

# Heart Out

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For my mom who stayed with me all the way

Heart Out is based on true events in my life. Be advised that there are hard things to read throughout these short stories. If any questions or feedback please feel free to email me at [margiecastejon20@gmail.com](mailto:margiecastejon20@gmail.com)

## Work at McDonalds

Since I was a kid I was always told to “do good in school because you don’t want to end up working at McDonalds.” It has always been the perfect threat to make kids do average in school and hopefully pursue further education. See, I wish I was told to work fast food. Currently I am a manager at a well known fast food restaurant, but it is not McDonalds. Similarly to McDonalds, everyday I have more than 100 interactions and each one of them takes 210 seconds to create a good or dangerous experience. I hope to be that mom that sends her kids to work at the age of 16 so they understand the terrible hours, the minimum wage pay, taxes, expectations from companies, and most importantly to learn how and when to stand up for themselves. At my job there are three main types of customers, the good customer, the annoying customer, and the shitty customer, and we have all been at least one of them in our lives. The good customer asks about your day, they don’t give you a hard time, and they leave satisfied. The annoying customer wants to pay separately through the drive-thru, will tell you “I’ll get you fired”, will ask how many pieces on a 5 piece meal, and most importantly they will say “hello, helloooo” right after you told them you would take their order shortly. The shitty customer will throw the trash can and break the window, some will want to get physical and maybe just maybe someone throws a death threat your way, and most importantly they are the ones that make you hate your job. The first weeks were rough, customers threaten you to get you fired by getting the manager, but we have all made mistakes and no one will get fired because one customer was uncomfy. Working customer service teaches you at a young age how to treat people, learn about work ethic, and build responsible relationships with customers and coworkers. It helps your character to learn how to control reactions, it creates a defense mechanism that is important to learn. My work experience is full of exhausted memories, countless mistakes, conflicted decisions, and multiple hours of work, but everything has shaped me to be better. After all, working at a fast food restaurant is not as bad as you think it is.

## Mirror

It was a cold December night, far away from home in Chicago when I noticed Stephanie in the bathroom. Stephanie was crouching in the corner of the tub, what a weird place to be at. Her hair was in a messy bun, there wasn't much to see. Stephanie is a beautiful woman, she has long curly hair, a pair of hips that contrast with her thighs, but there was one thing she didn't like about herself and it was those stretch marks on her belly, they drive her crazy. I've seen them before and they are beautiful! I don't know why but everything seems beautiful to me. When people look at me they mostly look at me with disgust and that was the particular look Stephanie had on me.

She got up from the bathtub and her mascara was all over her eyes, she looked funny! I like to see my reflection through her perfectly round dark brown eyes that stare into my crystal imperfect soul. In nothing but her sweatpants and oversized shirt she left the room. It seems like Stephanie had lost weight, the bags under her eyes she covered with foundation every morning shined like the stars on that cold December night. I heard her footsteps making a noticeable path between the kitchen and the living room. Steph made her way upstairs, to me. Steph approached the doorknob and without thinking once she laid her hand, her wrist moved to the right and opened the door. She sat back at the tub and let the warm water run. It ran through the black nail polish on her toenails, made its way to her thighs, and completely soaked her pants.

*What was Stephanie thinking?* I couldn't stop to question myself.

She then later grabbed a knife, a butter knife, and touched every single matter of it. With her fingertip she touched every single side of the plastic, from the top to the bottom, she examined the knife. I found myself hypnotized by the brightness of the knife, but I wondered why was she looking at it with such determination? Determination for what? I don't know. She left the bathroom and I just stood there hanging around. I waited for Stephanie and after a couple minutes I saw the knob moving, I wondered why she was struggling to open a door, at the end of the day it was just a door. She entered and her hands were covered with red warm painting, just like the water running through the black nail polish. She washed it off with warm water creating a cloud that made it quite hard for me to see. The red painting shined like a pearl and was abundant like the ocean, she tried to stop it, but it was getting everywhere, even in my shoes. I saw her eyes when once again she was crying, but this time she had no mascara and had red paint. We are in a conflicted relationship, and that cold December night she told me.

"Don't look at me like that! You are not worth anyone's time, you try to put an angelic face, but it won't work with me. No one knows you better than I do, anyways you are just a reflection of me."

Her words were like rocks breaking my body into small pieces, I begged her to stop because it hurt.

"Don't do this anymore, the pain is not worth it. It hurts me!"

It felt like she was never going to stop, she did until there wasn't much to say and all of me was broken. Laying on the soft carpet next to the red painting, I noticed that the red paint was finally gone and everything was clean again, and in a blink of an eye she had left.

It's not the first time that Stephanie comes in with red paint and struggles to open the door. It wasn't the first time that she looked at me with disgust, I wanted her to ignore me, but she cared too much. The red painting makes me uncomfortable every time, I sometimes wish she was gone. I would miss the times when we sing together to her favorite music, she pulls her hairbrush and mimics it to be a microphone while I am her cheering crowd. Finally, Stephanie had left me alone, broken into many pieces on the floor. An hour later, she apologized and like glue she put everything back together, and like glue some pieces might fall apart.

Later that cold December night, Stephanie opened the door, she looked different! She had a black dress and high heels, I've never seen this type of Stephanie before. I did notice that she was rushing like always, she was looking for her "stupid lipstick." When she finally found the red lipstick, she looked at me, opened the cap, I could tell it was brand new, it looked perfect! She looked at me, opened the cap, and with her right hand she took it to her lips, and slowly decorated them with delicacy. The perfection of the ink on her perfect handmade lips showed the beautiful imperfections of being human. Before leaving she told me, "you look amazing tonight, if I could I would take you out on a date." That boosted my confidence! I still can't believe how amazing she looked! Most importantly how confident she looked with herself. I think she was going to a party and I just hope the best for her.

