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ISLAND GIRL CAN'T SWIM

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by

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THESIS

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Preface

Swimming is seen as an obvious and expected prerequisite for island living. At some point, saying you can't swim is almost laughable. It can also be seen as irresponsible. As a moral flaw. This project started only as a title, as a way to reframe swimming, which is seen as an imperative necessity, and show how that assumption is an act of conquest and colonialism. The goal of this illustration was to shift and reflect on the relationship between one and the world around them. Whenever I mention that I do not know how to swim, people are baffled because I grew up incredibly close to the ocean and the sea. How could I survive life on an island if I could not conquer the water that cages it? I explain that I know how not to drown. Swimming is usually framed as a skill, as a competition, as a sport. Rarely does it center the relationship of our bodies to the water, as something more "passive". A swimmer might also see the water as an enemy, ready to pull it under or resist moving through it, but to fight the sea is such a presumptuous and colonizing idea that misunderstands the water as an isolating force that must be tamed. And much of this taming comes from language itself and its historical usage.

The official Puerto Rican national anthem speaks of how beautiful and awe-inducing the beaches were to Christopher Columbus when he arrived to conquer the island.

When at her beaches Columbus arrived;
he exclaimed full of admiration
Oh! Oh! Oh!
This is the beautiful land
that I seek.

This beauty is portrayed as docility this docility is given as the reason for conquest.

With *Island Girl Can't Swim* attempts not to reframe swimming, but to offer up not drowning as a valid alternate relationship to water. To reintroduce passivity, because it was never the reason for conquest, but an excuse. Although not drowning includes things like floating or even sinking, it is intentionally not defined because doing so would become another imposition

instead of a different possibility. This attempt to re-learn how to interact with water forces Island Girl to re-learn how to interact with everything and everyone around her to remap the ocean she finds herself in. This book seeks to explore the dynamics and evolution of various undefined relationships. This exploration is done through geographical positioning, both literal and otherwise, and how these people—these islands—are not isolated, but intimately connected through the sea. *Island Girl Can't Swim* is an exploration of romantic love by and about someone who seemingly does not understand it. Through different frameworks, those of Puerto Rico's colonialism, pop culture and personal experience, understanding is attempted within a society with rigid definitions of love. This rigidity extends beyond those of heteronormativity, nationality, and culture to include, and center, experience and what qualifies as love. Through a narrative constructed through poems with characters, such as Island Girl and her main love interest Border Boy, *Island Girl Can't Swim* blurs the lines of expectations among a variety of structures that are considered given, if the aforementioned are even acknowledged as structures at all.

Crumbs for the Starving or Food Doesn't Have a Moral Value

Unlike swimming, there are no formalized lessons for love—of a clearly defined romantic relationship—apart from young love. As someone who has not yet had that young love, I find that as I grow older it becomes less and less acceptable to not have conquered the basics. Basics that I am not even aware of because I have not had the opportunity to explore that young, innocent love, or anything else after ~~that~~ for that matter. It is something that feels deeply foreign, almost mystical. There's societal rules and expectations, rituals, regarding love and dating that every day grow more inexplicable to me, particularly in the courting/pre-dating stage where people are feeling each other out before entering into a defined relationship. In these “pre-stages”

as it were, love is not supposed to be on the table. It is more about initial interest, attraction and compatibility. Any deviation from these rules about love and relationships is met with mock and ridicule.

How many crazy, love-struck heroine characters do new see in pop culture being mocked for thinking of love in all the concreteness of the word before the love interest even looks her way? *The Take* calls this trope the Romance Addict. The video states that “Recognizing that love is to a large degree mysterious and out of our control, not a recipe you can replicate with the right ingredients, can be devastating to a romance addict” (2021). This reaffirms the assumption that in pop-culture, which reflects and informs society, the Romance Addict is naïve and working from the desire of the impossible instead of the pain of being dismissed and laughed at for their desires. This dismissal leads to further isolation from society, but mainly peers, who see the Romance Addict in real life as a fun character, rather than someone searching for love and trying different methods amidst a sea of rejection. Especially if the Romance Addict doesn’t find a relationship to practice love in, their source of information stays within greater cultural messaging, like pop culture, further compounding the problem. The societal reaction to this is to make fun of the Romance Addict and dismiss their fears when they do express vulnerability rooted in their experiences as an impossibility because love just eventually comes for everyone, arguably an equally, if not more, romanticized and idealized idea about love.

Overall, the critique of the Romance Addict in pop culture feels deeply rooted in shaming those who believe in love despite not having it in a way that society deems acceptable. When I share my ideas of love I get lumped in with the Hopeless Romantics that have had their brain rotted by one too many romantic comedies. The assumption leaves out any other possibilities of different manifestations of love. Although I am very much enamored by the grand gestures of

rom-coms and find myself daydreaming of futures with strangers because, it is the possibility of love that I'm more enamored with. The opportunity to explore what another person could bring out of you and vice-versa. This is an opportunity I have not yet had according to the societal standards of acceptable love. Yet love grew for people. Yet connections were established. Yet I did not drown. I do not seek to be an Olympic gold medalist in swimming through relationship milestones. I seek to throw myself at the sea and for it not to end me.

Defining Love and the Cost of Doing So

When attempting to explain love that is not portrayed as valid in media, I turn to Migene González-Wippler's explanation of sympathetic magic and its importance to Santería:

All forms of sympathetic magic assume that things act on each other at a distance through an unidentified and unexplainable attraction, the initial contact being sparked by the will of the magician. This belief in the sympathetic influence exerted on each other by objects or individuals separated by a distance is of tremendous importance in Santería, and indeed in any form of natural magic. (19)

Here she illustrates three main components that I find imperative in the type of love I explore: distance, unidentified and unexplainable attraction, and will. These are not the tenets of love that we typically see portrayed as valid as they recall the Romance Addict trope and the ridicule these characters must sustain. These components are often seen as the enemy of love, as red flags that indicate it is not love at all. We are told love can only flourish when two people are in proximity, that there needs to be a grand reason to fall for someone, and that it is effortless rather than actively created. To actively create love is seen as artifice, as blasphemous invention intended to manipulate and control. That, yes, love should be worked at, but it should never start at work. So when someone works to construct love that is not manifested in the accepted forms, this is seen

as not “earned” through some mysterious and random force that places value on us to determine who deserves a chance at what they desire.

More often than not this mysterious and random force is the oppressive structures that dictate our society. A concrete, and infinitely fascinating example of this is the TV series *Supernatural*, exemplified by Castiel’s love confession to Dean Winchester in the final season. To understand the impact of this choice, some context is needed. Throughout its 15-season run, *Supernatural* practically became a battleground for fan-showrunner tensions. As the homoerotic subtext between Dean and Castiel was increasingly pointed out and deeply explored by fans, the show responded in kind with everything from moments of fanservice to fuel the fire to outright dismissal through meta-narrative techniques including breaking the fourth wall and making jokes at the expense of fans of the coupling. Probably one of the most infamous examples of queerbaiting, the act of hinting at queer relationships without committing to them in order to attract queer audiences without alienating those who would disprove of such depictions, *Supernatural* presents a fascinating case study for a queer narrative constructed almost entirely outside of the literary canon while heavily informed and reinforced by evidence from show. *Supernatural* functions as a lengthy coming-out narrative, textually for Castiel and sub-textually for Dean, culminating in the love confession scene in episode 18 of season 15 titled “Despair”. The only solution to saving Dean from the wrath of an enemy, is Castiel confessing his love. He explains that a year ago he made a deal with The Empty, the entity that rules the afterlife of angels and demons, that cost Castiel his life. But the Empty said it would wait to take Castiel when he finally experienced true happiness. In his monologue Castiel says to Dean:

I always wondered ever since I took that burden, that curse, I wondered what it could be, what my true happiness could even look like. I never found an answer. Because the one

thing I want is something I know I can't have. But I think I know now. Happiness isn't in the having. It's in just being. It's in just saying it. (2020)

Once Castiel finally says the words "I love you," the Empty is summoned and takes both Castiel and the enemy, and this is the last we see of Castiel in the show. He is mentioned twice in the following two episodes, but his confession is not reckoned with, least of all by Dean. To compound upon this, Dean, the typical alpha male archetype, has been conceptualized by fans, with hefty textual evidence, as a bisexual character which further complicates any straightforward interpretations of the character within the text. *Supernatural* is fascinating to me because of how it exemplifies giving truth and validity to something that the other parties involved deny through words despite those same parties affirming through actions. It is the supposed dissonance of daring to love without and despite.

Understanding Colonialism but not Love

I began to think about how the connection of my lack of conquest in these two planes, swimming and love, could be explained. I thought of the conquest I did know, although from the colonized side, Puerto Rico's colonial status. The pervasive trauma that this colonialism has on its people is something that infiltrates every facet of our lives, including our interpersonal relationships. I began to think of the ways colonialism affects how we love each other. When we are cut off from the rest of the world, how can we attempt to build healthy and loving relationships? It is ingrained in us to be appreciative and grateful to our oppressors and that our disenfranchisement is our own fault. I remember a popular metaphor I grew up listening to, often from History and Spanish high school teachers, describing Puerto Rico as the 30-something, lazy adult child who will not leave their parents' couch. It is fascinating to see how this metaphor parallels criticisms of Millennials, the destroyers of industries and scapegoats of economic

collapse, despite our divestment from the precious structures and resulting economic crises created by Boomers and Gen Xers. That this ahistorical simplification of Puerto Rico's colonial status came from scholars and educators, those who supposedly know better, laid the foundation of my disdain and distrust of academia and the validated records of our history.

Various forms of colonialism are pervasive around the world, but Puerto Rico's is a crude colonialism, a classic colonialism, a colonialism long-thought to be extinct. When I speak to fellow Latin American friends who share a similar history of Spanish colonialism, I am told my mentality is defeatist; I need to just decolonize my mind. But decolonizing your mind does not decolonize your body. And that is where love is carried, in-between the chest and the gut. The visceral effects of love and colonialism are corporeal.

