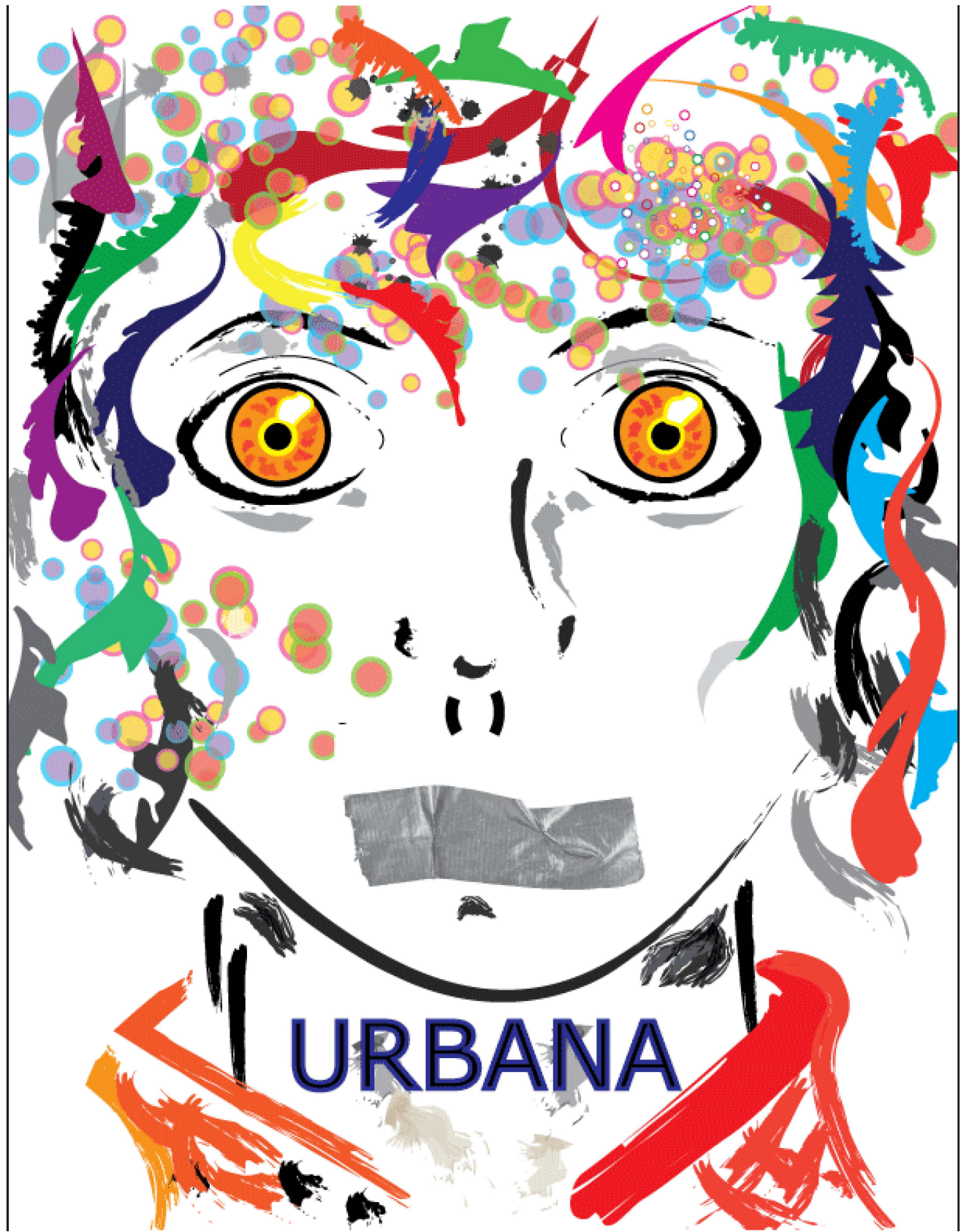




Urbana



Thank You!

I want to thank my friends, Daniel Molina and Teresa Cusidor for helping me when I felt completely overwhelmed and worried the closer I got to the deadline with barely anyone left to help me. Even though they were not staff members and didn't go to every meeting, they still took some time out of their day to edit and proofread over and over, making it a bit easier to see the light at the end of the tunnel. If it wasn't for them, I really do believe that this magazine would not have been completed.

I also want to thank Interim Department Chair, Glendora Phipps for coming up with ideas to help the magazine, facilitating some of our meetings and offering us support. I also want to extend my gratitude to Lazaro Llanes for being available when I needed a crash course while using InDesign.

The last person I want to thank and also the most important is Professor Emily Sendin. She was the advisor I needed to finish this year's magazine. Professor Sendin was more than an advisor to me, she was a confidant. Not only was she my advisor, she was my Creative Writing professor who pushed me to be a better writer and editor.

I know that every editor is supposed to present the final draft to their advisor, but she gave me more than just her approval. She showed me the reality of taking on this position every time I felt like dropping the entire magazine and leaving it unfinished. But, with her advice and her honesty, Professor Sendin refused to let me give up. Thanks to her, this magazine is just as much yours as it began mine. Now, I'm able to finish up this note and also finish these last words as Editor-in-Chief of Urbana V9.

Thank you,

Samantha Gonzalez
Editor-in Chief
UrbanaV9

Editor's Note

Dear readers,

Before I tell you what I'd like you to take from Urbana V9, let me bend your ear with some tellings of the 9 months I spent making this magazine. Because of the irony and how fittingly similar, I like to call this magazine my own bundle of joy.

It all started when I decided not to use protection. More literally, I jumped to the opportunity of being editor-in-chief with no doubt or second thoughts. All of a sudden, I was filled with a strong sense of responsibility, nervousness and of course, happiness at knowing that something great was about to be born.

The first couple of months were great. I had an amazing support system for this year's magazine, a lot of energy and ideas for this new volume, and I felt good, almost as if there was a certain glow within me that couldn't be put out.

But, like always, all good things come to an end. In this case, with the harsh and blunt kick of a deadline. I'm a little sad, but also proud to say that the final, laborious hours of editing, designing, and proofreading to bring this magazine into the world were by my lonesome.

Being a single parent is pretty hard, but if there's one redeeming quality it is the ability of calling something yours and yours alone and welcoming the pride in not only your product but also in you. I admit, visits to publishing consultants like Professor Sendin and Laz, at Media Services, eased the pain and burden immensely. Regardless, there were plenty of times I felt burdened, thinking about how much needed to be done. At one point, I thought I'd never see this magazine in the world, but then I remembered how much would be lost if it was never published.

The voices in our writing, the emotion in every art piece were all trying to be heard. This is what really should be taken from the magazine: a one of a kind opportunity to give and take. Our artists gave our readers their work and passion, which I hope you'll only be too excited to take.

Considering all this, how alone was I really?

The voices of the writers, my advisors and trusted friends kept me strong and determined. After all, publishing Urbana wasn't just about getting a volume under my name. It was about continuing the spirit and life of expression. Sure, the life of this magazine can be my own bundle of joy, but more importantly, it is one piece in the chorus of voicing a society, one that I hope will never be silenced.

Putting words in action, moving the emotions of our readers and bringing life in darker places is the duty and essence of Urbana V9.

Sincerely,

Samantha Gonzalez
Editor-in-Chief
UrbanaV9

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She

By Sofia G. Parada

She took a deep breath. This was it, this was the moment she'd been anticipating for the last couple of years. She was brave. Yes, she was. She could do this, and nobody could tell her otherwise. She had planned it, she knew what she was going to say, she was strong and above everything else, she knew who she was.

Look, mom, I've always felt this way and I thought you should know.

Yes, that would work. She would probably be shocked and upset, but she'd get over it.

That's how her arguments with mom usually went. One of them got upset but got over it quickly and they were friends again. This wouldn't be any different than that, she was sure.

-Hey mom, there's something I've been meaning to tell you.

-Sure, Johnny. What is it?

Foxtrot

By Natalie Niebla

They huddle in the snow
2 foxes in the know
They wrap and writhe to melt the ice
But always hunt alone
Come sunrise they unstick
They leave without a lick
Hunting rabbits out of habits
Yeah, they always think they're slick
Come night they stumble home
Scent of flesh and blood and bone
Reminding them they are no hens
Just weary monsters wearing robes

Miami Life in the Closet

By Samantha Gonzalez

When I think about Miami, Florida, the first thing that comes to my mind is the melting pot of cultures and the tolerance that people have living here. So, you would think that being gay would be a lot easier when living in a place like Miami. Then why am I still in the closet?

I've known that I've liked girls since I was in fifth grade, but it wasn't until I was in middle school that I heard the word Lesbian. However, I didn't really come to terms with accepting myself until I was in 11th grade. The journey I went through to accept who I am was difficult and terrifying and while I'm out to pretty much everyone else I know, the only people I haven't told are my parents.

It's crazy to think that twelve years ago, it was illegal to be in a homosexual relationship in Florida. Even though the state finally changed the law on gay marriage in 2015, my family is still somewhat closed-minded about the Les-

bian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender community (LGBT), especially my Dad. I know he has no clue about my sexuality, but it still hurts when he tells me that being gay is a lifestyle and that if gay people prayed hard enough they could be normal. I've been hearing those words since I was in fifth grade and I believed that something was wrong with me for a long time. I would pray hard every night, asking God to fix me because I didn't want my Dad to be disappointed in me.

I remember when I was in middle school, I would tell my friends that I was bisexual because I was unsure of who I was. Seeing my best friend's shocked, borderline disgusted face, brought my fears to life. Our relationship was severed for some time; he never shunned me, but he did feel uncomfortable for a while. Eventually, he came to terms with my sexuality and realized that our friendship was more important. On the other hand, I had others dismissing my confession for a hoax, a sin,

or something I would grow out of. I would much rather go through the effort of giving a loved one time to adjust ten more times than having to hear one more person tell me that it was just a phase or that it was wrong.