The lights were turned off and the light from the light pole on the street was flashing into me through the red curtain on the window. Everything around me was just clean, it smelled amazing, and felt romantic. It randomly helped to create the mood of the scene, scene in which Stephanie touches the knob, and slowly opens the door. I was excited but there was something new, a tall handsome man with dark brown curly hair, I assumed his name was David. He came in the door with Stephanie, he sat in the tub right next to her and talked. I was part of that conversation. Our conversations varied from politics all the way to death and fear, we talked about everything. Time passed by so fast, that I never noticed when their hands were together, with their fingers intertwined. It was the first time I had seen Stephanie bring someone home, especially to my presence. I kept telling them about my day as I was just there standing doing nothing but talking. I looked down and David and Stephanie were already touching their foreheads. The light of the pole was focused on them this time. I saw David, and his jawline was sharper than that butter knife Stephanie had used the other day. His eyebrows were perfect outlined math angles and beautiful Stephanie was next to him, shining on her own. I saw myself in the reflection of her beautiful brown eyes. What a moment?

It surprised me that she wasn't wearing her black dress or her heels anymore, it was two semi-naked bodies sitting next to each other finding the truth of passion and love. I was part of all of that. They stood up and he hugged her, the hug was for five seconds but it seemed like it was forever, they didn't want that moment to be over, only if I could stop time; I would grant them that wish. Her hands traveled to his cheeks and to his hair. His hands held her arms and played with her soft hair. His left hand slowly held a place on her lowered arched back. The room was getting steamy and they finally kissed.

This was the picture.

Two humans holding hands, a glued mirror, red curtains, light pole, black dress on the carpet, love printed in the air.

I felt like a third wheeler, but I'm glad I was there, I noticed love and hoped for it! Although that was very romantic, that moment wasn't the time where I noticed love portrayed to someone. Stephanie was the one portraying that love.

I've been with Steph for not that long, but I've learned her struggles and her passions. When she comes to me we discuss everything from the red paint all the way to that time with David. Sadly, I never saw David again, I saw Josh, Marc, and Karen, but she never touched the knob and opened the door for anybody again. I wonder if David meant that much to her.

Almost a year into a friendship - I think we are friends- and Stephanie came in again. She brushed her teeth as usual and washed my face. Our eyes locked at the stare of each other, her brown iris with mine, she smiled, I smiled. That was the first time she told me she had accepted me. With just a look and smile I felt that love I was always craving for. She took her toothbrush, her hairbrush we used as a microphone, took her hair supplies and everything she usually uses and left.

The last time I saw Stephanie was when she came back for her red "stupid lipstick" and she quickly stared at me and said "I've learned to love you". I haven't seen Stephanie, but if she were to read this, I would just want to say "I've learned to love myself."

I stopped counting seconds, the old conflicted Stephanie will never be back. For me I just hope for the glue to hold me together and keep the memory of an adolescent, struggling in the days of confusion and acceptance in our society, growing to be a woman shaping reflections across my mirror.

## La Revolucion

Left in 2014

Causes of war

My own country didn't want me

Death threat here and there

Someone bring their head to my hands

I did not ask to leave, never wanted to leave

But it was the gunshots at night that didn't let my mom Rest In Peace.

It's la revolución against the pigs in power.

Say we are winning, Proud of the many lives taken?

Including Saeed's mother, they aren't doing much better.

So far in my reality,

All crossing borders, my mom had to stay quiet

Or what? Do you want to go back?

The story told, the story written, no one believed.

No one believed, for a second I see the pigs

And my beloved land was destroyed.

My house, destroyed, the woman in me, destroyed

When that man at the bank touched me

And I thought my robes would save me, they saw it they didn't save me.

Saeed, you, my lotus that I want to give to,

Deny me.

Denied marriage, marriage is fake purposes to stay with each other, I'm in love

I'm in love, love with everyone,

But it's this situation that brings the bitch in me.

Cans ready, tampons ready, dollars and gold ready. Am I ready?

To move in, am I ready for a change? I want to go back when the truth was spoken

Back to my house roof and smoke a joint

I want to see my family, what has been of them?

The sun sleeping by the mountains,

The moon waking up on the other side

The air on my skin, giving me nothing but chills  
Never had to follow a rule as free,  
Now restrained to be the woman of the house,  
Of a house that's not even mine, back to the freedom I never had.



## One Gate

One gate was what separated Catharine's house and mine. My mom used to work long hours and there was no one that could babysit me. I had gone through four different sitters but all wanted to run away. My mom would call them and they would say, "sorry, I am busy tonight." Her only option was to leave me with Mrs. Catharine Memmolo. Let's say that Mrs. Memmolo and I never got along, but I'm not gonna lie, she loved me so much even after I chased her cat around the house and we broke maybe one or two jars.

Mrs. Memmolo was a thin tall woman with short grey hair and cool "drawings" on her skin, as I used to call them when I was seven. I remember eating and hating her spinach, but "Mike, eat your spinach because it will make you stronger." If I tried to say no or even dared to move my eyebrows, she would stand in front of me with her feet close together and say, "I'll call your mom!" I wasn't scared of my mom, in fact, I wanted her to call my mom so she would be back soon, but I knew Catharine had made just the perfect pumpkin pie with cinnamon.

Catharine Memmolo was married to Ricky and they decided to go on a trip to Chile, their daughter lived there. My mom got my aunt to come over and spend most nights with me until Mrs. Memmolo came back. They left for Christmas and they wouldn't be back until the New Year. My mom says that I would ask how much longer until Catharine came back. I would sit by the gate and count the leaves or play with the rocks and wait for her. They finally came back, but Ricky was by himself. Catharine wasn't with him and I asked where was she but he said: "We are moving to Chile."

Knowing that Catharine was gone made me want to cry. I was only eight but she was one of the couple people in my life that believed in me. Yes, I made her house a disaster sometimes, but we had the best zombie attacks. The thought of saving the world with her made my young heart beat faster than usual. We would see the beautiful mermaids and travel to Neverland together. We had the best Rock N' Roll parties, she had an exquisite music taste.

My mom and I decided to move to a different house a couple of years later after Catharine left. The last time I sat by the gate, I just hoped she was thinking about me from wherever she was. I hoped she was living her life full of joy, maybe getting more drawings on her skin. Now, I think of her and wonder when I will taste her pumpkin pie with cinnamon again.

