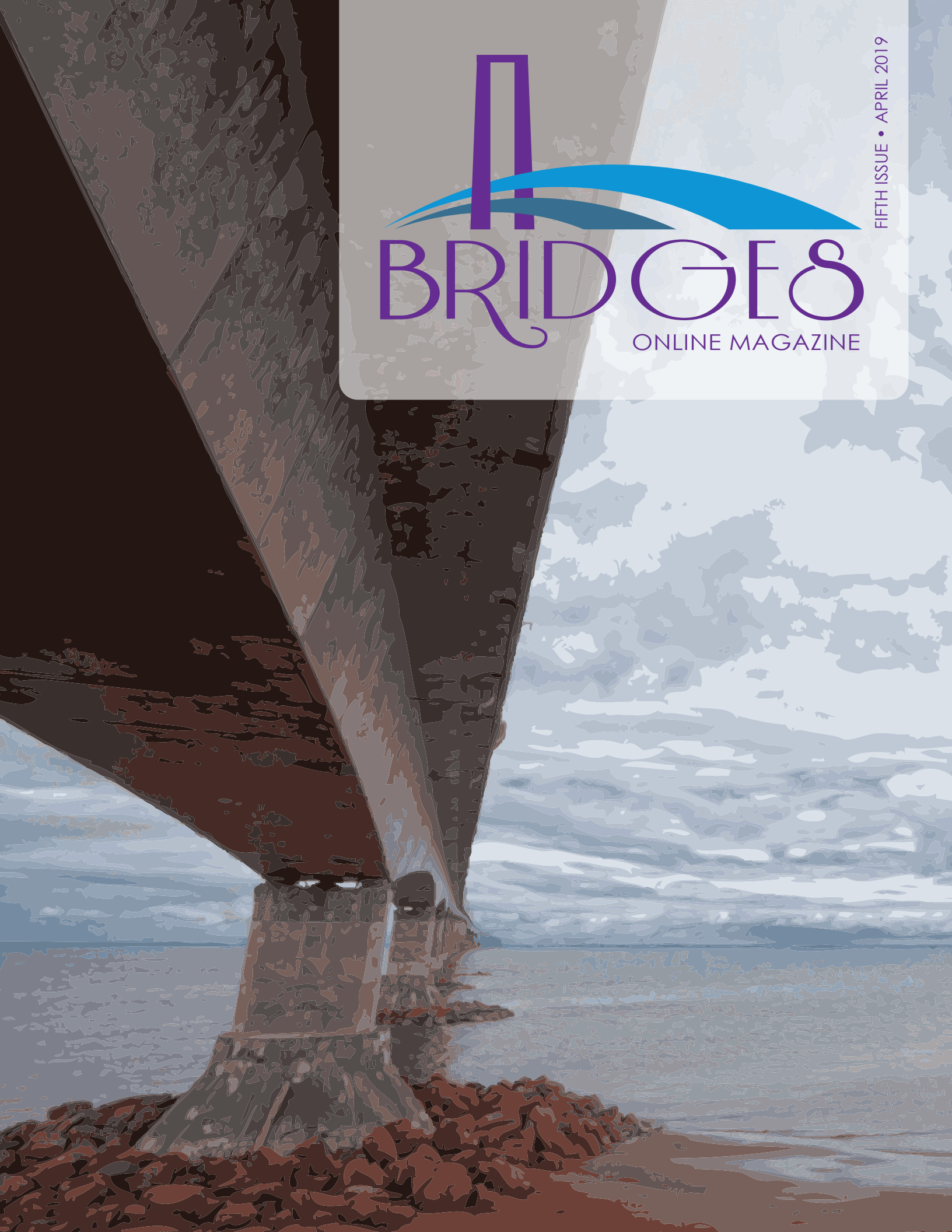




BRIDGES

ONLINE MAGAZINE

FIFTH ISSUE • APRIL 2019



Acknowledgments

Credits for "Bridges"

Jessica Adams Stone, Ph.D., Coordinator

Committee:

Petra Avillán León, M.A.

Denise López Mazzeo, Ph.D.

Enrique Olivares Pesante, M.A.

Cynthia Pittman Doletto, Ph.D.

Lena M. Rodríguez Colón, M.A.

English Department, College of General Studies

Brenda Ann Camara Walker, Ed.D., Acting Director

Dean's Office, College of General Studies

Aurelio García Archilla, Ph.D.,
Acting Dean

Yury Posada Marin, Ph.D.,
Acting Associate Dean Academic Affairs

Sandra J. Sánchez González,
Assistant Dean Student Affairs

Carlos Juan García,
Associate Dean Administrative Affairs

Technology Support Provided

CRET, College of General Studies
Carlos R. Echevarría Tirado, M.A.,
Graphic Designer

Contact us:

bridges.upr@gmail.com
Bridges Newsletter ©2019

Photo:

"Teamwork makes the dream work"
Ana C. Hernández

- 2 Foreword
- 4 Art Foreword
- Poetry**
- 7 My Life
- 7 Dreaming of Better Days
- 8 Untitled Poem
- 9 Imperialist Love
- 10 Font

11 Black Forest Siren

Short Stories

- 12 Time Crash
- 14 Because of Her
- 16 I'm Not Crazy
- 17 A Sacrifice for the Moon Goddess
- 20 The Workshop Effect
- 23 Moira

Mini-sagas

- 27 Missing Piece
- 28 Criminal Curiosity
- 28 Can I Get Out?
- 30 A Rock in the Way
- 30 Sixty-Nine Bucks



"Death Inside a Human, Outside of a Skull": Arlene Aleman

Art & Photography

- 1 Death Inside a Human, Outside of a Skull
- 2 A Wish PProvided
- 4 Beautiful Tragedy
- 5 Create Paths

Essays

- 31 Rehabilitation Reality
- 32 Animal Rights
- 34 Prison of Lies
- 36 When I Was the Dreamer
- 37 What's Going On with Me?
- 39 Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" as a Feminist Text

6 The Path of Life

- 7 Drawing by Valeria Schultz López
- 15 Alpha and Omega
- 27 Painting by Valeria Schultz López
- 28 Deadly Need
- 28 Painting by Valeria Schultz López
- 29 Drawing by Valeria Schultz López
- 30 Paradise Lost
- 30 Drawing by Allison McFarland
- 31 Brain Wash
- 34 Teamwork makes the dream work
- 39 The Forces of Nature
- 41 El límite está en tus manos
- 41 Wildfire

Foreword

Building Bridges: Reconstructing Literature After María

"Here, he said to her. Here both recognizes and demands recognition. I see you, or here, he said to her. In order for something to be handed over a hand must extend and a hand must receive. We must both be here in this world in this life in this place indicating the presence of."

—Claudia Rankine, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*

On September 20, 2017, the meteorological phenomenon known as Hurricane María made contact with Puerto Rico, drastically altering its land and history henceforth. The hurricane took with it lives, a sense of security, and the promise of the future, leaving in its wake fragments of the world we had once seen as whole. Many who have weathered the storm (directly and indirectly) have witnessed the immediacy of this destruction: some have lost their childhood homes to the wreckage, while others have been forced to abandon theirs in the hopes of self-preservation for the future. The sense of loss was profound while at the same time intangible. Something else beyond the plaster and mortar had been lost, something that has yet to be articulated. It felt as though something much deeper had been uprooted.

The students at the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras, were no exception, contending with the pressures of college life under the burden of limited resources as well as surviving outside the classroom. To say that the semesters after the storm were an uphill struggle (for every member of the university community) would be a gross understatement: hunger, exhaustion, and frustration soon became sensations too well known. Nonetheless, it seemed as though the only antidote to despair was the readiness to begin building anew, however arduous and hopeless the prospect might have seemed at the time. It is in light of these events that the theme for 51st Literary Contest of the English Department of the Faculty of General Studies was “Crisis Islands: Resistance, Recovery, and Reconstruction.” Our aspiring young writers submitted a bevy of literary texts that speak out, not despite the hardships, but through them and beyond. For this issue of Bridges, we are pleased to showcase the winners of the contest, aspiring new voices, as they reimagine and reconstruct the future of Puerto Rico through poetry, short stories, essays, and mini-sagas.

How does one rebuild a house? This question has become urgent in both its material and metaphorical sense: it leads us to the overwhelming experience of assessing damage, and taking stock of that which remains and that which has been lost. It involves a process of recognition that is at once necessary and painful. Where does one start? Does one attempt to remain faithful to its original design? How would we use our hands and hearts to heal?

A house is a home for a memory: it is a symbolic space where family and life itself coincide, it is the heart within a heart that we carry everywhere. In his latest book, *La pérdida es mía*, José Miguel Curet describes his own childhood home—“mi casa fue un refugio” (“my house was a refuge”). For Curet, home is not only a symbolic space in memory, but also an Edenic place where people could feel protected from the vicissitudes of the outside world. Home is our first cultivation of intimacy, the first step in our transition into the human world, our first laboratory for understanding love.

We carry our homes with us wherever we go. In light of the recent migration from the island to the United States, many carry the vision of home as their guiding light. While displaced families struggle to establish new homes in a

new country, they are also thinking about the spaces they have left behind. There is also a conscious yearning to return to the island, to not only feel proximity to memory, but to feel the closeness to the earth that birthed them. But how could we manage to bridge these distances and reconcile this separation? There is a special kind of violence in vacillating between two homes and being unable to claim either. It is because of this tension that the destruction of our emotional and physical architecture seems so devastating: the groundwork that had kept us centered has crumbled.

In a recent interview, writer Vanessa Vilches Norat expressed how the written word is capable of disrupting the structures of powers that organize to oppress us by speaking truth against these institutions. Adding to Norat’s observation, if we are able to dismantle these hierarchies, we are also able to construct new structures that are able to resist. It is through the work of literature that we can regain a modicum of power by becoming visible, by erecting the walls of the house of memory.

It is of the utmost importance how our stories are told, and who tells them. In the shadow of fake news, misinformation, and misrepresentation (especially after María), writing about experiences that speak truth to power is an imperative. Such work stands against the violence of historical erasure, defying attempts to render lives invisible. This is why this publication of this issue of Bridges seems so pertinent: it provides a place for our own up-and-coming voices to speak truth to power. I think of Cindy Jiménez-Vera’s “Muerte a la poesía lírica” when she writes: “Que las crónicas

“We’re building and walking across bridges between the past and the future, between the aquí and the allá, and more importantly, between each other. We find ourselves constructing the world we wish to live in: a world more just, a world more inclusive, a world we can call home. But for that space to exist, we need to build those bridges day by day, and word by word. Let these young voices pave the way.”

tengan los nombres/ de todos los que las viven" ("Chronicles should bear the name of/ all those who live them"). Literature should reflect the reality of its readers and writers.

Last year's keynote speaker for the contest, Elidio La Torre Lagares, spoke of the Promethean fire as an allegory for humanity. Not only does it provide heat, but it beckons us to gather around it to share our stories. In a way, this eternal fire was our first act of congregating as part of the human race. We all bear the responsibility not only to preserve the flame, but to hand it on to those who will continue the task. Such is our mission: to keep the gift of literature burning in our hearts and guiding us home.

It is apt that the literary magazine for the English Department is named Bridges. I cannot help but think of the lines from Tato Laviera's poem "AmeRícan":

AmeRícan, across forth and across back
back across and forth back
forth across and back and forth
our trips are walking bridges!
it all dissolved into itself, an attempt
was truly made, the attempt was truly
absorbed, digested, we spit out
the poison, we spit out in malice,
we stand, affirmative in action,
to reproduce a broader answer to the
marginality that gobbled us up abruptly!

We're building and walking across bridges between the past and the future, between the aquí and the allá, and more importantly, between each other. We find ourselves constructing the world we wish to live in: a world more just, a world more inclusive, a world we can call home. But for that space to exist, we need to build those bridges day by day, and word by word. Let these young voices pave the way.

— Enrique Olivares

Art Foreword

The Interconnectivity of Art

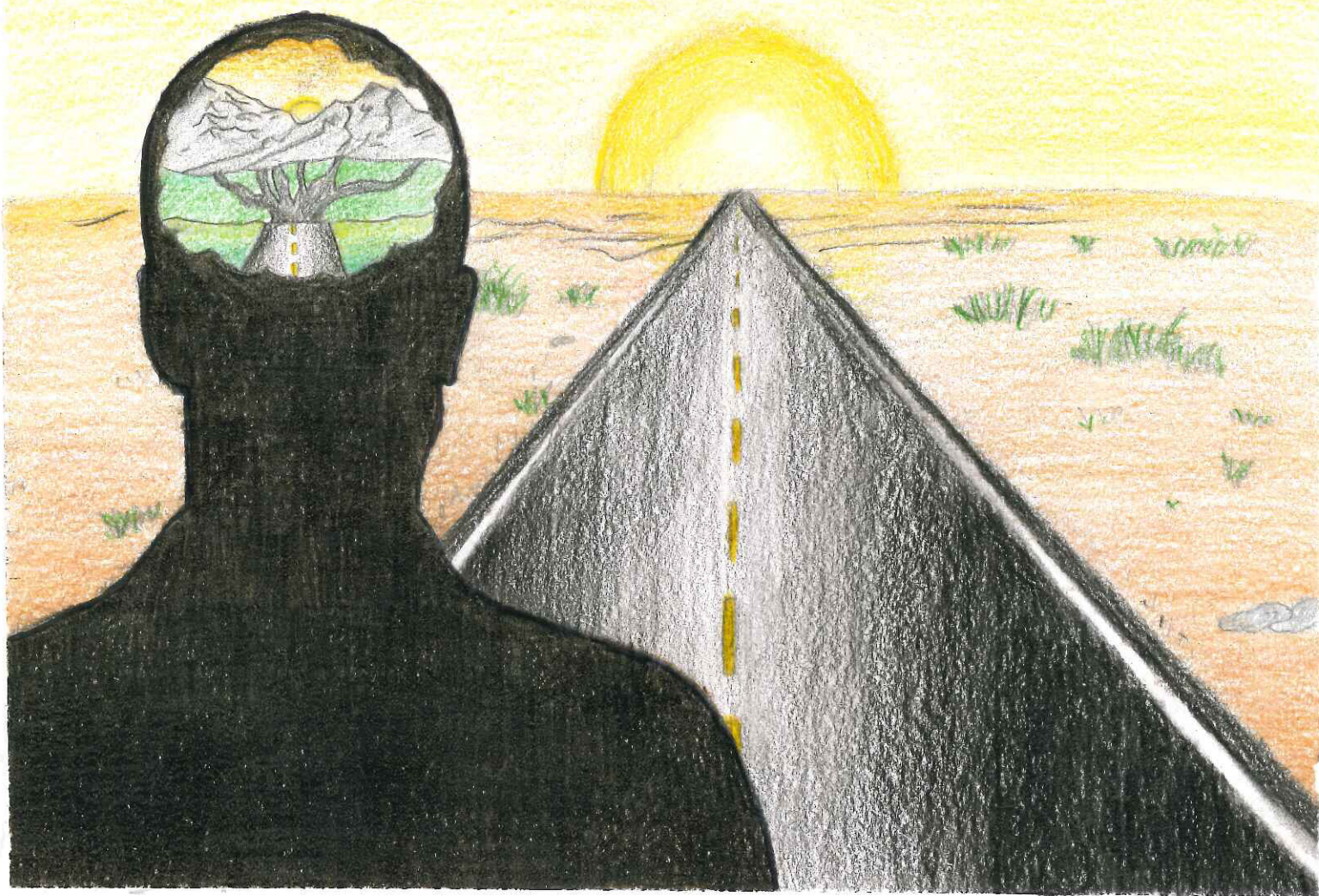


"Beautiful Tragedy": Alanis Manzano

Art connects us all through time and space. The different mediums which are used to illustrate our innermost thoughts, fears and dreams, imagined or experienced realities, allow for a multiplicity of creative forms where ceramics, paper, ink, paint, as well as the human body, among others, open the door to worlds unimagined by most. Thus, the work of Picasso gives us Cubism while Damien Hirst immortalizes the ever-feared death by shark. From the sublime to the morbid, art permits us all to find an answer to our questions or to make new unanswerable inquiries. The works displayed in this year's edition of Bridges illustrate a variety of ideas that can reflect us and make us wonder. As you enjoy this year's edition, we invite you to find yourselves in our students' artistic expressions, or as Jann Alexander states, see how "the art of it all connects me to everything my eyes can take in"...through all ages and dimensions.