Genre: On How to Say What You Mean Within Structures That Hate You

By using the flexibilities of time and space poetry allows, I explore the confusion and ambiguity of undefined relationships by centering how love can be seen and shown without being named. A curious experience about bringing poems from this project to workshop is that readers were often left confused about the nature of the relationship. They presented this as a flaw, something to work on during revision. They pushed me to define this love in a way that they would understand and would make them comfortable. I was hesitant to do this because it felt insincere to both the work and my experiences. I found a way to negotiate my commitment to emotional truth and the typical reader's expectations of a love story in the first lines of the poem "Them": "Border Boy & Island Girl love each other. She's sure. They're compatible in the worst ways. He's sure." In the first poem that introduces Border Boy, the main love interest, I name the love that others would otherwise call precipitated or imagined by juxtaposing the

perceptions of both characters not inherently as an interpersonal conflict, but as parallel columns that speak to structures bigger than both of them.

Effectively starting near the “end” of their journey, rather than a first meeting, also allows for the reader to enter Island Girl’s and the speaker’s ideas of love, without being bogged down by their own expectations and ideas concerning love.

Bisexual Theory: No, Not Just Another Binary

The way bisexuality informs inter-personal relationships, specifically those of a romantic and/or sexual nature, blurs traditional understanding and conventions of such relationships. In “The epistemic contract of bisexual erasure” Yoshino demonstrates how bisexuality threatens both straight and gay concepts of being to maintain social order. After explaining that discriminating by sex privately (sexual orientation) is in conflict with rejecting discrimination by sex publicly (laws prohibiting discrimination by sex in the workplace) he goes on to write,

Our erotic relationships, after all, are often viewed as simultaneously constituting and reflecting our most important emotional [sic] attachments. If we routinely structure these crucial relationships by discriminating on the basis of sex, it should come as no surprise that we (and our judicial institutions) experience a failure of nerve when asked to categorically abolish all sex-based distinctions. [...] Bisexuality implies that sex need not be as important in our desirous lives as we have made it. [...] As such, [bisexuals] have the potential to evade the public/private tension with regard to sex in which monosexuals find themselves. (29-30)

The public/private tension is one that is inherent in the book as the lack of necessity to differentiate between private emotions and public expressions of emotion inform the ambiguous nature of the relationships. The public/private tension also extends to many of the instances of

intimacy that happen in secrecy or privacy with little to no public expression. Following Yoshino's line of thought, this creates anxiety for the monosexual reader as the relationship and emotions encountered in the poems threatens their societal expectations.

The line between secret and private is then also blurred by not ascribing a morality to differentiate between secrecy and privacy as it would create another limiting binary that hinders an expression of love that is already there. This also reframes "illicit" relationships that require secrecy so that their hidden nature is not seen as an ultimate failure of love, but as a complicated exploration of it. This can be seen explicitly throughout the poem "Someone Else's Boyfriend", evidenced by the title, and in instances in "Maddening Woman" as follows,

Feeding a girl is no crime
to his girlfriend back home
especially if he's the one who asks
for a picture Island Girl will struggle
to find seven years later.

The illicit picture motif is extended into "Vigorous Heterosexual Life:

a picture of them holding hands—
perfect queer girl crisis DIY mixtape cover art."

The picture gets deleted off Facebook.
She becomes Wisconsin Girl.

Both of the images are deleted signifying not only an attempted erasure of the illicit relationships, but of the illicitness itself. In both of these poems we see how Island Girl's love interests contribute to the construction of her identity, cementing their influence into her being, despite any hard evidence of their existence.

Because the relationships in the book are not defined nor abide by society's cis/hetero/mono expectations, they engage with queerness by finding places to fit where they

might seem out of place or insignificant. For example, in “so she held it under her tongue” when faced with Mexican Boy (From Chicago):

Wisconsin Girl’s name tickles
Island Girl’s lips the same way
her fingers play
with his earlobes.

Here the queerness can at first glance seem to dissipate into the ether, but the title creates a circularity and makes the poem enter queer temporality. Queer temporality attempts to encompass how queer people experience time differently, such as delayed adolescence, marriage or having children, due to their queerness. It is a disruption of linear time.

This disruption also extends to proximity, in that the poems make evident that love does not disappear when the object of one’s affection leaves, especially when we have chosen to commit to it. An example of this is found in “Sobbing on my 25th birthday after you shut the door,” where I begin the poem with “These pants exist after you, so they don’t/love you the way I tell them to.” The line break in particular creates a paradox concerning the existence of the ‘you’. If the pants don’t exist, then there is no after, no end, of the relationship. There is a recognition of the various dualities in love later in the poem when talking about shudders and caresses and leaving and coming back and the revolving door, the circularity, that this creates. The binary then breaks its linearity and eats itself into a cycle that was already happening.

This bisexual framework also influences how gender is conceptualized and performed throughout the book. The way the “female” speaker in this book interacts with men is inherently queer, in that her identity construction is never posited as either complementary or oppositional to a man’s. By simply juxtaposing romantic interest in men and women it forces the reader beyond traditional gender role expectations. An early example of this juxtaposing can be found in “El Gran Combo toca de gratis en La Placita” when I write, “Chicos que me ignorarán hasta

que me quitara el uniforme de la escuela. Chicas a las que solo me le confesaré con miradas cargadas de las vírgenes martirias a las que intentan moldearnos.” Of course, the way that romantic interest is displayed is inherently different because of how these boys and girls are socialized, but always presenting them horizontally emphasizes queerness even when not evident in other poems. This is continued in “Island Woman” at the beginning of section II, when Island Girl and Island Woman as one say “We must/ exist out of boys and men,/ biblically I mean.” This reaches a point of climax in the final poem “Archipelago,” when the Island Girl as constructed thus far is fragmented and dissipated completely:

There are Islands
and there are Girls
and there are opposites
to neither. There is only
sea.

Becoming Holy

Self-deification is the practice of the male artist, both in the text and out. The speakers in these poems as a girl and woman, is then left with Virginization to achieve holiness.

Virginization here is more of an adjective, something that is actively thrust upon her, versus the rigid concept of virginity. As virginity is always contested because it has a hard line between virgin and not, Virginization then becomes weaponized against those who brand her with it.

Mothers, grandmothers, and aunts do not pray to God, they pray to La Virgencita, and that is the deity Island Girl chooses to embody. Even after she “loses” her virginity, she desires it back as explored in “Creation Myth Three: Eucharist”. Here virginity is explored not as a burden of purity but one of loneliness. It is a curse that brands Island Girl for all potential partners as either pious or dysfunctional, either way undesirable. This is explicitly stated in the poem “A boy on Tinder told me my poems were too depressing.”:

The girl who gets told it's ok that it hasn't happened yet by people on their fourth and fifth loves/ the 23 year old secret virgin/ the girl whose virginity is a stamp of disapproval/ the girl who toys with telling people she's saving herself for marriage, even though she doesn't believe in it, because that's less mortifying than admitting no one wants her

To reframe virginity as a sign not of purity but of loneliness is blasphemous and heretic given the catholic imagery used to tell *Island Girl's* story of creation. As that system loses its usefulness for her to understand herself she turns to other systems and images, like that of magic and the witch, to find new understanding. Yet, the image of the virgin isn't completely dispelled. Much like in *brujería* and magic practiced in the Caribbean and Latin American, many catholic saints and figures are utilized in the book in conjunction with afro-indigenous figures to create its own system. This negotiation of survival is how *Island Girl* adapts to the societal norms that reject her, but greatly inform her existence. This supposed dissonance, the false binary, reaches a point of crisis or climax in which she consolidates both her virginization and deification during intimacy:

Maybe it's because of the terror in his eyes as I'm naked on top of him revealing I'm a virgin or that I have massive period cramps as I watch *Gone Girl* and write this, but I know that I am his god even if only in my eyes for the grace I've given him.

Here she embraces godhood at the precipice of losing her virginity, noting the power she has when she reveals to him she that she is a virgin. She also recognizes that he may not recognize her godhood because she is the only one that sees the grace she has bestowed on him. It implies that instead of gods being the constructions of humans, gods construct themselves through humans. This conflict is later reckoned with "Creation Myth Four: Priestess" as it introduces the

final section of the book where divinity is surrendered for the ability of being able to mold it in her hands:

and divinity is the most human desire.
So goddess becomes far too messy
far too lost
for a girl
and anything else she swallowed—
the impossibility of choking
not a curse, a spell nor a blessing
just another goddamn thing.

As the hierarchy between divinity and humanity is flattened, it forces not only the reader, but me as the writer, to reflect on how we interact not only with each other what we create.

Island Girl is my construction, but she is very much an equal part of me, not a subordinate. This is why there are poems in the third person telling Island Girl's story and poems in the first person where she tells the story. This flattening begs us all to ask: What do we owe each other? How do we negotiate that? Where is it possible?

Mapping Island Girl: Contextualizing the Ill-Read

As a recurring theme of the book is flattening hierarchal structures, pop culture references serve to contextualize the speaker's voice. They challenge the glorification of the written word as the only valid source of knowledge. The written word imposes an implied hierarchy of writer to reader that creates harmful ambiguity due to the challenges of conveying tone via text and how differently we all interpret language. This was one of my challenges in writing the book, how to circumnavigate the limits of the written word with the written word. In next drafts I will explore and play more with white space to both match my speaking cadence better and break away more from these structures. However, I fear that this would still create some dangerous ambiguity. This ambiguity is harmful because it can be used to disguise intent of harm by stating the possibility of multiple interpretations or because it forces universality to erase specificity. It also

opens the door to a commitment to misunderstanding; universality lacks a sense of compromise with the matter at hand. Glissant best synthesizes this when elaborating on Saint-John Perse's errantry and optative universality, "like someone who takes refuge in the thought of the universal, because he considers no specific situation his responsibility" (37).