Fearing

It is crazy how much people can impact your life to desire your own presence be absent

Sitting with the lonely corner of my room, nothing but darkness surrounding me. I start crying and at that moment I realize how weak I am, I end up in pain, crying under the sheets wondering if someone would ever miss me if I am gone. My voice has become smaller and quiet. I seem to like quiet, but the feeling of feeling alive slowly starts disappearing. I have become used to the silence that my thoughts are the siren calling for help that makes me insane.

*I am okay, I think*

It is stupid to feel this way, when you have it all. There is no point to feel this way when you are content with your body, intellectual, social temples, it goes far to being scared of growing up, knowing that one day I'll die, and knowing that one day the people I love will die. The ones younger than me might see me with my eyes covered and my arms crossed together on my chest on a box, or standing right beside the river while my children cry a river of tears after my absence on this world called Earth. What if no one cries my death! Ouch, sounds disappointing.

I increase the speed of my steps, two steps feel like one and my home instead of feeling closer, feels the opposite. And the pepper spray on my hand will only help me to a certain point, I am not a runner. I loudly talk to Gods and tell them "let it be you I find on my way." I'm too scared of the pale man just a few blocks away from home, that once followed me home when the sun was at its best point, and no human didn't know I could have been the next "good neighbor", "smart and full of ambition" girl to become the prey. It's hard to look like a grown up woman

when I know I am still a kid just wanting her mom to tell her a bedtime story and kiss goodnight. It's hard to live in a society where the guy I work with gets paid higher when I work as hard as him, when I burn my skin trying to serve the food. It is hard to work at the food industry and have a customer tell you "maybe I should be the one teaching you how to do your job and many other stuff." He will never teach me how to do my job, because I am too proud and ready to learn on my own, this is what living in the twenty-first century looks like, always through the eyes of overpowering the weak.

Side note:

Do not Fear of death, it'll happen. You'll be alone but don't follow your Agenda.

## Painful Description Of Father's Day part 1

When I was 7 years old, my elementary school would come and invite everyone to come and celebrate Father's Day. That was when my 7 year old fragile self used to cry three nights before the event. That's when I realized that I did not have a father. My parents separated when I was 2 years old. Since that time, I've lost track of my biological father and my mom has been by my side for 17 years. Growing up, I would see my friends getting picked up by their parents. I wanted my parents to pick me up, but my dad wasn't there and my mom was trying to fit in both roles, which she couldn't because she was absent most times. Basically, I was on my own and had a hard time processing my feelings. As a kid, there aren't many times when an adult will sit down and tell you what is going on. With the little information you get, you start blaming people and forgiving is not part of your vocabulary. I used to be rough on myself, I would most times blame myself for the separation of my parents when in reality, I had nothing to do with it and it wasn't my fault.

Years later, I moved to a private school, where I had friends with successful parents. The following year, we celebrated Father's Day. My friends dressed up as the mirroring image of their fathers. Instead, I dressed up as a hairdresser with an apron, because my mom was a hairdresser and she sewed for a factory. I started to accept reality and realized that even though my biological father was never there, it didn't mean that my family wasn't going to be there to support me. I began to get involved with different classmates and created friendships that are still standing to this day. Yes, I'll admit that absence sucks but it's only for a while because then you start to forget what they looked like and that they are just a memory. The absence of something or someone starts feeling like nothing after the years go by. After you make more friends and start new adventures all sorts of guilt, anger, and rencor fade away. Anger and rencor became my friends and my biggest mistake was never talking about it with my family, I didn't want to be the center of attention. I didn't want to be another problem.

As I became older, it became harder to understand: Why me? Why does it have to be that way? I had more questions but no one to answer them. Until this day it's still hard to comprehend why my dad decided to leave and even though we have talked about it, I feel that more happened. He usually says, "I did not love your mom anymore." That leaves me hanging with more questions like did you love me anymore? Was it location that emotionally separated us?

When my uncle used to play "Don't Stop Believin" on my way to school and we would sing to the top of our lungs it would light up my day. Why didn't I have a dad like him? I had to understand that he was just my uncle. Over the years many people have become part of my life, but when I met my dad I cried. My emotions were confused and still are. I saw him and then I saw my reflection, he is tall with curly hair, big brown eyes and a deep voice. I would cry for my mom and he would say things like "why do you cry, if I'm here?" and I would stay quiet. All that

anger I thought I had learned to manage came back. The worst attitude would come out of me until I made him cry once. I loved my sisters even my step mother but the problem was with him. Everyday for a year, I tried to get closer but it was impossible. I would just think about that time when my uncle told me “Margie you have to jump off the car” because it was burning and how he put my safety first and then his own. Little things that my dad would say, made things harder for me to forgive him, made me want my life back. The last time I saw him, I still felt like a stranger to him. Looking at his eyes I said, “would you still support me even after distance comes between us again?” To my surprise he said, “I just think you have a better life here.” I am glad I moved to Philly out of a painful relationship, but I do admit that I miss him, I hope he knows that.

I am not upset with my biological father, I forgive him if there is anything to forgive and I wish him the best. He has a new family and I am happy for them, I hope my sisters have a different childhood than I did. The last time I saw him I told him I just hoped the best for him and even though we hadn't talked in a while, the last time we did we fought, I still want the best for him and I'll be here to give the support I never got. I've realized that family is anyone who welcomes you to their life. After all the pain I've learned that I'm not the bad guy in this story and that I never was, neither was him.

## Painful Description Of Father's Day part 2

My favorite part of becoming an adult is laughing at life and having the front row seat. It is crazy how everything becomes so measured like a routine and still very random. My finances are careless and so controlled, it feels accomplished. I have a long way to go but the fact that I do everything on my own now makes me breathe a little more. Although it gets easier, sometimes I get stuck. My mom and I have a beautiful relationship and it is very understanding, she is slowly letting me open my wings to fly, but any day she could cut them for me to fall and come back to reality. My dad is here but he is not. Our relationship is one phone call away and a 2 hour flight, 30 hour train ride, or a 23 hour car ride. You would imagine like a normal dad and daughter's relationship, he might be very clingy and I might be his everything but till this day that is not the case. Forgiveness has become part of our relationship and we hold each other to a high standard waiting for one to fail the other. I resent him for leaving without explanation and he resents me for being distant, but I learned it from him. That really shouldn't be an excuse, but the little love I have received has not come from him and honestly that hurts more.