Liana Delgado, a classmate, psychology major and a member of the LGBT community decided to shed some light on her own coming out story with me. Upon sharing her journey, she also told me about being a lesbian in Miami, in her home and what it meant to her identity. "There is so much [more] than being gay. Being gay just describes who I am attracted to and not much else." If there was any advice I could give myself, it would be her words.

Not having any support as I got older was very hard for me. I felt like my friends didn't understand me; I felt alone no matter where I was or who I was with, and I just felt lost. I was scared, hopeless and tired of everything.

'It wasn't until my 10th grade year when I went to the Gay Pride Parade in Miami Beach

that I felt like I truly belonged for the first time. I was buzzing with excitement as I got up early in the morning to walk in the parade with my high school friends. If you're asking yourself how I managed to go to the parade if my parents weren't accepting, the answer is I told them that I was volunteering and that it was too late to back out. It was a lie, and I don't regret it. The moment I saw those large, colorful floats, the drag queens dressed in beautiful sequined dresses, glittering jewelry, and the multiple rainbow flags my parent's disapproval was forgotten.

However much I changed as a person, I still had to pretend to be straight at home. It's exhausting having to put on an act just so that my pain doesn't show. Trying so hard not to cry because if I show that I care too much, he'll ask me why and that's not something that I'm ready for. I don't think my dad realizes how much every video against "gays" and every lecture makes me feel unloved.

A few weeks ago, when I came home from work, my

dad followed me into room, then shoved his iPhone in my face with a video about the “Gay Gene.” Standing in my messy closet as he made me listen to this video, hoping that it would change my opinion about it and all I could think about was the irony of the situation: a closeted lesbian standing inside an actual closet while forcibly listening to an anti-gay sermon.

Though funny to me, it didn’t lessen the feeling of being attacked. My dad wants me to understand that even supporting gay people or accepting them is wrong.

The difference between facing my parents now than before, is that I have the support of the community. It wasn’t until I saw all those smiling faces of heterosexual and homosexuals alike, that their acceptance and support of the LGBT community became obvious to me. Seeing their pride was when I finally felt pride in myself, and I finally felt the sense of belonging that I always craved when I was a child. Everyone who was at the parade that day came for one purpose, which was to be themselves.

I didn’t have to hide who I was for a few hours, and it was

liberating walking in the parade, hearing people clap and cheer for me,

showing that it was okay to be who I am. It was something that I’ll never forget.

Though I haven’t come out to my parents yet, I did gain the courage to tell my sister, and before I could back down, I heard Liana’s advice appeared in my head. “DO IT! You’ll feel better in your own skin and once you do it you will realize it’s not that big of a deal. As time goes on, it’s becoming more socially acceptable, making it much easier.” Liana was right. It was the best decision I ever made. My sister’s acceptance and support was the most precious gift I received and for the first time, I didn’t have to put on an act in my home anymore.

I’m content where I am right now in my journey. As each day passes by, I feel more confident about who I am as a person and the fear of my parents knowing that I’m gay is growing smaller and smaller. I don’t want to hide this part of me anymore because while I don’t let my sexuality define me, it’s still a piece of me.

Memoirs of Eternity

By Teresa "Tess" Cusidor

Stillness is immortality	I look into eyes of my own
I have halted in a moment	I hear knowledge derived from my own
Thrived in my place	I feel love shared from my heart
I am immortal	
Darkness has contained me	I have taken my moment
Here in stillness	And it is I who moved it
Abundance plagues me	
There will be death	
This, I know	
But death holds no weight against the vast and dark	
Perpetual	
Stillness	
Death holds no weight against my creation	
At the end of me	



The Hunt: The Bartender

By Teresa “Tess“ Cusidor

The neon sign’s bright and pink lights hummed before me. In bold, pink letters, it read **TRAUMA**. The night was humid and puddles formed on the sidewalk from earlier rain, but that didn’t seem to bother the night life. Not a hundred yards away from the club, I could see the wave of sequined dresses, glittering from the light of passing cars. The popped collars and dangling designer watches were among them, all coated in humidity and covered in a shade of neon pink.

“Hey man.” A voice made me look up, and I saw J-man. He was tall, dark and always wore a serious expression. He nodded his head towards me before clasp my hand and bringing me in for a quick, manly embrace.

“What’s up J-man?” I said while hugging him in return before passing him. J-man just nodded in response. He was the owner of **TRAUMA**, who decided to stand outfront tonight.

Next to J-man was his larger bouncer, who had his arms crossed in

front of his chest. I just nodded to him then made my way to the entrance. Past the double doors, the music’s beat echoed in my chest and banged against my head. I noticed the impressive mass of tangled arms and swinging hips that swarmed the entire floor. Walking past the bar, I went through swinging doors that said “Employees Only.”

Inside were the eerie, pale, yellow walls that looked unnatural compared to the vibrant, metallic walls and fluorescent lights just outside. There were mint colored, metal lockers that stacked together, forming rows in the room and in between were benches. I walked up to my locker and then heard the doors swing open again. I looked and saw an impressive head of wild and black curls. It was Manny, in all black attire, wearing an exhausted expression and black boots.

“Hey.” I opened my arms to her. She came towards me without picking up her feet and exhaled a long breath, showing the little energy she had for tonight. She kissed my cheek, and I



kissed hers. I gave her a quick embrace, smiling at how her head nestled under my chin. Manny was short and small enough to fit in the width of my chest. She took a long breath after pulling away and sat on the bench in front of my own locker.

“You saw J-man out there? Trying to be all professional and shit,” she chuckled.

“Yeah, I saw him. He’ll probably go back to his office. Don’t worry about him.”

“Shit, I work too damn long in this fuckin’ place. I am leaving this bullshit.” She moaned exaggeratedly and let her head hang while rubbing her neck with one hand.

I came up behind her and put both of my hands on her shoulders, kneading the tense flesh and aching bones. She let out a content sigh and smiled. “So...how was last night?”

The feeling of warm, flittering sparks began in my chest. I tried to get my words out to answer Manny only to lose it on my tongue. Finally, I said, “It was good.” I continued to move

my hands up her neck, pressing my thumbs gently enough for ease and hard enough for release while moving down, applying pressure then slid my fingers into her scalp before sliding to her neck again. She smiled and hummed in agreement to the stimulation. For what words I couldn’t make out, I hoped my hands would convey. She looked up at me, her head perched against my stomach. “Don’t hold back now, tell me all about it.” She smiled wide and bright, almost predatorily.

I looked down and locked my gaze with hers, “She brought someone else.”

In that moment, she jumped from her seat and hooted, clapping her hands in excitement. “Dom, got a threesome. Dom, got a threesome!” Her childish mantra repeated a few more times, before she rubbed her hands together, “Ok, tell me!”

I smiled at her, and Manny waited a moment before jerking her hands, impatiently. “It’s not what you think.” I said.

“You don’t know what I’m thinking.” She smirked and raised her brow.

“I bet you think it was another girl.” I crossed my arms over my chest.

Her smirk disappeared. “Another guy?” She smacked her lips, “Oh, that girl is too fuckin’ greedy,” and then sighed, “Fuckin’ Keana.” She tsked while shaking her head.

“Yeah... except I didn’t touch her at all,” I sighed. The blood rushed to my cheeks as soon as I saw the expression on Manny’s face. She froze for a moment, as if the wheel of processing was hanging over her head.

“Wait...so if you didn’t touch her...” she said and slightly dipped her head to one side. I didn’t think I’d get this flustered, explaining to her, but it was very different. I could feel my heart-beat speed up a bit when the memories of last night returned. I cleared my throat and looked down at the floor.

Very different.

“So...that girl had you sit and watch them?”

“No, Manny,” I was hesitant about admitting it, but I wanted to tell her, “She had that other guy there, so

we could fuck.” The heat in my cheeks moved all over my body. I was ner-vous. I was nice to guys, but that was it; that was the job: being tippable. Her eyes bulged and her brows could’ve gone up, over her head if she was any more shocked. It was the same face I had when Keana first invited the idea that night. Manny didn’t say anything for a moment. She looked me up and down, like if she was seeing something new.

“You like penis, Dom?”

“No...”

“So, was it like...rape?”

“No.”

Suddenly, her teeth beamed out again. Her eyes were bright and cheery. She laughed, almost cackling. “Oh Dom baby, if I had known you wanted to be manhandled,” she gig-gled, “I would’ve told Rex to take care of you, long time ago.”

“Manny, c’mon. Rex has more vagina than you, and you gave birth.”

“Shut up. You always throwin’ winks at guests. Shit, if I were a guy, I would’ve

wanted to grab at you too,” she smiled.

I chuckled, turning around to close my locker. As soon as it shut, I felt hands come around me. The heat in my body rose as if every inch of my skin was burning from the inside. I closed my eyes. Remembering him made my chest heat up and my fingertips felt warmer, like the guy was made out of fire: fire with rough and calloused hands. It’s like every spot he touched branded me. I could feel sweat forming at the edges of my temples. That damn night. This faceless, nameless, even voiceless memory buried itself under my skin.

“You do have nice, long hair,” Manny teased, her voice light and right at my ear. She hugged me tightly and moved her head against my shoulder, “But seriously, are you ok?” Her voice sobered.

I turned around to look at her, her brows were slightly closer, and her eyes were dim, having lost its cheery gleam from before. She was worried, and I didn’t want

that. I took a big breath. Maybe the air in my lungs would push down the scorching memories...or feed them. “I’m in one piece,” I exhaled.

