

# La Frontera

Dos Lenguas. Dos Culturas.

WELCOME

# LaFrontera

Dos Lenguas. Dos Culturas.  
**2016-2017 Issue**

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## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



It never stops: the hustle and bustle of life, the business and the *busyness* of living. We move from one thing to the next, our heads down concentrating on whatever important task is in front of us.

Yet, in the end we will judge the quality of our lives not through our adherence to a busy schedule but through moments... the small moments in between the work of life - moments with friends and family, moments of reflection, moments stolen from a busy schedule.

These pages are filled with stolen moments, moments taken to express ideas or feelings. Why don't you steal a few moments and give them a once over.

I promise: the hustle and the bustle are not going anywhere.

Thank you for reading and a big thank you to those who contributed.

Alan Webb

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## WELCOME by Alejandro Mata



On the cover  
Photograph





Oil on canvas

by Carlos Flores



# Featured Writer

This is the first chapter in Mr. Carlos Flores's new novel. We have the privilege of reading it here for the first time.

Like a far flung herd of fat white mountain goats grazing in a pasture of blue, clouds abounded. Only this time you were not a ten-year-old boy on a flight to Dallas, peering wide-eyed out a window of an airplane for the first time, in awe of God's creation. Instead, you were a young man in your early twenties, floating westward, face down, stretching your arms north and south over the earth, while your legs reached all the way to the eastern horizon at your feet.

Lazily, dizzily, eerily, you realized you were, in fact—  
A cloud.

A cloud?

Indeed.

You floated west over what could have been the green turf of the Dallas Cowboys Stadium, where your father took you to see your first NFL game on money borrowed from the Jew. But it wasn't that. It was miles and miles of green mesquite, an endless brocade of fine green leaves held aloft by black limbs that had survived the scourges of la canicula or the dog days of summer when the temperatures reached into the hundreds in South Texas. You weren't alone either. Long strands of fine golden tresses gathered on the contours of another cloud that gradually—eerily—took on the shape of a woman as rays of sunlight spilled through a crack in the world a few feet above you.

You wanted to touch her. Couldn't. Your hand was an unending stream of pleasure, oblivious to mobility. Instead, you spoke. Or tried. Tried because your vocal chords were compromised by the strange spirit that inhabited your heart.

"What. Do. You. Think?"

White as heavy snow drifts on a mountain side, a shoulder emerged. At length, a face in the profile. "What?"

You could not hold two words together. "What. Do. You. Think. Of—?"

Neither could she. "What...is...it?"

"Tezca."

"Never...heard...of...it."

"Short. For. Tez. Cat. Li. Poca. A hybrid."

"Strong...smooth...where...did...you...get...it?"

"Albino."

"Who?"

"Albino. Owner. Of. La. Cantina."

"Oh," she said, sitting up.

"Give. Me. Another. Hit."

"You...sure? It's...very, very, very...strong."

"Por favor."

Button-like, pink nipples flourished inches from your face. Itsy bitsy sparks

flew from the lambent flame that lit a pair of blue eyes wavering above a smile. A weird lovely smile. You rose, propping yourself on an elbow, and waited for the flame to ignite the herb in a small bowl of a lipstick-shaped glass pipe she had brought from Mexico. You inhaled from a tiny aperture at the end of the pipe that in a real lipstick would have been used to apply the lipstick. After the sweet smell of good shit filled the universe, its wise ancient spirit dispersed its tendrils in spirals that stretched throughout your lungs and entwined your soul. Dizzy, you inhaled deeply until the stuff burned your lungs.

"That's...too...much!" she said.

"One. More. Hit."

"No!" Her voice echoed in the chambers of your mind for fifty days, not five seconds. Again. And Again. And Again. Until she said, "You...look...like...a bull."

You cleared your throat. "Smoke. I'm turning. Into smoke. A cloud."

Suddenly, blue-petal irises twinkled inches from your face as she lay on the pillow. You longed to kiss her. Embrace her. Didn't know if you could since your limbs, indifferent to all commands, were floating away. Pleasantly. How weird. How nice. But your eyes remained fixed on the pillow, while hers were so wide you felt as if you were falling into the heart of a galaxy about which swirled spheres blue as the sea-bound planet earth. But you never quite fell in, just kept floating toward them like some lost space explorer whose umbilical cord to his space ship had been cut.

When a finger landed on your chest, you exhaled pleasure. "Ahhhh..."

Rings of delight radiated from a circle drawn around a nipple. At length, the finger meandered to the next nipple, where it dawdled in another circle of pleasure, before scurrying down the middle of your chest to your belly button, where it lingered. Thrills swept your thighs, your ankles, and your toes. Upon returning, they gathered in your scrotum, where her fingers alighted so delicately you could not help but relish every single moment of the lovely, loving tenderness of female attention.

"Babee!" you oozed as if you had a choice.

Then you had no choice. The pleasure was so intense you scrambled to your knees. As you contemplated the feast of flesh laid out before you, you shuddered. Then, thinking you were flying along a white beach in Cancun, you caressed a leg all the way to the waist, where you tarried, longing to advance, longing to explore breasts sporting nipples pink as bubble gum and flattened against a sturdy ribcage. Instead, you sat back, on your haunches, a lovely foot in your hands. As your lips grazed pink-lacquered toes, glamorous as polished sea shells, your famished eyes gorged on an inner thigh, white and smooth as a sand dune, until your vision got entangled in filaments of gold adorning the puffy lips at the entrance to her body.

When she opened her legs flirtatiously, pure lust commanded you to your knees. Poised to descend into her, you halted abruptly when voices shattered the magic. "What's? That?"

"The...wind."

You scrambled across the bed. While the mattress sustained your knees, a beam of light lifted you to the crack in the world, where you pushed a curtain aside. A white light planted yellow rings on your retinas. Sunflowers sprouted. You shut your eyes. As soon as the rings receded, you peered outside. A flock of black birds, not unlike beads on a rosary, perched on a cable sustained by a telephone pole. Meanwhile, two men walked past your father's white-and-red Chevy pickup. White hair afire in sunlight, the old men carried minnow buckets, long bamboo fishing rods slung across their shoulders, as they were headed toward the river.