The universalizing assumption about writers is that they are well-read. Well-read here has a narrow definition of the western literary canon books or texts. The "basics", along with contemporary texts that function according to the established canon's rules, that all writers need to know in order to operate in the literary world. Both *Island Girl* and *I as a writer* intentionally reject the expectation of being well read in order to be able to create our own systems and forms of knowledge rooted in our contexts and realities. That rejection then becomes a place to search for connection, which is directly referenced as the initial point of contact and later on tension between *Island Girl* and *Border Boy* in the poem "Sea Blueprint":

of *Border Boy* saying he doesn't respect
Gabriel Garcia Marquez.
Island Girl is drawn
to his bravado disguised as dissent
Island Girl misreads that dissent as she interprets overlap as kinship. But kinship is again attempted by the following poem "*Boldel Boi pone Soy Peor*" a poem in Spanish that attempts to blend the 14-line sonnet with reggaeton/latin trap influences as denoted by the reference to the Bad Bunny song. Again, the initial connection between *Border Boy* and *Island Girl* hinges on this axis of literary and popular tension and how they must face this socially constructed opposition of value in each other. But here it goes further to theorize the connection between them as how they relate to love and country:

Pal carajo el amor verdadero
ellos solo logran ser sepulteros
de sus patrias que fatigan en paz

dentro del otro fugaz pues quizás
se santifican uno al otro

The pop culture references in *Island Girl Can't Swim* also serve to create a landscape of archetypes that serve as shorthand for recurring types of femininities. The two carefully-crafted femininities are that of the goth and alternative Sam Manson and Wednesday Addams and the pink princesses Mia Thermopolis and Megara from *Hercules*. These figures are used both as survival armor and filters through which to understand the world. This goth-princess opposition is another false binary that is contested throughout *Island Girl Can't Swim* and best exemplified in "Cool Girl Monologue" when the speaker, a teacher, rants: "And the boy with the foot fetish in-class writing exercise isn't the worst. No, he I smite when he can't rip his eyes from my fluffy, mint green sliders (think Power Puff Buttercup Elle Woods) neck exposed for the smite." The union of these two types of feminine aesthetics, the aggressive and mean with the girly and sweet, creates the fixation of her objectification, showing how similar they really are and how neither of these armors can protect her. Thus, the pop culture references serve not only as shorthand for the various femininities played with by the speaker, but also show how she seeks solace and protection within them because she intimately understands them. Referring to the infamous monologue from the film *Gone Girl*, the speaker in "Cool Girl Monologue" seeks the cathartic liberation that Amy Dunne presents in the film, or shedding the expectations of the archetype, only to find that to survive she must retreat to what she knows, choosing that over her death. In the poem the speaker knows the limits of the relationship but chooses to continue to commit to it by deifying herself within it.

This survival mechanism becomes complicated to negotiate when it is tied to something that cannot be shed, altered, or played with, like race or ethnicity. To play into an ethnic stereotype that has much less wiggle room due to ignorance quickly becomes an entrapment.

This entrapment is best encapsulated by the figure of JLo, mentioned both in the aforementioned “Cool Girl Monologue” and earlier in “Mami always said “Para ser bella hay que ver las estrellas””. JLo here is recalled as the stereotype of not just the Latina bombshell, but specifically the Puerto Rican sexpot. JLo, literally the reason that Google Image search was created, stands in as the ultimate observable and consumable figure. This is a crucial specificity, Puertoricanness. Despite its ubiquity in pop culture, Puerto Rican and Caribbean realities are consistently and systematically othered within even Latinx and Latin American societies. In the poem this is shown near the end:

My American professor mentions Frida Kahlo and
from then on everyone assumes I’m Mexican
because, silly girl, Puerto Ricans aren’t real
apart from JLo playing Selena.

The tensions between ethnicities that this scene initiates, sets the stage for future tensions between Border Boy and Island Girl as the relationship between Mexicanness and Puertoricanness is introduced in supposed oppositions, but the tension is incited not by a true opposition but by the American professor.

Still, the invisibility of Puertoricanness is crucial because of how it relates to Puerto Rico’s colonial status. Yes, the existence of Puerto Rico is very well known among the Latin American community but the complexities of its political status is not, leading many to believe we have “the best of both worlds” when in reality we have none, or rather, one struggling to keep itself afloat. Puerto Rican culture is consumed at a large scale, specifically reggaeton, yet in the process of exportation becomes separated from Puerto Rican artists and bodies in order to appeal to a wider audience. Subsequently, the music genre is stripped of or whitewashed of its Puertoricanness. Hypervisibility then becomes an erasure of sorts. Frances Negrón-Muntaner in

her book *Boricua Pop: Puerto Ricans and the Latinization of American Culture* explores the commodification of Puertoricanness through various Puerto Rican figures. She contextualizes Puerto Rico's political history with different patterns of consumption:

With neither a nation-state nor a privileged economic position in American society to underscore our value, many Puerto Ricans have relied on consumption and self-commodification as two of several means to attenuate shame, negotiate colonial subjection, and acquire self-worth. (26)

Negrón-Muntaner, focusing on Rita Moreno, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Ricky Martin and Jennifer López, shows how popular Puerto Rican figures negotiate their identities in order to appeal to an American audience to the point of commodification, sometimes at the cost of their lives. She later goes on to say that “Bathed in the light of Boricua pop stars, for instance, Islanders can visualize themselves as flawless sovereign subjects, unhampered by colonial subalterity.” (31) Negrón-Muntaner sustains that the popularity of Puerto Rican pop stars gives Puerto Ricans the illusion that they are valued despite our colonial status. Given that the book is from 2004 I find that there has been a shift towards decentering Americanness, especially after the 2017 hurricane and the U.S. government's abandonment of boricuas.

Poetics: No Other Choice but to Double Down

Colonial anxiety now finds different avenues of expression, and Bad Bunny could very well fit within the book's pattern of exploration of identities. However, Bad Bunny differs in how he doubles down on his Puerto Rican identity and how he chooses to express it. It's this defiance of expectations that greatly informs my poetics in regards to this project. He has achieved massive success while still centering a Puerto Rican audience. This is clear in his music

and lyrics, as he doesn't shy away from Puerto Rican Spanish and references that might lead to audiences not privy to those nuances lost or not fully grasping the scope of meaning. A standout example is his song "BOOKER T" from his latest album *EL ÚLTIMO TOUR DEL MUNDO* in which he makes several references to an infamous ritual college freshmen on the island fear, and uses it to flip the terror of a newcomer into a defiance of expectation.

The constant expectation of being a Puerto Rican writer is to be an expert on all things Puerto Rico in order to teach those around me the basics of how I communicate and to counteract the intense anti-Puerto Rican programming that is pervasive in literary circles, especially Latin American ones in which Puerto Rican Spanish is still highly stigmatized, speaking from my own horrid workshop experiences. This ignorance then de-centers my actual work and focuses on its intelligibility by audiences it was not made for. Like Bad Bunny, the poems in *Island Girl Can't Swim* refuse to turn Puertoricanness into the commodification of Islandness, Island Time, Tropical Time. To take things at one's own pace not as a luxury but as a right. It takes *Island Girl's* construction and throws it back at those who constructed her, everyone else she interacts with, especially the reader. Doing so forces discomfort and silence, allowing everyone to sit in the muck. This counter can most clearly be seen in the Arecibo Radio Telescope poems in which they take news events along with anecdotal experiences and put them into conversations to attempt to show the emotional truth of when my realities collide, first by explaining and then by refusing to. After bringing "the Arecibo Radio Telescope gets decommissioned just as I learn to read birthcharts" to workshop I am told that the verse "home." needs to be earned, making abundantly clear that my colonial reality is completely ignored and divorced from my work, all in the service of "literature" or "art". If no matter how many times I explain the context of my work and my poetics they are ignored, then the next poem I offer up will be only a title, "the

Arecibo Radio Telescope collapses 12 hours after my classmates tell me I need to earn “home” in the previous poem”. These two poems were meant to introduce another framework to help Island Girl understand love, that of astrology to accompany the few instances of tarot, but were cut short due to external dismissal. Instead, they lead to the final poem which concludes the project with an accusation of that dismissal:

Oceans do not pertain
the girl or her boys, even
if those Boys think her
cavalier enough to want
what pretends universality,
what pretends understanding.

Giving The People What They Want or porque comerse a Julia una vez no fue suficiente para el mundo

Island Girl Can't Swim incorporates water in various forms, but mainly through bodies of water like seas, oceans, waves and even rain. The water here is vital as the source of connection between the characters. It also places the text within a larger Caribbean literature tradition, its main access point being Puerto Rican poet Julia de Burgos. In her book discussion titled “Toward a Genealogy of Water: Reading Julia de Burgos in the Twenty-First Century” Rebeca L. Hey-Colón analyzes of Vanessa Pérez-Rosario’s *Becoming Julia de Burgos*. Burgos’ use of water places her in in opposition to the established literary scene of La Generación del Treinta which was focused on the steadfastness of land and as part of the literary tradition of using water as an exit of these overbearing structures.

Hey-Colon states that Burgos is placed “within contemporary critical Caribbean discourse by identifying her as a precursor for the term *sexile*, a word typically used to describe the experience of the queer community’s migration from a repressive island culture to a presumably more hospitable place in the US mainland” (179). Similarly, *Island Girl* begins to

truly explore the possibility of her queerness when she leaves Puerto Rico as seen in the poem “I put Island Girl on a plane to South Korea/ where she will meet Mexican Boy (From Chicago)”. What follows is the weaving of Mexican Boy (From Chicago) and Wisconsin Girl into complex exploration for Island Girl of queerness and love although neither are viable partners for her, but she still persists in caring for and loving them. As all three figures are displaced from their homes at their moment of meeting, they find the less obvious and more fluid connections between them.

