

VOICES FOR CHANGE

Anthology

**A Collection of Short Stories,
Poetry, Statements and Art
Work by Latinx Youth in Toronto**

Editors

Christelle Moneypenny

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Design

Lourdes Duniam



**CASA
PUEBLITO**



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A collection of
Short Stories, Poetry, Statements and Art Work by
Latinx Youth in Toronto

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Chapter 1

Poetry

Ayotzinapa

By: Adrián T. González Figueroa

Canada, the nice place
Everyone is happy
Hiding secrets
Behind your face
Stupid conservative policies
Sugarcoated to simulate democracy
We don't talk about our messed up foreign affairs
Mexicans don't get visas

But I guess you don't care

It not like the country's already messed up.
All the government does is cover things up.
When there's no hope, hand them a rope
Out flows the red as they fill them with lead.
43 are gone, missing, left for dead.
Do you care?
No, the issue's all in my head.
They had families

Voices for Change Anthology

People who loved them
They were students
Indigenous young men
What did you do?
Oh wait. You don't care.

Ignore everything below your high chair.

Indigenous, indigenous,
What's wrong with it?
It's like a cursed word
See it, speak it, spit it.
"We've come so far,
Equality all around."
Have we really?
The truth is gone
Beneath the ground
Suffocate, silence, choke
Though they're gone, we cry out
'Cause they never spoke
Oh wait, you don't care

Ignore it like always
The world still falls around you.

Everyday.

Mama

By: Adrián T. González Figueroa

When I was little, my mama used to sit me down at my
little table

In the little apartment

In front of the little, but big to me TV

I stared mindlessly at the screen, watching the colours
drift by

A river flowing from the dots in the square to the circle
in my eyes

My eyes inhaled the artificial rainbow,

The artificial story,

The artificial, fabricated beauty

Yet I was blind to the kaleidoscope of hues

Making not a rainbow,

But a person right in front of me

In front of me the colours of the screen reflected into
the skin

Of the other set of eyes,

Watching

The sounds from the TV melded into my ears

Combined with a sweet sugary sound

The voice

Coated in chocolate and marshmallows and rainbow
sprinkles

That voice held me tight when I collapsed in my school
hallway

On the verge of panic
I thought it was the end of my family

Panic

Is what I felt when I thought that voice would
transform

Sugar into glass
As I told it I was not its little girl
I was a boy

Instead

Her voice
Turned from sugar into an anchor in the ocean
A sound made from a conch shell of flesh that said
I'll never let you go

I wish the voices of my "Loving, yet distant" family
Did not turn from pillows of cotton
Into razor sharp knives and pens that cut and wrote
Into my back

Burning a message of hate and silence
Pushing down at me till my face sank down
Into a dark brown dirt rainbow.
Yelling loud
Like a wall coming down

Between my rainbow coloured army
And their old never-changing soil

Yet that voice
The chocolate-marshmallow-sprinkle one
The one with the smallest frequency,

That voice turned into the boom that came before the
lightning
She was the crack of a whip piercing through stubborn
minds
She became the bang
Shot out into the dark night
A beacon of shelter

And pulled me back
Into the soft, warm bed that is her arms.

Her arms
Barely fit around me anymore
Her head
Rests on my shoulder
Yet it's me who pours tears into her outstretched hands.

When I was little, I asked for the sugar in my already
sugary cereal
The sugar appeared in my lap
Carried in by her sweet sugary sound

The coated in chocolate and marshmallows and
rainbow sprinkles

Sprinkles of Spanish

And English

And salsa and rancheras and monstros de piedra and
yo-no-se-que

Ferment themselves in that voice

Now I only hear her voice through the artificial screen
of my cell phone

The chocolate-marshmallow

Turned into a blue and white text box with a cold dark
edge

Making a fake bright sun on my face

Thousands of kilometres away the voice calls,

Hidden away behind the soon-to-be wall created by a
stupid Cheeto voldemort.

Yet her voice

Is still the boom of thunder before the lightning

Begging

No, commanding to be heard

Over the yells of the hateful,

The judging

The “presidential”

Making an anchor of arms
Letting me know,
MAMA IS STILL WATCHING OVER YOU
MAMA IS NOT AT HOME
BUT MAMA IS HOME.

“Mama don’t worry, I’m home.”

Chapter 2

A Faint Light in a Dark Place

by Steven Raigoza

I don't remember anything. All I see is blackness and I can't move. I seem to be in a small compressed space, with no room for much movement. Where am I? I start feeling a panic rise up from deep inside, trying to crawl its way out of my chest. I take some deep breaths to calm my nerves and begin to count to ten. I start feeling my environment with what little room I have. I barely have room to move my hands, and I only have a few inches of head room. Could I be in a coffin? Am I dead? A million questions are forming and my mind starts racing.

I call out desperately for help for what feels like an eternity, trying to get any sense of connection with the outside, anything that would help me at this point. I can feel the sliver of hope that I had slipping away between

my fingers, and worst of all, I'm scared. I've just about given up and accepted my fate. I'm going to die in here, wherever *here* is. I hear the sound of blood pumping through my ears, and that of my shallow quick breaths. But then I hear a very faint sound. I strain my ears to find the source. What it is? And is this a good thing? It's a voice, a man's voice, and he's not alone.



“We’re going to have to do it manually, something's wrong...”

My heart beat starts speeding up as the stranger's' voice gets nearer, a drop of sweat drips down into my eyes making them blur and sting. The voices are right over me, they're so close. I need to get out and there's no way they're going to stop me from trying. I hear gears and latches turning, locks clicking, and a crack of light starts seeping through my dark isolated prison.



I push open the door with all my might, knocking someone unconscious with the bang of the door and they crumble to the floor. I lash out and strike another blurry figure across the face and wipe my eyes. A man in a lab

coat now unconscious and lying on the floor, accompanied by a lab coat-wearing woman with a bloody nose, spitting blood and cursing.

I run off in a sprint, away from all of this, to anywhere but *here*. I hear her running as well, only in the opposite direction and seconds later a deafening alarm begins to echo off the walls and the ceiling. I'm surrounded by white walls. Everything is very clean. I appear to be in some sort of hallway, filled with doors and something that looks to be a hologram.

I hear a footstep behind me and I turn to face my new challenger: another male, only this time he's in what looks like what could be a police uniform. He is pointing a gun at me. There's no way for me to run away this time so I run at him fists raised. He fires his weapon and a dart sticks into my neck before I can do anything to him. My vision blurs, my arms begin to feel heavy, and my legs start to feel like Jell-O. I don't last but a second before I collapse and everything fades to black.

I wake up again but this time in a different area, lying on a couch. Across from me, in a chair sits a woman, the same woman I had encountered earlier. I rub my neck

and find to my surprise that there is no dart, not even a single indication that there ever was anything jabbed into my neck. I suppose if these people wanted me dead they would have done so by now. I sit upright and face her.

“You must have a million questions,” she said to me empathetically.

“I'm not here to fight you, I'm just here to talk”, she told me.

She doesn't seem like much of a threat. If worst comes to worst, I could probably take her in a fight. She's small and not very strong.

“You see, you aren't from around here,” she explained.

“Two hundred years ago, you signed yourself up to be part of a prototype program which would keep your body for safe and preserved” she told me.

“Excuse me?” I said in disbelief, “I don't understand.”

I mean, did I hear that right? Why would I ever agree to something like this?

She told me, “You see, around two hundred years ago, there was this man who had just become elected. He didn't care about the environment and made decisions that were detrimental to the planet's quality of life. These actions ultimately decreased the time in which Earth could be inhabitable for,” she explained.

“That's when this prototype stepped in, in order to preserve thousands of people, so they could be brought here. And the pod you woke up in, is our first... *encounter*.”

“I'm sorry, but where exactly is *here*?” I asked.

“Why don't you look and see for yourself?”, she said.

She waved her hand making a holographic keyboard appear. As she typed something on it, the entire wall became transparent. Everything beyond the walls were revealed. I could see the outdoors.

“We're in outer space”, I gasped to myself under my breath.

The view was incredible. An infinite night showered with glowing stars, almost like diamonds, clouds of dust and bright colors sweeping across the sky for as far as the eye could see.



“You’re not from here, or even from this century,” she told me. “You must be feeling all sorts of confusion and negativity”, she continued. I nodded my head slowly, trying to understand.

