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Volume 5
Issue 1 *New Vistas*

Article 5

February 2016

Letters from a Cynical Romantic

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Recommended Citation

Montalvo, Genesis (2016) "Letters from a Cynical Romantic," *First-Gen Voices: Creative and Critical Narratives on the First-Generation College Experience*: Vol. 5 : Iss. 1 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/fgv/vol5/iss1/5>

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I don't know how to express how I feel.

Growing up with a beautiful fairytale image of how love should be, I always imagined my life would be filled with the exact same romantic fluff. Well, maybe not the *exact* same fluff but I definitely didn't imagine I'd ever see parts of myself shattered on the floor with no one around to help me pick up the pieces. But that's what happens when your bedtime stories were the letters your dad wrote to your mom when they were in their long distance relationship.

This is a fairytale worthy of Disney. You may think I'm kidding, but I'm dead serious. The long distance relationship that turned into a twenty-three year marriage. But that's just the tagline. This story isn't just about the distance. There was the break up, and then the chase where my dad traveled back to Mexico just to ask for my mom's hand in marriage. And of course, my mom said yes because deep down she knew that she was meant to be with my dad. In this fairytale, the prince wouldn't let a border restrain him. In this fairytale, words became bodies and that was enough because there was always a promise. A promise that didn't need to be strengthened by daily phone calls, text messages, or Skype. A promise rooted firmly in the belief that each person loved the other. And even when it ended, it wasn't over.

Because true love always prevails.

Right?

* * *

Dear Sebastian,

You were the fucking worst.

Not in the beginning, of course. No, in the beginning you were amazing: attentive, caring, you made me laugh and roll my eyes, you let me be myself. You were everything I wanted out of a boyfriend.

Almost.

I always pictured my first relationship would actually end in a marriage. The white flowers, perfect dress, the whole romantic fantasy. But of course, you had to go and wake me from my delusions—despite everything you promised me;

despite our unofficial engagement. Guess reality isn't a place meant for daydreams.

You were my best friend for five years. A true first love story where everyone agrees to be naïve. It worked out for the first few months. Skype calls and long letters were manipulated to create the comfort and warmth of the bodies we both so dearly missed—for a while—but at the end of the day, no matter how hard we tried, you couldn't create a body out of words.

I was able to convince myself that it was just a bump in the road. That we'd be able to get over it and come out the other side stronger than ever. You didn't seem to share my vision though. In your mind, I was not there. In your mind, I was 3,000 miles away. In your mind, words were just attempts to fill emptiness.

Tears started falling. My Pandora's box of long-pent up frustration and pain began opening. I wanted to be that perfect girlfriend. The one who was patient, loving, and reassuring. The one who never seemed to mind how many times she had to repeat, "It's okay, baby, you'll see me soon."

It would work. It would work.

It worked for my parents. It will work for us.

"I can't handle this anymore, babe."

It will work, it will work.

"C'mon, Bas, just cuz I can't visit anymore, doesn't mean it won't work. I'll find a way there. I promise. I promise."

It will work, it will work.

"I can't believe it... I can't... I just can't."

Don't say it. Bite back those tears. Don't say it.

"I mean... I know I already said this, but all I want is for you to be happy, Bas. If you need to, we can break up and you can find someone there that can give you what I can't. because I can't give you what you need, and I don't know what I can do anymore. I'm so tired. I've tried everything. I've tried calling, writing, Skyping, none of it is working for you so we should just cut it now."

Don't say yes. Don't say yes.

“Yeah... I can't do this anymore.”

It could still work.

“Okay.”

“Okay.”

You never noticed how I would repeat the same words over and over. You never noticed that I was trying so hard to bring us closer and closer. The distance wasn't just hard on you. It would away at me as well: the parasite in my heart that would take each moment to make sure I remembered it existed. The difference between our parasites? I knew the medication I needed to take in order to kill it for just a little bit so I could be there for you.

You proposed when we were eighteen in the backseat of your car in one of our many escapades that later created the tension between us and your mother.

I will marry you. When we graduate, I will marry you and move anywhere you need to be.