Another critical exploration in Hey-Colon’s discussion of Julia de Burgos is Bajan Kamau Brathwaite’s concept of tidalectics, which “privileges the circular, which entails continuing movement. Circularity in this sense is not futile, however, since the tides themselves, constantly ebbing and flowing, are never exactly the same” (185). The concept of queer temporality and circularity discussed previously is intrinsically tied to Brathwaite’s Tidalectics. The relationships between these concepts is evident in the poem “two Puerto Rican girls get lost on the subway on their way to the statue of liberty,” when Island Girl and her sister end up in Brooklyn where their mother lived a couple of years in her childhood:

Abuela says it’s too cold to live
here, with hers
in the Brooklyn that almost
turned Island Girl into Look At The Island Girl
 into look at the only two dresses I have for school girl
 into look at the dolls nailed to our wall girl
 into look at the planes returning girl

The poem explores not only the cyclical nature that is Puerto Rican migration to the United States, but also plays with the idea of a different type of Island Girl who exists only looking at islands from afar, both Manhattan and Puerto Rico, and reinforcing the disconnection narrative of water.

Burgos' work stands in opposition to the Generación del Treinta, as Hey-Colon states that "the male members of this group believed that the national identity of the island could only be fashioned through the soil. [...] To focus on water, something that cannot be claimed and molded through colonial power in the way that the land can, was inconceivable to them" (182). Almost a century later this still remains inconceivable to many, enough that it sparked the title of this project. Both Hey-Colon and Pérez-Rosario insist that Burgos creates escape routes through the water, "forging alternate paths for belonging within a society whose strict parameters refused to include her," and this is where my work starts to divert from and expand on Burgos' work. Although this book stems from the various ways society has refused to include me, the water is not a vehicle for escape, but one of connection between an array of displaced bodies.

I also defer from Hey-Colon and Pérez-Rosario's conceptualization of water in opposition to nationalism, whose "strangling hold" was "one of the primary forces that Burgos' water-laden poetry struggled against" (181). They do concede that "despite Burgos' predilection for water she was also unable to completely ignore the call of nationalism, a construct that repudiates water's flowing and unbridled nature" (181). I find this conceptualization of nationalism one of an imperial, academic and detached lens that fails to recognize that a nationalism in a colony is fundamentally and functionally different than the nationalism of an imperial state that is the United States, from where both of these writers are writing in and for in these specific pieces. Burgos utilizes water in conjunction with nationalism to create intimacy similar to the one created with a lover. An example can be found in her poem "Canto a Aguadilla" (Canto To Aguadilla):

Tierra libre; libre y sola; sola y bella:
en tu valle de infinito
al Atlántico salvaje plenamente te le entregas;
y a las cumbres que cual besos fugitivos te circundan;

y al latino sol que quema;
y aún, seductora deidad;
aún te sobran noches tibias y románticas

(Land free; free and alone; alone and beautiful:
in your valley of the infinite
to the savage Atlantic you completely surrender;
and to the summits which like fugitive kisses surround you;
and to the Latin sun that burns;
and yet, seductive deity;
you have a surplus soft warm and romantic nights) (434-435)

Throughout the poem she uses bodies of water; references to pro-independence ideology and supporters like José de Diego; the single-starred flag and the revolutionary Borinqueña anthem; and intimate language like “fugitive kisses” and “warm romantic nights,” to create the trident structure of concerns that is found throughout her body of work.

Island Girl Can't Swim uses various frameworks to attempt to arrive at understanding, both for and of Island Girl. This is done with the goal of reframing connection and displacement in order to create an empathetic body of work that forces the reader to face what they owe and are owed in a less transactional, defined way. By centering the undefined and refusing to define it, it forces the reader to rethink why they cling so much to understanding as a result instead of a process of discovery or learning. Through discomfort, confusion and the decision to love without and despite this oft-dismissed way of loving and being emerges as a possibility worth considering.

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Por culpa tuya.

Island Girl Can't Swim

I.

her earliest memory is a hurricane.
mami swells with her brother
grips the edge of the bathtub
prays for no broken
windows or water.

in the eye, papi
takes her and her sister to the empty
pool. she sees all the stars,
wishes on the three kings on orion's belt
to not be a false prophet.

she throws the gold bracelet with her
name engraved into the pool,
scheduled its drowning with hers.

she holds the candlestick to the sky, wax
dripping and twisting elsewhere.
the star at the tip begs to join her sisters.

she walks back
past palm trees snapped by the winds, still slicked in rain,
circular jaws clinging.

II.

she chokes on ice
at her brother's sixth birthday party
small hands close around her throat
as if to squeeze the cube out
like a clown performing
party tricks
for adults.

her coughs read as drama, fear
as attitude. mami says you can't drown
on ice. just wait for it
to melt.

III.

she meets the some boy she almost has at sea:
beer cans float in the water
his name loses its footing on her tongue

“come here” he says
so she crashes into him,
a lapping wave
in that little corner, far out enough
to forget afterwards
in the shallow banks
where day-trippers park-their boats;
no swimmers allowed.

they stand, water at their waists,
fish kissing their toes,
the clear sea encasing the moment,
& panes shattering as she returns to shore.

IV.

a post-storm memory:
driving to the river
the one julia wrote about
to wash clothes & refill
the battalion of toilet-flushing gallons,
filling rigged shower buckets
hung from remaining trees
or tired arms.

people are naked, bathing,
washing off the Caribbean
summer sweat.
mami tells her and her siblings
to cover their eyes.

V.

this sea, not hers
maybe someone else's
rolls her three times
head and neck kicking up underwater sand
finding a new home in her scalp

erecting cement walls with unsealed roofs
reverberating doors
reminding her that leaving is the only survival
that there's no heroism in drowning
only pity and often blame.

she should have known better
so she lets the water carry her where it wants
her, deposit her sore and scared body on the sand
leaves the sun to take back
the damp in her skin, the damp in her hair.

Creation Myth One: Holy Matrimony

The sun is out and it is raining.
It must be my wedding day.

A tiara of broken curls
shriek at my mother

doing my nails candy apple red
to make him kiss the ring, eat the ring

choke on stones more precious than I
reflect. Refract the sun on his insides.

When Mami said bruja
she didn't mean holy

but the cave-dwelling virgin brews rain
to pair with a freshly caught groom.

The sky was pretty once and so was I.
He said so before I shat his weight in gold.

Zero-sum on flowers, lace, and dirt
all fake, cheap, and a ritual over his grave.

Since brujeria is all in the hands, fingers,
I swore fealty to my claws,

a caricature of everything he milked from me.
Spilled, spoiled, soured. Seared on the sky.

Rented

I say I look like a bride
in my first communion dress,
rented, like mami's wedding
gown.

I'm about to *really* like a boy
who will someday beat
drum skins during mass,
when his hands have
grown beyond me.

Before and after that he dates a girl;
first love shit.
She asks for my blessing.
I give it, unknowingly, in perpetuity
damming my assumption
at a second chance at first love.

After he will enlist.
Camo greens disappear him as the first
I spill the salt for:

another almost miracle,
for his laugh, too, gave it all,
before.

Culturally Catholic as in-

christ's olympics at parroquia nuestra señora del Carmen
faith comes in first place
hope in second
love third

[this is not a metaphor, it's a picture off the parroquia's facebook page]
and if one cannot have
hope without faith
then heathens are loveless
and I am their daddy: pontiff supreme

I killed the pope
before devouring christ: immaculate consumption
[no, I will not explain that papa juan pablo segundo died the day before my first
communion]
either to become a god
or kill a god
and I don't give a flying fuck
a tit-flapping, satanic witch on a broom-soaring fuck
if there is a difference.

El Gran Combo toca de gratis en La Placita

El tinte verde sobre los cuerpos salchichaos en la calle Dos Hermanos me recuerda al mar esmeralda con que las vitrinas de la iglesia inundaban los bancos. La congregación canta los refranes salseros igual de desafinados que los salmos los domingos en la Parroquia Nuestra Señora del Carmen. Comen las mismas frituras, las mismas carnes. Pero el vino en vez son Heinekens careras. Supongo que igual a la comunión ya que le salió un ojo de la cara la jugada a cristo. Los invitados son los mismos. Chicos que me ignorarán hasta que me quitara el uniforme de la escuela. Chicas a las que solo me le confesaré con miradas cargadas de las vírgenes martirias a las que intentan moldearnos. Viejos verdes (ja!) sus manos viajando de tu hombro a casi casi pasaítos. Hasta cobran los muy hijoeputas. Ya sea con la canasta de las ofrendas o con tu paz. Y con su espíritu. Me sé los versos y no recuerdo practicarlos. Los interludios carraspeados e ininteligibles de Rafael Ithier captivan con la misma magnitud y el timbre opuesto a los cuentos de juventud del Padre Antonio. Todo se acaba con destellos. Fuegos artificiales o aplausos rítmicos alabando el escape en masa del pueblo como las balas que llueven de vez en cuando. Pa' fuera. Pa' la calle. Deseos disfrazados de fiesta. Hasta los bebés engendrados en estos 100 por 35 señalan a la puerta de casa de abuela. La nena quiere calle, se ríen. Crece y pide ir al jangeo con las amigas. La nena nunca paró de querer la calle. La calle le grita y lo confunde por amor porque sus padres le gritan igual. Crece más y sale con sus padres a un evento cultural. Excusa para tomar licor aprobado como en la primera comunión. Los templos se convierten en uno, la fiesta eterna es alabanza para una salvación que sospechamos que no llegará a tiempo para sobrevivir la calle. Pero por más que arda, la seguimos intentando deslumbrar ya sea a coreo o tiro limpio.

Mami always said “Para ser bella hay que ver las estrellas”

Before I am allowed
to shave my legs and after
I do anyway, a boy
during bell choir
looks into my skull
bracelet and asks
“What are you?”

I want to be goth like Sam Manson
because Danny Phantom loved her.

The boy insists
I'm emo cause it's 2009
and I'm quiet and my depression
is about
to bloom.

I switch to fake flowers
in my hair in 2011.
They're the only thing
bigger than my curls
and my homeroom teacher,
a man who teaches music
and hides elementary school
teachers under his desk
always comments on their petals.
I hate it but don't
know why yet.