— Petra E. Avillan León

Create Paths



"Create Paths": Daniel Nicola



"The Path of Life": Adriana Pabón Rosario

My Life

by Yomaira Ramos Rosado

I love to study
at the university
with my English
teacher Mrs. Pitt.
I wanted to speak English
better—learn and study.
When I get out of prison,
I will continue to study
in the free street.
Nothing is impossible.
My son and my daughter—
they are so important to me.
I hope that someday I
can be with them.
One day I will go out
to the free street.
And I will say “Goodbye”
to the prison.

Dreaming of Better Days

by Sharelys López Pérez

Many of us have bad days,
Days where we lose
Our whole spirit. Where
Our ideas are lost.
Days when we just
Want to be free.
I tell myself this is a process,
But every day, I just see
Routines and more routines.
I ask myself when will I see
My liberty? For now
I just wait and look out
Windows and dream about
My future days when I
Will be free again.

Artist: Valeria Schultz López

Valeria 237
Kathy Red 12/12/14

Untitled

by Daniela Crespo



Photo: Getty Images

I grew myself too big for a house,
Inflamed, in flames.

Now I want to drown in ecstasy,
exorcise all sorrows that have impregnated my bones.
I want to float into stars,
burst,
become my own galaxies.
I want to be filled with light and
part that which clouds my vision.
I want my lips to meet the shore of another face,
crash into their teeth,
smile with tongues.
I want my feet to move the earth,
cut the ground,
make waves,
give birth to new soil,
crash buildings.
I want to see what it's
like.

I grew myself too big for an island,
solitary,
abandoned,
pillaged, destroyed, exploited.

I want to leave.

And I did leave.

So I walked to the sound of god for a year,
and in each step,
like piano keys,
I heard violent sighs, wind howling through skyscrapers—
the very skyscrapers that look down on me knowing
I did not belong, nor was yet big enough for this city.

I exhausted my youth on subways,
In fear.

I was washed in rust,
Deteriorated in shame,
Robbed of all personhood, yet
Persistent
On shaking the city's hand as if still needing to prove
I was big enough for her.

I grew too small for a city,
Too big for an island.

And now,
None welcome me.

Imperialist Love

by Marcus Moyett



Photo: Jim Garrett/NY Daily News/Getty Images

Oh, baby, I love you
Like the US loves wars.
Sweetheart, I love you
Like NASA loves Mars.

My love expands for miles,
It stretches far away, okay?
Like General Nelson Miles
Sailing from Tampa Bay,
Into the Puerto Rican way.

Yes, this is an imperialist disgrace,
That's really harsh. Indeed, it's a mess!
But woman, I will try to express,
This horrible imperialist maze.

We have died with honor,
Borinqueneers and proud.
Even with our status of dishonor,

"For Freedom, for liberty!"
We screamed your war cry loud.

At least I do love you, honey
But not like the US and his colony.
They love us because of the money,
Indeed, we ricans don't have any glory.

No, this is not a critique.
This is a story,
Made of false mystique.
Oh shoot!
That was sarcasm, I am sorry.

In the end, I still love you
Even if we are second class.
I guess you don't know, do you?
That we don't fit in American class.

Font

by Andrea P. Vázquez Colón



Photo: Infographic Design Team

Before filling the white, empty space
We pass our eyes across a
Vast selection of fonts

There's
The simple The **bold**
The **LOUD**
The *meek*
The globular
The **old fashioned**
The **messy**
The "girly"
The "macho"
The *twisted*
The **ALIGNED**
The meager

The **COLORFUL**

In this constantly working machine
There are many types to choose from
No matter the style, size, color
They all tell a story
They all send a message
And **when they all** work **together**
Everything looks a little **BIT** more **MAGICAL**

But sadly, we are all forced to be the same

Black Forest Siren

by Angelimar Veguilla Valentín

Black forest calla lilies' tones,
the scent of fresh future dreams
I held in my arms so carefully as petals.
I not only held my life now but my baby's.
Aspirations, desires, wishes, ambitions, hopes;
they were all hers, but they became my own goals.
Her needs became my life's true purpose: captive was I
of her dark, wild plum toned, flawless skin and her birdsong.
Her call was a siren's melody, irresistible for me not to aid her.
In no time, she's opened her eyes and looks at me with such potential.
Bursting out her first giggle, she keeps me mesmerized in her perfection.
At her service, I vow myself forever. I know I shall not surrender to her singsong,
and yet, I know there is no option to resist it; her clear water eyes so transparent, kind.
Soon enough, she leaves crawling with unsteady, insecure steps behind for princess role-playing;
with innocent little white dresses she could make a pure contrast to her skin; her beauty was faultless.
Endlessly jet black curls make her mane, bouncing while walking with such pride and joy, her essence;
a focused, determined, strong, tough and brave one; my chest bursts out as I observe how grown my baby is.
She's grown an independent and confident woman. I could never ask for more! She's indeed more than I deserve.
I must not surrender to her song, but her triumphs are the highlights of my life; her sorrows: my despair; her joys: my daily desires.
A willing servant, friend, confidant and ally, everything she could need she's made of me since the day she was born. My everlasting
promise to a black forest siren, my baby girl: she's everything to me; her newborn scent, her sweet babbles, I shall always remember.





Time Crash

by Laura N. García Cortes

White, it's all blurry and white. Where am I? - "Ugh!" my entire body hurts, everything looks kind of foggy. Who is this old lady injecting me? I try to struggle but it seems like I can't move. Is the stench of excessive cleaning products making me feel sick or is it the smell of despair in this place? Filled with doubts I lay on the cold bed.

- "Karma, run! Tell the doctor the doctor that the patient woke up!"

- "On my way, Hope."

- "Doctor J. Justice will see you in a moment. Stay calm, the surgery was successful."

A fucking hospital... where even though you have the "Right to Live" you still have to pay for it. I would have preferred dying; my life time won't be enough to pay for this crap. The butcher specialized in bistoury is here already, babbling about how much of a hero he is for cutting my body and sewing it back together. In between his nonsense something strikes me, "The blood donor decided to stay anonymous." Well, now that's what I call a hero, not taking credit even though you deserve it. All of a sudden, this Karma dude points a light towards my eyes.

- "Doctor, his pupils are going crazy. They expand and narrow constantly, even with light exposure."

- "Might be because of the anesthesia. Give him some time to adjust to light. Tell me about your sight, Angel, is it normal or do you feel something unusual?"

- "Aside from being blinded by a pen light by the fella right here, it's back to normal."

I was home from the hospital three days after that. My car in the garage was probably more wounded than myself. Guess I'll have to walk to the cafe, I wouldn't mind walking if my body wasn't mutilated by the car crash. My boss might fire me if I don't go today, I can't have that right now. The mug that I was holding suddenly fell from my hands and splattered all over my carpet. "Great". I arched my back to clean up the mess and holy! The pain in my back was so unbearable, my eyes widened and I screamed. Unexpectedly, the next thing I know was that I had the mug in my hands and the carpet was clean, as if nothing ever happened. "I need to get more sleep, hallucinations are scary things."

On my way to work, I saw her. I don't even know her name but she comes to the coffee shop whenever I'm working. Her eccentric style makes it hard to ignore her, you don't see many people wearing colorful steampunk outfits that makes them look like cyborgs. It's not a bad thing, at least for me. Yet, people's reactions are quite unique, some don't even dare to sit close to her and others eagerly want to take pictures with her. She sat on one of the chairs, always looking around, probably waiting for me. As I enter, she smiles enthusiastically. That's a look I've never seen on her face, it's almost beautiful. After changing my clothes, I go to her table.

- "Thank you for always being a loyal customer, what can I serve you today?"

- "I'll have the usual... You have been absent for a while, can I ask why?"

- "I had vacations, only four days, but better than nothing" I chuckled to make it more believable. After a while, I gave her the spearmint tea with two of sugar.

- "It's hot, therefore, I also brought you some ice." I already know she likes it cold.

- "Thank you!"

As I was about to leave, she stopped me.

- "I saw you walking..." Her voice was quite shy.

- "Such a beautiful day. I might as well enjoy it. Take some fresh air."

- "Your shift ends really late. It's not safe to walk the zone at that hour. I can give you a ride if you want."

- "Excuse me?" I saw her for the first time five years ago, yet I don't anything about her and I have to keep my distance at work. The boss is already looking at me.

- "It's just a ride home and after working hours."

- "Lady I-" My boss was coming this way, thus she cut me mid-sentence and whispered rapidly.

- "See you at eight in the market across the street"

- "Is there something wrong, lady?"

-“No, sir. He was just making sure everything was fine.” Suddenly her mug fell and splattered all over the carpet. “Oh my... I’m sorry”

-“Don’t worry lady, I’ll clean it up and bring you another one.” I said before seeing the defying look my boss was giving me. I washed the dishes all day long after that.

It is ten already, my boss made me stay after hours and do the saddest chore of the them all. Walking out of the cafe I see the market, already closed. Yet, she is there waiting on her motorcycle, asleep, but waiting. “Hey, wake up.” I said while moving her shoulder and looking straight to her face. Startled, she opened her eyes abruptly and her pupils moved so fascinatingly that I-

-“Thank you for the ride. I would offer you something but it’s already late.”

-“Don’t worry, I have to go home anyways. Good night and I hope you get to repair your car.

-“Good night.” I waved as she drove away. My garage door is closed so I wondered, how did she know my car is wrecked? I’m too sleepy to think about that. Also, the news about my accident might be all over the town so that might explain it.

Another day and I can tell I didn’t slept well, my eyes hurt and my pupils are going crazy. I don’t even know how am I seeing straight. Furthermore, my boss is being an ass towards me. Since I work the early shift today, he is making me cook most of the breakfast. I grab the frying pan to flip the pancakes. Since I was distracted I hit myself with the entire pan and the pancakes. The burning feeling rushed through all my face and I started screaming. My eyes were shut so all I could hear was the pan hitting the floor and all my coworkers rushing to me. I opened my eyes and I have the pan in my hands, about to flip the pancakes, everything seems just like a few seconds ago... But I am okay, so I must have imagined it. “Ruby, I need to go to the bathroom. Can you take care of this order for me?” I gave my coworker the pan and rushed to the bathroom to wash my face and clear my mind. My pupils are still acting abnormally, I’ll go to the doctor in the afternoon to see- “ARRRRGH!” I could hear Ruby’s screaming and all the chattering from the pan and something else. I rushed out, her whole face was burned and some of her clothing as well. It seems like she fell over and hit herself with a pan full of boiling oil. The severely burned skin is so disturbing. I think she might be scarred for life. I feel so guilty about this. Was it my fault? The cafe closed for the day due to the accident. I was so lost in thought that I didn’t see “steampunk lady” right in front of me.

-“Hello.” By snapping her fingers, she made me conscious again.

-“Oh, I’m sorry!”

-“I heard what happened at the cafe. Is she okay?”

-“I don’t know and I feel so guilty about it. I was the one supposed to prepare that order. It was supposed to be me yet... Ugh.” I sat on the sidewalk not knowing what to do.

-“Look, it’s okay. There’s nothing you can do about it. She might get better we never know.”

I sat there in silence.

-“Hey! Let’s go for some ice cream. It always cheers me up.” She handed me the helmet and I couldn’t say no.

We’d been there for hours now, laughing and eating ice cream. Her name is Destiny and her humor is pretty good. I had never seen this ice cream store in my life but she seems so fitting in it since it’s kind of retro and everyone is dressed as lunatics, even the staff. It is a beautiful place, though.

A month has passed since then and I can say that I’m dating Destiny. We go out every day and she gives me rides home. She is really caring and sweet, not mentioning how beautiful she is with and without her steampunk work attire. To think I thought she was a lunatic because of her outfits but it’s just her job’s uniform. But, the past month has not been all fun and games. The truth is that many episodes like last one have been happening. I “saw” myself falling while carrying out an order and ask one of my coworkers to do it instead. He broke his arm. My brother came to visit and the light went out so I lit a candle on my room and again I “saw” my clothing catching fire. I switched candles with him and instead his entire room was burnt. I can keep recalling things that I saw myself going through but instead they happened to someone else. Some are so horrible I better not remember them.

I am walking down the street and see this little girl, her mother was looking at her phone, not giving her much attention. The next thing I see is the girl crossing the street and a car. I closed my eyes tight because I didn’t want to see it. When I opened them, I am walking down the street and see the little girl, with her mother looking at her phone, not paying her much attention. Running I grabbed the little girl’s arm just before she crossed the street. Ugh... what a relief. The car passes by and no incidents happened, but the mother started yelling at me, insulting me for grabbing her child’s arm. She was so furious that she didn’t realize she was walking towards the street,



neither did she realized about the truck. I held the girl close while she cried for her mother.

