

## Nature's Lullaby

Maria shoved Kamilia out of the way, knocking her onto the pavement. Kamila breathed in sharply as the rough ground opened up cuts on her palms and knees. She mumbled something under her breath before yelling, "You'll never catch it!" At Maria who was now off the sidewalk and dashing into the seagrape trees. She disregarded Kamila's comment, the fact that it had shown up on her patio was a sign, she thought, so she chased into the middle of the grove. "Ven aqui, coqui..."she whispered to the area around her, but it was no use. The grass and leaves had camouflaged the tiny reptile. Maria sighed and turned around to run back home when she heard a small call coming from the inside of a curved grape leaf.

"Ko-"

Maria smiled quietly.

"Ko-"

It was such a beautiful sound.

"Ko-"

She took a deep breath and crept closer to the tree, trying to find exactly what leaf it was on.

Silence. Maria listened for it to complete its song.

"Ko-Kee-" She lunged forward and yanked at the leaf. She held it in her dark, sweaty hands.

"It's okay, Coqui. You'll like our house." She trotted happily out of the grove.

The smooth marble porch cooled her bare feet as Maria pushed open the yellow pastel door of our house. She squeezed her eyes shut, hoping for them to open to a plate for hot empanadas on the kitchen's island, but instead Abuelita, along with Maria's parents, were

huddled in front of Papa's computer. In the reflection of Abuelita's round, smudged glasses, she could see a small reflection of a building.

"Papa? Que está haciendo la abuelita aquí?" Something deep in her stomach crawled to her throat. Papa came up to Maria and took her to the living room. He told her that they were moving.

To New York.

In America.

Everything else in the conversation was drowned out. After Maria stopped crying, she went to her room and slammed the door so hard it almost shook the house.

It was night by now, and Maria continued to wipe her puffy eyes. Then she began to hear a clash of guitars, maracas, and howling. Her neighbors across the road love to play on these nights, and their chihuahuas love to sing along.

Eventually, their music came to an end. Maria opened her window to let the midnight wind hit her tear-streaked face, hoping it would calm her down. It whistled through her ears and the palm leaves, their big, wide leaves brushing against each other, seeming to keep the beat of a lost song that drifted away in the breeze. The dark waves crashed against rocks from the harbor and washed onto the beach as white foam. Even though she couldn't see the harbor from her window, she could hear it all around her. Occasionally the shriek of a screech owl could be heard far into the trees. Maria knew that the Song wasn't over just yet; the star had yet to arrive.

"Ko-Kee-" The call echoed through the night. "Ko-Kee-" The sound kept time to the music.

Maria tapped her finger on the windowsill, and just for a moment, all her problems had faded away. This nature's lullaby was what put her to sleep every night.

Then it dawned on Maria: She would never hear it again.

Two years later

Maria had finished her midnight snack; her mom's quesitos. She heard clashes of car horns, revving engines, and millions of conversations at once. Maria had gotten used to the constant buzzing day in and day out and found that she quite enjoyed it. Maria opened her family's apartment balcony to let the midnight wind hit her content face. The wind whistled through her ears, and by the construction site of a new building, every mechanical whirr and clank seemed to keep beat of a lost song that drifted away in the air. People in the apartments around her were cooking, watching the news, and discussing just everything. She couldn't see inside every room from her window, but somehow, she could hear it all around.

Occasionally a raven or crow would flap by. Maria knew that the Song wasn't over just yet; the star had yet to arrive. She brought out her (new) phone, and found her downloaded MP3, and pressed play.

"Ko-Kee-" The call echoed through the night. "Ko-Kee-" The sound kept time to all the music. Maria tapped her finger on the windowsill, and just for a moment, all her problems had faded away. This, nature's lullaby, was what put her to sleep every night. It might not have been what it once was, but it was always there.