I take Greek mythology as a college freshman
because I love
Meg from Hercules and there's no chance
I'll ever be in love.
My professor comments on my jacket.
The leather is fake
so the island humidity
sticks it to my body.
He likes it and says so
in front of the class.

It's lucky 2013.

It's lucky 2013
and I'm napping face down
on the floor next to a girl
I barely know.
A guy I don't
talks to me with his hand
on the small of my back
and I learn that my ass exists.
I block his number the next day
after I ignore his good
morning text. He calls me
a bitch and himself worthy.

After the Lady Gaga concert
a man on the train
offers my barely-teen sister a condom.
It's lucky 2013.
I refuse his kind offer
and take the aisle seat.

I transfer in 2015
off the island
away from any coast
and wear twin braids.
My American professor mentions Frida Kahlo and
from then on everyone assumes I'm Mexican
because, silly girl, Puerto Ricans aren't real
apart from JLo playing Selena.
So I put on a black bandana
and with red lipstick and purpled
eyeshadow I arrive to class
bloodied and bruised
by my own hand.
No one sits next to me.

First Love

Rom-Com scene that always make me cry:
Mia's post-makeover reaction in Princess Diaries
in which we learn you're only allowed
to love your country if you're beautiful
enough to break your own heart.

Princess Mia fares the looking glass
alone and we do not witness her
recover in time to be loved back.

Of course the first film is a rom-com,
despite the absence of a hunky Chris Pine,
for a teenage girl changes her shell
so her patria would want her
and learns she can keep some muck
if moated by plucked skin
and enough duty to deny
herself the glory of want.

Them

Border Boy & Island Girl love each other. She's sure. They're compatible in the worst ways. He's sure. But what's the opposite of an island? How about a border? That's the wrong question, mainland, continent, they're too much to not handle. He knows to leave, the again a bereft vow. She admires his strength for a revolving door relationship with home. The blur would undo her, everything constantly ripped, plucked. He admires her wanting to fade away in her barrio, the only place she'll let the calamities overtake her. Sink or swim, ahogarse en un vaso de agua, always so fatalistic. It's no wonder she loves him in a way that everyone advises her to not say. But she can't swim, you know this. But you don't know why. You don't know that it has never been a problem. That she respects the sea the same way she respects ghosts and women who kill their husbands. With an understanding that lifeguards label fear and indict for its gentleness. But this is about lifeguards only in English. To guard life, not save it, a stopgap measure that is cruel to both of them for how it tells them they're too much. And it's only about them in the way that they learned they survived that cruelty by pulling away at each other's glances too soon.

Pan de Sandwich

¿Comiste?
me pregunta todo
lindo, me creo.
Sí pero no
porque la ~~tipa~~ morra (yo)
se jampea platos
de trokero,
las migajas de él
dándole buena
fama al desierto.

¿Sería eso tan malo?
Él se atreve a preguntarme con toa
la sinceridad del mundo el
Border Boy Boldel Boi ese, y voy
y me entierro los tacos de dos
pulgadas (si los saqué del closet pa
medirlos ahora mismo) en la patria
que vi en él la primera vez
que lo escuché. Clarou
que él no se acuerda de cuando
me habló del Gran Experimento Mexicano
en mi cama mientras me contaba
la historia con sus tatuajes
pue su piel no es tierra
de conquista como lo es la mía:
su gran experimento puertorriqueño.

Everyone has a Puerto Rican ex-girlfriend

and he just *has* to tell me
with a smile and a slur
he thinks his now;
an undressing
code for “I know what you look like
under your cheap compression panties,
I’ve been there on Spring Break,
travel the only true form of knowledge.

He’ll sit under the same palm tree
we’re all cut from,
as we carefully landscape resort beaches
to shade him from wearing
the red he drinks from us.

Instead we deliver it
in Piña Colada glasses
under novelty umbrellas
while spilling out of the same pink string bikini
in the same spots
in that right way.

Except that sometimes
we haven’t shaved or feel bloated & wear shorts
over our bikini bottoms
to suck in our gloriously full guts.

Except that, you, man I love, will grasp
my thigh, smack
my ass, bite
my skin
in bed
in awe,
eyes shining, mouth half agape
the whole goddamn nine yards
and you’ll only text after to ask
if I took the morning after pill.

Except that it’s never me
burning half lit cigarette butts on your resort beach,
scars latticing intricate patterns on feet
nailpolished a solely-for-Latinas-I’ll-gargle red

that weathers *I know how to fuck you*
onto your teeth.

fresh nails weigh on my ring finger

Mami just did my nails. red with pink glitter. I hate them. they look like the Quince I never had. and the wedding I'll never give her.

There's this picture of Mami getting ready to marry Papi. Abuela is doing her nails a deep red. They're the longest I've ever seen them on her. She's spent months growing them out. Protecting them. Strengthening them. To cure them with Abuela's blood before clawing into Papi without ever letting go. They rest on his arm in their wedding portrait, the bloodiest they'll ever be cause Mami hates red and the divorce that echoes in Abuela's oversized house in el campo. They pop against the white of her rented wedding dress. The one with the poofy 90s shoulders that I never tried on to rehearse my own vows.

"Te gustan?"

"Si, gracias Mami."

The dinner table is for the dead

I eat dinner on the kitchen counter, alone
to understand my parents' marriage.

I finally graduated to big forks
that scrape louder against their wedding
registry plates, ceramic worn beyond blunder.

They drop their plates on mismatched
fold-out tables, sit on opposite
corners and watch football.

Mami was willed to grasp the game at my age
an almost pregnant, almost almost married 25.
I double tap the emoji from a boy

(the boy, man, guy that I love and
doesn't want me. But that's standard)
and listen to them.

I could know if the intonations I detect
are their knowledge or mine
but asking would be wrong. Toxicity is hard

work to build, a real
talent among the nightwalkers
of hallways & food raids.

¿Hay amor?
Papi asks whenever he wants
chocolate milk or queso y guayaba

the desserts his own mother made
for him. My Mami always hesitates,
the answer furrowed in her

brow cave deep enough to remind
Papi he's afraid of heights
but dreams of being a pilot.

There's always dead and dried
up flowers in a rum bottle
decorating the kitchen counter

and dining table we no longer use.
Papi buys them for Mami every Valentines,
she buys him his favorite chocolates,

KitKats or 3Musketees,
so he'll stop eating her favorite
cookies, Cameos, that are only

sold on the island after being
discontinued for lack of sales
I learned when I left.

Mami slugs past me and into the light-
less fridge, pulls out the cheese
and asks me to sharpen

a knife. It's the one
domestic skill she taught me
every time I lingered in

the kitchen she hates. She cooks
with hate, she always said.

Creation Myth Two: Penance

Mermaids are born when a maiden gets stuck in her bathing suit top and she doesn't have a partner or a roommate or a neighbor to free her so she jumps into the sea hoping the waves will pull it off.

Instead she sprouts a tail and gills and her awful singing voice vibrates underwater as it clashes against the sand and trash and precious oils. No matter how many luxury speedboats she outguns the bathing suit top clings and digs and breaks into her skin the way fallen ships chip away at coral by becoming it. She must must

meet a shark with a protruding fang to slice her top the way

her mother, a human charmed by fumes of dead roses in her kitchen, slices wrapping paper. Shivers of sharks with oversized overdosed overdue teeth aim but they're too deep set in their

mouths to not cut into her and know that if they were to toy with her taste they would choke to death and be better off for it.

Legs don't burst out of her tail. her hair sheds. The little ones in her arms and around her belly button and nipples. Little beads of light settle in those pores until she illuminates the entire cave she hid in. She cannot make herself bleed so she smashes and clobbers and splinters a rock into a point to scratch all of her forms as one onto the wall, faceless.

My Caribbean Romeo follows me on Instagram and tells me to download Hinge instead of Tinder

tenth grade drama class

Shakespeare in Spanish

Romeo and Juliet balcony scene

it's ok to hug instead of kiss

compulsory heterosexuality

wood pallet stage

wall fan powered classroom

mid October tropic

why are you so uncomfortable,

is it me?

yes, but not like that

Sea Blueprint

Caribbean Romeo is a self-
proclaimed man of letters.
Island Girl wants him
until he expires into an echo
that rustles her body hair
years later in the form,
of course,
of Border Boy saying he doesn't respect
Gabriel Garcia Marquez.
Island Girl is drawn
to his bravado disguised as dissent
that brings her back to student assemblies
calling for pickets
in a hemorrhaging campus
of a clotted island.

Boldel Boi pone Soy Peor

Boldel Boi pone Soy Peor
y le echa el brazo a la Aihland Gerl
en el sofá la primera noche
que sus panas vieron el escocote
de la nueva religión en el brote
metiéndose virao, puro escrache.
Pal carajo el amor verdadero
ellos solo logran ser sepulteros
de sus patrias que fatigan en paz
dentro del otro fugaz pues quizás
se santifican uno al otro
porque como si fuera poco
van pa la larga jugando lo corto
amando en cantos, álgaro broko.

Maddening Woman

I put Island Girl on a plane to South Korea
where she will meet Mexican Boy (From Chicago).
He will be the first not to call her beautiful,
but to ask how dare she be.
He knows he is also beautiful
and asks the favor returned.

Mexican Boy (From Chicago) loves
Don Draper. Dressed up as him, adultery and all,
to give Island Girl KFC mad money.
Feeding a girl is no crime
to his girlfriend back home
especially if he's the one who asks
for a picture Island Girl will struggle
to find seven years later.

Island Girl can finally be goth
freed from the tropics,
so she dresses up as Wednesday Addams
notable braided pigtails
foreign to Mexican Boy (From Chicago).

Don Draper knows them well,
how they weave every mistress
he marveled at with that long, curly hair
(that no one has anymore)
into Island Girl's skull;
tropigoth witch supreme
in a skimpy, pleather dress,
chicken wing bones between her teeth.

