

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

The Beautiful Complexity of Comadres

Grisel Y. Acosta

For this issue, I decided it was important to highlight the work of some of the participants of the 2022 Summer Institute Creative Writing Workshop, which was a wonderful group that supported each other with pastries, live music, yoga, laughter, and thoughtful listening and feedback. The exchange was healing and generative and I was so grateful for the space that these women created. However, you'll see that these pieces are in seamless conversation with the other contributors to this issue. All of the works speak to that complicated relationship that Latinas have with each other, one where we raise each other, see each other, see the world, and grow from the seeds of painful realities and transcendent imaginaries. The word comadre can mean many things: a godparent, a dear friend, a midwife, even a gossip pal. You'll see that all the works in this issue exemplify the role of the comadre in all its forms: these women are seeing each other and speaking to each other's experiences with innovative language that inspires.

I start with the incredibly honest and shattering testimonio by Diana Díaz, where she grapples with her mother's mental illness in *Living Dolls*, a terrible pain that we learn is rooted in her own abuse. The complexity in the piece somehow communicates the love in this resilient family, despite the shock of the opening line. Daimys Ester García reminds the reader that many traumas are rooted in the patriarchal, white-supremacist, colonial mindset that is imposed on us in countless ways, including the medical industry that Díaz points to in her work. Magda Rodríguez continues the conversation in her creative non-fiction excerpt, which shows how even textured hair can signify

deviation from the unattainable mythology of the Western world. Isis Lee uses lived language to voice a world where some find freeing connections with each other. The characters in the poetry sing their ideas and are unapologetic about who they are and what they feel, while the form on the page mirrors their vivid ways.

I continue with writers who underscore and expand on the concepts explored in the workshop. Azucena Verdín, PhD, writes about racism within the Latina/o/x community, asking the reader to consider whether we all might hold something the world might reject. In contrast, Karen Arredondo, in her short poem, is an accepting witness to an exhilarating new beginning for a recently arrived Peruvian woman. Alyssa G. Cavazos provides a beautiful testimonio of her time with her daughter during the pandemic. It captures intimate moments with her child, stressful moments at work, and the lessons she learned witnessing her daughter's learning process—you'll want to return to the epistle-formatted essay over and over again. Priscilla Daniels-Mark reverses the perspective when capturing a moment with her family from a child's perspective, in her poem "Cherry Season." Finally, Guadalupe Mercedes Muñoz Moroyoqui closes the section with poems that continue to nudge us outdoors to convene with the plants and natural elements that speak to us and allow us to reflect.

I am floored by the wisdom of these women and the words they have shared in this issue. I share their craft with you and hope you leave the work with a renewed sense of the strength and wisdom of comadres: how we see each other, how we care for each other, how we face the impossible together, and how we still find moments to listen to the wind, per Muñoz Moroyoqui, telling us to continue to "see," telling us to "go" after or towards whatever compels us. ¡Adelante, comadres!

LIVING DOLLS

Diana Dfáz

2022 Summer Institute Creative Writing Workshop Participant

My mother planned to kill us during the summer of my tenth birthday. She had begun to suspect that Dad had a drinking problem, and she felt betrayed. To punish him, she decided to fling herself from the tenth-floor bedroom window while he was at work, so that he would run into the gruesome scene on his way home at midnight. But it occurred to her that if she killed herself, Dad would be left to raise us, so that's when she decided to kill us as well. "I was gonna take the gates off the window, wake you up and tell you to look at something pretty happening outside. When you leaned forward, I was gonna push you out. The other kids, I could just carry and throw. When I was sure everyone was dead, that's when I was going to jump." Detaching the child safety gates proved to be more difficult than she had expected, and as she struggled with the screwdriver, Dad arrived at home and asked her what she was doing. She said she wanted to be able to open the window wider because it was hot. She told me this last year through tears as we were still mourning my father, who had just died that April.

My sister was seven and my brother was five at the time of her failed attempt, and we were all unaware of mom's machinations. What I do remember of being ten years old is having to come up with "the most frightening thing that could happen" for a school assignment which, in retrospect, was a terribly insensitive assignment for kids in our Lower East Side impoverished communities. I didn't give the assignment much thought, and instead sat with Dad in the kitchen pondering an extra credit brain-teaser. Without

giving me any answers, he guided my thinking with clues and analogous stories. I physically leapt every time something clicked. And as he smirked in quiet amusement at my fascination with his cleverness, it dawned on me that my worse-case-life-scenario was losing my dad. My hands turned cold and I started trembling. I didn't know it at the time, but that was the first of countless anxiety attacks. The prospect of having to live with only my mother landed in my stomach like something terribly inedible.

My mother always played favorites. Spoiler alert: I was not her favorite. It's not that she didn't love me. She did, and was also very proud of me. It was worse—she didn't like me. She didn't like my bad hair and that I couldn't pronounce “shh” correctly before braces. She didn't like that I cried all the time. She hated that I loved books. If her curled lip didn't tip me off early on, the disdain in her voice did, the same snarl she spoke through when she saw someone not cleaning up after their perro asqueroso on the sidewalk. It was no secret; my aunts, her *sisters*, have apologized to me for her at several points in my life.

It was so contrary to what we're told a mother should feel for her child that I found myself searching for evidence that I was wrong. One day during recess, Geralyn Cortez mused “I love being home when I'm sick,” while passing around a bag of Dipsy Doodles. “My mom makes me soup and tucks me in under extra blankets.” My mother did not try to hide her annoyance at my illness. “You say you're sick, you better stay in bed. I got housework to do.” I slept under a thin sheet until she found she couldn't flip her king-sized mattress alone. She woke me up and ordered me, feverish, out of bed to help her do it. I cried and even though I wasn't looking at her, I knew her lip was curled as she shooed me back to my contagious room, after the task was completed.

I didn't want to confess that I much preferred to come to school, where expectations made sense and I was told I was smart, so I said "mine too" and pushed a corn chip into my mouth. GERALYN'S mom is a nurse, I reasoned. My mom had to quit nursing school because of her heart murmur. That's why she doesn't take out the fat blanket when I'm sick the way Dad will when he gets home. It reminds her that she wasn't allowed to take care of sick people.