“We are all here, in order to live our lives again. That's why I'm here, that's why we're all here. We may be different in some ways. Sure. But once we put aside these differences, we're all the same really. And with all of us here, you don't have to feel alone or frustrated. Soon we will be landing on another planet we discovered to be stable enough to hold life. It is as close to Earth as we're going to get, just 10% away from being identical.”

The man who had been laying on the floor when I first woke up came into the room with a bandage on the side of his now bruised face. I immediately apologized to both of them for the confusion earlier. After engaging in conversation for a couple of hours, and going back and forth with them, they helped fill me in information about my past. They explained to me that the lack of memory was a temporary side effect from the preservation pods.

After a few weeks of walking around the vast and seemingly never-ending ship, I met a lot of the people and started settling down. I'm starting to feel like a part of these people, and I'm starting to learn the ropes of these new standards of living.

When surrounded by the right people who encourage, talk with you and influence your life positively, it really can make the biggest difference and get you feeling back on track – happy and included, like how everyone should be, no matter their age, gender, race, sexual orientation, etc. No one should ever feel like an outsider. This has been my experience the past couple of days. But we successfully found a new home and the future's looking bright. I don't know when I'll be writing again, but until next time, signing off.

Goodbye.

5 Things I would Say to Other Latinx Teens



Steven

1. Work as hard as you can from the start, instead of rushing in the very end. It will only stress you out.
2. You may feel like you are the only one feeling or going through something, but you aren't alone.
3. Isolating yourself may sometimes feel like the best "solution", but that isn't always the case.
4. Life will sort itself out, you will find your way through it.
5. Someone cares for you, even if it doesn't always seem like it.

Chapter 3

Twin Views

by Santiago Ornelas

Not so long ago, there I was: brushing my teeth getting ready to go to sleep. Being an average child. Before my regular schedule bedtime, I would always tell my mother to tell me a story. Most of the time they were deeply related to myself, as my mother always wished to encourage me to become whatever I wanted to be. Most of those stories described me as the hero of the day. Always looking to help anybody in need, putting others before myself. However, just because I made others feel joy does not mean I myself I felt the same way. Despite being surrounded by a large family. I would be the odd one out, the lonesome one. One night, my mother noticed I was feeling different. Thus, she decided to tell me a different story. Not one where I was the hero...

“Would you like to hear a different type of story?”, said my mom

“What kind of story”, I replied.

“One that you will truly never forget”, she said.



“Hmm alright. I guess it could be fun”, I agreed.

“There was one a pale man with dark hair, who was very lonely”, she said

“Why was he lonely?”, I asked.

She did not respond and kept going with her story.

“All things must fear this man. So, they shunned him”, she said.

“Why? I mean, that does not seem like the right thing to do...”, I said.

“One day everything changed, as he took an axe and split himself in half. So he would always have a friend”, she said.

“So he would always have a friend?”, I pondered.

That's it. That was the whole story. As a child, I never really knew what she was trying to say to me, yet I always felt that part of me did. Six years later, in a not so far and mysterious place, decorated with everything one could imagine, reside the two most unlikely of twins. Born at the same time, they come from different places.

Another day, another unsuccessful attempt...
“This is log entry number #4090, and this is ‘one’ talking”.

As a little note before we – I mean I start – by the

time you are reading this I'll long be gone. I'll become no more than a memory to you and your loved ones. Not just family but the majority of your friends as well. My current status is kind of rough. I haven't seen through the rounded windows that you call your eyes.



I really don't know what has been happening with your life. I've been chained here for as long as I can remember. I've completely forgotten how the controls feel.

You know? Since he that should not be named has taken over you, over your mind. You know, as much as he thinks he's helping you, the way he drives you is no good.

“You know I can hear you? “Ugh, you are making this far more difficult than it has to be. And don't even bother. He won't even listen to those stupid tapes of yours. Besides you know exactly why we're here. That's why you called upon me, right?

“No. I brought you here becau...”

“Ugh, I knew it. You are too afraid to admit you needed me to complete this mission. And I totally get it, it's not easy to make a human succeed in life. You of all people- wait it's only us two here. HAHA! No. But seriously, you were once the reason why he did not have much success in his life.”

“You don't think having the best network of friends is a success...?”

“Well, yes and no. I mean success varies on age. You made his childhood successful, now I'm in control.

The only way to make him successful is by doing everything like everyone else. With a little more effort and style, of course”.

“Ugh. Let me lose out of these chains! Then we can talk about his success.

“I'm afraid I can't do that. You see, you want to encourage behaviours that this city considers weird. And I can't let that happen. It will just intervene with my plans. We have to do everything my way, the ‘Canadian’ way. It's not only the more superior way, but it's also the most fun way... You know, I feel for you, I really do, trust me. When you were in control I was the one who was caged up, much like you at the moment. I, just like you, really wanted to do things differently. I did not wish to be popular, I wished for him to have the best grades, so that he would attend the best university there was. That's why we're here. You told me that. We have to make him successful by any means necessary. And I'm somewhat sorry for doing this to you, brother, but it's the way it has to be. You know, we might come from the same mind, yet we could not be more different.”

YELLS IN PAIN

“Do you know what happens to the forgotten?”

“Uhh. No. What kind of question is that?”

“Did I ever tell you about the story within these pictures?”

“No. What’s going on? Is this something to distract me again? You know how I hate it!

“No, its none of that. I need to tell you something. It is true that I am the original one, the one created by the human. What's not true is that you are my half. You are in fact my quarter. You see, I split myself in half, to create him. Someone who I thought would help me in my mission. It turns out he had different ways of achieving this mission. I was angered by his actions and choices. So I locked him up right in the chains that currently hold me. Sometime later I turned my back and he had vanished. I never heard his voice again. I was never able to recover my half. After a couple of years, I made you out of sheer loneliness. Right now I'm feeling what he felt: anger and sadness, but above all, betrayed. I ignored him as I thought he was just trying to get free. He was gone forever and there was nothing I could do.

Believe me, I tried everything in my power but it was not enough. I was alone once again. It just seemed far worse this time. I could not handle it."



"I do not believe you." *Looking out the window*
"Anyways, where was I? Oh yes, the math test! Hmm...
Hey, do you know how to find the intersection of two lines? 1, do you know? *there was silence* Uh 1, 1
where are you!? This can't be true. Stop playing with me.
Oh. I get it. It's another one of your games. Well, I'm not
playing this time. 1? Are you there?"

With no response from 1, 2 realizes 1 is truly gone. “AHHHH! I should have listened to your cry for help. I can’t do this mission by myself”, claims 2.

He falls to the floor. Tears fall down his eyes. He is petrified by the thought that he's alone. He then sees a card beside the wall where 1 was chained. 2 opened it and it simply read: “*I know how you will feel... abandoned.*” It is then when 2 realizes how much he needed 1.

5 Things I would Say to Other Latinx Teens



1. Don't be shy, people will like you for who you are.
2. Ask questions about anything.
3. Don't let your 'lack of friends' discourage you, you'll meet the right people at the right time.
4. Don't 'change your culture' just because everyone around you is different.
5. Try to enjoy the good moments in everything.

Chapter 4

Be Who You Want to Be

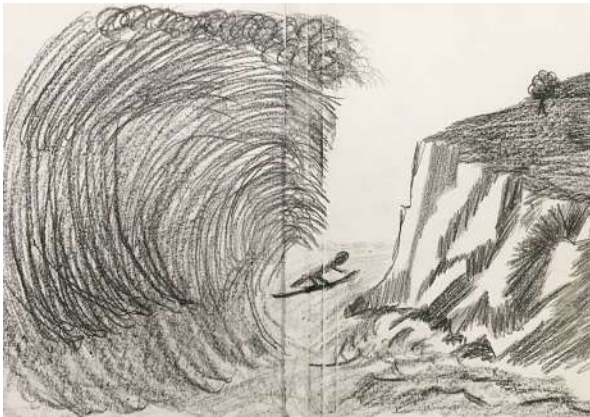
by Fabiola Torrejón

I always said that in this life I wanted to help save the world, the human race and all the living things on earth. Silly, right? But it's actually what I thought. Surely, I'm not going to be the only one who's going to help save the earth, but it will still be satisfying to contribute 'my grain of sand'. I had thought, one day, I'll be an engineer that will help make the earth a better and a less contaminated place. But truth be told, it wasn't actually my first plan.

