

# La Sirena



*By: Katrina Martinez*



OCTOBER 05, 2022

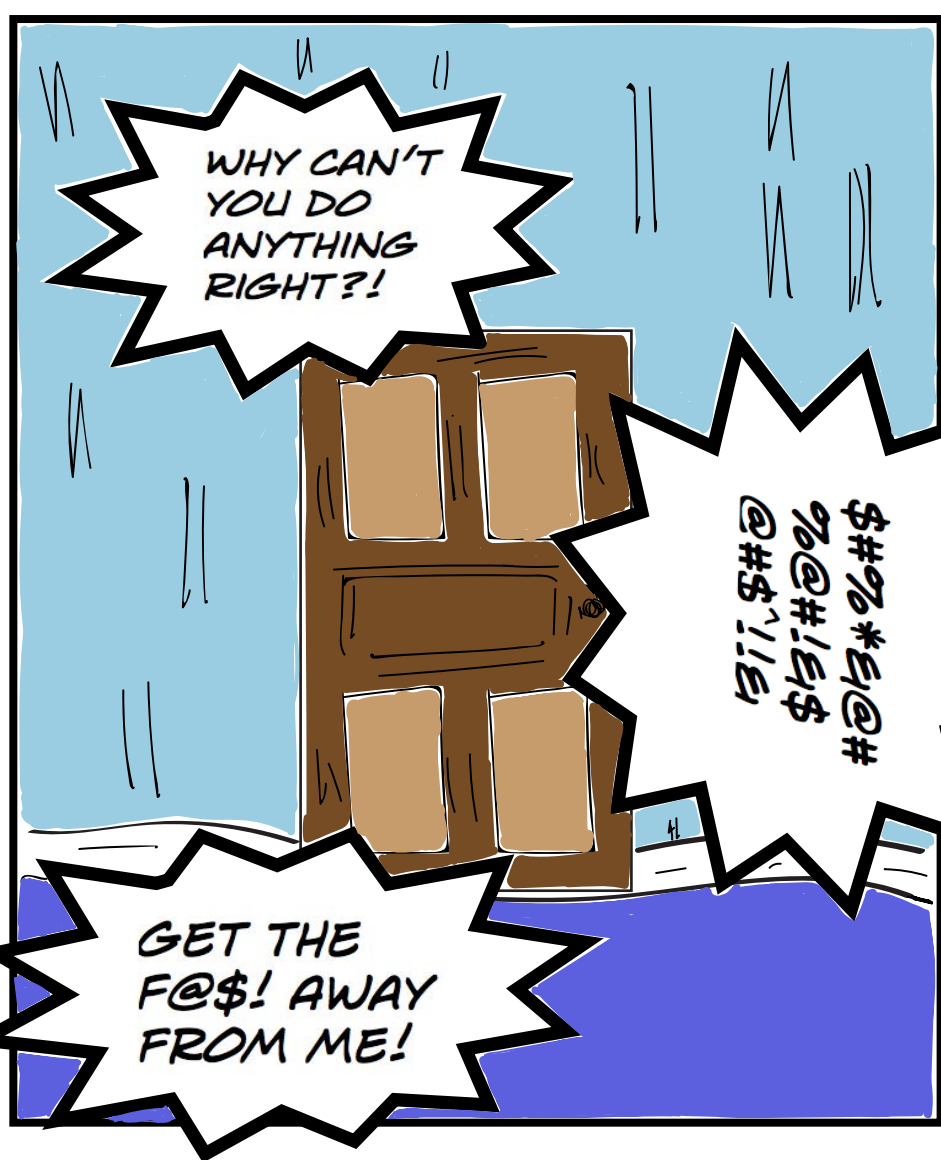
