

Silent moment change in handwriting read right.

One day you're driving and a car in front of you's going a lot slower than the speed limit...

Be Safe...

...and put left turn signal.

Lean Forward...

...and check all three mirrors.

You say "Oops!"

You don't cut somebody off.

It happened to you.

next time somebody cuts you off, do you connect both scenarios and understand it could be you in that other car doing the cut off at this very moment?
The Universe is at Your Command

Lady walking by the dumpster

Point of view

She's walking this way!

with dumpster on left

bird carrying chicken wing film

from "behind" the dumpster

bird settling near cars

The line connecting different kind of stories may be in silence or something else

Why are we here?

Are we doing anything?

Did you see what happened?

he comes out

Then she comes out

and goes to the kitchen

She stops and looks at him

"So what we saw and I described so you could be a story?"

She sits next to her friend

Then she turns around, looks at her friend, smiles and starts walking towards the house while talking off her arm and she says to her friend: "I think it went great!" and puts the phone down as she sits next to her friend...
“Tick-tock go the clock,” Adam said to himself.

“Uh huh. Sure it does sweetie,” mumbled Natalie.

She shoved a client complaint form away out of sight beneath a stack of papers and leaned back with a heavy sigh. Natalie rubbed her temples and shut her eyes briefly, trying to enjoy the soothing hum of electricity which flowed freely through the sea of cubicles. Nothing she did could keep her preoccupied enough. All the calls she had to make, the reports she had to fill out, and meetings to set up took a backseat to that gnawing question in her mind. Would he know?

Natalie eyed the clock at the bottom of her computer screen, and the corners of her mouth twitched. It was 10:00am. Any minute now.

“I wanna go home,” muttered Adam. He glanced up at Natalie, and she couldn’t help but feel sorry for the bored little boy. He lay comfortably on his stomach near her feet, biting his top lip absent-mindedly. He clutched a green crayon and scribbled awkward shapes over the thick black lines of a dinosaur coloring page.

“But I thought you were excited to see mommy’s job?” she said.

Adam ignored the question and returned to coloring. There were much more pertinent things in the world than her question, like T-Rexes, apparently.

A familiar voice sounded, and Natalie instantly straightened in her seat. She tugged at the end of her blouse and snatched back the forgotten form from her desk. Natalie could hear her heart pounding as she looked nervously to the little boy on the ground.

“So that’s the little man?” said an amiable voice. Rob half-leaned on the entrance of the cubicle and tossed some files onto Natalie’s desk. Out of habit he gingerly nibbled on the skin of his top lip.

“Yes.” It was all she could muster.

Adam, who up until that point had been preoccupied with coloring, was standing and watching the two adults intently, trying to grasp the gist of the conversation.

“It’s funny; he doesn’t look much like you. Then again, Nat, you don’t look like anyone in your family either if I remember right,” said Rob.

“Nope.”

“I bet he looks like your husband.”

Rob’s eyes crinkled as he smiled, and he reached over to ruffle Adam’s hair.

“He does.”

He didn’t.
SADIEL “SPEEDY” RUIZ
VELOCITY
Seeing you right before my eyes getting handcuffed and taken into a cop car.

You were my only support left on this planet, and now I have to visit you behind a glass window with a limited amount of time to talk. I really wish you had made different choices. I miss you.
ANI GONZALEZ
LADY DAY
Cuando el director salió de la oficina, la puerta se mantuvo unos segundos en movimiento hacia adentro y hacia afuera, en un lento e interminable mugir de los goznes de falso acero oxidado.

- Bueno, a lo que vamos. El muchacho colocó las carpetas sobre la mesa.
- Estos son los informes que piden, y estas las cuentas que se deben cerrar.
- Déjalos ahí, después los reviso, —dijo la mujer sin apartar la vista de la ventana.

El muchacho caminó alrededor de la mesa tratando de colocarse entre la mirada perdida y la ventana iluminada al fondo.

- ¿No oíste nada? Acaba de decir que es urgente, que nadie se mueve de aquí hasta que no esté completo.
- Por favor, ¿podrías apartarte un poco? El se quedó observando a la mujer que se movía de un lado a otro detrás del escritorio.
- Es un mal día para todos, Natalia, tampoco hay que exagerar como en los partes meteorológicos.

Se inclinó un poco hacia ella bajando el tono.

