

The Sky and the Heavens

My father always expected me to be a boy. After having my three older brothers I think he assumed there was no other option. It was inevitable. Of course my mother hoped and hoped I would turn out to be a girl. It's kind of a cliché, if you ask me, but I can't blame her. She knew I would be her last child. The story goes that my mother figured out I was a girl and waited to tell my father. It was almost a surprise until the midst of labor. "Boy, she sure has dark hair..." The nurse didn't know what she was saying and my dad was shocked.

I think my name screams my Mexican heritage. I hear it often sung, preached, or mourned by my Spanish speaking family. I know I don't look like them and worry if they'll treat me any different. I don't speak the language, know the food, or celebrate the traditions, I didn't inherit the accent that my name tells others I should've. I'm proud of my name nonetheless. To me, my name comes from Whalen Lake and the well deserved success of my grandfather. To me, my name is Casa Guadalajara and steak ranchero with my father. My name is what the guitarist belts out with his beautifully low voice and where the clouds paint the blue horizon. My name is where my relatives rest and angels sing, from Eternal Hills and sugar skulls.

My name is Cielo. It has five letters, and rhymes with yellow. It is a Latin term for sky or Heaven. I have been receiving compliments on the name for as long as I can remember. I suppose people appreciate its authenticity or how unique it is (even though my mother got it from a girl she met in law school). Although some people think it's a beautiful name, the harsh "S" sound in the beginning makes me feel in trouble. The noise pierces my eardrums like a training whistle to a dog. I don't hate the name. It just doesn't seem all that special to me. Sometimes people get a kick out of calling me Sky. I hate it. It strips my name of all its meaning and origin. I fail to correct them though because I know they mean no harm.

My name is what I'm stuck with and what I will have for the rest of my life so I might as well embrace it. Cielo Marie Gonzalez.

Hypocritical Artist

I draw. That's how some people know me. That's how some people describe me. I'm okay with that. I love being able to create whatever comes to mind. I love looking at my hands and imagining the millions of possibilities. The only thing that stops me is myself. As unoriginal as it sounds, I bring myself down far too much when doing the one thing that I plan to devote my life to. "Look at how good they are!" "I should be as good as them by now." "I wonder if I'll ever be that great." It's almost hypocritical. "Practice makes perfect" I was told the same things and I know what they mean. They've said that to hundreds of people. I've said that to hundreds of people.

I acknowledge the progress I've made so far and I'm grateful for it but I'm scared to call myself an artist; afraid that I don't have the right. It goes hand in hand with being competitive. I want to give critique to others and be looked up to like a goal to reach.

I've never had a consistent style. I wonder if that may be my style. It would be difficult to get a job if that's the case. When I put the pencil to paper I don't have an artistic vision. I think some of my best pieces have come from this method. You'd think if an art piece came out good, that you would mimic whatever method was used but, at least for me, it doesn't work that way. That is what's so challenging about being an artist without a consistent style. You never know what you're going to get. One day it could be surrealism, then cartoons, and then realistic. It's a gamble. It's one of the reasons drawing can intimidate me. It's a hobby. It's probably unhealthy at times but a hobby nonetheless and something that will have a hold on my life forever.

The Crows, Raccoons, and Possums

The crows, raccoons, and possums get a bad rap. People say they make too much noise, kill innocent animals, steal food, act aggressive, or bug people. People fail to remember that we do the same. It's how we've survived. We are protective of who we are and where we live. We defend what we believe and do what we must to survive. We've killed to be where we are today whether it was morally justified or not.

I remember the days my father shut up the crows. "They are too loud" he would say before crying out to the T.V when a stranger runs with a ball tucked underneath their arm, sprinting into a painted section of turf. Or when a hoard of the birds circled me when one of their babies had fallen ill and shivered in the concrete corner of my backyard. Protecting their child with all they had.

I admire these animals for their abilities to survive the way they do. The strategic ways they gather food and fool the predators around them. I don't exactly know how or when the prejudice were formed towards these animals but I can't help but feel bad for them. Crows are some of the most intelligent birds on earth. They solve problems, can reason, remember faces, count to five, and even make tools. Their brain to body ratio is the same as some of the smartest animals on earth and only a little bit less smart than people. I mean holy SHIT! Talk about a bad rap.

Beautiful Faces

We met after school. February 21st, 2019. We rushed out as soon as we could. We knew we'd be late. The reality of it all didn't hit me until we got to the venue. I remember everything about that night. That fair lady in front of us whose appearance didn't match her loud, kind voice, who told us stories of the other concerts she's gone to, who mesmerized me completely, who shared her umbrella when the hail hit hard even though her friends obviously didn't like us. I remember the man who gave us a small blue ticket that lead us into a line where we landed behind a lady with peculiar earrings.

