

Jasmine Perez

My whole life I knew that I would attend college. It had been engraved in me by my father who wanted to be an architect; he's a construction worker. He would wake up at 5 am to leave for work, and he would come home at 5 pm to join us for dinner. That must be where I get my work ethic from. Choosing Vassar was easy. I fell in love with the red brick walls and arched walkways, the freshly cut grass along the entrance road, and the circle of flowers welcoming me into Main Building. I finally had the taste of freedom and independence I craved so bad on the tip of my tongue. But, actually living in the Northeast is far from what I expected and it's brought a lot of confusion my way. Sometimes I can't believe I'm actually here. I am actually very lucky to be here; but some days, I don't really feel like stepping outside. It's been a cold winter, and I can't help but feel my brown skin starting to reflect the pale snow outside my window.

Lately I have just been taking it day by day.

Lip balm, hand lotion, hand sanitizer,

VCard, keys, earphones, and of course, face mask.

It's a new year, so I expect new and better beginnings. Firstly, a new monthly budget. How can I afford to go home when I have no job? Everyday additions on my to-do list: thesis, lecture, seminar, working out, self care, and don't forget about having meals. I like this time away from home. Yet, everyday all I can think about is sunny California, the taco stand down the street, and the smell of cafe de olla on late nights before bed.

I write for my parents who crossed borders so that I can cross the stage, have a chance at a life changing career, and eventually be able to care for them in return. My mother would brag about my good grades and my father boasted about his daughter heading off to NYU. I never corrected him because "Vassar " is already complicated in itself. Would they understand the culture here? How would they feel on Families Weekend when they see the gender neutral communal restrooms down the hall? Nonetheless, they told me that I could have anything if I worked hard for it. So I worked and I worked and I worked

and I burnt out. I ran as far as I could away from home only to find out I would miss home twice as much. When I came home and told my parents I could not go back, they held me. They still believed in me when I could not believe in myself.

Last winter when I visited my parent's birthplace. It felt like I had finally arrived onto the land where I belonged because in my time there, my anxiety went away. I questioned why they would ever walk away from a place I felt peace in; that peace was actually only possible because of the US dollars in my pocket and now double colonized tongue because the struggle continued to be evident. My parents always talked about the dirt roads and the fruits they would steal from their neighbors' trees while no one was looking. I understand the culture a bit more now; it's admirable how they celebrate and find joy in the things that are meant to keep them down.

When I arrive back in the States, it's like tragedy struck again and the once happy home begins to burn away. I can feel the warmth of the radiating heat and the fire beginning to rise while ashes pelt down to my feet and bring me back to reality. It's hard to wake up with the pressure to succeed in a place that wasn't built for people like me.

I didn't cry today

But don't ask me why

I'm just tired of peddling

Day after day

Restless nights

And assignment after assignment

On weekends my mother calls and I sit on her words, "You sound sad, are you okay?"

"I'm good, just resting," I responded, knowing damn well I could have said, "Ma, I miss you." It had been a while since I spoke to my mother and at the same time I could not wait to get off the phone. Love like this should not hurt, but I became a bitter little girl at the age of 5. All I wanted was to be one less problem and to be my father's favorite, so my only job was to focus on school. To me he was a good man, I never saw him cry, but he always made my mother cry.

“What’s wrong?” I would ask. She would respond by wiping away her tears, taking a deep breath and said,

“Nothing.” I guess I really am my mother’s daughter.

Do you ever wake up and have the feeling of not knowing where you are for a second? That feeling of not knowing how you got there? I feel that way all the time. Sometimes when I wake up to the sound of a siren, I pause and think “am I in LA?” Then I open my eyes, peek out the window, and realize I am still on the quad, still working on the assignments from yesterday, and still thinking about the moment in which this will all be done. I turn to my Alexa and ask, “Alexa, why do I feel sick?” She responds saying, “Playing the song ‘Like a G6’ on Spotify,” and my mood switches instantly. I break out into a dance in my room, think back upon my middle school days and realize that someday, when I wake up, I’ll be right where the universe has needed me to be. And I too will find joy in the things that are meant to keep me down.