You know when you're young, you always hope that someday, your dream will come true. Some of the most common dreams are of becoming an astronaut, a princess or a race car driver – to name a few. In my case, I had always wanted to be a detective. I really liked

watching movies and series about murderers; it's kind of creepy, I know. But I always thought it was actually pretty cool how the detectives would solve each case, finding the truth by only having a few clues.

However, there is a moment in everybody's life when people decide what they are going to be, what they're going to study.



It's necessary to see the pros and cons and to see if you are suitable for it – mentally and physically. I'm not talking here about the kind of thinking where people say women can't do certain programs because they are

women or that someone with a disability can't do certain things because they have a disability. Let me give you an example of what I am actually talking about. I'm going to do this by telling you one reason why I decided not to become a detective.

I remember one morning, when I was 16 years old, my dad was taking me and my siblings to school. My house was near one of the most dangerous highways in the city and we had to take it to get to school. A lot of dogs, cats and other little animals died while trying to cross this highway. Now, usually, there was no traffic on it early in the day but that morning was different. It was weird. We were stuck in traffic and didn't move an inch for like ten minutes. Suddenly, we start moving. It looked as if the cars were trying to dodge an obstacle.

A couple of minutes later, as we got closer to where the obstacle seemed to be, my dad started yelling, "*cover your sister's eyes!*" I was so scared, but I quickly covered my little sister's eyes. Then, instead of looking away or closing my own eyes, I couldn't help but look in the direction I saw my Dad looking. It was in that moment that I saw a man lying just a few meters from his motorcycle with his head smashed into the ground. It

was a pretty traumatic moment. I know that reading it, it doesn't seem so intense, serious or like such a big deal, but you weren't there. Trust me when I say, you can't imagine what it looked like. I thought to myself, how am I going to be a detective if I get so easily traumatized by tiny things like this?

Discarding the option of being a detective wasn't that big of a deal but at the beginning, it was a little hard to find a career that would match not only my abilities but also my personality. But I soon came to realize that my second choice was engineering, ecological and environmental engineering.

It is really important to always feel comfortable with what you are doing; that's the whole point. My parents always thought that I chose engineering because of a friend and that they couldn't picture me even five years from now as an engineer.

Understandable, I thought; I didn't imagine myself five, even ten years from now as anything. Therefore, by confessing a little secret to you, hoping that all of what I'm saying helps you in the ways it's has helped me, picture yourself not five years from now, but

one day. Imagine where you want to be tomorrow and the day after that and the day after that. Each day and each week will give you a goal; one that you are willing to reach. Looking back I say “*But look at me right now!*” A part of me said that I’d never reach this point but somehow another part of me already knew I could do it. Cool right?! How your mind plays with you.



Karen, my best friend, always thought that most of the people who move away, always wants to return to

‘fix’ their homeland. To some degree, I agree with her, until she started to say that there is nothing you can do to fix it. She wasn’t being pessimistic, she was thinking in a realistic way. Think about it. Once you get out of your country, you start to compare the two countries without even noticing. *My country has better things than this place, or this place has better things than my country.* Karen thought that the people in our country didn’t actually want to help, that most of them are waiting for other people to fix the problem. Maybe that’s true, but what happens if you move people to start working together? Our conversations often moved from talking about funny odd things such as cheese, to our different motivations and how we would like to help our country by working together.

Nevertheless, with these thoughts in mind –not cheese of course, I returned to my country after university. I started working on a project that was actually pretty cool: improving the construction of industrial plants so that it wouldn’t contaminate the water, or at least do so in a minimal way. My team and I were cleaning the rivers and lakes of my country. Someone had to finally do it.

After several months, my team and I started noticing that the lakes and rivers were less and less contaminated. It was awesome!



We were helping to fix a big problem. Unhappily, that was not our only issue. Once you stop the source of contamination, what happens with the water that is

already polluted? It is important to know the size of the contaminated area so you can actually clean it. Also, for how long will you have to clean everything up? Fortunately, we had an environmental scientist in our team that told us the degree of the pollution, and in a rough estimate, we could clean everything up in a bit more than six years.

After a couple of years, we were finally analyzing one of the biggest mining companies in the country. I would have liked to say that we had the government's help, but we actually didn't. There was corruption in the government. They were associated with the mining companies. By this time, my team grew bigger and we were moving fast. We didn't need the government's help since most of the places that we went to were willing to help. Others even called us.

But it was totally opposite with this one mining company. They were contaminating to such an extent that all the chemical waste was not affecting not only the living beings under the water but also the people living near it.

Their actions lead to diverting rivers, provoking a

shortage of water in some places. We were in a state of emergency and the community got so angry that they started to protest, showing that the government wasn't acting in a political and morally correct way. They helped us.

Five years later we cleaned all the lakes and rivers of my country, preventing them from drying completely since they were pretty close at that point. Remember I told you about when I was small I wanted to save the world? Well, I end up saving my homeland. I made people think there was and still is hope. I ended up contributing my grain of sand. I was satisfied with myself. Although I wanted more, I wanted to do it again, with my team. New goals, new dreams, new places and new feelings.

5 Things I would Say to Other Latinx Teens



1. In school, having something to do to keep you occupied during lunch time like joining a club or helping with something, will not just help you to open-up but also come out of your comfort zone, meet more people have make friends.
2. Do well in your courses because then teachers will take you into more consideration.
3. By working hard in school people will ask you questions, which is also a good way to make friends.
4. Don't care what people think of you because that will make you more secure and less worried.
5. Join Casa – Pueblito

Chapter 5

Long Live the King by Victor Lopez

You know when you get frustrated about everything, but you can't really show it and then it just builds up over time? Well, this story is like that, and it's set in a fantasy world ruled by the Creator and Gods. The Creator named Tiel as King and ruler over the realm of Asriality and he could make/create anything he desired in this world. But Tiel soon realized this responsibility was becoming too great for him. The people were asking too much and he didn't know what to do. Tiel lost control of what he was creating and became corrupted. The corruption within him created monsters, demons, and everything that was horrible. Tiel just couldn't anymore. He lost control of himself and everyone started calling him "*The Corrupted Creator and King of Asriality.*"

Tiel listened to evil voices going through his head and created whatever they demanded. He wasn't in control of his own body anymore. People and every other species were killed by the evil creations. Funny thing is, it was his creations that destroyed each other. The Gods had received word of the corruption within the kingdom and started a group to take over the King's crown and throne to replace him. Most of the Gods didn't do this for peace, but for power. The corruption got to most of them as well.



Tiel's castle got invaded, many Gods lost their lives and were awaiting to be reborn into a new body. Only one of

them made it to Tiel. Her name was Sinnon, the Goddess of the rivers. She and Tiel were great friends for a long time, and even though they didn't agree on many things, they still kept their friendship strong, even until today.

Tiel and Sinnon faced against each other. There were sounds of sword clashing, gunshots, explosions, and sounds of magic spells being cast against one another. At the end, the victor was Sinnon. She landed a strike right through Tiel's heart, bringing him close to the brink of death. Sinnon then stated: *"You corrupted everyone, including yourself. Why? If it was so hard, why didn't you ask for help?"* Tiel, trying his best to respond back, said: *"It was too much, even asking for help made me think I am a burden to you, and to everyone else... and I just lost myself. I lost everything."* Sinnon then said: *"You're going to redeem yourself, and I'll help you, but not here. You're going to be reborn somewhere else, with no memory of this ever happening. I'll give you half of myself to go on for your travel back here, but before that, you have to collect your memories again and build yourself if you are to become the king you want and love. As the new Creator, I will also take a part of your corruption and handle everything until your return. Until then..."* Sinnon took out her blue soul from her

chest and split into two. After, she took Tiel's soul and separated the corruption from it.

At Tiel's last moments, he watched Sinnon go to a broken balcony to blow the souls away together, just like if she was blowing a dandelion clock. The two souls traveled where the wind lead them. *"Prove to me..."* Sinnon said, *"Prove to me that we can make this work..."* Sinnon then looked back to Tiel and said *"I have to finish what I came to do. I'm sorry, Tiel."* She then entrapped him in water and prepared her blade again. She hesitated a bit, but got the job done. This is where our story begins.