Vigorous Heterosexual Life

Girl She Didn't Know She liked And Is Now Married To Her Then Boyfriend
laces up Island Girl's Braids before the costume party.

Girl She Didn't Know She liked And Is Now Married To Her Then Boyfriend turns
into Straight Girl Who Holds Her Hand By The Pier.

Straight Girl Who Holds Her Hand By The Pier tells Island Girl
that she hates Mexican Boy (From Chicago) as someone takes
a picture of them holding hands—
perfect queer girl crisis DIY mixtape cover art.

The picture gets deleted off Facebook.
She becomes Wisconsin Girl.

so she held it under her tongue

Who are you going to miss most when we're all gone?
Mexican Boy (from Chicago) asks Island Girl,
looking for the answer under her dress.
Wisconsin Girl's name tickles
Island Girl's lips the same way
her fingers play
with his earlobes.

What's the opposite of an earthquake?

Mexican Boy (from Chicago) writes to her sporadically
Island Girl always responds.

Maybe his hands grew or softened or hardened,
morphed enough to interlock and gather
the salt to ask why
he always came back to her
as a place to rest his grip
away from home.

His hands had fit everywhere.
In her hair, on her ass, up her dress,
except in hers.
Their knuckles scraped as they walked,
tectonic plates faulting
skin & wrecking homes,
built into mountains that begged
for release.

They held each other in shore kisses
and lapped each other's drinks.
Beaches lost their shores to give
mermaids a better view of his first time
at sea. She got drunk off his smile;
the teenage lust he drank off her.
He carved his name on the sand
caked on her back.
She rest her head
on his shoulder, claiming him
in a city she'd never return to.

Wet Season/Dry Season

Island Boy: tropical perennial,
autochthonous invasion,
actually says the damn words.
They evaporate into the ether
enter the cycle, a precipitated
“es que yo te amo.”

Island Girl always reminds Island Boy
of someone else. A girlfriend, a podcast host
always someone closer
than she appears. He drove her
car once as a getaway,
 utter tropical night trust,
jumping over potholes—
craters the moon envies
and speaks through.
She tastes the skids of their collisions
into each other’s ‘oh, maybe’.

He sends her two selfies
from a beach, asking
more mountain or sea?
 More sea, always,
 blue hearts necessitate
 this exchange
 every other sometime.

two Puerto Rican girls get lost on the subway on their way to the statue of liberty.

Island Girl and her sister end
up in a Brooklyn corner
in front of a bodega, witness
a car crash. dodge
sky skidding shrapnel.

Island Girl and her sister's mother
sat front row on school picture day, American flag back-
ground to 24 black and brown kids:
PS 161 Brooklyn Class-K 201AM
1973—

Abuela says it's too cold to live
here, with hers,
in the Brooklyn that almost
turned Island Girl into Look at the Island Girl
 into look at the only two dresses I have for school girl
 into look at the dolls nailed to our wall girl
 into look at the planes returning girl

Island Girl and her sister stand
at a corner wondering who owns
street names, familiar
only with barrio numbers:
the house with the basketball hoop,
carretera 853, km 1.7
Barrio Cacao, Carolina, PR
1999—

Mami says it's too dirty to not live
in el campo
anthills domed in chocolate-shit gold
where it rains green, green, brown, green, non-existent
sidewalk grey.

Island Girl's sister calls on her cracked pink Motorola RAZR,
Island Girl asks a passing
mother and daughter where they are.

“Tu vuelve’?”

Clap when the plane lands

Clap when the movie ends

Clap when the movie starts

Clap when the local variety show makes their nightly good joke

Clap when the rapper on stage asks anything

Clap when the home team almost scores

Clap when the home team almost wins

Clap when Monica wins gold and continue clapping whenever you see her at the mall

Clap when your friends and family roll up at your place at 11 pm singing with instruments in hand waiting to be fed

Clap when it strikes midnight and you have no one to kiss

Clap when you want someone to cry

Clap when mass is over

Clap when a family on the beach blasts on their speakers that one salsa song everyone loves to karaoke

Clap when your grandma figures out how to send gifs in whatsapp

Clap when your uncle walks into the living room announcing that the pig is done

Clap when your other uncle comes back from the beer and ice run

Clap when your aunt comes out modeling the blouse you helped your mom pick out at TJ Maxx

Clap when your cousin drops their slice of cake at the family reunion

Clap when the table across the Denny’s sings Happy Birthday at 1 am

Clap when your friend celebrating their birthday trips on themselves and falls in the bar without spilling their drink

Clap when they do spill their drink just sitting at the table

Clap when that group of girls that looks too young to be out at a bar don’t know the words to *that* Ivy Queen song until they hand you the mic pissed that the DJ paid more attention to you and your friend showing them up unplugged

Clap when you’re telling your friends how you ran into that one guy you kinda had a thing with and his girlfriend that you took a class with at the drive thru food truck

Clap when your friends complain about the abuse of the parking industry instead of deciding the next bar to hit

Clap when you see tourists stumble and fall from the balcony of the bar you can only afford happy hour from

Clap when the car in front of you slams their breaks during rush hour traffic

Clap when your sister misses the turn because the GPS can't pronounce Avenida Manuel Fernández Juncos

Clap when you forget to swerve the crater in the turn lane

Clap when you slip on the puddle that forms at the bottom of the stairs from the water that filters through the roof

Clap at the protest

Clap at the march

Clap at the cops in full riot gear's faces

Clap when your father tells you that the country is just gonna have to sit down and take it

Clap when the governor refuses to acknowledge the femicide crisis

Clap when the secretary of education quits after closing down 266 schools

Clap when the secretary of the department of public safety quits after certifying 64 deaths instead of the 4,645

Clap when the water comes back

Clap when the power comes back

Clap when the long ass line at the gas station finally starts moving

Clap when you rebound the paper towels and score a three pointer nothing but net

Clap when your brother's phone finally rings instead of the dead line buzz that carves into your ear

Clap when the jagged tree branches that refuse to grow back puncture the bruising sky

Clap your hand against the table till red while you read The Chat

Clap at the protest

Clap at the march

Clap in warning when the cops put the constitution to sleep

Clap with the protest chants: certified bangers

Clap at Calle De La Resistencia's birth

Clap harder when they start to drop like flies

Clap hardest cuando Ricky rasca pal carajo!

Clap when you and a friend do donuts around the fallen pole in the parking lot of a shut-down fabric store

Clap when you and your cousin's 18-month-old daughter that you're meeting for the first time somehow recognize home in each other

Clap your mother's back to hold back tears as you hug goodbye

Clap when the plane lands

“Es cierto que las boricuas son las más divertidas?”

but of course
that's all we do on the
aihland
drink lukewarm rum out of coconuts
that I suction onto my breasts
to let you rip off
& drink
the liquor sweating, glowing
off my sun kissed skin,
a non-toxic sunblock
to protect your stomach lining from my
espaicy latin faier
and the Caribbean sun I swallowed at birth
just to spit dawn and rainbows down your gullet.

coffee, cane, and cunts
si,si,si,
your three course meal exported in
a plundered gold platter.

Impressionism

Island Boy tells Island Girl he loves her.
She doesn't believe him because she knows
him the way no one does her lunar spots.

In spanish her skin is the sky idol-
atry, in english buried, burrowed, sin-
ful but memorialized all the same.

Islanders can always sniff each other
out, la mancha de plátano waving
before seen. They're only supposed to have

one. A smeared stain just thrown on
the body somewhere to mark the edges
of the sea. Small archipelago of collision.

Island Girl has two on her left, skull
and womb. Indulgent feast for the bad
Christian Island Boy standing next to her

but in front of a wake. Oller's Velorio,
with its hanging plantain bunches
guarding the door frame, chooses

the cuatrista to see what they cannot.
Of course, Island Boy is a cuatrista
and, of course, he serenades Island Girl;

a chance encounter turned soft
afternoon. Between plucked guitar strings
her heart scarfs down his fingers

and they become a stutter.

Function of landscape

Island Girl shaves half her head to look like the trees,

skeleton hands bursting from the ~~soil~~-ground

soil

supports life

and the little

left was ripped away

again *again* **again** **AGAIN** **A G A I N**

if you trim a tree enough it'll stay small

and beautiful

always, always beautiful

beauty is

even when ground up

Cool Girl Monologue

I confuse them, the boys, sometimes. Mix them up. They all build into each other until they're almost me. That's why Border Boy is the hardest. The ultimate mirror, more so than Island Girl & Island Woman. No, Border Boy is allowed to be bad. Expected to. Mean and cruel and ignorant. Clumsy and irresponsible and prideful. Wickedly holy for all the long legged, smooth skin, ethereal bisexuals who wear mostly black. He fancies himself a god, a minor one. One that's obscure and acutely human with a respectable amount of groupies with cum gutter tits. Doesn't matter how you picture them cause they'd all be right, the perfect fit for his right hand. Right is for desire; tits, ass, neck. Left is for caressing hands under bar tables and clutching onto while sleeping. I have created Border Boy in my image, crystalline, and he dared create back. Island Woman fell out of his head and down my throat. She's who Border Boy thinks Island Girl wants to be. As if all of us weren't women already. Forged by "you're too hot to be a virgin" even though that's the dream. Goddesses are eaten alive exclusively, the cost of immortality. Never in your wildest JLo dreams. Mrs. Lopez my students call me no matter how many times I sign the email Ms. Vázquez. So nasty. And the boy with the foot fetish in-class writing exercise isn't the worst. No, he I smite when he can't rip his eyes from my fluffy, mint green sliders (think Power Puff Buttercup Elle Woods) neck exposed for the smite. Gods smite in old ways. Curses of pleasure. Cum gutter tits suffocating in a blazer. Gods smite to impress other gods. Fucking is the afterthought. No one will believe it, but fucking isn't the power, it's the just before, it's the 'who won' between two who are always right. Maybe it's because of the terror in his eyes as I'm naked on top of him revealing I'm a virgin or that I have massive period cramps as I watch Gone Girl and write this, but I know that I am his god even if only in my eyes for the grace I've given him.