Life is full of expectations and we do not meet them at all. My dad and I we are constantly proving each other our worth, we feel each other's superiority, and we are hot headed humans, but the most genuine about our relationship are the hugs, the "I care about you", and the advice. I don't call him for Father's day anymore, I choose to forget. He calls me for two minutes on my birthday. Slowly working on a healthier relationship we learn more about each other's characters. It is funny, my mom knows our characters, but my dad and I can't seem to ever understand each other. Going back to what I wrote in Part 1, I see all of the pain and resentment I was holding and I could only imagine how he feels. I love his wife. She is amazing, she trusts me and we talk a lot. My sisters are my everything and over the years I have learned that family is home. You will always feel at home when you have your family around you.

## My Fall

My love

I promised on the third day we met  
Like the vows shared before the I do's  
Promised to not hurt you and to fight for our love  
Promised to not give up and not push away

Love who seemed to be foreign  
Just when I thought I knew you, I didn't  
Fearing that you could be gone one day  
And when that day came, I cried

Cried like a baby for the first time,  
Cried for hours under the light of the moon  
Under my blankets where we were one  
Next to my pillow as it had your scent

Cried for help, trying to forget those feelings  
Only the good feelings as you never made me feel unloved  
Until I noticed your absence.

You weren't there to tell me you loved me,  
To hug me, to fall asleep with your fingers running down my hair  
You were gone.  
The night had never felt so long, even the moon had the stars  
And I had lost my first only love

Your silence spoke, it hurt me more  
Confounded to my thin walls  
Crying under my breath, so not even the dust would hear me.  
As the tears disappeared on my shirt, I kept crying  
Slowly killing myself.

Maybe overthinking it and hoping it was all a very bad dream  
You had told me you loved me that night and  
I just wonder what I do? What didn't I do?

Going through our conversations and wished I said I love you more  
It's like falling down from a cliff,  
I don't know what is like, I just know that every second I fear and I'll be further from you

My words don't even make sense

I tear up to the thought of you

Going through the pictures and texts is even harder because your smile enchanted me

And made me feel like no one did



## Wealth Health Romance

“5..4..3..2..1.. Happy New Year!” everybody shouted. As the crystal ball in New York City got to the top, the fireworks broke out into the sky in Sydney. As someone gave their last breath, a new member would have been given their first. 12 grapes one for every single month, my mom had to run to the closest Shoprite, she couldn’t believe she had forgotten about the grapes. Each grape meant a prosperous and healthy month. Failing the tradition in my family meant dry hungry times of scarcity. All of us hoped for wealth, romance, and health, holding tight to our resolutions to kick off the year with the right foot. Well, that lasted for a couple of hours and business got serious.

On January 2nd, wildfires attacked Australia causing the death of many animals and the loss of their natural habitats. Across the world, people helped economically, protested and put the screws into a climate change, and we hoped for the Earth. Later that day, Iranian General Qasem Soleimani was killed in a US drone strike. US President Donald Trump had given the authorization and his tweets made it clear that he was ready for war. Today, my generation uses social media as the big platform where we stand together, joke... make memes, and inform the world about what is happening. While many were worried about being drafted, only five days later China had been covered with a virus, literally. With a Third World War about to break out in our hands, some people in our government underestimated the power of COVID-19. And so it was in that same week that the first death due to the virus was reported, America would have been witnessing an impeachment process for the third time. By January 20th, just 20 days into the new year and a new decade, America reported the first coronavirus case in Washington state and since then it is one wave after the other.

I was preparing for my Lacrosse season at a brand new school that had Asbestos for the first 3 months of the school year in 2019. Everything was running smoothly until paranoia started invading my head. “What if the virus gets to Philly?” My head was full of so many what-ifs that it was messing with my mental health. Physically, I was doing great and intellectually, I just wanted to give up with the SAT prep, but I couldn’t. No matter what, I had to keep striving and proving to my mom that I could deal with practice, school, and a job and home all at the same time. My body and mind started to feel more tired as the days went by and summer was right around the corner, I couldn’t wait for my junior year to be over. On January 1st I had promised, “to keep up no matter what.” When I felt like stopping “no matter what, keep going” When I felt like jumping off a cliff “keep going, no matter what” When running the last 5 minutes of work or at practice and those 5 last sentences of my essay, I would repeat “keep going no matter what” What was the “what” that was going to stop me? Would it be stopping me from what I felt obligated to? So by March 12th, I was out of school. I had gone to my last practice and it was the last time I saw my friends and on March 13th the US was on National Emergency and we were all going crazy!

The Sunday of the week prior to March 13th, I was supposed to go on a date, but the virus stopped it thankfully because after that I felt heartbroken and the love I had asked for on New Year's Eve wasn't desired anymore. While my aunt in Spain was in lockdown I was freely walking the streets of Philly on my way to work, that was all I had left. My mom had stopped working and she found a job at making face masks. As the days passed by, everything changed, there was no toilet paper on the Walmart shelves. Everybody was freaking out and it saddened me. I felt lonely and worthless and thought of attempting with my life, but I had other things in mind.

It brought me back to the old middle school days and wanting to run with my classmates chasing each other to my last breath. The craziness of the year, the unexpected happened, and death.

It was very funny! I wore a white bra, red lipstick, and green socks. Green socks to help me stand above scarcity, the red lipstick to help me kiss with passion, and the white bra to hold my monument and give me peace. New Year's Eve is the time to wish with illusion and hope. We wish for a prosperous year full of health, wealth, and romance. Us, humans have a tendency of believing and hoping for the best. We are innocent to failure and disaster! We cry when we face our fears and desillusions and New Years is the remedy to heal our poor broken souls.