“Good thing too,” she gave a small grin. “What about them?”

“You mean Keana and him?”

She nodded.

“I don’t know.” I shrugged. “I haven’t spoken to her, and I don’t know that guy.” I felt bad for saying so, but it’s the truth. The last thing I was is in love with him, or any man. The intimacy was something else entirely different. It was nothing I had experienced before; that’s for sure. All of my times with women were as easy as breathing: playful, soft, maybe a little rough sometimes. It wasn’t hard to figure out where my place in bed was.

Last night set all that on fire. I didn’t know what he’d do next. “I didn’t even know what I was doing. This was completely different, and we both enjoyed that, I think,” I said aloud to Manny. “If I tried touching him, he’d yank me

elsewhere. If I wanted to move, he'd hold me in place." I took another deep breath, trying to clear up the fog in my head and leaned against my locker.

"I know how you are, Dom. I never bothered you about all the nights with Keana, but this one isn't the same." Her worried expression was plain on her face. "Why'd you do it?"

"I mean, when she asked me to, I said no at first."

Manny's head turned slightly. Her eyebrows lowered and scrunched together over her glaring eyes. She was about to say, well more likely yell, something.

I stopped her, "She convinced me. Made it look like it was just another part of sex..." hoping not to get her too upset.

"You didn't really listen to her, right?" Manny's eyes narrowed. She was watching my face very closely as if looking for a sign to kill Keana.

"At the time, she sounded right." I paused for a moment, looking at

Manny's expression changing." Ya know, he was real smooth too. Without even trying, he convinced me. He had never been with a man, and this was his first time too." I had no reason to fear him. I knew we were both in the same, curious boat.

"So? He didn't know you right?"

"No. Well, I don't know. If he knew Keana, then maybe he's seen me working at the bar."

I was facing Manny, and finally admitted, "Maybe it was the crazy stupidity in me, but I was ok with it. had no way of knowing, but it didn't look like anything to worry about. I won't lie, there was a part of me that really wanted to." There was silence between us again.

The moment I felt hands cup my face, I realized my mind was drifting, and I must have looked miles away. Manny's face still sank in worry.

"He wasn't bad looking

either.” I added with a smile, trying to lighten the mood. I really didn’t want her to worry. I just wanted to share this with her. Actually, I was hoping she’d be able to help me, find the meaning in it all, or at least know exactly what I was thinking. Maybe, she knew the burn inside me now.

The lights were dim. When I put my hand against his skin, it began the slow and fierce process of melting into each other’s embrace. “We couldn’t see much else in the room or maybe we just didn’t pay attention, but I remember...” I said aloud to Manny, remembering all the events of last night.

Streetlights and the deep night colors brought in this tint of blue that made him look pale and glowing. “We were going really fast. The whole thing felt like a fight at first, like we were trying to prove to each other that we could do this. This guy was my size, my height. He could see me completely.” So different from a woman.

I continued, “Especially

since Keana’s shorter, all of our sex had me towered over her, so I had an advantage, a nice advantage too,” I smiled and Manny lightly smacked my chest. We both laughed and smiled at each other knowingly, “I could see all of her, and she never could have all of me in her view.

“Last night was the first time I experienced that: being completely seen, like vulnerable.” I lowered my tone while repressing a shiver that came up my spine. I was completely defenseless that night, but it helped me let go of all that I knew. There was no advantage but a leveled field that not only had us at turns but also completely faced with one another. Our silhouettes casted on each other was our reflection but also a reminder of our difference.

“He was pretty toned, but not more than me. Still, impressive. But Manny, he had these crazy, grey eyes, like rain clouds.” When our gazes caught each other, there was a pause from our flurry of kisses and anxious touches, where we sank deeper

into the moment, slowly realizing, we were both burning. "The room was a lot warmer when we got to it. Maybe it's because we were so close," I hugged my arm, thinking of him and Keana. "When I have sex with Keana-- it's not any less hot-- it isn't as...overwhelming," I tried explaining, unsuccessfully I think.

"This wasn't Keana waiting for me to touch her. He wasn't waiting for me at all. Made me think he lied about it being his first time," I laughed to myself, but Manny was still in front of me and following every detail.

I held my arm a little tighter before explaining, "Sometimes, I felt like I couldn't breathe. Maybe I was too eager or he was too much." Our breaths fell short or escaped us completely, especially when we kissed. Being controlled, dominated and dominating, especially with a sex I'd never thought I'd be this intimate with, had come from another world.

"But besides the pain

Manny, it was...man...I don't think I can explain it," I laughed again, "It was completely different, but no different, does that make sense?" What it felt like to be taken by him -- and him needing me -- was our purpose for the moment.

"I think Keana had stayed at a distance the whole time, but I have to admit, I forgot she was there. Until, she lay next to me and kissed me just before I fell asleep on the bed, after it all." It was a deep and slow kiss, as if she was trying to thank me. At the end of my story, "We fell asleep on her bed, all three of us," I told Manny.

"That was it?" She asked.

"Yep, that was my adventure last night."

Manny sighed and took in a few more breaths while she contemplated the whole thing. Finally, she brought her hands to rest on her hip and said, "Promise me you're going to take a break from Keana."

“Are you going to step in for her?” I smirked and smiled at Manny’s reaction. Her mouth was open in shock and amusement. I stepped forward, closing the space between Manny and I.

“You think you so cute.” Manny had to tilt her head up to look at me. She also stepped closer, so now we could feel each other’s breath. Our smug smirks were stuck on our face until she laughed and ruffled my hair, “Cut that out, one boyfriend is enough.”

“Hey, what he doesn’t know can’t hurt him?” I raised my eyebrows at her suggestively before I erupted in laughter with Manny.

“I’ll be sure to tell him that the next time we all meet up.” Her tone and smile were equally devilish and charming. Manny walked up to her locker and put her things away before turning around again.

“Dominic, Manny get your asses out on the floor,” another voice interrupted. It was Rex, funny enough. Our fellow bartender

and friendly reminder that we were supposed to be working. He disappeared as fast as he came in, so it must be busy.

In a moment, Manny and I tied aprons around our waists and marched through the double doors again. I tied my hair back in a low ponytail while she put on a headband to push her curls back. Just before getting to the door, Manny shot me a playful, side look.

“Don’t get in any trouble tonight,” she said in a mock tone before she giggled.

I chuckled, “I’ll try.” I winked at her before the doors opened, letting in the pounding music. I saw the swarm of bodies had moved to the bar, and the mass on the dance floor seemed to grow still.

This was going to be a long night.

The Bubble

By Natalie Niebla

Graduation day of my Senior year, my perception of relationships began to shift when I met my best friend, Emily, who has always shown me unconditional and unwavering love. She entered my life at an unsuspecting time, much like a gift one wouldn't expect to receive. Em and I were standing next to each other on the last day of our senior year in high school.

Impatiently waiting to graduate, we struck up a conversation about how poorly the event had been organized. I overheard Emily say, "We've been standing here so long, that moss is going to start growing on us." Laughing, I turned around and said, "It better not, I paid too much for this dress! Moss not included!" We continued to make stupid jokes that were probably only funny to us, and I was hooked. The following day we decided to hang out.

I only had two weeks left in Miami before moving to California to pursue my acting career, however, the bond we built during that time proved unbreakable. We were absolutely inseparable, beginning our days and ending our nights together. We spent countless hours driving around aimlessly just enjoying the hell out of each other's company.

There would be countless hours of conversations about past loves, as well as family troubles and everything pivotal in between. She always made me feel safe, without ever passing judgment. She understood me on a level I never thought possible, especially in such a short amount of time. Em understood me because we had the same core. When we were together, there were no cares. It was just us, in our bubble. That was a feeling I



The Lighten Road
By Andy Rivero

had never experienced with a friend.

The day came for me to leave, and what had become my other half, was going to be so far away. She drove me to the airport where we would say our goodbyes. We knew it would be emotional, but it struck us like a bolt when we heard the woman's voice call my flight for boarding. I quickly embraced her without hesitation while we cried uncontrollably in each other's arms. It was hard to get words out in between the sobs, but I managed to say, "I love you!" to which she responded, "I love you, too!"

It had been three years since my move and we had not gone a day without speaking. She was my rock while I settled into my new home and remained a constant while I struggled with everyday obstacles. At the time I had

just ended a tumultuous relationship and it left me seeking out Emily's comfort more than ever. Having had her counsel, and time to process, I was able to feel how eviscerated the break up had left me.

My boyfriend at the time played on my insecurities by manipulating me into thinking he would be the only one who could ever possibly love me. He knew I longed for stability and had a fear of abandonment, and those were the tools he used to strip me bare. I tried to go out, to socialize and make new connections. My efforts always fell flat, which led me to realize that it would be in my best interest to take a trip back home. I needed my friend. I needed to feel Em's warmth, face to face. As the escalator descended, she was the first thing I saw, which made me feel immediately elated. Instinctively we ran

toward one another and took hold as if we were carrying on exactly where we had left off three years ago. Em said, "Alex, it's your first night here, and I have made it my duty to get you happy!"

I replied, "I'm already happy! As long as I'm with you, I'm happy!"

We enjoyed our reunion all the way to Em's car, out of the airport, and up until she pulled up to my house.

"Be ready by 7:30, you sexy thang!" she said, chuckling.

I was so anxious and excited that I was ready and waiting by 6. I heard her car pull up, so I quickly gathered my things and rushed out. To my surprise, her boyfriend, Michael, was coming out with us. I wasn't angry, but I was hoping for our bubble. I bit my tongue, and tried to

remain hopeful regardless of the intruder.

