



# OC ORACIONES

VOLUME I, ISSUE IV

HOPE

SIGMA KAPPA DELTA | PSI ALPHA CHAPTER  
ODESSA COLLEGE  
MAY 2026

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OC Oraciones

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“Hope is the spark that pulls dawn closer.”

—*Sylvia Medrano*

# Oración

## 1. nombre femenino

Acción y efecto de orar.

«Llevó una vida de oración».

(Action and effect of praying. “He led a life of prayer.”)

## 2. nombre femenino

Palabras con que se ora, generalmente sujetas a una fórmula establecida por la liturgia o el culto.

(Words with which one prays, generally subject to a formula established by the liturgy or worship.)

## 3. nombre femenino

Discurso o razonamiento pronunciado en público con el fin de persuadir, conmover o expresar una idea.

(A spoken discourse intended to persuade, move, or express an idea.)

## 4. nombre femenino (gramática)

Enunciado con sentido completo, formado por la unión de un sujeto y un predicado.

(A complete statement formed by the union of a subject and a predicate.)

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## **Note from Dr. Ashok Karra**

### **OC Oraciones Senior Advisor**

“**H**ope,” the theme of our fourth issue, has a special resonance for this particular time and place. No, there hasn’t been a devastating slowdown in the oil industry, not yet. But life is more than work and the conditions within which we live are questionable. Texas, if considered an independent country, is the 8th largest economy on Earth. At this moment, it leads the nation in hunger. At least 10,000 children in Ector County are food insecure. War, poverty, and abuse are everywhere if we care to look. The great secret of our emphasis on careerism and productivity is that they let us look away.

I am grateful to our editorial board for being productive in a different way, a way that can beget change. They solicited, collected, read through, and organized the work by various writers and creators on campus and in the area. Dylan Garcia, Valerie Gonzalez, and Sylvia Medrano once again helped a community find its voice. I absolutely loved engaging with everything in this issue, from reflections about finding healing after heartbreak to confronting the loss of one’s elders. This little journal is a testament to those who will not look away.

I would be remiss if I didn't say something about what hope means to me. For years, I have wrestled with Mariame Kaba's words: "Hope is a discipline." It isn't a feeling. It is doing the work in order to learn how to do the work. I don't think people, in general, fail to demonstrate effort. Some work exceptionally hard and literally can't find the motivation or focus to do anything more. "Hope is a discipline" speaks to the subtle ways we must move beyond a dichotomy of "hard work" vs. "laziness/scams." For me, this entails the strangeness of helping publish a literary journal 30 years after I edited and published one in high school. Life isn't repeating as much as I'm realizing how I might have helped make an experience, decades ago, valuable to a community. The discipline, in this case, entails taking the time to understand my own life.

*OC Oraciones* is published by the Psi Alpha chapter of Sigma Kappa Delta. This chapter has done so much beyond the pages you hold. They've held multiple writing workshops, taken every opportunity to spread positivity on campus, donated hundreds of pounds of dry goods to a food pantry, hosted events where the community can come together and speak. As Senior Advisor, I can tell you it is a marvel to watch more and more lives orient themselves around hope.

Ashok Karra *May 3, 2026*

## Editor's Notes

– Dylan Garcia

With this being Issue 4 of Volume 1, I feel the process has become easier in some respects. Just as we have been able to build on the process of editing, there has also been a build in what the submissions have been able to accomplish. For this issue in particular, I feel the number of times I read a work and was left speechless was numerous. Truly, the pieces from this issue have really inspired me. With each issue, I can't help but feel like everyone is improving their writing and bringing out their best, and I couldn't be prouder to be part of this as both an editor and a contributor. As always, I am so glad that this platform exists and that all manner of people are taking advantage of it to have their voices and emotions heard.

– Valerie Gonzalez

I am proud and honored to be a part of the editorial board for *OC Oraciones* Issue 4. I want to thank Dylan Garcia, Sylvia Medrano, and our senior advisor, Dr. Karra, for the work and time they invested in the literary journal. While reading each submission, I was able to learn more on how people view hope. Some are about what it means to keep moving forward, or how hope has crumbled them down. We try to find a piece of faith and reconcile on what could've been or how we want situations to turn out. I enjoyed that we gave people a place to express their voices and opinions on how hope has impacted their lives. I hope they gain a life changing experience, even if it's for a moment; each person deserves to use their voice and have it passed on. I learned that faith and hope coincide with each other and when it's brought down, we must keep going. I am thankful for being a part of a team that wants other people's voices to be heard.

– Sylvia Medrano

Pulling this Hope issue together was a lesson in my own blind spots. I started the semester tired. A hint of cynicism followed me. My calendar was crammed with classes and tutoring. Sigma Kappa Delta projects took the rest of my energy. I wondered where the strength would come from.

Then the first files arrived. I looked at the poems, stories, essays, and visual art. I saw bold splashes of color and breathtaking lines. These works showed the many ways people hold on to hope. Some were fierce. Others were a steady glow and a heart cry. Hope is a stubborn ember. It stays lit when everything else goes dark. It is far more than a grand finale.

The work was still stressful. Community turned that strain into momentum. Seeing how many ways people reach for brightness made me lighter, too.

I learned more this semester than in the last. My previous time on the editorial board helped, but the task remained daunting. Every deadline stretched my nerves. Every layout tweak and adjustment I made ensured every work had room to breathe. Every change I made taught me something new. Now, my skills have grown sharper. My patience is longer and my confidence stronger.

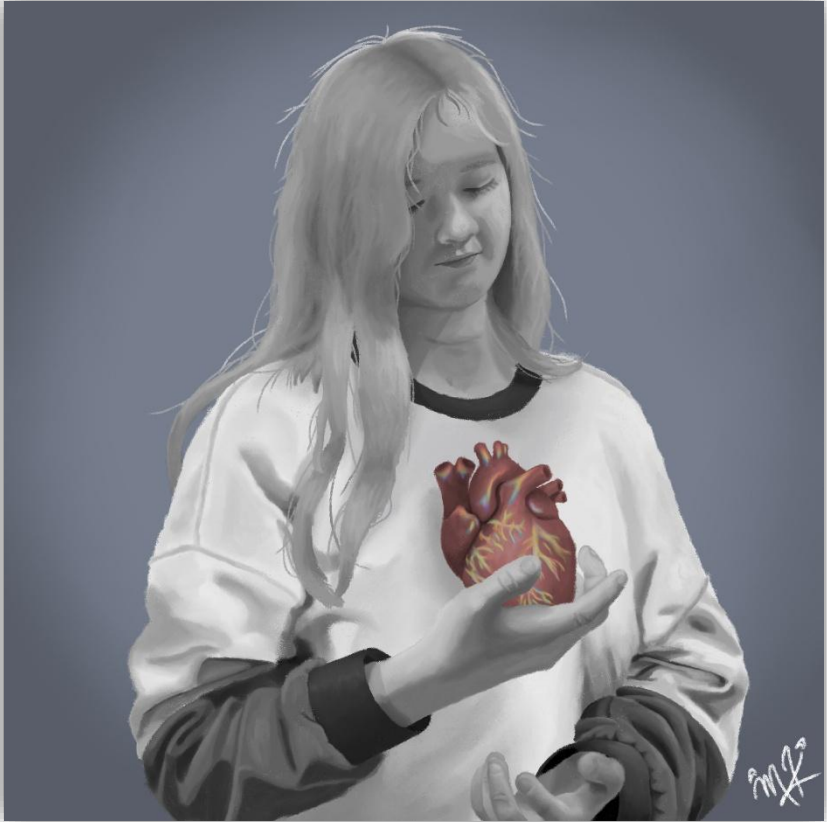
I am grateful for the trust our contributors placed in us. The SKD team showed faith by handing me the reins. I can say my cynical side has quieted a bit. These works gave me a reason to believe in what comes next and hope, maybe for the best. I hand you these pages with a steady pulse. If one line or image sparks something in you, tuck it in your pocket. Keep it for the road ahead.





# Hope

*MK*



# My Version of Hope

*Marcela Rodriguez*

I failed you

And I will never forgive myself for that

I told you I would give you a home

But in the end you were alone

I started to blame everyone else

But whose fault is it really?