- Sigue lloviendo y el tráfico es terrible.
Ella mostró un rostro serio, quizás triste.
- Mi vida se ha vuelto un infierno,
Manuel. Al menos abre los ojos.
- Tranquila, Dios vive del otro lado, mi amor.

Ella observó alrededor con expresión asustada.

El muchacho hizo un gesto de cansancio y regresó a su silla del otro lado del escritorio. Abrió cada carpeta colocando en grupos diferentes las hojas de un mismo color. Ella volvió la vista a la ventana ahora nublada por la tarde de afuera y el aire muy frío de la oficina.

- Mientras esté aquí voy a cumplir bien con mi trabajo. Tengo casa que pagar, tengo hijos, tengo cuentas y deudas.
- Tienes mujer que mantener.— Lo dijo sin apenas mover los labios.
- Tengo que seguir adelante.— El muchacho respiró profundo. —No es mi culpa. El mundo es demasiado redondo para no rodar.
-Hace tiempo estarías de nuevo embarrado de grasa y mugre en algún taller por ahí, que es donde te mereces estar.

El muchacho levantó la cabeza con el rostro pálido y los labios temblorosos.

-Voy a estar, y voy a vivir tranquilo. En cuanto termine el mes me voy.

-Pues creo que sí, que debes hacerlo. El muchacho tomó dos grupos de papeles y fue a ponerlos frente a ella.

-Estos son los del trimestre. Yo me encargo de los demás.

La mujer quedó mirándolo a los ojos.

-Por mí puedes tirarlos a la basura, ya acabe por hoy.

El muchacho sintió a su espalda un largo y triste silencio de oficina.

-Te pido que no lo hagas, por favor.

-Qué me importan los informes ni el dinero ni lo que él piense. Ni siquiera tengo que seguir en la mentira, en un final será lo mismo aquí o en la casa.

El muchacho miró cuidadoso al fondo de la oficina y luego fue a sentarse sobre una esquina del escritorio.

-No te conviene eso, piensa bien.

Ella alzó la vista poco a poco hacia él. Tenía los ojos húmedos, la mirada apagada, el cerquillo colgando dispuesto sobre la frente hermosa.

-No hay nada peor que tener que arrepentirse de haber hecho algo que uno siempre quiso hacer.

El muchacho la vio levantarse, arreglar la blusa, tomar el bolso.

-Pensó en detenerla pero sentía miedo.

-Nathy, a lo mejor podemos arreglarlo, ponte en mi lugar.

La mujer lo miró a los ojos.

-Voy a ponerme en el mío, Manuel. Es lo único que puedo hacer por mí.

Caminó despacio hacia la puerta.

-Pero duerme tranquilo, con suerte va y puedes seguir en ese rincón un tiempo más,- dijo antes de desaparecer con el ruido quejumbroso del metal herido.
When I was a boy, I was treated as such an
evil man, because only reprehensible beings
were sent to prison. Man can’t see his own face
without a mirror; likewise
I could think of nothing but sink deeply into thoughts.

When I was a boy, life became pregnant with conflicting insights.
Here and there shadow
thoughts invaded my kingdom, like illusions approaching
the realm of darkness, death victorious.
I could think of nothing but hateful desires.

When I was a boy, freedom burned under
descending cliffs, solemn moments,
for those rocks decay like eternal
truth; bare feelings stood upon the summit.
I could harbor nothing but evil desires.

When I was a boy, the sun rose sublime,
majestic, above those dressed olive-green
burned by eyes filled with fiery hate. One hand attempted
to restore harmony according to natural laws.
I could think of nothing but life as the victor.
The coach separates the two gridlocked players. “Enough!” barks the coach.

“Dirty rat. He can’t play,” says Jim, the senior starting linebacker. He rubs his battered knees.

“You bitch more than my baby sister,” retorts Mike. He is the sophomore who took over the running back position after the starter ditched the team for a more athletically prestigious school.

“Quit the petty fighting, let’s get back to our scrimmage,” growls the coach.

His face and shirt are drenched with sweat. Players, coaches, assistants, even bystanders, seem to sweat profusely under the sun’s blistering rays. The players return to their original formations. Everyone is dirty. Some are even bleeding. They are positioned, crooked, shaky, jittery, on the verge of collapsing. It is the final play of the two-hour practice.

“Everyone wants to take a sweet break. Execute it properly, and y’all can leave,” says the coach. The words are like music to the ears of the players who want to shower and head home. But as the team’s quarterback yells out incomprehensible orders, Jim has his eyes set on Michael, his only target.

