

*POV: You're a Word Document and
the End of the Month is Coming Up Soon...
...REAL Soon...*

May 2026



By Ariel Vallotton, Priscilla Siguenza,
Lindsay Jeffries, Dayna Bailey, and Trang Nguyen

“A nation or civilization that continues to produce soft-minded men
purchases its own spiritual death on the installment plan.”

-- Martin Luther King Jr. in his 1963 book *Strength to Love*

“Aw sweet, I finally paid off the burrito
I put on Klarna three years ago.”

-- Me about to buy another burrito

Special thanks to our bras for all the support they give us,
even though they can be a real pain in our sides.

Welcome!

It's May. Happy Cinco de Mayo and Happy Mother's Day! What an excellent time to be a Mexican mama. Well, Mexican-American. Apparently, Cinco de Mayo is only huge in the US. Beer companies in the 1980s wanted to capitalize on the Hispanic/Latin population, so they tried out different holidays and this was the one that stuck. This isn't even Mexico's independence day. That's in September. This celebrates the victory of a SINGLE battle in 1862. Just thought that was interesting. Speaking of interesting things...

I created a writing circle. And I'm inviting you.

The rules? Just the one: Write something every month of 2026.

That's it? That's it.

"But I'm not a writer," you say?

I DON'T CARE.

I don't care if you submit a 500 page novel or your shopping list. I don't care if you're a best-selling Oprah's Book Club award winning published author or if you're just learning how to read for the first time. I don't care if you write down the horny thoughts that go through your head when you look at Henry Cavill or a dissertation on why the toilet paper should go over, not under (I completely agree with you btw).

SEND LITERALLY ANYTHING YOU WANT HOWEVER MANY TIMES YOU WANT.

I WILL NOT JUDGE YOU.

I WILL NOT CORRECT YOUR GRAMMAR OR SPELLING.

I WILL NOT HUNT YOU DOWN OR SHAME YOU FOR YOUR SUBMISSION OR LACK THEREOF.

THIS IS NOT FOR PROFIT OR FAME. THIS IS PURELY FOR OUR OWN ENJOYMENT.

IT DOES NOT HAVE TO BE GOOD OR DEEP OR ENTERTAINING. IT REALLY DOESN'T.

PARTICIPATION IS COMPLETELY VOLUNTARY. YOU DON'T EVEN HAVE TO ASK MY PERMISSION. YOU CAN JUST SEND ME SOMETHING.

I just think it would be nice to have something we can all contribute to and get to read at the end of each month. I know we all have our own adult schedules, which is why this is absolutely NO PRESSURE and NO STAKES.

AND NOW, THE SUBMISSIONS>>>

May Submission

The sky had gone grey with thunderheads by the time Aurelia finished unpacking her van from travel, and the first heavy drops of rain pelted her shoulders as she jogged across the courtyard to the covered patio of Fenton's cabin. He'd left a light on for her, the single warm bulb beside the front door like a beacon in the dreary darkness of the impending storm. The front door, too, stood open for her behind the screen. The space beyond was warm and inviting, smelling richly of woodsmoke and the enticing aroma of fresh baked bread, and Aurelia toed off her dirty hiking boots and set them next to Fenton's to continue down the hall in her sock-feet.

If Fenton's appearance was professorial, his home was even more so, though surprisingly – albeit comfortably – lacking in the rigid neatness she had found herself expecting. A large cast iron woodstove burned merrily between the plush red sofa and a worn armchair, its open door casting flickering firelight from its belly onto the towers of books stacked atop every open surface; on the forgotten mugs; on the notebooks left open with pens still poised beside half-full pages of narrow, spidery cursive. Crumpled balls of discarded paper littered the faded oriental rug, interspersed here and there with tiny black char marks where stray embers had popped free of the confines of the stove and taken purchase among the fibers. An upright piano stood against one wall like a grand sentinel, it too piled high with books, beside a tall music stand cluttered with a tide of loose papers. A tower of milk crates at the piano's other side was stuffed with sheet music, corners of creased and wrinkled pages poking through the plastic lattice, and a velvet-lined violin case was open on the piano bench, the instrument lying in wait as if it had only just been set down. Classical music, so faint it was barely audible, issued forth from the speakers of a vinyl turntable positioned along the far wall atop a cabinet absolutely bursting with mountains of records, sleeves slotted into the shelves in any place and orientation they could be forced to fit.

Around the corner was the kitchen, where Fenton stood at the stove, and a small dining table already set with plates and dishes. Another pile of books on the floor told the tale of the tabletop's haphazard clearing to allow space for her intrusion.