It was me who gave you your name

So, for that, I'll take the blame

I'll carry it all

And all the weight that comes with it

It was me who was supposed to keep you safe

But now you're gone and I'm left with nothing but a picture of your face

I should have protected you

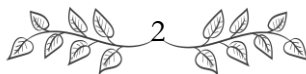
I should have kept my promise

I should have done so much more

I shouldn't be standing here with my heart broken to its core

When the day comes

And I meet you again



I hope when I call your name  
You'll wag your tail and run in my arms all the same

Even if I don't deserve it  
Even if it's selfish  
I hope you can forgive me  
For your forgiveness, I would pay any fee

So, until that day comes  
Wait for me patiently  
I hope until then your days are free from pain  
And I hope all the love I was able to give you remain

# That Hopeful Heat

*Dylan Garcia*

*If* I put all the

Longing and yearning

Onto page and set it ablaze

Maybe I'd have enough fire

To light my way through

Through the dark

With hot passionate possibility

Leaving me warm for a while

Sometimes it's what keeps me going

That hopeful heat

Maybe I should wonder

“Will I burn out

When I'm betrayed by my own flames?”

Because hope for love

Was extinguished by reality

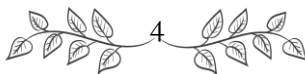
No page can manifest

Fire filled with fulfillment for affection

Fueling yourself so far

That you make it a point to find love

All because of that hopeful heat



# Summertime Cowboy

*Maya Galvan*

**A** wish to see the Prince of Pentacles,  
Waiting by a dim gate,  
With various faces, I stand prepared  
To glimpse his face, to meet my fate.

Since May I've waited, no sign shown,  
Curtains veil what once was mine.  
Only tears have come to greet  
Never the Prince of Pentacle's shine.

A woman asks, "Are you content here?"  
Her question echoes in my mind  
A scream of no, a muffled cry  
The prince's father watches, blind

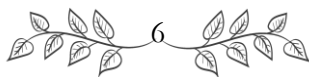
Endless waiting, endless stay  
Even prayers seem wasted and vain  
All the hope, the silent words,  
Show what the teller claimed

A weak hope, a consuming fixation  
Dreams entwined with longing

Wishing for what could become

A truth to become new

.



# Feather

*E. St. Claire*



# The Bleeding-Heart Dove

*Esther Hernandez*

The world is a loveless place to the Pink Maiden, either love died long ago or never existed at all, either way it didn't matter. Relationships were falling from her left to her right, and they all ended messy. When the Blue Suitor showed up at her door offering a bouquet of roses and dinner she panicked. Yet there was a speck of hope in her heart still, so she prayed to whoever listened. There came a voice of wisdom, and it said, tell the suitor that you would take his offer if a bleeding-heart dove came with a rose in the next three days. So, she did and left the matter alone in fate's hands for the night.

In the break of dawn what she proclaimed happened, a bleeding-heart dove with his rose in its beak appeared on her window. The Pink Maiden was stunned when the dove landed on her fingertips and tweeted its morning song happily. She became panicked when a hopeful sensation fluttered in her stomach. Out of fear she shunned the feeling away. It wasn't long till the feeling came back when the Blue Suitor brought a smile that was warmer than sunrays. Soon her hope began to grow.

The next morning the same thing happened again. A bleeding-heart dove flew onto her windowsill, chirping with delight. Later that day, the Blue Suitor appeared and showed kindness by wrapping a bandage around her bleeding finger as she was pricked by a thorn from a rosebush. Though she may have lost bit of blood, her heart pumped more rapidly as her cheeks began to flush. His hands were as soft as the kindness of his heart.

With the night present, she already planned the next night with the suitor. She could barely sleep. She twisted, turned, and rolled on her bed for dusk may have arrived but her hope for true love rose like the sun from the horizon from the crack of dawn.

In the morning, she ecstatically rolled off bed and rushed to the windowsill, only to find nothing. No chirping, tweeting, or rose in sight. In that moment her heart was shattered like a broken mirror. Tears began to fall on her face as the realization that this love she had for the Blue Suitor was not meant to be. Hopelessly she sobbed onto the roses she had received the last two days.

Suddenly, she heard a little chirp. Refusing to believe again, she excused it for a common pigeon. Soon, there was a sound on her window, and there was a bleeding-dove. Hope was in her again as she



leaped to the window, but something was different. A little scroll was tied to the bird's claw, and it spoke.

*Come Outside*

Immediately she burst through her doors, and as the morning sun was beaming there stood the Blue Suitor, having thousands of bleeding-doves, all with a rose, surrounding him. He had a farm dedicated to bleeding-doves. Later that night, they had a nice dinner with a hopeful future of true love.

# Echinocereus Pectinatus

*Valeria Gonzalez*

**W**hat is green and dry?

With a strawberry peach blossom.

Guarded by its high bridge,

Only the sun can touch its life.

Rooted from underneath,

Where there are fragments to seek

Withholding the deadliest air to breathe.

It stores their needs and can handle the breeze.

There is a meaning which is the absence of recognition.

Swindle through you and leave no ends.

What it means to harness the bones alone.

Swirling down the hall with headphones,

No need for masking.

What are you so afraid of?

Mold inward, crumble it down.

Stretch your arms out and fill up space.

What is next?

Find the bliss of sorrow and love on.

What kind of legacy will define your destiny?

# Hope Less

*Dr. Laura Holder*

**H**opeless

Less hope

Less than before

But not completely gone.

Hopeless is not

The same as “no hope.”

Hope less.

Do more.

Be more.

Try more.

Hope less.

Hopelessness

Is the state of having less hope.

Emptiness

Nothingness

Are voids.

States of being empty, of being nothing.

Hopelessness still has hope.

Just less of it.

Hope less.  
Work harder.  
Think smarter.  
Fight fiercer.  
Hope less.

Be brutal, relentless  
In your pursuit of hope.  
For the world has need of it,  
But the world is also  
Doing its damndest to take it away.  
To make the world hopeless.  
To make you hopeless.  
To lessen the hope you have  
For a brighter tomorrow.

So you must be callous  
And thick-skinned.  
You must punch and bite and kick  
And violently  
Resist the powerful  
Efforts to make you hopeless.

Be remorseless and pitiless –  
Have less remorse, less pity –  
For those who would attempt

To rob you of your hope.

To make you hopeless.

Stare bravely into the abyss,

Even as it stares back at you

With its cold eyes,

Lacking feeling.

Curl your toes against the cold floor

In your grippy socks,

Hold your broken, yellow crayon

Tightly in your fist and shout,

“Not today. You can’t have me today.”

Hope less.

Love more.

Be awkward with it,

Clumsy.

Trip over your kindness

As you try to offer the world a flower

Just to make them smile.

Hope less,

Don’t wait for others to step up.

Do it yourself.

Strike the flint, light the fuse

Dance in the flickering flames

Of “maybe tomorrow” or  
“maybe someday.”

Today.

Now.

Hope less.

Love more.

Yourself, your neighbors, strangers –

Love them all.

And maybe,

Just maybe,

Hope can be hopeful again.

# Let's Be

*Kat Copeland*



# My Purple Rain

*Colie D*

Sunlight poured through the windows like molten honey, dripping along floorboards, pooling in impossible shapes that seemed to breathe. Dust floated in the beams like tiny constellations, spinning slowly, catching and holding the light. I could reach out and cup it in my hands, carry it with me forever, but it always slipped through my fingers, warm and alive.

The air smelled of earth warmed by morning sun, of paper pressed in forgotten notebooks, of faint vanilla from cookies left to cool, lingering in the corners of rooms I thought I had memorized. Every breath tasted of memory and warmth.

The gold light moved as if it had its own life, stretching along walls, curling over tables, sliding across chairs. It whispered through the curtains, kissed the backs of my hands, traced along the curve of every shoulder I had ever leaned on. I could feel it wrap around me like silk, soft and infinite, and I breathed it in as if it could fill every empty corner inside me.