## College Essay

All writers have secrets and our biggest fear is that no one will hear our story. That was my case when writing my college essay during the summer of 2019. A total of 650 words, nothing over because they might not read it, nothing less because they might think I am lazy. I planned to tell them my secret and then just maybe they would want to give me opportunities, but what kind of opportunities does an undocumented student get? Here is what I sent:

Here is a secret that not everyone knows about me, I am an undocumented immigrant. One day, my mom said, "Tomorrow, we are leaving and we are never coming back." I didn't get a chance to say goodbye to anyone. And that's how just at eleven years old, I set on an unforgettable journey that changed my life. I used to live in one of the most dangerous countries in Latin America, Honduras. I thought we were taking a relaxing airplane ride, but my trip was elongated to 28 remarkable traumatizing days on foot.

Those days gave me the adrenaline of a lifetime, all of the running and hiding became like a cops and robbers game. I was hunted by the Mexican police at night, but in the morning, I was a tourist dazed by Mexico's beauty. Most of the action happened at night, from walking corn fields to jumping into buses, everything was planned. We must not get caught or they would send us back to Honduras and that would have been worse.

As children, part of our early education is learning about maps and their story. I always imagined that I was one of the crew members next to the cartographer watching out for any possible threats in our journey. Our mission was to escape to refuge but just like the pirates and cartographers, we were eager to see the full picture and scream eureka. One of the moments that I feared the most was when I hung from a tire to cross *El Rio Grande*. While on the tire, the waves would drag me away. I would slip through the tire and my view became invisible that my eyes were getting adjusted to the water until the oxygen started to scarce. My feet were tied to the grounds, making it a fight to come up.

On April 3rd, 2014, I had done so much traveling that my feet wanted to give up. My hands hated me, but my conscience had never been this happy. I remember walking by the fields, hearing the coyotes crying my welcome, walking on what was not soil, but old clothes and items of the many lost refugees. I was hungry and injured but the air had never felt freeing. The lights of a patrolling car blinded my eyes to the reflection of a tall man, friendly at first, but his mouth wouldn't leave the f word and Mexico alone.

At the detention center, I was placed in a small room, *la hielera*. I had never been so cold in my life that thought of it, freezes my bones. I was told I was a criminal, but I was a good and smart child. The patrol officers told me that I would be at the center for months. Covered in sheets of aluminum foil while eating a piece of bread my mom and I had shared, they told us to

go to our new home. At the dawn of April 10th 2014, I arrived in Norfolk, Virginia. After that day, life became a game with new levels to pass, but I'm too far to start all over again and too determined to pause.

I did not cross any other wall than the one in Mexico for no reason and risk my life for everything to be in vain. I want to make that trip worth it, I want to keep translating for my people at work, keep making doctors appointments for people I don't know, and teach them that they have human rights. I wish I was the last undocumented kid that had to step into a detention center and even go through my trip. One day I'll found a non-profit that will sanctuate these children, because they are hungry for a future of possibilities just like me. I am here to make my dreams come true and I intend not giving up

Yeah! I know it sounds a bit childish but it is fine. I wanted them to know my story so badly that I forgot to write about my feelings. Here is what I wanted to say if I had gotten the chance to a higher word count. That does not mean the word count makes me a failure, it is more like I thought of what they might have wanted to read, instead of writing what I wanted them to read.

Here is what I really wanted to say:

Here is a secret that not everyone knows about me, I am an undocumented immigrant. One day, my mom said, "Tomorrow, we are leaving and we are never coming back." I didn't get a chance to say goodbye to anyone. And that's how just at eleven years old, I set on an unforgettable journey that changed my life. I used to live in one of the most dangerous countries in Latin America, Honduras. I thought we were taking a relaxing airplane ride, but my trip was elongated to 28 remarkably traumatizing days on foot.

Those days gave me the adrenaline of a lifetime, all of the running and hiding became like a cops and robbers game. I was hunted by the Mexican police at night, but in the morning, I was a tourist dazed by Mexico's beauty. Most of the action happened at night, from walking corn fields to jumping into buses, everything was planned. We must not get caught or they would send us back to Honduras and that would have been worse. The memories haunt me sometimes. I think about the many times I saw death and fear and the many times I talked with each one of them. Fear was telling me that my mom could get rape. Fear was telling me that I was going to get caught, it told me that someone was after me and nobody was going to help me. See, death was very sweet. Death invited me to explore her and taught me to accept her just not yet. She was there when falling into a pond, she was there when I was drowning. She was holding my feet and

dragging me through the water and I was so ready to let her do it. I was so ready to tell her it was fine because I was tired. Death was a very unapologetic lady, she didn't let me fall through the cracks of my brain. She might have snuggled my body, but she never knocked to enter my head. I saw her walking back and forth but she never knocked and if she had, I would have let her walk in.

As children, part of our early education is learning about maps and their story. I always imagined that I was one of the crew members next to the cartographer watching out for any possible threats in our journey. Our mission was to escape to refuge but just like the pirates and cartographers, we were eager to see the full picture and scream eureka. I pictured crossing like seeing the other side from a mountain and pointing towards home. Although it wasn't anything like that or cute. Fear and Death were so prominent that you became familiar with them. Familiar like if they were family, that's how close they were. Just as close as when a grandma cooks arroz con leche for her daughter who is feeding her kid. Who would have thought that was going to be our story. One of the moments that I feared the most was when I hung from a tire to cross *El Rio Grande*. While on the tire, the waves would drag me away. I would slip through the tire and my view became invisible that my eyes were getting adjusted to the water until the oxygen started to scarce. My feet were tied to the grounds, making it a fight to come up. My mom was the first I saw after I made it to the other side and we both looked at each other and it felt warm without needing to hug each other.