No, I couldn't think of a life without Dad. I wouldn't think of it. For the school assignment, I said the worst thing that could possibly happen to me was a nuclear war.

Mom began to believe that Uncle David was right, that Dad did indeed have a drinking problem. And maybe she also couldn't envision a world without him in it. She watched for what she knew were signs: falling down, missing work, reeking of liquor. But as it turned out, Dad was a functioning alcoholic who held down a responsible job at RCA Communications and came straight home every night. He took us to school in the morning and to the park on the weekends. When my brother and sister were playing a game I had outgrown, he taught me morse code and how to tie different knots--skills he acquired in the Army, along with his introduction to alcohol.

It all seemed to work until it didn't. One day, when I was twelve years old, a loan shark came to the door demanding money and threatening to kill my brother. We were shielded from much of the fallout, but Mom gave Dad an ultimatum that night. Fortunately, RCA paid to send Dad to a detox program. My Aunt Lydia took us to visit him often, and during his time at Smither's House, I learned that alcoholism is a disease, that my dad was sick. I noticed my mother's absence from each visit, including the closing ceremony, and wondered how someone who was willing to devote herself to helping

the sick took such pleasure in turning her back on him. Dad came back to us sober and present and the summer of my thirteenth birthday seemed the best ever. We took family outings to movies and restaurants. We went to the beach more often. Dad took me on impromptu walks through Chinatown and Little Italy and I'd come back with a Chinese puzzle or a cannoli. One day Mom came to me as I watched Gidget alone in the bedroom. She said that the family was going out, but just to the park, so if I didn't want to go, I was old enough to stay home by myself until they got back. I chose the solitude of the empty apartment to watch reruns and read Judy Bloom. When they returned, my sister told me they had gone boating in Central Park and when I started tearing from having been left out, Mom said through a saccharine smile, "You said you didn't want to go." It was as if she resented him for recovering and me for being happy about it. That year, she baked a beer cake, knowing that Dad couldn't eat any and that I had given up cake for Lent.

The nuclear family scenario didn't last much beyond summer. She started having affairs with other men, and by the next summer began leaving us for weeks at a time to vacation in the Dominican Republic, which was okay, because "we were all grown." Mom's milestone for "grown" was nine years old. All of the big, family birthday parties stopped for each of us at the age of eight. In fact, she did not acknowledge my ninth birthday and I spent the day staring at the calendar and checking the date against the newspaper. Now, with my brother fast approaching his ninth, she embraced the freedom that came with grown kids. Her lack of focus on me allowed my anxiety attacks to subside, but my sister started showing suicidal tendencies and my brother started being bullied at school. All the more reasons to take her well-deserved vacations. By then, I was menstruating, and like nearly all of the women in my family, it was painful and heavy. "You should see the GYN," Mom suggested. "He'll check you and give you medicine." She gave me a name and

an address and I was able to be seen alone. Although he was kind and gentle, I had no idea what was about to happen, and the insertion of the apparatus was unexpected and painful. When I got home, I asked her why she didn't warn me and she responded through a Grinch-like smile of amusement, "You're not mature enough to talk about that stuff. What did you think was gonna happen?" I could not reconcile the contradiction of being too old to be a child but too immature to have answers about my own body whenever I had asked her prior to seeing the doctor. I watched her smile broaden as she seemed to delight in my pain and confusion, once again in my state of medical need.

When she didn't delight in my pain, she was a keen observer of it. By the time I was ready to give birth to my daughter, I had separated from her biological father. An unsavory character, to put it mildly, I remained attached to him because my mother liked him and I thought that this could be a segue to a better relationship with her. The pregnancy itself was uneventful, but the birth ended in a c-section due to back labor. Mom was with me throughout the whole process.

When I was finally wheeled into the operating room, she insisted on coming with me. The surgeons prepped me and instructed her to stay on my side of the sheet. Midway through the operation, when she saw that all of the doctors were focused, she stepped over and looked at the operation in progress. When she tells the story, she says she got to see my intestines on the table beside me. Not that she witnessed her granddaughter being born, coincidentally, on my father's birthday.

She does love babies though. Baby girls especially. "I hated playing with dolls, but I always wanted children. Ever since I was about nine years old, I wanted a baby. A brown little girl, with a lot of hair. And God gave me my wish. You

came out just like your father.” She always punctuates that last sentence by making okay signs with both hands, even through the arthritis.

She had always been in love with Dad. “He lived in the next building and he used to read by the window. I fell in love when I saw him, and asked mom ‘who is that Indio? I’m going to marry him!’ My mother yelled at me because I was only nine years old and I wasn’t supposed to be thinking about those things.” Here she giggles, the only time she ever does. “I used to send him love notes on the clothesline that connected our buildings, you know how they had in El Barrio. I didn’t think about the fact that we were on different floors, so he never got them. He didn’t pay any attention to me.” Dad left for the Army soon thereafter, and she thought about where in the world he might be and if he were ever coming back. When he did, he was unknowingly addicted to alcohol and she was eighteen and stunning. “And my mother couldn’t tell me anything anymore.”

She had four children with her Indio. The first pregnancy ended with the premature birth of my brother induced by a panic attack when a dog started barking at her suddenly. The baby miraculously lived for three minutes, born after barely four months in the womb. After that, she was under anesthesia for our births, because, according to the doctors, her heart wouldn’t be able to take much stress.

I remember her happiest when I was four, my sister was almost two, and she was pregnant with my brother. Dad was doing well at RCA, and when he came home with a state-of-the-art stereo system, Mom turned the enormous box into a dollhouse for us. She drew windows with curtains, pots of rice on a stove, and flowery wallpaper in the bedroom. For a while, we were her real-life dolls, and she dressed us accordingly in immaculate matching outfits and

labored over our hair each morning. She guarded us fiercely against all threats, both real and imagined, and held our hands tightly several yards before we approached a curb. Yes, she loved her baby girls.