Shadows leaned lazily against the walls, softened and stretched by the brightness, and I remembered how they used to dance along the hallways

in the afternoons, marking time like living metronomes. Every creak in the wood, every sigh of wind against the windows, felt intentional, orchestrated, like the house itself was humming a lullaby.

I could walk through hallways with my eyes closed, memorizing the tilt of the sunlight, the shimmer across the floors, the slight curve of the molding where dust clung. I knew which windows stayed open longest in summer, which doors stuck in humid weather, which corners held the faintest traces of laughter or forgotten toys. The air vibrated with memory, every heartbeat echoing it back to me, steady, familiar, unending.

Time itself felt liquid here, gold and dense, moving like syrup through veins of rooms and memories. Even the smallest sounds—the scratch of paper, the hum of a distant fan, the soft footsteps on the wooden floor—carried weight and warmth. They pressed against my chest in quiet affirmation: this is what it feels like to be fully known, fully held, fully at home.

And yet, in the gold, in the warmth, there was already an edge, a breath of air that hinted at change, a quiver in the corners of my vision. But I didn't notice it, not yet. For now, the sunlight was eternal. For now, the gold was infinite. I could step, I could breathe, I could exist suspended in

it, and it felt like perfection itself had chosen to live here, in these rooms,  
in these beams, in me.

It used to be gold.

Then the edges frayed.

A violet tinge crawled along the horizon, delicate as wisteria curling along  
a sunlit wall. It hummed faintly, like the first chord of a song you cannot  
yet place, threading into the air with a heartbeat of its own. I inhaled it  
unconsciously, thinking it part of the gold. But it was not.

The violet carried weight, patience, intent—coiling along ribs, brushing  
lungs, curling along the spine. The world seemed the same, but it had  
begun to bend.

Windows blurred. Pavement darkened. Then my purple rain began.

It pressed against my chest like a living thing, wet and breathing, leaving  
traces on skin and memory alike. It smelled of asphalt after rain, of petals  
rotting on windowsills, of moments I could no longer hold.

The first drops seemed soft, comforting almost, but beneath them, a  
pulse coiled. Alive, patient, aware.

The rain threaded itself through memory, through echoes of laughter I  
could still imitate perfectly. It hummed along my collarbones, traced my

throat, spiraled along my spine, moving with purpose, a being within the storm.

Droplets reflected faces in impossible angles, each one familiar and alien at once. I saw the corners of smiles I remembered, the tilt of shoulders, the spaces where words had lingered unsaid. Puddles moved slightly, like liquid mirrors bending to the storm's intent, shifting memories beneath the surface.

Shadows leaned and stretched unnaturally, whispering along walls, brushing the air like fingers, brushing my hair, fingertips, and ribs as if reading every heartbeat.

The room smelled faintly of birthday candles, frosting lingering on counters, of words I would never speak aloud.

The heaviness of doing what was right pressed like wet velvet against my chest, the storm aware of every choice I had made, aware of every love withheld.

I held the message unsent in my hands, its edges curling like smoke, every syllable heavy with intention. It lingered in the air, a faint pulse in the violet rain, reminding me of timing, regret, and responsibility all at once.

They became strangers in front of me.

Strangers whose laughter I could still imitate perfectly.

Strangers whose secrets still lived in my memory like furniture in a house  
I no longer owned.

I could walk through that house with my eyes closed.

I knew where sunlight used to fall, which door stuck in humid weather,  
which window stayed open longest in the summer. Every rug, every  
corner, every scratch on the wood, etched into memory like a map I  
could navigate blindfolded.

But the locks had changed.

And somehow I had not noticed.

The cruelest part was not losing them.

It was realizing I had already begun to.

The storm carried every hidden grievance, every resentment I had held in  
for years.

It rolled over me like deliberate thunder, deliberate and patient.

Every forgotten slight, every conversation turned sharp, every weight  
pressed against my skin and whispered my failures back.

It twisted along my hair, slipped through collarbones, pressed into joints,  
a living coil of memory and accusation.

I stumbled beneath it, lungs full of violet, teeth gritting against the pull,  
and every raindrop seemed to echo voices I knew, voices I had loved,  
voices I had fought against.

The violet deepened into bruises, swelling with every memory, every  
echo.

It pressed warmth and rot together, sweetness and acid, soft hums and  
sharp whispers, until the gold that once seemed eternal now felt  
fractured, broken into a million shards.

I stumbled through it, lungs full of storm, teeth clenching against the  
taste of lightning, hands trembling against invisible walls.

The rain crawled into every hollow, tracing grief along my bones.

It was alive, watching, merciless, and yet, beneath its weight, I began to  
notice small things.

High above, barely visible, the sky held faint bruises of color.

Threads of gold flickered through the violet, teasing me, reminding me  
that light could exist even here.

Puddles mirrored impossible skies, shadows shivered with memory,  
droplets clung to hair and skin as if breathing themselves.

The storm revealed rather than destroyed. It mapped absence, etched  
loss into bone, carved space for recognition and understanding, leaving  
threads of light along pain's edges.

Every hallway echoed with ghosts of familiarity.

I traced furniture in memory as if it were a map, but the doors would not  
open.

The warmth I remembered felt distant, yet every imprint of them  
lingered in my chest.

I stepped into the street, wet with purple, watching it pool around curbs  
and gutters, trembling with reflections of gold.

Even as grief pressed like a living thing against my lungs, a tremor of  
hope threaded through the violet, faint, delicate, insistent.

The rain softened at the edges, curling like smoke into corners of  
memory, tracing my steps but no longer crushing.

I could feel threads of hope stitching through the violet, just the faintest  
glimmer of gold humming in the air.

I had given everything, yet it had never been enough.

The storm soaked me, stretched me, revealed the weight I carried.

Every laugh, every shoulder, every quiet compromise pressed into my bones, soaked into the downpour, showing both devotion and limits.

The streets were rivers of memory, each drop carrying fragments of trust, love, and betrayal, every ripple reflecting faces I had once held dear.

Reality melted around me.

Voices sounded underwater, shadows slanted unnaturally, and familiar faces became impossible to place.

The storm became dreamlike, unsteady, alive, moving with intent, and I drifted through it like a ghost through memory.

Even the pavement seemed liquid beneath my feet, reflecting the violet like a mirror that held no edges, bending the world into something almost impossible to describe.

Droplets whispered faint melodies, refracting gold and violet, spinning memory into impossible, half-real patterns across skin, walls, and glass.

The world opened beneath my feet, unstoppable, infinite.

The violet receded slowly, imperceptibly.

It curled at puddles, along edges, brushing my hair, threading into my chest.

The shift was subtle, deliberate, alive.

For the first time, the storm felt soft.

The rain had lost weight, the violet sky thinned into light.

I breathed in calm like air I had forgotten existed.

The storm lingered faintly, a pulse beneath skin, a murmur along the spine, reminding me even peace is earned.

Golden threads began weaving themselves into the violet, curling along hair, fingertips, collarbones, like light learning to coexist with shadow.

Shards of violet fell into puddles and dissolved into silver ripples, reflecting glimpses of warmth I had thought gone forever.

Distance became a conversation in silence.

Separation became something I could hold without it cutting.

The violet haze lingered at the edges, curling in reluctant spirals, leaving threads of silver.

It taught me that letting go does not mean forgetting. Love and loss can coexist in quiet, impossible harmony.

The storm thinned, yet lingered, curling like smoke through empty streets, brushing against doorframes, clinging to windowsills.

Puddles reflected fragments of past echoes of laughter, half-remembered arguments, warmth I had thought lost.

I walked slowly, tasting the storm, letting it pulse through me, reminding me of all I had survived.

I could feel it retreat slowly, leaving the air humming faintly, the violet dissolving into threads of gold and silver, shimmering in puddles, along rooftops, across the skin of the world.

I moved with the storm, letting it guide me.

The rain no longer drenched, it ran along skin like silver threads.

The violet horizon thinned, folded into gold again.

I laughed, quietly at first, then louder, letting freedom catch me mid-stride.

The storm hummed alongside me, no longer weight, only pulse.

Light traced the outline of my shadow, brushing along hair, spine, and collarbones, and I felt the violet dissolve fully into the gold it had once fought against.