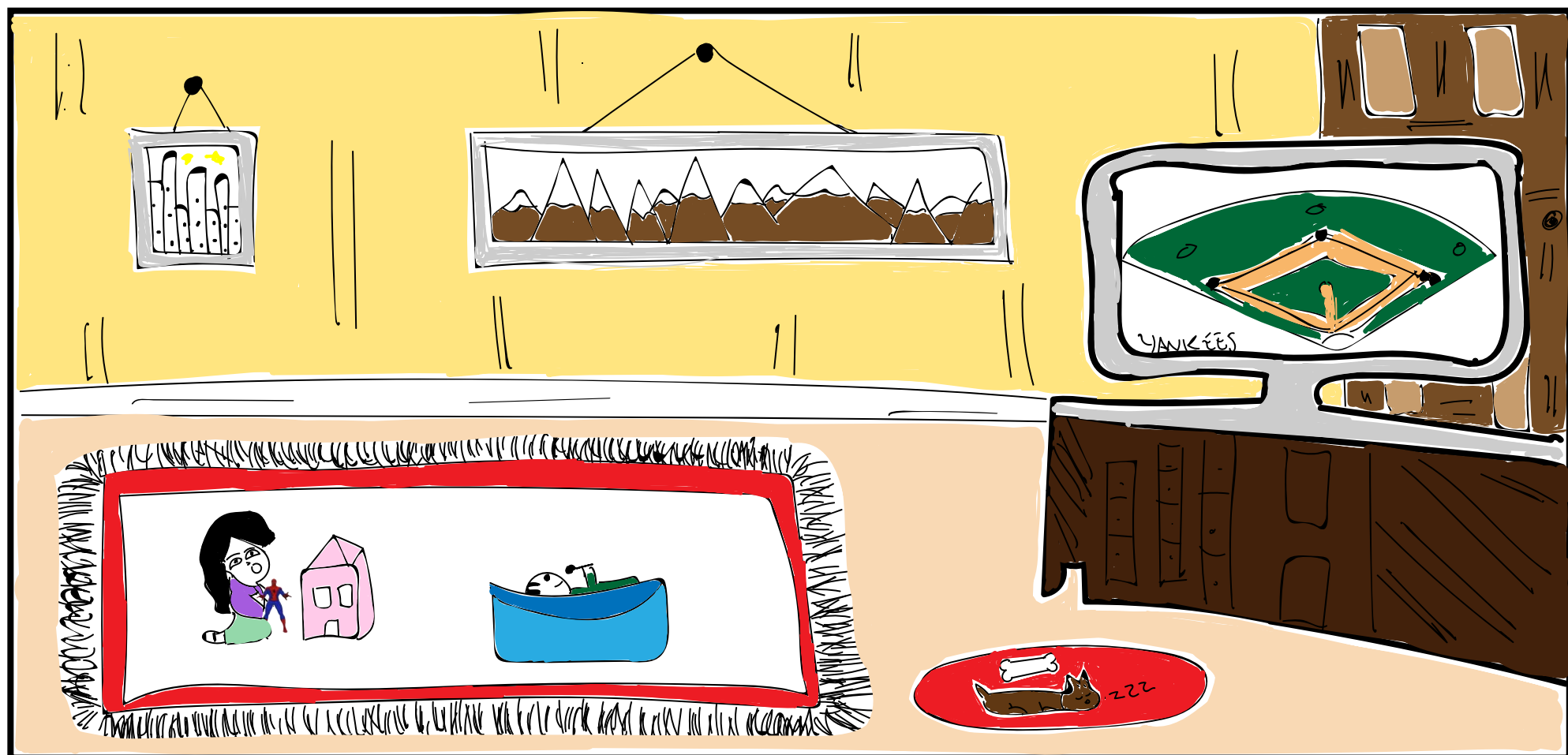
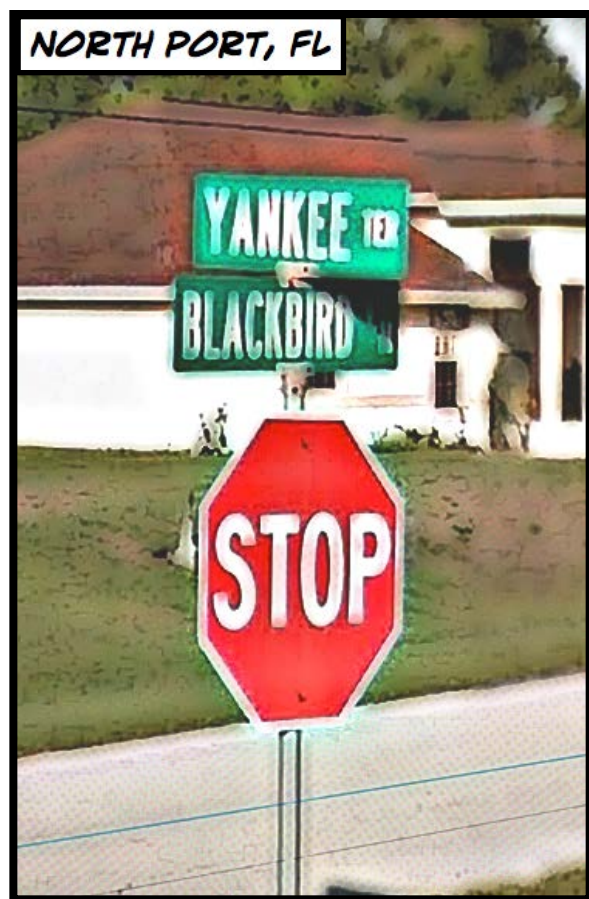