I think it's the unspoiled innocence. Because of her heart murmur, she had lots of doctor's appointments as a child. She was nine years old when she was first molested by her cardiologist. He would drug her before the examination, wait a while, then return for her, instructing Grandma to stay in the waiting room. The drugs would kick in on the way up in the elevator, and Mom would feel herself slipping in and out of consciousness as he rubbed against her from behind. This happened once a month. Eventually, she got to see a new doctor, a young red-head, she told me. She liked this one, and the nurse was always friendly to her. When she was twelve years old, he came into the examining room with two of his colleagues. He bent her over, fondled her, and broke her hymen with his fingers. Afterwards, he let her know that no matter whom she told, his friends would back him up. And besides, if she dared to say anything, they would kill her mother. They left, and the nurse came back into the room. She saw the blood and asked what had happened. "I got my period," my mother lied. "That doesn't look like period blood, and you didn't have it when I prepped you ten minutes ago."

All mom could think was "that was only ten minutes?" Maybe there is something in the weakness of being ill that she blames for other people's cruelty. Maybe she's been trying to spare us from this weakness.

Toward the end of Dad's life, I moved in with my parents, ironically, to help care for my mother, whose health was failing. Obese, diabetic and arthritic, she could barely take five steps without stopping to catch her breath, and Dad, nine years her senior, was her primary caretaker. "Oh, my husband

takes me everywhere. He handles all of my doctor's appointments." Even when he could no longer take her everywhere, she beamed with pride over his ability to remember every doctor's name and address, and the dates of all of her appointments.

On my first birthday back home, she suffered a neuropathy attack and we spent the day in the hospital. She apologized and I told her not to worry, that it was a replay of my first birthday, when we were also in a hospital together. As we walked out, she informed me, "I hate to see this entrance. When I was little, as soon as I saw it, I knew I was going to be molested." I had known about her childhood traumas, but this is the first time I learned that it all took place in the same hospital where she would witness three of her grandchildren being born, and eventually, her husband dying. You can see the building from the kitchen window. "You know, a couple of years ago, I started seeing a psychiatrist about all these things. It was a lady and I liked her a lot. I trusted her, so I started telling her about all this." She waved her unaffected arm in the direction of the hospital's electronic doors. "And while I was saying how scared I was, I started crying, and then suddenly, a group of men came storming into the room. I got confused, and she told me that they were there to take me away, because I was getting too hysterical. I couldn't believe it. She hit a button under her desk and just watched me cry, then told me I had to go with them. Of course, I didn't." At least there was that, I thought. "But I really did trust that white lady. And she betrayed me." We crossed the street to the Rite Aid pharmacy, and Mom bought me a small box of Russell Stover's candy for my birthday.

A few operations and a year into Mom's widowhood, I've inherited most of Dad's duties. My niece, Sam, picks up the slack. Mom can now run small errands on her own. Last week, she ventured to Kmart to buy clothes on sale

for Sam. We sat in the kitchen over coffee as my niece tried them on, emerging from the bathroom with a pair of sleep shorts that were way too small.

“Grandma, I think you read the wrong size.” She did, and we laughed. “I think they fit me,” I said and Sam tossed them my way. Mom snatched them. “Ay que linda.” Even without looking, I knew the words were squeezed through the snarl I had almost forgotten.

“I got that for SAM.”

I felt the familiar strain behind my eyes. “Are you kidding? It’s five dollars. You’ll spend more than that just going back and forth to Kmart.”

The money math convinced her and she flung them back at me. “Here. Are you happy?”

And now, on this side of parenthood, I caught something in her tone that echoed a nine-year-old’s inflection during a playground argument, a shift triggered by an insignificant change of plans that throws an insecure child for a loop when her world suddenly doesn’t make sense, again. She needed to feel in control of something. Or someone.

Was I happy? I avoided the question and thanked her. I debated putting the shorts in the charity bag, but it slowly dawned on me that I was not just mourning the death of my father. I had lost my mother as well, years ago. I lost her to her childhood places that were supposed to be havens, by people who were supposed to heal her. My mother died when I was still a wish in her small, flawed heart. I tucked the gift in the corner of my drawer where I keep a small pot of Dad’s ashes.

TAPESTRY

Daimys Ester García

2022 Summer Creative Writing Workshop Participant

I write with my organs I intake the colonial as it is pressed upon my lips through the trash poor folks are given to eat a form of sterilization as it seeps through my pores in the pollution from the raping of the earth my kidneys try to distill the over consumption mentality as it pushes pushes through the amount of coffee I have to consume to be at capacity double triple what this white man who sucks me dry through to my reserves my heart pumps the blood that is tainted with the systems of racism sexism imperialism that form all that I encounter when when I try to eat differently to remember my power I get attacked 'outed' as ungrateful as outsider my liver overwhelmed broken by the constant medication that destroys me as I try to heal me antacids that give cancer pain relievers that cause strokes anxiety medications that produce seizures no relief from the destruction of expansion the logic of conquest never human to those that are human I write with my organs my organs that survive despite organs that make me feel sick because they are working working overtime to revive the parts that were never meant to survive this world of sense this writing a despojo a dispelling of the demons the terrifying demons that came over putting people in chains turning them into property the terrifying demons that came over did not see life populating land they saw as territory a nation built on mass murder demons at the center of 'civilization' who slit my throat with a kind smile as if doing me a favor. I have spent organs and organs and organs

BECOMING BONITA (MY CURLS AND ME) (an excerpt)

Magda Rodriguez

2022 Summer Creative Writing Workshop Participant

I looked at the mirror, and all I saw were wet curls that would be ruffled by the breeze, increasing the volume of the hair twice-fold, eyes that should have been green like my mother's, a nose a little too big for my face, and incoming dark facial hair I need to remove with frequency. I moved my hair back behind my shoulders. Perhaps it is hard to find beauty within the self.

My curls are a constant battle as they ruin by touch. Yet they betray me as they demand others to touch them, being complimented and ruined at once.

My roommate poked her head into the bathroom as she knocked. "So...are you going to use my straightener after all?"

I shook my head. "I took too long in the shower. So, I don't have enough time to do that."

She leaned against the doorway. "You know, we could borrow another straightener and get it done faster between us."

I looked at her reflection. Her straight light brown hair framed her face perfectly. "No, it is fine. I would get sweaty from all the hot air and feel gross."

She broke into a smile, and her bright blue eyes sparkled. “You sure?” She played with a curl of mine.

I took a step to grab my makeup bag, causing her to drop my curl.

“Elena, you would look so pretty with straight hair though.”

I stared at us both and took a deep breath. “I get that a lot, but my sister says I look too different when I do.”