Funny how promises suddenly mean nothing, right? Because all those stupid promises were suddenly on the floor along with my shattered heart, and I was stuck picking up the pieces, enduring the pain as the shards pierced my fingers over and over again.

I couldn't breathe.

I couldn't think.

I couldn't eat.

For two months food triggered the gag reflex my stomach didn't know it had. The world was bleak; the black hole in my heart beginning to extend beyond my body. It was like running up a never ending hill. I just wanted to stop but even when I did, my muscles ached and my lungs struggled to take in oxygen.

All these feelings were the warning signs on the road to recovery that I shouldn't have you in my life. Yet, being the genius I am, I still wanted to be friends. I still responded to your messages; still saw your face on my computer screen. Still fulfilled every single request you asked of me because at the end of the day, that's what you do for the people you care about. Never mind the fact that whenever I asked you for a favor—for you to listen to me—it seemed like I was asking too much. You listened for two seconds before you suddenly “had to go.” I obviously didn't have my own schedule to consider, so I had all the time in the world for you, right? Must have been the greatest ego boost ever, huh?

And I defended you for it too!

“Oh he's just busy.”

“I know he'll be there for me in the future.”

“Maybe he doesn't know how to help me with my problem.”

Excuse after excuse, I justified you hurting me. I justified you taking advantage of my persistent love for you. My best friends told me our “friendship” wasn't healthy; it wasn't fair; it wasn't a friendship at all. They watched me turn into a shell of my former self. Lexie told me my smile wasn't the same. That every muscle in my face looked like it was working overtime to prove that I was “happy.”

I laughed it off.

For nine months, my laugh felt like a coarse hairball attempting to make its way out of my throat.

For nine months, I felt time crawl by like a slug, leaving behind a messy trail of what used to be.

Then you dropped the bomb.

To this day I still try to understand your reasoning behind this douchebag move of yours. Why did it seem like such a good idea to call me that day just because you “wanted to hear the sound of my voice”? And then after our conversation—after my voice, what? Calmed you? Reassured you that we were still friends?—why would you send me that idiotic Facebook message?

“I’m thinking of asking someone out. I just wanted to tell you.”

Real classy, jackass.

To this day, I still apologize to Lexie for bursting her eardrums with my scream.

But really, in what universe would it be okay to tell me that you wanted to replace me with Miss Pig Nose? (Yes, I had already seen her on your Facebook). Were you deliberately trying to hurt me? You said you didn’t want me to be caught off guard by surprise—that you were trying to “protect me.” How valiant. Someone should have dubbed you a fucking knight.

You just didn’t get it.

Somehow you always had the audacity to come to me for anything you needed.

“Hey, my girl isn’t talking to me.”

“My girl is mad at me. I didn’t do anything wrong.”

My girl this.

My girl that.

Are you so short-sighted you forgot *I* used to *your* girl? First you let my heart drop. Now you were just dancing on the pieces. You’re just as clumsy as love.

Did it feel good?

Did you feel like the winner?

You moved on first, congratulation! No need for nominations, you won the Oscar for Best Heartbreaker.

Every time I walked five steps forward, you had to come back in some way to pull me ten steps back to where I used to be. You just didn’t get how hard it was for me to rip you out of my smile.

How hard it was to force my hand to stop writing you letters ending with “Love, Forever and Always, Genesis.” How hard it was to swallow my pride only to feel it crawl out of my mouth.

Even after I told you to never talk to me again, you still found a way to slither your way back into my life.

New message: "Hey Gen, how are you?"

Ignore.

New message: "Gen, please, I really need your help."

Ignore.

New message: "Hey, I understand if you don't want to talk to me. I just really need someone and you're the only one I know will help me. I'm in the hospital (it was something stupid, haha). But please, Gen, I need you."

Don't respond.

Response: "You'll be fine. You should talk to your girlfriend about this."

New message: "We broke up. I don't know why. I didn't do anything."

Of course you didn't. Because nothing is ever your fault.

New message: "I still think about my promise. I hope I can still keep it. As soon as I graduate, I'm coming back for you. Doesn't matter where you want to go. New York, LA, I'm there with you. I just need to be with you. I wish I could be with you now, but y'know..."