I NEVER KNOW HOW TO START THIS STORY. BUT I GUESS, HI! MY NAME IS KATRINA OR "LA SIRENA." EVERYONE KNOWS ME AS ONE OR THE OTHER, BUT NEVER BOTH. I LIVE HERE IN NEW YORK CITY AS A STUDENT, BUT MY STORY ACTUALLY STARTED A LONG TIME AGO IN FLORIDA, THE PLACE I GREW UP. LEAVING HOME AND GOING TO MASSACHUSETTS FOR COLLEGE COMPLETELY CHANGED MY LIFE IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE. I REACHED MY LOWEST POINT WHEN SOMETHING HAPPENED THAT FORCED ME TO ACKNOWLEDGE HOW POWERFUL I ACTUALLY AM. I WASN'T ALWAYS THE PERSON I AM NOW, BUT WITH MY POWERS CAME A NEW SENSE OF CONFIDENCE AND RESPONSIBILITY THAT HAS ALLOWED ME TO DO ANYTHING I COULD POSSIBLY IMAGINE.



BEFORE WE GET RIGHT INTO HOW I BECAME "LA SIRENA," I'D LIKE TO SHOW YOU ALL WHERE I'VE COME FROM AND HOW BEING SO WITHDRAWN EVENTUALLY PUSHED ME TO REALIZE MY TRUE POTENTIAL. AND NOW, HERE IS THE STORY OF KATRINA AND "LA SIRENA"...