"What's...wrong?"

After they disappeared behind a thicket of prickly pears, you flopped next to Alexia, deflated. "Nothing."  
"The Tezca...is making you ...see, hear...things."

Fifteen minutes later, the yellow rings were gone, but the black birds were not. And the figures of the two men kept returning. Who were they? What did they want? Then you felt weird, below, in your gut. It wasn't painful, just annoying. At length, the weirdness demanded its freedom. So you slid off the bed, feet first, into an abyss. A cool linoleum received your toes when you kicked something, something round, stiff but hollow, which rolled away like a basketball—a gift from the Failed Poet, a mask from Oaxaca, a mask of the Devil. Now you sat on the edge of a vast plain, a lustrous white sheet with pillows huge as boulders, staring at it.

Linkages unlinked.

Time became timeless.

Surprises surprised.

All of a sudden, Alexia walked toward you from the across the room. Wait. When did she get out of bed? Who knows? Who cares? But there she was, blonde hair golden in sun rays, naked as a Greek statue in a book you filched in Houston, legs long and supple, an arm poised at an angle below an abundant breast.

"I'm...starving," she said, offering you a pink-and-white cube of cocola, a traditional Mexican candy made from coconut, which she had brought from her hometown. "Want...some?"

The weirdness annoyed you. "No. I have. To. Take. A. Wiz."

The bedroom vanished. Or you vanished. One moment, you were standing in a hallway; another, staring inside room jam packed with boots of every description—Father's bedroom. Next, you stumbled down the hallway toward the bathroom. Suddenly, a white cast iron claw foot bathtub startled you.

Father never told you where he got it, but you assumed it came from the Jew, whom your father admired so much he regretted he had not been born Jewish. Meanwhile, as timelessness lessened, you found yourself sitting on a toilet, dreading whether the mouse that scurried across the floor several nights before might return. You waited. Nothing. You waited some more. Nothing until you realized that the weirdness had become a mouse trying to escape through your urethra, squirming and squealing as it struggled to get it out. An eternity later—or was it a minute?—something opened somewhere, a vessel, an orifice. The annoyance became a stream of pleasure.

After flushing the toilet, you stood.

A stove sparkled in sunlight. A blue table cloth sustained an empty vase. Two books lay at the edge of the table. The universe became a kitchen, where you sat down somewhere and rested an arm on a tablecloth. Creaking and moaning, a wooden chair protested under your weight. Someone appeared. A woman. Not Ophelia. Gray-haired and dark, she stared at you from the past—that is, from a photograph on the wall.

"It is the sixth commandment," she said. "Honor thy father and mother. If you cannot honor your origins, you will have nothing but shame. And shame is the source of all sin and suffering. Your father is your father. He's old. He's dying. Be kind. We'll all be gone soon, and you will be alone with God. Find a good girl, not those crazy girls you like so much. Look at your father. He would have died years ago if it hadn't been for me."



You longed to talk.

Instead you heard a voice. In the air, like a butterfly, adrift. You waited, ears alert. She might walk in the front door any moment. Soon she would be in the kitchen, cooking breakfast, unleashing the aroma of tamales and frioles borrachos and guacamole and freshly made tortillas de harina. In seconds, everything would be the way it was when the air throbbed with the sound of mariachis and cumbias and laughter. When chickens clucked and pecked in litter-strewn dirt behind chicken wire outside. When goats peeked from behind a wooden corral when you came home from school. When melons, onions, lemons, and green peppers thrived in a garden created in an earth so inhospitable it demanded constant love. But no. All that was gone. Now you were haunted by ghosts, like the empty green vase in front of you. Mother always made sure it was brimming with freshly cut flowers from the garden. Now it stood full of neglect. Empty.

A voice spilled into the room. "You...okay?"

"Yes. Why?"

Out of nowhere, she plopped into your lap. "You...okay?"

Warm and smooth, a naked breast luxuriated against your chest. "Yes. Why?"

"You...were...talking...to...yourself."

"Was? I? What was I saying?"

"It was a weird sound, like you were in a lot of pain. You were cursing, calling yourself an asshole, a loser."

"You sure?"

She took your face in her hands. "Who else could it have been, papacito?"

Suddenly, you felt as if an out-of-water fish had flopped into your mouth! You recoiled.

Then you succumbed as her tongue rendered a many-splendored kiss.

After a while, she whispered in your ear, "I don't know what I would do...without you, pappacito.

You...saved...my life."

In a pleasant surprise, your tongue grew coherent. "I'm...a dead...duck...in bed."

Her speech sparkled between white teeth. "Too much Tezca."

The dizziness abated. Things became things. A chair, the kitchen table, the unwashed pots and pans on the counter, and hundreds of books on rickety shelves—everything reclaimed its shape and color. Meanwhile, the window above the kitchen counter decanted sunlight upon corners and edges. On a wall a wooden kitchen cabinet harbored utensils behind closed cabinet doors, while the refrigerator stood in white repose. The wall ended in a corner that intersected with the hallway; the latter led to the bathroom and bedrooms.

Munchies prevailed. "Is there any cocola left?" you asked.

"No."

"Can...you...make...me...something...to...eat?"

Her arms released your neck. "Let me get dressed."

The sound of bare feet on linoleum invoked abandonment. Five minutes later—or was it five hours?—you wondered why she was gone so long until the floor squeaked underfoot. In a short loose skirt and a breezy orange blouse from Oaxaca, an apron tied about her waist, a barefoot Ophelia returned, white legs aglow in an oblong of sunlight.

"Can you do something about that mask? It scared me."

"Okay, I'll put in my father's room, where it belongs."

"Which reminds me. Have you called your father?"

"No. I called him all day yesterday. Never got a hold him. Left him dozens of messages. No response."

"Are you going to Escandon today or tomorrow?"

"Today. I promised the Jew I'd meet him in San Agustin Plaza."

She opened a pantry door. "We're almost out of food. In fact, you have more books than food. Where did you get so many books?"