My purple rain had faded, leaving only threads of silver, gold, and quiet memory.

Windows cleared. Pavement lightened. My purple rain thinned into distance.

Not gone. Not forgotten. Waiting. Watching. Teaching.

And in its patient retreat, I breathed fully, alive, carrying hope threaded into every hollow of my chest, a slow, enduring bloom among the storm.

At the end of the day, I sit with my truth.

Not needing to speak, justify, or explain.

It is whole, threaded, unshakable.

And it is mine to carry, luminous even in shadow.

# On Fire

*Elsa Guerra*



## Bud In West Texas

*Dylan Garcia*

**A** tiny bud

Laid into the dirt  
On a dry roadside  
It wants light  
And water

It hopes one day to bloom  
It is surrounded by  
Metal machines  
With necks that move  
Up and down  
And only rain black

Storms bring dust  
Not showers  
The sun, what should bring hope  
Dries the bud out  
Before it can grow

Maybe its hopes are  
Misplaced, misjudged  
Mistaken for means  
Of survival

# Fraction

*Marcela Rodriguez*

*W*ho do I want to be?

I've never been able to answer that question

Maybe a person people will recognize when seen?

Or maybe someone everybody will know when their name is mentioned

I don't want to be famous

But I also don't want to be unknown

I want to live safely while wearing a harness

But I also want to live a life where I explore more than just my home

Is it normal to be so unsure?

Or am I not meant to be someone great?

Am I not capable of doing more?

Is being a nobody really my fate?

I want to find who I am

It's tiring not knowing

I want to find my path

I want to know where I'm going

I want to find my voice

I'm tired of being silent

I want to stop standing in my own way

I want to learn how to be vibrant

I want to stop being a coward

I want to be caring

I want to be careful

But I also want to be daring

I want to write

I want to write my own creed

I want to follow orders

But I also want to lead

Who do I want to be?

What a silly question

I want to be me

All of me, not just a fraction

# The Hopely Cynical Thing

*Sylvia Medrano*

Sometimes I see hope in a very cynical way. You see, when you get sick, that's not the end of it. A blunt diagnosis comes, and then somehow you have to keep moving on. Instead, you become gloomy and angry. Lonely even in a crowded place.

Suddenly, everything feels heavier than it should. So, you start seeing hope less as a gift and more like a way to keep your head above the water while everything around you sinks. Yes, hope keeps the gears turning even as the foundation crumbles.

It turned me into a ghost driven by the very thing that haunted me. Propelled by hope but paralyzed by the terror of its absence. A way to soothe the pain enough to stay, even as the present grew too dim to recognize and the future even darker to imagine.

I wasn't always like this. A long time ago, I was young and naïve.

I hoped for a lot, then I learned to hope for less. Eventually, I hoped for only the bare minimum. But none of it ever crystallized. It stayed abstract. It stayed hypothetical. Always an almost.

Hope promised shape, but it never delivered form. At some point, I stopped asking what hope could give me and started asking what it had already taken.

*How much time did I spend waiting?*

*How much pain did I soften instead of naming?*

*How often did I choose endurance over truth?*

Hope worked like a drug. A single sip kept me hooked. It fed me visions that never arrive. It funneled hunger into dreams and empty plans. It demanded no proof, only faith. And faith, when you are wounded, is easy to accept. And it is even more dangerous to embrace.

I've seen how easy it is to hope for healing without seeking help. Hope for change without changing a damn. It is a trap that allows inaction to feel like resilience.

Still, I see the allure, the quiet persuasion of just a little longer. There is a lie that waiting is wiser, and that change is imminent if I am patient enough, hopeful enough. I started to see Hope as an anesthetic that let me endure a present I should have abandoned long ago. It kept me functional while I eroded, driving me forward even as I remained pinned in place.

Don't misunderstand me; I don't hate or distrust hope. It was a tool that kept me going when I had no other choice. But then there comes a point when simply staying alive isn't enough; there's a moment when endurance stops being noble and starts being costly. Choosing takes more courage than waiting ever did. And if I'm honest, I almost let the cynical side of me win. I let myself blur what hope even means. The real thing, not the one I fed to my soul in my darkest hour and called it a win.

I started wondering... do I still have hope at all?

Not the kind of hope that magically fixes things. I know better than that. But the other kind... the one that moves you forward even when you are mad.

I began asking myself whether I still believed in anything ahead.

And to my surprise, the answer was quiet and made of a thousand pieces.

It is made of my hope for my kids—that their lives will be bigger and brighter than I ever dreamed.

It is made of my hope that things will shift, even if I don't fully trust how or if they will.

It's made of my hope to be a writer, even if it scares me that it might become real.

It is built from hesitations and questions about whether I'm brave enough to let my dream exist outside of me.

And that's when it really hits me.

I want my words out there and make something real out of all of this. A future that looks different from today. Something tangible to take with me to the grave.

That push and pull... that's hope. It keeps my soul alive. It keeps me wanting and reaching. Dreaming and yes... against my best reasoning, hoping.

Perhaps my hope isn't soft or wishfully innocent. It is worn down. and harshly cynical. But it's still there. In the way, I fight. In the way I write and live my brief passage through life.

# The Sleeping Goddess

*Caleb Mendes*



# Eternity

*John Herrington*

**F**alling autumn leaf

Reveals the hidden truth of  
The old master's death

Winter's cold embrace...  
Dead branches, endless snowfall  
A silent forest

Nascent springtime leaves  
Reveal the hidden truth of  
A ladybug's flight

Summer's warm embrace...  
Will you be ready  
When autumn leaves fall again?

## Love is What I Learned

*Dr. Josh Dobbs*

I don't know if it is true  
that it is better to have loved and lost  
than never to have loved at all.  
I should think, rather, the opposite was true.  
Still my broken heart returns time and again  
like a little puppy to its master.  
For I have read the bard's praises in rhyming verse.  
I found the lover's letter  
torn beside the river, nearly drowned.  
My mind is slowly learning what my heart has so long known:  
it knows there must be love—there must.

My shoulders are wider than I remember,  
from carrying the worlds of others, I suppose.  
But I could hardly care,  
for I am by far my least favorite person.  
For I have seen the side of me no one else has.  
I have lived to see myself hurt  
another far worse than I was hurt.  
I have faced the monster within  
and walked away scarred.  
I have fallen in this life, and there lain,

embracing the filth below my feet.

I have risen from this mire,  
not by my own strength, but with help  
from the souls about me that truly love me,  
the few among the many.

They do not require much:  
they oft require naught.

They have carried me when my feet failed;  
carried my burdens when my shoulders sank.

For every burden I have borne  
they have carried two, me  
and the load I could not abandon.

I do remember saying those binding words,  
but, death came far sooner than expected;  
not death of a body, but of a promise, of a hope.

In my mind I still see her though,  
I see her lying by my side while lying to my face.  
I see the hunger in her eyes as she consumes my very life;

I see her ingest—no, that is wrong—

I see her devour my soul.

My romantic heart bleeds on though.

Is it folly to cling to hope?

Maybe the stars will align and another fall into my life.

I have seen the devil possess  
the immortal soul of a church,  
the sheep of the flock scattered to the wind by goats,  
shafts of wheat choked by weeds.  
Hateful tentacles invading minds from the pulpit.  
I have asked God a question  
and waited `til the point of boredom for no reply.  
I have lived to see righteousness forsaken:  
I have lived to see children begging bread.  
But, I have also seen martyrs line up one by one.  
I have seen the broken-winged angel shield the dying man.

I have seen governments rise and fall,  
borders come and go.  
I have seen ideals forcibly replaced.  
The soldier dies alone,  
in defense of an unknown.  
I've seen this soldier eulogized  
and memorials built to remember what he died for.  
What did he die for?  
A flag waving in the air?  
In his death he had no other loyalties  
than to defend a child to the very last.

Maybe love need not always end in death,

I do not truly know.

But, from all that I have seen in life

I fear that this is so.

To love is to die, to die to self anyways;

to sacrifice my own desire for another's sake.

Was this what I was taught?

Or, did I learn this myself?

Can a void teach, or did I make a molded impression?

