

ICGIT COUNCIL PRESENTS

VISION

*A Creative Journal
by Students
for Students*

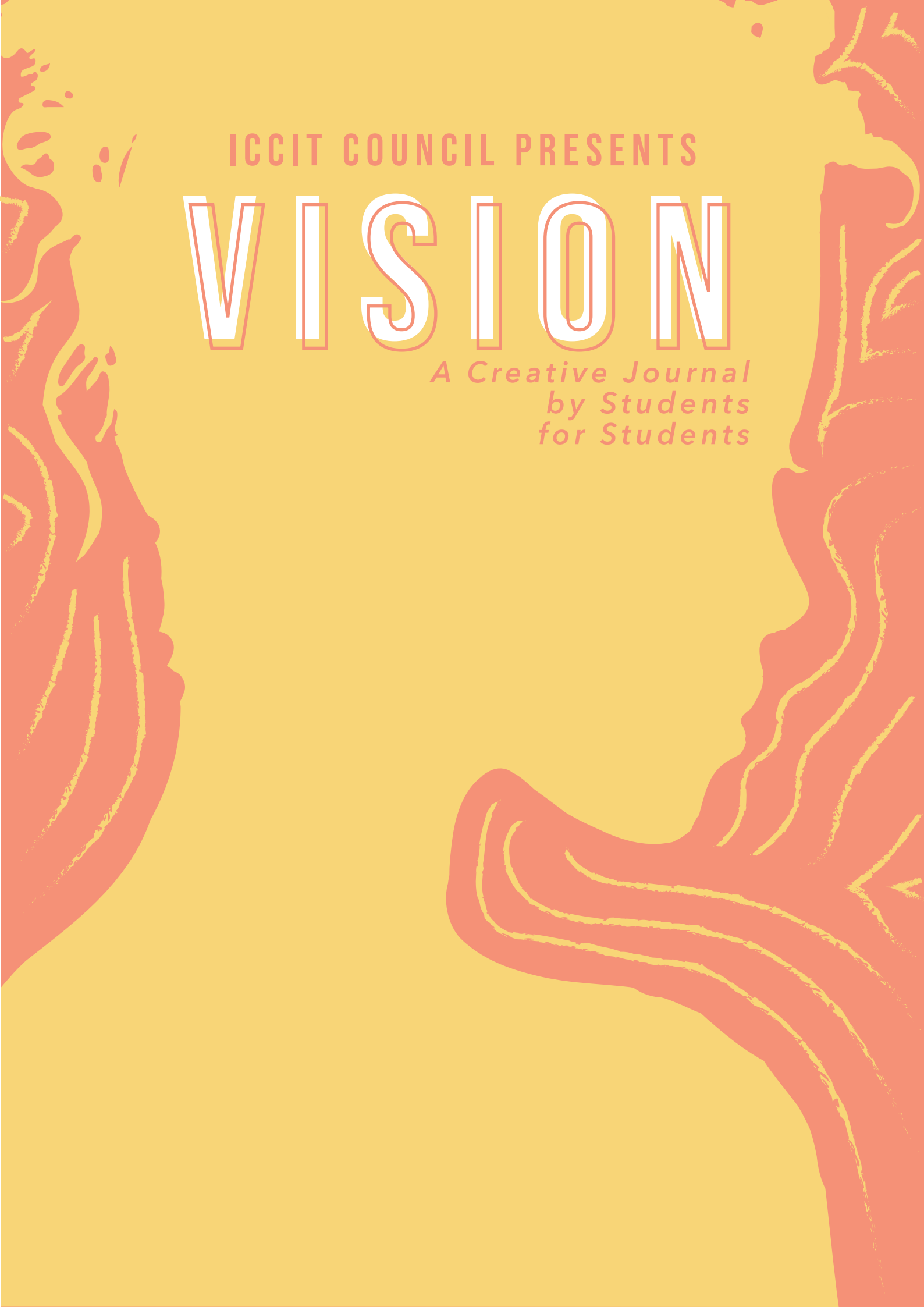


Table of Contents

Patience

iPad Intuition

After-Prom

Two-Way Mirror

Sitting in Silence

Chacachacare

Florida Series

Good Girl

Micheal's Soft Word

Epilogue

Mobster, 2009

Saving Green

Colours of You



VISION



PATIENCE

BY FAIZAH BALOGUN

"Only by admitting what we are can we get what we want."

Solemnity is bliss and vulnerability is strength. The complexity of human expressions has been dialed down to simple words to describe each emotion. They can be as simple as 'happy,' or 'sad,' but there really is more to it. The intimate nature of these images draws the audience as witnesses as well as subjects to create new cycles of thoughts and associations. The beauty of these images is masked through the melancholic appearance. It is through experiencing a deep sense of melancholy that individuals really reflect on themselves and question what true healing is. Only through introspection can one embrace their emotions and ultimately truly heal. Essentially, individual experiences can give one the ability to recognize that the beauty in pain is the ability to acknowledge and grow from it.



P.S. Whoever needs to see or hear this should understand that every negative is a positive, only if you make it so. I hope you can embrace your growth and practice this.



iPad Intuition

By Belicia Chevolleau

Edited by Danica Teng



Illustration by
Aamena Shaikh

The van door clicks behind dad after he slips on his red baseball cap and crosses the street. Mom's eyes follow him through the scanty parking lot until he disappears behind the automatic doors of Food Basics. The sun beats down on the roof of our blue 2004 caravan. After a long day of clothes shopping, my mom, two sisters, and I were too tired to go inside the grocery store with my dad—he only needed to pick up a few items anyway.

Mom waits another second before unbuckling her seatbelt and bending over the driver's seat. Her gelled, jet black hair spikes upward as she leans deeper, bulging stomach pressing into the center console. She fishes through the door compartment, hands rummaging over packs of Excel gum, hand sanitizer and spare change. Mom props her knees onto the passenger seat as she leans over more to the driver's side. Her hands move to the sun visor, flipping it open. White envelopes spill out onto the grey interior and the charcoal, rubber mat; she collects, shuffles, then places them back into a neat pile before shutting them away.

"What are you doing?" I ask, glancing out the window to see if Dad has returned yet. The sun reflects on the glass of the empty exit doors of Food Basics.

She glances at me, then returns to her work. Her eyes shift

up every few seconds, checking for passersby. Her eyes snap to a man she sees a man out of the corner of her eyes, she stills. He wears sunglasses and a black baseball cap, wobbling with two grocery bags. Mom sits back in her seat and looks forward. Her eyes follow him, watching his movements through the rearview mirror before switching to the side view mirror when he walks out of sight. She stays in her seat until he packs his groceries into the trunk of his black Ford truck and drives away.

Continuing her search, Mom hikes up her ankle-length jean skirt and now climbs over the center console where my dad's iPhone 4 rests. She plops onto the driver's seat and shoves her hands underneath the chair. She wiggles her hands until she grasps the edge of a solid object. Her fingers trace the deep lines in the leather. Her lips curl upward, and her eyes shine.

Mom's hand emerges from the darkness. She waves an iPad in the air, one with a white leathered case engraved with baby elephants.

"Ah ha!" she cries out victoriously. She bunches up the hem of her skirt and tosses herself back into her seat. She swings around to face us, iPad in hand.

"How do you explain this? Why does your dad have this?"

I shrug. "I don't know. I'm sure he has a reason."

"Why don't you ask him?" My sister, Jane, asks with her arms crossed.

Mom waves the iPad in answer as if to say, Yes, this is proof he's cheating on me. She nestles the iPad case to her chest and smirks.

I roll my eyes and stare out the window, then I spot a bright red baseball cap bobbing at the exit of Food Basics. Mom spots him too.

Dad looks both ways, lets a car pass, then pushes a cart full of toilet paper and a few grocery bags. A roll of aluminum foil and the familiar cartons of coconut water peek out from the top of the bag. The cart rattles as he gets closer; one of the front wheels twists in the opposite direction, so he wiggles the cart to straighten it out. He digs into his pocket, takes out the car keys, and unlocks the hatch. He unloads the groceries, then shuts the trunk door.

He drives the cart into the green cart shed, then returns with an easy gait and a satisfied smile. Probably the coconut water—those were his favourite.

Dad opens the driver's door, closes it, and buckles his seatbelt. Mom clears her throat. He turns to her, then his eyes move to the first-generation iPad in her hand.

"What is this?" she asks. His pupils dilate a fraction before returning to normal. He pushes the key into the ignition.

"Oh that. The secretary at work



wanted me to fix it for her."

"Why did she have to ask you?"

"She said it was giving her trouble. I offered to take a look at it."

"Then why are you hiding it underneath the chair?" She raises one eyebrow.

"Because," he begins, tapping the wheel with his index finger. He stops, then rests his hands on his knees and turns to her, voice clear, "because I knew you'd go through my stuff and think it was something else."

Mom always goes through Dad's stuff. Any excuse to rummage between his things, she'd do it. Whenever Dad's phone goes off, Mom will be the first one up from her seat and checking. She'll pick up his iPhone and read the notifications. I don't know what she's looking for, but it's like she's trying to find a reason to not trust him.

Mom leans back in her chair and buckles her seatbelt. He turns the key in the ignition. He reverses, clutching the back of her headrest with his right hand until he straightens the vehicle out. She reaches for

the grab handles as he drives forward. Her fingers tighten around the bars as he speeds up.

When we exit the plaza, she softens her voice and asks, "Well, did you fix it?"

He pauses, eyes on the traffic, before replying, "Not yet, I am still working on it."

Mom stares out her window all the way home.

A few days later, Mom roams around a strip mall looking for clothes, while Dad and the rest of us stay inside the van and wait. The sun beats down on us and slow-cooks our skin. 680 News plays in the background, and Dad drums his fingers against the wheel.

"The iPad was mine," he says. "I bought it way before your mom bought me that third-generation iPad for my birthday. I didn't realize she would buy it."

Sometimes my dad would tell me things he wouldn't tell Mom. Mom often blew things out of proportion rather than approaching things with logic.

For Dad's 51st birthday, Mom went out to Walmart and purchased a new third generation iPad for my dad who had been eyeing it for months. Along with the iPad, she bought an expensive black iPad cover with a gold name plate where she had his name engraved.

He turns down the dial of the

radio until the newscaster fades into silence. He peeks into the rearview mirror, and our eyes meet from my position in the back seat.

He breathes out, "I hid it because you know how your mom is when I buy something for myself."

Dad did not own many clothes. He owned a couple of jeans and only replaced them when the acid he used to dye wool at his workplace bore holes into them. The few tops he wore were hoodies and polos from Winners or his company's promotional clothing with the red 'Brand Felt' logo stitched along the right pocket. He loved shopping online for random trinkets like RFID wallets, software and bluetooth earbuds. He kept coins in the driver side car door, in the top drawer of the chest drawer in the master bedroom, and on the night table beside his bed. He was a hoarder. However, he never bought any expensive items.

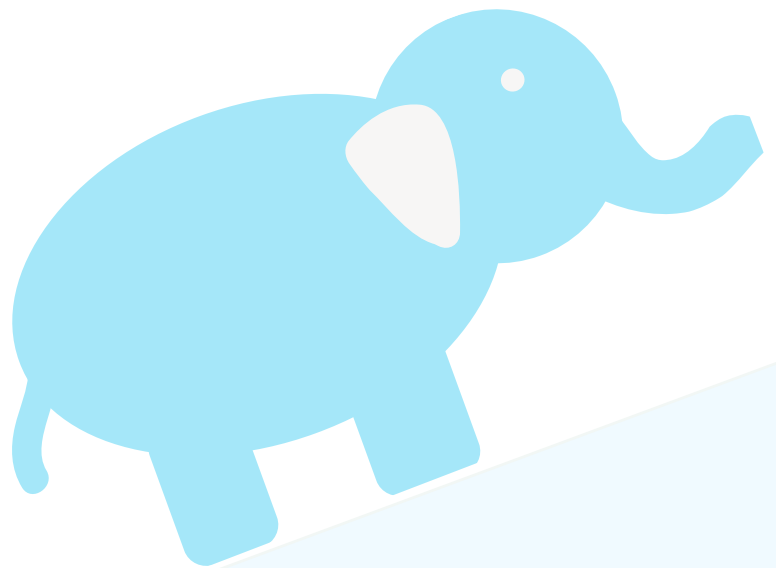
Still, Mom would question why he didn't use the money to buy something for the house like paint for the walls and cabinets, cleaner for the white paint stains and orange crayon marks on the carpet, and paying to repair the popcorn ceiling in our dining room—which needs to be patched up after the rain caused a leak, leaving a coffee-coloured stain on the wall. She started to sound like Julius from Everybody Hates Chris when he fa-

mously complains about the cost of spilt milk: 'That's 49 cent of spilt milk drippin' all over the table. Somebody gon' drink this milk!'

I nod, but one thing still didn't make any sense. My eyebrows bow in question.

"And the cover? Why elephants?" It was so childish.

He looked at me, hazel eyes twinkling. "It was on sale."