"Stole 'em."

She pulled down something from the kitchen cabinet. "You can't eat books."

"Now you're sounding like my father."

She put two plates on the table. "Have you read all of them?"

"Why else would I steal them?"

She picked up a book from the table. "I wish I could read English. But it's so different from Spanish and French. So Germanic. Who knows? Maybe one day you'll teach me."

Irreality lifted. Slowly, very slowly. Pleasantly. "Not as long as you live in Reynosa and me here."

She leafed through some pages as if consulting a cook book. "Did you get the tortillas?"

"In the fridge."

She opened the fridge. "Oh, okay." She put the package of tortillas on the counter. "By the way, we're almost out of water."

Rain barrels came to mind. They were part of the rain collection system Father built years ago. "How about the garrafontes?"

"We'll be okay for a month. As long as we don't shower a lot. What we need is drinking water."

"Okay, I'll pick up some bottles on the way back."

"What's the latest on the water scandal?"

"Not much. The guy is in jail, in Escandon."

The dread of whether you would be able to stand up departed. So you stood.

Reality

became

real.

In fact, edges eschewed edginess, surfaces surfaced, and depth deepened until everything cohered. So you returned to your bedroom without stumbling through a wall and found some clean underwear and socks in the chest of drawers. After dressing in jeans and a dark green Henley buttoned to your throat, you looked for your boots beneath the table that served as your writing desk. Nothing but a stack of unfinished, failed manuscripts sustained an empty cup of coffee. You had not written in weeks, and your last attempts fizzled in corny stories that went nowhere. Today you would accomplish nothing.

Something occurred to you. "By the way," you said loudly, "have you seen my passport?"

A voice burst from the end of the hall. "No!"

Cowboy boots stood on an old Mexican newspaper between the bed and wall, while a pair of socks peeked at you from inside one of the boots where you stuffed them last night. Then, sock in hand, you sat on the bed's edge, eyes on the mask on the floor. The Devil, a pointed black mustache above its lips and a goat's horns on its temples, smirked.

Guilt assailed you.

Days before the stroke rendered him immobile, Father got very upset. Not only did you lose your government grants and loans, he claimed, but you dishonored him by squandering what little money he had been able to save with so much sacrifice. Upon dropping out of Escandon Community College, you swore you would never return to that dump, baptized “tamale tech” by the students. Never having been to school, your father could not understand that your teachers were stupid, their classes so boring you saw no point in attending them. He was especially upset when you announced that you were going to devote yourself to becoming a great American author. Though you back pedaled, explaining it was a joke, he refused to listen.

But that’s not why he had the stroke,

He had already been sick a long time and had never taken good care of himself. In fact, he had refused to see a doctor in years. So you began to borrow and steal whatever books you could get your hands just as Roberto Bolaño had done when he wandered the streets of Mexico City. And now look at him. The New York Times had recognized him as one of the truly great writers of all time, along with Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel Garcia Marquez. And he never even graduated from high school.

“If he could do that,” you argued, “why can’t I?”

Your father’s voice was still strong. “Because you are a ‘wannabe.’ Wanting to be a great American author is the same as wanting to be a rock star. It’s a disease. When I asked some of my clients what they thought about this, they said that this country is full of unreadable books. They told me that over ninety percent of writers are lucky if they sell 500 copies of a book.”

“How do they know that?”

“They’re Jews. They’re from New York.”

“And Jews know everything?”

“Why do you think they’re so rich?”

“Which Jew said that?”

“The Failed Poet.”

“He’s not a Jew.”

“Might as well be. Talks like one.”

“He’s a Chicano.”

In a rage you caught a bus and headed toward that monster of an American city, Houston. You needed time and space to think about how the hell to get the hell out of hell, so you crashed at a friend’s apartment but spent most of your days skulking around gigantic malls, scoping out Barnes and Noble and later the libraries throughout the city. If you were going to be a great writer, then you needed to act like one. If Bolaño could be a great writer...if his literary education was grounded on stolen books...if he could finish a 1000-page novel while awaiting a liver transplant, why couldn’t you? Your dear father understood nothing. How could he? An illegal alien from Nuevo Escandon, he spent an entire lifetime avoiding la migra and cleaning and polishing boots of wealthy merchants in downtown Escandon. He was a peon. He was an ignoramus. What had he read? The Bible? Wow! Anyway, in Houston you managed to filch Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s *No One Writes to the Colonel* as well an illustrated book of Greek mythology.

“I found it!” Alexia yelled.

Feet snug in cowboy boots, you stomped into the kitchen. The passport was stuck inside the hardcover of a shitty novel by a Chicano writer from Califas. “Good. Now we can go to Nuevo Escandon without any

problems.”

“I don’t have my papers.”

“When was that ever a problem? They’ll think you’re a gringa.”

“I don’t know. They’re getting pretty strict.”

“Que se chingen. We’ll cross on a boat.”

“Stop joking around. When do you plan to go across. Today?”

“No. First, I got to see the Jew. Or his son. Pick up the money, downtown.”

“What about your father? When do you plan to see him?”

“Tomorrow.”

“Can I go?”

“No, I don’t think so. He’s an ornery old man. He might say something stupid.”

In fact, if he disapproved of her the way your mother had disapproved of all your exes, he might doom what few hopes you still harbored for a future with Alexia. On the other hand, if he approved, you would feel obligated to her. You were ready for neither.

A tortilla took flight and landed on petals of hot blue. Sunny-side up, two eggs shivered on the skillet. The smell of fried beans leaped from another skillet, while percolation released the aroma of coffee. Great sex was great, you mulled as you sat down at the kitchen table, but nothing was as great as a woman who knew how to attend to a man. All your other girlfriends couldn’t do shit. It wasn’t that you couldn’t cook. Thanks to your mother, you cooked better than all of them put together. Alexia was different, however. She could really cook. In fact, she could cook real Mexican food, not the crap Anglos and Chicanos north of Cotulla called “Mexican food.” She may have had the looks of a gringa, but she was brought up to be a traditional Mexican woman. A bit vain and spoiled. Nonetheless, she was not a dumb Mexican-American bimbo trying to be a gringa. On the other hand, if your mother were alive, she would want no part of her.