"I apologize for the state of the place. I haven't had company in a while, and I'm afraid I've let the mess get away from me. But I hope you're hungry," Fenton said as he lifted a huge cast-iron pan from the stove, "because I may have gone a bit overboard."

Orange or Pomegranate

I love oranges but hate the way how my hands feel after I peel them

I love the smell, the taste, but I barely eat them because of the white
it leaves on my hands.

But I will sit on the floor outside, covered in juice, to eat a pomegranate. It's harder to eat, messier even. But it's
worth the mess for me.

Am I an orange or a pomegranate to you? Am I worth the mess?

May Submission

“You’ve been seeing this person in every dream lately?” she asked.

“Every one I can remember, at least,” he said.

“And what happens in those dreams?”

He hesitated. It varied, depending on the night. The first time they’d met, he’d been floating on his back on the surface of a dark ocean, a starless expanse of night looming above him. A thread of dusty grey light faintly illuminated the horizon, melting upwards into the blackness of the sky. Though his eyes scanned desperately for any other sources of light, he could find none. Waves undulated beneath him, tilting him up and down, up and down, but it was only his sense of gravity, the pushing and sinking pressure against his body, that let him know they were there. They gave off no coldness or warmth, and he couldn’t see them approaching or rolling away. Maybe if he reoriented himself, he could get a better view of the horizon and find the shore. Then he could swim in that direction. Although part of him recoiled at the idea of plunging any part of his body further into the invisible water, the other option—lying exposed, waiting for whatever lurked in the depths to open its jaws underneath him—seemed far worse. He tried shifting his weight to the side, then panicked when his muscles didn’t respond. He tried wiggling his fingers, flexing his toes, opening his mouth, but nothing happened. His body was locked in place, a statue with arms spread wide, beckoning the darkness to swallow him. His breathing turned arrhythmic, air moving erratically in and out but never quite filling his lungs. The dull grey thread in the distance shifted to silver, growing steadily brighter, a sharp knife’s edge ready to sweep across the ocean and slice through him. He tried to squeeze his eyes shut against the light, but even his eyelids refused to budge. His breathing reached a feverish pace, his chest burning from the lack of air, his thoughts going blank as a raw, animal panic radiated through him. The minutes dragged on as he lay there, waves steadily rocking him while he gasped for breath and his mind trembled.

In the midst of his terror, he felt a sudden warmth on his fingertip. The numbness retreated, and he found he could move his hand, then arm, then shoulder, then neck. He turned his head towards the sensation and, instead of that sinister silver thread, saw only empty space. But no, that wasn’t right. Tiny pinpricks of light now dusted most of the sky, except for a blank, blotchy silhouette where the glowing horizon should have been. That must be the shoreline, he thought, its rolling hills blotting out the stars. Gradually, his breathing steadied to a normal pace.

Then, horror washed over him as the silhouette shifted and water splashed near his ear. That wasn’t land in the distance: someone (or something) was there, right next to him.

Elf Storage

I was driving on the freeway when I saw a big sign with big letters.

“ELF STORAGE.”

And I was like...what the fuck?

Is this where Santa keeps his elves in the off-season? Come on, that's just silly. How would he keep up with production? Let's say 10% of the world population were children. And maybe half of them make the nice list. That's 400 million presents. He's not making his deadline with a handful of happy-go-lucky elves in his workshop. Plus he's gonna need teams of engineering elves who can make PS5s. Need LOTS of tiny elf hands to solder all those microchips.

Or maybe it's where he keeps the overflow. I imagine that elves can multiply like bunnies if left alone for too long. I mean, I don't think they fuck or anything. Not that I've checked them for genitals. That'd be fucking weird. Even if it were “for science”, I'm not exactly chomping at the bit to go up to an elf and ask if it's got a dick. Plus, the alternative would be far worse. What if it was like SUPER hung? What if it was like a duck and it was corkscrew shaped? What if it was like an echidna and there were four heads?

No no no. Elves are beings of magic and striped stockings. They probably undergo mitosis. But then that would disprove the overflow hypothesis. Leave any number of elves in an area and they'd experience such exponential growth, they'd fill their container in no time. You'd need some form of population control. Do elves have a natural predator? Is that what the reindeer are for? Maybe that's how they fly. But then you'd need a predator for them too. Maybe wolves with wings.

At that point, it's not an elf storage. That'd be a magical biome located in a desert in California. We already have one and it's called Disneyland. Our ecosystem isn't healthy enough to support two. That'd be crazy.

