

01 - MY VOICE

At the age of 11 I lost my voice.

It got lost in a list of Smiths, Parkers, Coopers and Johnsons.

Discouraged by a society that promotes freedom but oppresses individuality.

Nancy Martínez... or should I say: "Nan-see Marh-tee-ness"

As I sat in that room waiting for my name to be called, I practiced sounding the words in my head.

Stumbling upon words that were unfamiliar, much like the land I was in.

Hoping to utter with perfect pronunciation the paragraph I was assigned to read.

Expecting that somehow, someday, my accent would go away, so they could stop questioning my intelligence.

I'm convinced that if Siri was around back then, she would have fit in better than I did.

Martínez goes after Lewis and before Morrison.

One, two, three, four... eleven.

That's my paragraph.

I pointed to a word to the girl to my left.

"How do you say _____?"

Done. I was prepared. I got this.

But plot-twist.

The Johnson kid went to the bathroom, fucked up the queue.

I had to get familiar with the paragraph before mine.

The one that belonged to Lewis, but now belonged to me.

Except I had been practicing my paragraph while nine people read.

There wasn't enough time to get this new one right.

See being an immigrant doesn't come with a manual.

They don't outline what to do when Johnson decides to go to the fucking bathroom.

It isn't Johnson's fault by the way.

But in a world of "speak English this is America", the 11-year-old me needed to get it right.

She needed to prove that her voice had power, even as it stumbled to pronounce words... to get her thoughts across.

She carried the weight of a system that feeds off her mistakes. Hungry to catch your weaknesses and ready to point them out.

I didn't fully realize then what I realize now.

That our failures and our missteps are used as daggers by those that try to oppress us.

But nobody prepares you to be an immigrant and no immigrant story is the same.

There is no clear transition, no audition.

Just an 11-year-old taking it one paragraph at a time.