“Hmm...well you would look different.” She fixed her hair as she looked at her reflection. “But that isn’t always a bad thing.”

I tried to smile at her and continued as I put toner on my face. I know she didn’t mean it the way it had come across. “It just wouldn’t feel like me.”

FEEL'N BROWN, FEEL'N DOWN

Isis Lee

2022 Summer Creative Writing Workshop Participant

...People talk

.....Walk.....

.....Chill.....

Hang on the stoops----- (clicks after the bell rings)

.....Shoot hoops.....

Broz with their Rucas

.....All fighting in the pen (Chicken Heads)

Jokes..... like (pop!POP!pop!)

“Little Joker”<on the mend> BENZOZ

Kidz sniff spray..... TIME TO BE GROWN..... right?

Gettin laid in their cuz'ns

El Camino (tweeters bang so hard)

Word

on

the

Street

We hit that lick bitchzzzz!

Lil Boo Boo got chipped.....

Dovez... scatter when they ALL scream.....

La Locita cried.

Yo, we did him proud.....?????

(.JUSTICE.)

We dropped that dime que no?

Showed up /“OUR COLORS”

Sound of trunks bustin up the hood CHALeeeeeeee

Come to think..... Homez.....

<That jale was the bomb!>

Had to burn a fattie splif for that fallen Soldier

.....(BLOOD).....

Took the copz to break up the tearz in the street

“ESE”

MALINTZIN PEDAGOGIES: Susto y choque at an East Dallas Park

Azucena Verdín

What if Malintzin's sons had called her an ugly-ass, n-word bitch?

How do we know they didn't? What if her coping mechanism for surviving Cortes' psychological prison was to reject her indígena maternal cariño in favor of golpes y patadas? O ¿qué si, in a counterfactual, a Mexica elder, or two or three, emerged from (co)comunidad to gently admonish the boys? To guide their bodymindspirit away from colonial bro culture and toward self en armonía?

Mamá Malintzin, I need you to help me make sense of this choque that has left me norteadada. Torcida in a state of paniqueo and cognitive dissonance because, like most things about being a racialized mujer in a hypermasculine settler-colonial transcontinental project, there's no clear good or bad guy.

Mamá Malintzin, I need you to teach me how to explain to miijo, a mixed-race Chicano with a brown Xicana mother and a white father, why the boys on the playground called him a fucking white-ass and his mother the n-word? Why he's too brown for the private school for niños especiales who found his brand of special was just a bit too, um, descontrolado ("Mom, can you increase his ADHD medication?"). And why he's not brown enough for the Dallas public school named after a civil rights icon. Pero lo que más me urge, Mami Malinche, es explicarle a miijo porque este grupo de chamacos, estos cinco huercillos, led by their oldest brother, himself a familiar phenotype—

brown, chaparrito, ponchado, and with a sprouting bigotillo—would shadow my son’s movements on the playground spewing homophobic, racist, and misogynistic slurs.

How naïve I was to think that using my “teacher voice” would settle things between *mijo* and one of the younger *chamacos* who looked to be no older than nine. ¡Qué pendeja! That’s how I felt when the *huerco* shot his middle finger right at me, like an *espina de nopal* coated in *mercurio* piercing my Mexican Karen’s ego.

There’s that *choque* again. My multiple subjectivities, wanting to be gentle but firm, using my *sangre livianita*, as *papi* would say, to score well on the matrix of colonized parenting, como dijo el tal Baumrind, con sus artificially delineated categories of good and bad parenting: authoritative, authoritarian, neglectful, or indulgent. How useless this PhD in human development and family studies was proving to be! No developmental theory (internal working models, anyone?) could help me understand why I suddenly felt una *furia fenomenal* toward these *chamacitos*. They were just kids, right? How threatening could they be? Pero a la vez, my *nepantla facultad* made it clear that this *susto* was real, despite my hoity toity education leaving me wholly unprepared to deal with it.

Cálmate, *niña*. Why so much anger directed at these brown boys who could be my *sobrinos*, los *primos de mijo*? Or maybe the *rabia* was directed at myself for repeating Malintzin’s original sin. For *chingando* a un *gringo* and cursing *mijo* and *mija* with both unearned white privilege and perpetual liminality of contemporary mixed-race *mestizaje*. A global north ontological racial in-betweenness that no progressive, diversity-minded PTA parent could adequately address during feel-good Hispanic Heritage Month. Angry at myself for

hardening my heart toward these children whose young existence had clearly been pockmarked with unchecked hatred and violence and god knows what else.

Pero mi intuición, despite efforts to gaslight it, was telling me that this budding misogynistic, racist, and homophobic terror they were unleashing at this East Dallas park is exactly what the Texas colonial project intended. A model city of neoliberal maltrato y descuido, the onslaught of toxic dude culture (the guns! the vigilante womb-surveillance! the gender-denying police!) invites hypermasculinity of the white supremacist kind, and all melanin shades are encouraged to participate.

De repente I felt a tug, “Mommy, I’m scared.” Allí estaba miya with tears and runny mocos staining her broad cheeked face. I’d kept a side-eye on miya this whole time, but suddenly it was clear that the threat wasn’t isolated to my son. There were other little girls playing in the mulch, including my mixed race, güerita Chicanita. Y pues me puse más brava. I couldn’t shake the choque, the internal conflict rooted in the spoils of neoliberal urban development and diaspora, the privilege of moving into the middle class and birthing white adjacent, pseudo Chicax children while my raza neighbors remained tethered to violent labor exploitation, underground economies that prey on young, docile, brown bodies, and the institutionalized devaluing of collectivist family ways of knowing. I wanted to leave, but I could not let hate triumph on this day.

Nepantla waters rose around me, sending me into a state of ahogo as I gasped for a sense of firme conocimiento. Like me, these five chamacitos signaled their racialized otherness with multiple visual and sonic markers. In contrast, the mixed-race Chicano/a I was aching to protect broadcast illegibility, a precarious embodiment attracting odio y repugnancia in this urban playground.