I am at Destiny's place. I have this urge to tell her everything that has been happening. After an hour of talking she didn't seem surprised by any of this, rather she was sad and with a face of guilt.

- "Angel, do you remember the car crash you had a month ago?"

- "Well, obviously."

- "I was the blood donor."

- "...Why are you telling me this now?"

- "My family and I can travel through time by blinking hard or just shutting our eyes. We can go back up to two hours in time, but if something crucial changes, it has its repercussions. I guess that by giving you my blood you inherited this quirk of ours."

I just sat there for a few minutes, contemplating everything that had happened. How every time I was going to have an accident I closed my eyes and someone else had it worse.

- "I don't want this... DESTINY I DON'T WANT THIS! I CAN'T CONTROL THIS, I'M A MONSTER!"

- "Calm down, Angel!" She tried to stop me but out of panic I thrust my fingers inside my eyes so hard they exploded.

It's been a year, a year with no accidents. Destiny now lives with me, and she takes care of everything for me. I do feel like a burden but I love her and she says she is happy by helping me. I want to propose to her but it makes me feel like I'm tying her to be with this coward blind dude. She is the most caring person I know. It's late at night and I'm hearing the radio, Destiny went for some groceries but she's taking longer than usual. "This is Liberty radio, and today, July 17, we are having a special..." It's been exactly a year since my car crash, so many things... My eyes widened when it all made sense. I saw Destiny that night, right before the car crash, with her eyes shut. She... she saved my life. But, if so, then who is going to pay for my death? I already knew the answer. I cried and waited for her in vain, even after the cops came.

Because of Her

by Carlos Padua

1952—It's a very gloomy day here in London. I always used to hate these kinds of days. Sad, rainy, just depressing in general. But, I have kind of gotten used to it. I don't feel the happiness of sunny days anymore, the sun touching my skin. I can't feel the satisfaction of eating my favorite food in my favorite place. I used to love it there in "Aux pain de papy," the best bakery ever created in London. Eating a warm buttery croissant, with a dark coffee, lightened by a little bit of almond milk, with a tad of whipped cream. Surrounded by my favorite flowers, the lilacs; they were just so beautiful. It was just perfect. Just the smells oozing all over the place, combined with the amazing flavors was unforgettable. However, I can't find the joy or thrill of that any longer; I don't think I am capable of that nowadays.

These past two years haven't been great. My mom is always crying; she hasn't gone to her job in months. My dad's out of the picture; he left when I was five years old. It has been ten years, and there is no sign of him; I don't think there ever will be. Everything is going downhill. Even the people all over town are talking about how our family has not been the same in a while saying, "Wow, that family never goes out. Tragic," or "Damn, the Montgomery's have really lost their way." I had tried to not listen, but it is the truth they were speaking. The only ray of light left in this life full of darkness is my sister, Annie; she always knew how to make me feel better, how to lift my mood. She used to call me Susu, a nickname for Susan. She is the cutest little four-year-old with her red hair and freckles—it runs in my mom's side of the family; she had burning red hair, too. I guess I turned out to be like my dad. I don't remember him all that well, but I do remember his hair. It was just like mine—dark, thick and unable to tame.

I am feeling more and more alone every day, not being able to connect with anyone. I feel invisible. I feel trapped. I wish I could do more to make everyone happy, to stop everyone's pain and depression, and mine, too. Seeing everyone like that hurt my heart, if that was possible.

One day I tried to help. I went to my mom's room in the house. She was on the floor crying, but I couldn't get close to her. I just admired her from a distance. I accidentally turned off the lights and then back on. I do that a lot. I think she sensed me nearby, but I wasn't going to let her know I was there. She got up from the floor, wiped her tears, went to Annie and told her that she'd be back soon.

My mom hadn't gone out the door in months. Did I have something to do with it? I followed her out.



"Alpha and Omega": Jeriliz Ortiz Laboy

I had made my mom... well, my family I should say... suffer a lot before. I made them miserable. It was not my fault, I guess... or was it? That thought ran through my brain day and night. As I followed my mom, I saw that she went to the flower store.

"I want the biggest, most beautiful lilacs you have," she said.

The girl in the register showed her the prettiest lilacs I've ever seen and commented, "They arrived yesterday from France. Believe me these are what you are looking for."

"I'll take em. How much is it?" mom asked.

"Take them. They're a gift from me," the girl insisted.

"Thank you so much," mom replied.

And she walked out the door with the lilacs in hand, and I continued following her. She walked and walked until she arrived at a

forest. She seemed to be looking for something. She stopped and placed the flowers on the floor next to a gravestone that read, "Susan Montgomery 1935-1950." It was me...

My mom had not come to visit me since the funeral. She got really depressed after I died. She thought it was her fault; I thought it was mine. But, the truth is nobody could have done anything about that tumor. It just kept growing and getting worse; the doctor didn't know why.

My mom started talking to the grave... to me. "I wish I could've done more for you. I wish it would've been me," and her head was touching the ground with tears all over the grave place. "I hope you are at peace."

I can't be at peace if she is like this. I must help her somehow. I tried to make her know I was.



I'm Not Crazy

by Natasha Jiménez

Prologue

(Y/N) = Your Name

Today reader, you are about to conduct an interrogation.

You work for a magazine called "Daily World". Yesterday, they had all of a sudden called you into your boss's office, which surprised you a lot. Since October was approaching, your boss wants a story that can strike fear into people's hearts. He called for you specifically knowing your amazing ability as a writer. Realizing he won't accept 'no' for an answer, you ended up agreeing. Because of that decision, you are now standing in front of the biggest mental institution located in the area you live in. Swallowing nervously, you think through what you're about to do.

To be able to write a story that conjures up the particular feeling you are trying to portray, one must either have experienced it him/herself or get to fully know someone who went through it. Thankfully you nor anyone you know deeply has gone through such an experience. Now having to select an unknown person, you decided to choose Miss Payne. Yesterday, you had heard rumors about it at work; but earlier today it was on the TV news this morning. "Girl gone completely insane. Has been transported and inscribed in a mental institution."

As you heard these reporter's words, a light bulb went on in your head. That case has been spreading around non-stop. It has everyone's attention. Many of the reports referring to it just expressed what the judges, police, and people thought of it, yet not once did you hear the girl's voice.

Standing at the entrance of the institution was more frightening than you thought. You know nothing of this person's personality or attitude.

What if she's dangerous?

The answer is right in front of you. A shiver runs up your spine as the cold Fall breeze dances around you. The nearby trees appear worn out; the surrounding environment emanating a solitary appearance. You look to your left and watch as orange colored leaves sway with rhythm in the air. As one of them separates from the others, you kept staring at it, acknowledging how mysterious and fascinating it appeared. Following it with your gaze, it blew in front of a window. That's when you notice you're not the only one staring.

A little jump scare escaped as your body caught up with your fright. You placed a hand over your heart feeling its quick beating of alarm. Sighing

over your reaction, you look back up at the window. The person behind it kept his eyes on you. It was a man with a solemn expression on his face. As you stared at him, he remained motionless and stern, but you could hint a certain gloom in his eyes. It could even resemble that of pain and loneliness...

The air shifted as the crystal doors opened in front of you, quickly gaining your attention.

"Are you coming in?" Asked a woman wearing nurse attire.

"Y-Yeah," you replied.

"Then come on in" she smiled and gestured for you to walk inside.

Before you took a step, you looked over at the window again. Only this time, the man was no longer there.

Day 1

You hesitated slightly at entering a place you had never gone inside before and never planned on actually ever entering. Stepping inside, you were engulfed by the smell of cigarettes. It took you a whole lot of willpower to not gag. You tried holding your breath, but it was in vain. The nurse noticed your discomfort and apologized. "I'm sorry, we don't get visitors so the workers decided on this area to be our smoking room."

"Oh, it's okay" You replied, taking the neck of your shirt and pulling it up to cover your mouth and nose.

As the nurse went to open some windows, you took the time to scan the room. What first stood out was the brown circular desk in front of you, particularly the fact that there weren't any scattered papers on it, or any piece of paper at all. They must have a lot of time on their hands to organize it. At the left and right sides of the room, there were deep red couches against the walls and a furnace on two of the corners. The walls were a dark color and hung with pictures hanging over them of the institution. The floor's tiles were color grey. Scanning the floor, you noticed the tiles near the entrance had cracks and scratches.

Animals come in here?

Letting go of the neck of your shirt over your face, you grew curious. Approaching, you squatted to get a closer look. Between the cracks of the tiles you could see blood and parts of a human's fingernails. Your hand went over your mouth as you recognized the disgusting discovery. Falling

back on your bottom, you quickly scrambled to get up as you heard the nurse behind you.

"Intrigued are we?"

Standing, you brushed a bit over your behind in case it got dust over it. "Yes," you answered, then pointed to the sickening scene. "What happened?"

The nurse saddened as she saw it. "Our patients don't like being here. They're always trying to escape. But thanks to our security guards, they never make it past that door."

You cringed as you imagined a riled up person holding onto a tile as if life depended on it. Then the guards trying to take him away...and the nails ripping off from their skin...exposing flesh...

You sensed the nurse leave your side. As you pushed those images aside, you turned your attention back to the nurse who was now behind the desk. Walking towards her, you saw she had placed a paper and pen for you to sign your name. It was the list of visitors that came this week. Your name was the only one written.

When you finished, the nurse took the paper and placed it in a drawer. While doing so, she asked aloud: "Who are you here to see?"

"Miss Payne."

The nurse's eyes shot up. "Really?"

"Yes."

She suddenly began to laugh, which startled you. Confused, you asked: "What's so funny?"

When she finally regained herself, she spoke: "Out of everyone here you want to talk to the one who doesn't make sense?"

A frown appeared on your face. You don't like being mocked or made fun of. "I'll believe that when I see it."

Noticing the anger in your voice, the nurse grew embarrassed and quickly apologized. "I'm sorry. I'll make the arrangement for you to see her. Please sit down on one of our couches to wait."

"Okay," as you headed towards the comfortable furniture, you remembered something. Looking around and not seeing it, you decided to ask the nurse. "Excuse me, wasn't there a man in here?"

When the nurse heard your question you could see the confusion clearly on her face. "A man? Honey, I'm the only one here."

A Sacrifice For The Moon Goddess

by Isaías Mckenzie Gaetán

Andromeda, Year: 0012 ATC (After The Collapse)

The ship was wrecked. The engines were bursting fire due to damage we took during the attack we had just repelled. Around us there was nothing but the dark void of space. As the captain of the ship, I sent the whole crew ahead in the remaining escape pods so they could reach safety. There was only one left. Achelois was with me, crying, trembling; for the first time she was afraid. Only one of us could return home. The oxygen levels were decreasing fast due to a leak in the atmosphere control system. I took her in my arms, placed a kiss on her scarlet lips, full of pain and sorrow--I did what she would have done for me. Without her noticing, I placed her inside the remaining pod. When she realized what was happening she started trying to escape the pod, fighting, pushing, even almost biting.

The fragments of a small yet heartfelt conversation are things I can vaguely remember. I remember, denial, lies, pain, tears of regret and the agony of losing the entire world with the push of a button.

Achelois - "No, I won't leave you here to die alone!"

There goes the denial. She wouldn't stop fighting her way out of the escape pod. Without using my full strength I kept pushing her in. I did not want to be the reason she died. Not like this, not ever would I let her put herself in a dangerous position just to keep me safe. I had to lie to her--again here is the pain and the part where I must lie to keep her safe. I had never done such a thing, but I had to give my best shot at lying to that woman for the first time.

Me- Hey, listen to my voice, everything will be okay. Everything is under control, just stop fight-

She interrupted me with a piercing scream, the scream a child makes whenever it doesn't get what it wants. She kept pushing me so she could get out of the pod. I did my best to block the doorway like a protective wall separating the dangerous world from the defenseless soul. While she was pushing, tugging and pulling me by the uniform, my soul was breaking. Her voice rang in my ears, begging for something I couldn't give her.

Achelois -You're lying... she kept saying as she pushed me and tried everything to move me out of the way; but I did not move. Her face transformed from sadness to frustration as she saw I wasn't changing my mind. At that very moment, I was full of remorse and agony because I knew I had failed her, her parents--I had failed myself. I was going to save her but that



meant she would be alone now. The real problem was that I broke a hundred promises that day.

Me -*I'm sorry but I can't bear to lose you, no, not like this and...I'm sorry.*

I couldn't bear to look her in the eye and finish my sentence. I had to keep my composure. "Always keep straight face while you are making a decision, cadet!" Those words from the general at the academy rang in my ears as I tried to not burst into tears while watching the most important thing in the universe breaking down right in front of me. And as always, I was incapable of making a choice.

Achelois - *Let me stay with you till the end. Please, I'm begging you.*

She had always cared for me back home. She used to not only share but to give me her umbrella when it was raining. She would always keep me on track with classes, she was the only girl in the flight academy and there she was, always excelling in her classes and somehow she managed to still care. But as bad as it may sound, her idea of staying with me till the end was just stupid. This was my time to repay all those years she gave me by giving her a chance.

Me - *I cannot do that, please just listen to me for once and let me make this decision.*

I was ready, I was about to make my choice. I wasn't going to give her up to the cold vacuum of space. I gently pushed her inside the pod. The door locked, never to be opened again until she reached safety. She kept punching the fortified glass in anger, trying to break it, trying to come back to me. I placed my hand on the window, and she placed her cheek on my hand through the glass. Crying, she kept saying to me, begging me for a chance.

Achelois - *Saith, please...*

She was now sobbing, that after-tantrum type of crying. Her voice was cracking and shattering, I could hear her through the glass. As she slowly calmed down, space itself was too little to fit all our emotions. We said the things we never thought we would. Those words we swore not to say to each other. We broke each other's hearts that cold merciless night.

Me - *I can't let you stay; otherwise you'd die of asphyxiation and--*

Achelois - *I DON'T CARE, to be frank and logical here, you are the one that should go not me!*

Whenever she got mad or anxious she'd scream at the top of her lungs what her heart was feeling at the moment. She was an emotional woman. I always liked that about

her, it was evidence that she was human, not a robot or simply an overcomplicated A.I. She had a heart, and I broke it—again.

Achelois - *You promised me you'd grow old with me...*

God, she wasn't helping with that sad, emotional, dramatic, vibe she was radiating. She was making this harder than it should have been. It would have been easier for her to go; hell, I would have even been OK if she escaped without telling me. But here we are at the end of times, fighting one last time over something so small and yet so delicate.