As I stepped into the car, I greeted Em and Michael: "Hey guys, thanks for scooping me up." Em replied, "I considered making you walk, but Michael talked me out of it." "I guess chivalry isn't dead and I owe you a drink, Mike!" Michael promptly responded to me "I never met a drink I didn't like." The three of us lost it laughing.

It was a short, sweet ride from my house to Irish Times; A bar we used to frequent, and after 10 minutes we arrived. We sat down. Em and Michael sat across from me and we began to order drinks.

After two or three gin and tonics each, I think we all started to loosen up. "Vogue" by Madonna started to play. Bursting out in laughter, we decided it was time to dance. After a few minutes

of dancing, Em and Michael kissed, when an idea came to mind. Playfully, I approached Michael and said, "I bet I can get Em to kiss me, too." He shook his head with a curious look on his face. "Ok. Let's see it, then." He replied. I loved a challenge and this one really piqued my interest, even though I wasn't quite sure why.

The dancing continued, but I grabbed Em and pulled her toward Michael and I. I filled her in on our conversation where she was the target. "I think you and I should kiss." I said. To which she replied hesitantly, but with a giggle "What about Mike?" So, I suggested we all kiss. I leaned into Em and Michael, giving them a quick kiss. They were both taken aback by my hasty action. There was a slight tension building as a consequence. We thought it best to graduate from drinks to Tequila shots in order to

keep the energy flowing as smoothly as possible. "I'll go get more shots", Michael offered. I didn't object; it would mean more alone time for Em and I.

All the negativity I was carrying with me from California had begun to fade away and I started to have fun. I was focused on conquering my kiss with Em. "I still think we should kiss", I said. "We did..." Em replied with a grin. I smiled and kissed her softly before she could respond. Our lips were locked in an unfamiliar lust. When we pulled away from one another I focused my attention on Em who had a look of confusion and worry, like her world in that moment had been altered, and she wasn't sure how.



Dance of the Seven Veils

By Natalie Niebla

The sultan on top, becomes the prey at
the bottom

Many shades of women come to claw at
what is rotten

As he soars to heaven

Purged unburden purified

Quite unlike unbridled hunger searing
in their eyes

But craving not to fuck not to eat not for
him

An appetite to trump each other all they
wants the win

Because this is a game

A paltry gambit for their lives

Whoever locks his stare the longest lives
or else she dies

Love for the Hearse

By Teresa "Tess" Cusidor

First time in a limo,
I was 6 years old, at my mother's funeral
I had no idea what I was doing.
Running around with cheeto coated fingers, laughing
with cousins.

My grandmother scolded me so many times
Looking at her grand-daughter having fun at her
daughter's funeral.

Others cried and mourned for me
She tried to make me pray. Tried to make me regret
having fun.

Kneeling,
Mourning,

Lying,

I didn't regret.

I pretended to. Never asked God for anything.

He already took the one thing I asked for

I just wanted to see her.

I would always look,

Thinking that she'd smile again. Open her eyes again

Apart of me, held on to the corpse that rode in front

Others mourned for me.

They were right to.

A child still holding on to her mother's formaldehyde
scented body.

She still looked beautiful, maybe that's what I see
every day,

her lying in the coffin with a green dress on.

Maybe that's why I couldn't let go.

Maybe that's why I can't remember the color of my
own dress
Or the sad thoughts in my own head
I remember a girl
Wearing a white, gypsy skirt. She knew my mother
better
Enough to know to wear a gypsy skirt.
Even in her coffin. Even in the hearse
She was untouchable
My first limelight moment, was riding behind her
hearse.
It was my first time in a car like that, and I felt like a
superstar
With my mother's casket
Watching her being put in the ground, everyone else
crying, but I don't know if I did.
I didn't know myself.

The Sad Love

By A'shunti Zanders

Love has no shame
Acquainted with each other
Still hurting from the past

Life is love and love is pain

Two

on different levels

One

falling in love and the other
believe it a lie

What a beauty,

this new art form of showing
others that we care

But how sad

it is to not even know

when there is care and love
in your life

Hurt

and deeply wounded

The love is broke

and the slayer hurt as well
Still in love

all can be fixed,
fixed

The roles are reversed

This is true horror



Party of 3

By Natalie Niebla

Digging at the dancefloor
Tastes his glare and grinds his core
She doesn't know that through that door
There's someone else that he wants more
Inside his head a two-step lead
By a boy he'd love to bed
Drawing close from far away
Is he straight or is he gay?
But of course some fucking hoe
Kisses him real tight and slow
Slumped to swaying to and froe
Is there anyone we really know?

The Hunt: The Dom

By Zulem Llana

I'm standing at the far end of the bar at **Trauma**, where I can see the entire club clearly: the front door, the rest of the bar, the dance floor and even a view of the people coming in and out of the bathroom. I order a Jack and Coke, the perfect mixture of burning whiskey and sweet soda.

Picking something to wear for tonight was a no brainer. A burgundy button up with rolled up sleeves and black dress pants. I didn't even bother to shave, but a little stubble doesn't hurt. Women like a little edge on a man. I'm starting to get the hang of this dressing up thing because of Charlotte. She's changing me for the better. If it weren't for her, I would've worn a t-shirt and a pair of jeans. She tells me I'm a fool, that a grown man like me shouldn't dress that way. We've had our fun and I'd like to find someone like her here, but a one night stand is good enough. I just want to remind myself that Charlotte isn't the one.

We are under a strict contract, and she doesn't want a serious relationship, but she still

wants me as her Dom. I know I do all the right things, which I won't argue with. She's been mine for almost a year now, and we've had an eventful time together. My favorite memory was when we went kayaking and had a little squabble over staying in the water or going back on the kayak which led us to grab at each other and fall into the water. I pulled her closer to me and just held her. I wish I could've paused that moment forever.

The fluorescent lights and the loud, booming music in Trauma pull me away from my thinking about Charlotte. As I glance around the club, the need to satisfy my urges increases. I want someone to dominate tonight. After about fifteen years, I can tell who can be just that.

The club is full tonight, but I can still keep track of one or two girls I might be interested in. I notice this one beauty: soft, blonde hair, slim and pale. She has big, innocent eyes and full lips. She's got on a short, shiny dress, so she's not hard to spot. She carries herself like a Sub and the way she's moving on

the dance floor makes me wonder how she moves in bed. She's pretty but still seems too young and inexperienced to handle what I'll give her. She probably doesn't even know what BDSM is. A friend leads her to the bathroom. They'll probably be there for a while, so I keep searching for any other candidates while taking a sip of my drink. I see a couple other girls, but they all remind me too much of Charlotte.

A second girl catches my eye. I see a guy approach her, and she immediately denies him. What an amateur.

It was my turn to try to get at her. I take a sip of my drink and watch her. She walks in my direction and stops right next to me at the bar. She's a gorgeous brunette with really nice curves. She orders a drink and we lock eyes. I smirk at her and she smiles back while biting her bottom lip seductively.

"Hey there, handsome." She says while making extra efforts to push her breasts towards me.

"Hello." I turn my body completely towards her and lean closer.

"What's a guy like you doing in a place like this?" She asks grinning.

"Just looking for a good time, care to dance with me?" I ask moving closer, pressing my body against her.

She bats her eyes then she takes my hand and guides me to the dance floor. While dancing, she couldn't keep her hands off me. Even though her moves teased me while she grinded her hips against me, she was leading most of the time. Her foot forward made me want to run back to the bar.

I stop our dancing and face her, "Sorry, beautiful but not tonight."

I start heading back towards the bar, without looking back.

Finally arriving to the bar, I slouch over the counter, and signal to the bartender to get me another drink. He returns with my drink, and I sigh before taking a big sip. Some time later, I see the blonde

girl who's with her friend. She's been going back and forth from the bar to the dance floor. She stumbles over a couple times which means the drinks are starting to get to her. Makes me second guess, since I want someone sober enough to remember their time with me.

At around midnight, the club is packed tight. I've been here for an hour and still haven't found the one I want, but I'm hopeful, only on my second drink. I have another look at the entire club from the same corner I was before.

Then, I spot a gorgeous redhead at the bar. She's got this white dress that hugs her hourglass figure nicely. The light made her arms look toned and her skin is a beautiful olive. By the way she walks, she looks like she needs someone to put her in her place, swinging her hips side to side making all her assets move. She leans over the bar arching her back, asking to be dominated.

The Redhead is fit, and I start to wonder about the exercise I should put her through. If she were my Sub, I'd take her home and show her how much she'll crave to be with

me.

I lose sight of the girl with her friend a while ago, but the Redhead has set the bar. I take another sip and prepare myself to talk to her. I'm pretty confident because I've dealt with spicy girls before, and even if this backfires, I still have the rest of the night to hunt for another Sub.

The Redhead is a little flirty with the bartender. I wait till they stop talking, so all of her attention will be on me. The conversation with the bartender comes to an end when the drunk blonde takes his attention elsewhere. We then make eye contact. I raise my drink to her and give her a cocky smirk; in return, she smiles. We both take a sip of our drinks simultaneously, and she licks the salt off the rim of the glass.

You can't miss a suggestion like that.

Chemises genéricas y chalequitos rancios

By Sofía G. Parada

No pasé mucho tiempo trabajando en ese banco, fueron seis meses que se sintieron como dos años, no mucho más. Creo que lo que más recuerdo de ese tiempo maligno fue poder atenderla dos veces a la semana.

Martes y jueves venía siempre, a hacer los depósitos de una tienda que yo no conocía, que quedaba en una zona de Caracas que jamás había pisado. Nunca entendí por qué se venía tan lejos al banco, asumí que era porque vivía por acá; me gustaba esa idea. Me gustaba la posibilidad de que viviéramos cerca, de encontrármela un día por la calle y que se acordara de mí.