Why the hell do I need to know this...? I don't see it anymore. That picture of you and me and kids. I don't see it. Why do you feel it necessary to tell it to me?

Response: "Whatever happens in the future happens. We just have to let it ride."

Four months later, the conversation continues.

New message: "How do you do it... how do you not feel this stupid pain that fills my throat and heart every night?"

Because I took the time to work on myself instead of jumping from one relationship into the next.

Response: "I don't know. I think I just don't think about it as much anymore. I don't like holding onto pain anymore..."

New message: "I guess I never really let go then hahahaha "

Response: "I guess not."

New message: "Sorry to bother you, I generally really try not to since you're always busy, I just can't help but remind myself of these moments when I find myself thinking at night."

Why did you always do that to yourself? And why did you always feel the need to dump it back onto me? You always apologized about bringing back "old wounds" but you never did anything to change. It would always come back to your own self-pity, your need for my comfort, and your hope for the unclear future. How do I even know that you still want to be with me when we haven't spoken in the last year and half?

I thought that I would know what I truly wanted to say by the time I reached the end of this letter. I still don't know though. Sometimes I do wonder what it would be like if I didn't break up with you (and yes, it was me who pulled the trigger, don't get it twisted). You never really left my heart completely; you left an imprint that will never go away; you left a tenant who will never moved out.

Actually, I do admire you a bit. You managed to hold onto your hopeless romanticism. I couldn't do it. What we went through...that was too real for me to be able to believe that love conquers all, or that people will always find their way back to one another. Yes, everything happens for a reason, but life isn't a fairytale. It doesn't matter how many fairytales you grew up with, your life isn't destined to turn into one.

But at the end of the day, I just can't dwell on it unless I want to depress myself. I guess all I can say is thank you.

Thank you for the experience.

Thank you for being my great first love in the beginning before the world crumbled beneath our feet. The only thing I am really sorry for is losing my best friend.

Forever and always,
Genesis

* * *

Dear Rudolfo,

I still fucking miss you.

It makes me so fucking mad that I miss you. For all the strong-girl-I-don't-need-a-man speeches I've given, your name still leaves a bitter coffee aftertaste on my tongue: a vague reminder of the original taste you introduced me to that night at your apartment during a very casual kickback.

I was able to smile like nothing happened. Three days after we broke up, I was able to answer questions about our relationship with a causal, "Oh, we broke up." without the sharp wasp sting I was expecting.

Pero, en vino veritas, because every time my blood turned to alcohol the first name to run down my cheeks was yours.

Stupid me for thinking I could quietly forget you.

Halloween just passed and I thought of you—of our first and last Halloween together. As the clock ticked towards the 9 o'clock hour, flashes of you texting me to come to the Halloween party early appeared on my phone. 11:00 PM and instead of carving a pumpkin, we were taking shots, dancing on each other and wishing for a private room. 1:00 AM and instead of driving home, you were asking if we could try to find that private room. I answered no because a good (albeit frustrated) DD never leaves her crew behind for her own personal gain. By 2:00 AM, I wasn't sleeping in my bed but walking the several blocks to my car with you so that I could take it back to the apartment. We chilled in the front seats, the exhaustion from the week began settling on my eyelids. For you, the weed and alcohol were settling in your bloodstream. Nothing could have prepared me for your next words.

"I'm confused—"

I could feel the recently mended shards of my heart drop back onto the floor. It was Bas all over again. Suddenly my car was an all-too familiar room with a laptop open and a Skype window displaying a face I had worked hard to forget. But when I blinked, the face on the screen was yours. I had to give you the benefit of the doubt though. I mean, being confused could refer to a lot of things, right? About the future, about writing, about graduation? *Please dear God, let me be anything but...*

“—about us.”

That.

To this day, the conversation plays in my ears like white noise. The anger it stirred travels through my bloodstream like a drug my body has never been able to flush out.