Me - *There are more than a hundred promises I couldn't keep—I am really, really sorry. I know that this may sound so cliché right now but,—* I tried my best to convince her in a civilized and calm way, but she was always a fighter. Achelois was top student in all classes. She'd always win every debate in class. To have her on your team was to have claimed victory even before the game started. I was running out of

options. I was running out of words to calm her, she was already convincing me. I couldn't let this happen.

Achelois - *Saith, Why can't I stay?. Why don't you want me here?*

I had to remind her constantly why was she so important to me. Aside from her being my world and my everything. It wasn't easy to use it as an excuse for me wanting her to leave, but it was my last resort. I wasn't willing to lose both; not now, not like this and even less when I have the opportunity to save them. Become a hero for her, for once in my life stop being the saved one and be the one who saves.

Me - *Achi Please I need you to understand, you need to leave., understand, you need to leave. You really can't stay. You are a vessel of hope.*

She was now trembling, about to burst again into tears. I pressed my forehead against the glass as she placed her hand on the other side of the glass. Seeing her like that made me hurt even more. It was all a constant reminder of how bad I am at making choices. The following exchange of words came out fast, with no pauses, no silences; it sounded rehearsed, almost mechanical.

Achelois - *I promise, Saith.*

Me - *Please, never forget who you are or what you stand for.*

Achelois - *I-I won't; I love you— my hero.*

Those words, the last words I was able to understand, were the words I needed. Between tears, sobs and sniffles, she smiled again—that warm bright smile that quiets the white silence of screaming broken souls. I placed my hand

on the control to launch the pod. I was nervous—after this there wouldn't be a way back. She'd be safe but I would die. I was prepared for this—or so I thought. She gave me one last smile full of light and hope, the same smile she'd given me back at the academy.

Me- I love you too, moon goddess.

My voice cracked. My hands were trembling like the first time we touched in the hallway. I looked away and shot the pod into the darkness of space. With my gun I shot the blast door, panel closing it forever. Through the panoramic forward window I watched as the pod shrank into the darkness of space. It was over. I had saved our new home, I had saved the most precious thing in my life, I had saved the moon goddess.

I sat down to wait—wait until the oxygen levels went to zero. I tried several times to fix the hyperdrive but it was useless. It was burnt and the engines were blown up, too. Nowhere to go, nothing to do about it. The oxygen levels were decreasing fast.

20%.

I feel fear—now I know that there is no way out of this one. I know that I'll never go home again. I knew that what I did could be very well marked as unforgivable, abandon my wife, play hero? Did I do the right thing? I felt guilt and regret for ever joining the academy. I could have lived without her and she was happy without knowing about me.

15%.

Acceptance...maybe it is for the best? I mean, I saved the world and I saved the girl I love the most all in one day. I feel happy that my sacrifice won't be in vain. I can say I enjoyed life, with my family, with her. I died saving her from a certain lonely death I don't wish upon any other soul.

10%.

A cold tear runs down my face as I ponder the many things we had planned—a wedding on the beach, honeymoon in Germany, a small apartment in the countryside; a family. The hundred promises I didn't keep continued to ring in my ears like the deafening sound of a signal-less T.V.

5%.

I smile... those happy memories come into my mind like a movie. Our kisses, hugs, jokes, pranks, cuddles, love—all those fragments of small moments we had. I stood up and started to roam around the cadaver of the ship. I feel stronger, I feel like

everything I trained for was happening now. All those years of training were now about to be tested. 1%.

The cold darkness already caressing my skin howled and begged me to join her. As the alert alarm blared, screaming about my obvious state of danger due to the critical level of oxygen in the shell of what used to be a cruiser, I kept doing push ups to keep myself awake. I was singing at the top of my lungs songs from before "The Collapse" to keep my mind from setting sail to the uncharted frontiers of my subconscious. I broke into laughter. I was in some sort of post- denial state. I wasn't going to die here, not frozen like a popsicle.

0.5%.

Why is it so cold here? Sheesh! 0.0%.

I close my eyes and I wake up in a church. Up here from the altar I can see hundreds of people. At the end of the cathedral I see a silhouette, the silhouette of a lady dressed like a princess; an angel. I take a deep breath and hold her hands. Fighting back the tears in my eyes, as if it was rehearsed, I remember a silent "I do." I remember the gentle warm embrace of that angel.

I woke up in a hospital room, I saw her by my side. Her hair was longer, her eyes were brighter, her smile was as gorgeous as always. Out of the corner of her eye she saw I moved a little bit, she knew I was conscious, that I was there.

Me -What happened?

As she saw that I was awake she threw herself in my arms, overwhelmed with emotions, crying with gratitude. She hugged me tighter than ever before. The first time I felt her embrace it was a winter cycle month, 0008 ATC. That "sweet see you tomorrow" she said, made my life take color.

Achelois -You were in a coma. It has been 11 months since we were able to repair everything you lost.

Me -Who saved me?

Achelois -I did.

Me -How? Why did you go back?

Achelois-Ask that another day. I want you to meet someone...

She went outside and brought in a beautiful girl. Her eyes belonged to her mother, her smile was obviously the property of her father, and her heart was ours to keep. Protecting it from the cruelty of humankind. I held her in my arms; it was my daughter.

It was a new dawn, and her name was—Hope.

The Workshop Effect

by Paula V. Ayala López

Sami and Amara met during their first year of college. Sami walked into the tiny spec of an apartment—which she managed to get once she saw an ad of a broke art student looking for a roommate—to find Amara, a dark blonde (before she fell into a hair dyeing addiction), sitting cross-legged on one of the two twin beds. She was hunched over in concentration; eyes focused on the canvas in front of her. She slowly brought a pointer finger to the palette resting on her lap, dipped it in a small puddle of yellow (Sami scrunched her nose up at that) and swiped the color along the canvas. She repeated this process: stare, dip, paint. She didn't really notice Sami's presence, and Sami didn't try to make herself known. Instead, she stared. The whole scene was oddly calming, like the pitter-patter of rain on a window or a quiet afternoon chatter in a café. She wanted to remember the sensation, so she lifted the camera that dangled from her neck and snapped a picture. The flash of the camera brought Amara out of her reverie and she turned away from her canvas and towards Sami and the camera. Sami blushed, and Amara grinned. The two art students quickly became friends. This is how Sami learned about The Workshop.

Many suspected The Workshop was a drug ring, or a serial killer's home, or a cult. But that was the talk of the people who never made it into The Workshop, Amara told her. The place was infamous for the mystery behind it, and anyone from the bustling city it was supposedly located in (and the surrounding towns) knew about it as well. Ten years ago, twenty-four people received an invitation to the opening of a brand-new museum. Only six attended, and all said their lives had been changed by what they saw in there. This peculiar occasion became a routine: a yearly invitation would be sent out to the chosen dozens, and these would get to experience The Workshop. The only requirement: no plus-ones and no (under any circumstances) talking of what had been seen inside. The secretiveness and exclusiveness of the museum attracted artists, journalists, reporters, and overly curious people to it; but its location always remained hidden and no insight was ever heard of it—other than the many rumors that surfaced yearly. Many thought The Workshop was simply a myth created to bring more tourists into the city during difficult economic times. And then Amara and Sami received an invitation.

"Is this it?" Sami tried not to let exasperation seep into her voice as she looked out of the passenger side window. It felt like they had been driving around in circles for the last hour, despite Amara reassuring her that she was following the directions correctly. Now they had stumbled upon a building in a quiet, poorly lit area that was what Amara believed to be The Workshop. The building was small and scrappy—a black sheep among a sea of skyscrapers. In the blanket of the night, Sami had to squint her hazel eyes closely to get a better look at the walls covered in stenciled graffiti. Maybe it was her limited

imagination, but she found it hard to imagine that *this* was the ever exclusive and elusive museum that Amara spoke about. It looked more the part of the drug ring and cult rumors.

"Well, it's definitely noticeable," Amara commented as she turned off the ignition and stepped out of the car. Her petite body was wrapped in a knee-length dress that hugged her curves and gave her a look of maturity, something she usually hid behind her blue hair and loud personality. Sami reluctantly followed her movements, stepping out and quietly closing the door behind her. She smoothed out the skirt of her dress, that would be brushing against the asphalt if it weren't for the heels that accentuated her already tall stature.

"I don't think it's a good kind of noticeable," Sami mumbled, her hand anxiously fidgeting with her necklace. If it weren't for Amara grabbing her hand and reassuring her that *it'll be fun* and that *it'll be a once in a lifetime experience*, and all but dragging her towards the entrance, Sami would have surely stayed in the car. There was a keypad on the wall beside the door, and Amara glanced at the number on the silver band they both wore around their wrists—part of their invitation—before punching it into the pad.

"You ready?" she asked but didn't wait for an answer before she pushed the door open and stepped into a long hallway, Sami following beside her. The only sound that filled the emptiness was their heels clicking on white tiles as they followed the corridor; Sami still fidgeting nervously and Amara growing more excited by the second. They made a turn and stumbled into exactly what they had expected, but not what they had imagined.

It looked exceptionally *normal*. In front of them was a big room with no plaster walls to separate one art piece from another; all the paintings were splayed out along the walls and a few sculptures were lined up in the middle. The thoughtful silence of a few dozen people, dressed in sparkly gowns and neat suits, filled the air as they all admired the various art pieces. They hadn't noticed the girls' presence.

"Welcome," a sudden gruff voice startled the girls enough for Amara to jump slightly and Sami to let out a small curse. Sami instinctively stuttered out an apology as they turned around. A man stood to the right of the hallway exit, dressed in all black. Their outburst seemed to catch him off-guard as much as his presence did to them. "I'm security, I'm meant to escort you through the museum." The need to be escorted seemed redundant; he could keep an eye on them at any point in the room, and there was no place to hide (and no reason to either). He started walking, motioning for them to follow without allowing room for questions. So, they followed.

Despite Sami's apprehensiveness about the museum, she had to admit the artwork was worth the admiration. As they stepped up to the sculptures, her

eyes focused on a particular art piece of a woman. Her position—the epitome of grace—gave way for serpents to wrap themselves around her form: one of them was wrapped around her outstretched arm as though it were frozen in time as it readied itself to strike at her throat. Sami took a step closer. The sculptor managed to reflect a worried fear in the woman's eyes. They didn't seem to belong to that graceful body, which only made the sculpture that much more intriguing for her.

"Why doesn't this sculpture have a plaque? You know, with the artist and the name of the piece?" Amara, who had been standing beside Sami, piped up.

The security man shrugged, "None of the pieces have plaques. They say it distracts from the piece itself, from its purpose."

"Well, she seems to have found the purpose," Amara commented, nodding her head towards an elderly woman who was observing the same sculpture. Amara continued walking, but Sami lingered behind. The woman gripped at the cross that hung from her neck with one hand. Her eyes didn't leave the statue-- she seemed transfixed by it.

"Ma'am," Sami turned towards the security man. He pursed his lips and gestured towards Amara, who was already far along the row of statues. She forced a small smile and bowed her head. "Right, sorry," she hurried along, taking a second to glance at each sculpture. She could tell this was a group effort. All the sculptures had a different style to them, a different way of carrying out their message, but they were all detailed to the smallest degree. It made goosebumps rise along Sami's arm. She met up with Amara. "Hey, Ama, did you see that statue's eyes? I think they really did a good job with--... Ama?"

Amara didn't respond. She had her hands crossed in front of her chest, her eyes focused on the sculpture in front of her. Arms sprouted, limbs going this way and that, fingers reaching for something to grab onto. It seemed to know what it wanted, and it was ready to grab onto her.

"She seems to have found the purpose as well," the security man joked, a hint of a smile on his lips. Sami turned to him and forced herself to smile back, an awkward half-curve of her lips. He saw the subtle worry in her eyes. There was a hint of the snake woman in them, but not enough. He cleared his throat and tried to sound comforting, "She's just enjoying the art." Her worried eyes didn't cease. "She's not going anywhere. You can continue looking. . . I'll stay by her if you want," he added.

That made her feel better. It also made her feel a bit foolish, how she worried over something as trivial as her friend's silence. After all, despite how loud Amara might like to be, her silent moments were rare and wonderful. Why would this moment be any different? She looked back one more time: Amara still stood in front of the grabbing hands and he stood beside her, hands behind his back. She sighed and continued walking. And that's when she bumped into one of the guests.

"Sorry, I didn't. . ." she looked at the man she had bumped into. She couldn't help but compare his features to the figure in the painting in front of him: a

young man, around his twenties, with olive skin as dull as the rest of the coloring. There was something behind him: a disfigured silhouette, almost a glitch of some sort, praying over him. She looked back at the man. She wondered if this was a coincidence. It didn't seem like one. ". . . Sir?" The same way the elderly woman was looking at the statue, his eyes seemed fixated, and it didn't feel right. It wasn't the type of look you gave something you admired; it was the type of look you gave something you wanted to run away from but couldn't. She placed a gentle hand on his shoulder and shook it lightly. "Sir, are you there?" she whispered. He still didn't respond and his gaze never broke from the painting. Suddenly, she didn't feel all that foolish anymore.

She snuck a glance around the room, and her hand started trembling. The elderly woman, the young man, Amara. . . Amara looked so different. Amara was always everything Sami wished she could be: outspoken, confident, fearless. Now, at the will of a work of art, she looked so small. So fragile.

They all did.

Except the security man. She locked eyes with him, and he looked back at her briefly. The fear in the snake woman's eyes, the smallness of Amara against the hands waiting to take her—he wasn't affected by that. This wasn't meant for him.

His gaze shifted to the wall behind Sami, and she followed his vision to the painting on the wall. It was with dread that she realized it was the only one that had no eyes stowed upon it. This painting was meant for her. It was blank except for a dot in the middle. No, it wasn't a dot. She tried to take a step closer, but a sharp pain in her head stopped her. She stumbled back slightly, eyes trying to focus on something other than the painting, but they kept coming back to the dot. She tried to move, but her limbs seemed stuck; just as well as her body, her eyes, and her breath. Her mind was moving non stop, though. It moved too fast for her to keep up, and that damn dot only made it run faster. She shut her eyes until her brain slowed down.

Her eyes opened slowly-- the painting wasn't there anymore. Her eyebrows furrowed. She stepped towards the wall and pressed a hand against it, thinking maybe it was some sort of illusion, but her hand only met the blank wall. The same silence surrounded her, but it was somehow quieter. She turned around.

No one was there.

"Hello?" she called out, and her voice rang back at her in distant echoes. She took a step towards the center of the room. "Amara?" Her eyes were searching around desperately, and she could feel how her heart began to race faster with every echo that sounded. "Is anybody here?" It was a stupid question, she knew. She looked from corner to corner and there was not a single sign of life, but she didn't want to listen to the silence. She could handle the blank walls and the large space. She couldn't handle the silence. It made her feel alone, and she didn't like feeling alone. It made her heart race and her palms sweat. She couldn't be alone.