Santa must therefore have some way to turn the elves off. Put them into a suspended state or deep sleep or something. In which case, another question naturally arises: How are they stored?

Does he put them into bins to keep the dust off of them? Maybe vacuum sealed. Do they need to be kept at a certain temperature to maintain their freshness? Does he put the elves on shelves? Those pointy hats make space optimization a real problem. Does he stack them like eggs? Maybe they're stored horizontally. I roll up my clothes to fit them into my wardrobe. It really helps to save space and I can see all my clothes at once instead of the traditional way of folding clothes, where you can only see the top piece and have to dig to find a certain shirt. Maybe elves can roll up too. Then they can be bagged up by their hat and even hung up. Santa can probably tell by their hat design which elf he wants to take out of storage at a glance.

But wait.

What if it was a storage for high fantasy elves, like Galadriel or Frieren?

I kept driving. The implication of all that mana in one place would be sure to make my head spin. Then I noticed a tree in front of the sign, blocking out an “S”.

It was a “SELF STORAGE” place...

...

...

I swear, I don't have ADHD.

Pond de Replay

The other day, I went to a duck pond.

It was the last Sunday in May and my partner requested that I join him and his family on their make-up Mother's Day. And when I said no, he begged and bargained until I gave in. I don't like his family. He also does not like his family. But his mom likes me. Enough to wake me two hours before my alarm went off, because she was so excited.

He and his mom live about 10 minutes away from me, 5 if it's an emergency. So naturally, we drive 30 miles and spend an hour in traffic up the side of a mountain during a heat wave to get to his sister's house. It was 82 degrees back home. It was 95 in Corona. I idly wondered if it was named that because of how close it felt to the fucking sun. But from what I was told, all I had to do was show up, eat, and go home. I wore comfortable clothes that could withstand air conditioning going at full blast.

But what was Mother's Day without a fun day at the park with her kids, their partners, and her only grandchild?

Fun fact: if you deprive me of sleep, surround me with people I don't like, and nearly give me heat exhaustion, my brain goes into low power mode and I start spouting random facts about things in my nearby vicinity. These included "There was a zoo that had to stop feeding their animals fruit genetically modified for human consumption, because we've made them too sweet and the extra sugar content was making the animals fat", "I'm allergic to lotion, but only on my face. It feels like someone threw acid in my face and my eyes water uncontrollably", and "The signs say 'don't feed the ducks', not just because the food you give is bad for them, but also because it discourages them from engaging in their migratory patterns, because if there's an abundance of food, they won't leave, and if they don't leave, they won't intermingle with other migratory birds or disperse seeds, thereby reducing biodiversity amongst their species and their habitats."

I found a shady bench. I told them to go without me. I needed a break.

I wanted to lie down and nap, but it was too fucking hot and too fucking bright to even close my eyes. So I sat and I stared at the strangely hypnotic lake. The waters rippling with the waddling of webbed feet. The sun shimmering off the blue surface. The sounds of childlike delight.

Two years ago, my city got rid of the local duck pond. They cordoned off the area, drained it of its water, and paved over it with cement so that they could put up a parking structure and a giant police station. It was there for the first 30 years of my life. It was there when I met my partner. It was there when my dad died. It was there when I graduated. It was there on my first day of school. It was there when I immigrated to America.

My dad used to tie up my hair in pigtails every morning before preschool. He loved to dote on me as his obvious favorite, but wasn't skilled enough to learn any other type of hairstyle. I still remember the sounds of the beads clacking together next to my small ears as his fumbling hands corralled my hair into two tiny bushels that brushed the tops of my shoulders, usually sheathed with overall straps. I wonder when he stopped.

This is how I usually looked when going to the duck pond. I remember the route I would take. My mom would park her car and give me a bag of old cereal, always reminding me not to use it all, so we would have enough for the next visit. I would make my way to the main platform where I would toss tiny handfuls to the ducks and birds before the big geese would spot me and muscle their way to the front to try to monopolize the food. Then I would

make a lap around the lake, always clockwise. Past the ferns and statues, to the inlet hidden in the rocks, to the small clearing at the farthest corner, then along the calm shore where the ducks and turtles slept and sun bathed together a stone's throw away from the busy street, across the two bridges to the lone island, then across the waterfall's rocks--miraculously never falling in, despite my clumsy nature and my too-big shoes I would surely soon grow out of--then making one more round. You would've thought I was the city's youngest health and safety park inspector. Once I was satisfied--all animals accounted for, with full bellies and bright shiny feathers and shells--I'd return to my mom and we'd head towards the library, always checking the bushes for goose eggs.