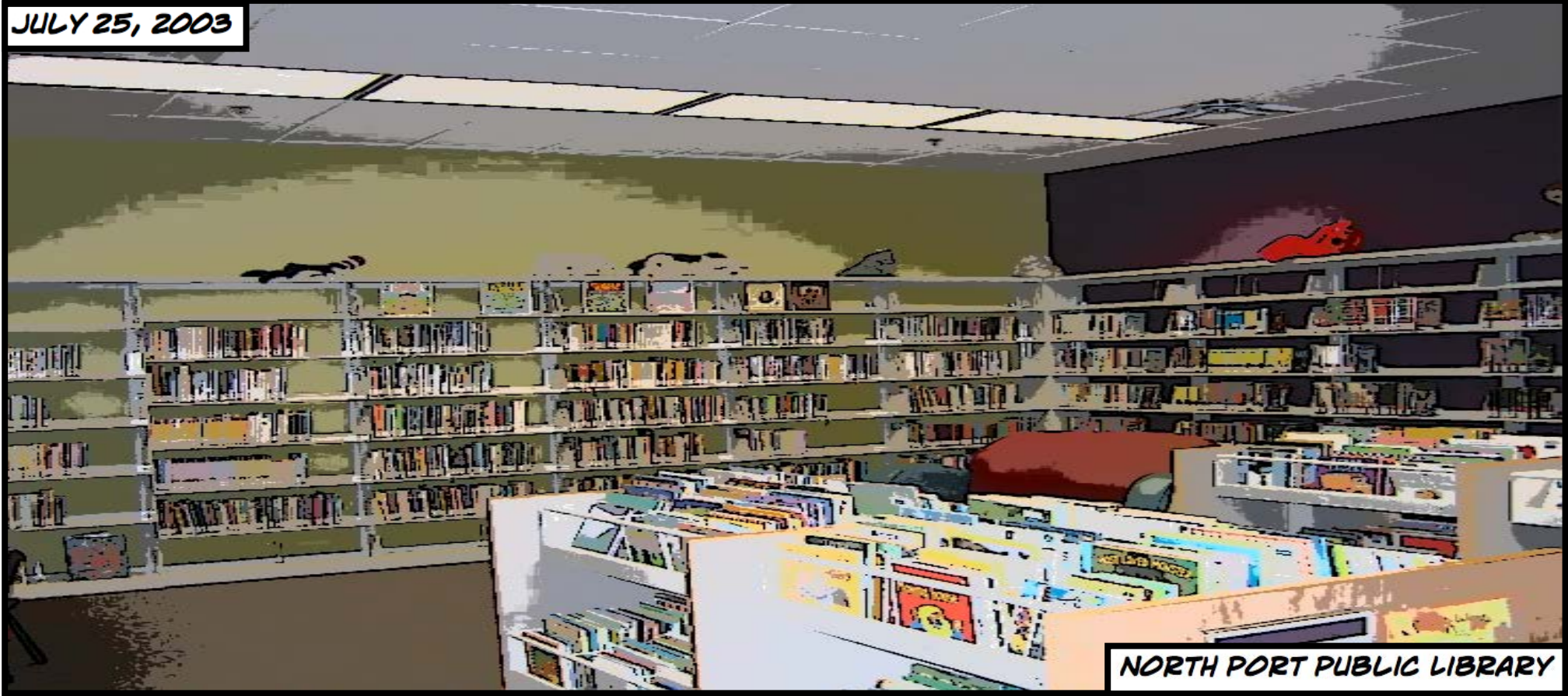


WHEN I WAS A YOUNG GIRL, I QUICKLY LEARNED HOW IMPERFECT MY PARENTS REALLY WERE. THROUGHOUT MY HOUSE, A LOCKED DOOR MEANT YELLING. NO MATTER HOW MUCH MY LITTLE BROTHER RUBEN AND I TRIED TO BLOCK OUT THE NOISE, THE SCREAMING AND FIGHTING EVENTUALLY BECAME OUR FAMILY'S ANTHEM.