Siempre llegaba en su uniforme: una de esas chemises genéricas bordadas y pantalones de colegio que no favorecen a nadie. Con su pelito

liso y negro, casi siempre en una trenza que le caía en los hombros. Siempre tan jodidamente bonita.

Me sabía su cumpleaños y su nombre completo, había visto sus papeles infinidad de veces. Iba todos los martes y los jueves, sin pelarse ninguno, a las cinco de la tarde puntual como un clavel; como si el metro no la afectara, ni el tráfico de mierda, ni los autobuses llenos de gente. Llegaba bonita, oliendo a naranja, y siempre impecable. Una de las ventajas de trabajar en un banco pequeño era que, con dos cajeros, a esa hora casi siempre estaba yo solo y podía por lo menos verla más de cerca.

Ya nos conocíamos, ya me saludaba. No creo que se supiera mi nombre pero me gustaba imaginar que sí, que me recordaba y que pensaba en mí cuando no me veía, casi tanto como

yo pensaba en ella.

Un día me hice una resolución: movido por mi propia ilusión infantil me convencí de que era una buena idea invitarla a salir, pedirle su número. “No soy un tipo bonito pero tengo encanto” me repetí unas cuantas veces para agarrar valor. Había pensado en llevarle una flor porque se acercaba su cumpleaños, que pendejo y cursi. Tenía todo meticulosamente cuadrado.

Esa jeva jamás va a imaginarse el delirio que me hizo pasar. El lunes no probé bocado, no podía ni ver comida, se me descompuso todo, se me descompuso la vida; fui al baño como tres veces, qué vaina tan antinatural. Si hubiera tenido hemorroides, por lo más sagrado de mi vida que se me hubieran salido, si hubiera tenido una úlcera se hubiera duplicado, los

vómitos verdes de Florentino Ariza no hubieran alcanzado. No dormí nada, pasé horas dando vueltas en la cama, imaginando cómo me decía que sí y cuadrábamos un plan simpático para su cumpleaños.



MALE ENERGY

By A'shunti Zanders

EMBRACE ME
FEEL MY WARMTH AND FUSE
WITH MY SOUL
TRAPPED FOREVER
SUBCONSCIOUSLY PLANTED
IN OUR MINDS
LET'S TAKE OUR SPEARS
AND GO
TO THE TOP
WE'LL SAVE THE WORLD
VOICE
THE KEY TO OUR POWER
LET THE EXODUS COME
FORTH
RUN TO YOUR ROOTS
TO STAY AND LAY WITH YOU
FOREVER
BLISS

The Hunt: The Drunk Blond

By Daniel Molina

They broke up.

Their relationship had been difficult for quite some time, so she wasn't surprised that it ended the way it did. But, whether it was a relief or not that it was over was another discussion for another time. It's something she still hadn't come to a conclusion on.

Victoria and Oriana sat outside in the mall pavilion on a Saturday morning for some coffee. The mall was busy and a breeze hit them every so often as the sun's rays struck. They wore designer sunglasses.

"Does your boyfriend ask you to send him nudes?" Oriana asked Victoria.

"Yeah, why?" responds Victoria, not missing a beat.

"He never asked me to send him nudes."

She raised an eyebrow as she took a sip of her salted caramel mocha latte.

"Why?" Oriana continued. "Should he have been asking me for nudes?"

"Ori, I don't see why he wouldn't ask you for them."

"Should I have sent him nudes without him asking?"

"Look," she began, crossing her legs and putting the cup of coffee back on the glass table. "All you should think about is, if you're not sending him nudes, then who is?"

...

A puddle on the ground reflected the pink fluorescent lights that read **TRAUMA**. It's night time.

They made their way to the bouncer, disregarding the impatient line of twenty-something year olds.

The bouncer was Victoria's cousin.

After Victoria introduced Oriana and caught up with him, he let them into the club and they were attacked by the reverberating music and bright lights. The music could've literally blown them back into the street again.

Pink, blue and yellow florescent lights illuminated the club, and the dance floor was filled with dancing, drunk, apathetic, hedonistic people that had drinks in their hands and nothing to lose.

The club had two floors. The first had the bar and the dance floor while the second had a balcony

and a lounge area with a tiny bar. The second floor was a much more personal setting.

They walked through the dance floor, Victoria leading Oriana by the hand to the bar for drinks. Tonight was a time to forget, and that's all Oriana wanted to do.

"How stressed are we tonight, Ori?" asked Victoria, scanning the drinks behind the bar that the club had to offer.

"Very," Oriana responded.

"Are we waking up late tomorrow or at 7 pm?"

"Around dark thirty?"

"Perfect, then we each need to get a vase to fill."

Oriana had drifted away from Victoria's

friendship while she was dating, but it was an alienation that had just happened naturally. She never really gave it a thought, and only now was it beginning to dawn on her that they had spent a large frame of time apart from one another. What a waste.

“Has he texted you?” she asked Oriana, moving slowly to the beat of the music.

“I saw him yesterday.”

“I’m so sorry to hear that...”

“He came by to pick up his stuff.”

“And what’d you tell him?”

“That he owed me a mother’s day gift for basically having to raise him. I was so mad.”

“Look at you growing up.”

She just smirked and took a sip of her drink. It was nice to have some time to herself, and that’s all they did for a good while until a man approached them near the dance floor. He had short blonde hair and was wearing a purple polo with blue jeans.

“Hey, what are you two ladies doing tonight?” he asked, smiling.

“Dancing,” Oriana responded with a stone cold look, standing completely still and taking a sip of her drink.

The response catches the man off guard and he just awkwardly nodded in agreement. “Would either of you want to dance?” he asked, “Because it’s much more fun than dancing by yourself. Trust me.”

“I’m sorry. I’m here with

my girlfriend and we're not really planning to spend time with anyone else," said Victoria, butting in. Oriana didn't bother correcting her and just went with it.

Again, the man was caught off guard, accepted it and walked away.

"Why would you do that?" Oriana asked her, genuinely feeling bad for the guy.

"What if I wanted to dance with him?"

"Did you see that guy?"

"Yes, and he didn't look half bad. What was the worst he could do?"

"Your nails or your hair because God knows he's not doing anything else. Besides, you honestly think he's disappointed? He's just on to the next one."

After a while of scanning the room and

commenting on the people in the club, talking about their personal lives and drinking, Victoria excused herself and said she needed to go to the bathroom quickly.

Oriana was beginning to feel the multiple drinks kick in.

Stumbling a bit as she walked, Oriana made her way back to the bar with her empty glass. The music boomed. Several people were crowded around the bar and the bartender was indifferent. Slumping over the bar, she raised her glass in front of him.

"Hey! Bartender! Hey!"

He was tending to another customer and took notice of her calling. He told the customer to wait a second and then walked towards Oriana. In his

hands, he cleaned a glass with a towel. His long black hair was pulled back into a low ponytail and he wore a black shirt, the uniform for all the bartenders at the club. She wouldn't say he was attractive, but there was something about him that piqued her interest.

"Do you see this?" She asked in her drunken stupor, motioning to the glass.

"Yeah?" he asked, tilting his head slightly to the right with an amused look on his face.

"What is this?"

"An empty glass."

"Exactly, you're right" She responded, slurring her words a bit. Oriana could tell he found it amusing. "Today's been a pretty rough day for me. So, if you see this glass empty, fill it."

Nodding his head in agreement, the bartender responded by taking her glass and saying he'd keep that in mind. After a short while, he came back with a full glass and a smile on his face, and then he left to continue his business elsewhere.

Doing a much better job at holding her liquor in than Oriana was, Victoria walked down the hallway that led to the bathroom. It was dimly lit with a red hue permeating through it. Before making it to the bathroom door, she dropped her phone and kicked it by mistake, which sent it near the bathroom door. As she bent over to pick up her phone, the door quickly swung open and hit her head, knocking her out and causing her to fall back against the wall.

The loud music drowned out the hit and the woman who'd opened the door didn't notice and just walked out in the opposite direction. As people passed by Victoria to make their way to the bathrooms, they just assumed she had had a little too much to drink and had passed out. She would spend the entire night there.

As Oriana made her way back to the dance floor, she looked back through the crowded room and saw the bartender move back to where he was before, and that's when she caught sight of a girl around her age. She wore a short tight white dress that accentuated her toned body. In hand, she held a black and white clutch that complimented her black ankle strap stilettos. Her skin tanned a light olive and her hair

a dark red, and, with an indifferent look on her face, all she did was observe.

Maybe another man wasn't the answer Oriana was looking for.

Victoria would make her way back soon.

And that's when she threw up.

Es amor...

By Joseph Martinez

¿Cual es esa luz tan tierna...
Que te ilumina en tu peor
estado?
Esa luz, amiga, es ser amado,
Tener a alguien a tu lado.

Ser querido por quien eres,
No hay mejor regalo.
Esa luz es el amor,
Sin el vive en vano.

Tu amor no es de muchas
palabras,
Solo se siente.
Como el aire que respiro,
Siempre esta presente.

Es un sentimiento profundo,
Dentro de mi mente.
Luchando duro dia a dia,
Pero nunca se arrepiente.

El amor es un fuego ddel
mas alla,
Una llama ardiente,
Roja e intensa,
Y siempre esta caliente.

El amor no se niega,
Ni avisa.
Y quien se gane tu amor,

Tendra siempre tu sonrisa.

Es amor si eres sincero,
Y quieren juntos disfrutar.
Es amor si estan dispuestos,
A, juntos, ir a la orilla del
mar.

Ahora dime si es amor...
Lo que sentimos en verdad!
Dime si lo que llevamos den-
tro,
No es digno de admirar.