After serving breakfast, she joined you at the table. “Why do you read so much?”

You got up and poured yourself some coffee. “Father says it’s a disease.”

She opened a book. “So what’s this about?”

You sat down. “Oh, it’s about a crazy gringo and a Chicano lawyer nicknamed ‘the Samoan’ tripping on acid in Las Vegas.”

She picked up a tortilla. “Sounds interesting.”

“Not really.”

“Didn’t they make a movie?”

You sipped coffee. “Yes, and it was worse than the book.”

“I like Woody Allen.”

“Now there’s a genius. His movies are crazy but intelligible. I loved *Midnight in Paris*. But I still prefer the Latin American writers. And Colombian telenovelas.”

“They’re so long, though.”

Both of you ate.

After a while, you said, “Yeah, but that’s why they’re so good. It’s like a good novel. You get to know the characters. Plus, the Colombians mix in history and culture and politics. Great stuff.”

She picked up another book. “And this one?”

“Oh, that one is about a fat Chicano who hates himself. He is the lawyer who appears in the gringo’s

book about Las Vegas.”

“Is that him on the cover?”

An ugly fat Chicano in a white wife-beater glared from the cover, his face writhing in bitter self-hatred. “Yep, that’s him. He wrote another book called *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*.”

She chuckled. “The what?”

“That’s us—Chicanos, *pochos*, Mexican-Americans.”

She hoisted an eyebrow above an incredulous eye. “Why cockroaches?”

“Well, I suppose because neither the gringos nor the Mexicans think much of us. The gringos see Mexicans as dirty, ignorant bandits crawling out of the woodwork and crossing the border like cockroaches. Mexicans see us like dogs whose tails have been cut off. That’s what *pocho* means.”

“Really? I always wondered what it meant. Why?”

“Well, we can’t speak or write Spanish or English well. We have lost our culture and history like dogs who have lost their tails. ‘*Desarraigados*’ might be a better word. Personally, I don’t give a shit. Today everyone is uprooted. Just look around. And these two loons—the gringo and the Samoan—are good examples. Especially the Samoan—a so-called Chicano revolutionary.” You opened the gringo’s book. “Listen to what the gringo says about him.” You translated, more or less. “There he goes. One of God’s own prototypes. A high-powered mutant of some kind never even considered for mass production. Too weird to live, and too rare to die.”

“Sounds like us.”

“What do you mean?”

“Don’t you think our situation is kind of weird?”

“Weird but interesting.”

“I wouldn’t be here if things had not gotten ugly. They say this is just the beginning”

“I know, I know. Father says that’s the way of world, things have to get worse before they get better. Sometimes humanity has to be destroyed. Like in the great flood.”

Bingo!

Why not write a novelette about the flood that destroyed half of *Cuatro Vientos*? You could see it now. The storm at night. The wind rattling the windows. You can’t sleep. Lightening hurls harpoons of white light across the room. The thunder is so loud it must be the end of the world. Torrents of rain assault the tin roof. Water drips into a bucket in the kitchen. The next morning? Water everywhere. You, your father, and mother on the roof. No way out. And then when what? Nothing. Was this another corny story that went nowhere? Stop! Stop! You’ll never be a writer thinking like that, shooting yourself in the foot before you begin the race. Wait, talk to Father.

“What’s the matter?” she asked.

“Just thinking.”

“Your imagination gone wild?”

“Yes.”

She came over. She passed her fingers through your hair. “Good looking guys are dime a dozen. But you—you always have something interesting to say. You’re so smart. So eloquent. Were you born like that?”

"No, it's the result of growing up reading and reciting the Bible every day."

"And in bed you're a lusty tornado."


"When the yerba is not too strong."

"You look like an Aztec warrior, strong and handsome. Dark. Your parents should have named you after the last Aztec emperor, Cuauhtémoc."

You chuckled. "Yes, and you look like la reina Isabel."

She laughed, then looked around. "You know this place is a dump. My mother would be very upset to see me here. But, you know, I wouldn't mind spending the rest of life here, in the heat, in the middle of nowhere, as long as we're together. Reminds me of grandfather's ranch."

A dread silence descended upon the room as you recalled what happened to her poor grandfather.


"You don't know what you're talking about." 



Being Lost  
Not to the eyes  
But to these lies.

I'm swimming in fear,  
I'm swimming in  
Deception  
All while I slowly drown in my own tears.

When you want to  
scream to the world  
When all you want is to  
disappear  
Like a ghost  
startled  
by the night

You say to be happy, it happened  
But I'm not happy...I'm more than sad  
I'm broken  
I'm alone  
I'm missing myself  
Losing control as the pills slowly  
Sink in  
I see the lights of this old town  
Fading away  
In the back of my head  
Nothing is as clear  
As when you close your eyes  
And beg for your God to hear  
To feel all that you felt  
Ask him, is this what you want for me?  
Tell him this is how it will go  
But in my head I'm only drugged up  
I'm only on some pills. 



Color Photograph

Every time I turn on the TV  
There's always something to see  
Too many bad things to handle  
It's like a huge fire in a candle  
The whole world is in a scandal


Nothing can be normal  
Everywhere is abnormal  
Religion is taken to the extreme  
Everywhere I hear one big scream  
It makes me boil in my blood stream

They take something that is bright  
Taking believers and making 'em fight  
But it make everyone run in fright  
Something to spite  
And seeing it is not right

I wish I could make it stop  
It's always nonstop  
It'd be easier to just use a nuke  
But just the idea makes me puke  
So what's the point

I can't fathom that I live in a world  
Something usually found in a dark place  
Too scary to face  
I feel sorry for the human race  
I wish we would live in grace

I wish we had heroes  
Someone to just look up  
Easily knows what's up  
Like an awesome buddy  
If we lived in a place that wasn't cruddy

In the end it's real  
I wish I could just peel  
It off like it's no big deal  
For now, let me be with my headphones  
It's better than being under a gravestone. 