The slurs grew louder, more frequent, more threatening. What would I do if they attacked one of my kids? What kind of internalized or horizontal racism would that trauma inflict on my already liminally conscious children? So, I whipped out my phone and started recording. No sabía que más hacer. Not my proudest moment. The older boy puffed up y se me acercó. “You can’t do that! That’s illegal, you creepy ass bitch!” And he wasn’t wrong. “You need to stop terrorizing these kids,” I heard myself say, feeling dangerously close to embodying the collective Karens and Beckys of social media. After a few tense minutes the boys left, swaggering across the street to the nearby apartments, slurs trailing in the air.

What the hell was I going to do with the video anyway? Call the police on a group of brown kids? Wouldn’t that make the picture of La Chingada? Worse, I had weaponized one of the oldest tools of settler-colonial corporeal regulation—visual surveillance, the technology of the oppressor.

I was rattled. What could I have done differently? I wanted to call mami, my sisters, my Tía Gaby—anyone who would understand the aching desperation of not knowing how to protect mijo y hija from Malintzin’s other sons. But I didn’t call. Porque ya las oía decir, “Te dije, you should have moved to the suburbs, Plano or Frisco or somewhere...not East Dallas.” Somewhere where the white Mexicans live, where the rents are higher so the people MUST be nicer. Somewhere less Raza, like your cousin Verónica who Made It because she lives in the McMansion by the strip malls.

¿Y qué tiene que ver esto con los Big Problems of the world? Digo, have you seen the news? There’s relentless bombing in Ukraine, an unending queue of Amber Alerts documenting an egregious rise in girls ‘and femmes’ abductions, and Melissa Lucio¹ sits on death row as of this writing.

There's that gaslighting again. It has everything to do with it. Por supuesto que sí. What has happened to these young boys in this wretched colonial project? What have they witnessed in a city where the white cop who shot twelve-year-old Santos Rodriguez *in the head* served a laughable two years behind bars? Two fucking years. Where it took the Dallas Police Department fifty years to apologize to Santos' mother only to misrepresent him, his family, and his community by erasing his Mexicanness in the race-neutral plaque that sits afoot his commemorative statue in what used to be Little Mexico. No, mi amorcito, this city doesn't see those boys the way they see you. And because Black-White is all people know about race, this city, state, and nation cannot make room for more complex racial identity, you will only be legible per their prescribed Anglo settler-colonial code. A circumscribed other at the mercy of untethered racial, gender, and sexual animus. You and they will internalize the hate, albeit quite differently. It's why they call me ugly, the n-word, and a bitch. Because in order to survive in the land of Texas Rangers lynching Mexicanos y Tejanos with impunity, they know they must drown women with physical and symbolic spit. It's why they call you gay and white, because their oppression was systematized by men who look like your father, and that makes you complicit as a mixed-race Chicano.

You will not learn about the lynching and police brutality of mestizo boys in your history courses. Not in the Black and brown schools of East and South Dallas, nor in the private schools where white kids are docile and medicated. El Jefe Abbot is winning, don't you know? Haven't you heard about Senate Bill 3?² Pero no se rinda, mijo, because it's not up to him to teach our comunidad about 500 years of violence, of Indigenous genocide, rape, and displacement, and of erasure by deindigenization of mestizx. Tenemos que desahogarnos nosotras mismas. Empezando con estos chamacitos.

What if we learned we were all the children of Malintzin?

Notes

1 Melissa Lucio spent fourteen years on death row for the murder of her two-year-old daughter, Mariah, after she was coerced into making a false confession. Her execution was stayed by the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals on April 27, 2022.

2 Referred to as the “critical race theory” law, Texas Senate Bill 3 was signed into law in 2021, prohibiting teachers from discussing controversial topics of race and racism in the classroom.

PERUVIAN WOMAN MOVES TO TOWN

Karen Arredondo

She asked, ¿Quieren otra cosa?

She forgot the tostones.

A horrified look and she dashed to the back.

Too busy flirting with her newlywed husband in the kitchen.

The love of a new beginning.

Two weeks in.

Their American dream surrounded by comida.

Exhaustion never looked so happy until I met them.

She wanted to know where she could ride horses.

CARTAS A MI HIJA: Chispitas de tu creatividad y conocimiento entre la naturaleza (an excerpt)

Alyssa G. Cavazos

Mi preciosa Lyxi,

Un día en marzo del 2022 me dijiste, después de dos meses que regresaras a tu salón de kínder, “Mama, no quiero ir a la escuela. Cierro los ojos y siento que estás aquí. I miss you when I’m at school. I want to stay with you to learn and do our fun activities together.” Tus palabras me hicieron sentir perdida no solo por una transición escolar pero también por una transición de lenguajes y crecimiento físico y espiritual. Regresaste a la escuela en enero del 2022 después de casi dos años en casa. Ya con tus vacunas contra el COVID nos sentíamos más seguros de mandarte a la escuela. Por lo regular te sientes muy feliz de ir a la escuela, pero en esta ocasión siento que también, al igual que yo, sentiste tristeza y anhelo por nuestras vivencias en casa. Estamos pasando por una etapa que Gloria Anzaldúa llamaría nepantla o “entremundos” donde vivimos y creamos conciencia de nuestras vidas y transformamos los mundos que nos rodean.

Ya a dos años después de que nuestra vida diaria cambiara a mediados de marzo del 2020 cuando tenías solo cuatro añitos, te quiero escribir estas palabras y compartirte mis recuerdos y sentimientos encontrados a tu lado. Fueron unos momentos muy especiales porque tuvimos la oportunidad de verte crecer de una manera que nunca nos hubiéramos imaginado y quisiera preservar esas vivencias. Presenciamos tu desarrollo en una época de tu niñez que está llena de inocencia, magia, inquietudes y sed por creaciones magníficas, fantásticas

y fuera de este mundo. Aunque estos eran momentos maravillosos también nos encontramos con muchos desafíos y dificultades donde me cuestionaba si yo era una buena madre mientras trataba de ser una buena maestra durante momentos muy difíciles en la educación pública universitaria.