Tiel

I opened my eyes, only to see a black view. Nothing to see and it really felt like I was falling. But then all of a sudden, images like flashbacks showed up all around me, yet I couldn't recognize a thing from them. These images felt like opportunities, opportunities that I've missed over and over again. It was painful to watch them go by, but there was nothing I could do. Whenever I tried stretching out my hand it just wouldn't move. So, I just accepted it. I kept falling deeper and deeper as these images of opportunities that I didn't even

know about pass by me, until I couldn't see them anymore.

Time passed by. “*Tick, tock, tick, tock*” was all I could hear. Then, my view slowly filled up with sparkling white lights. They were getting closer and closer to me until I was blinded by them. I opened my eyes slowly and it was blurry at first but after a while I could see my body and actually move it a bit. I inspected myself to see what I looked like: I had what seemed to be black soft cotton pants, a mix of green and blue shoes, and a black long sleeved hoodie with green stripes that looked like veins all over it.

At the time, I didn't question any of it . Next, I inspected my surroundings and it looked like I was in a dimly lit room where you couldn't really see the walls that well. As I was looking around, I saw someone. This person was sitting opposite of me “*on a see-through chair? Wait, what, how is that possible?*” I stood up and from a distance I observed the person a bit more and noticed they were reading a book. I called out to them.

“*H-hello..!*” The person flinched and turned back slowly towards me and said “*Oh, you're awake... stay*

right there.” I noticed the voice seemed to be feminine. Afterwards, I responded *“No. I can walk towards you!”* As I tried to take a step forward, I felt my leg being pulled. When I looked down, I saw some sort of black chains releasing a strange black aura from it. I scanned my body again and my arms and other leg were also chained. *“Why am I chained up? I swear a few minutes ago I wasn’t entrapped like an animal.” “What’s with these chains!?”* I asked, as the person slowly walked towards me. *“I don’t know. Those chains always appear when something tries to move you...”*

When the person got closer, I could faintly see what they looked like. She had long black hair and was shorter than myself and she had a slim body. As she got closer, I could see what she was wearing: a white and blue sailor uniform tank, detached dark blue sleeves, dark blue short shorts, white thigh highs, and blue shoes. As she took her final step to be in my view, I could notice the colour of her eyes. *“They’re blue...”*, I said surprised. She gave me a confused look and said *“What’s blue? My sleeves?”* I kept looking at her for a while until I got my senses back and said: *“Your eyes. They’re blue! Like a shining blue colour!”* While pointing at my face, she then replied: *“Uhh.. Well your*

eyes are green and they're shiny too, so what's the big deal?" "Wait, they're green..? And shining as well? I asked myself.

After giving it some thought, I asked her: *"We aren't normal... Are we?" "I don't have an answer to that..."*, she responded. *"But let's ignore that for now. Let me introduce myself. My name is Ezili and I woke up laying beside you around five days ago. I have checked around the room and it seems we're in some type of 'not see-through' glass dome..." "A dome...?"* I responded. *"Yes"*, she said. *"As you can see, it's becoming morning..."*

I then looked up and light went through the glass as it filled up the room. I can finally see around myself and her clearly. "Huh..", I muttered. *"What about these chains though...?" "Well I can try making a weapon out of my powers..."*, she responded back with a sigh. *"A weapon!? Really!?"* I said surprisingly. *"You saw how I made that chair right..? Well, it took a while to get used to, but I learned how to use it well. Maybe I can make some sort of weapon to release you from those chains!"* I looked up at her and nodded. *"Alright.. Let's try it then!"*

Ezili

"Okay... Now, If I just do this..." I started letting out the water from my hands and imagined what I wanted: a sword sharp enough to cut through any steel. And it happened. I have a sword at my hand and Tiel's expression is funny looking with his jaw dropping. I go beside him and look at the chains. I raised my hands up with the sword and hacked down at the chains, breaking one of them. I looked at Tiel afterwards. *"Wow! You're really strong aren't you? I didn't expect it to break that easily."* *"Ughghhh!!"* Tiel suddenly had a painful expression. I got really worried but I didn't know how to react. *"Uh... are you... okay?"* He was gasping for air but he quickly responded. *"It's okay...! Just just take the other chains off... and make it quick please."* I hesitated for a second, but I raised the sword once again and hacked against the two other chains. Afterwards, Tiel had tears in his eyes, so I asked *"Are you sure you're going to be okay..?"* *"Yes, I'm fine! Just do the last one"*, Tiel yelled.

I noticed that something black was drooling from his back, like black blob, but again I hacked at the last chain. The black blob then started flooding out, taking

shape and form into a humane creature. The creature looked a bit like Tiel, but disfigured and black goo was dripping from all over his body. *"It hurts! Too many thoughts! Too many things to worry about! Too many voices! Too many responsibility! It hurts so much that I can't keep going. I want to make them all happy but what is wrong with me!? Why can't I do it? Why did i think i can handle it? Everything sucks in this world! Graaaaaahh...!"*, said the creature in a demonic-like voice while holding his head in pain. I then look back at Tiel and notice him having a fearful look on his face. *"That thing... That's what has been talking to me in my head. Why...? Why is this happening to me? All I wanted was to make everything right. But what was I making it right?"*

Looking at Tiel in this state was starting to piss me off. *"My head hurts. I want to give up on everything"* both Tiel and the creature said. At that point, I held the sword from the blade and swung it at Tiel hitting him on the head. *"Ow...! What was that for?" "Came back to your senses, I see..."* I gave him the stare and then looked at the disfigured Tiel. *"But that guy won't"* Tiel then looked at it and said *"For some reason, I felt it was a part of me, something I want to get rid of, but I*

couldn't. It was holding me back." *"So that's what those chains were."* Tiel straightened himself back up. *"I want to confront him... But in order to do that, do you think you can show me how to make stuff like you did?"* I responded back. *"Just imagine it, imagine it and feel proud about it."*

Tiel then looked at his hands and closed his eyes, while slowly something appeared in his hands. The disfigured Tiel looked at us yelling. *"You're responsible for this! You left me alone! You didn't help me!!! I will pul..verize... You!!!!..."* The disfigured creature then started charging at us with his hands out, showing his long claws. I instinctively went in front of Tiel and blocked the disfigured one from hurting him. I then asked myself: *"Why? Why am I helping him? Why do I want to protect him?"* I start swinging my sword to make the creature stay back, but it kept dodging it like it was nothing. He suddenly countered one of my swings and landed a powerful kick on my side that I went flying to the other side of the room. *"Ow.. ow..."* I tried getting back up, but I could only get on my knees. The disfigured Tiel then started charging again at Tiel and before it was about to land a hit on him i yelled out his name. *"TIEL!!"*

Tiel

I heard her calling my name. I opened up my eyes and parried the monster's claw, pushing him back away from me. I looked on what I had on my hands and they were dual wielding swords. They had the perfect hilt to grip on and I really liked how the blade looked on both of them. Full with awe, I shook my head and told myself to get back in action and looked at the monster in front of me. I pointed one of my swords at him and said *"I'm sorry for leaving you in a time of need. I know I needed myself more than ever at that time... Which I don't remember, but I have a feeling that it was really important!"* The monster growled at me and said *"You know nothing! If.. If.. only you were stronger! This would have never happened me in the first place!!"* The monster charged at me again. I was prepared to take it on, but when he tried to hit me with his blade I somehow managed to dodge it. Then, again and again. I noticed a pattern on how he was attacking and I saw the opportunity and took it. I swung my blade in an upward motion only to get a slice on him. The monster screamed in pain, holding it's chest. *"I'm here, I'm myself and facing you now is the first step to fixing this whole mess. I don't even remember what I am or who I was, but what*

I do know is that I need to find out and redeem myself."

The monster then gave me a look full of hatred and anger. *"You talk... big... but get nothing done!"* It charged towards me once more. Launching itself above me, without having any time to dodge, I braced myself by holding my swords together, blocking it's attack. I could only hold it back for so long before my arms started giving out. The monster just kept getting closer to my face. As it was about to chew my face off, Ezili came yelling *"Get away!!"* charging against the monster's side with her sword. The monster screamed again. I pushed him away from us as far as I could with my remaining strength. The monster pulled out the sword from his side, going on it's knees when it started crying *"Everything I've done until now has been pointless. All I wanted was to have my own world to rule and to have many people love me, but everything wasn't as simple as I thought it would be... Everything was too much for me to handle and I now look at myself and you..."* Ezili you always come to help me don't you?... *Tiel.. Prove to me. Prove to me that you're strong enough to make it out of here!"* The monster, in pain, got up slowly and was ready to attack once more. But then, Ezili used her powers to trap its feet with her water powers. His speech was long

enough to give her that opportunity, but it just looked like it wasn't troubled by it.