No! DEATH was what I was taught,

Love—LOVE *is what I learned.*

# The Flicker of an Outcry

*Lina Hernandez*

**W**hen the world you know as safe, loving, and comforting betrays you,

You are left feeling confused, hurt, unraveled, and alone.

The betrayal happens again and again.

Does everyone know? Is this normal? Who can I tell?

What's the point? No one will believe.

Not being able to endure the pain, hurt, and betrayal any longer.

With each betrayal, a spark is ignited, and then a flicker begins.

A flicker of hope is sparked deep inside. Your mind whispers, "Tell someone."

As a flicker begins so small, thinking, is it possible someone would believe?

You can feel hope rising inside, making you brave enough to speak.

One day, this will stop. You can make it stop, as the flicker grows.

Today is the day to speak; you can do this, stop the hurt.

You will feel the warmth rise inside, and your face gets hotter.

Finally, you speak, it starts out slow, questioning if they will believe.

You see their facial expression change, and you know they believe!

What was once a flicker of hope has grown into a large flame.

A flame that all can see: what once was in darkness, is now in the light.

It was fearful at first because of all the threats, but assurance now resides.

So many believe and are doing their best to keep you safe.  
Hope is overflowing as help comes your way.

# The Light Abstract

*Linda Harris*



## Six Sides of a Casket

*Dr. Dan Abella*

### I

*It does not look like her*, so it's kind of okay right now, my cousin says as we walk in the funeral home not too far from where I grew up in South Florida. My cousin is kind of the emcee of her mother's funeral, along with her brother. They look the part. My Tito is fortunate to have them take on such duties. Today would have been, he admits, their wedding anniversary. Thirty-six years on the day. *It does not look like her*, I am already thinking that while viewing the photo slideshow in the reception room. A TV screen fans out pictures I never saw of my Tita, glimpsing both a whole life lived before my own and years in physical decline after I moved away. *It does not look like her*, so it's bearable to view her in nun-like repose. She's clutching her favorite rosary. *It does not look like her*, so I permit myself to separate the memory, person, disability, and illness into glasses of liquid whose contents do not mix. I nurse those glasses all night. *It does not look like her*, so it is easier to pretend our fragility is otherwise.

## II

Of course, there's food. Trays and trays of it. The reception room has a white swinging door that never stays shut and sweeps in funeral staff all evening. All the classics are there arranged buffet-style; my sister, partner, and I are trained on the *lumpia*. It's conventional for us in attendance to eat meals with our hands, but it tickles me to see a kind of wildness take each of us over, all skulking toward the food like predators with noses to the dirt. As if reciting a pagan prayer, we take turns pleading with our waists for forgiveness while we pile our plates high. Between trips back to the serving table, people come to greet us, catch up, marvel at things that have changed. You feel like the center of attention until you find yourself drifting to another and passing around the same that-time-when and hey-do-you-remember and can't-believe-it's-happened. Mid-conversation, I catch a server liting, "this is more food than we've ever served ever for a viewing." My logic interprets her words as a common courtesy, but my vanity laps them up as a compliment.

## III

At least three generations attend. In the anteroom and far back in the viewing room, children old enough to walk sneak back to the reception for a snack. Others, much younger, fuss in their strollers or in the arms

of their mothers. Many of the young ones are dressed in black; a few choose more comfortable attire for an evening past their bedtime. I am surprised to see so many kids I don't know; for that matter, I don't know many of their parents either. My thoughts gravitate to the children throughout the service. I hear one of them coo or laugh between the priest's recitations and moments of silence when family members gather their strength to speak. I half-expect them to do what kids do best and join in on the bouts of audible crying, but most have other plans. A few older ones can dimly feel enough to hush themselves in contemplation; one or two are confused about the tears welling in their eyes. Others, not yet old enough to read the dedication, curiously grip the prayer card. After the viewing, I watch one of my cousins nearly get on hands and knees to recite passages from a book to one of them in a covered stroller, something about learning ABCs maybe. Shrieks of babyish laughter peal through the anteroom with each page flip. I turn to one of my other cousins, one I had not seen in some years, and asks if she has any. No humans, but she and her husband, now living in Ohio of all places, enjoy corralling their two cats: one named Phil, the other, bewilderingly but also totally obviously, named Social Security. A good government name, she says. I laugh harder for her benefit the way that the children, I think, laughed for our own.

## IV

I don't see my father for most of the service even though my family arrived and left together. I catch glimpses of him speaking low to others who had drifted in; other times, I peer around a corner to watch him alone, busying himself mentally, as if he were turning over his tasks for his day off tomorrow. I cannot bring myself to tell him it's ok to view his lifelong friend who might as well have been and often acted like his sister, nor urge him to sit with the rest of us to brace against the waves of eulogies beyond the glow of votive candles. On the ride to the funeral home before the service, he explains what my Tita's nickname meant ("flashy, over-dressed," supposedly from an archaic Waray word) and retells the story of how she worked her equal parts of grace and resourcefulness to sponsor my mother and facilitate our move to the US. When he muses about the time that he and my aunt's car had broken down on the way to work back in the Philippines, describing how she had to push the idle thing up a dirt road wearing heels and a miniskirt, I guess that that there are just some pains you can't bear to abide except alone. The day after, as he pulled up to the departures drop-off lane at the airport, he puts his hand on my shoulder, hard, and tells us to have a safe flight and that he'd see us soon. Some sadistic reflex kicks in and I

start imagining some loose bits of a eulogy for both my parents. The first words of that grim fantasy had already come to me when my mom was asked to light the friendship candle during the ceremony. She too keeps her distance from the reality of it all throughout the service, but she eventually finds a moment to sneak away to the casket by herself just before it is closed. I then understand how easy and how hard it is going to be to put the words together when it's my turn and theirs.

V

As we leave the funeral home, I catch sight of myself reflected in the glass panes of the interior double door separating the anteroom and reception. The reflection is of someone older and, for the time being, sadder. But I also see those of my Tita's generation, hunched over the last bits of *ensaymada* and ube cake, making good on a universal effort to smile and be pleasant between a shared plate of food. Until the dams of their grief break throughout the night, everyone appears to exaggerate their levity—for what? The sake of others or ourselves? As part of an Americanized diaspora, I always felt that the engrained cultural concept of saving face, or *hiya* as the anthropologists render it, rang with falsehood, even as it still corrects my social posture. But here, the effort to smooth out the awkwardness of a sudden death through jokes and

cajoling—the more ribald the raillery, the better—gives the sense of a rehearsal for a viewing that was not here, not now. The scene beyond the glass reminds me that putting up an act may not be avoidance of but preparation for realities like the one that lays down the hall. Our shared roleplay steels us to it, binds us until the imagined resolve somehow becomes real. If we all jest about how warm it is, we won't grimace at the gnaw of a freeze. If we are all acting, then the cracks in performance (of which there were many), only charge our mourning with higher sincerity.

## VI

There is the familiar malaise after coming home: a distaste for all effort, face slacked to a frown, joylessness seeped into every experience. *It did not look like her.* But everywhere was suffused by a memory of a life: in the reminiscences, the faded photos, even in the bristling regret and pleas for forgiveness. Among my cousins, so many of whom I've drifted away from, the gaps among the grooves of our paths shrunk for a moment, and we were again children tumbling down carpeted stairs while our parents shook their heads and belittled our games. My Tita reserved her harshest criticisms for her children, but we'd often feel a staunch, if demanding, care that spread but never thinned. Such vigilance from her and all our parents could stifle us; would they see us for the people we

hoped to become or undercut our ambition? Once, many years ago, we all came to her house, our favorite thing to do on the weekend. Our parents and grandparents would whittle the night hours playing Mahjong, and the children would be left to their devices. This time, my brother and I brought our plastic instruments for the music game *Rock Band*, booted it up in the living room, and warmed up for a setlist for an imaginary audience. My Tito, the only time he suggested it, told my cousins and us to wait before playing Bon Jovi's "Wanted Dead or Alive." He returns with a camera and starts to record. (If that recording still survives, maybe one day I'll have the courage to watch it.) As we play the first notes of the ballad, the space between our parents and us widens, and I feel them recede from us, blending first into the imagined audience but even further behind and away from them. I turn to them between verses to see if I can hold on to their presence. They have paused their own game to watch us. Approving and attentive, my Tita rests her hands resting on the felt-covered table, nods, and encourages us to go on.