Through the days, I had done so much traveling that my feet wanted to give up. My hands hated me, but my conscience had never been this happy. I remember walking by the fields, hearing the coyotes crying my welcome, walking on what was not soil, but old clothes and items of the many lost refugees. I was hungry and injured but the air had never felt freeing. I stopped to catch air and I will never forget the moment when I heard the sound of the city, when I celebrated that I had made it. I was very confused but it felt good, it felt good to be free, I had all I wanted and needed with me, my mom and a necklace my dad gave me. The lights of a patrolling car blinded my eyes to the reflection of a tall man, friendly at first, but he thought I was Mexican and he kept saying "fuck". My English was very broken but I understood. He drove for about 40 minutes and my mind thought he would get us McDonalds, but he kept driving. He dropped me off at a detention center.

I was placed in a small room, *la hielera*. I had never been so cold in my life that thought of it, freezes my bones. I was told I was a criminal, but I was a good and smart child. First they told me to take shoe laces off and ripped the earring out of my ears. They gave me a piece of aluminum foil. That night my mom covered both of us with the aluminum foil and although the cold of the floor pressed against our backs, we found warmth between us, all of us! There were many children and many women and each of us had a different story.

The patrol officers told me that I would be at the center for months. I was scared, I felt cold and hungry, but it was better than nothing. Then they took me to a different cell where I didn't see my mom for three days, but the officers were so sweet. I will never forget one of them, his face is tattooed to my mind. His name tag rests in my eyes. He gave me water when I asked and he knew my name too, he was the one that let me go to my family in Virginia. Although I hadn't seen my mom and I was covered in period blood, I met the strongest girls, they braided my hair, they hugged me, and they prayed with me. We held our hands and prayed and prayed. "Margie Castejon? Let's go, it is time to go."

After that day, life became complicated and hard but I have no intention of giving up. I did not cross any other wall than the one in Mexico for no reason and risk my life for everything to be in vain. My trip was worth it because I am accomplishing things I would have never done back home. I want to keep translating for my people at work, keep making doctors appointments for people I don't know, and teach them that they have human rights. I wish I was the last undocumented kid that had to step into a detention center and even go through my trip. I remember telling my mentor my secret and telling her I wasn't a criminal, but she told me that everything was going to be okay. And it was great! One day I'll found a non-profit that will sanctuate these children, because they are hungry for a future of possibilities just like me. I am here to live the best and take all of the opportunities I can because I am young and full of dreams.

Now you might be wondering what happened with college? Well I applied to Villanova, Swarthmore, Northeastern, Widener, Temple, Saint Joseph's, and among others. Although some turned me down and others didn't. It infuriated me that after being in Philadelphia for so long I was never considered a Pennsylvania resident, meaning that tuition would be higher and I was already at a disadvantage. I felt I was being set up for failure, I felt my dream was being robbed from me. It was very unfair, having to read from the International Admissions Office when I was very much less than 5 miles away. It was like a cold bucket of ice, like fire burning my heart, like needles on my feet. There is no greater pain than feeling robbed from what you love. The many times I wrote my essay meant crying my eyes out but I had to keep typing. As I write this description I can't help but let my tears run down my cheeks and feel so proud of myself. Although those schools and the government make it a pain in my ass, I will be going to Community College and I am pursuing an Architecture degree and God knows how much I wanted this. I wanted this with all of my heart and soul. Being a straight A student and working at night was hard, but I am not stopping now. Nobody can stop me, because any day I will cross borders to pursue my dreams.

## Roots

About five years ago I wrote this mini speech and it made me fall in love with writing. And although I will never climb Mount Everest, 11 year old Margie was so proud of this piece of writing.

I am from political speeches, I am from my uncle's long, dramatic, and persuasive speeches that talk about how the government should be. I am from a country where the people only get political promises and no changes by the government. Here, I am from a diverse culture. In my small world at home, yo hablo Español and in the outside world I speak English. I live in a Cambodian neighborhood, with my Hispanic family in an American city!

I am from turtles, slow movements describe me. Green is not my favorite color but it gives me hope. I love turtles. Turtles are brave because the ocean, which I am afraid of, is their home. By that, they teach me to not be afraid of this cruel but amazing world.

I am from those who fight for everybody's rights and equality. My first name is Margie and my last name is "Fight for justice". I am against discrimination, discrimination of any type. Discrimination, like when an old man at Rite Aid dropped his things, and refused my help because of what I look like, because I am Latina, because of my roots. My dark curly hair, my brown skin, and my Latino accent were a problem to him.

I am from part-time loneliness. My mom works everyday and my dad lives 20 hours away. I spend most of my time with my imagination and creativity, making them my partners in crime.

I am from curiosity. I like to learn about new things every single day. People say I am the daughter of the word 'danger' and 'risk', because I love to explore, meet, and try things I never knew before.

I didn't like the color blue, but when I turned 7 years old, out of nowhere I saw the inner blue that some girls don't like. I am from the color blue. Blue reminds me of the beautiful melody of the ocean. I am from memories. I think that we are made out of memories which turn into valuable life lessons.

I am from Mt. Everest! One day you will be watching TV and suddenly, you will find out that I "Margie" will be climbing to the top of the mountain!!! This is a dream that I will accomplish. Whether or not I make it to the top, just having the mountain in front of me would make me happy.

I am from my thoughts. I love my thoughts, positive ones or negative ones, that is what I think. Even though I do not like the negative ones, they still turn into inspiration. I am from my school subjects. I just love them, simple as that. Each day my school subjects teach me to try hard and not be afraid of mistakes. Math might not be my favorite, but it teaches me that every problem has a solution we need to find. Social studies teaches me that we can be part of memories and history. Art teaches me the beauty of the world, but also the beauty of life.

I am from competitions. I like to win but I do not always win. I am from my own personality, I love myself, and I like who and how I am! I am from everywhere, except for silliness. I am allergic to strawberries but I also consider myself allergic to negativity.

Finally, I am special because I am a writer. I am from writing because writing is the place where I can make mistakes without being judged, the place where I feel safe.





## Male Parent

She cries every night  
Thinking you'll be back  
Holds tight to me, I am all of you have left behind  
One call, enough to open her eyes  
To know she is alone.

