

THE RECORD 2023

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Front cover: Esmeralda Paez, "Down the Rabbit Hole"



Trinity

Trinity Washington University
125 Michigan Avenue NE / Washington, DC 20017-1704
www.trinitydc.edu / 202-884-9000
therecord@trinitydc.edu

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I choose to remember / Taniaceli Simon

I choose to remember my 18-year-old birthday cake

Chocolate with red roses

All of you are in the kitchen singing happy birthday.

Not that we spend all day at the emergency room.

I choose to remember a wild, free, jobless me

Instead of a worried student, driver, and caregiver.

I choose to remember you taking me to get my license at 18

Not that the reason was because you couldn't drive anymore.

I choose to remember the nice talks with the secretary about the music in
the waiting room

Instead of the fact that we saw her four times a week.

I choose to remember the great cookies in the waiting room.

Instead of you being rolled out of RADIO, exhausted and in pain.

I choose to remember you dragging me to church every Wednesday, just
the two of us

Instead of rolling you up to the third floor for chemo every Friday.

I choose to remember being surrounded by our family in the tiny apartment

Not that it was extremely hard for you to go up and down the stairs.

I choose to remember how happy you were on your last birthday.

Not that by then we already knew it will be our last.

I choose to remember the kind nurses that were there day and night

Not that they tried to prepare us in our kitchen. The same kitchen you made spaghetti I never learned to cook. That you were not okay. That this was end-of-life care.

I choose to remember you eating all the pancakes and complaining they weren't fully cooked.

Not that it was your last coherent day.

I choose to remember how I read the bible to you at night.

Not that I keep reminding you that you raised us strong and independent

That we were going to be okay. To just let go.

I choose to remember that you loved Christmas.

Not that you left this world four days before we could open gifts.

I choose to remember how peaceful and not in pain you looked.

Not the screams coming out of your room before 6 am.

I choose to remember you.

The strong you.

The hardworking you.

The beautiful you.

The silly you.

My cheerleader.

My police.

My religion.

The reason I have a breath.

I choose to remember you, MY MOM.

Not the cancer that took you away.

Black Women / Machée Kelly

Black women, the sisters, the mothers, the queens,
the aunties, the grandmas that make bomb greens

The speakers of truth, the givers of life, the backbone
of everything, and too often sufferers of strife

The overlooked, undervalued, underpaid

The ignored, and forcibly self-made

The foundation of families, businesses, and movements,
the creators of great works, and the improvements

The educators, liberators, the curse breakers and trailblazers

Resilient

May honor, respect, protect, celebrate, and liberate the Black woman.

Black Women are Brilliant

Midnight Gaze / Montserrat Arellano Bermudez



My Only Way Out / Belen Gutierrez

My mind is limited, and it upsets me that school is my only way out and how the airport, my workplace, is my only way out. There must be more beyond these walls, these videos, and these books.

Marijuana, marijuana, marijuana

Three things that can't bring me to bed.

Latuda, Bupropion, Trazadone

Supposedly are drugs that will put me at ease.

Is what I'm looking for, peace?

Rumor has it.

It comes from within.

Thinking about the guy who brings goosebumps to my skin

Who always has

Marijuana, marijuana, and marijuana

Up to his lips.

Who's afraid to say the word KISS.

I want my mind to expand

Feeling like I'm trapped

in Azkaban.

The Boy in the Woods / Jasmin Avila

The remote dust road, warmed by the sunlight plastering everything with a coat of yellow light, sits transfixed in time. The thick green walls on either side, tree branches and their vines, vivid, green, and healthy. The afternoon is hot. The gentle breeze blesses young Luna's face with a cool kiss. The red pickup truck raises a cloud of dust behind it on the outskirts of town. She's standing on the back of the pickup on her way to her old house in San Miguel, from back when mom and dad lived together with her. She lives with her grandmother and her grandma's son now, while her parents work in the U.S. This day is very special, a giant box sent by her parents containing tangible proof of their love awaits her there. A friend of dad's could only drop off the box in their old house. As it is dangerous for a new person to enter a new town that is guarded by gang members.

As they drove into the road, Luna couldn't help but feel uneasy. To Luna, these woods held sinister secrets. As the passing trees blurred beside her, she'd think of tall shadows coming out at the last minutes of the sunset. Folklore legend encounters, evil spirits, and stalkings by coyotes at night were common anecdotes by the town's elders. As the pickup drove into the road, Luna felt certain the vehicle would keep her safe from any creature that wanted to ambush them. She silently dared them to come out.