Two-Way Mirror

These pictures were from a series that captures both the beauty of being in the moment and being unaware of it. I personally like to be able to include nature and animals in my shots, because it is not only how I started out, but it helps add some backdrops or just an overall better feeling to the pictures.

I personally feel that there is something to be captured not only just when you need or want to capture something, but as well as in the moment, where no one realizes it, and that is what I attempt to convey through the three shots that I have selected. The pictures fit the theme of people because the shots capture her in different ways, how she acts when she is watched, how she acts when she's unaware and when she's in the moment and not caring. These pictures represent





how people behave and act differently around a camera when they know it's there, and when they do not know it's there. The shots show what people think they need to look like and how they are very similar yet different. Through the use of three different moments I was able to capture three unique pictures that represent different ways that people behave and are seen as.



The person in the picture is actually my best friend and she means the world to me and she wanted to take pictures for her Instagram so I offered to help out and I got some good posed shoots but even better unaware shots. This explains how people feel the need to have candid pictures that aren't candid and forced to fit this idea of normal, but an actual candid picture can be just as beautiful, and I personally think that these pictures can showcase that.

by **Jasmine Aujla**

AFTER PROM

BY MIRANDA GALEGO
EDITED BY DANICA TENG



ILLUSTRATION BY AMENA SHAIKH

"Is Tati here?" I ask the cute blond with the blue polo shirt.

"Yeah, she's inside. Do you have your invitations?"

"Yeah, we all do," I say as I take out a silver envelope from my shimmery black purse. The three of us hand our invitations to the bodyguards and enter our first and only after-prom party.

I arrived with Madison and Katya, but I'm not that close with them. I just didn't want to pay the full Uber fare to Richmond Hill, so I offered to share my ride with them.

The mansion appears proudly behind creaky iron gates, bordered by rows of pine trees and perfectly square-cut shrubs that sway gently to the chilly wind. At its threshold stands a delicate Carrara marble fountain with carved fish and birds, the soft gurgle of the clear water melodic as it resonates in the silence. Two older guys that graduated from our high school years ago, paid to be intimidating, stand at the large Renaissance-styled mahogany door.

"I'm going to go look for Tati," I say as I walk towards the left wing of the mansion. The girls nod their heads and walk towards the bathroom.

Psychedelic rock blares as I get closer to the garage entrance. A cloud of smoke escapes from the doorway. The air-tight room contains pot-smokers with joints. The

exhaled smoke from the joints lingers and circulates. The vicious music pierces my ears as I open the door a quarter of the way.

"Hey, is Tati in there?"

"Nah, I think I saw her go up to her room with some guy. Don't bother her," says a voice from the far-left side of the hotboxed garage.

I text my friend Sheherzad to see if he is still on his way. Sheherzad wanted to bring his childhood friend, Barna, to the party to practice his photography skills. Tati thought it would be great to have everyone remember this momentous occasion.

I met Barna briefly at the Streetsville Bread and Honey Festival in early June. He wore a faded brown shirt with stonewashed jeans and a huge tear over his right knee. When I asked him about the hole in his pants, without a concern he informed me that his dog Bruno decided to redesign his outfit.

Somehow his calm nature was reflected in his tousled brunette locks that were confined in a beige frayed 'We The North vs Everyone' baseball cap. I only knew that Barna had a cute, but silly dog named Bruno, a silver BMW named Violette and would use the words 'chilling and bowling' in almost every sentence. Sheherzad assured me that Barna was just nervous and is a lot more sociable than he seems. My phone rings. "Hey Sheherzad,

are you on your way with Barna?"

"Yeah, he ended up taking his beamer so watch out for him. I gave him your number."

I let out a soft giggle. "Why did you give him my number? I'm supposed to do that bro."

I set down my Victoria Secret duffle bag in the closet of my assigned room that I would share with five other guys that lay seductively on the bed in the left corner of the room. A green couch, too big for the room, is placed in the right corner with two cushions. Three girls, that I've never seen, sit on it glammed up with blank stares on their faces.

The tall brick walls of the mansion can only contain so many intoxicated teenagers. Tati officially invited the entire twelfth grade to this after-prom.



She rented this extravagant house and charged people an entrance fee of 80 dollars, 40 of which would be returned to the attendee if nothing in the house was damaged during the night. Tati gave us the option of staying overnight when she handed out the invitations. She knew people weren't driving home.

"Who is sleeping in this room tonight?" I ask as I look over at the double bed.

All eight people in the room raise their hands.

"I can also bring a couple of friends from the other room if you guys want," says the girl with purple eyeshadow.

All the guys give each other a look that knots my stomach. I roll my eyes, pick up my black duffel bag and walk out of the room. I'll be lucky if I wake up on time for work tomorrow.

As I walk around the house, I pass people I had never seen before— maybe girlfriends and boyfriends from other schools or people who wanted to have a good time at someone else's after-prom.

I switched my heels to flats in hopes that my feet would stop throbbing.

I find the nearest bathroom on the second floor and softly knock.

"Occupied!" yells a male voice.

"I just need to change." Muffled sounds of female moans get through the door. "Open the door

man, I will only take a minute," I say while looking for a bobby pin in my purse.

"Yeah and so will I!" screams the male voice.

THUD THUD THUD. Grunts and moans echo through the hallway. I step away from the door. A girl in an aquamarine sequin dress with matted long blonde hair emerges from the doorway and combs her hair with her fingers. A blond guy wearing a black tux, with a red bowtie that matches the rose pinned on his jacket, follows her close behind. He lunges his hand forward in her direction and his palm lands with a hard slap on her butt. The force of his hand causes the girl to jerk forward, and the vicious sound reverberates off the walls in the narrow hallway.

I step into the humid and muggy bathroom. It smells like a football locker room. "GOT FUCKED" is written on the foggy mirror. I turn on the bathroom fan and search for lavender Febreze under the sink.

I quickly change out of my silver cross back dress and carefully place its folded elegance in a clear Ziploc bag. I put on pink velvet shorts and an extra-large black t-shirt with a cat in a tie-dye bandana printed in the middle.

RING RING RING. "Hey, I'm outside next to the bush that looks like SpongeBob," says a deep male voice.

"Who is this?"

"It's Barna, the photographer for the party."

"Oh okay, I'll be right out." I lock my phone and see my child-like grin reflect back at me on the black screen. I speed walk down the hallway, kick open the gigantic mahogany doors and skip towards the square shrubs that line the driveway.

I step past the tall bodyguards and look for Barna's silver BMW, Vi-olette.

"Hey! It's so great to see you again. How have you been?" I say. I perch myself on the tips of my toes, swinging my arms across Barna's chest and around his shoulders.

He taps me on my shoulder blade and says, "Same old, same old, you know, chilling, bowling." I still don't understand what he means.

He wears black ripped jeans, like usual, with a flowered long sleeve shirt that makes his biceps bulge.

When I shook his hand the first time we met, it was tender like a piece of bread fresh out of the toaster. When we hugged this time, his heat warmed me up.

He gets his camera gear out of the back seat of his car. I've never been in his car, so I look inside for anything weird. My mom says that you can tell a lot about a person by the way they treat their car. The

cleanliness makes sense for someone who names their car, no dust on the dash and no garbage anywhere in the car.

Sheherzad smokes cigarettes and told me that Barna's whole family smokes, so I look for a pack.

Nothing. I can't smell any kind of smoke. The smell makes me sick so my nose would have picked it up instantly. But nothing. Nothing that implicated him. Did he hide it all because he was coming to see me?

I tell the bodyguards that Barna is the photographer for the event, and Tati is aware of his arrival. I notice that the older guys aren't that cute anymore. I sashay through the doorway with my arm hooked on Barna's, with no intention of moving it anytime soon.

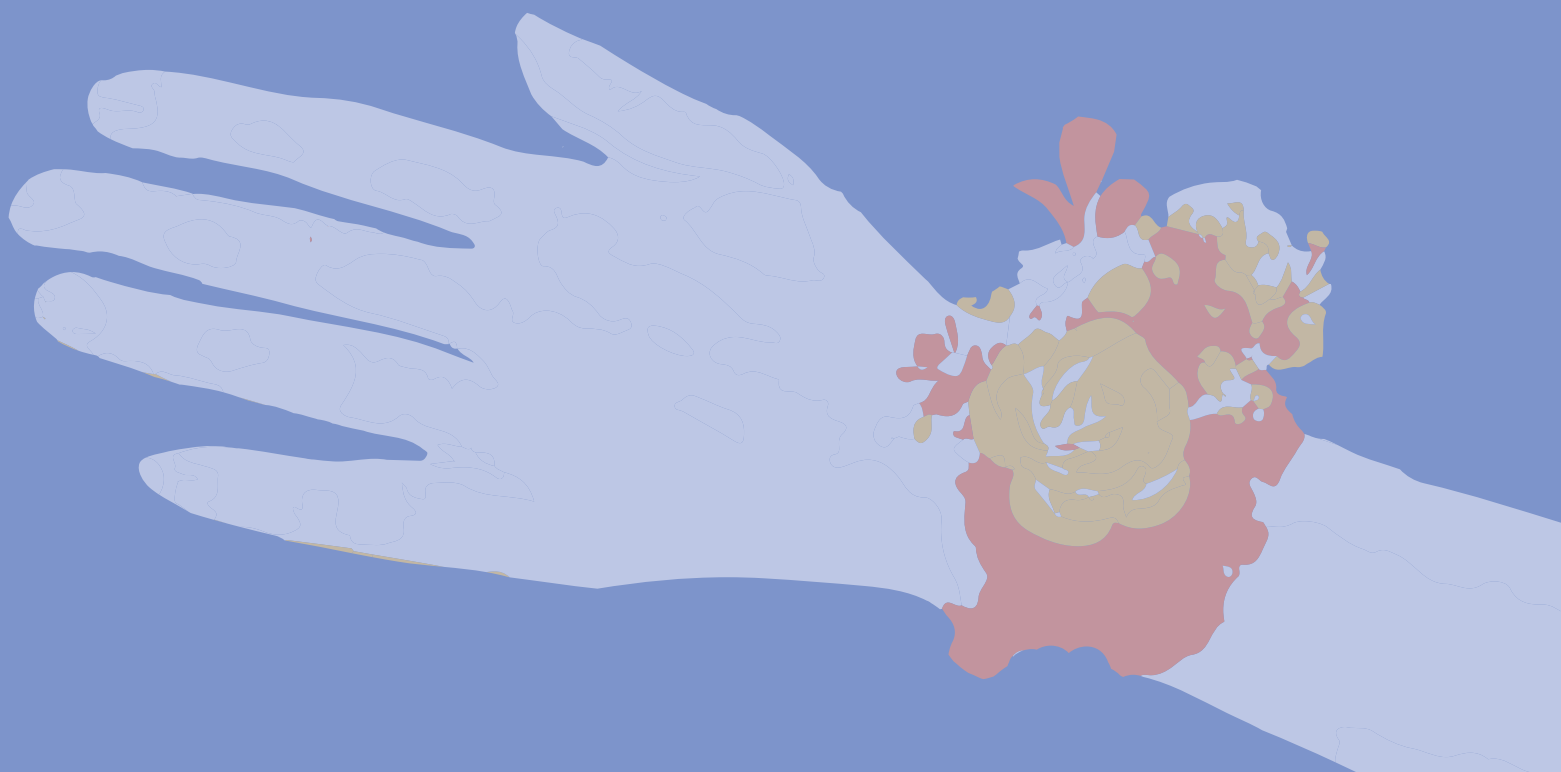
Sheherzad arrives with another friend of ours, Raf, at 2 a.m. We all start to play beer pong on the lowest level of the mansion. Everyone

grinds, twerks and dances like their sex lives depends on it. The whole floor feels like that humid bathroom from earlier.

Barna and I take turns throwing ping pong balls into Sheherzad and Raf's red solo cups.

"Hey Barna, can you pass me that Crown Royal on your left?" I say with an empty cup. He hands me the oddly shaped bottle; I struggle to hold it with one hand and almost drop it. I pour until my cup is a quarter full and add a bit of orange Cîroc because I thought the bottle looked cool with the orange ombré. I topped the chaotic drink off with some Coke because I've heard people talk about rum and Coke together. Crown Royal is a type of rum right?

"That's going to taste like shit," says Barna as he makes a perfect bounce shot into the left corner cup. "I guess we'll see," I act like a tough





rebel and chug the bubbly brown liquid. The repulsive cocktail meets my tongue, and all my taste buds scream in pain. I spit the vile beverage back into the cup and hope Barna didn't see.

"It was shit, wasn't it?" says Barna as he takes the cup out of my hand and throws it in a nearby trash bin.

"It wasn't that bad. I just need to get used to it," I say.

"You don't want to get used to the taste of alcohol, it doesn't do anything but make people blackout and do stupid shit," he says in a serious tone. I shrug my shoulders and hop up on the grey table behind us. I toss my legs back and forth. What can I say to grab his attention?

"How's Bruno?" I ask with a smile.

"He's great," Barna pulls out his phone. "Here's a picture."