You who left for the future of three  
Should have kept it in your pants,  
So hard was not to cheat

Of your lies  
Had not broken the trust  
Had not to open her eyes  
She would still believe of your unrequited love

A denied replica of your blood,  
Your conception of four,  
Only two get your love.

And when the second was denied,  
And I warned him, you said  
He did not have to know, you should stand by my side you traitor of my blood

I'll kiss you and make up for the  
The young heart you broke  
The woman you don't love  
For my siblings, it's not their fault  
And as for the first-born,

I hope I don't carry your curse.

## Dream

Just like your son, I dream to be  
To be me, to find myself with no limitation  
But it is the limitation that confines me to these walls  
Like a bullet on the shotgun  
A call to stay home, I want to fire up  
Screaming to your son can I be like you?  
Not like you, you, but you the one that gets the power you

I get the names, I get the endless fear, I get a number  
And shouted out to get in line.  
All of us live in fear,  
Before walking out the door  
Turn left and right at 7:31  
Don't wanna be caught by the wrong pal

I want to be like your son,  
He does not have to fear.

Be a lawyer they always said  
You have the posture, the character  
You can be anything desired  
A Desire, clenching on to your teeth  
And screaming, God why me?  
We've been through worst

And the barriers will wall me from that desire, a dream

It's living in the nightmare  
And waking up, can it really just be a nightmare?  
I am scared  
Every day I dream  
Every day it changes but I know who I don't want to be  
I am a forgotten, rejected dreamer of the world.

a Dreamer  
Not a number,  
not an alien,  
If I could. I'd get in line,

But would you visit me and bring me flowers back home when I die?  
and just might die

“Because you asked about the line between friendship and relationship”

Starts with a smile

Moves on to a conversation full of “hellos”

They hold you tight between their arms

The sound of their heartbeat making your world an earthquake

midnight calls, full-on gossip mode

Your eyes and the stars are brighter until the sun starts peeking through the window

And you told them everything because they listened like no one did

And

A moment of doubt and question make the earthquake stronger

Becomes more than a hug,

And when you crash you become one intertwined.

So, can I live without them? And

When you notice you are better with them

You ask for more

But you are just a friend.

## I See My Beauty In You

I see my beauty in you  
Through the mirror of your eyes  
Reminding me of my mother  
My mother who hugged you  
Who you believed was yours,  
And became yours

She wanted you,  
You were a small reflection of me  
And through your eyes, she saw her mother  
And her mother wanted me.

The thought of you being gone.  
her mother, my mother, and her sister asked me  
Should you exist? Her sister asked my brothers  
Should she exist?

You between the forbidden wrong love,  
Her sister was married and her husband shall not know

I see my beauty in you  
Just like me, your mother was told like my mother  
It's you or her? It's your choice  
My mother said, her,  
But years later my mother said,  
her sister,  
my mother and your mother did not know of you

Did not know your beauty, your love  
A group chat of many of pros of choice and not,  
Endless fights, but it was up to your mom.  
The deed must be done,

Your mother, my mother, her mother  
Mothers of us left her to decide  
And cheating shouldn't be the excuse, your mother  
My mother, a condom was so hard to find?  
Nobody knew what your mother was going through

Your mother who carried you on her belly  
The brother that secretly judged her,  
My mother who supported her,  
Her mother who couldn't recognize her

I see my beauty in you  
The beauty of my mother and her mother  
And in your eyes, I see the women  
The women who said no,  
Who did not know,  
Who conceive every 9th month

I see you being like me, your mother, my mother, and their mother  
I see you being human and imperfect  
I see our beauty in you.

Raised by Machos

Machos from the mountains  
Machos that didn't have shoes,  
Whose parents would hit them every night  
“Act macho’ he would always demand us”  
Crying their souls to sleep

Immune to the tears and pain  
“I swear my child won't have that curse of mine”  
Humiliated by their grandma, laughed at her drunken dad

Raised by Machos with city dreams  
“A house, a car, a different life”  
As of my mom, they saw the maid,  
The sister know-it-all, the sister-like mom  
Raised also by my mom with visions and missions  
But the Machos, taught me, about a coward  
Opened my eyes to my worthiness and beauty.

Machos that wouldn't let me walk down the street  
they knew about the other men  
Sermon after the other “you are young, you are the easy prey”  
“You act tough, you act macho, you are not and won't be easy prey”

Raised by Machos  
Four machos, short, tall, tall, and tall  
Feisty, smart, feisty, and patient  
Machos acting tough, but cried to romance  
Feared love, feared loss and loneliness.

Machos who became my father  
Four portraits for the machos  
Hugs for the machos  
Laughter with the machos  
Love, advice, and protection for me



## The Day I Was Followed Home

Intuition,  
Prior feeling that something will go wrong  
Followed by the mathematical problems  
Hunting me at night  
Hunting me after the exercise  
And when I want to say no and give up

I don't

But I fear I'll stay behind and be trapped  
Just like the white of his paper followed me through the parking lot  
And when he said "need a ride home?"

I answer "leave me alone, I see the way you trouble through my head"

Leave me alone because it's not my choice to be followed home

I only want to pass  
I noticed the way you test all of us  
I noticed the way you looked at the pink hugging her writing  
I noticed the malicious look on you,

Or am I just scared?