After waiting in the wet for two hours, warm from all the body heat but cold, achy fingers from the frigid night, we were in the first 50 to be let into the building. A room I remember so clearly. The room was small, could hold maybe 600 people, the lights, the red and purple lights brushing over the beautiful faces around me, standing three rows back from the stage that sat straight ahead, the lady in front of us who's transparent backpack kept pestering us. I remember seeing the famous bass guitar that I had seen online so many times it seemed more like a myth. The concert hadn't even started and I could feel the adrenaline creeping up my body and through my veins. I could see and feel the shimmer in everyone's eyes. Then there they were. Standing right in front of me.

I could remember their faces and how much they adored the crowd. The show they put on was pure love. I still feel my heart beating and the speakers shaking my chest. I can still feel my smile curling when I made direct eye contact with him or my stomach dropping in the best way possible when I caught the water bottle from the drummer. I can still feel my legs beginning to give in from all jumping and my voice growing hoarse from screaming out the lyrics I had listened to on repeat everyday. I can't see myself anywhere else. This is where my life is. This is how I'm supposed to live. This was the beginning of it all.

Chamomile Tea in the Window Sill

I know exactly where I belong. I know exactly where I'm going and I know I'm going to get there one day. "Mijah, you need to get out of here. Get out of this place. Don't stick around." I believe my father. I'm going to get out.

I know that one day I will sit on my gray loveseat, holding a warm white mug with a small stream of comforting steam and the chamomile scent will remind me of my childhood. I'll look out my light blue victorian window sill where my two favorite succulents that I got from the farmers market will rest. I'll put a record on and pick up my sketch book. I know that one day, the rain will pitter-patter on my roof and I'll wonder what life would be like on a small farm. My white walls will be clean and my bed will be a charming mess. I'll take a few seconds out of my day just to admire my artwork and vinyl records that accompany the hall. I know one day I'll leave at 6 pm sharp to go to a concert and feel that same adrenaline I felt in 8th grade. I'll come back around 9:30 and order chinese take-out and watch a new film a friend told me about. I know that one day I'll have my small San Francisco apartment.

I'll be who I want to be and who I know I am. People will look at me how I want to be seen and I'll have left behind the things and people I know I need to leave behind. I could be really happy. I could be calm. I'm going to live the life I know that I could. I'm gonna reach for life I know I deserve.

I'll think back from time to time. I think back to my childhood. I'll remember it a little bit better than it actually was. People might hate me for becoming distant. I'll feel guilty, of course. I'll get stares when I go to the next funeral or holiday. I'll have to answer questions like "So, where you been lately?" or "So, whatcha been up to lately?" and I'll reply "Oh, nothing much! The same ol' stuff. What about you?" until the night is done. It will all be worth it for the life I'll have. I'm gonna get out.

She Smells Sweet

I feel like a flame. So destructive. So destructive. A candle can be admired by many. An elegant flicker of light to warm your fingers. She smells so sweet and seems so bright and accompanies an edge that some people wish they had. But, get too close and you'll burn yourself up. Some people just don't know when to step back. When to run away or blow the candle out. Tip me over and I'll turn into a flame and soon enough, a fire. I'll grow and grow and continue to push. Push and push until you have to leave. It's best for you to leave.

Too many people say I'm really nice. Those people don't know me well enough. I obviously don't mean to hurt people. I'm just too scared they'll hurt me.

I'll build my wall so thick and high. I'll protect myself and won't let you in. I'll do anything in my power to show no weakness. I'll tell myself: don't bother them, drop your smile, and lower your brows, don't look too sad or they'll ask you what's wrong, don't look too happy or they'll think you're innocent enough to mess with, keep your responses brief but don't seem too rude. I'll overanalyze a look you gave me and dwell on the tone of your voice. I want you to love me but not too much. I want you to fear me but not enough to leave.

I'll live alone and I won't hurt anyone else. I've been hurt before. So I'll get out one day. I'll run from my problems. I'll live in my own little bubble and tell myself this is what I've always wanted. I could sip my chamomile tea in the window sill. A dash of milk and a spoon of honey. I'll light a candle and look out my window. I never wanted to be flame.

I am...

I am from broken pencils
From Whalen Lake and a red 80's Toyota 4Runner
I am from the Golden Castle
Yellow, towering, and you could hear us from a mile away
I am from sunflowers
Tall and bright: everything I'm not
I'm from Thanksgiving and Christianity
From Mark and Irene
I'm from the hopes and prayers
From "Quit your crying" to "You can tell me anything"
I'm from crosses and dreams
I'm from Oceanside and too many cousins to count
Nopales and limes
From the times my dad carried me on his back
The Eternal Hills and plastic flowers
From Morro Bay, Julian, and the stories from the good ol' days
I am from independence and memories I wouldn't mind leaving behind

Cielo Gonzalez

Cielo is a young, aspiring artist currently living in San Diego. She has grown up with three older brothers, two loving parents, a dog, two parakeets, a guinea pig, two tortoises, and rabbit. She attends High Tech High and has a lot of plans for the future regarding college education and career. She lives to become a character concept artist in a small San Francisco apartment. She loves going to concerts and trying to understand different people. Cielo's friends would describe her as thoughtful, caring, and imaginative. She spends a lot of time daydreaming and trying to sounds way more deep than she actually is.