"He's so cute! I wish I had a dog," I say as I throw the ping pong ball at a random spot on the table.

"Bruno ran into the sliding door today. He's kind of dumb, but he's still my son," Barna says while he admires his purebred Hungarian dog.

"What's his breed?" I ask.

"He's a Vizsla. They're hunting dogs," Barna enunciates.

"You pronounced that so well. Were you born here?"

He chuckles and sighs, "Is it really that bad?" He rolls his eyes. "Yeah, I was born here. I was taught

Hungarian before English, so a lot of people thought I was an immigrant. Some still do, and I'm not sure why."

"Oh no," I nervously laugh. "I didn't think that, I just thought your accent was cool."

"Köszönöm," Barna says with a wink.

"What does that mean?" I say in amazement.

"It means 'thank you' in Hungarian. Sort of, it just takes practice," he says while throwing another effortless perfect shot.

We all get bored of beer pong. I offer to show Barna around so he can take some pictures. Sheherzad and Raf go out to the patio and the pool.

"What do you wanna see first, the drunks, the hoes or the stoners?" I say.

"The drunks," says Barna.

"Well that is convenient because there's the kitchen." Glass alcohol bottles clutter the tiles. Empty bottles are in the cabinets and the sink. Red solo cups litter the floor.

A guy is passed out, slouched over on a plastic lawn chair in the corner.

"Whose man is this?" says Barna in a loud but assertive voice.

"That's Tweedy, he's taking a nap," a male voice, among the group of dancing teenagers, howls above the EDM music.

"Imma take a picture of him

'ight?" Barna says as he takes out his retro camera.

"Hold up," says the male voice.

A mob of football players emerge from the mass of dancers and huddle around their drunk friend, Tweedy. Barna counts, "1...2...3", and the mob of guys fall all at once in a pile on top of Tweedy, causing the plastic chair to break under the weight. They all laugh, and the pile of football players wiggle. A muffled angry voice leaks out from the bottom of the pile. The guys get up off each other one by one. Barna and I look at the photo and see seven burly guys suspended in mid-air about to fall on their innocent friend.

"Fuck you guys," Tweedy groans.

"I think he's gonna puke," says one guy. Tweedy turns green. His body jerks forward, and he vomits in the trash bin.

"I think I've had enough of the drunk category for tonight," says Barna.

"Yeah, I agree. Want to see what's up with Sheherzad and Raf?" I say as I step away from the nasty smell that burns my nose.

Raf puts on a dance show on the rim of the pool, with a beer in one hand and a cigarette in another. The girls point and giggle. One mis-step and I'll have to ride home with a soggy drunk. Sheherzad sits unbothered on a patio chair, surround-

ed by girls of every shape and size, most still in their prom outfit. Girls always seemed attracted to him like magnets.

I had work at 8 a.m., and if I didn't show up I would get fired. Not to mention the fact that I was not going to sleep overnight in the orgy room.

"Hey, when did you want to leave?" I ask Sheherzad.

"I told Raf I would drive him home too," says Sheherzad. Raf moves over to the corner of the patio and chugs a Corona with Spanish guys who smoke expensive cigars.

"I can drive you home, if you want," says Barna. A smile infects my face, and the corners of my mouth turn upward. I can feel the muscles in the apples of my cheeks get high. I hope he doesn't think I'm weird.

"I would love that!" I get my bag from the orgy room, shutting my eyes upon entrance. We head to Barna's car.

"Your car is so nice, like it's super clean," I drunkenly leap into the black leather passenger seat of his car. I pull the lumbar lever on the seat to meet my back in a comfortable lounging position. "Thank you so much for offering to drive me home, like I would be so bored

in the car with Sheherzad," I press buttons on the dash to see which one turns on the air conditioning.

"No worries, do you mind if I play the Weekend?"

I have never heard of this band.

"Yeah for sure, I love them!" I stick my blistered feet out the window and try to cool them off. I wore heels for most of the night.

I put my address into Google maps and prop the phone in the cup holder. We follow a dirt road for what feels like three hours. An older song comes on from his playlist—Endless Love by Lionel Richie echoes throughout the car and into the farmer fields on either side of us.

"You listen to Lionel Richie?" I say shocked.

"Hell yeah, he's my illegitimate dad," he says with a grin that curls the left side of his mouth.

"I have like all of his records, even his CDs, like I have a collection at home. It's all over my walls," I say quickly while blushing.

"What's your favorite song by him?"

"Probably Dancing on the Ceiling, Hello or Truly are my all-time favourite songs." I take a breath to make sure I don't speak fast. "But Endless Love is up there too."

"Yeah, I like them all," he looks at me and gives me a side smile that makes me want to lunge over at him, lips first.

"So, why don't you smoke?" I say abruptly.

"What makes you think I don't smoke?"

"Well, you don't smell like smoke. You don't have cigarette packets anywhere that I can see, and we passed so many smokers at the party, but you didn't even flinch."

"I've been around smokers too much, and I've seen what it does to people, so I stay away from it."

"Oh, I'm sorry I didn't know," I wiggle in my seat.

"Don't worry, it's their choice to ruin their lungs."

Running with The Night by Lionel Richie plays from the car speakers.

My heart beats fast and loud. I worry if he can hear it. My cheeks get hot, and my hands are clammy. Should I kiss him? I want to, but I don't know if he wants me to, but I want to.

I loosen my seat belt slightly. I stretch up on my seat, so our shoulders are at the same level. He stares at the dark road with scarce streetlights. We are the only ones on the road at this time. I lunge over the center console and land my lips in the middle of his cheek. His head turns to me, and I kiss the tip

of his nose.

"You're drunk," Barna says.

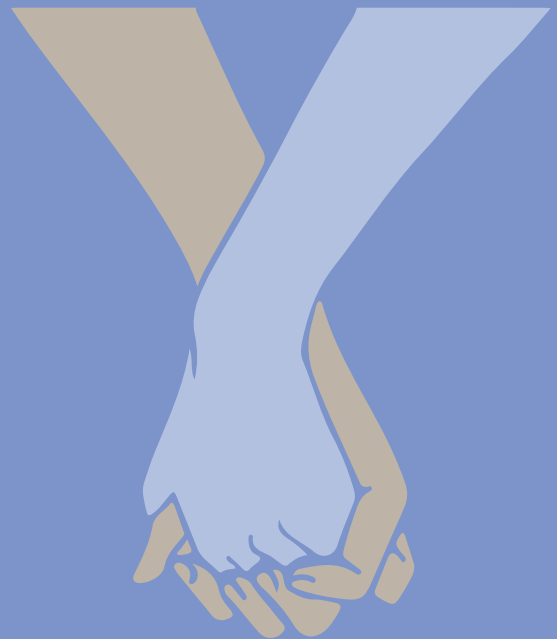
"Not that drunk, I know what I'm doing."

"I don't want to kiss you while you're drunk."

I slouch back into the passenger of the car and stare out the window. The word 'rejected' spells out in big red letters in my mind.

"Come out with me next weekend, and we will see what happens then," Barna says.

I nod with a smile.

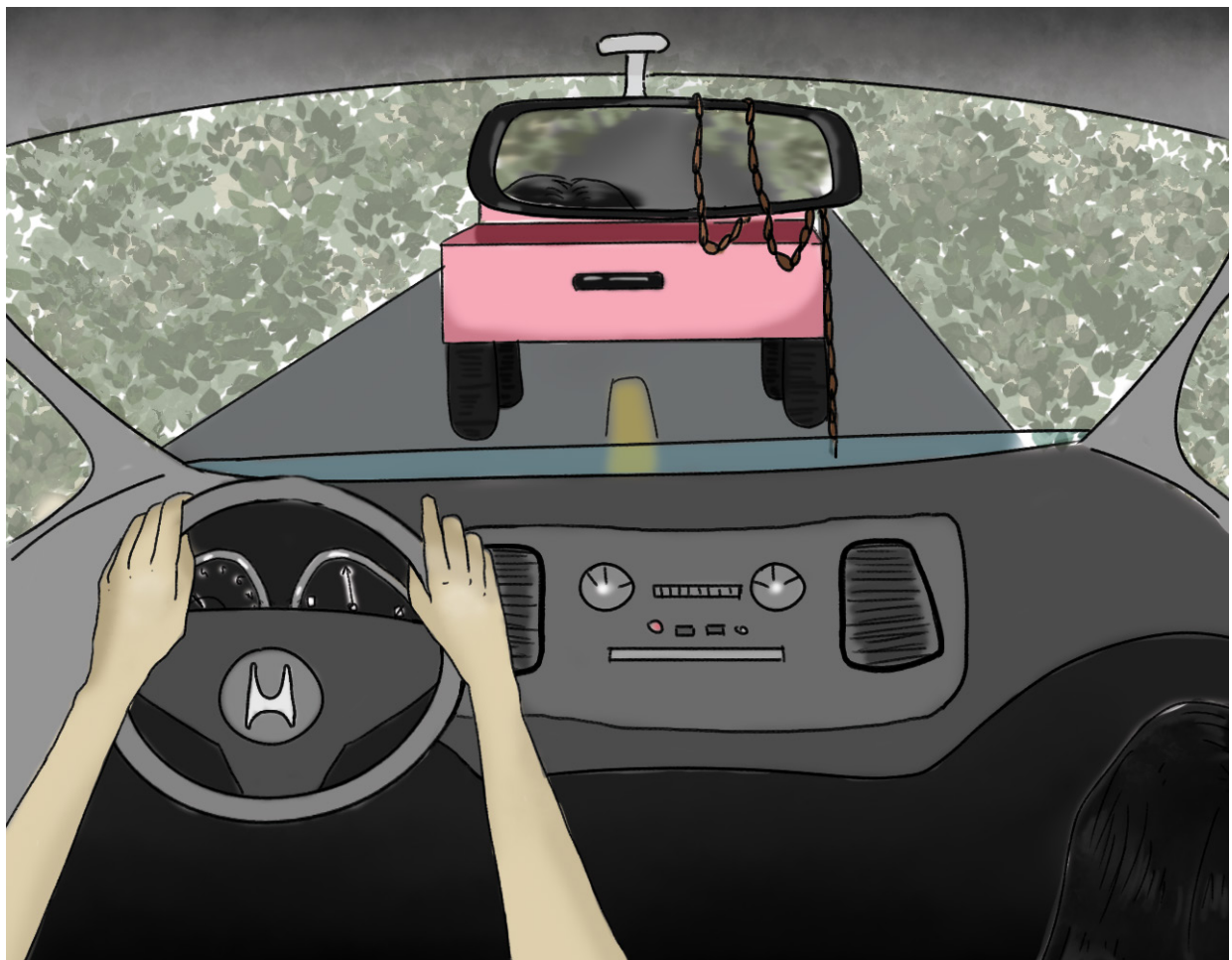


Sitting IN Silence

BY CHARISSE IBAY

EDITED BY

MELISSA BARRIENTOS



ILLUSTRATED BY
ANANYA ANANTH

I slip into the passenger seat of my sister's 2008 black Honda Civic. The scent of raspberry lemonade tickles my nose. A rosary dangles from the rear view mirror. The stereo stutters as my sister, Ate, plugs the auxiliary cord into her iPod. She presses play and early 2000's throwback R&B vibrate through the speakers.

I buckle my seatbelt and Ate starts the engine. I press record on my phone.

"This is so unprofessional," Ate groans.

Her eyes lock onto the road in front of her, hands clutching the steering wheel at the standard nine and three o'clock position. We're driving to Captain's Boil for lunch. A thirty-minute trip from our house to fulfill our fish tempura craving.

"Okay, but you're the one who said this was the only time I could interview you," I say.

Before we left, I suggested doing the interview at the restaurant. Ate declined and insisted we do the interview in the car. "I want to enjoy my food," she claimed.

I tap my fingers against the car's arm rest. "I just need this, okay?" I mutter.

I've pressed stop and record three times on my phone already. Three times that prompted annoyed

grimaces, irritated head scratches, and frustrated groans from both parties. I assumed interviewing someone I was close to would be easier for my expressive writing assignment, but all I keep getting are blunt sentences and condescending glances.