I knew the way to the kids room, so my mom let me go ahead of her. Through the doors, turn left at the reception desk, down the carpeted stairs, another left through a bright hallway adorned with ever changing exhibitions of crayon and construction paper art, and I was there. Pick a few picture books off the shelves, bring it to the table, read it quietly, return the books to exactly the place I found each one, then do it again with another set until it was time to go.

I'm a bad adult now, but I used to be a good kid. Smart too. Too smart actually. My parents struggled to keep me stimulated while they were working. They were surprised the first few times I would turn on the TV, navigate to the right channel, feed a movie into the VHS player, and sit back on the couch before I even learned to talk. My brothers used to trick me into doing their homework and chores. The duck pond and the library proved to be a reliable and productive way to keep me busy and get my parents a well needed break.

But as a side effect of my entire family being immigrants, we all had to learn English at the same time. And due to my parents always working, I quickly outpaced them and even my older brothers. I remember very early on wishing they would read to me or help me with me homework, but never voicing it out loud, because I knew they couldn't. There were a lot of things like that. I never asked for new clothes, because we didn't have the money. I didn't ask to spend time with my friends, because they didn't have time to drive me. I didn't ask them complicated questions, because they wouldn't understand. I swore to myself that if I ever had kids, I would read them a bedtime story every single night, answer any and all questions they had seriously, help them with their homework, and take them to the duck pond and library every single day.

Admittedly, I could've fought harder to preserve the duck pond. I could've joined the handful of people showing up to town halls and city council meetings. But I knew it was an inevitability. Afterall, there was duck shit *everywhere*. The water was always a sickly green despite semi-regular cleaning. The invasive and more aggressive Canadian geese replaced the white geese and bullied the ducks. Homeless people slept by the bridges and in front of the library's doors, scaring off potential patrons. And most damning of all, coyotes had wandered down from the mountains and made the pond their new favorite buffet and when that wasn't enough, they'd roamed through the neighborhoods for stray cats and small dogs. I once opened the front door to my house and made eye contact with a young and hungry coyote in my driveway.

It simply made too much sense. So I stood by and watched as the trees were felled, the bridges destroyed, and the ferns uprooted. And from the wreckage rose a mass of cement, steel, and glass. A monument to my transmogrification into a being that somehow subsists on cheap coffee, subpar sleep, and a handful of cash. A gravestone for the girl with pigtails.

Occasionally now, I see a few stray ducks ambling aimlessly by city centers and neighborhoods, quacking for crumbs. Lost. Confused. Evicted. Maybe someone with a pool will take pity on them. Maybe the city will pick them up and take them to another duck pond. But maybe, just maybe, they haven't forgotten that they can fly. And maybe they'll migrate, feast on tasty seeds, meet new waterfowl, and find a new home. Maybe one day, they'll be able to live without needing a big and benevolent being around to feed them, care for them, and protect them.

My boyfriend climbed the small hill to come and fetch me. I gathered myself and asked him if he had fun. He regaled me on how the ducks were eating out of his nephew's hand, how a koi fish suddenly splashed him and he almost fell in, how his family's instinctual concern made way to relieved laughter. He had on a silly grin. So did the rest of his family. Squeals of delight erupted from them. Playful teasing exchanged between nudged elbows and pointed fingers.

Time to go home.

Audiobook Narrator Crimes

Or: What words/names did the audiobook narrator mispronounce* egregiously this time?

The series: The Touchstone Trilogy

Note: This is probably my fifth time reading this series. Only my second time listening to the audiobook. I genuinely like it a lot.

Dedication: For Dayna, who has seen my storygraph/goodreads reading history and both Always and Never judges me for it.

*Yes, I have already taken into account that the narrator is Australian. The author and protagonist are also Australian, but they would not have made these mistakes.