Looking ahead, she remembered when she would walk back home with her grandmother in these woods after trips in the hot afternoons to the city market. The market would make her feel claustrophobic. The smell of dried meat, tangy onions, sweat, the cacophony of people, and the humidity and heat would make the trip vexing. She'd rush with her grandmother to reach the bus's scheduled trip back, because grandma always gossiped with her favorite vendor and that always meant sitting on the curb, with nothing to do for long minutes. Only one bus drove into her town. But sometimes, as if the melting afternoon hadn't carried with it enough misery, Luna's heart would sink to her stomach whenever they'd miss their town's bus. That meant having to be dropped at the outskirts of town from another bus where the dirt road began—or ended. After being dropped off, her exhaustion would be met with an eerie aura from the woods. She'd clench her jaw and hold on to her grandma's hand. Walking in silence, she'd look to the sides and back. She'd start walking with the mellow sunlight behind her, cooling her head but her mind overworking itself. The dimming light gave everything a hazy feel, like a sign for the monsters to wake up and the shadows to emerge. Sometimes they'd encounter another adult and Grandma would walk while conversing with them about things she couldn't bring herself to remember.

Back on the road, the red pickup slowed down, as if to give her enough time to soak in the sight of the dead boy who laid stomach down naked

to the side of the road. His arms straight on his sides with his feet together. He looked to be around her age. No more than 10 years old. His body basking in the sun. Still. He had what she thought was short and kinky hair. For a split second, she worried about dust entering his nostrils. An officer crouched beside him, examining his body. Other officers and patrol cars surrounding them. He was clean. No bruises. No scratches. No blood stains, or pools of blood neither near nor far. She had the feeling he hadn't died right there where he lay.

She felt a fleeting ache in her heart.

The adults riding with her diligently deliberated amongst themselves, their faces sorrowful and withering. Luna stared straight ahead riding at the back of the pickup. Her hands extended over the roof of the truck. She felt the breeze hit her face. Sometimes, the air friction would cut her breath short, and a quick rush of panic would inundate her. But she always rode that way.

The pickup made a stop in front of her parents' old brick home. As she stepped inside, she brought to mind the latest memory of Mom and Dad wrapping themselves in their hammock with her between them, helping her hide while she played hide and seek with a friend. She'd giggled and Mom and Dad would have a wide grin on their face. She came to

understand that grin as a passing manifestation of joy, not as a promise to stay together like this.

She saw the men that went to help open the box and her grandmother reached in to take out a doll and hand it to her. It made her happy. The box was loaded to the pickup to be emptied in her grandmother's house. She rode back the same way she came, holding on to her baby doll that spoke words she didn't understand.

Arriving at her grandmother's house, she organized all the new school materials bought by her parents. Princess designs in nearly every clothing or shoes they sent. She was eager to go back to school and use everything; show off to her golden ring and bracelet. Her bracelet had her name and her ring a butterfly. In the future, wearing visible gold would be almost lethal for her. As a group of thieves with guns ambush the bus she is in with her grandmother, on their way to see a friend who lived close to the beach. She will hide her hand behind her. Pray for her life and be relieved to see the men scatter away after they steal the money of all the fare that was collected from the riders. Her jewelry would remain unstolen.

But now, she saw herself surrounded with the love of her parents. She saw family members come and leave. Her grandmother gave away some of her things to her cousins. But Luna didn't mind. Her grandmother also

hung some toys on the walls. The prettiest Bratz and Barbie dolls still in their packaging. They looked too pretty to be played. She stares at them and dreams about playing with them someday, but her grandmother will eventually bring them down for her to play with after a few months.

After her joyous moment with her gifts, her jubilation slowly diluted as the memories of the boy slowly started to drift back into her consciousness. It was evening, and by this point news of the tragedy had trickled through town. An ambush by gang members, rumored the adults.

She'd sit at the back steps of her house. A dark shadow beside her. In her solace, she'd feel in herself a companionship with the dead boy.

She imagined the boy outrunning the perpetrators. He would let out a cry so loud, someone came to rescue him. In her head, his fighting spirit and quick thinking lead him to escape his demise. In her mind, the boy was spared his life. She'd pass him by through town, unaware of who he was, and never learning his name.

When the monster inside her house would touch the small masses on her chest, she'd stay silent. Did the boy scream when he felt unsafe, she would ask herself.