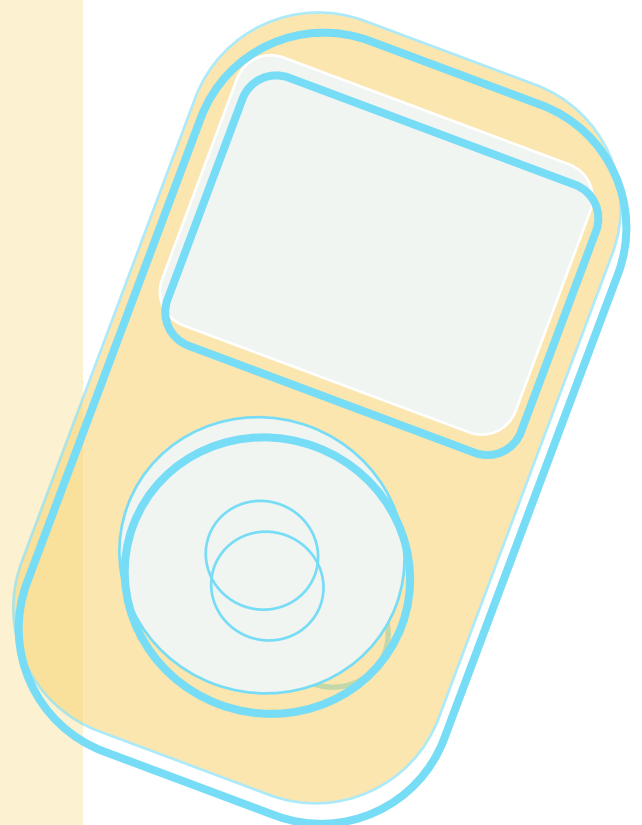
"Dad's too busy and I don't really want to talk to my manager about his anxiety." I say, scratching the back of my neck. I want this to be over just as much as she does.

"Fine, but hurry up," Ate says, releasing a long sigh. Her speed goes over the limit by five kilometers.

Shaking my head, I press record for the fourth time.

"How long has it, um-- no, actually, tell me about your accident," I say, licking my chapped lips.

I lift my phone closer to her



mouth. I make sure not to completely block her view of the winding road.

"It was two years ago," Ate says. Her eyebrows knot and she chews on her lip. "I was on the highway. A truck hit me."

I glare at Ate. The smile I've forced on my lips twitches and I let out a laugh through gritted teeth. This was going to be tough. "How?"

"From behind," says Ate.

"Okay--can you elaborate? Or be a little more detailed?" I ask.

Ate rolls her eyes and tightens her grip on the steering wheel. The colour of her knuckles pale and the bones extrude like tiny mountains. "Like, a truck was changing into my lane. Then it hit me."

I peer at Ate with a bated breath. I wait for her to continue. When she doesn't, I purse my lips and sigh. "Did you hit anyone else?"

Her gaze darts to her window. A large pick-up truck zooms by in

the opposite lane. Our car wobbles as the truck blows past us. "No."

My eyes narrow. My past recordings and memories of the night go against her answer. "You didn't hit anyone else?"

"Oh, yeah. I did," Ate clarifies, shaking her head. Her foot switches to the break as we near a stoplight. "When I was spinning, I hit another car. Then my car hit the median. And that's it."

"Um," I say. I look down at my notes and the questions I prepared. The questions that I thought would spark a conversation don't. Ate answers the questions like she's on Jeopardy and there's less than a minute until commercial break.

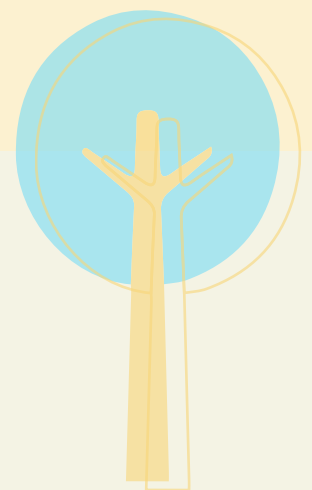
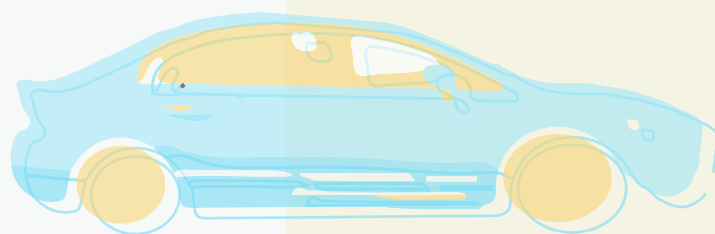
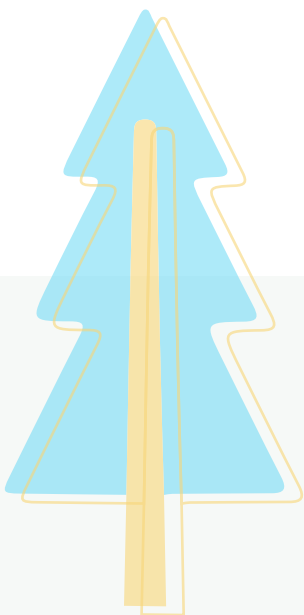
"Where were you going?"

"We were going to an escape room in Mississauga."

"Who's 'we'?"

Ate turns her head in my direction. She squints like she's trying to decipher if there's a hidden message beneath my question. I know who she went with, but I want her to say it for my recording.

"My boyfriend," Ate says slow-



ly. A smile tugs at her lips. Ate and Jason have been dating for three years and my parents like him. He's even picked me up from my job once since everyone else was at work and I couldn't drive. There was another time my family went to New Jersey without me, and Ate asked Jason if he could pick me up after an evening management midterm. He agreed.

"How did you guys feel when it happened?" I ask, dismissing the shift in her mood with a smile.

"And like, what did you guys do?"

"We were scared. Hysterical," Ate coughs. The traffic light switches to green, her head turns from left to right, her foot pushes the gas pedal and the car accelerates. "I told him to call 911."

I shift in my seat. My mind rings with Professor Divya's words from her lecture. Good interviewers work with silence. Instead of encouraging her to continue, I press my lips together. Our

conversation falls and "Confessions" by Usher replaces her abrupt responses and my eager prompts.

A minute passes.

"So, he called 911," Ate continues.

I stay silent for another minute. We drive by the Oakville GO carpool lot. Cars line the parking lot in clumps. A woman stands underneath a bus shelter.

"What else?" I ask.

"I called Dad. He didn't pick up." Ate says.

"Okay? And then what?"

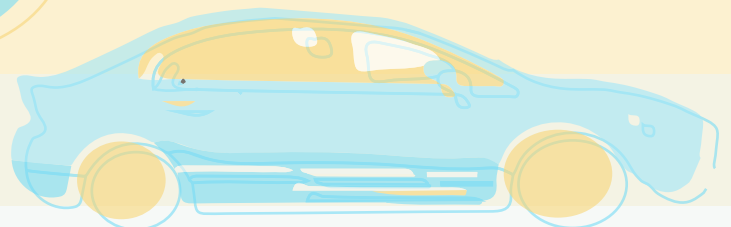
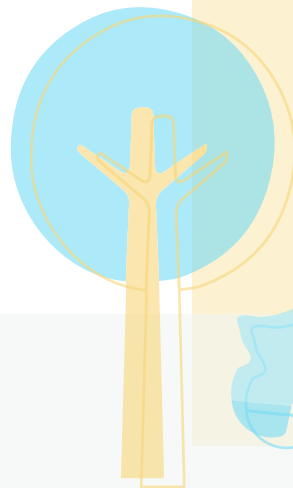
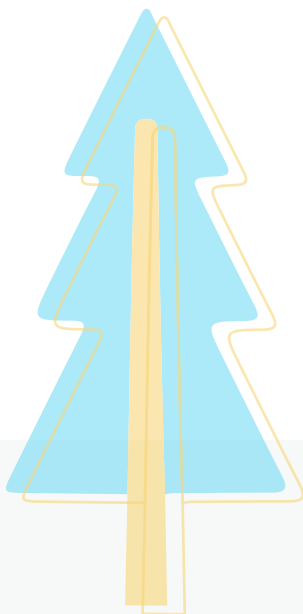
"I called you."

"And?"

"And I was screaming at you to, um, put Dad on the phone. He was annoyed."

I remember that night. I ran into my parents' bedroom with Ate crying on the phone. Dad was already in his pajamas when I shoved my phone into his hands. Dad's face crumpled, his eyebrows scrunching. When they hung up, Dad sighed and hauled himself out of bed.

"And?" I prompt.



"I don't remember what he said. He just told me to stay there. So, I did," Ate says. She reaches over to turn the heater down. "And then the ambulance came and the firefighters came."

"Did you guys get hurt?"

"I got whiplash. Jason got a bruise on his arm."

My teeth sink into my bottom lip. I let silence take over again. After another minute, Ate looks at me for another tired prompt. I oblige.

"And? Was the accident bad? Was your car destroyed? What happened?" I ask.

"Oh, yeah," Ate says. "The car was totaled so I needed to get a new car. Like, I couldn't drive it anymore. But I got the same car model."

"Why?"

"Because I felt safe."

I glance at the rosary that lurches with every pothole we hit. It used to be mine, but Ate has claimed it since the accident.

We sit in silence for another five minutes. My patience thins.

With a sigh, I look at my last question. "Was there anything you took away from the accident? Like a mantra or a way to live your life?"

"Yeah," Ate replies. "That I was meant to be here."

I let us succumb to silence again.

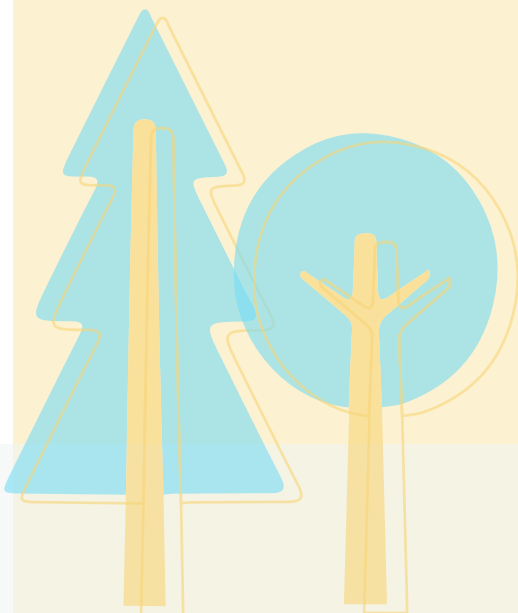
"I didn't die, so I still have a purpose here ... That's why I'm here," Ate adds. "Also, treat yo'self."

"For real?" I laugh. I side-eye her direct reference from Parks and Recreation, a television show we always watch together.

"Is that what you got from almost dying in a car accident?"

"Yeah, basically," she laughs.

My throat catches and I snort. A fit of giggles envelope the car. My laugh drowns the music and slices through the silence I've continuously reinforced.



CHACACHACARE

BY GABBY ALYSIA

EDITED BY MELISSA BARRIENTOS



ILLUSTRATION BY ANANYA ANANTH

A crescent-shaped island rises out of the water, barren and brown. The waters of the Gulf of Paria glisten in the sun. My hair whips in the wind as the little white speedboat, *La Cucaracha*, cuts through the waves off the North-West coast of Trinidad. The rays of the beaming sun soak into my skin. I glance past the bare island to the horizon. Livid mountains from Don Pedro, Macuro, and Patos Island, of Venezuela peer through the rough, open waters of the Boca Grande. Dad slows *La Cucaracha* and steers toward the last island. We cruise into the bay.

Chacachacare, the infamous haunted island Mom warned us about. The disturbing stories from this island echo throughout Trinidad. When Dad asked my little brother, Eduardo, and I if we wanted to go 'Down the Islands,' I never thought he would bring us here.

I expected that he'd take us to Monos where we'd hear the screams of the wild Red Howler Monkeys. I figured Huevos, Egg Island, was out

of the question because of the Venezuelan drug and weapon cartels that frequent there.

I was hoping we'd go to Gasparee, to search the limestone caves for the famed pirate's treasure buried somewhere below the waterline. I would have expected him to take us to Gasparillo, island of the centipedes, before bringing us here.

"Hey Gab, why do they call them Bocas?" Eduardo asks. He walks toward me from his seat in the back.

"Bubby, Boca means mouth in Spanish. They call it Boca Grande 'cause it's a literal mouth to the ocean," I say, wrapping my arms around him.

"Did you know that they're actually known as Bocas del Dragón?" Dad says from the front of the boat. "The Spaniards called it that because the islands used to eat their ships."

"Eat their ships?" Eduardo asks.



Aunty BJ's eyes brighten from her seat next to Dad, and she nods furiously.

"Yes, each island is surrounded by rocks hidden below the water." Aunty BJ's slick smile spreads across her face. "It was said that going through the Bocas, and around the islands, is like trying to avoid being swallowed by a dragon. There are a lot of shipwrecks here, mostly unrecorded."

"That's so cool!" Eduardo says.

"Dad, are you taking us to swim at Chacachacare?" I say, cutting a side

glance at Aunty BJ, Dad's 'sister-in-law.' "Mom said that we shouldn't come here." I glare at the back of Aunty BJ's bottle-blonde head. The divorce is her fault. Mom and Dad wouldn't be throwing tantrums and kitchen spoons like toddlers without her influence.

