

On hometown afternoons, in the twenty golden minutes when the sun would peak through to Bedford Street, we'd sit in my second-story bedroom, squirming in the gold-and-brown promise of Massachusetts September and we'd do nothing and talk about everything like the jovial, incomprehensible old Dominican men, reunited after half-a-century, who sat on the battered fold-out chairs outside of the Bani Auto Body, laughing and shooting the can and mourning the holy mid-century world that they'd known as children. And Yandel García and I would lay in the sunstream, books sprawled on the floor like broken spirits, and would bemoan the uselessness of our public American education and when I heard the cool fountain of feminine banter bubbling up from the gravel alley where I had taken my first steps, without pretense, with four feline steps, I'd clamor to the window, hoping to catch a glimpse of Virginia Martinez and Stephanie Tram in tight white skirts, scampering down Bedford "Street", on their way to Pappy O's and on the way to my window of opportunity, I'd laugh to think that once Stephanie was the object of my pubescent affection and how on June 14, 2011, at a party on the balcony of Jocelyn Quinones (that lemonade-yellow, invincibly-happy Chicana spirit), I had been sitting around a rottedwood picnic table overlooking Lowell Street with Stephanie Tram and seven chattery pubescent females and Emma Zambrano had pressed me about who I liked and, drunk on the Lyman-June air and delusions of cinematic grandeur, I had declared proudly that the apple of my eye was seated at that very table and their jaws dropped and I sat there for an awkward moment, paralyzed, then scampered down the fire escape and it took them all of forty-eight seconds thereafter to figure out who it was and Yandel and I had a good nervous laugh about it later—but that was beside the point. For at the wise age of seventeen, I'd graduated from Stephanie Tram to her brown-eyed, doe-eyed, sloe-eyed, blonde-haired, beige-skinned, pink-lipped, tight-bodied, classic, vintage, timeless, flawless, restless, half-Chilean, all-American beauty queen best friend.

And so, with poise and dignity, I'd stumble over myself towards the open window to drink up the sweet, stray drops of her Coca-Cola beauty and we'd be Romeo and Juliet inverted—I on the tenement balcony and she in the garden of cracked pavement and candy wrappers and Burger King soda cups. And behind me, Yandel García, my first love, would become a rail-thin giant on his tiptoes, craning his long neck in hopes of glimpsing his own muse, Mary Angela Fiorello (Mary, angel, flowers, how perfect her divine femininity in the puppy-dog eyes of her lanky-limbed beholder). But then the windowsill would subside to street and Eden would sink to grief and we'd both be pretty bored to just see Jasmine Ochoa with a black choker necklace and earbuds and a giant wad of gum and a grey scowl, chattering drably on her cracked Samsung to Lord-knows-who on her way to who-cares-where and I would remember that Virginia's dad had fixed up his old Chevy Bel-Air sometime in July, bringing an end to her Bedford Street commutes as hasty and heartbreaking as the death of disco. And Yandel García, the Jonathan to my David (or perhaps in somebody's narrative, he was David and I was Jonathan and maybe sometimes, he was David and I was Goliath), would remember how Mary Angela Fiorello's family had moved to a more respectable home on Tower Hill last winter

and now she only journeyed into the belly of the great brick-and-cement Lyman-beast as a drunk stumbling to the toilet to vomit—resigned, hurried, spurred by necessity and desperate for the end of it.

And he would fret poignantly with heavy eyelids and downturned lips and I would pretend not to care and I'd flop back down on my hand-me-down mattress and he'd sprawl out on the floor and we'd pretend like that didn't just happen and for a minute, we'd keep silent vigil of the love-moment that had just eluded us and then we'd once again moan about Mr. DuBois' pointless fucking AP Lit and Comp class and whine about Toni Morrison and satisfy our smug adolescent selves with talk of the ceaseless stupidity of existentialism, little dreaming that in just three years, when the daily Eucharist of our hometown darlings had evaded our drying lips for the last time, we, too, would scream into the void and grasp for threads of meaning in the ever-turning world beyond the forlorn comfort of Bedford Street.