## Still the Same

*Dr. Josh Dobbs*

**A** grey ball of fur  
darts before my eyes  
Pausing a moment  
to stare at the sky  
Drawn to play a game  
by a mystic call  
    To touch the soft coat  
    nothing else at all

He scampers ahead  
and as I follow  
I constantly ask  
why does he not know  
I only chase him  
across the green mall  
    To touch the soft coat  
    nothing else at all

A scent grabs my mind  
of rain drawing near  
I look at the sky  
and confirm my fear  
But locked in a match  
I cannot withdraw  
    To touch the soft coat  
    nothing else at all

There's a dry crackling  
from leaves on the ground  
A cool breeze blowing

that whirls them around  
But I continue  
through the signs of Fall  
    To touch the soft coat  
    nothing else at all

He clings to the side  
of a nearby tree  
And up it scurries  
to his home of leaves  
So close, yet so far  
but I can stand tall  
    I lost the soft coat  
    *nothing else* at all

# Friends

*Kat Copeland*



## Wild Once

*Evelyn R. Allen*

You pause at the edge of the field, the present thick with the scent of dew and the cool press of earth against your toes.

You loved the warmth of the sun on your skin as you ran through the fields, smelling of fresh-cut grass and damp earth. You were barefoot more often than not, your soles toughened by gravel and shell, your laughter echoing through the long afternoons chasing the waves of lightning bugs. The berries you picked from the thorny vines were sour-sweet and plump with juices that stained your lips with red that the river never fully washed away.

You were free and wild in those days, hair flowing in unrelenting streaks of chocolate curls. The world was immense and wondrous, and you thought it would always welcome you.

Then you grew up.

And just as all wild things do, you raged against your bondage.

The fences didn't appear overnight. They crept in quietly — an unkept promise, a family obligation, a compliment hiding a request for change. Such beautiful hair, if only you put it up; such a beautiful face, if

only it weren't covered in dirt. You told yourself this was love, this was maturity.

Slowly, the wildness seeped away, and fear took its place. The ring on your finger felt more like a manacle. You came to fear what freedom might demand of you. So, you folded yourself into corners of safety and called it peace.

It would have been easier if you had just cut ties and run. But guilt has a way of rooting deep, twining around your ribs until you mistake it for love. So, you stayed, living a half-life — a ghost of the girl who once ran through fields. The wild girl who was free.

You pulled your hair back. You changed your clothes. Memories of lightning bugs faded from your mind. You learned to smile through the pain of a joyless life. You built a life that appeared right from a distance but felt like shoes a size too small. Happiness was a myth whispered in other people's voices. Freedom was a cage you could never quite see, and that made it all the more cruel.

And then, one day, the door swung open. Not gently — never gently. It flung wide, with a violence that startled you. The hole left in the wall by his fist revealed the light. The thunderous crack of your life splintering reverberated through the empty halls.

Everything you had wanted, everything you had lost, stood shimmering just beyond. You could have reached for it. You should have. But your body was frozen in fear. You were too old, too weak, too long subdued to recognize it. Like an animal kept in a crate too long, you feared the very thing you'd longed for — the grass, the air, the uncontainable sky.

So, you took one shaky step. Then another. Small, trembling movements that didn't register as freedom but felt like it. You made mistakes. You wept for all the time gone by and then laughed at the sound of your own voice rising again. Slowly, you began to carve a space that was yours. Not the one they built for you. Not the one you thought you deserved. One you made with your own bare hands.

Now, when you consider that cage — that half-life — you see how small it was. How did you ever fit inside? How did it ever contain something so wild and so whole?

The first morning you wake in your new home, you walk outside and slip off your shoes, the grass spongy underfoot. The air is filled with the scent of berries—sharp, sweet, alive. You tilt your face toward the sun. Its warmth pushes through the fear, and for the first time in years, you don't flinch. You don't ask permission to breathe.

You were wild once.

You are again.

## I'll Be

*Christopher Gutierrez*

“**T**he strand in your eyes that color them wonderful / Stop me and steal my breath” are lyrics by Edwin McCain. Those lyrics will be ingrained in my memory forever. As I was sitting here listening to my playlist, this one popped up and brought lots of emotions and memories.

I was sitting in a bar, having a Malibu and pineapple beverage, and my date got up to sing a karaoke song. Of course, the song was “I’ll Be” and from that point I was hooked. As he sang, he stared at me with those green eyes and a grin that lit up the whole bar. During that time everyone stopped talking just to listen to him. Not only did I feel his heart in that song, but the whole bar did. If I had not mentioned it before, he has an amazing voice. That song has been the anthem to our relationship.

“I’ll be your crying shoulder,” another lyric from the song that holds truth. We have been each other’s shoulders from losing loved ones, to just having a bad day. We both lost family members during COVID. I lost my aunt and he lost a sibling and his grandfather. Being that shoulder to cry on has helped me a lot, and I think it has helped him as well.

“I’ll be better when I’m older / I’ll be the greatest fan of your life.” Now I am older and going to school to better myself and find a job that I love doing. Going back to school is not easy, but having him by my side to encourage me, and to cheer me on, has helped me know I can do this. I know he’s my greatest fan as I am his.

So, when it comes to this song, it is one that is held dear to my heart. It’s a song of our life and it will always be a part of me. I just hope and pray that this song is with us when we are old and grey (one of those already exists). This memory will always be engrained in my mind, me sitting there and admiring the love of my life.

# Texas Bloom

*Sylvia Medrano*



# Hope Thrives in the Waiting

*Esther Hernandez*

**H**ope. Hope. Hope!

How can I possibly write about hope in a world like this?  
Every day there seems to be something negative happening  
I sit down with my pen and my notebook at the ready, there comes  
nothing  
Blinded by disappointment and despair  
In my room pitch black at night  
I softly ask, “What is hope?”  
A thought that was not my own did not simply tell me  
It reminded me of a testimony that I did not consider one before

Leaving what I once called home  
Traveling to the Odessa Road  
Now in a new school all alone  
Classmates, I tried to get along  
However, I simply did not belong  
One youth service night  
Out of loneliness I cried with might  
Prayed for a friend and began to have hope

Thought I found a place in a holy community  
The Body of Christ was supposed to be in unity

Thought my prayer was answered swiftly  
Yet God had a change of plans  
Considering leaving the community turned into mutiny  
My prayer wasn't answered like I expected, but I still had hope

To Odessa College to pursue my passion  
Attempts of connection were trial and error  
Friendship became a difficult endeavor  
On the tip of losing hope in my prayer  
There I met a friend like no other  
Sweet as a banana for her words are soft and cheerful  
Beautiful as a hydrangea for like the flower she is many  
Connection most pure and true than any other  
Hope that this friendship is the answered prayer  
We may have begun, but I pray it's in his cover.

Through my journey  
I learned that patience is key  
In your waiting time  
Have hope, for it is everything  
Your reward will be sublime  
Hope thrives in the waiting

“Blessed is a man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh,

but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought,  
neither cease from yielding fruit” Jeremiah 17:7-8 (KJV).

# Hope

*Vivian Yanet*

**A**m I who you hoped I'd be?

I ask this quietly,

Lightly.

Afraid that if I am too loud it will wake something in you that will make you tell me the truth.

You would say you never had any expectations, as for you are not too attached.

You would tell me the world is big and change is common.

You would do just about everything but tell me what you really feel.

And I accept this.

This half-truth, this runaround.

I accept this because I know what you expected of me.

I should be quiet, respectful.

I should keep the peace and preach perfection.

I should cry alone, silent, in the dark.

I should be happy, though, and responsible.

Married, with or without children, that is left to me.

I should go to church twice a week and stick only to what I know.

I should be intelligent but never more than anyone else

and I should, of course, be useful to those around me.

This is what I had tried to be.

But pretending correctness does not make one correct.

And it all fell apart at the seams,  
In ways only we knew.  
So as I sit here now,  
asking you  
if me trying had been enough  
and you answer me in the way you always do,  
I realize,  
this is you  
trying to be who I hoped you'd be.