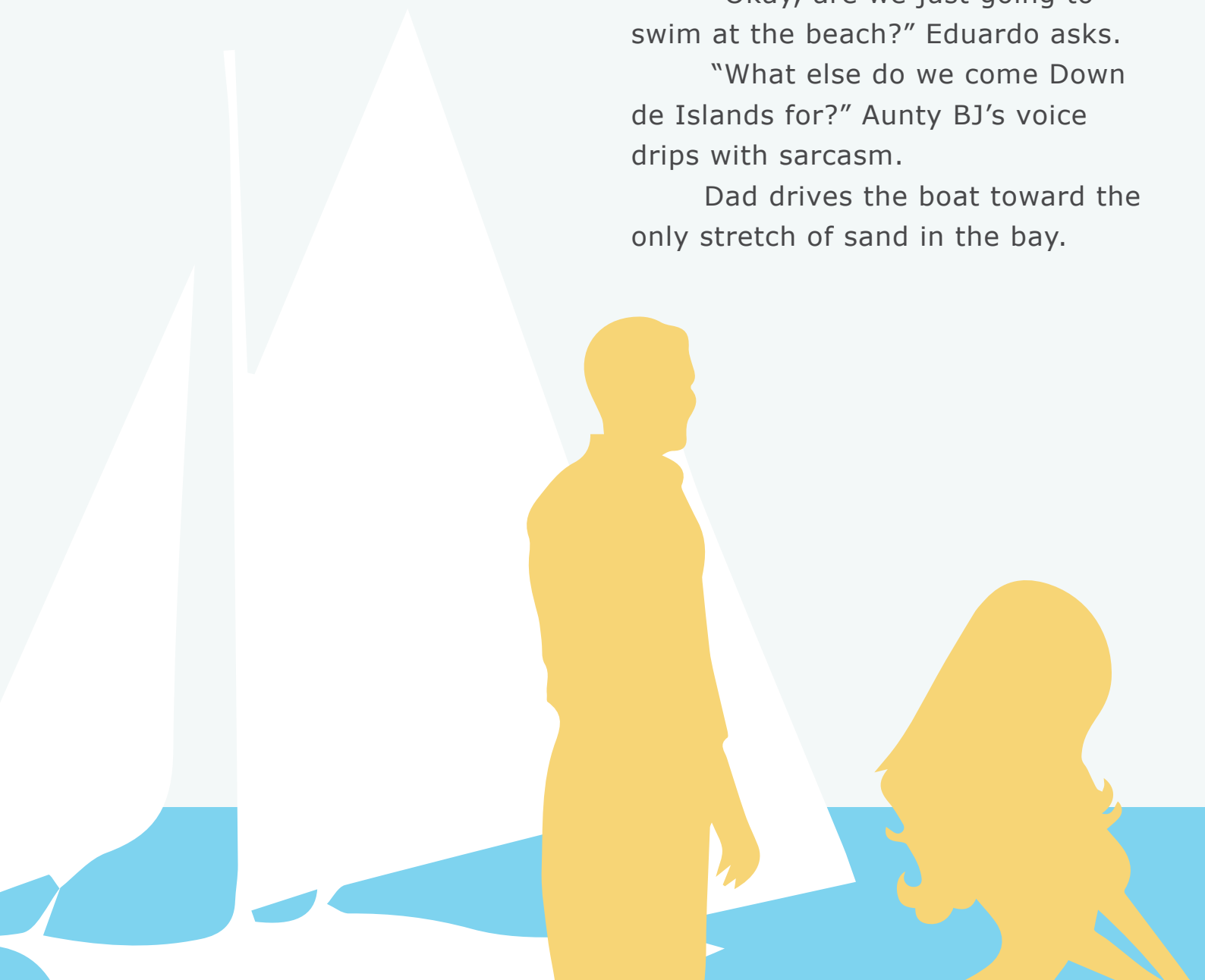
"Your Mother and her silly superstitions are wrong. This island is not haunted or dangerous," Aunty BJ sneers.

"Besides, you should trust God to protect you from anything that comes your way," Dad preaches. Eduardo and I roll our eyes.

"Okay, are we just going to swim at the beach?" Eduardo asks.

"What else do we come Down de Islands for?" Aunty BJ's voice drips with sarcasm.

Dad drives the boat toward the only stretch of sand in the bay.



Last time we came Down the Islands, we went to Scotland Bay. Scotland Bay is on the mainland facing Monos. We drove from Trincity in the east of Trinidad, passed Port of Spain, to Chagaramas in the west. We hopped on La Cucaracha with Uncle Carlos, Aunty BJ, and their kids and drove out of the marina towards Casa Navarro, the family island house. We docked the boat on the exclusive Casa Navarro jetty.

Dad waved at several of the families on their boats. One yacht, Sweet TnT, played Machel Montano's new soca song 'The Road.' Bodies writhed and bobbed to the rhythm, sweaty, and swaying in the sun. Beer bottles in every hand encouraged the large families to scream excitedly at each other. I recognized Jordan Pierce from school and her boyfriend – of the week – grinding on each other to the loud beat.

Another small fisher boat tied to the shore played Congo Man, an old calypso made famous by Trinidad's national treasure, Sparrow, on an old, analog radio. The conflicting pulse of the two songs bounced off each other in the small bay. Families shouted from boat to boat, laughing and drinking. Little kids jumped from the jetties into the teal waters. Giggling and splashing around.

The empty, brown bay of

Sanders Beach stares at me. No families, no boats, no music. Nothing. Two broken, concrete jetties stick into the water at the base of the two ports at opposite tips of Chacachacare's crescent. Both jetties sit – broken, rusty, and undisturbed – as they have since the island was abandoned in the late 1990s.

"Dad, I don't know how I feel about this place. It feels kind of eerie," I mutter.

"Don't be ridiculous. Your damned mother is filling your head with shit." Deep lines mar his forehead and his nose turns bright pink.

"Don't talk about Mom that way," Eduardo spurts out.

"Bubby now is not the time," I whisper to him.

Dad parks La Cucaracha near the shore. I take off the black dress covering my bikini. The semi-clear water of the bay gleams to the bottom. Soft waves rise and fall across the grainy sand. Anxiety crawls across my skin. I note the absence of people, the absence of colour in the water, the absence of life on the island.

"Hey Gab, you wanna go in?" Eduardo asks.

"Yeah, sure." I shake myself. It's just water. "Off the bow?"

I glance over at Aunty BJ's hand on

Dad's chest, a pit of annoyance fills my own, and my jaw clenches.

"What other way is there?"

Eduardo laughs.

We scurry up the front of the boat. The bow rises two feet out of the water. I hold out my hand to Eduardo. He stretches out and squeezes my fingers.

"One, Two, Three!" We free-fall together into the sea. The second I'm under, the coolness soothes my sun-warmed skin. I sink to the bottom of the ocean. My toes cringe at the squishy, mud-sand at the bottom. I push up to the surface and run my hand through my curls.

"Gabby, look!" Eduardo points to the other side of the bay. A purple porpoise arches out of the water.

"That was amazing!" I yell.

"Dad, did you see that?" Eduardo cries.

"Yes, sweetheart, I did." He smiles through clenched teeth.

Eduardo swims away, kicking mounds of water into my mouth. Salt burns my nose and eyes. I swim to the back of the boat. I make sure to flip my soaking hair as I run past Dad and Aunty BJ, up the bow. Eduardo floats, eyes closed. I

smile and cannonball next to him. His head submerges and he comes up coughing. We laugh.

"Watch out! Anchor is going down," Dad calls out.

The large silver hook plummets into the water. The chain clanks and clunks as it lowers the hook. Billows of sand explodes where the anchor meets the floor. Dad presses a button and jumps into the water. Aunty BJ spreads across the bow on a towel and spreads tanning oil across her pudgy, freckled skin.

I ogle at the dilapidated buildings peeking out of the foliage across the large bay. The yellow and white building at the edge of the cliff looks dirty, even from Sanders Beach. Two other buildings crumble behind it, but dead trees obscure my view.

"Are you looking at the hospital?" Dad asks. His black hair sticks up in all directions, slick with water.

"Yeah, I don't know much about the legend to be honest. I just know it's haunted," I whisper. I glance around. "I know this stuff freaks Bubby out."



"That's okay, do you want me to tell you the legend?" Dad asks.

"Maybe, I don't know much about it. But I do know a lot of stuff about the island. First, no electricity or phone service, so no Instagram. I know that Chacachacare used to be a colony for leprosy and that creepy nuns ran the hospital. I know a lot of people died here from disease and the great fire, and I've heard about the woman," I say.

"The woman," he laughs. "You make it sound so ominous. The legend has it that there was a nun who lived in a house across the bay from the hospital. Do you see the faded red building on the other side of the crescent?" I nod. "That was supposedly where she lived. There are different versions of this legend, which is how I know it's crap. But this is the most common."

Dad straightens his shoulders. My eyes lock on the little red building.

"One night, a Venezuelan naval officer lost his way and came across the island. He saw a light on in the little red house. Because of the dangers of the Bocas at night, he was looking for refuge. He rowed his small boat up to the shore." Dad points his finger to the port at the end of the crescent next to the red house.

"Supposedly, the on-site doctor

had to return to the mainland to get medicine. One of the Saint Dominican nuns was to stay and watch the house until his return. Legend has it that the nun, Mary Luigi Sansoni, was a stunning woman. With her long black hair and pale skin, the sailor was lovestruck. He tried to make an advance, but she was devout to the Lord. She refused him, though tempted.

"Now this part is up for debate. Nana's version of La Mujer de Chacachacare is that the naval officer raped her. After raping her, it was said that he murdered her. Now she haunts the island, waiting for anyone, particularly young men and naval officers, so that she can exact her revenge. But most Trini's believe she slept with him and killed herself because of guilt. I've also heard that she got pregnant, and both she and the child died in childbirth. What a load of crap."

"I don't know, I've heard a lot of stories of people we know having bad experiences here," I say.

"All lies of confused men."

"How do you explain Uncle Richard? He's not confused, crazy, or even religious. But he's seen her and he was pushed down the stairs in that house. Mom has seen her. Uncle Derek and Uncle Gervais were both attacked and pushed down the

stairs, just like Uncle Richard. Plus, how do you explain Uncle Derek's stay in the ICU?" I frown. "No one lives on this island. No one was here. He had eight broken ribs, a ruptured spleen, and had to stay in the hospital for months! You know these people!"

"They all hit their heads," Dad says. "They're all idiots."

"Mom didn't. She saw the woman point-blank, long black hair, white dress, and a beautiful pale face that distorted into a demon. How can you explain that? She wasn't pushed. She didn't hit her head. And," I pause, take a deep breath, and gaze through the top window of the red house, "she wasn't the only one who saw her that night."

"She imagined it."

"She imagined a nun-ghost beating her friends to a pulp in front of her eyes. Is that what you're saying?"

"Superstition explaining drunk idiots who fall down the stairs."

"Okay, what about the hundreds of accounts of other people who heard screams, footsteps, and seen not only the woman, but disfigured people who look like lepers? What about the man who's always checking his watch? Are you really saying everyone was drunk or had a

concussion?" I exhale in a huff.

"I promise you there is nothing to worry about," Dad laughs.

"I don't know, Dad. It's just too much not to be real..."

"Don't be ridiculous," Dad interrupts. "Even if it was real, you should know by now that God will protect you from everything. You shouldn't be afraid. Deuteronomy says, 'Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.' Your damned mother is putting crazy thoughts in your head." His brows furrow.

"Dad, Mom has nothing to do with this. I'm old enough to make my own assumptions and decisions. Plus, Deuteronomy says to be unafraid, not stupid," I say. "Stupid is bringing her on our family trip. It was supposed to be just us today," I whisper, glowering up at Aunty BJ's ugly feet hanging off the bow.

Eduardo swims around from the other side of the boat, red-faced and excited. I glare at the back of Dad's head.

"Hey bud! How would you like to go to the hospital up there?" Dad asks Eduardo excitedly. Eduardo widens his eyes and a mischievous smile spreads across his face.

"Seriously? You'll take us?"

Eduardo exclaims.

"I don't think that's a good idea," I say.

"Don't be a bum." Eduardo holds my face and squishes my cheeks.

"Someone should stay with the boat, plus I have a bad feeling about it," I persist.

"You're being ridiculous. We're going. End of story," Dad states firmly. "Aunty B can stay with the boat. You're coming."

"Are we going to sail over?" Eduardo asks Dad.

"No, the anchor is holding really well here and it's too rocky near the hospital. We can swim across the bay."

"Swim across this whole bay? I don't think my knee can take that," I say, wide-eyed.

"Yes, swim. Your ACL should be healing by now. You tore the ligament over a year ago."

Dad climbs into the boat and grabs our flip flops and boogie boards from the small cabin under the bow. He locks the cabin and zips the keys in his pocket. Aunty BJ and Dad share a brief, intimate, whispered conversation. She hands him the water-proof walkie-talkie and lays back down.

We start the swim across the bay. The sea becomes deeper, darker, and colder as we move further in. I kick and kick. The clear water near the shore deepens into a navy blue.

What creatures lurk below my dangling feet? What creatures wait for me once I'm out?

My legs burn and the cliff seems no closer than before. Breathless, I kick as hard as I can to keep up with Dad and Eduardo. My knee burns and clicks. My eyes dart around to every flicker of motion in the water.