“Hike!” yells the quarterback. Everyone moves in sync, Jim running towards the bulky linemen like an angry ram. He spots a gap made for Michael, who just received the ball. The two are on course for a collision. A resounding boom from the contact was audible. Michael rushes for positive gain. Jim lies on the ground like a crushed insect. Everyone is content, happy. Practice over. Time to go. Jim gets up despite the pain and obvious defeat. He sees a small boy with a cap and earphones, probably the coach’s son.

“Everyone. Huddle,” growls the coach. “Fantastic practice, gentlemen. There is no doubt and no excuses for tonight’s game against our rival, St. Peters High. We will prevail and get that win. I expect the best from everyone.” He also adds, “By the way, great performance, Mike. You showed us the talent you have and the amazing plays you are capable of making.” His growling voice makes it difficult to distinguish his mood, and if it weren’t for the smile, it would be hard to know whether that is a compliment or not.

The coach disengages the huddle, and everyone marches on to the locker room, everyone except for the coach’s former favorite, Jim. As he limps to the school, the coach catches up.

“I need to see you in my office. Urgently,” Coach says. He then rushes leaving the slower Jim behind. After what feels like a mile’s trek, Jim gets to the coach’s office, feeling like a
worker who might receive the pink slip.

“Son, take a seat,” says Coach, sitting in his desk.

“Is there a problem, Coach?”

Coach growled pitifully. “I didn’t like what I saw from you this afternoon. You played slow, too slow. I considered benching you for tonight’s game, but we have few veterans left on this team, so I decided not to. In addition to your slow speed, looks like you’re also developing a quick temper. This is a make or break game, bust your ass, or bust your future, son.”

Jim, his eyes staring into nothing, steps out. His burden keeps increasing, like the heat inside an oven.

He goes to his favorite locker spot, a place he held throughout his entire student football career. He opens up and sees all kinds of trash: crumpled paper, dirt, grass, bandages, notes, a picture of his ex, a copy of *The Old Man and the Sea*, and a notice of failure from his math class. Solemn, he sits and ponders, his limbs throbbing from the arduous practice he just completed. He wonders why everyone is taking a shower if they’re only going to be doused in a mixture of sweat, sod, and maybe blood again tonight. Maybe they just want to look good in the pictures. Jim notices a commotion in the corner. Mike, all brash and pumped, steps on top of the bench and yells, “All you playas stand your ground tonight, do your thing and pop heads, offense and defense, the win is ours, as long as you don’t play like that slouch!” Mike points at Jim, and the locker room chuckles. Jim stops paying attention to Mike’s raucous speech and goes back to dressing up for the game.

“That kid is really annoying,” says Terrelle, Jim’s close friend and fellow linebacker.

“He’s immature,” Jim replies.

“Win or lose, I just need to get my stats and make highlights for the recruiting tapes. Hey, I better see you taking care of business,” Terrelle says.

“Today, Mike was going after my right knee during passing plays, and on one of them, his helmet bashed my right knee. I’m pretty sure something got messed up inside there,” Jim says.

“Why don’t you see the trainer?”

“Cause he’ll tell coach to sit me out, and I gotta play tonight,” Jim says. “I’ll just wrap some bandages around my knee.”

“Bus is here. Go,” Coach barks. The excited bunch grabs all their equipment and goes to their transportation.

The bus arrives at their destination. Familiar sights: the archaic stadium where their grandfathers probably played, the bright lights, the plethora of colorful and noisy
people, squawking and showing off their bright school colors like tropical birds during mating season. The same routine: go inside the fetid locker room, review your game plan, focus and stay calm, see the trainer for a bandage or a shot of “energy,” get together with your teammates and rush the field like the running of the bulls in Pamplona.

“Guys, you should already know what to expect. Let’s end this damn day with a sweet bow, boys,” growled the coach.

“Oh, and one more thing, a little change up here. Mike, I need you to do triple duty, play special teams, running back, and line backer alongside Terrelle.”

“I got The Chump’s spot,” barks Mike, jumping up and down like an elated Jack Russell Terrier.

Jim is stone cold petrified; his eyes swell up, throat dries, his mind lost.

The coach tells his team to get on the field. He passes by Jim.

“Hey kiddo, put this hat on and watch,” his coach said as he hands Jim a hat with the school’s emblem on.