Tag Yourself



Border Boy

- classically emotionally unavailable
- strong cuddler
- “shine longer not brighter”



California Boy

- soundcloud rapper
- always in some sort of existential crisis, but in a chill way
- will kiss you in broad daylight



Island Boy

- true blue life of the party
- cheats on all of his girlfriends
- “es que eres tú.”



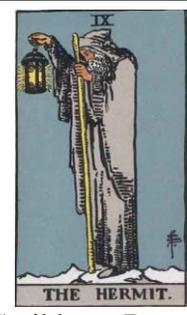
Mexican Boy (from Chicago)

- a good guy despite being an entrepreneur
- scared of horses and rollercoasters
- unflinching, deep brown eyes



Wisconsin Girl

- married
- tight hugger
- will tell you she hates your boyfriend only after you break up



Caribbean Romeo

- should smile more
- deletes his Instagram feed every six months
- unbearably and authentically indie



Island Woman

- you think she hates you because she expects better from you
- outfit is always well put together
- bites off more than she can chew



Island Girl

- makes sure everyone is hydrated
- listens to Lorde's *Melodrama* on repeat
- writes love letters she'll never send

Hustled

The green table in a barely
crowded bar inflates
with the anticipation of a break
two shots away from imploding.

California Boy & Island Girl
talk about the Haitian Revolution:
cheers for the rebellion,
a drink for the storms.
She tells him
and only him
she would die for her Island
if it comes to it.
In that moment
and only then
he loves her
and asks if she plays pool.

Magic eight ball kisses the pocket
his hand circles her waist
like a lemon shark
with a magnetic nose
salivating for bone.

Island Girl likes pool cause she's not
good or bad,
much like in love:
half skill, half luck, half chaos.

Gallina

They're about to outlaw cockfights
and the wild
roosters in Cacao keep me
company as I eat a 3pm breakfast
of coffee and sweets.

We drive past galleras
that I'll someday dream of
buying to start a commune
of repurposed cages turned
shared bedrooms.

"Tu sabes que el gallo aquí soy yo"
Papi crows every time
the radio squawks
about the bill.

He called me gallita,
practically bred for bulldog jaws,
to fuel the mascot feud
that halves the family.
Jerezanas aren't even real
and how dare we invent.

How dare I invent.

Our gallera, his and mine,
echoed with volleyballs and strike
chants. All the fury of our
incompatible god(desses)
bowing to the land that swallows.

How dare we invent.

The chicken bones make love
-ly rosaries. And rosaries make love
-ly bed ornaments. And in bed
we carve ornaments into the air

*

It's been [REDACTED] since I last had sex.
Mami makes me an appointment

at the gyno.
She doesn't know
but she must suspect
and part of her hopes.

A kind woman in a cold room
but I still see chickens out
her window. I've never tried
to catch one. I just stomp:
scatter!

“Are you sexually active?”

What do you call it
when the last boy you fucked,
(Island Boy who this poem is actually about)
sends you a digital, sincere hug
for nine years of 'I would rob
a bank with you' looks?
Or when he says you're gold
as if both of you didn't
know home
was stripped of it?

The answer is
eventually
no, again.

Clyde's first crime was chicken theft.
Bonnie wrote poems about them.
People questioned if they loved
each other. She had to write
about it after all

and how dare she invent.

Their counterfeit death car
touring as the real dead
drawing crowds for morbid love
long after the couple could
verify their love
was filled with chickens before
shooting it up
to get
an authentic splatter.

Two-Way Mirror

Border Boy salvages
something
in or from Island Girl
as she falls like sunflower
seed shells on sea
blue bedsheets. He recognizes
himself.
“You’re so young. You’re *so* young.”
He still feels
the pangs and bullshit
of mid-twenties manic mistakes.
Border Boy was
always clear about it being
a physical thing, crashing at her
place when it’s too late
to cross home.
Island Girl didn’t have a leg
to stand on when she decided
to love him. It fell asleep
as they awoke to a self,
avoided. Or stolen.
They still cannot tell.

{Un[(for)gettable]}

Island Girl keeps her
lipstick underneath her
tongue for easy access. She
paints on California Boy's neck
runes of a life matched
and missed.

It suits her, the red.
He means the lips & implies
the bloody utterances
of love of country.

"; indelibly impressed on the memory:
scenes of unforgettable beauty."

But he says 'not forgettable'
implying nothing at all.

She pulls it back out to twirl
around her mouth
and into his ear.

California Boy calls her a year after,
while he drives somewhere
and they weave lives for two hours.

 She never mentions Border Boy
 who christened the bed
Island Girl avoids sitting on
as they speak of someday.

Someone else's boyfriend

Island Boy drives Island Girl's car to this dead-end street in front of an abandoned suitcase factory. The backseat cramps around their bodies. She refuses to take off her sneakers, so they zip up their jeans and fall against the trunk. He's backlit, silver lining glowing by the almost full moon and she forgets that earlier he refused to kiss her as the only mercy to his her.

Island Girl doesn't ask him about his her. Island Boy tells her anyway. How he asked her to be his girlfriend twice before she gave in. He asks Island Girl if it's their island that's hanging from her neck while his fingers trace the molded metal coasts, shore skin and blood waves indicating that coming back is the worst love and the only kindness she understands. He lets her drink Heineken alone because he's sober now; it's this new thing he's trying. She makes him buy her another, refilling his softest words' failure to puncture her heart deep enough to stain his fingers.

It still manages to burst like sea salted veins in an ocean far too timid to make her forget him. Or the last girlfriend, the one he insisted looked like her. Back when he cooked baked potatoes for hungry college girls in their cramped apartments. Back when he fed and starved her lap with his head.

The moon is beautiful enough to convince Island Girl that the warmth and length of their hugs is comparable. Again, Island Boy plates her in gold like after she yelled at him to go aggravate his girlfriend instead. They fuck and it's mediocre and they get caught halfway by a cop who just tells them they can't be there. They drive to that 24-hour BBQ place in front of the airport.

The most vivid memory of Island Boy's body is her feeding him. His eyes consuming that tostón de pana with a fraction of the want she hopes he gives his her because it doesn't scratch what he's given Island Girl. It's all the thanks she can muster after he's given her and his her and even himself under this almost full moon on almost Christmas in this almost country a piece of anything. That's all there is to give here. Her. A thumbprint, a bruised thigh, a wink, and three eyelashes to someone who at one point smelled of frying oil and sea foam under the almost full moon they call home.

No Cabe

monoestrellada
monorestregada
monoinstigada
la nena que pelea sola pol pelial
menos cuando le preguntan pol
qué su cuarto se cubre de Cuba
pa instigar
pa restregar
pa estrellar
un beso puro, puro como el carbón puro
para el chico, hombre, tipo ese
que no sabe cómo el
coraje se hace
todo ganas en su monoestrella
y que la ganas lo son tó pa
sellar el cuarto
con el chico, hombre, tipo ese
ahí contigo
(sorry mala mía pol
instigal
restregal
estrellal
desesperanzas)
con ella
ambas la estrella y la nena,
niña, chamaca, muchacha, mujer, tipa, morra
hecha mona, monita, monísima
monosilábica
no
sí
 la
 bi
 os
pintados en franjas rojo gastado de casi patrias
pues qué patriota no se ahoga
en rojo, pues el rojo solo
viene en un tono
no como el azul
de cielo y mar
cielo y mal
sí eso, ellos
mal mal mal

no tengo pruebas
pero tampoco dudas
de todo lo que decide
morir en carne viva

A boy on Tinder told me my poems were too depressing.

and what of that girl/ the girl I've never written about before/ the girl that desperately tries to understand love by writing about it/ despite never feeling it/ the "real" way at least/ the way everyone else wants her to/ the girl who gets told it's ok that it hasn't happened yet by people on their fourth and fifth loves/ the 23 year old secret virgin/ the girl whose virginity is a stamp of disapproval/ the girl who toys with telling people she's saving herself for marriage, even though she doesn't believe in it, because that's less mortifying than admitting no one wants her/ the girl who likes boys and girls so there should be more options, right?/ the girl who cries in debilitating fear whenever a high school classmate gets engaged/ the girl who sleeps on the right side of her full sized bed and pretends that the last boy she kissed is stuck at work and will slip in later/ the girl whose sadness is pathetic and shareable only through poems so people think it's hyperbole/ the girl who deserves more than these shrieked poems/ this is all the world allowed her.

Creation Myth Three: Eucharist

I stole the receipt and wrote a poem on the back
about your hands and my thighs
or some other body parts that got
slapped, or squeezed out
the slip.

Virginity can only be exchanged for an item of equal or lesser value or for store credit.

The clerk doesn't look
at me as he punches
in product codes.

Error. No Sale.

"Can you check the back?"
He comes back and hands me
a complaint form.

Installer gone rogue.

"It happens as often as you
feel. No consecration to kneel to.
You can call corporate, but they won't
answer."

Corporate claims they separate men from monsters
and spare those men
from the furious, terrified oceans in me,
from the tainted waters of monsters past
who promised to die there
but were cursed as Men.

I only wish I knew if he was
a Monster Man or a Man Monster.
If he had been a ghost,
or Mothman or Bigfoot or el Chupacabra
I could have been fucked into magic,
into elusive sacrament,
a second menstrual cycle to
howl at the moon. But that
blood never came. Not as the gushing
winds of morning that were
prophesized or the toppled
4 am chirps that were
threatened. Maybe it wasn't
Monster Man Monster because
monsters are
anomalies living despite our wants.

eyeglasses on the bedside table

I had you in my arms and jesus CHRIST you wouldn't shut up!
You had me in your arms and FUCK my fingers fit through yours!
I scratched your back and COÑO I get why Mami never says no to Papi!
You traced my lips with your finger, marveling at my easy smile and PUÑETA I've
poured all over you!