And when I told you as you followed me to my bus "go ahead, move, I don't need your help"  
I don't want your help  
I don't want to be the next unreported case  
I don't want to be another dot  
But they say life is also about failure

I've prepared myself for the next time  
To see you  
To look at you in the eye and feel my fear  
Fear me like I feared you  
And when I see you again

I won't break my breath

I will Hold my chin high  
I won't bow to your height  
I will use my power, I'll use my voice

I'm not scared of you man

I don't want a ride home

strangers

Unexpected conversations with gorgeous souls  
Strangers at first sight  
Our mother tongue spilling the beans  
Forcing each other to tell on the feelings  
And on the gossip, like his first elementary fight

Stranger whose voice I became used to  
Stared at each others ceilings while sharing our sins,  
His beautiful personality hiding  
under a cracked shoulder,  
His stubbornness won

Awkward like the word itself  
Bonded by countless emotions and  
The rhythm of our hips through the screens  
Feeling los tambores beating with our heartbeats

And

Endless conversations  
he didn't want to sus and get caught  
We knew about our mom's shared adrenaline

Opened honest hearts only strangers share  
It's about the process of meeting and accepting crazy  
The crazy of his cold basement  
My eyes shutting behind our laughter  
As we handshaked goodbye and feared to never hear each other again

## “Five More Minutes”

Lately I have been very sad music driven, where every single song has accompanied me through the pandemic and each triggers a memory. “Fallin” by Harry Styles was my on repeat song for two months and when he sings “I am falling again, I am falling” I couldn’t help to break down and think about the “love of my life” who cheated on me and went back to his ex. Then I heard a song talking about five more minutes and it made me think of everything and everyone we leave behind and when it becomes late you wish for five more minutes with them. During the pandemic my mom was dying. It was at the beginning where everything was chaos. Out of everybody at home she was the one experiencing it worse. One night after not seeing her for four days, she calls me and she tells me to come into her room. I open the door and she is bundled up with three blankets sweating, she looks thin, her hair lost all sort of brightness, her eyes had fallen down the cliff. I was standing there thinking my mom would die at any moment. She was scared and we literally said fuck the social distance and hugged each other. I needed it, she needed it, we are the kind that doesn’t hug each other much. She told me more about her life, she told me about mine, she gave me advice, she was saying goodbye.

I remember sleeping on the couch that night and just crying because I was scared my person would be gone. I prayed the entire night and hoped for a miracle. And at that time was when I needed those five more minutes with her. I wanted to tell her how much I loved her and feel her love. I didn’t want to be left out of her love and attention. Although she is doing great now, we hug more, we celebrate each other’s achievements, and she is letting me open my wings slowly. I cherish every moment we get together. It has always been the two of us, she is my family, she is all I have. My achievements and the woman I am today is because I live up to her image and it is because she sacrificed everything to give it to me. There are more memories, I want her to be proud of me and see the great person I become every day.

## Death and The Willing to Live

A year ago sometime in April trying to balance everything and being at home alone most of the time, I became my number one enemy. When I was with other people everything was fine, but when I would be on my own everything turned gloomy and grey. Our minds can be the most creative place, yet it can become the most dangerous place. Being at home made me aware of my insecurities, my stretch marks all over my body, the acne on my face, my poor math skills, how impatient, bossy, and bitchy I can be. All the bad things kept coming to me. I was tired of my body being sexualized, to be in constant fear of walking home at night, I was angry with the men who took advantage of me and I was mad at myself for never speaking up. I was disappointed because I let them use me. The worst feeling is caring and loving someone and then opening your eyes to a lie, to understand that they never cared about you. That was the hardest part understanding what had happened and facing the reality of it happening to you. We like to be undeniable about our truth and we choose to live a fairytale. After being my own enemy I thought of my own death. Who would miss me? Definitely my family! Would my friends even notice that I was gone? It wouldn't hurt to find out.

I kept saying, "It wouldn't hurt to find out" and it sounds weird now that I say it because it will hurt a lot of people and it certainly hurt my mental health. One of my biggest fears is becoming a failure and after thinking and trying to attempt with my life, I felt like a failure. I thought I wasn't good at even killing myself. I thought I was useless, I couldn't even tie a shoelace around my neck knowing that I have been fishing a lot of times and know all sorts of knots, even one that will knock out a crab. I honestly do not remember much of that day, but sitting at the basement with a shoelace on my hand and sobbing because I didn't want to die and it was the most stupid thing I have ever done. To cope with my feelings I have become a workaholic, I like the adrenaline, I forget about everything and I see a lot of people that bring me joy. The people that don't bring me joy make me happier because they help me let go of my anger.

A couple weeks ago, I thought of it again. This time it was all happening in my head rather than my hands. I thought of the many people I helped with homework and to study and how much of a bright future they have ahead of them going to a four year university/college. It affected me because this whole thing about being a non-resident according to many universities and colleges sets me behind and it makes things much harder. Double the tuition, I have no money, I felt like at a dead end. I am certainly happy and excited for everyone, my anger was with the universe. If I had done this much, why couldn't it be rewarded? If I was such a good human, why not grant what I love? I am a sucker for learning, and college might not take me to all good places, but it certainly puts me above. I was so angry that I had tried and I knew it wasn't fair. Although I had come to an understanding that going to college might not be a possibility for me, I still kept

looking for ways to get better, to make my situation better, and to honor everybody's hard work. I know it wasn't easy for any of my counselors, mentors, and advisors to try to talk to me into a reality that I wasn't seeing, that I wasn't prepared to hear yet. Nobody told me about Community College until it became the right time to do so. I thought I was some regular student, but I am not, not according to my status, and then I went down the hill.

One day after a 14 hour shift, I was tired, but nothing unusual happened. I got out of the train, (yes I take the train to work) and started my 15 minute walk as usual. Then everything that has happened in my life came to my head. I was drowning while I walked in the street, I was running out of air, I wanted to cry but I couldn't. I had no purpose to be crying, other than that my mind was crashing. It had been a year since the last time, I crashed again and I wished to be dead. Like seven minutes later, I cried and I couldn't stop. I get to the door and wipe my tears away because it is embarrassing! I go into my room, lay down and cry again. I am someone that enjoys being alone, but this time I was scared of being alone. I went upstairs to my mom's room and I told her I didn't want to be here anymore. She was so confused and she kept saying where and I just kept saying "here, I don't want this, I don't like it, I want to go and never come back" She was scared and she asked so many questions, but she knew I was throwing like a death sentence. She hugged me and I felt safe, but I wasn't there. I still haven't come back from that experience. I think of my level of stupidity to attempt to die. I think of how disappointed I am of myself for letting me go down. For letting little things go in the way of life and not enjoying the good. It might take forever or I might never come back to who I was without thinking about the past, but certainly I strive to walk a brighter future towards the light.