"*Now, Tiel!*" I prepared my blades once more and my body moved on it's own again.

With a blink of an eye I was already close to the monster, slashing and hacking as much as I could. "*Starush!!*", I yelled out, as if I was doing something epic. I looked back at the monster and noticed a star symbol all over it's body. The monster started disappearing rapidly, saying "*This proof will suffice for now...*" Then, blurry sparkles started appearing around it and going into me. I wasn't freaked out, but I felt whole again. This time it felt like most of my worries went away.

Then I remembered Ezili. I looked around and found her laying down on the floor, looking at the ceiling. "*Ahh.. It felt I could so much better..*" I walked towards her and asking "*You okay?*" "*Yeah,*" she answered. "*Just exhausted.. I wasn't expecting any of this to happen..*" "*Ah.. yeah..for sure...*" I went and sat beside her. The moment I sat down she sat herself back up as well. "*Hey, let me help you for a second. Turn the other way for me?*" I listened, turned around, and felt a

cold liquid on my arms and legs. It made me shiver at first, but it felt relaxing and soothing.

I asked *“What are you doing?” “Something to make you feel better; I got you hurt here after all”*, she answered immediately. As the last sparkle from the other me came into me, the whole dome lit up, we could see the whole room now and we discovered a door that wasn’t there before. *“That’s what it took to get some real light in this place huh, and i’m guessing that’s our ticket out of here.” “Yeah. I guess so.”* She stopped and stood up. *“Shall we then?”* I touch my arms and legs and notice the wounds from the chains are gone! *“You having healing powers too!?”* I said surprised. *“I’m special aren’t I?”*, she said right after. *“What about you? Your injuries?” “My injuries are okay now. That’s how I discovered them after all, after being kicked by the other you”*, she said. *“Ah. Sorry about that.”* I felt really guilty about it. I got back on my feet and she did the same thing right afterwards. *“Also, you looked cool when you responded back to him...”* Ezili then rubbed her nose looking away. *“Who, the other me?” “Yeah. Anyways... Let’s go!”* we both went to the door and prepared ourselves to leave the dome. *“Ready?”* I asked, looking

at her as she was right beside me. *“Yup!”* she said *“Also, Ezili, thanks for staying beside me when I was sleeping and in the fight, for everything really”* “Everything?” she asked. *“Yes, because I feel in my previous life, you have done a lot more to help me.”* She looked at me and smiled. *“I guess so.”* I then put my hand on the doorknob and opened the door slowly. We both took our first step outside and began our journey of life.



5 Things I Would Say to Other Latinx Teens



1. Know that someone out there loves you, no matter what.
2. You'll find happiness, just be patient.
3. Everything may seem to be collapsing, just hold out a hand and someone will try to pick you up again.
4. Never give up on yourself, there is no point if you do. Nothing will change if you give up.
5. Always give yourself time to your own needs.

Chapter 6

A Seed

By Adrián T. González Figueroa

As usual, I was playing with the label on my *Rojita*. I always play with the label when I'm nervous. Which is always. I mentally rolled my eyes, chiding myself for not being more involved with the conversation going on in front of me. My Tia Lucia's sharp manicured nails kept up a steady beat on the table. Each sharp tap made me jump a bit. I looked around longingly for the waiter; he'd been kind of cute.

It was the last day my mother and I were spending in my native land of Nicaragua. She was here for business and I was here because why not? Sure. I was missing a week of school, but it was the beginning of the year. I hadn't been there since I was 8, and a visit was much overdue. I think I saw more family in the week than I even knew before then.

It went all right; family didn't pry too much,

short trip to the beach, almost falling in a volcano. You know, fun stuff. Surprisingly, no one commented on my weight. That was a true first. The only shit that bothered me was visibly indiscernible.

Being a full out Mexican-Nicaraguan immigrant, I expected my coming out to go a lot more different than it did. Meaning arms out, full support from my parents, siblings, and Mexican family was very unexpected. I had heard horror stories from other trans* friends of mine, so much so that I expected my family to have nothing but hostility. But as soon as my mother held me stronger than I thought her little arms ever could, I knew I was one of the lucky ones. It happened that way, and I was grateful.

People started calling me Nicolas and using male pronouns, and I had sunk into a warm oblivious cloud of comfort. I barely ever heard my old name anymore, save for a few random people in my school having similar ones. My dad made mistakes all the times, but corrected himself immediately. I felt accepted, and it was ok. Even my anxiety was better.

So when I got to Nicaragua and heard my *Tía* call out “*Hola Ariana!*” as her bony arms pulled me into a hug, I was understandably taken aback. It hit me like a slap in the face. Or more like an actual slap, as my *Tía* lightly tapped me on the cheek and exclaimed, “*look*

how big you've gotten. You're almost a full woman now!". I made eye contact with my mother's brown eyes over her shoulder, and she silently apologized. As we rode in the car to my *Tía's* house, I thought the bump in my throat would go away within the hour. It didn't.

It stayed for the rest of the week. My coming out was completely ignored, identity tossed aside as if it had never happened. *Ariana* here, *Ariana* there. FEMALE FEMALE FEMALE. I was so unused to it; I felt my standing diminished day by day. No one even mentioned my old name. Even my mother was afraid to say anything about it. It was only then that I began to understand what my friends had meant. I became afraid to be myself. So I tried to be a different person. The one they expected me to be.

That was how we had come to the end of the week. My aunt and mother sitting at dinner, talking animatedly about local gossip while I sulked in my seat wearing down the label of my *Rojita*. Yet my Latino blood only allowed me to ignore the gossip for so long.

Unwillingly, my attention turned back to the words floating through the air. Words judging some poor woman my aunt had worked with. The short and recognizable rumour of an affair, a burst out at work, a disgrace from the family. They were nearing the end of

the story by the time I really started paying attention.

"The poor girl lost her senses completely after that. I barely recognized her." My aunt spoke nonchalantly, waving a hand in front of her face as if to signify how mystifying it all was. My mother uncomfortably nodded along, sneaking glances at me out of the corner of her eye. But when my aunt is on a roll, you just nod along until it's all over. Or else, it turns into a discussion that will never end until she's right. It had happened all week, all the time. As the label of my Rojita finally came free, I was sick of it.

"She obviously had some kind of mental issues. Someone doesn't just go crazy 'cause a man won't love her." I was still staring at the table when the words spilled out of my mouth. I gripped the side of the table, nervous with the courage of opposing her or proud. My aunt turned her attention slowly from my mother to me, surprised someone dared to interrupt her.

"No. Sometimes people just break like that. They go crazy. People don't have so many mental problems here." And with that she turned her head back to my mother.

"Well that's entirely not true. Nicaraguans have just as much issues as North Americans." The look she gave me as she turned back was almost incredulous. It

made me feel more confident.

“Have you seen the statistics? One in 5 people in North America have mental issues. Its nowhere near as bad here.”

“That’s because if people talk about their mental issues here they end up being the evening gossip at the dinner table for you.” Her mouth shut closed as my mother’s did the opposite and fell open. My aunt recollected herself and started on a new direction, hoping to recover. New battle strategies just formed as quickly as the insults did. Her hands crossed in front of her defensively, contradicting her appeasing expression.

“Maybe everyone has mental issues. But at least we know how to deal with them here. We let them out, we get angry, we get sad, and we get emotional. Unlike Americans and Canadians, who are trained to keep it all in.” I moved forward, even more enraged than before.

“You call random fits of rage healthy? Crying uncontrollably on the street because you lost your favourite earring? That’s not normal. That’s what happens when people bottle their feelings up.”

“Nicaragua has one of the worst alcoholism rates in Latin America. That’s not just a coincidence. It’s caused by something.” My mother interrupts quietly.

“Well it’s hard to keep up with the world sometimes!” her voice raised loud enough that people at other table turned to look. *“Here our society sits with a useless socialist idiot as its president and the rest of the world expects us to move forward. All these equal rights, all these wars, and you, ARIANA, wanting to be a ‘different person’. Its ridiculous.”* She threw her arms up exasperated, shaking slightly.