Book One: Stray

1. "Disorientating" (the word 'disorienting' was definitely written correctly, I checked.)
2. "Agrophobia" instead of 'agoraphobia'
3. 'Stipend' but like "stih-pond"
4. Interchanges the way she says the planet name "Muina" from "M-you-nah" to "Moo-ih-nah" and "M-you-in-ah" and "Mwina" or "Mwinians"
5. 'Slough' as "SI-oww" and 'Sloughed-off' as "SI-Oww'd off" (which is apparently correct if this was the completely unrelated Noun Slough instead of the actual Verb Slough pronounced "Sluff")
6. "Equih--vocal" for 'equivocal'
7. "Pronounce-iation" (yes)
8. "Sad-ist" for 'Sadist' (this might legit be an Australian thing but regardless, it's wrong; I swear it sounded like "Saddest")
9. Put emphasis on first syllable of "object" when using it as a verb, not a noun
10. Said 'machismo' as "Mah-Kiz-mo" 🤪
11. Said "underminded" instead of 'undermined' as written
12. Put emphasis on second syllable of "record" when using it as a noun, not a verb
13. I can tell she just tripped up on this one, but she chose not to re-record it, so: "Cata-cleesm" (with a long E-sound) for 'cataclysm'
14. Another slip up: "Emis-siary" and also "Emiss-er-ary" instead of the written "Emissary"
15. "Samwise Gam-gee" with a Hard G !!! Straight to Jail !!!!!

Book Two: Lab Rat One

1. Said "I would make more people like me" and emphasized 'me' implying the desire to make others similar to the protagonist, when instead the sentence called for emphasis on "like" meaning the desire to have more people have positive feelings toward protagonist. Semantics I guess.
2. Put emphasis on second syllable in "survey" when using it as a noun, not a verb
3. Pronounced central american people 'Mayan' like "May-in"
4. Said 'accrued' like "ah-cured"
5. "Omnis-see-int" for 'omniscient' and idc if that's an allowable way to say it
6. "Chágrined" with a "cha" like "chat"
7. Said 'minutae' like "mi-new-tay"
8. "Anachronástic" instead of 'anachronistic'
9. Said "disorience" which is not a word, plus the text as written was 'dissonance'
10. Only said "invalid out" when the text said 'invalided out'
11. "Equidisant" as if 'equidistant' had no first T
12. "Huged-Eyes" instead of 'huge-eyed'
13. "Exorborant" instead of 'exorbitant'
14. 'Epically' pronounced like "Epi-Cali"

Book Three: Caszandra

1. Said 'drowsing' like "drow-ssing"
2. Repeats of Stipend and Mayan crimes
3. "Discerntment" with that random extra T in 'discernment'
4. 'Stymied' said like "Stih-MY-d"
5. "Geas" said with a soft G, but to be fair, that's a weird and rare word that I will admit I also had to look up to see the admissible phonetic options
6. 'Escher' as in M.C. Escher like "Es-Chur"
7. Same error as before: "Disorientate" instead of 'disorient' as written.
8. Said 'Basilisk' in a very "Zeddy" way, as an Australian might say. So like "Baz-i-lisk". I don't agree, but I guess it can't be helped.
9. Pronounced the name "Ys" like 'Wise'... in what world does that make sense... Like why choose to be literal about how the letter <Y> is pronounced... Jail.
10. "Stih-pend" again. Maybe this is normal Australian pronunciation.
11. "Mih-nih-STEh-ring" for 'Ministering'
12. Misread 'sparse' as "Spouse" ??? "Spouse collection" didn't register as wrong to her ??
13. "Stih-MY-d" again for 'Stymied'
14. Said 'Secession' almost like "Succession" with a "X / KS" sound
15. Said "them importance" instead of 'their importance'
16. "Foyables" for 'foibles'
17. Said 'echelon' like "Eh-Keh-lon"
18. Said 'basilisk' weird again, like "bah-SIH-lisk"
19. Said 'aplomb' like "Ah-PLome"
20. Said "charged" when 'changed' was written
21. "Distracters" instead of 'detractors' as written

THE END

That's all, folks!

Aw fuck, I just spilled my coffee. I'm sitting on the couch doing this and it got onto the arm and a bit onto the seat cushion and also on the floor. Wondering what's the best way to clean all this up. Especially since I drink it with lots of milk and sugar, so I'd rather not get double teamed by ants and old dairy smell. I have an upholstery cleaner, like the ones you see on TikTok where they're cleaning someone's dirty ass car and you see all the caked in dirt get washed out and sucked up the hose. Fuck, so satisfying. But mine isn't that strong and it takes forever to take out, fill with water and soap, clean up my mess, dump the dirty water, put the machine away, open all the windows, and wait for the furniture to dry.

I'm just gonna grab a few Clorox wipes and hope for the best. Hopefully, I don't make a mustard gas situation. I mean, I'm not *that* dumb, right? If so and I die, let it be known that Darwinism is still going strong.

Thanks again to everyone who submitted. I look forward to the next one!

Have a gold star!