Y derribemos las murallas,
Con la fuerza de este volcan,
Porque el amor es inmortal,
El amor no morira.



They always said it was the
easiest thing

to become addicted to

They never tasted a love as divine
as ours

High

By Ashlyn Cano

I stopped

I no longer needed to use
to give me some substitute
energy

It solely defined my empty
motives

to fulfill some greater power

Every sunrise soon became
about the revitalizing idea of

Trans

By Ashlyn Cano

My feet made distinct marks in the snowy field,
That would soon be forgotten and buried deep

Did my significance have any importance?
Or would I be forgotten like many others before?

I watched my cuts drip a burgundy and crimson red

It almost cried to me

Being so distinct as they landed upon this white hav-
en

The voices pained me much more than my lesions
ever could

I plunged into the freezing earth,
Yet it could never surpass the tundra in my heart

34

By Sofia Parada

¿Sabes qué, Emi? No me arrepiento, te lo juro que no. Pero no pretendas que me sienta mal por todo esto. No pretendas que me sienta culpable por mi malestar. Como si tuviera que agregarle a mis pesares el tener que ocultarlos porque no son apropiados.

Yo no te pido que los veas, de hecho, agradecería que los dejaras quietos. Sólo me siento bien siendo miserable en plena privacidad y, aunque tú no me vayas a interrumpir jamás, prefiero advertírtelo, por si acaso. Porque este amor es mío, Emi. De más nadie sino mío. Y yo hago con él lo que me de la gana, y tú no tienes que estar de acuerdo. Yo puedo ser infeliz si quiero.

Yo sólo te quería a ti, todo lo demás iba a ser un agregado. Las cosas que hacía para que tú notaras, mi trabajo, mis hobbies, las vainas que me gustan, tú no las ves y solas

no son tan interesantes.

Creé toda una vida que pudiera gustarte a ti, para que la vieras y te provocara unirte, pero tú no estás interesada y mi fachada es muy arrecha como para tumbarla ahora.

No me hallo sin ti. No sé qué mierda hacer. Odio ser el tipo desesperado, por el que todos sienten lástima e incluso un poco de asco, el que recuerda a los demás que sus vidas no son tan perfectas como lo piensan. Hubiéramos sido tan felices, Emi, te lo juro. Eso era todo lo que yo quería, hacerte feliz.

Pero ahora estoy dudando de que llegue a conseguirte alguna vez. Y si no te consigo ¿qué hago? ¿me consigo una nueva razón de ser? Resignarme a que no vas a venir nunca, a una vida eternamente sin ti es demasiado difícil.

No puedo. No estoy listo. Déjame bloquearlo un rato, déjame seguirte imaginando en desconocidas a mi alrededor, déjame pretender que en algún momento sí tuvimos oportunidad de ser felices.

Déjame pretender que mi corazón no está hecho mil pedazos y que aún tengo una razón para salir todos los días. Déjame, Emi, sólo por un rato más.

¿Pero sabes qué? No importa. No importa, Emiliana, en serio que no.

Porque inesperadamente he estado volviendo a ser quien soy y me di cuenta de que me extrañaba. Me extrañaba más de lo que te extrañaba a ti. Y es como haber vuelto al hogar, haber vuelto a quien soy. Y darme cuenta de que quien soy, no te necesita.

De que te puedes devolver

por donde viniste porque no me voy a calar otro de tus desplantes. Otro de tus impulsos necios para hacerme sentir mal. Estoy harto de ti y de tu egoísmo y de pretender que todo gira a tu alrededor.

Ya no llore más, Emi. Y no creo que llore tampoco.

When We Feel the Fall

By Daniel Molina

My grandmother, four feet tall at most, Albert Einstein white hair standing up in all directions, rushes to the bathroom with a ready-to-use enema in hand. She closes the door behind her and the house is quiet.

From the living room, my mom is sitting on a brown, worn out reclining chair that's chipping away, and she's struggling to type on her iPhone 6. Her red acrylic nails are so long that it takes her centuries to write the word the.

She asks my grandma if she's alive but there's no response. My grandma needs a hearing aid, but she refuses to wear one because that would mean accepting the fact that she's old. We usually have to scream things out several times for her to hear it and then she gets offended, telling us that screaming at her is disrespectful.

Again, my mom asks louder now if my grandma's still breathing, and my grandma asks from the toilet if my mom could come into the bathroom for a second.

Trudging, my mom makes her way to the bathroom and opens the door, putting her iPhone on the olive sink counter. My grandma says that she needs help with pumping the water.

"Are you kidding me?" My mom exclaims.

This is how she ends her long day of work.

And this is when I completely lose it.

As she pumps the water, my mom is clearly aggravated.

"You need to see a psychiatrist to live in this house!"

I'm laughing.

"I can't believe this shit!"

I'm laughing.

"Give me a revolver now!"

I'm laughing.

Then she shifts her attention to me from the bathroom.

“You think this is funny?” She screams at me. “Everything is funny to you! Your grandma is fucked and everything is funny to you! All you can do is laugh at a time like this!”

“Yes, yes it is funny to me.”

The saying goes that you play the hand that you’re dealt in life. Well, parents have a deck of 52 victim cards. That’s all they use in arguments, and those are the only cards they’ll ever have up their sleeves. To them, you’re never appreciative of everything they do for you. You always make decisions with the intentions of hurting them in the long run. And you’ll never know how much you’ll miss them until they’re gone.

They finally come out of the bathroom.

My grandmother makes her way back to her bedroom, blowing her nose with a Kleenex and putting it away in a pocket of her orange

robe. My mom then makes her way into my room, taking a seat on a plastic black chair near my bed. I’m lying on the bed face up, and I don’t move.

“Listen,” my mom begins. “I need to talk to you, seriously, so stop eating shit. God, I don’t know why you and your grandma fight like cats and dogs.”

“I’m not eating shit.”

“Listen to me! This trip is important. Especially now. I don’t want to be the reason we’re held back, but I can’t take us because work is too stressful right now.”

I quickly sit upright to face her. “What?”

“I just started my business and got a closing. I have all these things circling around my head, and I can’t afford to take time off from work right now. That’s why I want to know if you feel comfortable with driving all the way up there? I don’t want your grandma driving that distance because she’s 88, and her reflexes are shit.”

“Mom, her car is shit. It doesn’t even have a PRNDL!”

“Yes, it does! It just doesn’t light up, but you can still tell which gear is which! Parking is first; reverse is second...”

“Yeah, yeah, I know.”

“Then what’s the problem?”

“You know how she gets, and I really don’t want to deal with that by myself.”

“You have to. She’s your grandmother.”

I have no idea how many cards are left in my mom’s deck.

“You have to grow up. What are you gonna do when I get to that age?” she continues.

“I’m gonna put you in a retirement home and take all your money.”

“You’re gonna be like that with me?”

“I’m kidding.”

“I know you’re kidding.”

“But how do you expect me to react when you’re making me do something against my will?”

“You wrote one?”

I only shake my head in disagreement. “One, I’m leaving you out of my will. Two, I won’t be there during the week, but I’ll try driving up for the weekend.”

“One of us will have killed the other by then.”

“Everything will be fine.”

From the bedroom, my grandma’s been listening to our conversation. She has a great ear for things that benefit her.

“Make sure you get a good room. I’m going straight to the Jacuzzi.”

“Can I drown her in the Jacuzzi?” I ask my mom.

“No, I have first dibs.”

...

All of our bags are packed in the trunk of her maroon colored Buick. Why anyone would get a car the color of dried up blood, I don't know. I'm wearing a pink tie dye shirt with black shorts and my grandma is wearing olive shorts with a white buttoned shirt that has light blue flowers on it. She's making her way to the driver's side of the car, and I catch up to her. The same misconception about turtles applies to older people – they're really not as slow as we joke they are.

"I'm driving," I tell her, motioning for her to give me the keys.

"When?"

"Now. What do you mean when?"

"You're not driving my car."

"Yes, I am. Mom wants me to drive."

"I didn't get my license from a cereal box. I can drive. I've driven in snow and on slippery streets since before your mom even thought about having you. You haven't been through that."

"Well, you can tell me about it while I'm driving, so give me the keys."

She's furious.

She has no other choice but to give me the keys, and she makes her way to the passenger's side of the car, struggling and using the car for support. Under her breath, she mumbles curses at me.

The sky is grey, and a cold front is fast approaching. The reports on the television said it would rain at night. Either that or my grandma heard wrong. Either was entirely possible.

After a mostly silent half hour of driving, I glance over at my grandma, and I notice that she's tightly gripping the "oh shit" bar, otherwise known as the assistance handle, with her right hand. It's rightfully named because people usually grab a hold of it and exclaim "oh shit!"

"Why are you so tense?" I ask her.

"Because of how you're driving."

“How am I driving?”

“Like you’re a maniac!”

“I’m going ten miles below the speed limit!”

“When you drive, it’s not about how you’re driving. It’s about how everyone else is driving. Don’t you know that people are crazy, and that people die because of crazy drunk drivers? Times aren’t good right now.”

“Please tell me a time span where times were good and people didn’t die. You talk as if people just started dying.”

She’s quiet.

“What is the problem?”

“You and your mother are governing me in a way that I don’t like. There’s nothing wrong with me driving. You and your mother should be happy that, at my age, I can still control a car as well as I do.”

“And how did you control the car the other day when you hit that roadside memorial?”

“Well, why was it there?”

“That’s the whole point! They weren’t supposed to be there! That’s why the signs are there because people died there!”

“Forget it. You wouldn’t understand.”

“What am I not understanding?”

“Forget it.”

...