Color Photograph

You violated her body, mind, and soul. You stripped her of all her happiness and hope. You destroyed her completely in that moment, but the worst part about it all is that you were not the person she thought you were. She was an insecure girl just eighteen years old in high school. The vulnerability of the way she walked timidly into the classroom with her head faced down was unnoticed by many except for you: the boy with no shame. You analyzed her every movement as if you were stalking your prey. She sat down quietly on to her seat next to you; the guy she thought was her very close and trusting friend. You both began to converse like you usually did with each other on the days you shared a class together. Everything was seemingly very normal until the professor announced to the class that they were going to watch a movie and the room went black. She began to feel a panic feeling in her gut that she should leave to go to the bathroom, but she remained against her instincts telling her something horrible was going to happen. So she sat in her seat talking to the guy she felt she could tell anything. Then it happened. You savagely grabbed one of her hands and pulled it close towards your genitals telling her to touch it. She tried desperately with every fiber in her being to loosen your death grip and told you repeatedly to let her go. You didn't listen and it continued on until she finally became free from your grasp. She was just about to get up from her chair and leave, when this time you sloppily and persistently placed your hands in between her trembling legs. As you got closer and closer to the spot she thought you would never hurt her, she gave up, knowing her strength would be powerless over yours. And so there you got from her what you wanted. Was it worth it? Losing your friendship with her and her respect? She never did look at you the same way again did she? With that one unwanted touch you made her feel even more lost and alone than she was before. Ever since that dreadful day she never felt safe again with anyone. To you it was nothing more than a game. The helpless way she struggled trying to get free while you laughed at her misery. After what you did to her she changed, she no longer was the same. You damaged her forever and you did it all without ever once feeling an ounce of shame. ◆

Can someone please enlighten me  
And tell me what love is?  
Because I have seen a friend slice her skin open  
When a boy no longer loved her  
Because I have watched a mother leave her front door unlocked  
Every night for a father who will not return  
Because I have seen a girl lay lifeless in bed  
When her boyfriend cheated on her with her best friend  
Because I have noticed a classmate kiss a new guy every weekend  
To forget how it felt to kiss her lover  
Because I have lost a friend in alcohol  
And I don't know if she drowned or is drinking her way out  
Because I have a friend who scrubs her skin extra hard  
When she showers to wash off his touch  
Because I have seen a wife accept a beautiful and expensive ring  
In exchange to forget her husband's affair  
Because I have seen a boy with bags under his eyes  
So profound from burying his girlfriend and his favorite drugs  
And because I have heard a friend cry and swear  
It wasn't rape  
So, can someone please enlighten me  
And tell me what love is?  
Because if this is love,  
Don't sign me up.







Color Photograph

The street light had turned on, showering the park with white light. The sun was long gone and it seemed darker than usual. I stood up and looked up at the sky. A cold fat drop fell on my cheek. Then several more landed on the concrete around me, so I sheltered under one of the picnic tables.

It was almost nine, on a Sunday night. The rain was falling sideways, if I sat a certain spot I could evade most of the rain, but not all. Trying to cover both my skateboard and phone was a hard task. At this point the music coming from my earphones was giving me a headache. It sounded more like wailing than music. I was not happy.


I closed my eyes for a minute. I felt the light cool breeze helping carry the water to my skin, and clothes. It collided on the roof with soft tapping sounds. I heard the sound of the leaves as the air moved them. The smell of the wet ground around me soothed me. Calming me down, and relaxing me. I heard laughter. I opened my eyes, and turned to the sound. There was a group of girls coming from the creek. They seemed to be having a good time under the rain. Lucky them.

Boredom started to creep up on me, causing my eyes to wander around. Sliding from one point to another, my sight finally landed on a lonesome frog. It camouflaged perfectly with the varying grey shades of the rocks beneath it. If it hadn't jumped a minute later. I would've thought it had all been an illusion. The frog took tiny silent leaps towards the creek every other minute. It was probably enjoying the freedom the rain gave it to roam around without its skin drying. On the other hand, I had to stay dry, so the rain limited my freedom.

I resigned to my current situation. From the looks of it the rain wouldn't stop any time soon. The sky looked pitch black. It didn't have that usual dark blue color, or stars shining all over it. Even the moon was temporarily covered by the passing clouds. Looking at a faraway street lamp across the creek, I could see the water droplets illuminated by the yellow light of the bulb. I wondered how long it would take to draw all those drops, or if the artist would be able to capture the feeling of calmness that came with them.

Consumed by the scenery, I had forgotten about the music coming out of the small white buds in my ears. I raised the volume a notch. "Baby Came Home 2/ Valentines" by The Neighborhood was playing. Placing my attention on the tune of the song I found that it complemented the current atmosphere. I could hear all the hidden, barely there sounds that I hadn't noticed before. They worked so amazing together. It was lulling. It lured me into a state of calmness. Making me feel as if I was floating. My body felt numb and weightless. I felt like part of the rain. Free falling until it's absorbed by the earth.

About an hour later the rain stopped. The street lamp no longer had that drizzling blurriness of water around it. The frog was long gone. Hiding in the safety of the long green straws of the grass along the creek. The tree next to the swings was dripping water. Pools of brown water formed under it with dead leaves, and twigs floating on top. There was silence. My music had reached the last song.

It seemed as if the time had stopped. I realized that I was free to go. I was no longer confined to the picnic table. I looked around in surprise. It was really over. I grabbed my skateboard and hesitantly turned to leave. On the way back I looked at the ground, and how it slightly sank every time I took a step. Stray strands of grass got flattened along as well. Butterflies that survived the rain continued their journey to wherever they were going. Just as I was. 



Color Photograph

When you first told me the news  
I was just so confused.  
Why did they find cancer?  
I just didn't have the answers.

Being detected at an early stage,  
You were never prepared, no matter the age.  
Cancer doesn't discriminate,  
Or care if you're 58.

You're my hero, my mom and my best friend  
And I know this is not the end.  
You are the strongest woman I know  
And you still have a long way to go.