After half an hour, the stone jetty becomes large and looming. The water slowly shallows. Stone chunks from the dock sit, moss-covered, at the bottom of the ocean. Dad and Eduardo climb over the massive rock chunks strewn across the shore. They lean over the side of the jetty and pull me up. At the end of the dock is a wall of mountain. A treacherous, broken, concrete staircase sinks into the mountainside. Wild bushes grow through the cracks.

"Dad, I don't want to go up there. My knee is really hurting from that swim. These stairs look steep," I say between pants.

"Don't be a baby, your knee is fine," Dad says.

"Yeah, but that was an intense swim. It was like, half an hour."

"I just want to go upstairs," Eduardo mumbles.

"Suck it up Gabs," Dad says, sizing up the stairs.

We trudge up the crumbling staircase. Trash lines the crooked, cracked stairs. Cigarette butts litter

the path. Dented, faded pop cans and shattered beer bottles lay carelessly scattered around. A dirty deck of cards sprinkles the path. The Queen of Clubs stares at me, dirt caked around her. Lady Clubs' eyes seem to say leave. Panting, I get to the top. The graffiti-laden yellow building towers above me. Splintered floorboards spill onto the dirt path. Broken windows with liquidy brown stains make my gut twist.

"Guys, I don't want to be here. I don't like the vibe here," I say.

"You're being silly, nothing is going to happen," Dad says. "We're going to see the buildings. One by one."

Each building has fewer walls than the last. The first, yellow, building stands tall with two levels. Faded white Victorian-latticework frames each window and door. Metal poles stick out of the building. Bold red letters on the staircase declare "Danger! Camping restricted. Asbestos Exposure." Scrawled across the side of the building in black spray paint screams "Ozzy fucking rules!"

Eduardo and Dad step through a door frame with no hinges. Eduardo's face pales. I walk over and peek behind the wall, not stepping past the threshold. A putrid scent catches in the slight breeze and I gag.

"What is that?" I cover my nose.

"Dead rats," Dad says. "Poor rats ate Machineel apples."

"What is that?" Eduardo asks.

"They're poisonous trees. You can't touch their bark either. There's a sticky sap on them that will cause boils on your skin. It causes your throat to burn and swell, then you develop fever and chronic pain, and usually, you die. These bad boys are designed to kill. If you burn the trees, the smoke can make you blind. One bite of a manzanilla de la muerte, you're toast." Little apple of death, it rings in my ears.

Dad leaves the building and heads toward the next. The path leading from one building to another, passes under two dead trees that curl into each other like ugly, ragged hands. I pass through and my foot catches on a knobby root.

"Gabs, are you okay?" Eduardo asks, turning his head back to look at me.

I nod.

Five crows sit on the roof of the sun-faded lilac, blush pink, and pale blue Victorian house. Old, rusty bed frames sit stacked deep in the house on the remaining floorboards—the springs coil into each other. The stairs to the entrance of the house broke into sharpened

spikes. They seem to wait for you to dare to enter.

A crow flies down from the roof. It caws and caws. It swoops past me, catching my hair in the breeze of his black wings.

“No, I want to leave,” I scream. “I know Mom wouldn’t be comfortable with us being here. This place feels wrong. Can we go? Please?”

“Stop. We have one more building to see and then we can go.” Dad brushes past me and hikes further up the mountain, dragging Bubby at his side.

A motherfucking crow literally touched my hair. A fucking crow! I glance back towards the birds flapping their wings on the roof. Six

more crows fill the balcony of the Victorian building. Their beady black eyes follow me as I catch up with Dad and Eduardo.

The third building sinks into the land. Trees grow through windows. Bushes and flowers poke out of cracks in the walls. The front wall of the building lays flat on the ground, exposing what used to be a chapel. Broken pews, caked with leaves and jungle debris, sit empty. An icon of Jesus on the cross hangs by one arm. Jesus faces the ground. A rope hangs ominously above the altar, swinging in the breeze.

I walk further down the path to small cement rooms. Black soot cakes the walls and the twisted-metal bed frames. A half-burned, damp cloth lay crammed with dirt and leaves in the corner. Can I get leprosy from that?

The wind picks up and a shiver runs through my body. I glance around me. Dad and Eduardo are gone. My eyes scan the concrete building. Anxiety drills through my veins. I half-run around the corner of the building and stumble through a rusty wrought-iron gate. A tall, white cross towers over me. Six small markers lie on either side of me. Name by name. Date by date.

My eyes halt at the headstone in the cross’ shadow. Sister Mary Luigi Sansoni, October 31, 1918 – July 12, 1942, Aged 28. My heart picks up and my breath heaves fast.



This is the woman's grave.

"Dad! Dad!" I scream. Tears pool in my eyes.

I whip around and sprint back the way I came. Tears flow as I grapple through dead branches, tearing and snatching my clothes like hungry giants.

"Dad! Where are you?" I cry.

"Gabby?" A faint voice whispers.

I whip around. Nothing. No one.

I step backward and my foot catches on a broken floorboard. I land on my ass and see a rusty nail sticking out near my eye. I quickly stand up and bolt down the path. Dozens more crows line the dead trees. One caws and it's all I hear.

Dad leans against the gnarled finger-trees. Eduardo lounges on the ground.

Panting and sobbing, I crash into Dad's chest, clutching at his t-shirt.

"What happened to you? See a ghost?" Dad laughs.

Sobs wrack my body.

"Dad, she isn't okay. Maybe we should go," Eduardo says. He stands and hugs me around the waist.

"Fine, we'll go," Dad says. Finally. We turn and head back on the path we came down. I am met with the stare of Lady Clubs again. I hold on to the splintered railing for support. I step down carefully.

"Ouch!" Eduardo screams. My head snaps up to him hopping on

one foot and holding his toe. My foot slips and I'm falling. A sharp pain lances across my left calf. Blood gushes warm and sticky from my leg. Tears burst onto my cheeks. I cry out.

"What happened?" Dad asks calmly.

"I don't know. I lost my balance... I just knew we should've stayed away. Mom was right. Mom is always right," I pant.

"Why do you feel the need to validate that woman every chance you get? You think she knows everything? She knows nothing! I genuinely don't understand what she has over the two of you! Y'all must be idiots to follow her so blindly," Dad shouts.

"Dad! Are you really choosing now as the moment to try to prove that you're better than Mom?" Eduardo explodes. "If you were better than her, you would have respected Gabby when she wanted to leave. You also wouldn't be yelling at her for feeling like it was a mistake to come here. Look at her leg! It's bleeding so much."

Eduardo crouches next to my leg and takes his shirt off. He holds pressure on my leg and pain lances through me.

"Who, the ass, do you think you're talking to? Boy, you better respect me. I will not tolerate rudeness from you," Dad bellows.

"Dad, please just go get the

boat. I'm in so much pain...please," I say through laboured breath.

"Whatever, fine," he says. He takes off his shirt and ties it around my leg. Dad takes the walkie-talkie from his pocket and takes a step back to radio to Aunty BJ.

Eduardo speaks to me, but I don't hear him. My head feels light and my leg weeps with me. I glance up at the staircase. My blood screams from the stairs. Leave. Just like Lady Clubs.

Dad speeds over to La Cucaracha. Aunty BJ hands him the first aid kit and he runs to me. After patching my leg, he wraps me in a blanket, and lifts me onto the boat.

The brilliant blue sky starts to change. Bright orange, magenta, and lavender sweep across the sky. The brightness of the sun fades behind the horizon. Dad starts the boat and speeds toward the Bocas.

I turn my head to look back at the little red house across the bay. The three-tier house, faded and overgrown, haunts me. The house's curved staircase greets the wrap-around porch. I lean on the side of the boat, ready to forget this island. One more glance towards the faded red house and I'll forget it. A light flickers on in the top window.





Florida

SERIES *by Merica Joy Carlos*

It's important for everyone to see parts of the world rather than being stuck in one place all your life. People forget to take a break from work in order to live their lives to the fullest.

Travelling allows people to make happy memories with loved ones and relax away from the duties we left at home. I tried to capture the aura of happiness in these images of my family.

The picture with three women is dear to me. I'm on the far left. 2018 was my first time visiting my relatives in Florida and together we celebrated a baby shower honouring my goddaughter.

Throughout the trip, we made so many unforgettable memories complete with smiles and laughter, whether we were at the beach or at a spring.



GOOD GIRL

By Odette Lau
Edited by Isabella Corno



Illustration by
Tania Khan

June 23, 2005

Mom and I weave through the hectic Hong Kong streets to the bus stop after church on Sunday morning. Flocks of people rush in and out of buildings, crowd the streets and fill the vibrant city with bustling conversation. We stand at the bus stop on the edge of the sidewalk. Cars whiz past us with deafening honks. Sunlight reflects off the windows of high-rise buildings and steams the city in heat and humidity.

"Mom, why do we go to church?" I clutch the sleeve of Mom's jacket.

"Because we need to listen to the word of God," Mom responds. I huddle close to Mom despite the sweat sticking to my skin. Her hand rests on my shoulder.

I pout. "Why?"

November 6, 2007

"Mom, what does God look like?" I cling to Mom's arm. She sits cross-legged on our living room couch with a pack of crackers in hand. A Chinese melodrama plays on TV. The autumn sun illuminates the room and bathes Mom's face in mellow, golden light. I crouch beside her and tuck my knees underneath my chin and squish a juice box in my hands.

"We don't know. God might not even be a person. He might just be something out there, some-



thing that we will never see." Mom reaches into her packet of crackers. The plastic packaging crackles and crunches.

"Then how do we know He's real?"

The crunch of Mom's crackers mingles with the TV show soundtrack. She cackles at something the characters on TV say. "We don't. We just choose to believe that He is. We have faith that He's looking over us."

"But —"

"Too many questions. Don't challenge," Mom chides.

"Okay." *Mom's always right, right?*

Mom pats my shoulder, her gaze fixed on the TV. "Good girl."

December 10, 2013

I lean on the armrest of our living room couch. Beside me, Mom watches another Chinese drama with another pack of crackers in hand and another guffaw at some-

thing said in the show. I work on an English paper. My head rests on a beige pillow, and my legs bend to prop my laptop between my thighs and my chest. The music in my headphones drowns out the sound of the TV and most of Mom's roaring laughs.

"Do you have a boyfriend?" Mom's voice pierces through my music.

"No." My fingers dance across my keyboard.

"Do any boys like you?" Mom tries.

I sigh, "No."

"Are you sure? Are you keeping secrets from me?" She pauses her drama. Her voice rings in my ears. "If you like a boy or have a boyfriend, you don't have to hide it from me. I don't mind if you date."

I look up from my laptop. My brows scrunch, and my lips contort into a grimace. Mom lurches forward, rests her arms on her knees and studies my expression.

"No, I *really* don't have a boyfriend. And I don't like anyone right now," I groan.

"Hmm. Okay." She sinks into the pillowed backrest of the couch and runs a hand over the remote. Her finger catches in the crevices between the buttons, searching for the play button. "Really though, it's fine if you do, you can tell me. Just don't become a lesbian, okay? Girls should like boys. That's what

God says is right," She lectures. It doesn't matter to Mom that I stopped going to church two years ago. It doesn't matter that I stopped believing in God and it doesn't matter that I learned to support equality and LGBTQ+ rights. "Girls aren't supposed to like girls," Mom continues.

My fingers freeze and leave my sentence unfinished and my thoughts scattered. Why? Still, I nod. *Too many questions. Don't challenge.*

"You're not a lesbian right? You would never be!" Mom jokes.

"No." I force a smile.

"Good girl." She presses play.

February 17, 2016

"What's a topic you care about? A social issue you want to address?" Mr. Wright, my civics teacher, prompts the class, "Think of some. Write them down."

Equality, I write. *Gender norms and stereotypes. Racism.*

A fourth topic emerges at the forefront of my mind. My pen hovers above my paper. I gnaw on my bottom lip. Should I? I lower the tip of my pen and scribble down the string of letters.

LGBTQ+ rights, I write.

I see the disdain in Mom's eyes as she glares at me. I hear the spite in Mom's voice while she reprimands me. I visualize the scowl on Mom's face as she shakes her head and

scoffs at me. "You didn't listen to God," she'd say. "You're not a good girl," she'd say.

July 21, 2018

I lay in bed, scrolling through my phone, submerged in the glow of my desk lamp. I tuck my covers underneath my chin. Downstairs, the muffled noises of Mom watching TV drift up the stairs, through the dim hallways, and to my room.

Mom shuts off the TV and the living room lights. I glance at the clock. 1:45 AM. Her heavy, slippered footsteps thump on the carpeted stairs and echo through the house.

"You're not asleep yet?" She nudges my bedroom door ajar.

"No. I'm about to sleep though."

"Mmm." She yawns. She clutches her iPad in one hand and a throw blanket in the other. Sleep laces her eyes. She smooths over her ruffled hair. "Do you believe in same-sex marriage?" My forehead creases, and my lips purse.

"I heard that the government is making schools teach students

to refer to their parents by gender-neutral terms instead of using 'mother' and 'father' like normal people would. It's outrageous. Unbelievable. It doesn't make any sense. Right?" Mom scoffs.