I’m looking over the dessert menu and I’m undecided. My grandma’s been eyeing the chocolate mousse cake since we got here, but she won’t tell me that. After two hours of talking on the road, now is when she decides to keep quiet.

“What are you gonna have?” she asks.

“An Aneurism.”

“Seriously, what are you gonna

have?”

“I don’t remember if you said yes or no, so I brought it anyways,” says the waitress with a smile, placing a cup of Dr. Pepper in front of me before walking away. She has long, blonde locks tied up in a ponytail.

I’ve drowned in her blue eyes since we sat down.

“She’s been eyeing you for a while,” says my grandma after the waitress leaves. “You should talk to her. She’s not ugly.”

“Everyone’s ugly,” I respond, still looking over the menu. “I’m not looking for anything now. You know that.”

“I’m not asking you to marry the girl.”

At the bar nearby, a much older man and two men in their mid-thirties are drinking and discussing politics. Every once in awhile, they flirt with the bartender by hugging her and complimenting her looks.

“Well?” she asks me again, still looking over the menu.

“I want this caramel thing, but I don’t know if I want it.” I reply, smirking.

My grandma was confused, not knowing if I was referring to the waitress or the caramel cheesecake.

“You’re as hard headed as he was,” she says.

“And you’re as crazy as he was, which is why nobody else was gonna marry either of you... And the hard headedness I got from you.”

We’re quiet. My grandma goes back to looking at the menu and then looking around the restaurant.

“And all your mom got from me was arthritis,” she responds, and we both laugh.

“I got your brain and my mom got grandpa’s brain.”

“That’s not a bad thing.”

“I’m sorry to tell you but grandpa was an idiot.”

“No, he wasn’t.”

“Yes, he was. When I was 6, you know what he did? He sat me in the driver’s side of the car and told me to drive.”

“I would’ve killed him...”

“You should’ve.”

“But, your grandfather was the smartest man I ever knew. He, he, he could do multiplications in the thousands in his head, and he accomplished so much...”

“For being an idiot?”

She just glares at me.

“I understand. I’m just kidding...”

There’s silence, but I’m glad we’re talking about it.

“You know what he used to do?” I continue. “When you’d give me that stupid hair cut, he’d take me

outside and try to trim it, but it would come out even worse.”

“You liked that hair cut.”

“I was six. I wasn’t old enough to really understand why girls were avoiding me at the time.”

Again, there’s silence.

“I used to like playing chess with him all the time though. He taught me how to play it, and now I don’t have anyone to play with.”

“We could play chess too if you asked me.”

“When the hell would you want to play chess with me?”

“If you asked me, I would.”

“Every time I talk to you, it’s an argument.”

“When people get to my age, nobody wants to hang out with them or talk to them and...”

“I’m on vacation with you. How do I not want to spend time with you?”

“I’m just saying,” she responds, and her voice trails off.

Old people are complicated. They cannot be fixed. They’re not meant to be.

“So what are you gonna get?” she asks me again.

“Nothing, I’m full,” I respond, closing the menu.

“Of shit,” she responds, smiling. All I can do is smirk back.

“It’s ridiculous how much you smirk like he used to,” she tells me after a few seconds of silence. She closely inspects my face. All I can do is look back. “You look exactly like him when he was younger.”

“I’m gonna go pay,” I tell her, standing up from the table and heading to the entrance of the restaurant where the cash register is. The waitress is standing behind it, and I see her yawn.

“I agree,” I say, and she’s confused. “Your yawn.”

“Oh, yeah, it’s been a long day.”

“Tell me about it. That over there might look cute but it’s a handful.”

“It’s nice though. Are you the only grandson?”

“Yup, the only grandson.”

“Then she must’ve spoiled you.”

I laugh. “She basically raised me when my mom was working, so you could say that.”

“That’s really nice,” she responds, looking at the debit card in my hand. “Are you ready to pay?”

I give her my card and she swipes it at the register.

“I can tell you’re young.”

“How?”

“Because you still wear your high school ring.”

“Hey, a lot of people didn’t like their high school experience, but I did. I

had fun, and unlike other people I wouldn't mind going back. I don't mind wearing it."

There's silence.

She gives me back my card with the receipt.

"Well, like Groucho Marx once sang, I must be going," I respond.

"The communist?"

"The clown, but even then that's not specific enough."

She laughs.

"Are you from around here?"

"No."

"Shame."

"Yeah."

"I'll see you around," she says, and I watch her leave to tend tables.

The nicest people you meet always leave you with "I'll see you around." The encounter is best left short. Being in love is having an

idea of how someone is, and maybe it was best for me to not find out how she was.

We'll never see each other again.

"What did she tell you?" my grandma asks, walking up to me and hanging on to my left arm for support.

"What she told me is that next time you're eating a salad because your food was expensive," I respond, helping her walk out of the restaurant and back into the car.

This story doesn't end with my grandma passing away. We all know she eventually will. Everyone will die. That's the law of life and it's the hardest truth to come to terms with.

We're born with an expiration date that can't be extended.

Instead, this story ends as a postcard from better times, and those are the only ones we remember after heartbreak. Def Leppard's Hysteria is playing on

the radio as we cruise down the lonely road. I turn the volume up and take a quick glance over at my grandmother whose right hand is gripped tight on the 'oh shit' bar as she stares out her window at a world she's leaving behind.

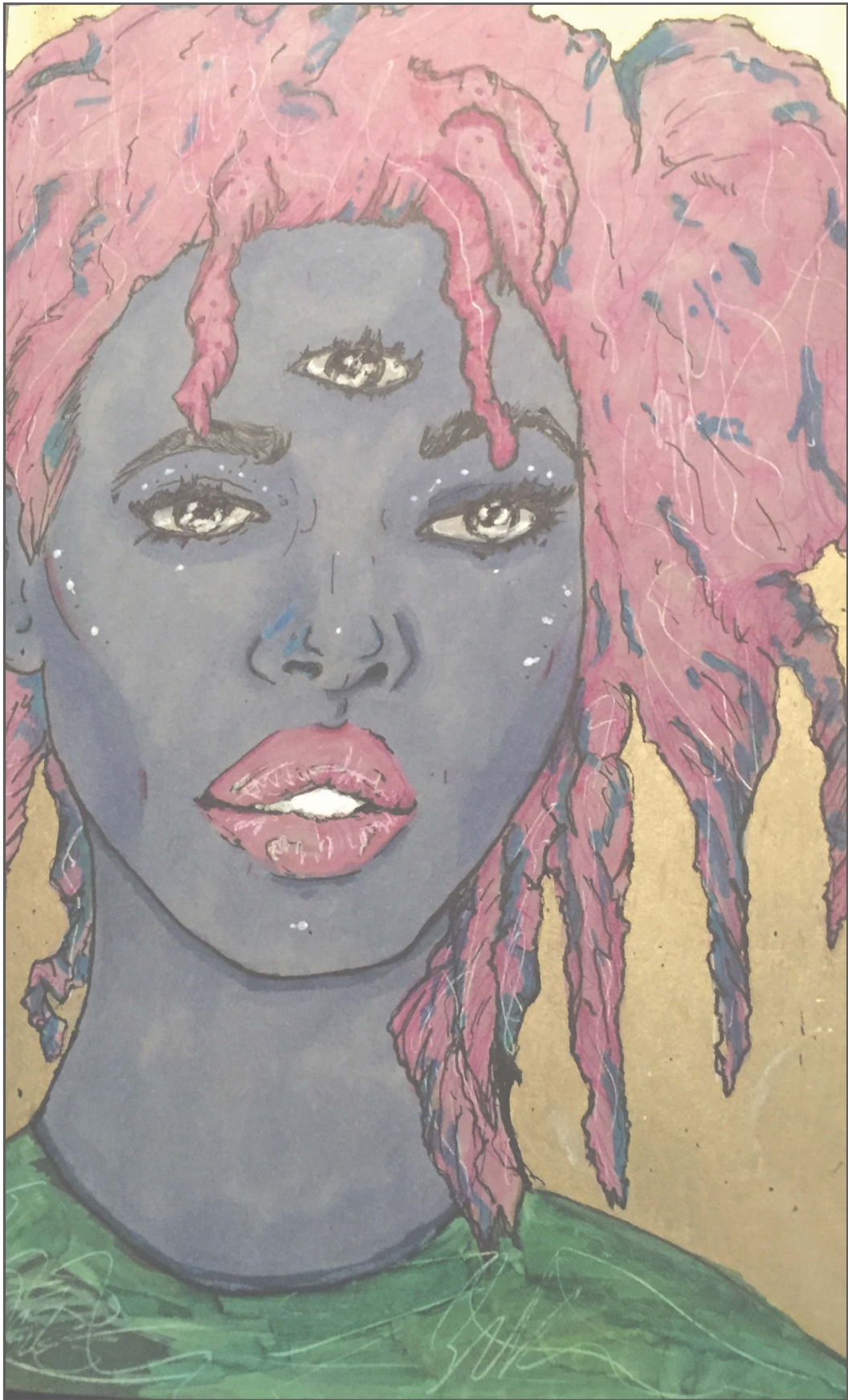
I know that everything is going to be fine.