The whistle blows, and the opposing team kicks off the ball. Mike catches the spiraling ball and starts waltzing around the field. He glides into the opposing team’s field, and as he tries to evade defenders, the opposing kicker clumsily aims for his leg and twists it awkwardly, like a scrawny man hanging on to a high pressure fire hose. A large distressful screech is hollered. The entire team encircles the immobilized, aggrieved player. Teammates assist in lifting him, Mike’s face showing agony. His facial expression resembles that of a child after getting spanked.

While the entire team looks on, Jim sits quietly with a smile, remembering that word he learned in his world religion class that spoke about Hindu and Buddhism earlier today.
Winter's Echoes
MAC DINNEEN

after Robert Frost

I have never read a poem sadder,
For no other has ever been so clear,
About so sad and sadly true a matter,
Articulating that which I most fear.

For if it’s so, that “nothing gold can stay,”
A thought arises that I can’t get past,
If even gold itself will fade to grey,

What is the point of things that cannot last?
With that in mind I, fearful, wonder of,

The point of all my work, which seems for naught,

If my labor’s fruit will wither, or love,
If those loved dear will die and be forgot.

The truth of life is all things melt like frost,
Then time ensures the memories are lost.

Second Place
Fred Shaw Poetry Contest 2012

College-wide winner, Poetry
League for Innovation Contest 2012
Characters:
LIAM is in his early twenties.
JONATHAN is in his thirties.

Setting:
Inside a moving car

(One man is driving a car while his brother rides in the passenger’s seat)

LIAM: I can’t believe he gave you the car!
JONATHAN: He gave you the house.
LIAM: I never wanted the house. I worked with him for years on this car!
JONATHAN: You and I both worked on this car. Don’t get like this. He’s dead and you have a house to your name. The house is worth more than this goddamn car anyways.
LIAM: You want the house? We can trade, you know?
JONATHAN: No.
LIAM: C’mon! You wouldn’t want his house?!
JONATHAN: Why would I? You don’t want it.
LIAM: You’re older! Please, give me the car and take the house. You are going to need it anyways, right? You’ll start a family soon.
JONATHAN: I can’t believe you are talking about this! Dad hasn’t been in the ground for a week and this is what you’re thinking about? His old car?

(Liam looks down at his hands and shrugs)

LIAM: What else are we supposed to talk about?
JONATHAN: I don’t know. Normal stuff. (Pause) How’s school going?
LIAM: School?! It’s college. College. College is fine I guess. I think I’ll graduate in about two years.
JONATHAN: That’s good. Are you staying in town after graduation?
LIAM: Yeah. Why would I need to leave?
JONATHAN: To go explore? Become independent? Something like that?
LIAM: I’m independent whether I stay or leave. Dad is gone, Jon. No one is left here.
JONATHAN: Yeah but… (Pause) You’re right. Stay here.
LIAM: Well, what are you going to do with the car?
JONATHAN: Sell it? If I can’t sell it whole I might chop it and see if there are any pieces I can sell by themselves.
LIAM: Sell it? (Liam puts a hand on his forehead to wipe off the sweat that has collected there) Of course you would.

(Long pause)

LIAM: Yeah, well, dad never thought you were going to come back home you know? Not even for his funeral.
JONATHAN: He never forgave me for leaving, did he?
LIAM: Apparently he did. He left you the car.
JONATHAN: I suppose he left it so I can just drive back out of here, huh?
LIAM: I wouldn’t put it past that old bastard.

(Jonathan laughs and Liam rests his head on the side door window)

LIAM: You’re not going to sell the car, are you?
JONATHAN: Nah, this car might outlive us all.
Drill Seed. Caged.
Tear out. Brand
It.
Shape
It.
Twist
It.
Force

It. Kiss
Gently. Shape
Smile. Drown
Desire.
Domesticate

It. Stitch eyes.
Sing
To it. Feed
Lies. Stitch lips.
Curb
Appetite. Box it.
Blame it.

Abandon
It.
Wait to be drilled.
Characters:

VICTOR is a young college student from Texas, hungover from partying the night before.

MR. C is his physics professor.

Setting:

Professor's office

VICTOR: May I come in, Mr. C?

MR. C: Ah, Victor. How are you? What happened? We missed you this morning.

VICTOR: Yes, that's actually what I wanted to talk to you about.

MR. C: Well, come on in, son; but before you begin, I should have you know that I am allergic to bullshit, so please spare me the lies.

VICTOR: (Chuckles)

MR. C: So go ahead, son, tell me. Why did you miss the final test this morning?