"Um, I think it's fine, I guess," I mumble. I press my lips together.

"You don't see a problem with it?"

"No, not really." The end of my sentence lilts upwards, like a question. I peer at the grimace on Mom's lips.

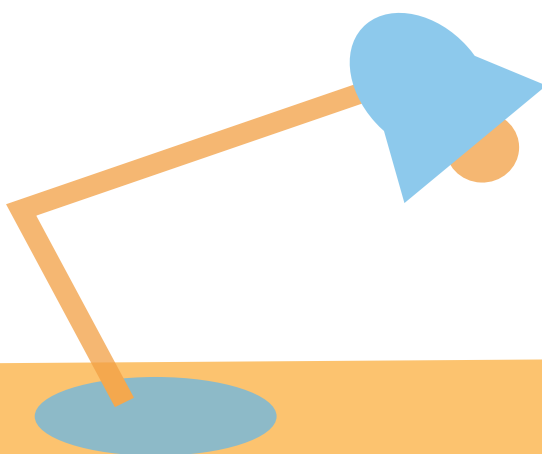
"So you support men marrying men and women marrying women?" I hear the disappointment in her voice.

"Yeah."

"Why? Don't you know that same-sex marriage makes no sense?" Mom hisses, "God didn't intend for men to be with men and women to be with women. He intended for men to be with women! How is same-sex marriage okay?"

"I think it's fine," I whisper. *You're fucked. You should have just shut up. You should have let her speak her mind and agreed without a second thought, like you always do. You should have nodded and smiled, like you always do. You shouldn't have challenged her.*

"Don't you know how reproduction works? A same-sex couple can't reproduce! It doesn't work!" Spite oozes from every word. "How



is the human race going to survive if it can't reproduce? That's why you can't have same-sex couples!"

I stiffen at her claims. "They can always adopt." My head shrinks into my shoulders but my words spill from the corners of my lips and they don't stop. My conviction doesn't let them stop. My eyes burn and tingle. I blink away my tears and stare at my phone. *Why didn't you shut up when you had the chance? Why do you have to be so opinionated? Look what you got yourself into.*

"Only crazy people think that same-sex marriage makes sense. Gays and lesbians, there's something wrong with their heads. It's stupid. It must be some mental disorder that they have to get fixed," Mom spits. Her figure hunches over me and casts a shadow over my body.

"It's not a big deal. It's their preference." My cheek dampens. My voice wavers.

"You really think it's okay to be gay? To have same-sex marriage legalized? To throw off the natural order of the world?" Mom's words bleed venom and disgust. She thrusts a finger at me. A scowl scars her face.

"Mhm." I dry my cheeks with the back of my hand. *You idiot. You should have let it go.*

"I can't believe you're okay with this. I shouldn't have let you stop going to church. This isn't what

God says is right. You're crazy, just like them. You're insane."

"I—" My words wedge in my throat. *I'm not insane.* My breath stutters. My tears stream down my face faster than I can wipe them away. The taste of salt soaks my lips.

"I'm telling your dad that you're crazy and that you believe in same-sex marriage and that you believe that being gay is normal. I'm telling your dad to stop paying your university tuition. He'll think you're crazy too. You're not a good girl."

Mom yanks my bedroom door shut. My breathing drums in my ears.

I flick off my table lamp. My quiet sniffles fill the darkness. I shut my eyes and let my tears seep into my pillow. Mom's voice resonates in my head like an earworm.

You're not a good girl.

I sigh. *But I want to be.*

July 22, 2018

The next morning, I wake up with puffy, bloodshot eyes and bloated cheeks. I run a hand through my disheveled hair and stretch my stiff limbs and crack my tense joints. I trudge to the bathroom and brush my teeth and comb my hair and splash handful after handful of cold water onto my face. I take a deep breath and walk downstairs.

In the kitchen, Mom fries eggs



and sausages. The savoury scents waft through the air and tickle my nose. Sunlight beams through the windows and soaks the kitchen in a warm, summer glow.

“Morning,” Mom calls over the crackling oil and whooshing exhaust hood ventilation, “Hungry?”

“Good morning. Yeah, I am.” I slide into a wooden chair at our dining table. Mom sets a plate of eggs, sausages, and toast in front of me. The yolk of my egg bursts and colours the crevices of my egg white a bright, golden yellow. Mom’s faint chews and the hum of ventilation invade my ears.

We don’t talk about what happened last night.

June 23, 2005

“Mom, why do we go to church?” We wait for the bus at the edge of the sidewalk on our way home from church.

“Because we need to listen to the word of God,” Mom responds.

“Why?” I ask. My brows furrow, and my lips pout. I gaze at Mom.

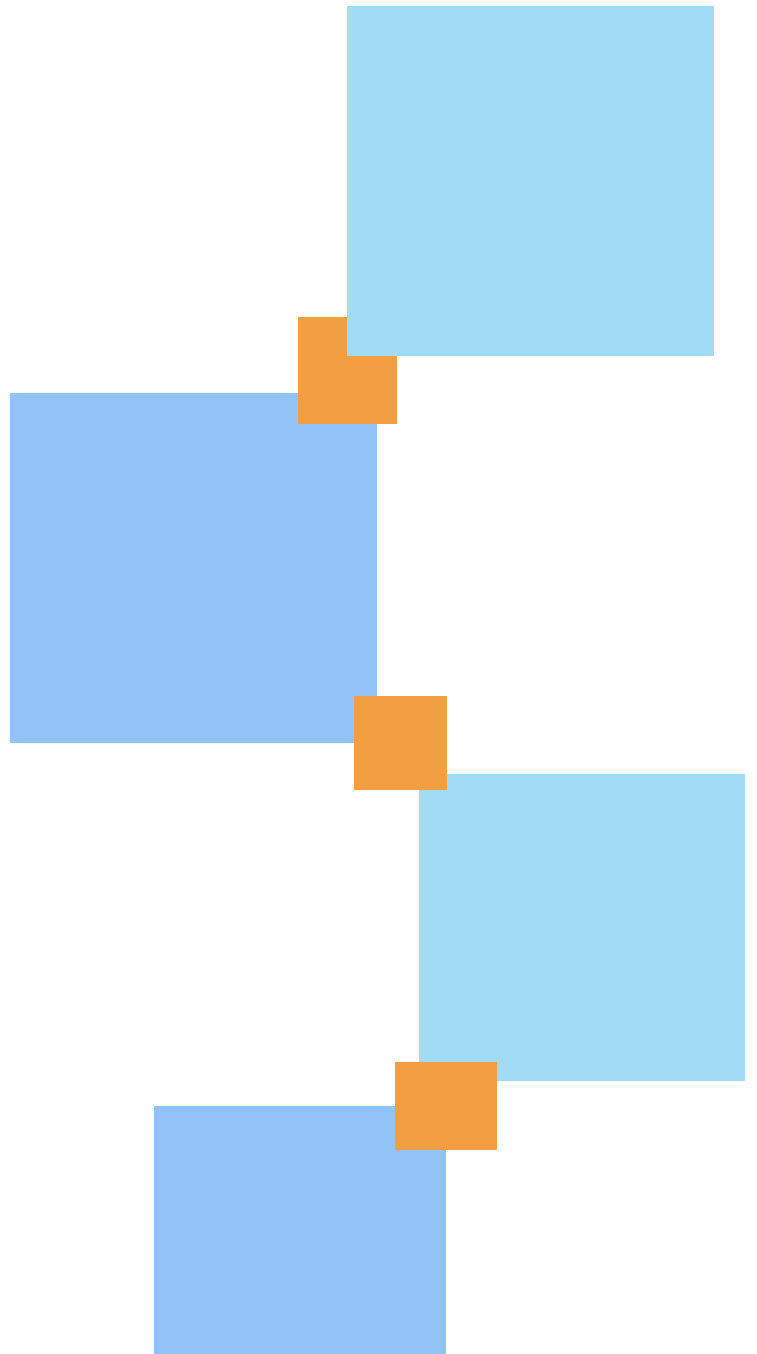
“God will give you wisdom and guide you in life.” Mom smiles.

“So you need to listen in

church so you know what God wants you to do. Okay?”

I nod, neck craned and eyes wide. She runs her fingers through my hair.

“If you listen to God, you’ll become a good girl. You want to be a good girl, right?”





MICHAEL'S SOFT WORD

BY SHARON CHAN

It's twelve a.m. in the morning and I don't know how to say goodbye.

The day dragged and it's time for bed, yet I could not turn you off.

You are so bad, you seduce me, and make me binge Netflix with you.

I mean – it's chill, but you should have nagged me to do you.

I crave another episode, you blazing hot devil.

So we peck. Peck and peck and peck and pack, packing for school tomorrow.

It's twelve a.m. in the morning baby don't you ask me why.

I wanna head to bed but tippity-tappity-tippity-tap,

You and I have unfinished business.

Our long drag isn't over yet,

We are here to write, we're gonna finish this tonight.

Now place your fingers here. Don't Enter yet. Don't click, double check.

Cause' your faint white top with azure lace makes me dazzle,

As if our bedroom crumples and our surrounding spirals.

My eyes begin to close,

What superpower do you have to pull my head towards your chest?

Oh my Desk! I hit my head. I doze and resurrect.

Fingers typing away, quote unquote, Turn-It-In.

In the fog of desperation, I hand it in,

My paper is due and undone I am.

I smack Mike's silver head and head to bed.

We associate memories of loved ones onto objects. We dedicate gifts, artworks and songs to people who are special to us. We keep movie tickets and old t-shirts to remind us of happy memories. They become inanimate placeholders for moments we feel most alive. What happens when they are no longer a part of our lives? What do we do with these objects that remain? Sometimes the memories of these objects are too painful to keep.



I kept a collection of items from my last relationship that I struggled to let go of because letting go meant moving on. It was my first experience of bringing someone into my world, and I never wanted to let go. She was my muse, the center of my life, and everything revolved around her. It took a lot of time for me to establish that the relationship was over, and closely holding on to these objects gave me a false sense of security that she was still present. To move on, I needed to let go.

I gathered all the objects that



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CELINE P

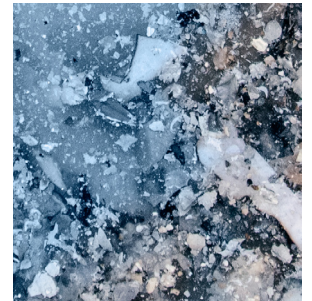
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reminded me of her—all our memories, set up a small trash bin in my backyard, and built up the courage to burn it all. Polaroid pictures capturing our intimate moments, old art gallery tickets from our first date, and the one that carried the most weight, a whole painting series that I dedicated and named after her all lay beneath a burning candle—lost in the fire. When I put out the flames, I looked in the bin and saw that blue fragments left a mesmerizing image. I took out my camera and photographed the remains.

This act gave me relief. I no



longer have physical reminders of our past. After I saw the ruins in the fire, it enabled me to step back to appreciate the relationship, but allowed me to move forward with a sense of wonder. Epilogue is the image I saw within the remnants of a past—unbearably heartbreaking but unconditionally beautiful.