Sometimes she thought about loneliness, even when she was surrounded by people, even when she didn't want to. She would wonder what would happen if those people left her. "Anybody?" She didn't tell anyone about it, though. It was her little secret, her burden, and she didn't want to place it on anyone else's shoulders; so she learned to live with the lonely feeling and block it out when it got too strong. "Please, *someone*." Was she supposed to block it out now? Now that she wanted to tell someone about it and there was no one to talk to?

Just a dot, she was. A dot in the blankness, in the void.

For a moment, she stopped speaking. She let silence take hold. She could hear her heart as it struggled to slow down; she could hear her lungs as they expanded and contracted. She could hear the movement of every one of her muscles, even when she tried to stay completely still. She considered letting it take her. Letting the void swallow her like a snake ready to strike, or the silhouette inviting her into the darkness, or hands wanting to whisk her away.

And maybe that's what they wanted. She didn't know who *they* were and she didn't care to ponder about it. Maybe that's what they wanted for all of those who were trapped in their own nightmares: to give up and let it take them away. That was the purpose. Those were the rules; Sami was good at following rules.

"Sami!"

Her eyes shot open. She turned in circles, but she couldn't see anyone.

"Sami, stop!" It was her voice. It was Amara; she just knew.

"No, please, just. . ." she heard a quiet sob. Sami paused. Amara wasn't talking to her. She was somewhere, and she was saying her name but she wasn't talking to *this* Sami, the dot-in-an-empty-space Sami. But it was something away from the silence, so she reached for it. The loneliness they were trying to instill within her was still there. She could feel it, but she didn't try to avoid it. She listened to it.

"Amara!" she yelled and waited. The silence offered no response, so she yelled louder. She still heard the sobs. "*Amara, answer me!*" She blinked at the emptiness around her and—*right there*. For a second, a different world blinked back at her: the same room, but there were people, and they were surrounding someone. They knew what they wanted, and they were ready to grab it. She could hear a distant cry coming from the center.

"Amara!" She ran towards the room, but it disappeared. She saw a shift in everyone before it vanished. They heard her. She screamed.

"S- Sami? Sami!" The moment Amara's voice infiltrated the empty room once again (this time directed at the Sami within said space), she saw the other room between blinks. The two worlds had a defect now, a glitch in the system.

"It's me, I'm here!" Sami yelled as she blinked rapidly, trying to catch another glimpse of Amara. "Don't concentrate on where you are right now. Focus on

me, okay?"

"I'll. . . I'll try," was a good enough response for Sami. And then she heard Amara whisper faintly, "I'm scared."

"I'm scared too," Sami said. She didn't know if she was meant to hear Amara's confession—after all, fear was something Amara didn't like to show. It made her want to fight all the harder.

"I saw you!" Amara exclaimed just as Sami caught another glimpse, this one longer and clearer. Amara was looking at her, wide eyes and sweat on her forehead, and began to run towards her. The glimpses started coming rapidly, and with each one Amara came closer. Sami started running too. With every step they took closer to each other, the two worlds started glitching simultaneously, falling in and out of existence. They were so close to each other, and the two worlds suddenly vanished, and it was only them.

Then they woke up.

Sami opened her eyes, and it felt like a breath of fresh air after hours without breathing. She also literally felt like she had spent hours without breathing and gasped for air as she sat up, pressing a hand to her stomach until she felt like her breathing had regained some sort of normalcy. She looked to her left and saw Amara lying there beside her, eyes wide open and a hand running through her blue locks. "What happened?" Amara whispered through heavy breaths. Sami didn't know how to respond. She glanced around them, and her heart fell to her stomach. She had almost believed the museum had all been a part of this nightmare as well. But the paintings and sculptures were back, and so were the guests.

They were on the floor in their shiny gowns and pretty suits, their eyes closed. Sami wondered if they had gone through their own little worlds. She wondered if any made it out. She wondered if she and Amara were still inside their nightmares. They heard a familiar voice speak behind them; he almost sounded impressed.

"Yes, we have two subjects who passed the test. No, just them. Shall we clean the others out? And shall we take them in for further examination? Will do, sir."

Neither made a sound as they were taken out of the room.

Maira

by Isael Real Ramírez

The first thing I noticed was the air. It felt different. I couldn't put my finger on why, but I assumed it had something to do with being in the country while accustomed to breathing the pollution of the city. Maybe that was part of it, but I should've known that it was a sign that I didn't belong there. Not anymore.

The train left as soon as I stepped out, as if it were in a hurry to get away from the deteriorated station. I watched it move along the train tracks until it was gone, and I couldn't hear the engine sounds anymore. The silence was absolute. I was the only one there. That wasn't unexpected; no other outsider knew about this place.

Dense vegetation grew around and into the station. Wild-looking vines hung from the broken zinc roof while moss and mold filled the walls. Grass and mushrooms had grown from between the cracks of the floor. The handlebars for the stairs were not only rusty, but they were falling off. They probably would've given me tetanus if I just as much grazed them. I tightened my grip around the strap of the bag I carried on my shoulder and started walking.

The station felt humid and uncomfortable. The exterior was a little better, but the sun blinded me temporally. I was forced to blink several times until my eyes adjusted to the brightness and were able to see the village I had grown up in. Maira looked exactly how I remembered it.

The same dirt road led to the same circular space, the only spot with cement on it, surrounded by the same rundown brick houses. The same electrical poles with broken wires were hidden by the same trees. The same untamed bushes were everywhere they could thrive in. Everything was the same.

Not a soul was around; it was a Sunday after all. Allowing my memories to guide me, I walked down another road, this one leading to a heavily forested area quite a distance from the village. It ended in a secluded and deforested space where the temple rested: a small, pristine, white chapel. It was in better condition than the rest of the place.

I could hear Sebastian's voice from outside. I decided against entering; I didn't want to interrupt the sermon. Besides, my mom wouldn't be able to control herself if she saw me. It had been 10 years since we last saw each other.

A few moments later, Sebastian gave his accustomed farewell. I could still recite it word for word, even after such a long time. He did always have a way with words, although I hate to admit that.

I soon heard people getting off their seats and chatting among themselves. Bodies started pouring out of the entrance of the temple. The

village's entire population was here. Like I said, no outsider ever set foot on Maira, so it had been inhabited by the same families for generations.

I was right about my mom. At first, she seemed a little hesitant when she saw me. Probably didn't recognize me. I smiled at her, and immediately she ran towards me, holding out her arms for a hug.

"Isidora!" She exclaimed while crashing into me. "It's been . . . gods! How many years?"

She pulled away and contemplated my face.

"You look so much . . . older!"

"I'm not the only one who looks older."

"Oh, stop it! You know it's not nice to tease your dear old mother like that."

I was distracted by a person walking nearby: a young man, around my age. His eyes were downcast and walking beside him was an older couple; I figured they were his parents. He looked familiar. I didn't have much time to think about him, because my mom dragged me with her to reintroduce me to the other villagers.

I could tell by the way that they treated me that I wasn't welcome there. They were nice enough, but always kept their distance. Almost like they were afraid of catching something if they got too close. It was natural: I was a basically a stranger. They didn't like strangers in Maira. They were ignorant of their ways and could disrupt everything that they had worked for. Or so they said.

"Ah, Isidora. Your mother did tell me you were coming today."

I turned around quickly when I heard the voice behind me. Sebastian was staring at me with his smiling blue eyes. He was wearing his white robe and had his hands behind his back. My knee-jerk reaction was to back away, but I knew better. This guy was the village's pastor, placed by the gods to guide Maira in the "right" direction.

"She has grown into quite a lovely young lady, hasn't she Sebastian?" My mom said.

"Quite lovely indeed," he agreed. Mom may have gotten older, but Sebastian didn't age a bit. His skin was as fair and his hair as blonde as ever. According to the villagers, he had looked the same since time immemorial.

"From what I've heard from your mother, you have become a very promising young woman. I am happy you managed to get back up on your feet after. . . all that transpired here."

I didn't respond.



"You should attend next week's sermon!" Mom suggested when we were on our way back to the village. "Sebastian has gotten so much better with his sermons! Not like he needed improving, of course!" She added, laughing. I contained my urge to retch.

We arrived at her house: my old home. The brick house was small and cramped, with part of the roof missing. But it felt oddly cozy. That's what nostalgia is capable of, I guess. Mom made me sit by the chimney while she prepared some hot chocolate. It may sound strange to make hot cocoa in this weather, but there's never a reason not to drink some.

"I always knew you would come back," she said suddenly. "I knew the gods wouldn't be so cruel to let me die without seeing you again."

"The gods were cruel enough to leave a wife and a daughter without a husband and a father," I replied, scornfully. My mom didn't respond, and I didn't expect her to. "Besides, I'm just staying for a few days. At your insistence."

"Well, that's good enough for me," she said cheerfully, while stirring the pot full of liquid chocolate. "You should visit once in a while. It gets awfully lonely sometimes."

"I'll . . . think about it," was all that I said. I felt bad for her, but I didn't want to make any promises I couldn't keep.

The chocolate was delicious, by the way.

I woke up at noon the next day. I got some nasty looks since the villagers always got up at 6 a.m. on the dot. I suppose it makes sense for people to wake up early when they have no electricity to keep them in or out of bed.

After eating my breakfast, or lunch, I went on a stroll in the outskirts of the village. I didn't want to be around people that didn't want me to be around them. I found a lake nearby; it wasn't very pretty, dead leaves and insects floated on its surface, but other than that it was clean. Good to know Moirans were at least environmentally friendly.

On the other side of the lake was the young man I saw the other day. He was sitting down, looking at the still water. He gazed up and locked eyes with me for a moment, then hurriedly looked away. I went over to him.

"Hey," I exclaimed when I got close enough. "I know you, don't I?"

"You don't. . . ?" He began to say. He cut himself short. "I don't think so."

"Hold on. Victor?"

It hit me. Victor. He lived next to mom's house. We used to play together sometimes but we weren't really friends. Still, he is probably one of the most important people in my life.

"I was hoping you wouldn't remember me," he stated. I couldn't decipher his expression.

"Why?" I asked.

He just shrugged and got up. "I should get back to work. I was collecting wood for today's campfire."

"I'll help," I offered. He didn't seem too comfortable with that, but tough luck.

I had no problem chopping wood with the axe that Victor lent me. It was a nice change of pace from what I was used to, cutting logs into smaller blocks. It gave me a nice workout.

"Hey," I said to him, after we were done. "I never really thanked you so . . . thanks."

"You don't need to thank me," he said, lifting the wood-filled cart.

"I do. If it wasn't for you, I would've . . ."

"You wouldn't have. It was always meant to happen," he looked at me. I think he was angry. "Isn't that how it goes? Anything that happened or will happen is premeditated. I was always meant to stop you, and you were always meant not to die that day. There's nothing else to it."

"You don't really believe that, do you?"

"The will of the gods is absolute," he replied. We didn't talk on the way back.

I went to the campfire to please my mom. The fire burned brightly in the center of the village. It was beautiful, but sort of foreboding. Victor was sitting opposite to me, on the other side of the flames. He watched them dance with no emotion.

"You are worried about him."

I jumped when I heard Sebastian. He sat down next to me, smiling like always.

"Victor," he continued. "He was the one who prevented you from committing suicide, wasn't he? Back when your father died."

"When you let him die," I said under my breath.

"Well, I won't deny that I did. But, it was written in the scriptures. I couldn't stop it."

"Couldn't? Or wouldn't?"

Sebastian sighed. It was a heavy sigh, like an old man that was tired of explaining himself. "You know why we follow the will of the gods."

"To prevent Moira's descent into chaos," I stated reluctantly.

"Exactly. We need to adhere to the scriptures written by the gods, or else this village will be forcibly thrown out of the cosmic order and enter a permanent state of mayhem."

I rolled my eyes. Always with the big words that made him sound knowledgeable.

"I know it isn't easy sometimes, but it's a necessary sacrifice," he said. He stared at me. "Please, try not to do anything you shouldn't do."

I watched with contempt as he got up and was approached by people eager to chat with him. All of them were just as guilty.

The next day, I found Victor sitting by the lake again. This time his back was facing the body of water, and he was looking at the clear sky. I stood next to him. He directed his gaze at me.

"Here again?" He asked.

"Here again."

"You should be with your mother. You're only staying for a few days, right? You should spend time with the people that matter."

"I'll spend time with whoever I want."

"Fair enough."

I sat down next him. I let silence take over for a while. The sun was beginning to set, coloring part of the grey sky orange.

"It's bullshit," I said.

Victor didn't respond immediately. He seemed confused.

"What is?"

"The will of the gods. Sebastian. This village. It's bullshit," I replied. "The guy just makes stuff up to suit his whims and we're stupid enough to believe him."

"You shouldn't say that," Victor said. He looked nervous.

"I've been living outside of Moira for years. The people out there don't need some pastor leading them. They just live their lives however they want. And as far as I know everything is just fine. No descent into chaos or anything."

"I've got to go," Victor blurted out. He hurriedly got up.

"What I'm trying to say is that you saved me of your own accord. Not because someone wanted you to," I said. He froze for a moment and looked at me. It seemed like he wanted to say something but left without a word.

"Mom. Is something up with Victor?" I asked her during dinner.

"Victor? Sonia's kid? I haven't heard anything out of the ordinary," she replied. "Why, do you think something is wrong?"

"Not really," I said dismissively. It seemed like I had to find out on my own.

Victor wasn't at the lake the day after. I waited for him to show up, but he didn't. I was about to leave when I heard sobbing nearby. I followed the sound until I found him: Victor, sitting against a tree, with puffy red eyes. Tears streamed down his cheeks.

"Victor?"

He noticed my presence. I was sure he was going to cry even more after seeing me, but he regained his composure. Some of it.

"Goddamn it," he cursed in a low voice.

"What's going on?" I asked, crouching next to him.

"Nothing."

"You think I'm gonna buy that?"

"Why do you care so much?" He exploded. "You don't even know me! Just . . . leave me alone."

"I can't," I said. "I just can't."

Victor sighed. He took a few minutes to calm down.

"I'm going to die," he said in a monotone voice.

"What?"

"Today. I'm going to die today."

"Why would you say that. . . ?"

He rose to his feet and started walking opposite of the village, into the woods, without answering me. I went after him, trying to get his attention. I blocked his path, but he pushed me aside.

"Leave me alone!" He repeated. "I just need . . . I need some space. Some time to . . . think."