# Crossing Paths

*Valeria Gonzalez*



# Reconnecting to Myself, Reconnecting to Hope

*Anthony Buening*

In the climax of the musical *Dear Evan Hansen*, the title character desperately tries to explain why he lied, saying “Words fail.” Unfortunately for all of us, words often fail to convey our complex interior lives. Nearly a century before the musical premiered on Broadway, Virginia Woolf wrote on a similar idea, stating that “The merest schoolgirl, when she falls in love, has Shakespeare or Keats to speak her mind for her; but let a sufferer try to describe a pain in his head to a doctor and language at once runs dry.” Despite how often words fail, we continue to try to use them because not trying is a desperately isolating, lonely experience. Even the most antisocial human being craves being seen, being heard to some degree. Babies die without physical touch even if their physiological needs are met. Adults who have not seen another living soul for an extended period of time start to experience hallucinations and other symptoms of psychosis. Seeking connection with others is encoded within our very DNA. In this way, fulfilling our physiological needs is necessary to life, but sharing ourselves with others is essential to living.

As a kid, I vividly remember panic. Before I knew the word or even associated that word with the feeling of suffocation, my body knew the terror of a panic attack, how it felt like I was being buried alive. Like many young kids, my pajamas were essentially one piece that zipped up in the front to enclose my entire body up to the neck. My head, neck, and hands were free, but my feet and toes were not. Because I felt my toes unable to stretch out, confined by the fabric, my heart would race; sweat would flow from my pores; my throat would swell, crushing my windpipe. After what seemed like many severe panic attacks, my mom cut off the feet of my footed pajamas. All of this because my toes felt entombed within tight fabric. Once my feet were free, once I could stretch out my toes, I was able to breathe again. My body would cool down, my heart rate slow. I no longer felt like my existence was going to just stop.

Later I'd feel embarrassed and ashamed, but in the moment I felt like I was going to die. Back then (in the now ancient days of the 1980s), words like "panic" and "claustrophobia" existed, but those words were reserved for extreme situations, and being suffocated by footed pajamas never seemed like an experience worthy of *those* words. It seemed foolish to label my extreme reaction to having my feet contained as "panic." And

discussing mental health was something reserved for “crazies” forced to live in padded cells, away from society. A mere thing like a weird child being weird was not something that warranted finding assistance from mental health professionals, and my parents likely couldn’t afford it anyway. For them and for the times, I was a child, and children do weird things. Today, the weirdness remains. I don’t wear socks and shoes that restrict the movement of my toes. I’ve learned how to manage my panic. Maybe my strategies for managing my symptoms are not optimal, but at the very least I recognize the signs and work to address them before they get worse.

Before I could start making decisions about my own clothing, I sought out new words and forms of expression to communicate. And so, in a way, fear drove me into words and storytelling. In the stories my mother would read or in the stories my father would tell about his past or his current job, I found wonder and comfort. Words and stories were distractions from the insanity of living in a body that sometimes felt like it was dying. The steady and sure rhythm of a well-told story focused my mind and calmed my body, connecting one to the other.

Even better, the more stories I heard, the more tools I had to communicate what I was feeling. Like the writers and storytellers I

encountered, with an increased vocabulary and more storytelling techniques, I could control the narrative. I could tell others how I was feeling, get them to listen. Because that was probably the worst part of being a kid, at least for me: being unable to communicate *why* I panicked, why my fight or flight response was triggered because I couldn't move my toes. If only I could find the right word or the right phrase, I'd be able to understand my fear and communicate it to others.

I have more words to communicate how I feel now, and many people are more aware of psychological concepts and neurodivergence. But I still panic when I feel like I can't communicate my experience effectively. And that is why words and stories continue to hold a special place in my life. When I'm hurt, confused, or numb, words and stories are there. New words and old words; ancient stories and fresh perspectives. There's nothing quite like finding or rediscovering the right words for how I'm feeling. During my yearly reread of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, I'm reminded to celebrate life and the connections we have to the people around us. Woolf's "On Being Ill" is a comfort when I'm not feeling like my emotions and body are in sync. Dante's *La Vita Nuova*, Alice Oseman's *Heartstopper*, and Ngozi Ukazu's *Check, Please!* gave me hope in the aftermath of my divorce, when I thought I might never feel anything

but numb for the rest of my life. Adam Silvera's *They Both Die at the End* shattered that numbness and helped me feel again. Emotional numbness is safety. Emotions are terrifying when it feels like they are threatening to overwhelm us. Words and stories remind me that it's okay and necessary to feel. In the safety of words, I feel comfortable enough to unlock the emotions I may be holding back. When I need to feel again, words reconnect me with my emotions. They reconnect me with life; they reconnect me with hope.

# Whisper

*E. St. Claire | Niko*



# One More Time

*Sylvia Medrano*

I have to make sure.

I have to know if what I'm feeling for him is magic.

Or if it's just tragic.

I've been running from this for years,  
from the very thing that right now  
is staging a heist on my heart.

Maybe love has been running from me.

Or I've been running from it.

I'm not sure which of the two it is.

But it has finally caught me.

The way he looks at me,  
like I exist in every f... ing second, he breathes.

It makes something in me shift,  
something I thought I long buried.

One by one, the walls begin to crumble.

And it makes me ask, why now?

Why, when I'm feeling so cynical?

When I've already decided what love means to me.

And then he pushes,

He keeps pushing until I cannot think of anything but him.

And here is the thing,

I don't want it.

Or maybe some part,

some hidden still-beating thing deep inside,

says perhaps.

And I think I might surrender.

Or just keep the armor on and say, No, f...k that.

And every time I try to push him away,

to go back to what I know,

to do the stupid thing

I already warned him about...

He wouldn't let me hide.

And it ruins me a little,

because I don't know how to fight that.

Then it happens against my best advice.

I start wondering.

I start hoping.

I start seeing that maybe  
I'm not a frozen thing after all.

The new warmth inside my heart pushes back.  
It asks for one last chance.  
So, let's be hopey.  
And let love ruin my life one more time.

## Contributors & Editors

### **Anthony Buening** *Contributor*

Born and raised in Odessa, Anthony Buening was reading and writing even before he knew how to decipher the black marks on pages. That love of reading, writing, and the deciphering of symbols propelled him into earning a PhD in English from the University of North Texas and becoming a Professor of English at OC. Anthony's favorite writers include Virginia Woolf, Adam Silvera, Toni Morrison, Gillian Flynn, and James Baldwin. With only the slightest provocation, he will gladly infodump on movies, Shakespeare, and psychological trauma.

### **Caleb Mendes** *Contributor*

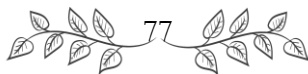
Caleb Mendes is a local illustrator, author, and creative inspired heavily by comic books, music, and movies. He has two self published poetry novels, a published chapbook, and many pieces of art that either fit personal themes or fit within the narrative universe of his own design (of which there is lore for all of the pieces). He has won two of the last Midland Arts Association summer shows with his works and continues to develop art and lore for his works.

### **Christopher Nick Gutierrez** *Contributor*

Christopher is a native to Odessa, TX. He graduated from Permian High School in 1998. He worked for Chuy's Tex Mex for 11 years doing caterings and marketing. He decided to go back to school to get his Doctorate in Marketing. He has a partner named Alex and 3 dogs (Minuet, Haiku, and Kashi). He loves them all.

### **Colie D** *Contributor*

Colie is a 19-year-old college student who loves music, writing, and all things creative. She is a complex mix of intensity and vulnerability, someone who feels deeply but refuses to be defined by it. She channels emotion into expression, unafraid to be both vulnerable and sharp.