Manual labor in a dress in exchange for a spicy chicken sandwich

Island Girl snores but Border Boy hasn't
told her yet. He can't find a way
to describe them without naming
a storm because all natural disasters feel
the same and she is lost
to the sea that doesn't show it wants
her, like Border Boy pulling away a little
too late to prevent collapse
in lungs steeled by salted air.

Border Boy doesn't know
how to properly cry, he shares,
when Island Girl helps him
move a mattress into his new place.
She drops it on her toes
and gets winded after a couple
steps. The number one
screwed next to his front
door is backwards in a way
that doesn't change anything.

They drop the mattress she will
never sleep on and he
sketches a future
that doesn't need her.
Bike rack next to the AC,
television in the dining room. What kind
of apartment has a dining room
but no bedroom doors? Maybe
the same kind that only has a lamp
and these two eating quesadillas on top
of cold tiles in a living room.

Offering

It snows in the desert
& Island Girl assures everyone
that the heat will never kill her.
She sees how happy the snow
makes Border Boy,
happy enough to remind her
that once she missed the rain
so much that she missed the snow.

Border Boy described his dream
home to her once. Floor to ceiling
windows, forever a desert boy;
all glass and angles.

Another time she smashed
a beer bottle against a wall
in front of him
attempting to make the purest
form of sand:
finely crushed glass
catching new moon rays.

Border Boy Drives Island Girl Home

I.

He knows exactly where she lives
but still asks, for decorum.
She considers either inviting him in
or spilling it all
like they spilled over
her tundric living room,
cold tile incapable
of warning them.

II.

They discuss having sex, it's that time of year
when he's not terrified of the him in her.

Border Boy tells Island Girl about a girl
that it all fell apart with. Island Girl
tells Border Boy about California Boy
writing her again. They hold hands
under the bar table, caressing winter
struck skin, playing with the idea of them.

Border Boy drops Island Girl
at her apartment, car full of witnesses.
He shakes her hand goodbye
but doesn't let go until
she's yanked from the car.

III.

Island Girl loves maps. Border Boy might
know because he always trusts
her with the GPS no matter how
many times they've left the state trying
to drive her home.

Sobbing on my 25th birthday once you shut the door

These pants exist after you, so they don't
love you the way I tell them to.

They've worn out by the time
I figure out a way to show
everyone else
that you didn't wither away
anything that wasn't already fading.

They held in only the you that shudders
and caresses in the same finger. They know
even if they don't understand, because once
you left they gave way to all the yous
that decided to leave and come back and
not.

Creation Myth Four: Priestess

What are myth's myths?
Outliving those we love
by disappearing and falling
in love without a fight.

And what is the fight
but a chaos ritual against the love
and light suffocation
that deems you damned,
caged by some devil
who cannot lie.

Take it up with the stars and the sea
who know invention is prophecy
and divinity is the most human desire.
So goddess becomes far too messy
far too lost
for a girl
and anything else she swallowed—
the impossibility of choking
not a curse, a spell nor a blessing
just another goddamn thing.

Who damns us better
 than the holy we see
 than the fall we grasp
 than the scripture we hide
in each other.

Good Girls

Good girls who hate
being good girls stop
paying attention at church,
clutch their bony fingers
and pray for bad boys
to love them.

Good girls who are virgins are obsessed
with the Marias and light
candles to not be the next one,
eternal, fake. Manicured.

Good girls who are virgins who don't want to be
commune with Lilith, Puerto Rican Boa
and burn Christmas
trees in el campo.

These good girls used to make love
potions in the bathroom sink
with recipes from Barbie doll spellbooks:
a pump of pink hand soap,
six second pour of Para Mi Bebé cologne
Cetaphil bar shavings (must use fingernail)
and yellow tap water.

These good girls fall in love with better girls:
the bad girls who stopped
going to church altogether and ran
anti-statehood Facebook groups
while dressed in all black in the dead
of Caribbean summer to signal the coven.
They learn to pray for those better girls to love
them. They learn that if you ask God
you can be a virgin again. The trick is
to ask the right God and the right
God is no god at all.

The good girls meditate because that's half
of witchcraft. They see la Virgen de la Monserrate
and their deaf great-grandmother. They cry
because their gift is hearing and the bestiary
of spells wrinkled into her homemade

sign language dies with God-
mothers who lead rosary prayers for the hearing.

Tarot con briscas

El 8 de oros brinca
del paquete. Significa reflejar
en los alrededores para restaurar
armonía y balance necesarios
para superarlo. En reversa sufre
de traumas pasados.

Es sobre nosotros, el espejo de dos
vías falso disfrazado de mar.

Algo me convierte en la sota de espadas
alrededor de él. La dama del pensamiento,
toda aire y arrogancia. Con su espada
corto la sota de copas, la dama romántica
que he guardado para un algún día con él.

Juntos somos el rey de copas,
el señor de los sueños,
demasiada agua para tomar,
insuficiente para ahogar
y dejando la garantía del amor
como boya desanclada
justo fuera de la llanura.

Island Woman

I.

Island Girl is a girl on the island
because she's a woman elsewhere.
her rooster, crowed
her cherry, popped

her first tampon insertion
 holy bastardization of both
 with a splash of moon
 drip stolen (GASP!) from the goddess
abroad.

Did you know I could have sworn
I smelled you in the kitchen?
(Siempre te voy a querer
de que nunca te diré que no.)

I suppose you believe me
because the Island Woman in your head
is the best fiction you or I
will ever take part in.

Island Woman is
La Boricua,
La Puertorriqueña,
some slang term ripped from roots
that learned to dance.

Border Boy, you, will always see her
as foolish, but foolishness
requires intimacy and you
never left enough air in the room.

I wouldn't know what to tell her,
Island Woman,
the stupid girl you hollowed out of me.
I write you, knowing
you'll translate.

I would have liked to meet her,
but you wouldn't allow it.

Maybe for fear that I
would have loved her too.

I want to rip her from you,
let her grow into me. With me. For me.
Some of us do need saving
because it's the only thing we're missing
and I don't know how to ask you to let me.

II.

We wouldn't know what to tell us
if we were ever to meet. We must
exist outside of boys and men,
biblically I mean.

You must think us when
you face something you decide must be
nailed in our vertebrae.

You must think us when
you forget we're the only ones here
that smile like home.

You must think us when
either of us smile you into
loving her too.

Island Girl was supposed to be-
come Island Woman. Island Woman was
supposed to remember being
Island Girl. Border Boy was meant
to let them save each other.
But gates in the sand
rust by the sea
and desert boys think
islands default to alone.

So Border Boy splits
on a girl who splits
on herself
to loom.

Island Woman is
La *Boricua*,

La Puertorriqueña,
the first love, gathered.

The three of us communed once:
head to head to head on the tiled,
couch-less living room floor.
We forgot that we finally
understood, and that not,
saved us from a thousand sorrows
buried under a thousand brighter layers
coating fingertips you callused.

Soledad

blessed is she who believed
I fell in love with a witness:
red eyed, never bloodied, virgin
for I assume they don't menstruate either
as cherubs need no conception,
immaculate or otherwise. I'd say they baptize
in tears, that only eyes can contain
the bigness of the sea. that fears
of weeping are truly a terror
of waves denied by swimmers
who know they would not step
in her should they know her.

Patabajo

Los adoquines intentan tragarse los tacos de las muchachas de la misma manera en que ellas tragan tragos en la acera a pesar de los letreros indicando su ilegalidad. La luz rosa neón del letrero de la barra cae como una segunda luna, rebotando de las carcajadas de los corillos que se forman, racimos de personas como los plátanos que decoran los bares más turísticos de la antigua ciudad.

Un tipo con un pequeño barril debajo del brazo le habla a la chamaca recostada de la pared, vaso plástico de cerveza en mano, justo debajo de las losetas que declaran “Calle San Sebastián”. Ella le pregunta que es la que hay con el barril. Él contesta que le gustan los barriles.

Una tipa para a unos gemelos, que llevan despidiéndose hace hora y media, preguntando que si son hermanos de fulano. Dicen que si, la jumeta escondiendo la confusión. Ah, si es que tienen la misma cara. A la verdad que esta isla es una cama twin. Se ríen y se aprietan como si se criaron al cruzar la calle.

La chamaca se cuele en la barra 23+, dice que está buscando a Raúl el bartender. Los panas del tipo le preguntan que donde quedó su barril. El tipo se dobla a buscar debajo de los carros parkiaos en la calle. No ve que empieza a rodar a las millas cuesta abajo por los adoquines que llevan años hundiéndose bajo el peso del tapón. A la velocidad que iba ya debió haber caído en la bahía.

the Arecibo Radio Telescope gets decommissioned just as I learn to
read birthcharts

so I cried
knowing the stars
are begging to scrape off
imposters and call the solitary
home.

Last night I learned I have
a Scorpio Stellium in my fourth house
of home and country
making everything
intense like a metaphor pushed
too far for people who haven't
known the disaster of no one.

Everything disastrous is my fault.
The sin of starving gluttony,
the shame of finding delicacy in crumbs.

the Arecibo Radio Telescope collapses 12 hours after my classmates tell me I need to earn “home” in the previous poem

Archipelago

There are Islands
and there are Girls
and there are opposites
to neither. There is only
sea. Not the. Only seas see
us. Oceans do not pertain
the Girl or her boys, even
if those Boys think her
cavalier enough to want
what pretends universality,
what pretends understanding.
She only knows yearning, not
desire, not
want. To love them all out-
side of the opposites,
of the salt, of the enormity
understanding the world
and by world they mean
land and by land she means
away, and by away all meant
vile to dare. And how dare!
How dare not a world
but a land, a ground
coffee and egg fertilized
flowerbed seeded past present
miscegenation, mythification,
mass exilation pollinate
the hopes of Girl,
a Girl, any Girl and every Girl
for an archipelago within them all.

Vita

Laura Andrea Vázquez López received a Bachelor of Arts in Multidisciplinary Studies. She has published in Rio Grande Review and Acentos Review. She taught Rhetoric and Composition.