I know you hate this radiation  
But just remember mom, you are my motivation.  
Everything's going to be ok  
God makes miracles, we've just got to pray.

Whatever you're going through  
Know that I'll always be here for you.  
I know you're afraid and I am too  
But you are not alone, I promise you.



We made eye contact, and that's all it took. Just one look.

It was perfect. It was natural, pure, and lovely.

We sat next to each other, and talked endlessly, listened to music, and exchanged gazes. We both were aware of how we felt towards each other. I was just anxiously waiting for him to ask me to be his all day. Then suddenly, a perfect opportunity arose. He leaned in and kissed my cheek. I felt a shock of electricity running through my body, my heartbeat accelerating as if it was an engine of a sports car, my thoughts running wild.

"This is it Chelsea. This is your chance. Be brave," I told myself.

It took all the courage I had inside of me to go for that one thing I desired.

I kissed him on the lips.

It truly felt magical, and time literally stopped. Nothing else mattered. It was just him and I showing our affection. His lips were so soft, and I just couldn't get enough. I had waited and imagined for so long to feel his lips pressed against mine, but my imagination didn't compare to that beautiful moment. That kiss was the beginning of something so beautiful. It was the first page of our love story.

Everything was perfect. He loved me with all his enormous and kind heart. He loved every inch, flaw, and quirk of mine. He loved me for everything I am. He took care of me, he picked me up when I would fall, he motivated me, he supported me, he showed me how important and great I was, he treated me like a princess, he respected me, he made me believe in myself, he changed my perspective on many things, and he loved me deeply. He never failed to make me feel loved.

He was everything I had ever dreamt of. He was my dream come true, and my real life prince. He was my angel sent from heaven. I was so blessed and incredibly lucky to be able to call him mine. He had a beautiful and kind soul, and all he ever did was show me how much he loved me every single day.

God, was I extremely fortunate and blessed to have him.


I loved him. I loved him with every ounce of my heart. I loved everything about him.

We shared so many unforgettable, magnificent, and thrillingly beautiful moments in the two years that we were together.

I'll forever treasure them in my heart.

...

He was my everything, my best friend, my other half, my missing puzzle piece. He was everything I had ever wanted. He was the best thing that had ever happened to me. He'll forever be in my heart, mind, and soul.

I'll never hate him for breaking my heart. In fact, I thank him. This heartbreak has allowed me to become a better version of myself, grow, see things in a new perspective, and gain a new-found confidence. 



Color Photograph



“Yawp!”

“Yawp! Yawp!” I hear the sound in the middle of the night. I roll over and try to go back to sleep. “Yawp! Yawp, Yawp!” I take the down-filled pillow and wrap it around my head, covering my ears and roll to the side. Again, “Yawp, yawp, yawp”, and I stare hard into the night. Annoyed. I am so tired. Every muscle hurts. My bones hurt. I rasp, “Oh please. Not now. Not just now.” And I shut my eyes tight. The yawp comes softly and continuously through the night.

With real stealth, from habit I suppose, I slip silently from the bed and walk across the dense carpet to the French door, unlock it, and step outside. It is another hot dry night in Laredo. The bougainvilleas tangled in the pecan tree block out the moonlight.

I jump, although I am expecting this, when the strong hairy hand grabs my wrist, and jerks me towards El Segundo. He reeks of beer and garlic. My stomach heaves. My wrist hurts. Yawp! I cry silently into the night. I must not show fear. I yawn and hunch my thin shoulders in the darkness and through half-closed eye-lids, I murmur, “What is it *this* time? I have to teach Whitman’s *Song of Myself* tomorrow to scintillatingly Schmoopy students. You should sit in.” And I snicker to myself imagining El Segundo as the 29th bather. This calms me.

El Segundo shoves a backpack hard into my stomach. I gasp. That’ll leave a bruise that will last a couple of weeks. Plavix and baby aspirin just make the bruises darker and meaner.

“Take it to Kayo’s house. The front door. Ring the doorbell 4 times. Give it to Kayo and leave,” El Segundo says. Oh kcufl, I think, I’ll have to ask some questions.

“Which house?”

“The blue one, two streets down. How many houses does he have?” El Segundo asks sarcastically.

I laugh silently. I almost say nine for nine lives, but I don’t, of course. Kayo has three houses in this ritzy Huisache Haciendas subdivision: one directly behind mine, with a balcony overlooking my entire back yard and with strategically placed cameras positioned to see all in his yard and mine and who knows who else’s as well.

I shrug.

“Go now.”

“What if Kayo doesn’t come to the door? What do I do then?”

“He will.”

I shrug.

“Go now.”

I put the backpack on my shoulder and turn to go inside. El Segundo grabs me from behind, pinning my arms to my sides. For a moment, I am afraid, and then I steel myself.

Looking up into his ugly brutal face, I say, “Your mother and God are watching you.”

I can feel his hardness pressing against my lower back and then the limpness before he steps back.

I close the French door, lock it, slip on black Nikes, cover my cropped raven hair with a Spurs baseball cap, and I am out the front door.

Night’s hands brush El Segundo’s vileness from my back.

I struggle with the backpack. It is heavier than most of the backpacks El Segundo brings me.

I walk through the quiet and calm night much like Thoreau walked through the woods at Walden. I am not afraid. I fear no evil. Nor am I excited. I'm merely walking through the night like a shadow.

I see Kayo's enormous blue house with the observation deck and the basement that has the tunnels that cross-collect, cross-collate, and cross-connect Laredo and its sister city. Las Tres Ciens? The Trinity? I saunter to the door and ring the doorbell four times: one for the north, one for the south, one for the east, and one for the west. I take stone-ground cornmeal from my pocket and sprinkle it around Kayo's doorway. Kayo answers the door. He sees the cornmeal and nods. He's wearing black sweatpants and a black T-shirt. Like me. I hand him the backpack, shrug, and walk away.