Dad & Lula / Jasmin Avila



Power vs Privilege / Dane't Harris

I am a black woman

It's a shame that we don't have the rights to be black but we have the
rights to remain silent

And the right to shut our mouths

For if we speak we say "excuse me can you tell me why you pulled me
over"

Because you fit the description

In my eyes you don't belong here

So I'm going to shoot you until you can't breathe

We're sacrificing our lives trying to live by this false impression of

Make America great again

America was never great

WAIT

Let me rephrase that

America was never great for us black folks

Because we were so busy getting forced to serve the white folk so ofc it
was great for them

Don't let them see you cry

just smile and say you're OK

Don't you dare let that teardrop from your eye

Don't let them see you cry

Suck back the pain and hold your head up high

Hurt in silence and cover up your emotions

Don't let them see you cry
Put on a person of being happy
They only see what you let them
They'll stare and congratulate on what seems to be strength
Yet what you know to be pain
Black women experience depression and confuse
It with failure
And at one point I thought I was failing too
I suffered in silence just to look presentable to my friends and family
Watching myself pick up the pieces
I created a love I never knew
I am so black that in the summer
I'm dark chocolate
I am so black that my hair curls in the humidity
I am so black that the other girls wanna be shaped like me
Want hips like me
Want lips like me
Get surgery to look like me
I am so black that history wouldn't exist without me
My style is black
My language is black
I am so black... no matter the statistics I am here today
I am so black in 2 years I WILL be graduating in May

I am so black... I let them copy my style, my smile, my walk my talk, my
attitude and my gratitude

My name is Dane't Harris and I am black excellence

Sea Beneath the Clouds / Samuel Adzaka

I

While on the deep seas,
I heard the stunning speech of Silence
And saw the calmness of Stillness
With big fishes
diving in deep waters
... I marveled

II

Back to the shore,
I saw the trumpet of Loudness
and heard the cacophony of Noisiness
With small fishes
wallowing in shallow waters
... I wondered

III

It dawned on me
Why empty barrels make loud noise
and highly-pitched shouts
Why they have a showy display
of their so-called wisdom

IV

I ascertained

why thin clouds disperse quickly
and why windy air blows away chaff

Why the shallow

enjoys getting drunk with hearsay
and bladder forth baseless rumors

And why not all title-holders

wield thinking ability

V

I discerned

the truly wise seeks more truths
that there's time for silver speech

And pure golden silence

I understood

Why Jesus was deeply silent

To Pilate's shallow questionings

mi vida / Elizabeth Silva C.



untitled / Elizabeth Silva C.



golden hour / Elizabeth Silva C.



bloom / Elizabeth Silva C.



No Queda Tiempo / Esmeralda Paez



"I Ran" / Esmeralda Paez

Sitting at a Greyhound station

In Raleigh, North Carolina.

The nerves start to arise

Will I step on the wrong bus?

Leave my bags behind?

It's only been an hour

It's 1 pm, Tuesday.

My heart starts to fill,

With what? Something heavy.

I don't know,

Will I make it to where I'm trying to go in time?

It constantly feels like I'm running out of time

Or that I have missed the time.

The past twenty-four hours.

They replay in my head.

Work, what time do I go in?

School, when will I be graduating?

Life, do I want to go to dinner, tonight?

Now, I wait at a bus station,

Five hours from home, which home?

I left Gainesville for D.C, Monday.

I left Gainesville for D.C, four years ago.

I left, was I running?

Am I running?

The fear of the unknown from this trip starts to settle in.

It crept through the cluttered halls of my heart.

It clings to its shadows and cracks.

It was 9 pm, Sunday.

I started drinking to celebrate,

A happy moment,

But fear was there all along,

Behind each sip of my margarita.

I sat and smiled.

I laughed and talked.

I hid.

What am I hiding from,

why am I running?

How much time will fear to consume?

It's 9 pm, Monday,

I haven't packed.

I'm running late, no.

I still have time to reach the station

Leaving chaos behind as I was ready to board.

When did fear get here?
I have no reason to run or hide.
Yet fear came around Sunday evening
Stuck around till Tuesday,
Slowed down time
took me by the hand,
through my cluttered heart
And made sense of it all.

Did I have to run?
Am I running, still?
I have nowhere left to hide.
So I gave in to the fear,
Let myself feel haunted
by the words I couldn't say
and all the running from before.
The way I hid within myself.
But ran to find me.

Breath of Life / Esmeralda Paez



THE RECORD 2023 staff and acknowledgments

Student staff

Mary Adebayo

Ammi Cabrera

Bella Ditsky

Emily Manzano

Faculty advisor

Bill Beverly

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