"To think what? You're not gonna . . . ?"

"I'm not going to do anything. Just . . . please."

He looked so defeated. I didn't want to force him, so I decided to go back to the village. Maybe I could get some help. As I approached Moira, my anxiety grew. Should I have left him alone? What did he mean by that he was going to "die today"? I began to sprint.

I spotted my mom first, hanging recently washed dresses on the clothesline. I hurried over to her.

"Mom!" I called out to her. "Victor. . . Victor isn't okay."

"What do you mean honey?"

"He . . . he just walked into the woods alone. He said he just needed some time alone, but I think that he's . . ." I had a knot on my throat. "I'm afraid that he's going to hurt himself."

"Oh dear," replied my mom. "We should tell Sebastian."

"What? Why?"

"We always go to Sebastian in situations like this! We need to make sure we don't do anything that we shouldn't."

"To hell with Sebastian!" I yelled. Mom gasped.

"Isidora! I can't believe you would . . . !"

"Don't you get it? You can't trust Sebastian!" I insisted.



"Sebastian keeps us safe. . ."

"No, he doesn't!" I was starting to lose it. "He killed dad and he's now going to kill Victor!"

I didn't see the slap coming. My cheek burned.

"Your father gave his life for the rest of us!" She said between clenched teeth, with tears on her eyes. "He was a brave man and understood what had to be done. Don't tarnish his memory by saying he was murdered."

Of course. I should've known. She didn't understand. She never did, and she never would. Mom was just as bad as the rest of them. Everyone in this village was rotten. I ran away, ignoring my mother's calls. I wasn't going to let it happen, not again. This time I wouldn't let him get away with it.

I remember my dad lying on the bed, coughing up blood. He was very sick. Sebastian came to see him. After a private talk between the two, I was informed that dad would die. I couldn't have that. I pleaded with them, to take him to a hospital where he could maybe be saved. But Sebastian insisted that he was meant to die in Moira. If he didn't, we would go against the scriptures. I had to watch dad's condition worsen until one day he was dead.

That's when I tried to hang myself. I managed to get to the hanging part, and that's when Victor found me. He reacted quickly and cut the rope with a kitchen knife. Soon after, I decided to leave. Too many bad memories of that place.

I should have never come back.

I reached the spot where I had last seen Victor. My heart was thumping against my chest. I had to find him but didn't know where to start. I began to shout his name and walked blindly across the forest. I searched for a long time; it was already dark when Sebastian appeared.

"You should leave him be," he said. He was standing a few feet away from me, his face obscured by shadows.

"Got to hell."

"Victor's going through a tough time. He needs some time alone to sort things out."

"So he can kill himself?" I spat at him. "That's what you want isn't it? Because it's in the gods' scriptures?"

I think Sebastian smiled, but I wasn't sure. It was too dark. "I suppose it's impossible to deceive you."

He closed the distance between us, and I stepped back.

"You may have guessed something already, but Victor has been going through a crisis. It has lasted a long time now; about 10 years."

"10 years. . .?"

"Yes. You see, Victor was never fond of Moira. He always thought life here was rather dull and uninteresting. But, it was all he knew. He had no

reason to question it, until you left." He took another step forward. I responded by stepping back again. "He liked the idea of moving away and seeing more of the world. His parents didn't. They were a proud Moiran family for generations, and they didn't want it to change. Besides, Victor isn't meant to leave Moira."

"I . . . I didn't know. . ."

"His relationship with his family started to deteriorate because of their conflicting opinions. He became depressed; cooped up in a place he didn't want to be in. And then you came back. His mental state got worse, and even more so when you started to interact with him. Now, he contemplates whether to end it or not."

He got closer again. This time I didn't step back. "He will."

"I . . ." I started shaking. Was it true? Was I the reason for Victor's fate? No. Sebastian was a liar.

"Shut up!" I screamed, even though he wasn't talking. "Shut up. You're lying. There are no scriptures. You just do what you please and then you trick us into thinking it's all part of some big plan and threaten the end of the world if we don't follow it. You're a liar, and I'm going to prove it!"

"Isidora. . ."

"Shut up!"

I turned and ran. I didn't look back. I fell many times, but I got back up. I was determined. Determined to save Victor, like he had saved me. Like I couldn't do with my father. Determined to make everyone see Sebastian as a liar and a murder. I needed to save him.

I found him. He was standing a few feet from me, his figure outlined by the light of the moon. When I jumped on top of him to push him to the ground, I heard a metal object fall on the dirt. I never knew what it was, but I can assume. I straddled him and held his wrists. He was looking at me in shock. I was gasping for air, my heart still out of control. For what seemed like an eternity at the time, we just laid there. Looking at each other.

Suddenly he wasn't there. I got up and looked around: I wasn't in the forest anymore. I was surrounded by black. Just black. It was silent. It was cold.

"Oh, Isidora." Sebastian was in front of me. He looked disappointed. "Look at what you've done."

"Where are we?" I asked. My voice was weak.

"We are in Moira. Or at least what used to be Moira," he said. A cacophony of noise filled my ears. They were terrible noises, human noises. Voices. They were the voices of the villagers. I couldn't distinguish what they were saying, but I could understand the emotions behind them: frustration, fear, despair.

The place began to distort and wobble. I was disoriented, I couldn't tell up from down, or right from left, or anything from anything.

"Chaos isn't very pleasurable, is it? It alters the laws of physics without thought," Sebastian's voice said. It could be heard clearly among the mess of sound. Space started to fold in on itself. "If you just had listened to me, and let Victor die, this wouldn't have happened."

I tried to scream, but my voice didn't belong to me. Images flashed before me, but I couldn't see them. I was pushed back, and I began to fall. I fell for a long time.

"An entire population doomed to eternal confusion because of a selfish woman," Sebastian's voice echoed. "What a pity."

Was it selfish?

"There was still so much left to experience in Moira. The scriptures will now have many stories left untold. It really is a shame."

I am still falling. Maybe . . . maybe this was for the best. Maybe this chaos is preferable to a society where people suffered because some higher power decided that they should. Maybe this is what this horrible village deserved for the crimes it had committed. Besides, would I really have been able to live with myself if I had left Victor to die? It would have just been a different hell than the one I'm in right now.

It doesn't matter. The only thing that does is that I made a choice, and I need to live with the consequences. I need to accept that this is my reality. That I am forever damned to drift in a world of chaos, with no other company than my own tortured thoughts.

Missing Piece by Lesmalee González Esquilín



Artist: Valeria Schultz López

Captain Moreno: Lieutenant Donovan, another case of a missing teenage boy. Name, Hamish. That's thirty cases now. Last time seen with black jacket, his name written on the back.

Lieutenant Donovan: Fine, we'll catch that bastard.

Donovan at home: Unfolds black jacket, smells it, smiles, folds it again, falls asleep.



Criminal Curiosity

by Andrea P. Vázquez Colón

A millennium had passed since anyone on Earth spoke.

Words became the most lethal weapons of them all. The UN made any verbal or written interaction between citizens illegal.

And in the midst of it all, after years of research and practice, she broke the law with a single question:

“Why?”



“Deadly Need”: Giodalys Dávila Martínez

Can I Get Out?

by Kelvinson D. Ortiz



Artist: Valeria Schultz López

The cops are coming, the building is high, I want to jump, my memories say no. There is no job in any place, I want a solution, the baby already talks, money is my enemy, life keeps going for my wife, cops are here, and the floor is my savior.

It's not over

So I'll never let you go

Perfect imperfections

Grow up together, forever and always

Long enough to last forever

Starting right now I'm still working on my masterpiece

Just now I'll be strong

Beautiful Disaster



A Rock in the Way

by Guillermo A. González

He struggles to find clarity, he is driving down an underpass and sees a rock in the way.

His instinct is to remove the rock but some things are easier said than done.

He can abandon the rock, losing sight of what matters or move the rock, attaining transparency.



"Paradise Lost": Waldom A. Pellot



Artist: Allison McFarland Soler

Sixty-Nine Bucks

by Jeaneishka Ruiz Vázquez

My supervisor forces me to continue.

He has my brothers and sisters locked up.

Threats. Manipulation.

Losing my dignity instead of my family.

Protecting them, I breathe every time a client enters the bedroom.

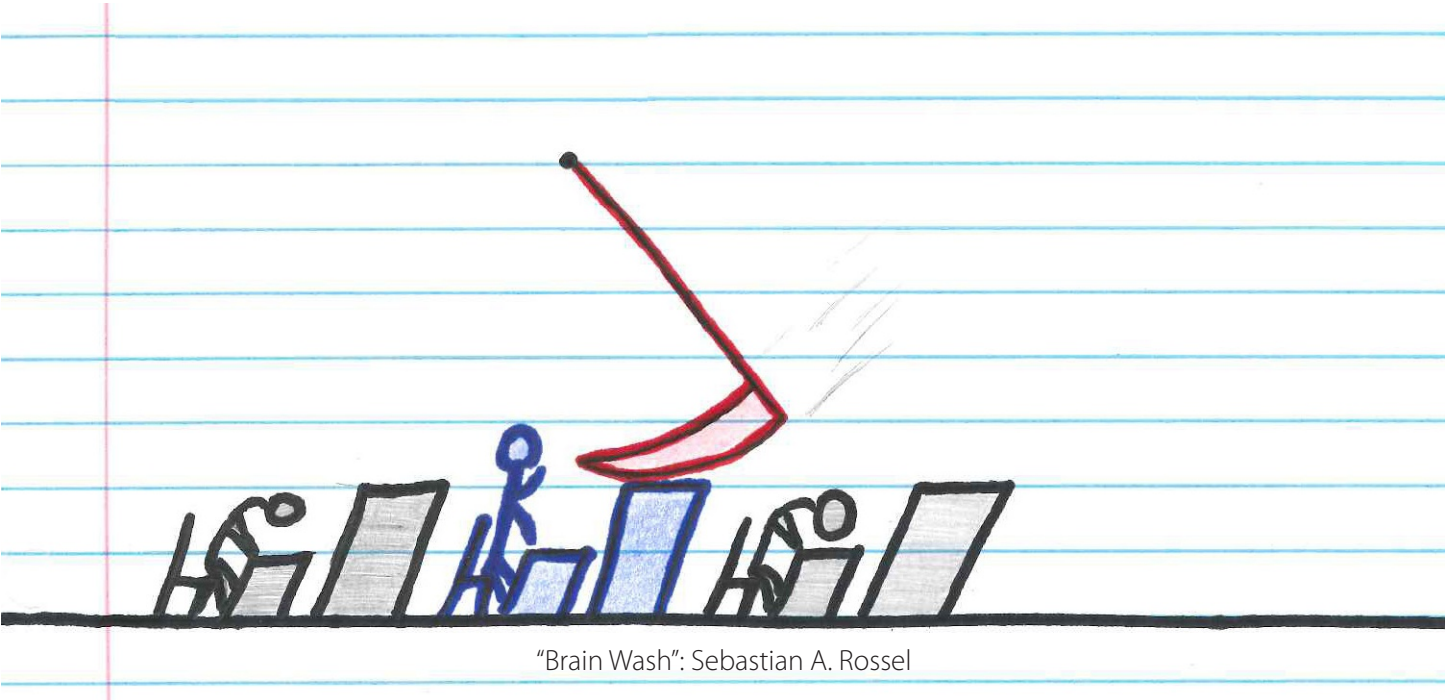
Money. Sex.

We are slaves to survive.

Because for them we are beautiful dolls without life.

Rehabilitation Reality

by Thais Ayala Durán



The first of July 2014, I entered the Vega Alta jail and stayed confined for a year. While I was there, I saw many things that were unknown to me. I was in total disagreement with the attitude of a particular person who liked to use others—and enjoyed it. Her in-your-face attitude tormented me. I knew that this person would continue to humiliate and intimidate others and me. Her facial expressions and body language were complete evil. After time passed, this same person got her custody status changed but she continued with her behavior, earning hate and rejection from the rest of the jail population. When I went to maximum security, I would always hear bad comments or a horror story about this person. When we were transferred from Vega Alta to Bayamón, I did not have to be with this person.

But three months passed and I had to be with her again. But this time, she was quiet and distant like she was studying the area. I too maintained distance from her. Since I lived with her, I treated her with consideration and everything was peaceful.

Suddenly, she began to be hostile, offensive and vulgar again. Like always, she wanted to exert power and control over other people and used her tone of voice to frighten and intimidate others. She even challenged the authority here and received disciplinary actions. This behavior proved her drive to subordinate others.

Her rude actions towards me accumulated like a big mountain of rage until one day she verbally and physically attacked me. She tried to insult the memory of my dead parents and cursed my kids. My mind and emotions weren't prepared to tolerate this hostile action. I decided to put a stop to it. A torrent of icy-hot juice went through my bloodstream and erupted like a volcano. I did what anyone would have done in my same case. I took her down. This occurred Thursday, February 2 at 11:45am. I am at peace with myself. Nobody will disrespect or anguish me. My soul doesn't cry.

Animal Rights

by Kiara P. Cruz Costa



Image: philosophytalk.org

Animal rights is the idea that some, or all, non-human animals are entitled to the possession of their own lives and that their most basic interests, such as the need to avoid suffering, should be afforded the same consideration as similar interests of human beings. It refers to the belief that animals have an intrinsic value separate from any value they have to humans, and they are worthy of moral consideration. Animals have a right to be free from oppression, confinement, use, and abuse by humans.

Supporters of animal rights believe that animals have an inherent worth, a value completely separate from their usefulness to humans. We believe that every creature with a will to live has a right to live free from pain and suffering. Animal rights is not just a philosophy; it is a social movement that challenges society's traditional view that all nonhuman animals exist solely for human use. As Ingrid newkirk, founder of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), the largest animal rights organization in the world, once said, "When it comes to pain, love, joy, loneliness, and fear, a rat is a pig is a dog is a boy. Each one values his or her life and fights the knife."

Almost all of us supporters grew up eating meat, wearing leather, and going to circuses and zoos. Many of us bought our beloved "pets" at pet

shops, had guinea pigs, and kept beautiful birds in cages. We wore wool and silk, ate McDonald's burgers, and fished, but we never considered the impact of these actions on the animals involved. For whatever reason, we may be asking ourselves, "Why should animals have rights?"

People often ask if animals should have rights, and quite simply, the answer is "Yes!" In "Animal Liberation," Peter Singer states that the basic principle of equality does not require equal or identical treatment; it requires equal consideration. This is an important distinction when talking about animal rights. Animals surely deserve to live their lives free from suffering and exploitation as human should. Equal consideration to animals will make us more human.