Cosmic Roots

By A'shunti Zanders

This pain that I feel deep within
To be free
But how do you become free
Free from lies, hate, pain, and deep deep depression
A sea in void
Shallow but hollow
My life has always been pure
All of my innocence
I sacrifice to make this world pure again
Once more to feel clean like before
I've allowed them to mold me in their image
But I cling to my soul
And swim deep in thoughts of lucid dreaming and
pure bliss
My mind is mine
And this makes breathing underwater easier
I have awoken myself and I am now insane with
sanity
Love runs out in a flash
My eyes could never stick with it but it always sticks
with me
Infatuated with one's self, I am alone in the dark
To go through so much pain
Just to be alone at the end of the day



Rotting Flowers

By Ashlyn Cano

A boy gave me a sunflower along with his vow
of everlasting love

I left them in a place to rot as dark as my heart

I beg to reach my adolescent state of
interrupted joy

My ribs have consolidated my heart from
sunshine for as long as I could recall

He is constantly shredding my veins and bones

He doesn't know my mentality is already
unraveling at a constant pace

Novels and love stories said I would be saved by
a lover

In the moment I began to lose my breath

I am my only salvation

My

By Samantha Gonzalez

Creativity is engaging and stressful

Reaching into the deepest part of my mind

Entering the darkest part of myself

As I try not to let it overwhelm me

To the point that

I have to run away back to reality and

Visualize something else that

I can handle so

That I can create a poem or story for

I can handle just so

You to connect to.

The Hunt: The Redhead

By Samantha Gonzalez

The deep bass encased the entire first floor of **Trauma** with excitement. Guys were fist pumping, jumping and chanting with their friends. Some girls had both their hands up in the air, swinging their hips from side to side, while others sat in the dark blue couches, only moving their upper body to the up-tempo music. I sat on the black, round, leather bar seat as I watched people on the dance floor. I moved my head slightly to the beat, but had no intention of joining the cluster of sweaty bodies.

I took out my iPhone from my black and white clutch, opening up the photo roll to decide what picture I should post of

myself.

It didn't take long for J-man, the owner of **Trauma**, to find me sitting at the bar and tower over me, leaving me no choice but to look up at him—something we both knew that he greatly enjoyed—He was muscular and always had this serious look on his face that made him appear intimidating to most.

“Who are we looking for this evening? Anyone in particular?” He asked me.

“I haven't decided yet, it's too early to tell.”

I hid my smirk from J-man as I felt his fingers brushing my bare arm. He was so obvious, it was

almost painful to watch him try to seduce me. He knew exactly how to touch me, what move to make me tick, but even though we've slept together— multiple times actually— I have no interest in taking him home with me tonight.

“You’re coming off desperate, J. When was the last time you fucked?” I teased.

“Hopefully soon if I play my cards right.”

I rolled my eyes. “Who’s the bartender, J?” I asked, motioning towards the young, male bartender.

“His name is Dominic, he’s been working here for almost two years.”

“Really? I’ve never seen

him before,” I said.

Dominic was by no means what I would consider hot or sexy. He had deep, dark circles under his eyes and his ears kind of stuck out a bit from his head, but it was his smile. A smile that I caught between laughter and other subtle exchanges between him, ladies, and even gentlemen crowding around his bar. He seemed to love being surrounded by them and the way he bobbed around was like a game of teasing and the bar was his barrier between the bait and catch.

This game was all too familiar to me, having played it myself, but Dominic was easy to look at. Even when he was just setting a cup

down, his movements were light but undeniably weighed by the many eyes on him, but he seemed effortless regardless.

His long, black hair was pulled back into a low ponytail and he wore a simple black T-shirt that hugged his biceps and black pants that defined his nice, firm ass that I really wanted to get my hands on. Although he was a sight to behold, I wanted to win his game... and maybe him.

“He mostly works on the second floor, but every now and then, Dominic works down here.” J-man said, interrupting my observation of Dominic.

“Hmm...Dominic’s kind of cute, don’t you think?”

“Seriously? You’re going for him?” He questioned in disbelief.

“If I am, what are you going to do about it?” I teased.

He stepped closer to me, placing his large, warm hand on my thigh, massaging it. I raised my hand and laid it on his smooth, dark cheek, sitting up straighter to get closer to him. He smelled intoxicating, musky and natural. When he leaned down to kiss me, the laugh that I had been trying to keep in blurted out of my mouth and hit J’s hopeful and determined face.

“You’re a real bitch you know that?” He told me,

quickly stepping back from me.

“If you keep using the same moves every time, I’m going to get bored.” I responded, unconcerned.

“That’s not what you said last week.”

“I just don’t want to fuck you tonight, baby.” I told him, tired of trying to break it down to him nicely.

“I see how it is.” He nodded his head stiffly, stuffing his hands inside his dress pants pockets before he turned and walked away from me towards the back of the club.

I sighed in exasperation when he left,

irritated that J was getting upset over something that he had no control over. One thing about J-man is that he got attached way too quickly for my liking. J knew what kind of person I was from the moment he met me, but just like with every person I sleep with, they think that they will be the lucky one to tie me down.

A few minutes later, the music changed to a slow R&B song. I glanced up at the dance floor, guys and girls dancing much closer than before. Near the edge of the dance floor, I noticed one couple dancing so close together that a sheet of paper wouldn’t fit between them. The guy had both hands on the girl’s hips, pulling her

closer to his lower body while meeting the girl's gyrations with his own.

When I continued to scan the dance floor, a stunning, blond girl caught my eye. She was dancing by herself, trying and failing to swing her hips to the slow beat of the music. Everytime she moved her short sequin dress would sparkle when the club lights passed by her. I couldn't— didn't— want to take my eyes off her even though I knew that she was wasted out of her mind.

Her dress was tight, accentuating her breasts and stopping a few inches before her knees. I saw a man walk towards her, interrupting her dancing

and whisper into her ear. The blond girl gave him a drunken smile and awkwardly pulled him closer to join her. She was clumsily trying to be seductive when she danced with him, but instead it looked out of place and a little embarrassing from where I was standing.

Deciding to take a break from watching the blond girl, I turned back towards the bar and raised my hand to order my drink. I waited for Dominic to take my order— longer than I wanted— but I finally receive my drink, a Kamikaze shot.

The The drunk blond stumbled towards the bar next to the blue-eyed man. She had

her upper body lying over the bar table, her hand holding her empty glass towards Dominic, asking for another drink. Her green eyes were glossy and if she tried to stretch any further, her breasts were at risk of presenting themselves to him and everyone else near the bar.

I shook my head amused by her antics, her inhibition was low and she was completely embarrassing herself, but I knew that if I decided to take her home with me, she would be up for anything.

Bringing up my shot to my mouth, I pause for a short moment when I see a broad, tall man leaning against the corner of the bar. His blue-grey eyes

reminded me of the beginning of a storm, his salt and pepper stubble covered his cheeks and chin, giving him a rugged look, which I liked. He's wearing a burgundy dress shirt rolled up to his elbows with the first three buttons undone, showing me a bit of his smooth, tan skin.

We make eye contact for a few short seconds, and he gives me a cocky smile, raising his drink to me as if we were having our own private toast. I can't help but smile at his cool attitude, so I raise my shot as well, keeping eye contact with him the entire time as I drink then lick the salt off the rim of the shot glass. I smirk to myself because I know exactly what I've done to him. Then, I take a moment to look at all of my options.

As I stare at all three of them, my mind created multiple scenarios with each of them. I imagined Dominic being gentle and playful, not rushing to get to the finish line so soon like most guys I know tend to do. Our kisses would be sweet and passionate, our touch leaving small memorable trails on each other's skin until we're fully content and satisfied till the early hours of the morning.

A small tremble goes through my body as I picture Dominic's hands all over my naked body, touching me in all the right places until I'm satisfied.

When I notice the drunk blond leave the bar, I follow her with my eyes, paying a bit more

attention to her backside as she wobbled towards the bathroom. She was so beautiful; she was so fucking hot that all I wanted to do was follow her inside and give her an experience that she would never forget.

But it will be different with her, it had to be different. I couldn't take full control so early on, even though I'll be the one calling the shots if I decided to take her home with me. I picture her underneath me, her eyes are closed, legs twitching as she's moaning and gasping, clenching the bedsheets so tightly until her hands turn white as I go down on her.

Then there was the tall, muscular guy in the corner seat who I just

sensed wasn't the kind of guy to give up control. He would be rough— not like I wouldn't be able to handle that— and intense. But, so was I. I wouldn't be surprised if we woke up with a bruise or two on some part of our bodies. I conjure up an image with him and myself, my arms wrapped around his neck as we kissed heavily against my living room wall. We're practically ripping off our clothes, his warm, large hand traveling down my back to my hips, pulling me closer to him before he lifts me up and carries me to my bed.

I motion for the nearest bartender to refill my shot glass as I try to stop more images from appearing in my head and focus on what's important

tonight. I finish off my shot, enjoying the burning sensation traveling down my throat and the heat spreading inside my body. Sliding off from the chair, I grab my clutch and head towards the bathroom slowing down my pace to grab the large, warm hand of the blue-eyed man who was already walking towards me.

I turn my head to look up at him, giving him an inviting smile as I gesture towards the door to leave the club in the back. His cocky smile widens, removing his hand from my hold only to place it low on my hip and guides us towards the back exit.

I can always ask him for his name later.

Block

By Samantha Gonzalez

The scratching sound of a pencil against a crisp
white paper,

Words fluidly coming out is music to my ears.

Until.

I'm.

Stuck.

Words scattered everywhere!

Can't come up with anything!
my ideas hide?

Where did

Where are my words?
pages out of frustration

Ripping

Erasing sentences, deleting documents

Having to start from scratch

Why is it so hard?!

Why is it so hard?!

To come up with an idea

To create something great

That moves people

Bringing them to tears

Inspiring them

This Is How You Write with No Hands

By Samantha Gonzalez

I sometimes imagine myself with no hands

What I will do?

If I needed to write without them...

Would I use my feet as hands?

Hold the pen in my mouth...

As I struggle to form the letter W?

Maybe I would tell someone what to write,

Watching them with eagle eyes

For any mistake.

What if I had no hands?

K-9 Fatale

By Samantha Gonzalez



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