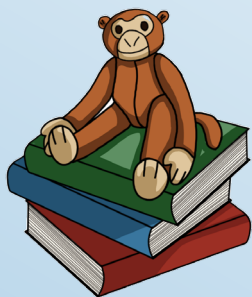


*By Ri Herrera*

# Senior Year



## **“The Monkey On the Pedestal” - 3/14/23**

They placed me on a pedestal and told me not to fall  
I'm a very jittery little thing, so naturally I would try hopping on  
one foot to the other  
Trying to see if I get could my balance right  
It's a wonder how young kids can be given so much responsibility  
When all they want to do is push themselves to the limit

They placed me on a pedestal and handed me a stack of books  
and told me  
I couldn't leave unless I finished reading all of them  
I tore through every page, even the books I hated and  
Couldn't bare to read another sentence  
I absorbed every word until my mind grew  
Fuzzy and blank  
After I finished, they took away those books, even the ones I liked  
I miss those books

They placed me on a pedestal and told me not to fall  
But my legs have grown very tired and  
There's only so much a child can do before they want to fall asleep  
Oh well

## “tethered” - 2/21/23

do you hear that?

it's my footsteps in the living room,  
taping string lights all across the furniture,  
so that when we fall asleep on the couch  
we can pretend we're surrounded by stars

do you smell that?

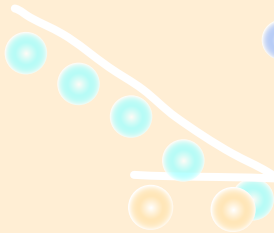
it's this morning's breakfast,  
this afternoon's lunch,  
and tonight's dinner,  
carefully crafted together in our own little kitchen

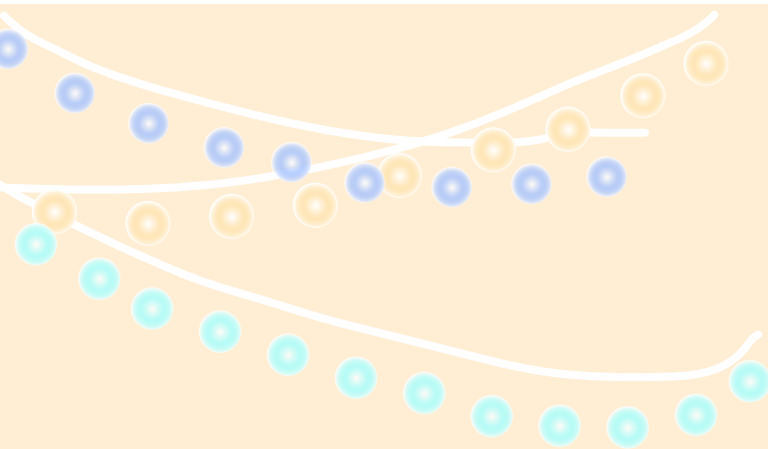
do you see that?

it's the table we purchased when we first moved here,  
and the lamp shade we assembled,  
the bed we made,  
the home we've constructed from soft words and fleeting whispers—  
pieces align to fit a much bigger puzzle piece

do you feel that?

it's like we're one in the same, you and i—  
tethered in a way that goes beyond human capability.  
you end where I begin,  
you begin where I end,  
so what is 'together' but you and me?







**“Farm Boy”** - 12/1/22

Sand gets in his shoes,  
Prickling his feet as he traverses across the great dunes  
Reminding him that the endless sea of a barren wasteland will  
be all he ever knows  
But then suddenly he's flying  
And the sand that seemed to follow him all his life  
Is suddenly just a memory, a lingering nostalgia  
With nothing left but sun-doused skin freckled from work

When he leaves the sand, it's not by choice

Snow gets in his face,  
Baby fat ripped away by an avalanche of ice shards ✦  
Reminding him that he is a long way from the sweltering  
heat of the dunes

✦ A body used to the sun shrinks underneath the frost that  
silently sneaks up on him  
Skin burns in a way it has never burned before ✦  
Not of the haze that encapsulates the landscape  
Nor the suffocating embrace of the twin stars above  
If this is what the cold feels like, he thinks,  
Then let me never find myself trudging through the snow  
again ✦

When he leaves the snow, it's not by choice ✦

Mud gets on his hands, ✦  
It's all he can do not to sink into the bog  
Reminding him of teetering on the edge of panic as  
He sinks knee-deep into quicksand  
Murky waters reflect a wavering farm boy a millennia away  
from home ✦  
Except he's not really a boy anymore,  
Hasn't been for a long time  
He looks into the waters and sees a man  
Skin rubbed raw from trying to remove the dark stains on  
his palms  
✦ And blames the swamp for the sudden dread that douses  
his entire being ✦

When he leaves the swamp, it's not by choice

The dark endlessness that surrounds him  
Hums a lullaby that seems to ease away the tears in his skin  
Reminding him that he is untouchable in the air,

Youth is nothing but frail, escape but a manifestation of childhood dreams

But escape to where? he wonders, and  
Escape from what?

Bright eyes speckled with stardust are meant to see the galaxy  
Infinity a blessing, time moving inevitably

The stars above beckon him with open arms,  
Comfort when sinking, affection when drowning  
Has the sky always looked like this?

If he reached forward, he might even be able to grasp the remnants of a burning star in

his grasp

Understand the young farm boy left to sink at the edge of the galaxy

When he burns, it's by choice