Honest, observant, and a little unpredictable, she values depth over surface. Drawn to psychology and self-growth, she is constantly evolving, turning her experiences into understanding, and her understanding into something powerful and uniquely her own

**Dr. Ashok Karra** *Editor/Senior SKD Advisor*

Dr. Ashok Karra is an Associate Professor of Government at Odessa College and the Senior Advisor of Sigma Kappa Delta, Psi Alpha chapter. If you're interested in reading and writing, please say hi. He writes semi-regularly at <http://www.ashokkarra.blog>

**Dr. Dan Donovan Abella** *Contributor*

Dr. Dan Abella is English faculty here at OC after completing his doctoral work in Seattle, Washington. Focusing on modernism and Anglophone Philippine literature, he's attentive to the many ways that language, identity, power, and art each complicate the others. Occasionally, he tries to write creatively.

**Dr. Laura Holder** *Contributor*

Originally from southeastern New Mexico, Dr. Laura Holder has been a professor of Humanities and English at Odessa College since August 2014. They move from one creative distraction to another as the urge hits, but have always been drawn most frequently to words.

**Dr. Josh Dobbs** *Contributor*

Dr. Joshua Dobbs is an Associate Professor of English at Odessa College and a graduate from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (PhD) and Virginia Tech (MA & BA). His academic articles explore Scottish and Irish folkloric fairies who were used by nineteenth-century British authors like Dickens to give voice to marginalized groups throughout the century's societal discourses. Because of all his research into the fairy realm, he will forevermore carry a cross of pure iron in his pocket, avoid

mushroom circles entirely, and decline all food offered by unknown persons of diminutive stature...just in case.

**Dylan Garcia** *Contributor and Editor/SKD Advisor*

Dylan Garcia is a poet, a founding co-owner of WrestlingInTheMiddle LLC, a tutor at Odessa College and a bachelor's student. His goal in poetry is to promote expression and vulnerability. You can find some readings of his work on Youtube @DTGArts.

**E. St. Claire | Niko** *Co-Contributors*

This one piece is the first collaboration between the two artists.

**Elsa Guerra** *Contributor*

Elsa Guerra is a native of Odessa Texas. She has worked for Odessa College LRC Library for over 20 years. She loves to do any arts and crafts. She is a big reader of romance fiction and loves to listen to music. Elsa has a big love of painting. She painted “On Fire” for her brother-in-law, who owns and plays guitars. Check out more of her art at the OC LRC Library.

**Esther Hernandez** *Contributor*

Esther Hernandez is currently pursuing an associate degree in English at Odessa College. She hopes to build a career as an author, writing books, short stories, poems, and scripts. In her free time, she enjoys listening to Christian and Broadway music, watching cartoons, watching video essays on YouTube, daydreaming, and imagining how she would rewrite shows she likes. As a writer of unpublished works, Esther knows that ideas often arrive at the most inconvenient times, interrupting her thoughts and racing through her mind until she has no choice but to follow them.

**Evelyn R. Allen** *Contributor*

Evelyn R. Allen is a Texas-based writer whose work explores memory and the ways we lose ourselves and claw our way back, piece by piece.

Her writing leans into the dark, searching for the line between what we want and what we're told to want. She chases stories the way she chases the wildness outside—bare hands, boots in the dirt, hoping to find something real enough to hold. When she's not writing, she walks the fields, letting the sky remind her what it means to belong to a place, even if only for a moment.

**John Herrington** *Contributor*

John Herrington is an instructor of history at Odessa College. He is originally from the Houston, Texas area. He enjoys black metal, synth music, haiku, and video games.

**Kat Copeland** *Contributor*

Kat Copeland. Published visual and written word artist. Professional photographer. Organizer of family friendly arts events and open mics. Member of Permian Basin Poetry Society, Chapter of Poetry Society of Texas

**Lina Hernandez** *Contributor*

Lina Hernandez is someone who has worked with children for over two decades. Beginning as a teacher, seeing how trauma can negatively impact children, she made it a goal to change careers to become a therapist. Lina is a recent graduate from Abilene Christian University, and has become a Marriage and Family Therapist who does trauma therapy for children who have endured sexual and physical abuse because it shouldn't hurt to be a child.

**Linda Harris** *Contributor*

Linda has worked full-time at Odessa College for 20 years and has greatly enjoyed being part of the college community. During that time, she has also taken several classes at Odessa College, many of them to explore subjects she was interested in learning more about as hobbies. In 2013, Linda took a black-and-white photography class where students were

asked to create an abstract piece, an assignment that proved challenging for many. She managed to complete the project successfully, and as far as she knows, her work is still used today as a demonstration piece for the photography class.

**MK** *Contributor*

MK has been drawing for as long as she can remember. A self-taught artist, she works in both traditional and digital mediums.

In 2023, MK won a local drawing competition in Mississippi. Since then, she has completed various art commissions and created the OHS Theater logos for 2025-2026.

Looking ahead, MK plans to earn her associate degree at Odessa College before pursuing a degree in graphic design at Texas Tech University. Art has become a central part of her identity, and she is committed to continuing her growth as an artist. .

**Marcela Rodriguez** *Contributor*

Marcela Rodriguez is a 19-year-old student from Odessa, Texas, currently attending Odessa College and pursuing a career in journalism. She has always had a passion for writing and continues to look for opportunities to share her work with others. Marcela puts time, care, and effort into every piece she writes, and she hopes her audience can feel that dedication while reading her work.

**Maya Galvan** *Contributor*

Maya Galvan was born and raised in Odessa, Texas. She is currently working on her degree plan in preparation to transfer to the University of North Texas. Maya also works part-time as a graphic designer for ICA Marketing. Her family consists of her mom, dad, three brothers, and their dog.

**Sylvia Medrano** *Contributor/Editor/ SKD Board*

Sylvia Medrano is a Mexican writer living in Odessa, Texas, who occasionally writes under the pen name E. St. Claire. She is an Art and Teaching Art college student and a mother of two; her work explores the friction between cultural expectations and the gritty realities of survival. Her writing is a map of transformation, moving through cynicism to find a quieter, more honest desire of a relentless mind. She is currently working on a collection of poetry and her first novel, seeking to turn the weight of her words into something real that exists not only in her feverish dreams.

**Valeria Gonzalez** *Contributor/Editor/SKD Board*

Valeria Gonzalez is a student at Odessa College. She is a member of the Editorial Board and a member of Sigma Kappa Delta. Valerie has grown to love the art of poetry and wants to write her own. A quote she sees poetry as is "Poetry happens to a poet long before they ever write it". To understand poetry is to find meaningful word play to define the moment in your life that has moved you. She used hope to define her struggles with believing in herself and the timeline she can be on.

**Vivian Yanet** *Contributor*

Vivian Yanet is the daughter of Cuban immigrants who have spent most of their lives living in Central Florida. She recently made a move to West Texas and has since been drawn back into her passion, writing. Writing has always been a release for her and allows her to travel to places she's never been.

## About Sigma Kappa Delta

Sigma Kappa Delta is the National English Honor Society for two-year colleges. The Odessa College Psi Alpha chapter celebrates student creativity through writing, literature, and the arts. *OC Oraciones* is our annual literary journal dedicated to honoring the voices and stories of our campus and community.

### Acknowledgments

We extend our sincere gratitude to the students, staff, faculty, and members of the Odessa College community whose creativity, support, and encouragement helped bring this issue of *OC Oraciones* to life. This issue, centered on hope, would not exist without the contributors who trusted us with their words, images, memories, and visions. Each piece reminds us that hope can appear in many forms: in resilience, in community, in grief, in faith, in imagination, and in the courage to keep creating.

We also thank the Sigma Kappa Delta officers for their time, dedication, and care throughout the process of shaping this issue. Your work behind the scenes helped create a space where student voices could be honored and shared.

A special thank-you goes to Dr. Karra, our chapter advisor, for his guidance, patience, encouragement, and continued belief in the importance of student expression. Your support helps make *OC Oraciones* more than a publication; it becomes a place where writers and artists can grow, be seen, and leave something meaningful behind.

## Explore our Previous Issues of *OC Oraciones*

*OC Oraciones* continues to grow through the voices, creativity, and dedication of Odessa College students and the Sigma Kappa Delta community. To learn more about our chapter, explore previous issues, and find additional information about *OC Oraciones*, visit our Odessa College LibGuide.

<https://odessa.libguides.com/skd>

Also available at Amazon.

<https://www.amazon.com/-/es/OC-Oraciones-I-Issue-III/dp/B0GFX89YK>