I hear the door close softly in the night. The stars are shy tonight, but a few wink at me slyly on the way home. A black cat crosses my path, even though I am ambling home. It looks a bit like poor Pluto, but then I see it's more like the second cat, and even more like Maria Farias-Fencer's cat, Flippet. This cat's not only adorned with an abstract gallows in white below his neck, but branded also with a surreal Hitler mustache in white above his mouth. He scurries into some hawthorns with lovely pink birthmarks. Aylmer.


Men! Mean, mean, mean men!

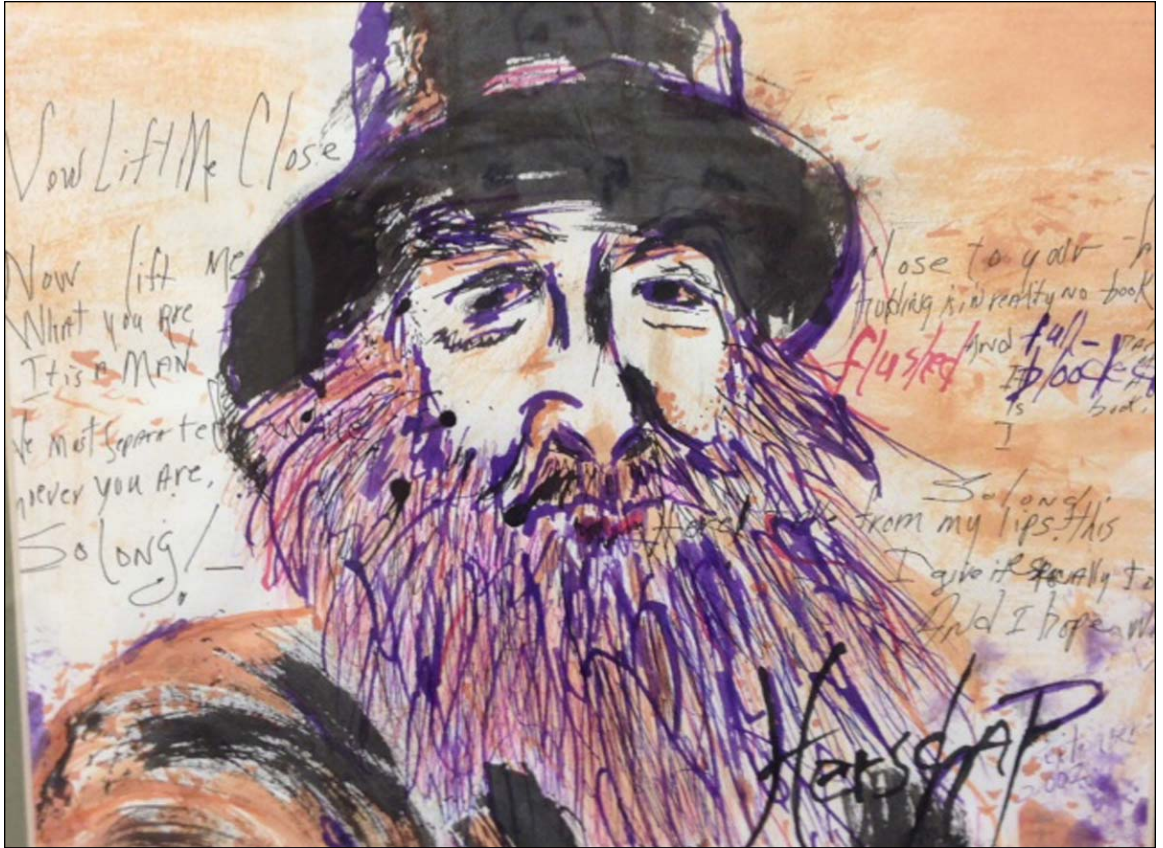
He's a meaner misogynist than Iago: El Segundo, that is. Not Kayo.

"Your mother and God are watching you," I say again. That saved me. But I didn't know who I was telling that to, El Segundo or myself. Maybe when I open the door, my family will return.

Like the ghost I am, I open the heavy wooden white doors and glide across enormous and empty rooms. The silence is deafening. I cross the threshold to my bedroom and fall on my too soft king-size bed, flip open my iPad 2 and listen to a YouTube reading of Whitman's *Song of Myself*, the one with the images from the Hubble telescope. "Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself." It's a contradiction: this loafing, this living in Laredo.

I shrug.

"Yawp." 



Pen and Ink

How long? He asked.

13 years, she replied.

How long for you?

Silence

It seems like yesterday,

I was holding the world in the palm of my hands, she spoke again.

It slipped, was all he could reply.

How did you know to ask? She looked at him with curious eyes.

He looked into her eyes and said, the scar - only our type can see, the scar

Our type?

Silence

I try to hide it, he said.


But you can't, she calmly touched his chest.

You can't hide something that will always be a part of you.

If there wasn't a scar she would have ceased to exist.

She gave you life,

Her existence is your scar.

Silence 


As for those with memories that are selective  
Lies a space within the mind  
A space where the forgotten is collected  
To disappear and leave behind

Remembering and reflecting on one particular  
scene of life  
A time of a certain feeling that truly was unique  
With such a precious memory to adore  
What's the point of making more?

The past is what you could live in!  
What a wonderful place to be!  
Your mind: a portal? Or trashcan bin?  
Why don't you come in to see?

A broken record, a song that's been on repeat  
for an unfavorable amount of time.  
What is going with your mind?  
Have we run out of selection?  
Here's what we shall do:

Let's visit the space of the forgotten!  
All memories need love!  
Pull out what's been dropped in!  
And release it like a white winged dove!

We all become memories  
Whether you like it or not  
So why not appreciate each one of our own  
Life will be even better than we could've  
thought. 





Color Photograph

There will come a time when the roses won't be red

The flowers won't bloom for they'll be dead

The sun won't shine for long

And the birds won't chirp their song

The time is coming fast and not slow

You will leave, forget me, and let go

I'll tell you I'll miss you and I'll keep in touch

But deep inside, I know this is too much

And although you don't see me cry


You notice the sadness in my eyes

I'll see you one last time, we'll hug, we'll cry


Because I know, this is our last goodbye



Love has caused me too much pain,  
For the pain is more than I can bare,  
The more I think, the more it stings,  
The more he drinks, the more it hurts,  
I hide in fear  
And close my eyes and ears,  
Hoping this will disappear,  
I must live my life in fear,  
As he will never leave.  
I don't see the why he drinks that poison  
Does he love it more than me?