Te escribo estas palabras sentadas afuera en nuestro jardín mientras admiro un colorido colibrí chupando y bailoteando entre las brillantes flores moradas—este jardín, la tierra, nos regaló muchos momentos especiales, de aprendizaje, de nuevas conexiones y nuevos conocimientos, en estos dos años. Mientras siento una gran paz y satisfacción también siento tristeza por los recuerdos de esos dos años a tu lado que me hacen darme cuenta de que cada día qué pasa vienen cambios. Son tan leves, pero tan grandes a la vez. —Mami

Espiritualidad

Durante los inicios de la pandemia, mientras tu Daddy y yo navegamos una vida, una rutina diferente, teníamos muchas preocupaciones como nuestra salud en familia, la salud de toda nuestra familia, tu bienestar educacional y emocional, y nuestros trabajos, principalmente enseñar en línea. La incertidumbre del virus y el proceso de adaptarnos a una nueva manera de trabajar y asegurar tu desarrollo y crecimiento eran algunas de muchísimas preocupaciones que me quitaban el sueño y la tranquilidad. La presencia de Dios, los angelitos y la Virgen de Guadalupe siempre estaban presentes, en imágenes y estatuas en nuestra casa, en nuestras tradiciones espirituales y en tus dibujos. Estos dibujos representan los entre mundos donde vivimos y me llenaban de paz espiritual. Al ver tus creaciones, sabía que Dios, que algo más allá de esta vida estaba con nosotros, está en ti. Era mi esperanza. Y tú me recordabas porque eran tus rezos a tus cuatro añitos y tus dibujos, en especial uno donde te dibujaste subiendo una escalera hacia la estrella más brillante que era Dios en tus ojos, que me llenaba de paz.

Conciencia

En muchas ocasiones me encontraba en juntas, en talleres de desarrollo profesional, o dando clases y tu estabas a lado mío ya fuera en mi escritorio o afuera en el jardín o en tu casita. Como directora del Center for Teaching Excellence en UTRGV, mi responsabilidad durante esta transición era de crear recursos y ofrecer talleres y sesiones educativas dirigidas a como mejor navegar, enseñar y motivar a los estudiantes durante esta transición académica. Me sentía agobiada con tanto cambio y acorralada porque no siempre tuve un buen apoyo de mi supervisora en ese momento; su liderazgo y manera en la cual me hablaba me causó mucha angustia—más de la que ya sentía que hasta me viste llorar tanto un día por como ella me hablaba. Me dio mucho más sentimiento al ver que tú jugabas con tus ponis y hadas y pretendías que era yo y mi supervisora. Al verte jugar, recreando esta escena tan triste y desapoderante, llore mucho más porque no quería que presenciaras esa parte de mi trabajo. Estaba muy molesta con todos y con nadie a la vez. En ese momento me di cuenta de que no hay trabajo o persona que me pueda controlar de esa manera, al punto de afectar tu desarrollo. Decidí que no le daría importancia a ella y me enfocaría en aspectos de mi trabajo donde sentía que estaba creciendo como persona, como madre, y como modelo a seguir.

Mientras tenía que ayudar y presentar recursos a otros maestros también estaba tratando de averiguar cómo enseñar, cómo apoyar a mis propios alumnos igual que todos los demás. Mis alumnos se encontraban también desorientados y con sus propias preocupaciones por su familia, falta de trabajo, falta de acceso al internet. Preocupaciones que me mostraron que vivimos una vida de mucho privilegio y lo agradezco porque yo no siempre lo tuve. Sabes que vivía en una trilita vieja y mohosa sin aire acondicionado, sin agua caliente en medio de un terreno rodeado de piedras y tierra para vender.

Comprendía a mis estudiantes cuando decían que preferían no encender su cámara o que no tenían internet para entregar su trabajo a tiempo.

Creaba yo videos donde enseñaba o introducía conceptos de nuestras lecturas y donde explicaba nuestras metas o enfoques de la semana. En una ocasión te vi con tu iPad creando videos donde tenías a tus peluches viéndote y tú explicándoles sobre la luna, las nubes, las mariposas y las orugas. Me pareció tan tierno y una manera diferente de aprender, de desarrollar tu vocabulario en dos idiomas. A la vez me daba mucha lástima porque pensaba que no era manera de crear y aprender—que deberías de estar aprendiendo y jugando en tu escuelita a lado de otros niños y con atenciones que yo no te podía dar. También me di cuenta de que tal vez en estos juegos de imitar a mamá era tu propia manera de procesar cognitivamente lo que estaba pasando, una forma de hacer sentido de lo que pasaba a tu alrededor.

Balance

Me fascinaba ver cómo desarrollabas tu imaginación, cómo procesabas cosas nuevas y cómo aprendías a escribir entre dibujos y palabras sobre la naturaleza. Admiraba como admirabas las flores, los colores, cómo les cantabas a las plantas mientras las regabas, “flowers grow, grow, grow; flowers glow, glow, glow.” Estoy segura de que ellas sentían tu amor, tu paz, tu inocencia y verte de esta manera me decía a mí misma, que privilegio el poder verte crecer así. En cualquier otra circunstancia no estaríamos en casa juntas. El jardín y tú eran mi refugio durante el caos de juntas tras juntas en Zoom que me dejaban agotada.

Un día sabrás la verdad sobre la historia que escribiste con las hadas. Sabrás que las hadas, Tania y María, eran en realidad tu mami y mientras escribo estas palabras se me llenan los ojos de lágrimas y se me hace un nudo en la garganta. Escribimos este libro juntas durante el verano del 2021—tenías

cinco años. Fue muy especial formar esta conexión contigo y presenciar tu entusiasmo e inocencia al ver que las hadas escribían contigo y te hacían preguntas para que tu continuaras la historia y dirigieras el camino de tu aventura mágica. Todo empezó con “Eres una niña muy creativa, continúa usando tu imaginación. ¿Quieres escribirme una carta y dibujarme dibujos?” ¡Te emocionaste tanto! Ponías a trabajar a Tania y María también. Tenían que pensar mucho para estar al mismo nivel de tu creatividad mágica. Esperaba con anticipación tus reacciones y creaciones por la forma tan natural de apoyar tu desarrollo en la escritura en español. Eso es lo que quiero para mis alumnos también—saber qué es lo que les da curiosidad y que los motiva a aprender y cuáles son los recursos que ellos aportan a su educación. El tiempo que pasamos juntas en casa me ayudó a descubrir lo que te motiva a ti—la magia, la espiritualidad, la naturaleza, el deseo de ayudar. Eran tus historias que me acercaban a ese conocimiento que buscamos—no conocimiento de libros, si no el conocimiento de paz, espiritualidad, un sentimiento de balance. Claro que serías tú quien me regalaras este conoció/sentimiento si naciste en la cúspide.

