

Permission to Acknowledge the Burden of Being Me  
Yesenia Ramales Perez

They ask me every day, my friends, my family, even nice strangers. How are you today? You are so brave for being you. Can I be honest and say the words that I always choke back? They've become like a thin cloth tied around my neck like a noose I put on every morning. You see a beautiful scarf but in reality I'm slowly breathing a little bit less. Can I let the *grateful narrative* rest for a second and cry the tears that are tired of silently carrying the truth in my heart into the pillow under my head.

TRAPPED

Trapped in this skin. Brown, short, HISPANIC. Believe me, I've tried so hard to break out and I have the scars to prove it. I don't have an issue with it, but it seems to offend you that there are high levels of melanin in me. Which means it must be a bad thing right? In the stares of everyone who looks at me with pity when they realize I'm not really one of them. In the judgement of my own people who say I don't speak *their* (isn't it mine too) language well enough. Shaking the hands of the white people who are *graciously giving me an opportunity to dream*. Hoping they don't see that my other hand is behind my back clutching the arms of my parents who are still in the shadows. They are secretly proud of me because I am their greatest accomplishment and they have never admitted a moment of fear to me. Instead, those truths linger like spider webs in the corners of our home.

TRAPPED

In this moment of my life where I plan in chunks of two years. Can I fall in love and risk losing him if the deportation machine catches me and sends me away? I don't want you to love me to the moon and back, I want to love you here in my city and in my home. Would our love survive the great divide of Trump's wall? Or will he always wonder if I'm with him for papers like everyone around me will assume. The equator of my life has become IF my EAD is still valid THEN I will be able to *insert daily activities here*.

TRAPPED

In between the sweet privileged of getting dressed every morning and sitting in traffic complaining about my bills and getting restless at my job. All the while feeling guilty. I do know what it's like to work my body to exhaustion. I'm still the same girl who was cleaning your toilet yesterday. Except today I have the 9 numbers that allow me to dress up and sit at a desk where I think of my father's cracking sun baked skin and the new burn marks on my mother's arms cooking your *Authentic Mexican-American Food*. Life this way has a way of tainting all of the good things in life.

TRAPPED

Smiling and creating the illusion that my heart isn't in overdrive and I'm ok with my hair going grey at 25. Because I'm one of the lucky ones. I got the education and I fulfilled all of your requirements to step into the shoes of an American. But the great pumpkin is losing its spell. DACA is over and today I have 626 days left of this cycle. After that, I don't know who I will be or what is next. I have to be ok with that answer. Will I have the strength to see those days through? Would you judge me if I didn't? Can anyone hear me?