I had followed *your* lead! How could everything have gotten too serious too fast when *you* were leading this race? *You* were the one that wanted me to move in with you after only one official month of dating! *I* was the one grounding *you*! And then you dare throw it in my face that *I'm* the one creating the distance? Tell me that because I wanted quite literally wanted to go the distance—across the Atlantic Ocean—and leave you behind for four months, this relationship can't work.

What was wrong with dreaming? With wanting to see the world? Beyond the bubble that is LA.? I thought that was the reason you fell in love with me in the first place...

But I was going to come back. This wouldn't be like the last time—like the last memories I had with a boy that wasn't you—where we'd only be together for three months and then one of us would leave. No, I would go and come back and stay.

With you.

I'd see you graduate; help you plan out life. I'd stay.
I'd stay.

But then you decided to step on my heart even harder.

“I sometimes go to a party and I wonder what it'd be like—“

You didn't have to finish the sentence.

Twenty-two years.

You had twenty-two fucking years to date other girls and screw around! No offense dude, but from my understanding, I was the first to even give you the time of day, and you still wanted to try and find someone else?

You heard my disbelief in the silence. You asked me to speak, but really what could I say? This is how you felt; apparently nothing that I had done up until this point was good enough to keep you from feeling this way. You stuttered, trying to take everything back, trying to blame it on being cross-faded.

“But when I’m with you, I know what I want. I want you.”

Again, *en vino veritas*. What about the other 95% of the time that we weren’t together? Let’s face it, my schedule kept us apart a lot. Overachiever and overly-committed. Nevertheless, I still made time for you. Not enough, though. Because during that 95%, of the time, you were wondering about the single life—trying to blame everything on me and my dreams. How they were what were keeping us apart and what had pushed us too close, too fast.

Really, how could I fall again?

How could I be so blind? So stupid?

You used your smooth velvet words to trick me into believing it could be something real.

But it was real up until this moment, right? I mean guys don’t normally make a corny pun out of their last name and use it as a pick up line unless they’re really putting themselves out there, right? They don’t take the bus to see the girl they like perform her first ever spoken word poem. They don’t call the girl everyday during the week she’s sick because they wanted to “see how’s she feeling.” They don’t continue to want to talk to her when she constantly says she’s “busy” or “not sure.” Guys don’t do these things unless they’re serious, right? At least, not in this day and age.

It felt like a movie—the day we re-met at the social between our two orgs. Of course, I remembered you after we met the first time at that other party. So when I saw you again in that kitchen, it felt like time slowed down. The surprise on your face turned to a slight twitch at the edge of your lips that I would soon know the shape of well. You acted like you didn’t remember out of fear of rejection. For anyone else, that stunt would have hurt, but I just called you out.

“Hi, I’m Rudy.”

“I remember. I’m Genesis.”

I like to think it was the boldness that urged you to come around the kitchen counter to offer me a drink. To teach me how to play beer pong after I warned you how bad I was at the game. Even after we lost, you were fine with just chilling on the couch and talking. Crazy coincidences popped up like weeds: we were studying the same things, had the same goals, and my name had another special meaning to you that you made me swear to never disclose.

You didn't have to tell me I was your first kiss; I could tell that night we stood outside your apartment balcony. Too much tongue, not enough lip.

The next morning, I was confused. Did I actually like you, or was it the alcohol in my system? My stomach was telling me it was the latter. The rest of me, however, was just as unsure as my head.

Three months.

That's how long it took for me to get over the other guy I had liked before I met you. That's how long you showed me your persistence and stubbornness. Because, according to you I was "special". Something in your gut, told you so. Nothing beats your intuition. It's also how long you stayed like a fly buzzing in the back of my head. How long it took for me to let the waves of feelings drown me.

I thought it was long enough to know what I needed. You wanted to meet my family; wanted me to meet yours. You met my extended family before we even got together!

"I didn't like being introduced as 'your friend.'"

Then how should I have introduced you? You hadn't asked me for anything more, even though it was no secret it was what you wanted. Could I really let myself go back out onto the tight rope with no net? I barely survived the last fall. Could my body, could my heart, survive another?

Actions speak louder than indecision though. The beautiful words you said to me, didn't hurt either.