Jeremy Bentham, the founder of the reforming utilitarian school of moral philosophy, stated that when deciding on a being's rights, "The question is not 'Can they reason?' nor 'Can they talk?' but 'Can they suffer?'" In that passage, Bentham points to the capacity for suffering as the vital characteristic that gives a being the right to equal consideration. The capacity for suffering is not just another characteristic like the capacity for language or higher mathematics. All animals have the ability to suffer in the same way

and to the same degree that humans do. They feel pain, pleasure, fear, frustration, loneliness, and motherly love. Whenever we consider doing something that would interfere with their needs, we are morally obligated to take them into account.

Only prejudice allows us to deny others the rights that we expect to have for ourselves. Whether it's based on race, gender, sexual orientation, or species, prejudice is morally unacceptable. If you wouldn't eat a dog, why eat a pig? Dogs and pigs have the same capacity to feel pain, but it is prejudice based on species that allows us to think of one animal as a companion and the other as dinner.

There is nothing abstract about animal rights, and there are no barriers to getting involved. Anyone who cares about animals can start putting these principles into practice every single day with the food they eat, the clothes they wear and the products they buy. These choices are forms of nonviolent protests that make a real difference both by reducing the profits of corporations that harm or kill animals and by creating a growing market for cruelty-free food, fashion, services, and entertainment.

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) is composed by more than 5 million members and supporters. PETA focuses its attention on the four areas in which the largest numbers of animals suffer the most intensely for the longest periods of time: in the food industry, in the clothing trade, in laboratories, and in the entertainment industry. They also work on a variety of other issues including the cruel killing of rodents, birds, and other animals who are often considered "pests" as well as cruelty to domesticated animals. PETA works through public education, cruelty investigations, research, animal rescue, legislation, special events, celebrity involvement, and protest campaigns.

Furthermore, puppy mills are large scale commercial dog breeding operations where profit is placed above the well-being of animals. Bred without consideration of genetic quality, these produces generations of dogs with unchecked hereditary defects. Some puppy mill puppies are sold to pet shops and marketed as young as 8 weeks of age, and there are 10,000 estimated puppy mills operating in the United States each year.

To maximize profits, female dogs are bred at every opportunity with little to no recovery time between litters. When they are physically depleted to the point that they can no longer reproduce, breeding females are often killed as are the puppies born with little overt physical problems. This means that neither the parents of the puppy in the pet store window nor many of its brothers and sisters are likely to make it out of the mill.

Puppy mills usually house dogs in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions, without adequate veterinary care, food, water and socialization. Puppy mill dogs do not get to experience treats, toys, exercise or basic grooming. Dogs are often kept in cages with wire flooring that injures their paws and legs, and it is not unusual for cages to be stacked up in columns. Breeding dogs at mills might spend their entire lives outdoors, exposed to

the elements, or crammed inside filthy structures where they never get the chance to feel the sun or breathe fresh air. We need to understand that animals are not ours to eat, wear, experiment on, use for entertainment, or abuse in any other way.

Instead of buying a pet at a pet shop where the animals were likely raised in a mill, one should either adopt or rescue an animal. Why? The satisfaction you feel when saving a life is indescribable. You save money. You fight against puppy mills. Adopted and rescued animals are the most loving, intelligent and loyal pets ever. But, most of all, because your life will change forever.

I am going to talk a little about why animals are my biggest inspiration in life. I am not exaggerating; when I say my mom and I have rescued more than 80 pets all around Puerto Rico. Since I was very little, she taught me that animals should get the same respect and rights as we humans because they feel and suffer exactly like or even more than us. We always have bottled water; and dog and cat food in our cars so that if we see an animal in need, we can help them right away. If we see an animal in very bad conditions, we immediately take them to the vet, put them in good conditions, and then find them a lovable home or, like most of the time, adopt them and keep them for ourselves.

I am sure most of you already know this story because of all the photos and videos I have put on social media, but for those who don't know, on January 9th of this year I went to the beach, like any normal day, to take two of my dogs out for a walk. Since I arrived, I saw this shy, lonely, abandoned dog not too far from me. I had dog food and water in my backpack, so I took it out, and she slowly walked towards me. Then, she dug a hole, lay on my lap and didn't leave our side. Since that moment, she began to steal a piece of my heart and I couldn't imagine leaving her there, so I took her home and gave her a bath. That same day, I found her a loving owner that would take care of her and, on Tuesday afternoon, I drove her to her new home. This was my first rescue without the help of my mom. I gave her food every day, took her for walks, took her to the vet, gave her medicine, and even paid all the bills. I have never gotten so much satisfaction in rescuing an animal, but this one just stole my heart completely. Today, she is a completely different dog compared to the dog I found that Monday at the beach. Now, she's always playing, moving her tail and even throwing you to the ground. Letting her go and giving her to her new owner was very hard, but I know she's now in the best place ever, living the life she deserves. I assure you there is no bigger satisfaction than saving a life!

And, if you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito! That is the worst and most annoying thing ever. We have to keep that in mind; it doesn't matter if you are only one person. Even if you are one person, you are saving thousands of animals by what you put on your fork. We can motivate, we can agitate, and we can win this war, but we can't be silent a minute longer.

Prison of Lies

by Sheila Ohlinger



"Teamwork makes the dream work": Ana C. Hernández

Is the Department of Corrections in Puerto Rico effective? Does the Agency fulfill all the expectations to rehabilitate a convict? Our Constitution establishes in Section 19, Art. VI, the moral and social principle of rehabilitation of the Department of Corrections in Puerto Rico (DCR). But from this side of the fence, the reality is another story. After doing more than nine (9) years in confinement, I can explain the truth about this system in our country. The Corrections and Rehabilitation Department is a fallacy. It boasts of having the necessary tools required to reinsert a convict back into the community, but it lies.

In order to reinsert a convict into the community, it is necessary to reeducate this person. With emphasis in this area, you can change the mind of the person and avoid future criminal acts. The system firmly assures that it will give the inmate many

programs and classes. Here are some examples of the classes and programs offered by the system: (1) The cosmetology course. It is three (3) hours daily, five (5) days a week, forever. They give you the course but never give you the cosmetology license. (2) The General Education Degree (GED). You take the classes and review for the test, but they do not give the test. (3) Many therapies are offered: Anger Management, Control of Impulses, Drugs and Alcohol Dependency, Love and Poetry, and they even give you a certificate of participation in these courses. Still, the Agency does not consider any of these therapies when evaluating level of custody (minimum, medium or maximum) or in granting bonus time.

We participate in the University program, but if another convict does an illegal act, we lose our classes for the sake of the application of the famous Rule #9,

which is when five (5) or more inmates are involved in violating disciplinary rules, they automatically apply this mechanism to everyone for security and control reasons. They use this rule to punish other inmates that are not even involved in the event. And if you commit an illegal act, like getting into a fight, having a medication that it is not yours (even if it is an aspirin), you are awarded a complaint, which means that you are removed from your study program. These examples show the real way that this Agency reeducates and molds the values of the inmate.

Another issue that demonstrates ineffectiveness of rehabilitation is that to reintroduce an inmate into the community, it is essential to give her/him the tools to find a job as this will prevent that person from committing a criminal offense again. The DCR swears to give the inmates some of these tools. For example, you can work in the jail cleaning yards, tables or floors, washing clothes, doing the dishes, working in the green areas cutting the grass or watering the plants. For a day of work, they pay you .80¢. Here, we have a Co-op called “Taínas” but since the passage of the Incorporation Act of 2014, the Agency does not provide a guard for this workshop. According to the Agency, these work experiences will help us find a job in the community upon release. Ah, I almost forgot! We have a bakery too, but it has been closed for the last six (6) months. It is important to know that the Agency does not give you a certificate for the work that you have done while imprisoned so there is no way to verify work experience.

In order to reintegrate an inmate into the community, it is essential to consolidate the affective bonds between the inmate and her relatives; after all, she will be returning to family after a significant absence. The Agency complies by providing inmates with a certain amount of visitation time, one day per week with varying lengths of time, which is allotted based on your classification. It is supposed to be one (1) hour if you are in Maximum Security and one hour and a half (1-1/2) if you are in Medium Security. But, if they do not have enough guards on shifts, they can cut the time of the visit. Sometimes this results in a forty (40) minute cut! This reduction does not take into consideration that maybe the relative traveled many hours to visit a prisoner. The quality of the

visitation is also complicated by various factors. For example, the Vega Alta jail has a park for the children of the women in confinement. The First Lady Wilma Pastrana inaugurated these facilities a few years ago, however, neither we nor our children can use it. The reason? None is given. The mail service is supposed to be done daily so that you can communicate with your family, friends, and your lawyer. But, due to staff shortage, they cannot give a daily service so they limit it to once a week—in spite of the fact that the regulations say that the Agency cannot keep the mail for more than twenty-four (24) hours. Inmates are offered a course called Long Distance Motherhood, but you cannot use it as proof to demonstrate to the Social Worker that you are strongly interested in being reunited with your kids. In this way, the system works to give you all the necessary tools to consolidate affective bonds.

Lastly, to reintegrate a totally rehabilitated inmate into the community, the Agency gives you help for your addictions. If you are an alcoholic or a drug addict, they offer you a psychoanalysis. Just one time! They do not refer you to a psychologist to undergo treatment because for that you need to apply using a different process. If at the time of your arrest, you were a drug addict, the Department of Corrections will place you in a detox program but when it is over, it is the inmate’s responsibility to request continuation. Really? These inmates are often not yet ready to request this service. It is the perfect key for an opportunity to rehabilitate a drug addict or an alcoholic person, yet it is left unturned.

But, I live here, in this prison of lies and am left wondering about the methods of rehabilitation used here in this warehouse. Today, we the prisoners, the Agency, and the country have a new Secretary of Corrections Department (the fourth in four years). I really hope that things change now. We must have the moral and social rehabilitation established by our Constitution. We are tired of being tricked. Lies! Lies! Lies!

And now I ask, with all of the money that this Agency spends each year, where does it go? But then, that is other matter.



When I Was the Dreamer

by Angelimar Veguilla Valentín

The agenda marks September 14, 2025, while I eat breakfast on my desk. I take a sip of orange juice and raise my eyes to see **Puppy-Nose Veterinary Clinic** printed on the glass door and a golden plaque on top of my desk that reads **Angelimar Veguilla-Valentín, D.V.M.**, identifying me as the owner. Every morning I take a look at the things I have to do throughout the day before it starts, but today is a very special day for me as it is the clinic's 1st anniversary, and I am going to be interviewed in 45 minutes by a veterinarian practitioner. As any other Sunday, since this is the day that I have available to bill the insurance companies and my clients for the services provided during the week, I log onto the system for a bit. My phone chimes, and it is a text message from my swain; it reads, "Congratulations, love! I am so proud of being with someone that at such a young age has accomplished so much. Undoubtedly, you are the most independent and focused woman that I know. Glad to have you in my life." I reply, "Thank you, honey. I cannot wait to celebrate with you tonight!" and continue with my work. I love that we are the type of couple that encourages each other to follow their goals. Currently, I am 27 years old, have my own clinic, a modern silver Nissan Sentra and share the apartment of my dreams in Hato Rey with the man I love. He could not support me more! We have the same vision about life, if we want something, we work hard until we get it.

A reminder of the scheduled interview shows on my computer's screen. Soon after, through the glass door, I catch a glimpse of a girl and invite her in. She introduces herself as the one that is going to interview me as she prepares her materials. Time flew, and soon enough I realize that she is already asking me her last question as she shoots, "What inspired you to become a veterinarian?" Just like that, she sends me far away into my past. I remember when I decided to take on this vocation as my own dream.

It was the day before my sister's 25th birthday, on December 6th, 2014. We went to her apartment in

San Juan, all the way from Arroyo, to celebrate with her. Zoreyna is my big sister, the oldest of my siblings, and had been living in San Juan for more than two years since she worked there. We did not do much that day: we ate at her house, watched TV and did some grocery shopping. She was not feeling very well due to a cold and asked us to stay until the next day. My mom did not sleep well that night; she did not want to hurt my sister's feelings by leaving her alone while sick on her birthday. However, she had a bad hunch about *the girls* —that's what we used to call our pups. On her birthday, my sister felt sicker, so we joined her during the day, leaving afterwards to go home in the afternoon to encounter a terrible nightmare.

When we got to Arroyo, *the girls* were outside the fence. I was the last to leave the car to realize that my mom was lightly sobbing, while my little sister, Zorlisse, with her hands on her mouth and her big eyes wide open, was at one corner, horrified by the sight of Verdell. Verdell was Zoreyna's pup, but we were taking care of her during her puppy stage because they tend to be a little more destructive, and she did not want problems with the apartment's owner. Verdell's eye had almost popped out of her face; she had bites around her neck and was covered in blood. She had gotten into a fight with other dogs and was brutally attacked. I freaked out instantly, but my mom told me to take her and go back to the car as she desperately called my big sister. It was a Sunday, and we did not know if there were any veterinary clinics available nearby that could help her dog. We secured our pup back in the gate and left immediately with Verdell. In a matter of minutes, we were back on the road to the Animal Emergency Clinic at San Juan.

Verdell was peaceful, as if it was not happening at all. Zoreyna called again to tell us that she had already made an appointment and that we had to lubricate Verdell's eye to try to save it; thus, I went all the way to San Juan pouring eye-drops in her eye.

Verdell averted the eye-drops when she could; it was obvious that it caused pain. I was scared and shocked but kept doing it; I did not want her to die. I felt something dripping from her face to my jeans, since she was resting on my lap, and I thought that she was crying. When we arrived, the veterinarian's assistant asked us the personal information of the pet while I realized that what I thought were tears was blood. Almost instantly, I passed on to the veterinarian's office with Zoreyna, and Verdell still in my arms. After the veterinarian checked her, he said that she needed surgery and that they would try to save the eyeball, but that most likely she would not be able to see from that eye again. I went to my little sister and mom to tell them what the veterinarian had said. We were all devastated, but we got to keep Verdell after the operation because of the veterinarian's abilities and God. That experience —saving Verdell— made me realize what my place in life was, since I loved animals enough to treat and take care of them in any emergency or intensive care case. I wanted to be like that veterinarian, to do something that seemed impossible, something that could change lives and provide hope to the families of pets in need of immediate care and thus, saving them.