Why can't he be my hero and not some lump?  
He needs to stop,  
Before I leave:  
I will always love him  
But he is my biggest fear. 



her walls were oceans & waterfalls  
anyone can be let through  
but just like oceans, people get lost  
she lost herself in the oceans she called home  
and her waterfalls became skyscrapers  
that she couldn't help but jump from.  
what used to be her, became something else  
something which turned against its past life.  
it became dull and breathless.  
it made her mind go blurry  
and her hands feel like pop rocks.  
with each breath crumbling her insides  
like the cold winters she never experience.  
her eyes became droopy & all would be forgotten  
as the life she knew went on 



Color Photograph

"Hey Edgar," I said. "Hey Edgar, stop stalking me."

He didn't think I would say it.

I said it again, "Stop stalking me."

I turned on my heel and walked away. I didn't have to turn around; I could hear him padding after me on soft cat paws.

"You Poe hoe," he hissed behind me.

The 1845 Wiley and Putman Tales slipped from my hand and I turned with a desperate deliberateness to dump once and for all this idiot of a man.

"Nevermore," I said. "It was a one nighter-talker. No more, no less."

"Nevermore," I said again.

"You Poe hoe," he slurred.

"Go home and sleep it off," I said with disdain picking up my book of forgotten lore and heading to San Jacinto to catch the Metrorail.

"You're killing me," he said catching up with me.

"You're chilling me," I shrugged.

"Edgar, let it be."

"No, no, you Poe hoe; you belong to me. Remember that evening in the bleak December? I thawed your dark heart."

"It was dreary," I said.

"And I am weary," I added wearily and warily.

"Never, never, nevermore," I muttered.

I shook my Raven locks musingly and morosely. I've taken to seasonal dying. Heh. Heh. For everything there is a season. In the spring my hair is copper fire red, but come December, in the bleak December, it is blacker and shinier than a raven's feathers.

"Clang, clang, clang," grates the rail. I've walked up and down Montrose and I am weary.

"Caw, caw, caw," scold the black crows hopping and perching on Saint Paul's lawn. I want to go to the condo, but I don't want that obsessive obtrusive neurotic Edgar to follow me and find out where I live, on weekends that is, when I'm in Houston that is.

"Come on, Poe hoe, come on home with me, Poe Hoe", he whispers into the wind which besieges my dreadlocks and crawls up on the back of my neck making me shudder.

He uses his charm. He is a lithe good looking man with deep set brooding twinkling eyes...looks like a young Kristofferson -- and with a deep gravelly voice, too, but I heed the silver-haired poet's prophetic warnings about doubles "hiding intentions of evil under the smile of a saint."

"You're killing me," he trailed off softly, feigning tenderness. But I hear the violent voices vindicating themselves beneath his and Everyman's tenderness.

"You're chilling me," I mimicked, letting my words trail off. Heh. Heh. I couldn't help myself... I had to say it. Again.

Killing and chilling.

Chilling and killing.

The beautiful Annabelle, the lost Lenore, me....all enmeshed.

Wouldn't you know it, down at Half Price on Westheimer, I meet a man named Edgar in the Poe section and we strike up a conversation. Oh, I know he saw my 6.66 carat diamond ring and banked on it being real, but I'd been holed up in the condo on Crawford, alone for weeks, reading Papa Hemingway and Leo Tolstoy and Doris Lessing and whoever else I could claw off the bookcases ... and I hadn't seen a soul in weeks. Didn't bother to walk down to Herman Park either. Just stayed holed up in the condo. It was bleak, but nothing much I could do after sipping that Canadian beer soup laced with arsenic and living through it and looking back at that high definition security camera and seeing my tall Adonis of a husband, needing no axe and no tripping over cats, simply stooping down, opening up the cabinets beneath the sink, and retrieving a lovely shaped ginger jar and methodically pouring from that ginger jar some of that spice or flavoring into the soup he made especially for me because I was down with another horrid case of bronchitis.

Well I hurled and hurled and hurled and wanted to die...seems I was always hurling married to Hubert. And hurting.

My sister, Jean, comes over to care for me and to wash the dishes; I am still in my vomit-speckled, shining like infinitesimal Swarovski crystals, white gossamer night gown and she reaches below the cabinet for the dishwashing liquid and brings up instead the lovely shaped ginger jar. I laugh a bit and say, "That's Hubert's special spice for his famous soups."

My sister held it up to the light and then, you know...we watched the high definition surveillance video and took the ginger jar down to the lab, and then I left Laredo and Hubert in my rear view mirror and I've been reading one author after another and one book after another trying to find the explanation for Hubert's recipes. Why all that? Why not just nevermore it?

Oh.


Axe me not.

Edgar stealthily comes alongside me, tries to take my hand, and I bolt faster than Usain Bolt himself. "Nevermore!" I scream into the dark dubious December evening.

"Nevermore!" I shout, raving and waving at Edgar.

"Nevermore!" I quip, trying to refrain from keeling up that beautiful refrain, but nothing else will do.

"Nevermore!" And I leap with real alacrity into the railcar and leave Edgar in his Deuteronomy holy jeans and tattered Roquelaure swaying drunkenly on San Jacinto with that friendly fiend Alcohol.

It's crowded on the rail...doctors releasing grasping hands, lawyers lucratively lounging on their stuffed briefcases, pickpockets peering slyly at your wrists, ladies of the oldest profession winking at the grotesques, nuns getting none sinking into the nadaness, teachers talking redundant riddles, bums bumming banal buns, and the riffraff riding for Solitude's Sake. I settle into a seat, open up "The Man of the Crowd", and before I continue on the Reading Pilgrimage mapped in my genes, a shrill contemplative and bemused laugh erupts from me and I ask out loud to everyone, and no one in particular, "Now why, with a last name like Hoe, was I named Poe?" 



Artwork

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