VICTOR: Well, you see Mr. C, over the weekend I took an unexpected trip down to Miami to visit my sick grandmother because she was hospitalized, and I couldn't get a flight back home until this morning.

MR. C: I see. But you obviously had access to a computer.

VICTOR: Yes, I did, sir.

MR. C: So why didn't I receive an email?

VICTOR: Umm…
MR. C:  AAH-CHOO!
VICTOR:  I would have sent one, sir, except that...
MR. C:  AAH-CHOO!
VICTOR:  Did you not get the one I sent on Saturday?
MR. C:  AAH-CHOO!
VICTOR:  I meant to, sir, I just had a lot on my mind with my grandmother’s condition and all.
MR. C:  How is she now?
VICTOR:  Not great. I would have stayed had finals not been this week.
MR. C:  What was wrong with her?
VICTOR:  Alzheimer’s?
MR. C:  AAH-CHOO!
VICTOR:  Alzheimer’s.
MR. C:  AAH-CHOO!
VICTOR:  She had an infection.
MR. C:  Ooh, what kind of infection?
VICTOR:  Uhh, a really bad one.
MR. C:  AAH-CHOO!

VICTOR:  On her toenail. It was so bad… pus and blood everywhere.
MR. C:  AAH-CHOO!

VICTOR:  On an incision wound, it got really bad.
MR. C:  What was the incision wound from?
VICTOR: From a recent surgery.
MR. C: Oh, that’s serious! What kind of surgery did she go through?
VICTOR: Umm, an episiotomy I believe.
MR. C: AAH-CHOO!

VICTOR: Umm, it was like a “something-otomy”
MR. C: AAH-CHOO!
VICTOR: A hysterectomy
MR. C: Oh. Wow.
VICTOR: Yeah…
MR. C: So what do you propose we do now Victor?
VICTOR: Well sir, I was hoping that you would allow me to complete the final exam, or any other assignment of your choice, in order to make up the grade for the missed exam.
MR. C: Okay. Since you had such a hard weekend, I suppose I could make an exception this time. Have a seat and we’ll get started. You will have an hour.
Mr. C hands Victor a sheet of paper and sets a timer for “an hour” *(which is really a minute)*. Victor takes the test, sits down, and immediately begins working on it. After thirty seconds Mr. C sneezes.

MR. C: AAH-CHOO!
VICTOR: Bless you.
MR. C: Thank you, Victor.
VICTOR: You’re welcome, sir.

MR. C: Okay, Victor, time’s up.
VICTOR: Thank you so much, Mr. C *(Hands over the test)*, and I’m sorry for any inconvenience that this may have caused for you.

MR. C: No worries. I was your age once too Victor *(he says without looking up at Victor)*. Make sure you drink plenty of fluids and take some Tylenol. *(He looks up at Victor)* Run along now.

*(Blackout)*
My belly roars in Lion’s tongue.
It howls, not in territorial dispute, but at sight of its empty depths.
My buds taking the clamor as command, ready to salivate at thoughts of consumption.
Vision picturing the vivid
Sizzling of cooking steak.
Benihana the cook.
The beastly roar growing louder, only way to fend for its turf.
Ears hear the mirage of a sweet ding from a triangular bell.
The lion ponders on why I skimp him out.
Unable to speak, my tongue slips on the pools of saliva.
The lion shouts, “Lo que hace falta es jama!”
The weakening growl mirroring its will.
King of the bowels now cries then commands.
The cries ripple through my entire body
Striking Lito in his very bones.
That heavenly steak advancing closer and closer to the lion’s den.
A weaning cub now waits obediently in the depths.
The steak flips and spins followed by a bow.
The cub the same, through a flaming hoop instead.
Nothing rewarded for the effort,
“Por favor lo que falta es jama.”
Knife and fork battle cry to the frontlines,
“Jama!”
Depths now full of prey.
SADIEL “SPEEDY” RUIZ
THESE ARE NOT THE RIDES YOU’RE LOOKING FOR
He held me in his arms. We tumbled in the bed. I kept trying to pull away. His legs were so powerful. I began to panic. I screamed. He let go. We were never the same.
Santa’s lap
Warm, inviting,
An imposter. He
Is the janitor.

Mother mouths
Smile, pretend,
Sit straight. She
Needs the memory

The suit
Noxious, synthetic,
That smell. Eyes
Well up.

Smile. Click.