My mouth shut closed. That was it. That’s what she was waiting for. It’s what had been itching at the edge of her mind for a week, maybe longer. All she had needed was for me to bring it up. Her eyes darted intently from me to my mother. A small quirk at the side of her face pulled it up, revealing what she was feeling. The thrill of saying something she wasn’t supposed to, of the power she had over us seemed to fill her up with confidence again. I shrunk away, pulling in my arms towards my bound chest in a futile attempt to keep my emotions from tumbling out and spilling all over the table.

“I-I’m going to the bathroom.” My voice sounded small and afraid. No, not afraid. Ashamed. I got up and walked away, scurrying like a little brown mouse running from the claws of a sleek blond cat. I leaned against the wooden door in the bathroom. What the hell was wrong with me? I was ashamed. So scared to be

myself, taking everyone else's opinions about who I should be over my own. I was disgusted with myself.

Back home in Canada, I encouraged my friends, told them to fight back at society. Challenge social norms and praise our community loud and proud in the face of bigots. I said all this without having to really face what they did. Now I knew. I knew how much of a coward and hypocrite I was being.

Not even two months before, Pulse had happened. I'd made a Facebook post or some trivial thing like that. We get shot down for seeking our own happiness. How ridiculous is that? Our own family can't stand us from something ridiculous like love or happiness. People in my community fight every year, every day for me. For the teenagers, the kids, the future generations. And there I was crying in the bathroom.

I pulled out my phone from my pocket. I messaged my best friend Max back home. I told them about everything going on this week. They answered in a within a minute. The light from my phone illuminated my face. I cleared my eyes and looked at the message.

"She attacked you man, but you're not wounded. You're not alone. Our community is huge. A million hands hold you up. Remember them. Plus, you've got me ;)."

A small chuckle erupted from my chest. Ah Max. With new resolve, I washed the tears from my face. I wasn't going back to the table and let her attack me again. Not for this.

When I got back to the table, my mom had pulled the conversation away, and I didn't say another word. I just stared angrily at my Tía. She ignored, looking occasionally around the room. Looking for the "niece" she apparently missed dearly or to make sure no one was looking at her, I don't know.

The next day we were set to leave. I came downstairs earlier than everyone else and sat at the kitchen table. The family tabby cat, Jensen, caressed my ankles, begging for attention. I leaned down and pet him carefully. His subdued purrs vibrated against my skin, humming a happy tune. It calmed me down. The quiet moment was broken by the sharp "*CLACK CLACK CLACK*" of heels walking across the marble floor of the dining room. Jensen dashed out of sight, behind the fridge, and I stood and turned to face my Tía.

Her sharp features matched her sharp outfit. Businesswoman. Leader. Boss. Every time she walked into a room, it felt like when the principal called you to the office. You sat there with your hands in your lap, head down, and then she walked in, with that cold hard

stare, you KNEW you were in deep shit. It was ridiculously intimidating.

Now was no different. Her lips pulled back into what I assumed was an attempt at a motherly smile, but was overshadowed by the daggers in her eyes. I flinched a bit, and recovered as best I could. She spoke first.

“Buenos Dias Ariana. Do you want some cereal?” she moved into the kitchen to make a cup of coffee, never taking her eyes off me.

“No, I’m fine,” I answered. *“I know where the cereal is. If I was hungry I would’ve taken some.”*

The smile on her face swiped right off. Her knuckles on the coffee cup went white, and she gripped the counter with the other.

“Listen here. I have dealt with your... lifestyle the entire time you’ve been here. I’ve tried to be nice; I’ve tried to ignore it. And then you have the audacity to be rude when I express my own way of life.”

I stepped up to the counter, closer to her, and leaned in. *“It’s not a lifestyle. It’s who I am. The difference between my ‘way of life’ and yours is that yours hurts people. Mine doesn’t. I’m not hurting anyone. I’m just something you don’t agree with, so you*

act like it affects you so much so you can condemn me for it."

With every word out of my mouth, she looked more and more like an angry Chihuahua because of how skinny she is. It almost made me want to laugh. But if I did, I was sure she would tear me apart with her razor sharp manicured nails. So I didn't.

"Ever heard of the saying 'When in Rome'? Well it very finely applies here. Conform to our culture or get out. Except we can never get rid of you, because you're family. And I love you. So you need to change for the people who love you." I scoffed at her. My own anger builds in my belly.

"Love? You love me? I don't think I've ever heard a bigger load of shit come out of your mouth."

She gasped, and took a few steps back. I came around the counter, chasing her back. *"If you really loved me,"* I continued, *"You would try your best to accept me. You would try and support me. You would ask me questions about things you don't understand. And even if you didn't get it at first, I would stick through it. But all you do is attack and attack and attack. So excuse me if I don't believe you love me."*

I turn away from her speechless gaping mouth, and head back to my room to finish packing. Without

looking at her, I yelled back over my shoulder.

“You better get used to it Tia. You better get used to me and my community and our ‘way of life’. It may only exist so prominently in North America now. But before you know it, it’ll be sprouting right under your nose.”

When my mother and I came down with our suitcases, ready to go, my *Tía* was nowhere to be found. Instead, my older cousin, Alejandro, sat at the table texting someone. He looked up and offered a much friendlier smile than his mother had.

“Mama says she can’t drive you to the airport today. Something came up at work apparently. So I’ll drive you. We gotta stop somewhere first.”

As we cruised through the green paradise that was Nicaragua, the sun warmed my face as the wind kept sweat from forming. For the first time since I arrived and first heard that dreaded “*Ariana*”, I felt good.

We pulled up to a small but cosy house in a quiet neighbourhood. There was nothing particularly significant about the neighbourhood, but it was nice. “*Why are we here?*” I asked my cousin. He unbuckled his seatbelt and looked up sheepishly.

“I’m picking someone up. We’re uh, going on a

date afterwards.” I understood his blush then. “*Oh.*” My mother uttered. “*Sorry we had to take you away from it.*”

“*No worries.*” We shook his head and opened the door, stepping one foot out. He paused for a second before looking back at both of us. “*Just uh, don’t tell my mom.*” He didn’t wait for an answer as he stepped out completely and walked toward the house.

My mother and I looked at each other in curiosity. After a few seconds, a tall lean man opened the door. At first glance, he looked thin, but the biceps and *pecks* were there. One just wouldn’t notice because he had such a cute face. A few freckles littered his nose and cheeks, and light brown curls framed light brown eyes face. A long nose bridge combined with a button rounded end and prominent cheekbones created an almost elf like appearance. It sounds unappealing, but it worked so well for him. The best part is how his face lit up like New Years Eve when he saw my cousin.

I glanced at my mom. She got it too. We both smiled silent hoorays. He drove the rest of the way to the airport silently. A quiet conversation was happening in the front seats, but I tried not to eavesdrop.

As the car pulled away after dropping us off, I smiled and waved at them both. Shyly, they waved back. My *Tía* was going to have to get used to it sooner than I

thought.

They had a rough road ahead, but they were a seed. A seed of an idea, which would turn into a word, which would turn into a shout. A shout that would rattle all of the people of Nicaragua. I couldn't wait to come back and shout with them too.

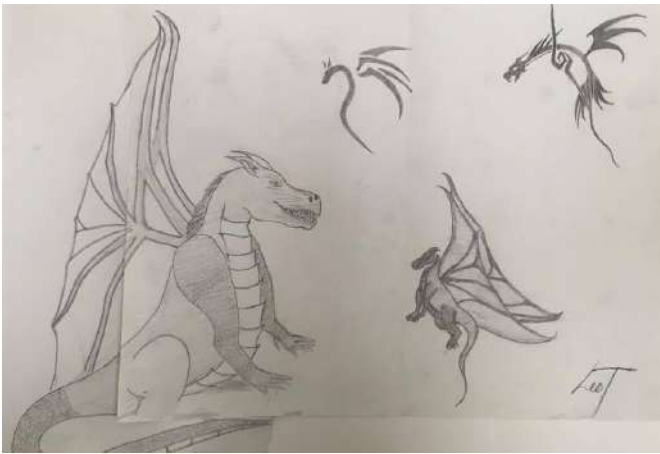
Chapter 7

Secrets in the Known

By Leonardo Torrejón*,
Juana Valentina Mendez & Jhonny Gil

It was a morning like any other. The alarm woke me up and I saw my schedule beside the door. I didn't see anyone else in the room. That was weird because my roommates were always there. I had the weirdest dream ever. It's not the first time I've had it and it was all I could think about. The dream starts with me, around two years old. There were many people in a room, but my attention was on two of them: a man and a woman. The guy was tall with brown hair. He had a little dragon tattoo on his hand that looked more like a birthmark; the same I have. The man looked around forty years old and he was yelling and struggling on the ground with two soldiers, pinning him down. He was looking at a woman at the other side of the room. She was beautiful. She kind of reminded me of myself: she had big green eyes,

blonde hair, and her skin was white as a pearl. I bet she had a beautiful smile. She was crying and telling me that she loved me. This is when my dream always ended; not because it didn't continue, but because something always woke me up.