I lean back on my seat, getting back to the present as I answer her question. "I wanted to be able to save the lives of loyal and loving animals. I wanted to be able to help them and ease their pain, regardless of their inability to tell me where it hurts. Their ability of seeing you as part of their circle and being by your side unconditionally is my inspiration. To extend the time they can share with their owners became my passion." All of a sudden, she asks me another question, "Did you think your dream was never going to come true?" And I answered, "Of course, but then I understood that the limits are only in our heads —we can create them or erase them completely with our attitudes and determination. That is why I tried, and after my eight years doing my doctorate at U-Penn, the University of Pennsylvania, I have become a professional. Though, I still remember when I was a practitioner just like you; I still remember *when I was the dreamer.*"

What's Going On with Me?

by Amanda I. Castrello Quintana

It was about five years ago, a normal afternoon at my house. After I came home from school, I was lying on the couch in the family room watching TV with my father. Suddenly, a thought came to me: "I swear to God that you will die tomorrow." I felt a burning inside of me; my heart started beating very fast. It is hard to explain, but I didn't literally hear a voice, it was like my subconscious was speaking to me. At that moment I freaked out; I didn't know what to do. I remember that I got up from the couch, went to the bathroom, and looked at the mirror. My eyes were big, I started crying. I couldn't believe what was happening. My father didn't notice anything until I came back. I was crying desperately and told him what had just happened a few minutes ago. He looked at me very surprised. He was shocked because of what he had just heard. I sat down again on the couch, trying to calm my nerves, but I was so scared and nervous that I couldn't stop crying. I tried to distract myself by watching TV and after a while I could finally calm down.

Minutes later, my mom arrived from work. I went to her room to tell her what had happened to me. When I started talking, I started crying again, I couldn't control my nerves. It was like something stronger than me. My mom was surprised by what I was telling her. She got worried after seeing me like that. For a moment, I felt like neither my dad nor my mom believed what had happened to me. It was hard to explain because I didn't understand what was happening to me. Both of my parents tried to help me, but I couldn't get that thought out of my head: "I swear to God that you will die tomorrow."

At night, when it was time to sleep, it was horrible. I remember being alone in my room, everything dark and quiet. It was the perfect moment for the thought to come back again. I could barely sleep because the thought was running over and over through my head and my anxiety was rising. After a long time fighting with my conscience, I finally fell asleep.

The next morning, I woke up like every morning without any concern. I got ready and went to school. I was in 7th grade, ready to start my first class at 8:00am when I suddenly remembered what had happened yesterday. The thought came back again, but the only difference was that the "tomorrow" of the thought was today. I started crying in the classroom. I became very nervous and couldn't control my feelings in that moment. Everybody was working in the classwork. I didn't want my classmates to notice I was crying. I tried to control myself, but I couldn't. The teacher noticed and asked me what had happened. The only thing I said was that I wanted to talk with the school psychologist. When I went to her office, I told her everything that had happened yesterday and everything that was going through my mind at that moment. While I was telling her, I couldn't stop crying. My body was shaking and once again I couldn't control myself. Immediately, she took the phone and called my mother and explained to her what was going on with me. My mom obviously knew what had happened in my house, but she thought that I woke up feeling better. I thought that I was better



too and that the thought couldn't come back again. Still, time proved us wrong. After, the psychologist and I had been talking on the phone with my mother for some time, she told my mother that something was wrong with me. When I could finally calm down, I continued with my classes normally until school was over and I went home.

Days passed and new thoughts were coming to me. They were all different and random, but had the same effect on me. They created anxiety and panic attacks, and I didn't understand what was happening to me. My parents decided to ask for help, taking me to a clinical psychologist. When the day of the appointment came, I was very scared to know what was going on with me. I remember it was a Saturday morning and my parents and I were ready to go to the appointment. When we arrived we entered the office. There was a big couch on the right and her desk was on the other side. It had low lighting and a relaxing atmosphere. It felt like being home. I sat with both of my parents on the couch and she sat in front of us. When I saw that medium height, tanned skin, black long curly-haired woman; I felt comfortable. There was something in her that made me feel confident; that everything would be alright.

After getting to know each other, she started asking me a lot of questions about what was going on. I started narrating everything since day one. I told her everything that I felt, every single thought that came through my mind in the past month. She looked so interested in what I was telling her, that I finally felt that someone could understand me. Then she started asking my parents a if there was a history of psychological disease in the family. I started crying because of my nerves, and when I looked at my mom she was crying too. With a smile on her face, the psychologist told me not to worry because everything was going to be fine. I was so nervous because I didn't understand what was happening to me. I felt like those thoughts were manipulating me and I couldn't do anything to stop them. Sometimes I felt like I was going crazy because I couldn't ignore them and I had to do whatever they told me to do. I didn't want to think that I was going crazy, but that was exactly how it felt. It felt horrible that no one could really understand what was happening to me. The more I tried to explain, the more I felt no one could understand.

After some analysis and therapy sessions with the psychologist, she met with my parents without me. I was outside waiting for them to come out. I was sitting on one of the seats in the waiting room. My mind started imagining everything that could happen in that office. I was expecting the worst case: that I couldn't get any better, that I was crazy, and that there was nothing to help me. Suddenly, the door opened and they called me in. So, I entered and sat on the couch. The psychologist told me that they had to explain something to me and I became really scared. My parents were sitting on the couch looking at me. I felt tension in the room: everyone was quietly staring at me. The psychologist started talking about a condition called OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder). After she explained it clearly to me, she told me that all of those symptoms that I was presenting were caused by that mental disorder. I felt relieved, I could prove to my thoughts that I wasn't

crazy and that I could get better. Then I understood why every night I had to check under my bed and my closet to see if everything was ok, why I had to do the things that my subconscious told me because if I didn't I would die, and why I had to wash my hands a lot of times before eating. The anxiety, the panic attacks, the desperation, and the frustration (especially at night) all got control of me. Every single night that I went to bed, I had to face these symptoms, and they wouldn't let me sleep well. I sat on my bed and looked at the mirror, trying to convince myself that everything that was going through my mind was false, that I wouldn't die because I didn't do what my mind wanted me to do. I talked to myself, I tried to be strong and to calm down so I could sleep well. After the psychologist explained this to me, she told me what was going to happen next. Now everything was making sense to me. I had to start a process of therapy and also visit a psychiatrist. After that consultation, I was a little more calm because now I understood what was happening and that I wasn't going crazy. Now, every night I can sleep calmly because I felt confident enough to ignore those stupid thoughts. It was a little war between my thoughts and me where we were challenging each other to find out who was stronger. But now, I felt stronger than them and I felt that I had everything I needed to win the war.

Definitely it was a very difficult time in my life. Those 2-3 years were the hardest years of my life. Facing my OCD has been the most challenging thing that I've experienced in my 18 years of life. The pressure I felt to try to control myself was horrible. Sometimes I've asked: "Why me?", "What have I done to deserve this?"; but then I realized that life challenges you to become a stronger person. Those experiences are for us to learn from and become more mature. During this time of my life, praying was the only thing that could calm me down. I couldn't sleep without a rosary under my pillow. If I didn't have the rosary, I felt that something bad would happen. But the truth is that all of these fears were part of the mental disorder.

It was hard for people to understand what I was suffering. I was afraid that they would think I was crazy and wouldn't want to hang out with me anymore. But it wasn't as bad as I had anticipated. When I explained what was going on with me to my best friends and family, they understood and tried to help me when I had a crisis. I remember one day that I went to a sleepover at one of my best friend's house and I had one incident. I couldn't sleep because thoughts of death were passing through my mind. I started crying and all I wanted was to go home. I called my mother and she tried to calm me down. After talking on the phone for a while, I could control myself and went back with my friends. They decided to spend the whole night watching movies so I could get distracted and enjoy the sleepover with them. Now that it has been 7 years, I can clearly understand everything that happened and I'm not afraid of accepting it. I can't deny that I still have some of those thoughts sometimes, but not with the same intensity as before. Now I know how to deal with them. I'm prepared to control myself. I have to thank those people that were there for me when I needed them the most. They supported me when I felt that I would never get better. Thanks to them, I can now look back and be proud of myself for never giving up.

Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" as a Feminist Text

by Natalya Rivera Maldonado



"The Forces of Nature": Morelia Milagros

According to Merriam-Webster, feminism is: "the belief that men and women should have equal rights." One of many ways of expressing feminism is through literary works, ergo the existence of feminist texts. Moreover, feminist texts speak out about feminist ideas such as gender equality. An excellent example of a nineteenth century feminist text is Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour." Throughout the story the protagonist, Mrs. Louise Mallard, reaches an epiphany of liberation and freedom as a consequence of her husband's presumed death. The euphoria that the protagonist experiences after receiving this news provokes her passing. This story can be read as a feminist text because the author critiques the oppressive marriages that characterized Victorian culture. In this manner, Chopin utilizes Mrs. Mallard's death as a symbol of her liberation from

Victorian gender roles.

A woman's role within a Victorian marriage was solely to please her spouse and the purpose for which she would marry was often for economic stability. The norm of the era was not romantic nor passionate love, but that a woman's main role in society was motherhood, and consequently needed a man to sustain her. Furthermore, the subordination that Victorian women experienced did not limit itself to society, since within the marriage itself wives were expected to be submissive to their husbands. The husband had the right to impose himself, his beliefs and his opinions over his spouse and, consequently, deprive her of her free will. Moreover, a common piece of advice given to newlywed Victorian women was to "lie back and think of England." This expression reveals how female oppression extended itself onto



the couple's sex life. Sexuality was focused towards the male figure, resulting in the taboos of female sexuality even within the intimacy of matrimony. The protagonist of Kate Chopin's story is a victim of these social boundaries established for women within the era and the idea of being freed from social norm was too overwhelming for her to grasp.

In Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour," the reader is exposed to a Victorian wife's point of view. At the beginning of the story, the protagonist is dealing with the news of her husband's death, which is delivered to her cautiously because she suffers from heart ailment. However, Louise's reaction to the notice of Mr. Mallard's death is quite peculiar. Instantly after receiving such news Louise: "did not hear the story as many women would have heard the same, with a paralyzed inability to accept its significance. She wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister's arms. When the storm of grief had spent itself she went away to her room alone" (Chopin 73). Louise's reaction is the beginning of her self-discovery journey. Despite her heart condition, grief did not take a significant toll on her body, insinuating that this was not the direct cause of her upcoming death. Ironically, Mrs. Mallard's response to her husband's death is death itself. Louise's passing is a consequence of her epiphany and it epitomizes her freedom.

Although the author begins mentioning that Louise's reaction to Mr. Mallard's death is uncommon, the description leads the reader to believe that she entered a stage of shock and denial. After grasping the realness of the situation, Mrs. Mallard begins to cry and grieves publicly only for a moment, and then proceeds to grieve in the privacy of her own bedroom. An important element within the text is the fact that Louise grieved in her own room. This is due to the fact that privileged Victorian couples did not share a bedroom in their home; husband and wife slept separately. Metaphorically, the two bedrooms are a representation of the separateness between husband and wife. The bond that joined them was not love or passion, but a social commitment to one another. As Louise experiences the loss of her husband, she realizes her disentanglement from a socially manipulated marriage. This idea of a newly acquired freedom overwhelms the protagonist to the extent that it becomes incomprehensible by her physical being.

The rising action to the protagonist's upcoming epiphany begins once Louise grieves privately. As she enters the room, she sits in front of the window through which she can see outside of the house: "She could see in the open square before her house the tops of trees that were all aquiver with the new spring life" (73). The phrase "new spring life" is a metaphor for the life that awaits Louise as a widow. Although the outcome of Brently Mallard's death should be negative, for Louise it signifies the culmination of the oppression brought upon women in a Victorian marriage. The reader can perceive a connection between Mrs. Mallard's emotions and the images of nature that surrounded her. Her emotions are compared to nature's seasons; her married life was the cold winter and now she has moved onto the bright

and vivid spring.

As Mrs. Mallard grieved in the privacy of her own room, she suddenly arrived at a conclusion ("But she saw beyond that bitter moment a long procession of years to come that would belong to her absolutely. And she opened and spread her arms to them in welcome" [73]). She was beginning to reach the revelation of the new life that awaited her, a life in which she was no longer a product of society's corrupt perception of what it meant to be a woman and a wife. Louise is accepting the freedom she may experience in any possible manner, even if the only way to obtain this freedom is through her death. The protagonist is no longer tied to a marriage based on social commitment or the Victorian era's misconceptions of romantic love: "What could love, the unsolved mystery, count for in face of this possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being!" (74). Finally, Louise is her own being and is not subjected to society's social rulings. It seems as if every fiber in Louise's body is experiencing liberation and it occurs with such passion that it makes her a stronger being. The realization of this self-belongingness is overwhelming; for the first time in her life, the protagonist feels that she is in charge of her own destiny. The free will of which Mrs. Mallard had been robbed of for such a long time is, for the first time, her own property.

Mrs. Mallard's epiphany reflects various feminist ideas. For example, throughout her moment of illumination, Louise expresses her upcoming independence from a nineteenth-century marriage. Some of Louise's last words are: "Free! Body and soul free!" (74). Louise finds herself celebrating her freedom from the Victorian age gender limitations and her liberation from an undesired marriage. She is no longer tied to social restrictions; for the first time, she can embrace her femininity, her self-acknowledgement and her sexuality. No one can take away the freedom she has experienced, even if just for a brief moment. The briefness of the protagonist's liberation is a consequence of her death, which is the embodiment her freedom from a patriarchal society.

In "The Story of an Hour," Kate Chopin uses the protagonist's death to create a feminist statement. Although Louise's death seems to have occurred because of her heart ailment, it is her bodily reaction to a euphoric experience. Moreover, her death can also be considered ironic. The irony of her death is related to the timing Chopin utilizes in the story. She died at the climax of her epiphany, which was also the moment in which the reader finds out that Brently Mallard had been alive the whole time. According to the doctors who examine her body, Louise died of a "joy that kills" (74). The realization of her ultimate independence is so overwhelming that it costs her life; ergo, she died due to her own bliss and the excitement provoked by the idea of freedom. Louise Mallard can be considered a martyr of her own liberation. Her death, although lamentable, is her official disentanglement from the pressures of Victorian society.



Pa

El límite está en tus manos

USM '18

"El límite está en tus manos": Gabriela S. Mendoza Ortiz



Wildfire

by Vianca Rodríguez

Three friends went camping. As they explored they saw beautiful mountains, trees, birds and insects. They all sat down and prepared a fire to eat some s'mores. Feeling tired and exhausted they went to sleep in their tents. Later in time they woke up to the hearing of a firefighter.

English Department

Brenda A. Camara Walker, Ed.D.
Acting Director

Natalie M. Hernández Amador
Secretary

Tel. (787) 764-0000
Exts. 88862, 88883

E-mail: eng.dept@upr.edu
<http://generales.uprrp.edu/ingles/>



facultad de
estudios generales