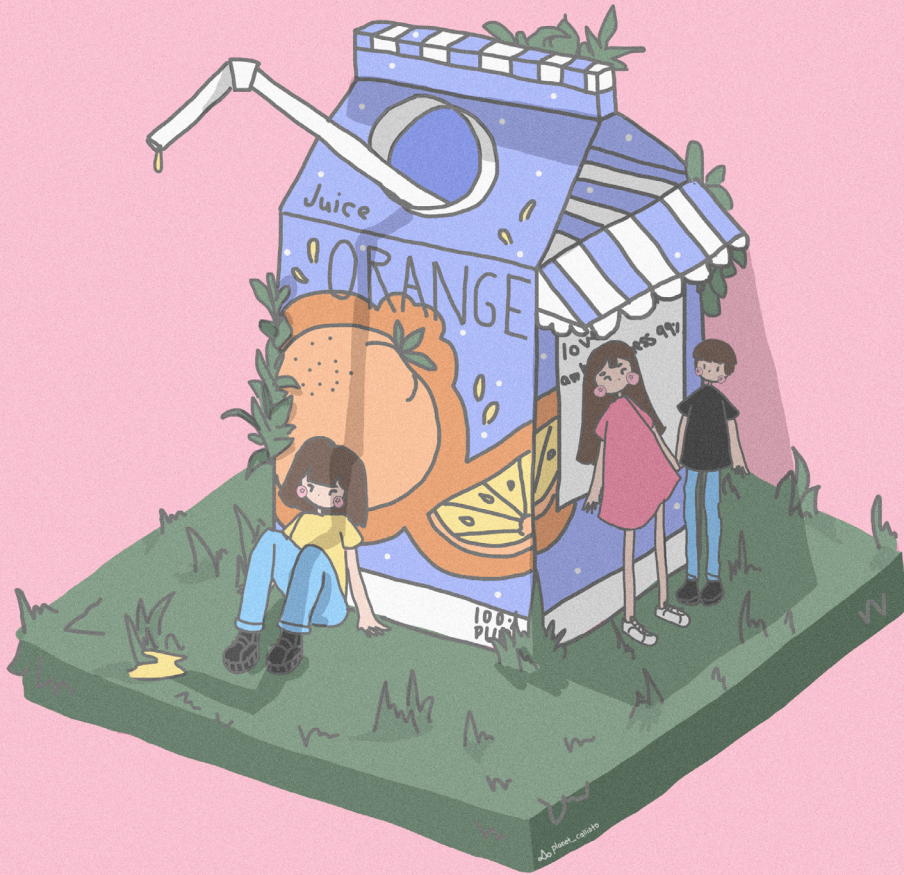
OGUE

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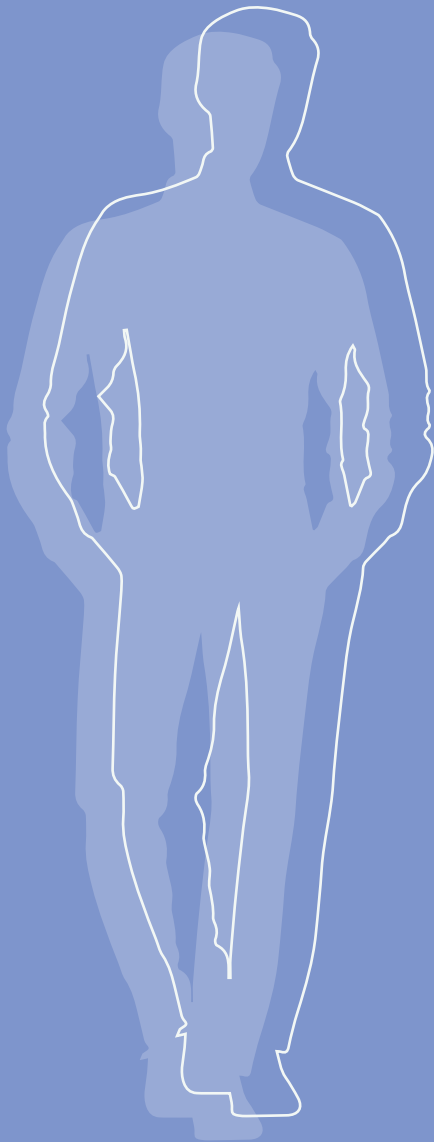
BY SHERENE ALMJAWER
EDITED BY KEVIN COHEN



ILLUSTRATED BY:
SHERENE ALMJAWER

“I told you I didn’t like him.” Haya’s friend, Reem says as she drives onto the gravel path behind the high school.

Three weeks ago, my mother, brother and I landed in Wetzlar, Germany to visit family we hadn’t seen in 11 years. The last place I thought I’d be was at some German high school meeting Haya, my cousin’s, secret boyfriend. Three weeks ago, her secret boyfriend was a different guy, Amir, but they broke up and she met Bilal, who she’s convinced is the one. She’s had four boyfriends, five including



Bilal. I’ve had none and she’s only 3 months older than me.

Haya unbuckles her seatbelt and pulls herself over the console between the driver and passenger seat, “Can’t you just give Bilal a chance?”

“I hate him, but I’ll try,” her friend Reem puts the car in park, “now get out.” Reem looks over at me. “Do you like him?”

I shrug.

Haya told her mom that we were going bowling and she smiled and told us to be safe. But we didn’t. Instead we’re at Haya’s German high school meeting her secret boyfriend. But we’re not supposed to date. We’re not allowed to. It’s haram. Then I turned 19 and my mom would always ask, “Is there a boy you like?” “You’d tell me, right?”. Just boys. No, I wouldn’t but I nodded whenever she asked anyways.

Haya’s lucky. Bilal moved from Syria sometime after she did. They both ended up living in the tiny town of Wetzlar, went to the same highschool and found each other through Instagram. He’s the perfect son-in-law, the perfect husband and father to Haya’s extra-religious parents. Every Arabic mom’s dream.

We watch Reem drive away, out of the parking lot, past the

green bricked-school building and the German flag.

I follow Haya into what used to be her high school, Goethe-Schule, eight minutes from her house. The building is covered in brown and green bricks, spanning enough to fit a couple of classrooms, only two stories tall. Students speed past us, shouting things to each other, some in German, some in Arabic, some in languages I can't recognise.

A man steps through the stairwell doors and walks towards Haya, a crookedly sweet smile on his face. Each stride is three floor tiles long.

He wraps his arms around Haya's waist. A single strand of hair stands out of Bilal's gelled-back black hair. The white letters etched into his black t-shirt are half hidden under his stained jeans and black belt. The frayed threads of the black belt stick out around the third hole where the silver prong sits, holding his baggy pants tight on his small waist. Crackles on the surface of the leather get deeper around the buckle. The large silver buckle has curved and pointed embellishments at the corners, deep grooves, dips and turns along the frame and an engraved word just before where the silver frame is hidden behind the leather. It has the delicacy of a frame holding million-dollar

artwork, except here it frames the deepest leather fracture in the entire belt. Like he just walked out of a 2009 mobster film. Like he was just given the Mona Lisa by the henchman he hired to steal it but threw away the painting and kept the frame. A short, non-traditional mobster.

Haya and Bilal whisper and giggle to each other while groups of students push past them.

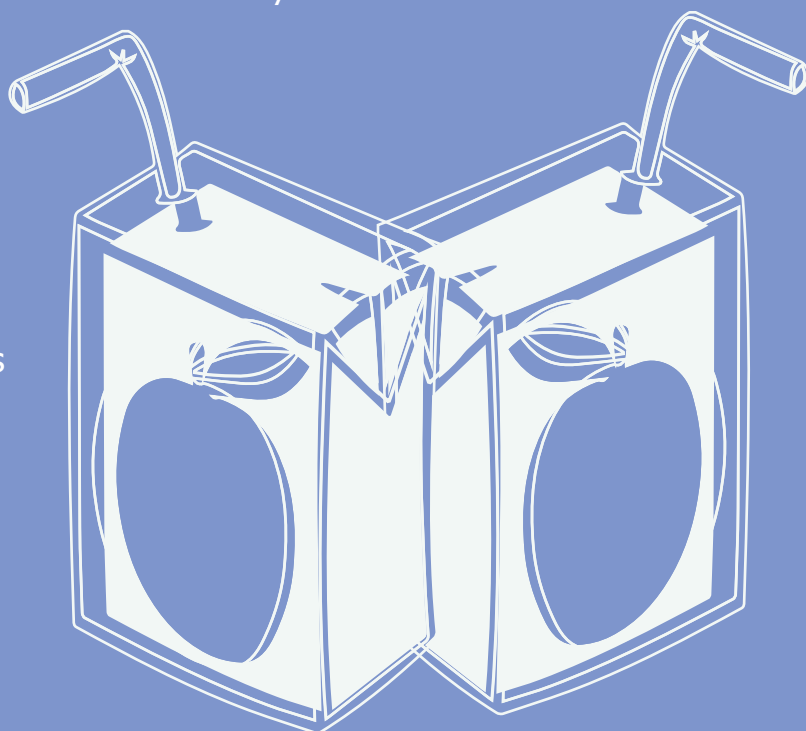
"Don't you have class?" Haya asks, pulling away from him.

He nods, "Whatever."

I stand back, near the doors, watching them. My right arm gets hotter and hotter. I turn around to see a large window, spanning from the floor to the ceiling, letting in pools of the hot German sun.

"Yalla," let's go, Haya looks over at me and gestures towards the hallway.

They walk next to each oth-



er, not holding hands, almost a foot apart like thirteen year-olds at their first school dance. Not too close, but close enough so that people know they're dating.

A long beige desk wedges open the door to what seems like a classroom. A collection of juice boxes and plastic-wrapped sandwiches sit on the desk.

"You want something?" Bilal asks Haya. She nods and smiles.

He looks over to me, awkwardly staring past my head, to the wall, "And you?" He asks, his foot tapping quickly on the uneven tile floors, fingers picking at the strand of hair that can't seem to stay in place like the rest of his hair. He asks like he doesn't want to but has to because I'm his girlfriend's cousin.

"I'm good, don't worry." I say.

He walks into the room and pulls out his black leather wallet.

"Isn't he the sweetest?" Haya keeps her eyes on him.

I nod.

"Do you have someone you like?" I do.

I shake my head. "No."

"Let's go outside," Bilal says with two orange juice boxes in hand. He hands me one.

Outside the heavy green double doors, a small gravel path leads away from the school and into the field of grass before the parking lot. I follow behind Haya

and her boyfriend until we get to a large rock, the ones that you're supposed to sit on and feel like part of nature. They sit at one end, and I sit at the other.

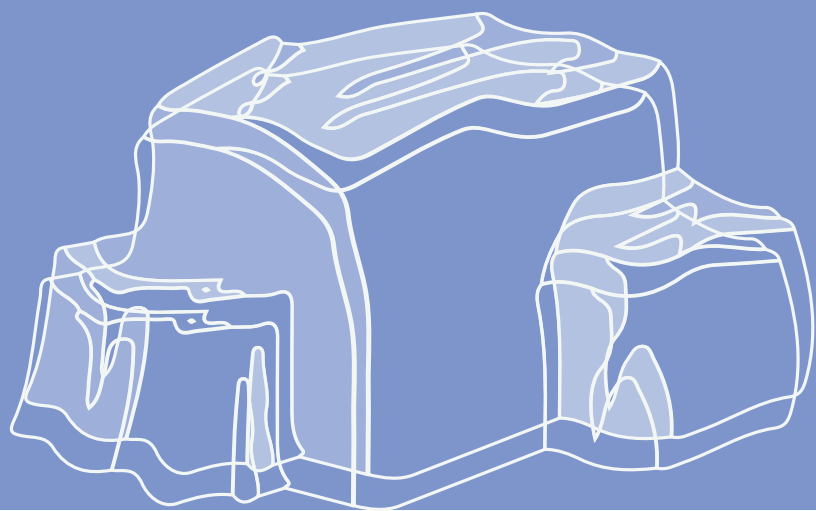
Haya rests her head on his shoulder and leans against his outstretched arm. She crosses her legs and lets one of her fuzzy pink flip-flops fall onto the grass.

"How much longer do we have?" She lifts her head and stretches her arms behind her back.

He pulls out his phone pressing on the black case to turn it on, "Five minutes."

"You should go now so you're not late." Haya insists.

They stand and hug again, a little less awkward this time. He stares at her, not passing her head like he did to me. She stares back and pushes him away, maybe in embarrassment, maybe in shame. She fiddles with a black rubber band behind her back, stretching and tying it between her fingers. He walks away with the same crooked smile on his face.



“Should I have kissed him?”

Her eyebrows draw together and her nose scrunches, showing the dimple on her left cheek.

I shrug.

She reaches up and plays with the plastic backing on her silver hoop earring, “I think,” she sighs and averts her eyes to the ground, “I think I’m gonna tell my mom about him.”

“About Bilal?”

She nods.

The wind picks up a strand of her hair, brushing it against the front of her face. She tucks it behind her ear, “What do you think they’ll say?”

They’ve lived in Syria most of their lives, grew up in the midst of the culture and still hold their values to this day. No dating, no handholding, no kissing, no hugging, but somehow, you’re supposed to find a husband. Not a wife. Never a wife. But Bilal is different. When an Arabic mom thinks of the perfect man for their daughter, someone like Bilal comes to mind: a sweet Syrian boy. A boy. Only a boy, no exceptions.

I tug at the black hair tie wrapped around my wrist, “It’ll be fine.”

“Really?”

But she met him over Instagram, just after a breakup from one of the other Arabic boys she rounded up. “What if he’s a murderer?”

Haya’s mom would say.

No, not really, but I nod anyways.

She breathes out and drops her arms to her sides, poking at the patch of dead grass just in front of her.





COLOURS OF YOU

BY ASHLEY CAMACHO

Portrait photography has become my creative outlet to showcase self-expression - not only of my own but also who i capture. The intense but true looks that the person gives to the camera as well as the body language being shown are what captivates me the most. In photography, there's almost this power dynamic between the photographer and the subject. As much as the camera gives the idea of the gaze, I create my work in a way where it's the opposite.

I approach photography in a way where I give the least expressional direction because I believe confidence relies on comfortability. I tend to weigh a lot of my work towards how the person feels at the moment, how they want to feel, and how they want to be seen.

I believe that people exist in this world to be able to express all sorts of emotions, states and behaviours that other living creatures cannot. We are able to show happiness, love, sorrow and all other forms. Confidence is a state of being I strive to achieve and photographs are a great way for people to have that fulfilling moment kept in a single frame forever.





planet_callisto

Illustration by: Sherene Almjawer

SAVING GREEN

BY KELLY ANN MENESES

Life is like Spring...

Relief in the sun's warmth
after enduring the Winter's freeze...

Brand new petals and leaves
after days of cold unease...

Birds singing in delight
as morning conquers the night...

Winds content and assuring:

a season of happiness...

a future alluring.

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