But now I can't go to the comedy club in Santa Monica.

I can't drive past 47th Place without wanting to make an instinctual turn.

Neruda's poems are tragic.

My once smooth Spanish has become holed with stutters and gaps, always conscious of my "white-wash" manner of speaking; something I had never noticed until you pointed it out.

Guess at the end of the day I was too Pocha for you. Not enough Mexican in the veins that sang rancheras y norteñas. Too "bougie" because I wasn't raised in the streets of South Central but the suburbs of La Mirada. As if I should be ashamed of the hustle my dad did in order to get my family to the OC.

What really breaks my heart is that I always wonder what it could have been like if we had actually tried to make it work. I sometimes blame myself. I didn't push hard enough; I easily got scared. As soon as a concern was brought up, I bailed. Especially fucked up coming from a person that previously preached the need to do everything you can to make love work, isn't it?

The moment you called and said that you couldn't do it, I pulled the trigger. Another romance dead in front of me. My beaten beside the two dead lovers we left behind.

What could've been.

What would've been.

What should've been.

Por tu maldito amor.

And when I saw you again, it was like time had stopped, only this time there was no promise of something blossoming. My heart beat was suddenly in my stomach and I sent a prayer to clumsy-ass Cupid that you would not come to talk to me.

Stupid-ass Cupid, never listens.

Because what was the point of coming to talk to me? To seem civil? You went to go flirt with another girl right after, so where's the civility? Still, I couldn't fight the bumblebee sting in my stomach.

I swore I would never think of you again.

To never speak of you again.

To never have my heart yearn for the way you made me feel and want.

To forget you the way I could've sworn you had forgotten me.

There are two kinds of lovers out there: the kind who forgive (which I hardly am, you can ask Bas for that confirmation. He's never heard me say the saving grace he had asked of me all those years ago); and the kind who forget (which I try so desperately to be. Deal with the feelings and leave the past in the past. No need to remember the kisses laced with pain, unless the ghosts of us past come back to punch my stomach again and again). I'm in a limbo between wanting to forgive you and forgetting you all at once.

I sometimes wish I had never even met you.

But it doesn't change the one thing I know to be true:

I still really fucking miss you.

Best,
Chiquita

PS:

I wasn't going to add this post-script. In my head, I left it all on Facebook Messenger the eve of the commercialized celebration of love after you sent me that stupid—albeit, good. The professional in me can't deny that it is good—story.

But my feelings take so much more to resolve than just a few words in a message bubble. I want to kick you. Hit you. Cause you the same hurt and humiliation you caused me for my stupidity in wasting three precious words on you.

You ask for forgiveness; a saving grace to relieve you of the guilt clawing at your heart and knees.

Keep praying.

I heard God has the true divine capacity for forgiveness and mercy.

I wish I could say the same for myself.

* * *

My parents make it look so easy.

What frustrates me is that I know it wasn't easy. I know the distance took a toll on my mom's heart. She didn't know what her prince was doing in the land where the streets are made of gold. For all she knew, he could have been making a fool of her with other women that didn't deserve the crown. My *abuelita* and *Tías* all told her the same things:

No va a regresar por tí.

He isn't coming back for you.

Encuentrate alguien mas, hija. Alguien que te va dar el mundo.

Find someone else, sweetie. Someone who will actually give you the world.

But my mom still had faith. An almost unbreakable faith in love and in my dad for everything to work out. And it wasn't one-sided. You don't go back to your Motherland to inquire about the woman that has haunted your dreams if you didn't have faith that she—on some level—still loved you.

My parents are the one in a million.

I know because I tried. And yes, I know I am only twenty-one years young, but that doesn't mean I haven't tried. Tried so hard to make the extremes work. But I've become like this rest of this Tinder swiping generation: wanting everything to be so easy—so ready to go that as soon as the situation gets tough I run. Run as fast as I can because I can't fathom the possibility of my heart being broken again. But my parents have shown me that you can't run from every single problem in a relationship—if so they would've split a long time ago. But that's the easy route.

And the best things in life don't come easy.

But those are also the things that can bring you the most hurt.