As my roommates entered the room, they were yelling and laughing. Bryan had a cake in his hands, Alejandra had birthday candles and matches, and finally, Angie had a card and a little box wrapped in old newspaper. I wasn't expecting anything, but I did like the surprise. As they began singing me happy birthday, Angie gave me the box and Alejandra put the candles on the cake, and lit them. I love these guys, they are the

closest thing I have to a family. I lived my whole life in this place; it's a military base. I was told that war destroyed the environment and killed most of humanity. We were created in labs to be super soldiers in search of peace for all of humanity.

The speakers turned on, and we had to stand up for the anthem. Right after it ended, we heard in the announcements that I was being asked to talk with the Colonel. He was supposed to be the brightest, bravest, and smartest of all. He was the founder and creator of everything in this place, even us. He led people to safety in the last war in which most of the population died. Everyone told us how dangerous it is outside and how we wouldn't survive there. That's why we are being trained to be braver, faster, stronger and smarter than normal people and animals.

After chatting with my friends for a bit, I went to the colonel's office which was in the center of the base in a big and nice building. On my way there, I saw injured people coming from outside the barrier. I tried to ask them the reason behind their condition, but no one answered me. I then continued because the colonel was a busy man and I had a schedule to maintain.

There was an armed man with him and they were discussing something that looked serious, the colonel had an expression of anger in his face, and the other guy

was giving him a letter while he was saying something. Out of nowhere his secretary appeared behind me and told me to wait outside because the colonel was busy. While I was waiting on the sofa, I wondered if the colonel remembered that he had called me. Then, I realized that he had congratulated all of us on our birthdays personally.

I saw the man getting leaving the colonel's office. The colonel followed him. They both had worried faces. Suddenly, six words came out from the colonel's mouth, "*We are waiting for future attacks.*" What were they talking about, I wondered? "*Mr. Leonardo you can go in now,*" said the secretary, smiling at me. I nervously went inside, asking myself, what were they talking about? Are they planning future attacks soon? What kind of attacks and why? Who is attacking? And to who? I thought we were in peace!

The colonel went behind a nice wooden desk. There were two things on top of it that caught my attention. It was two photographs: one of a girl about my age, and the other photograph had the colonel with a woman and the girl in the first picture. I had never seen any of the girls in the picture. It was weird because everyone, even me, admired the colonel, but we didn't know much about him, least of all, soldiers lower in rank like me.

"Oh Mr. Leonardo, what a lovely day to have you

in my office, on this really special occasion," said the Colonel. *"Aren't you excited?"* I nodded. *"Let me give you a very spec-"* The secretary interrupted. She told him that he had to sign some important papers because those were going to be sent in the helicopter that had just arrived. He apologized and told me to wait just a few minutes for him to get back.

The words he said to the other guy were echoing in my head. Is there a war that we don't know about? I remembered that the colonel had received a letter from the same guy. So I decided to find it and read it. The colonel left the letter on the desk, next to a bottle of rum. I looked for it and I saw a picture. There was the lady from my dream. It was so weird, I thought she was a product of my imagination or a nightmare that only haunted me. Her traits didn't change much, but in the photo she looked older: with more scars, and she was using old clothes. The letter was kind of a report of a mission, where it said that they were taking provisions to the camp but a convoy had attacked them, lead by *Rosse*, the face of the revolutionary army.

I didn't understand any word in the paper, but I kept reading. This woman named Rosse had kidnapped two men in the provision mission. The rest of the people that escaped from her came back here with serious wounds. She was searching for a guy named Tony, who was supposed to be kept in this base camp. Although I

lived all my life here, I never saw or heard someone with those descriptions. The report said that one of the officers told her that Tony was kept in the south wing of the camp, in room 216. I didn't know about the existence of that room. I had spent much of my time in my childhood searching for adventures and exploring everything, I had always been so curious as a child.

The colonel came in while I was reading his letter. My instinct made me bend down under the desk and pretend that I was searching something I'd dropped. The colonel gave me a look as if he suspected something, but he didn't say anything. He looked at me for a couple of seconds and after that said *"I'm sorry about that"* *"It's okay"*, I said. We both shook hands and he congratulated me for all I had achieved throughout the year, and wished me happy birthday. After that weird moment, I decided not to ask any questions, so I made an excuse to leave. He bought it and I went directly towards the south part of the camp.

Suddenly, I felt my stomach growl, then I realized that it was lunchtime and everyone would be at the cafeteria. It would be the perfect time to search for the man the colonel had spoken to. I walked quickly, then heard someone calling my name. I faked as if I didn't hear anything, but it was Bryan. He came running towards me, patted me on my shoulder, and asked *"Where are you going so fast? It's lunchtime and you're*

always hungry!” I didn't answer at first. But he was my best friend, so I decided to tell him everything that I had happened in the colonels office. He wanted to come with me, but I told him to go tell the others in case I needed help.

I went towards the south end and saw someone getting food ready in a little car. He was walking in the same direction as me. I followed him, hoping that he was carrying the food for the guy I was looking for. He went inside a room, but I knew that room: it doesn't have anything in it. I waited outside the door.

Some minutes later, the guy comes out without the food. This was my opportunity. I went in when no one was seeing. It was the same old room that I knew. There wasn't anything different, so I decided to search for something new. Maybe before, I never saw anything weird because I didn't search for it.

This time I felt wind coming from the slots of the wooden floor. Then I noticed that there was a handle on the floor. I pulled it down and it made a secret stair that it was hidden in the wall appear. I followed them and I found a metallic door which I opened. I went inside and what I saw was shocking: the man that I had seen in the dreams I was having was in there. He was sitting in a chair eating the food the other guy had brought him, chained to a metallic table that came out of the floor.

He saw me and said: *“Now they're sending kids to do their job?” “Who are you?”, I said. “If you're doing the dirty work now, why don't you know?”, he answered. “Is that part of your game or do you think I'm stupid enough? I'll never tell you my wife's plans, not after you kidnapped my son and all those little kids fifteen years ago only to make your experiments and get your super soldiers for the war you're starting!”*

I was shocked, I didn't expect something like that at all. Who is this man? Is he really the same man I saw in my dream? I explained to him why I was there and told him about my dream. He gave me a look like if I would've touched his soul. He asked me: *“Can I see your hand?”* Was he talking about my birthmark? I showed him and he started crying. He told me that I was his son. It surprised me that no one knew about this place. He told me that outside the barriers, a war was being carried. The population was very small and the government had fallen to tyrants who only sought to quench their thirst for power. Those people started kidnaping kids to make a new and better army.

We had been separated since I was a child and my mother was the leader of the revolution. My “father” told me that he used to work for the government. He was a genetic scientist that designed a machine that could convert any trained human into an actual super soldier.

But there were some requirements. He said that after turning nineteen they were going to be able to use that machine, and control us as if we were robots. That's why they kidnapped us and made us think that we were created by them.

We then heard an explosion! I told him quickly what I had read in the letter in the colonel's office. He told me that the revolution was happening and this was the only time that we were going to be able to escape. *Escape? Why should I escape?*, I thought. I let him go out of his chains. When we got outside we saw a shooting encounter between people that I knew and a group of people that came from the south part of the camp. They had made a gap in the barrier and we were too close.

My dad grabbed me by my hand and we started running towards them. I pulled my hand back and said: *"You have to go. I'll stay here. My friends are here."* My dad looked at me very worried and told me: *"You don't know these people, they are savages! After you turn nineteen you will become another person and won't be able to control your actions. I don't know if I will be able to find you again!"*

"Leo!", I heard Alejandra yell my name from a few yards away. Bryan must of convinced her and Angie to come help too. They came running with backpacks

and guns in their hands. I quickly told them what had happened.