Monarca

Diseñamos un jardín lleno de flores y plantas huésped y néctar para atraer y crear un santuario para las mariposas, colibríes y abejas. Era nuestro refugio entre la incertidumbre. Entre juntas, conversaciones, enseñanzas y presentaciones tú escribías, dibujabas, leías, coloreabas sobre la naturaleza y sobre nuestro jardín en particular. Aunque batallamos mucho tu Daddy y yo en como mejor balancear estos momentos, Daddy and I split our time 50/50. Así como apreciábamos estos momentos junto a ti también había momentos donde Daddy y yo nos sentíamos culpables y no estábamos seguros si te estábamos enseñando lo que deberías estar aprendiendo. Por una parte, decía yo, que mejor manera de aprender que observar las orugas monarca en la planta milkweed o algodoncillo y la oruga Gulf Fritillary comiendo hojas de

la enredadera Purple Passion, o la mariposa dejando sus huevitos en las hojas en tu propio jardín. Es una magia presenciar cómo las orugas devoraban las hojas con mordidas tras mordidas pequeñas y admirar como las oruguitas gorditas se arrastraban rápidamente para encontrar un buen lugar donde hacer su crisálida, alrededor de la casa, entre las hojas y plantas, en tu casita. Contabas las orugas y crisálidas cada mañana, dibujabas el ciclo entero de la mariposa y cuando te ponías tus alitas de mariposa imitabas lo que hacían poniendo huevitos en las hojas de la planta. Esta fue otra manera indirecta, entre la naturaleza, donde aprendiste a escribir y dibujar.

Tus creaciones, como la historia de Monarki, la mariposa monarca de peluche que te compré cuando tenías cinco años y la cual llevas a todas partes, y el ciclo de las mariposas, eran magia. Cuando la planta algodoncillo echaba sus semillas envueltas en un material blanco y suave que parece algodón, tú me ayudabas a juntarlas y ponerlas en bolsitas para regalarlas más adelante a nuestros amigos y familiares. Entre la naturaleza nacía tu imaginación— escribiste un libro sobre cómo cuidar y proteger a las mariposas donde dibujaste sobre la importancia de sembrar semillas. Si las orugas siguen adelante con su camino, sin importar las pequeñas molestias ya sea por el agua o las avispas, o algún otro bicho o por nosotras mismas, uno también puede adaptarse a estos movimientos. Y tú me decías, “las orugas son fuertes mami” o “soy la doctora de las mariposas” o “caterpillar helper” ya que tú ayudabas a las orugas entre el zacate que buscaban un refugio donde hacer su crisálida. Las relocizabas entre las plantas para que estuvasen a salvo y se transformaran. ¡Claro que tú harías esto, el ayudar está en tu sangre y corazón! La oruga come y sigue adelante porque sabe que vienen cosas grandes— “¡van a hacer magia!” me decías. Que lindo tener esa perspectiva. La realidad es que es difícil, el temor y la emoción hacia los cambios, son dos sentimientos muy diferentes y similares a la vez. Los dos requieren valor.

Deseo que recuerdes estos momentos cuando enfrentes situaciones difíciles y recuerdes cómo veías la vida desde la perspectiva de las orugas y mariposas en tu jardín.

Fluidez

Ver tus ojitos, tus manitas y tus sentimientos al presenciar cambios de una manera tan natural es admirable. Cuando nuestra gatita Camila falleció, la dibujaste en forma de un ángel y fue tu idea sembrar una planta donde abuelo Hugo nos ayudó a enterrarla en el jardín para recordarla y continuar cuidándola. La fluidez y la conciencia con la que vives la vida es una magia que atesoro y resguardo con palabras. Bueli Alma nos regaló una papaya y estabas asombrada por tantas semillas redonditas y negras que traía la papaya. De esa papaya sembraste las semillitas en botellas de plástico que habíamos reciclado y pintado juntas. Las regabas y cuidabas todos los días y les cantabas con entusiasmo para que crecieran. Decías, “¡cuándo van a nacer mis papayas!” Sembramos tantas semillas en un solo recipiente que cuando nacieron las tuvimos que separar. Muchas siguieron creciendo y otras no dieron. Cuando heló, las metimos a la casa y desde ahí las seguías cuidando. En marzo del 2022, abuelo Hugo nos ayudó a plantarlas en la tierra, y para agosto ya estaban casi de tu tamaño, ¡unas más altas que tú! Cuando salíamos a regar las plantas decías, “¡mis papayas! Yo las riego porque yo soy su mamá.” Nuestra madre naturaleza nos regala estos momentos y espera que también nosotros seamos su madre y cuidemos de ella. Tu disposición natural de cuidar y proteger y preocuparte por seres vivos es lo que más admiro de ti.

Me perdía entre la naturaleza a tu lado. Hacía mi trabajo afuera en el jardín viéndote juntar flores, o contar orugas o dibujar las plantas con sus nombres, o dibujando a la Virgencita de Guadalupe rodeada de rosas moradas. A la vez, me sentía culpable de no siempre estar contigo, presente al 100%, me dolía el

corazón porque pensaba que si no estuviera trabajando podría estar contigo y solo dedicar mi tiempo a ti, a tu aprendizaje y desarrollo. Para mí también era importante que supieras que las mujeres son fuertes, profesionales y pueden trabajar y ser madres. Recuerdo momentos cuando me traías dibujos y estabas tan contenta de enseñarme y no te podía prestar atención porque estaba en una junta y te decía, “Ahorita no, Lyxi. Mama está en una junta y después Lyxi, por favor, o respeta a mamá, Lyxi.” Y tú, pues eras solo una niña de cuatro, cinco, seis años y que en realidad solo querías presumir tus creaciones, solo querías que mami te dijera, “Wow, que creativa, mi amor. ¡Que bonito!” Me partía el corazón y me dolía en el alma que yo esperaba paciencia de ti en estos momentos cuando en realidad era yo la que tenía que tener más paciencia. No es fácil navegar y mezclar el mundo de madre con el mundo del trabajo—es ahí donde trato de encontrar conocimiento, crecimiento, fluidez, espiritualidad. Desafortunadamente vivimos en un mundo, un sistema que no reconoce y no facilita la fluidez.