Daddy always said
Never sit on another
Man’s lap.
The sky seemed so much clearer and closer here, maybe due to the elevation. I felt as if I were to reach out my hands, I would be able to touch the clouds. The colors so vivid, I was dumbfounded. The soil was rich; it was visibly obvious that it could nurture any plant. Was I not in the ghetto here? Amidst all the mud and tin houses, there were colors that I had never seen in America. This foreign place was the land of my parents. Tearing eyes from my surroundings, I focused on the matter at hand.

The old lady was sitting on a wooden rocking chair six feet in front of me. I tried to breathe and hoped the generous burst of fresh winds would not stop. I did not want to be here. I felt like a coward for coming, when I promised myself that I would never see this woman. I had already accepted the fact that I would let my hatred fester in my heart like an open wound for the rest of my life.

I tried to recall when this hatred began. It was about three years before, on a Sunday night while running errands. My mother suddenly broke down like a child in the car. The muffled sounds she made as she sobbed reminded me of when I used to cry. I tried to swallow hard to avoid looking at her in this vulnerable state. I tried to make my heart turn to stone, my stupid attempt to be strong for her. How I swore to hate her for inflicting such wounds in my mother’s heart. I would never forgive her. My exact words were, “Mom, not even a bitch leaves her pups! What right did she have to give you away? A damn animal has more common sense than she did!” It’s incredible how fragile and fickle a heart is, yet strong at the same time.
She looked at me with red eyes, but what was most shocking was a look that spoke pity. Up to this day I cannot comprehend the dimensions of my mother's heart. She never spoke ill of her biological mother.

I sat down observing this woman in her late sixties as she spoke to my family. The sun had not been kind to her; she was about ten shades darker than my mother. I was disturbed by the fact that she looked identical to my mom, only much older. They had the same forehead, eyes, lips and long straight black hair. Everything! It was revolting. She wore a sleeveless blue floral dress with her black hair picked up in a white clip. Her right leg was missing; she recounted how a bus ran over her leg. She started to reveal her past; she began to cry, those memories still fresh to her. More than once her grandmother tried to kill her by drowning her. She mentioned that she was abandoned at the age of twelve and forced to wander the streets. She was a child trying to survive, and so she had many children that she gave away, including my mother. She was broken. As she stood on one leg and held my mother, she asked for forgiveness. They both cried.

I sat looking at this woman in disbelief. I pitied her. My eyes welled up, and I was angry. It hurt me that I hated her for so many years, but my hatred was misplaced. Life had not been kind to her. What could she do? In old age she was trying to make amends. She received the forgiveness that she longed for. A month after coming back home, we received news that she had passed away.
Mother moon, frigid and pale
you raise the daring dead
carcasses of those like Sylvia Plath
from worm-filled coffins.
Mother, you cold-hearted lover, you
tumultuously tender and black,
lack the touch of a thousand suns.
Claws at the end of your blue grey hands
that rip through the skins of men
devouring each one of them
from neck to groin.
Emasculating men is your pleasure,
oh mother, how you enjoy causing terror
you silly withered corpse you.
With a wicked smile and silvery eyes that hypnotize
luring are your ways
You wretched widow spider you,
Leaving bodies to decay.
And are you happy now, Mother? On your self-built pedestal
in which you sit alone,
with the bones and skin of tortured men
tied around your neck.
A traumatic illness to my best friend. Losing her meant losing my family, my teammate, everything. She taught me how to appreciate the fullness of life. She was 15, and I was 14. She died January of colon cancer.
Lost but in
formation
Over-burdened with
anticipation
Ignorant
of your creation
But filled with determination

A determination
fueled by society’s goals
Weighing
heavily
Regardless of the toll
To be paid via the cost of time

Time which
instead, I choose to write this rhyme
In the hopes that one day,
you too will be found
Found by yourself

Before you’re put in the ground
Out the window stands the old clock tower,
The minutes tick away as if seconds,
The hand draws close to the fated hour.
The typewriter on my old desk beckons,
I check it for words already written,
Looking for a shard of inspiration,
The hard truth feels like I have been bitten,
I feel a cold bead of perspiration.
Days gone, and I have written nothing yet,
My stomach turns as I’m bled out of time,
There is something that I just do not get,
For each good word I find there is no rhyme.

    The deadline looms, and day now turns to night.
    But will I find the words I need to write?
ALEJANDRO VELIZ
WORDS ARE WIND
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