Bryan said *“If what you said is true, we are with you with whatever you decide. There is a bigger attack coming and we were ordered to get everything we could and evacuate to the air ramp, so we can go in the helicopters.”*

“We have to go with people who are attacking the base”, I replied. Angie started panicking and said: *“Why would we go with them? They are attacking us and you wanna go there and ask them for ice cream?”*

I didn't know what to say and Bryan saw it in my eyes. *"I don't know what is happening right now but we always knew that there was something wrong here. Now we just have to trust and go with Leonardo. I don't know why exactly, but I do know that Leo would never let any harm come to us"*, said Bryan.

An explosion nearby threw us to the floor. The reinforcements on both sides had just arrived and we were in the middle of the fight. Out of nowhere, some people from the south barrier found us. They were going to shoot us but then one of them saw Tony. He yelled to stop fire and he took his mask off. It was the woman who I had also seen in my dream. She went running towards Tony, opening her arms to hug him when suddenly she dropped to the ground.

A reinforcement team had just come from the north and the battle got worse. Tony grabbed her in his arms while one of her teammates lead us towards the gap in the barrier and us covered as we ran towards it. The lady saw me and recognized me at first view. I didn't know what to do. Everything was confusing, now was worse than ever. So many things to think about. The last thing I said before we went outside the barrier was *"I will come back to save you all."*

The End

5 Things I Would Say to Other Latinx Teens



1. You are amazing! You are able to do anything you want to do! Just try hard and a lot! Things with time will look better and you will be better handling stuff.
2. Don't be scared to ask for help. You should be shameless (in a good way).
3. Don't think someone is better than you, there is always someone better than you, as you are always better than someone else.
4. Just try to make friends, but don't ever forget who you are and your beliefs and who you are.
5. Don't ever try to impress others, impress yourself! Try always to be a better person!

Chapter 8

The Unknown

by Anja Ornelas

Introduction

It was the start of another day where I was surrounded by everything I loved: my family, my friends and somewhere to call home. I took a moment to take it in and appreciate all I had. Everywhere I went seemed like an adventure filled with positivity and vibrant colours. But suddenly, I woke up. Was I just dreaming? I opened my eyes slowly. I felt disoriented as a cold breeze brushed above my arms. I felt an inwards shiver down my back. My whole body was sore but I had no explanation for it.

I found myself lying on a white bed that I had never come across before and saw a dim light bulb above me, lighting up a part of the room. Slight panic built up

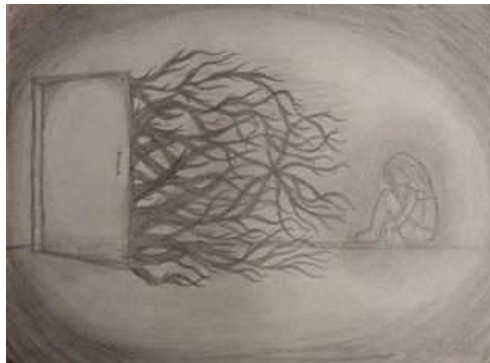
inside me. Curious of my surroundings, I sat up cautiously. My eyes widened as I saw what appeared to be the walls slowly closing in with every breath I took. I got up and searched for an exit, a way to escape.



Escaping

Behind me, there was a gray metal door slightly opened. Something inside of me questioned it but my mind told me I needed to get out as fast as possible. I ran towards the door with every bit of energy I had, but as hard as I struggled, I could not reach it. With every step I took, the door started to fade and close. I slowed down,

starting to lose hope in my actions. As I fell on my knees, my mind went blank, realizing I had no concept of time or reality. My mental state started to deteriorate. I didn't know who I was, where I was, or what I was trying to escape from. I lay motionless, on a cold ceramic floor surrounded by dull white walls painted with nothing but disappointment. There was no way out. I was trapped in a place I never imagined could be possible to exist.



The Box

I felt a tear running down my cheek. It somehow felt refreshing. It cleared my vision, allowing me to see a box in the corner of the room. I approached it slowly, seeing this as my only hope. The box was a boring light brown.

Not surprising to me, as everything else in the room was just as bland. I opened the box hoping there was a key inside. I could almost taste freedom. Inside, there was a book and a pencil. I was outraged! I threw the book across the room, making a small dent in the wall. Careless, I walked away from the box. I laid down on the stone-hard bed, feeling weak and lightheaded.

Mirror

Starting to feel claustrophobic, I stood up determined to look for an exit. I slowly started becoming even more distressed as there was nothing else in the room other than the bed and the useless book I found in the box. The anxiety, fear, impatience, and hatred inside me, were not at all helping with the situation. I looked under the bed realizing I didn't search the whole room. Under the bed, there was a mirror. I pulled it out slowly. I held it up to my face but there was no reflection. The only thing I saw in the mirror was the dented wall and the book behind me. Almost as if the mirror was laughing at my foolish actions. I became more and more irritated when things weren't going my way. I calmed myself down and approached the book. I opened the book to see what was written inside, giving it a second

chance. Blank. The whole book was empty. No pictures, no words, no emotion inside. I felt confused, lost with no direction, feeling trapped once again.



Memories

I felt a sharp pain travel from my eyes to the back of my head. I closed my eyes for a moment and felt nostalgic as I saw a variety of familiar faces, similar to the ones in my dream. I wasn't sure where they were from. It seemed like I was having flashbacks from another life I wasn't aware of. These vivid moments allowed me to relive what I thought were past experiences. Some of these visions were filled with

positivity, but others were pure disappointment and loneliness. I wasn't sure whether or not I had lived through these moments and why they were coming back to me in this way. Although, I did know one thing. These brief moments were important to who I was. I felt an urge to remember them somehow. Maybe they would help me figure out who I used to be before being caught in what I felt was never ending suffering.

Drawings

I picked up the book and the pencil. I tried writing down what I was feeling during the flashbacks, but it wasn't working. I tried to learn how to be patient, but my feelings took over. I simply gave up. I started doodling purely out of boredom. The drawing was of a person stuck in a maze. I stared at the drawing realizing something phenomenal. Somehow, the drawing expressed how I was feeling during this time. I felt lost in who I was and where I was. Over time, I eventually began to recall all of the flashbacks and started to draw them in the book.

Realization

Slowly, I began to realize what all of these memories meant. They seemed to tell a story about me and who I was. I started to remember everything about myself. Some drawings represented being shy around others yet confident when I expressed my opinions. Others were about having a positive attitude, no matter the situation. Many drawings were about being able to conquer my fears and achieve my dreams. Also, I expressed my love. I loved many things: people, nature, knowledge and music, but most importantly I loved myself unconditionally. All of these drawings were aspects of the development of myself. The person I was before I lost my way of being. When a major challenge got in my way, I forgot who I was. I went to sleep with an open mind, having hope for the future.

Hope

I woke up to a beautiful sight. The door had appeared again. This time it was different. I did not feel an urge to rush out of the room. I saw this as a new opportunity, not a way to escape from my fears. I picked

up my book and opened the door to see a hallway. The hallway was pure darkness, but I was not afraid. Although I didn't know what was beyond the dark, I was ready to face anything that stood in my way. I knew I would always go back to remembering the real me.

5 Things I Would Say to Other Latinx Teens



1. Don't change who you are for others.
2. Don't compare yourself to others; try to reach your OWN goals.
3. You can achieve anything you put your mind to; don't stop because others tell you too.
4. Do not be afraid to try new things; you never your options on something until you try it.
5. Learn to let go of mistakes, unwanted memories, or regrets; you will never be able to be at your happiness if you keep all your negativity within you

VOICES FOR CHANGE

Anthology

Casa - Pueblito is a non-profit, international organization that facilitates community development and intercultural learning with a focus on youth in Canada and Latin America. One of our programs, *Voices for Change: Developing Leadership in Inclusive Education*, has been a Toronto and Peel-based program working to increase Latinx student success and retention rates, by providing a space for Latinx secondary student to champion for diversity and inclusivity in our schools and communities through the Youth Change-Maker program. This year, 7 Latinx secondary students participated in our Youth Change-Maker program. During the program, the youth did a series of creative leadership projects, which empowered them to illustrate and express their experiences as Latinx youth using a range of mediums. Short stories, visual art and abstraction pieces, along with statements and poetry were used as creative outlets for self-expression and channels to critically explore topics of identities, discrimination and barriers faced by Latinx students, both personally and in academic settings, while reflecting on strategies to cope with and overcome such challenges.

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