Cuando la universidad tuvo un evento para la inauguración y celebración del Literary Landmark de Gloria Anzaldúa en marzo 2022, no dudé en llevarte conmigo a mi trabajo y presenciar este momento histórico. Como siempre, llevabas tu libreta para escribir y dibujar y un libro que escribió Gloria Anzaldúa, *Amigos del otro lado*. Fue un momento muy especial because this landmark validates Anzaldúa’s lenguajes y conocimientos, nuestro español, Spanglish y Tex-Mex, nuestra identidad, and it inspires and empowers nuestra conciencia mestiza. Mientras escuchábamos poemas en honor a Gloria, me pregunté, “¿estará ella aquí?” y tan pronto lo dije, tú y yo vimos a la misma vez una mariposa negra bailoteando entre las hojas de un árbol grande—era la única mariposa ahí. Estoy segura de que el espíritu de Anzaldúa se manifestó ahí ese día en esa mariposa. Tan pronto la viste, dibujaste un hermoso dibujo del árbol y la mariposa, y me dijiste “para recordar el momento.”

Al verte apreciar la naturaleza de esta manera me doy cuenta de que preocupaciones están demás porque al final del día, todo se resuelve, todo sigue, todo se mueve. Es tu crecimiento lo que nunca volveré a sentir y presenciar. Ese momento cuando me regalaste una flor que cortaste en el jardín, o el momento donde me cortaste hojas de guayaba u hojas de le hoja santa que nos regaló bueli Alma para hacer té. Estos son los momentos donde viví una chispita de paz, tranquilidad, agradecimiento, conocí/sentimiento.

Mi preciosa Lyxi,

Te escribo estas palabras en español por muchas razones. Es este mi primer lenguaje—el lenguaje donde siento una conexión con mi identidad, mi historia, mi cultura y del recuerdo que aprendí inglés como segundo idioma. Sé que tu literacy history, lo que regularmente enseñé en mis propias clases, será muy diferente a la mía, pero no quiero que te olvides que en estos años el español fue el lenguaje que nos unió con la naturaleza y fue la naturaleza y tu conexión con ella que nos cuidó y nos enseñó sobre la paz, los cambios, y la espiritualidad. Yo sé que las plantas y flores de nuestro jardín están tan lindas y felices porque ellas aprecian tus manitas, tu voz, tus cuidados. La manera en la cual te expresas de ellas y como hablas con ellas es un gran ejemplo para muchos—en cómo vivir en paz y en armonía con la naturaleza. Te escribo estas palabras porque deseo que siempre recuerdes esa fluidez espiritual y mental que es parte de tu ser y tu corazón y que te refugies en este espacio durante momentos difíciles y de felicidad. Me has enseñado tanto, mi amor. Quiero que sepas que disfrute mucho estos momentos de tu vida, aunque vivimos sentimientos encontrados—momentos que se sentían como una eternidad, pero ahora los veo como fugaces. Doy gracias a Dios por tu vida, por mantener a nuestra familia a salvo y a ti por siempre recordarme el

poder de la espiritualidad, ya sea por tus dibujos, detalles o palabras. Espero con entusiasmo como crece tu creatividad y espiritualidad y todo lo que continuaré aprendiendo de ti. —Tu mami

CHERRY SEASON

Priscilla Daniels-Mark

My Mama and Daddy drove North with my sister and me
To Washington
In a rusty red colored Chevy station wagon
Listening to “Crystal Blue Persuasion”
Over and over
New tires then
The engine checked
A map in the glove compartment with my Daddy’s black oil prints on it
An address of a cherry farm in Washington that my mother gripped the whole way
Using it as a fan when it got hot
Folding it a hundred different ways when she got bored
My little sister and I in the back seat drinking thick carnation milk that came from a can
I preferred my Mamas breastmilk from what she said
When we landed in the green landscape
We didn’t have time to settle in
Or money to get Nostalgic
Rain a blessing
It made music tip tapping against the metal of the hood
It was the last thing we heard before we fell asleep in our cocoon
With the smell of sweat sifting away from the days labor
Sweet baby dreams sometimes
Other nights awoken by a crick in the neck
Nothing that some midnight mota couldn’t help
Mama and Daddy smoked on the hood of the car on clear nights

Watching for the stars that moved between the trees
Waiting until those lights disappeared
They never expected so much rain
And they opened their mouths to catch it when they got thirsty
and bottled it in jugs
My mama recalled standing on a wooden orchard ladder
The kind that has three legs
A deer sniffed at her shoes
While she held me in her arms
Breastfeeding me
While she baby talked the deer
Letting it lick her fingers
Cherry juice flowing through all of our veins

NOPALES

Guadalupe Mercedes Muñoz Moroyoqui

Nopales,

Bistec de Zacatecas,

¿Qué me vienes a contar hoy? Palabras curativas, cuentos mágicos;

A cambio de una canción nacida de mi corazón.

Planta de la vida,

¿Qué secretos me puedes confiar? Con tus pencas nutritivas,

Y frutas dulces,

Estoy dispuesta a escuchar.

NOPALES (English translation)

Guadalupe Mercedes Muñoz Moroyoqui

Nopales,

Steak from Zacatecas,

What are you coming to tell me today? Healing words, magical stories;
in exchange for a song born from my heart.

Plant of life,

What secrets can you tell me in confidence? With your nutritious flesh,
and sweet fruits,

I am willing to listen.

¡VE!

Guadalupe Mercedes Muñoz Moroyoqui

“¡Ve!” me gritó el viento;
Con las fuerzas de mil Abuelas,
I don't know
if they meant “ve”-go Or
“ve”-see;
I intend to do both

JAMAICA

Guadalupe Mercedes Muñoz Moroyoqui

Hot, fiery, chalky, spicy, sweet

You remind me of Nákhuame,

Of my Nana Tina,

Of mountains,

Of chiles outside my Nana's home.

I see you nestled in your rightful place,

On the steps of the sacred ancestral garden,

Surrounded by lavender, rosemary, and Yerba Buena

I get distracted by intrusive thoughts, worries about the physical dimension. You answer, "soon".

And it's enough to make my feet start dancing.

I am so grateful to have connected with you.