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Hand-Me-Down

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Hand-Me-Down

Briana Yah-Díaz

To *mis palomitas*,

This is my third attempt at writing to you.

My first attempt was in class and my mental health was declining. What I wrote was a reflection of what I wanted to hear; I gave the advice I needed.

The second attempt was in the evening, two months later, my mental health was improving. I wrote about love. I noted the strengths each of you have and how I'm here for you both.

On this third attempt I write about survival. My mental health is balanced.

This institution isn't meant for people like us.

The media doesn't depict our people accurately.

Resist; take it over. #BlackLivesMatter. The education system caters to the white narrative.

Resist; don't give up and believe in your intelligence. They'll dismiss you *mijx por tu piel color de caramelo y mazapán*.

Resist; your existence *is* resistance. They'll impose their beauty standards on you *mijx porque no eres guerx*.

Resist; love yourself. They'll try to dictate *tus decisiones*.

Resist; your body — your choice.

They'll try to make you feel ashamed because *somos del barrio*. Resist; be proud of it. They'll feed you false ideas and try to mold you into who they want.

Resist. They'll try to silence you, **no te dejes**.

Resist; *maldito capitalismo*, don't consume what they produce.

Resist; *malditos roles de sexo*, don't allow them to define you.

Resist; *maldito racismo*, don't let them label you.

REVERSE RACISM ISN'T REAL.

Resist; *maldita institución*, never let them convince you broken glass is violence. Never let them convince you of *anything*.

War is violence.

Homelessness is violence.

Racism is violence.

Profit is violence.

Property can be replaced, your lives cannot. You matter.

I believe in you both.

No matter what they'll try to do don't forget how resilient you are. Don't put away the pain – feel it.

Mijx, you don't have to be modest in order to be respected... don't believe it.

You are more powerful than they say you are.
Be empowered *palomitas*.

I love both of you, unconditionally.

There's no predicting the future, only living through it and fighting.

Keep fighting *mis palomitas*.

Mijx, you don't belong in the U.S. Prison Industrial Complex...
don't believe it. You aren't what they say you are on the news.

Self-care is important.

You are enough. You are valued. You are needed. You are loved.

Take care of yourself first and never apologize for it.

You are water.

*Powerful enough to drown,
soft enough to cleanse,
deep enough to save.*

Remove toxic people from your life and do so without guilt.

Don't make room in your life for people who cause you pain or
make you feel small.

Let them go and hold yourself close.

Make yourself a priority.
Love yourself.

Call them out when they don't treat you the way you both deserve
to be treated.

Be full of life.

People, relationships, places, and material things will come and
go—it's part of being alive.

Choose yourselves over anything.

Use your voices.

Tell the truth with kindness.
We are all flawed, but flaws are not sins.
Support each other.

Your activism doesn't need proof to be real; it exists daily when your bones work against the morning's weight.

Stand with your people, not against them. If they watch passively as you struggle – they aren't your people.

You don't owe this society anything that it didn't already take away.

Acknowledge your privileges. Listen to the stories actively silenced by this society. Be an ally.

If you feel like giving up look in a mirror
and embrace
that your existence alone
is an act of resistance.

I am here for you both. *Creo en ustedes como ustedes creen en mí.*

Los quiero mucho,

Palomita

REFLECTION

This class is my safe space.

We all created this space; it has helped me survive the semester. I look forward to ES 107 every week. The people. The environment. The cuentos. The days my depression and anxiety start to war, this space offers me peace.

This space inspired me to create and write the piece I submitted. I wrote this piece to my babies – my niece and my nephew. I wrote my consejos to them with the hope my words will guide them through the structural, internal, and emotional highs and lows of their lives.

This piece is for anyone who needs these words.

María believes in me, in the power of my words, and in the importance of our narratives. I am thankful.