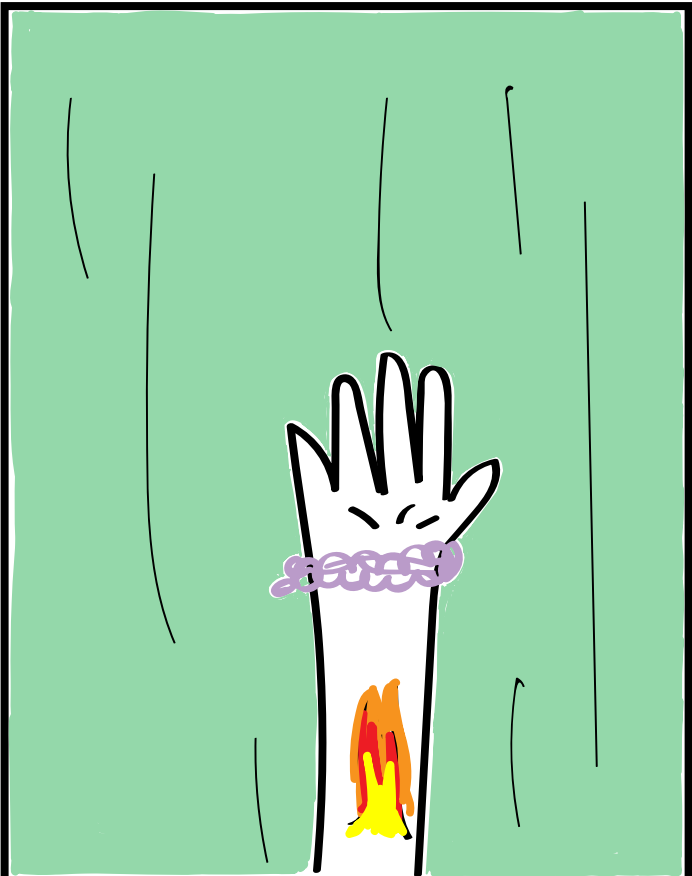
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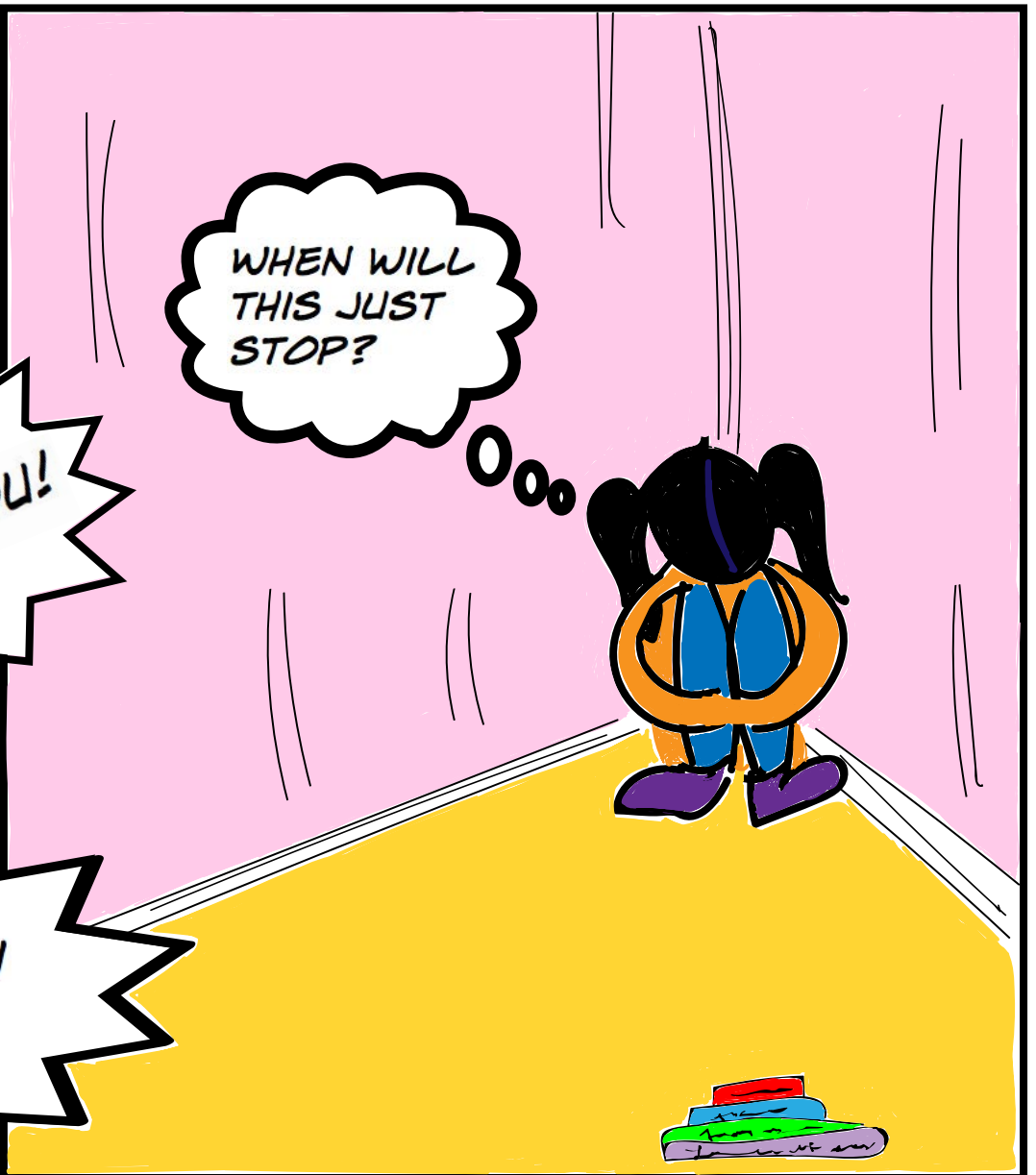
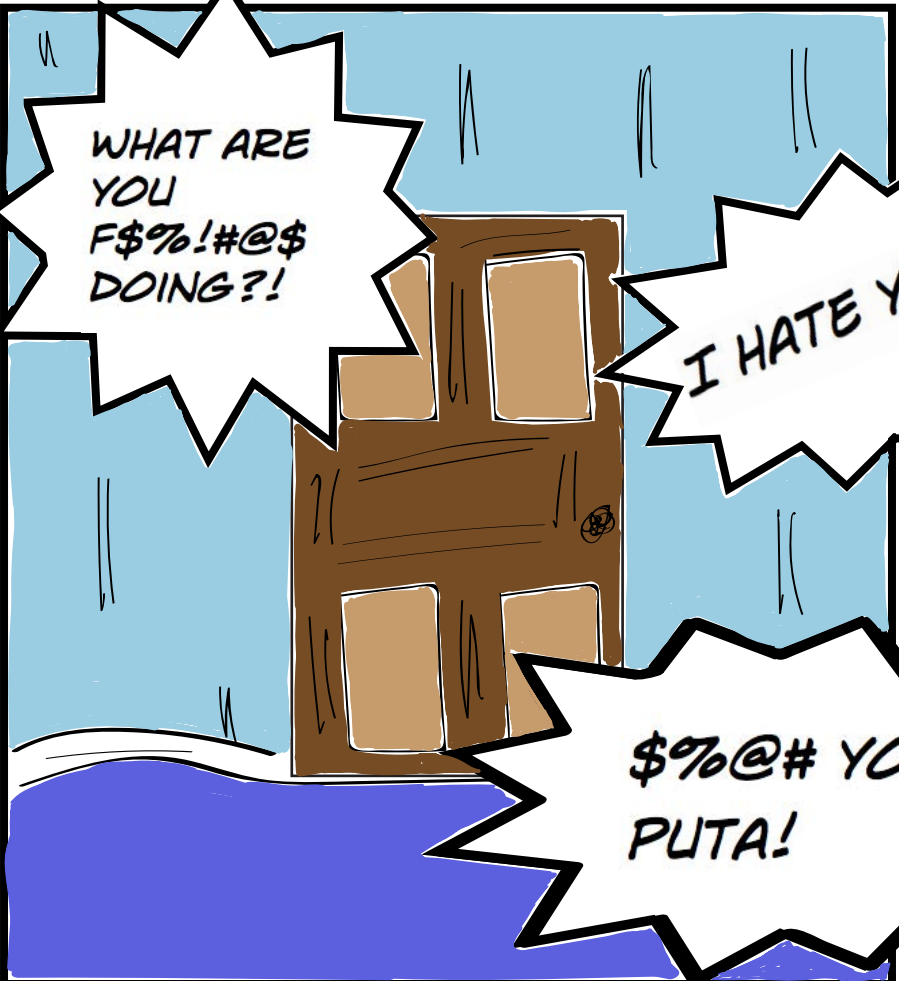
NORTH PORT PUBLIC LIBRARY



READING BECAME MY SANCTUARY—MY HOME WHERE NO OTHER WAS AVAILABLE. I PRACTICALLY LIVED AT THE LIBRARY, ABSORBING EVERY SUPERHERO STORY IMAGINABLE. IN PARTICULAR, THE STORY OF THE ISLAND OF AYALA CAPTURED MY ATTENTION. THE MAIN CHARACTER'S POWERS SORT OF LOOKED LIKE THE BIRTHMARK ON MY ARM. I FELT A CONNECTION.



READING WAS THE ONLY THING THAT COULD HELP MY THOUGHTS FLOURISH. OTHERWISE, THE FIGHTING NEVER STOPPED. I WAS AT A LOSS.





OCTOBER 29, 2015



WILLIAMSTOWN, MA



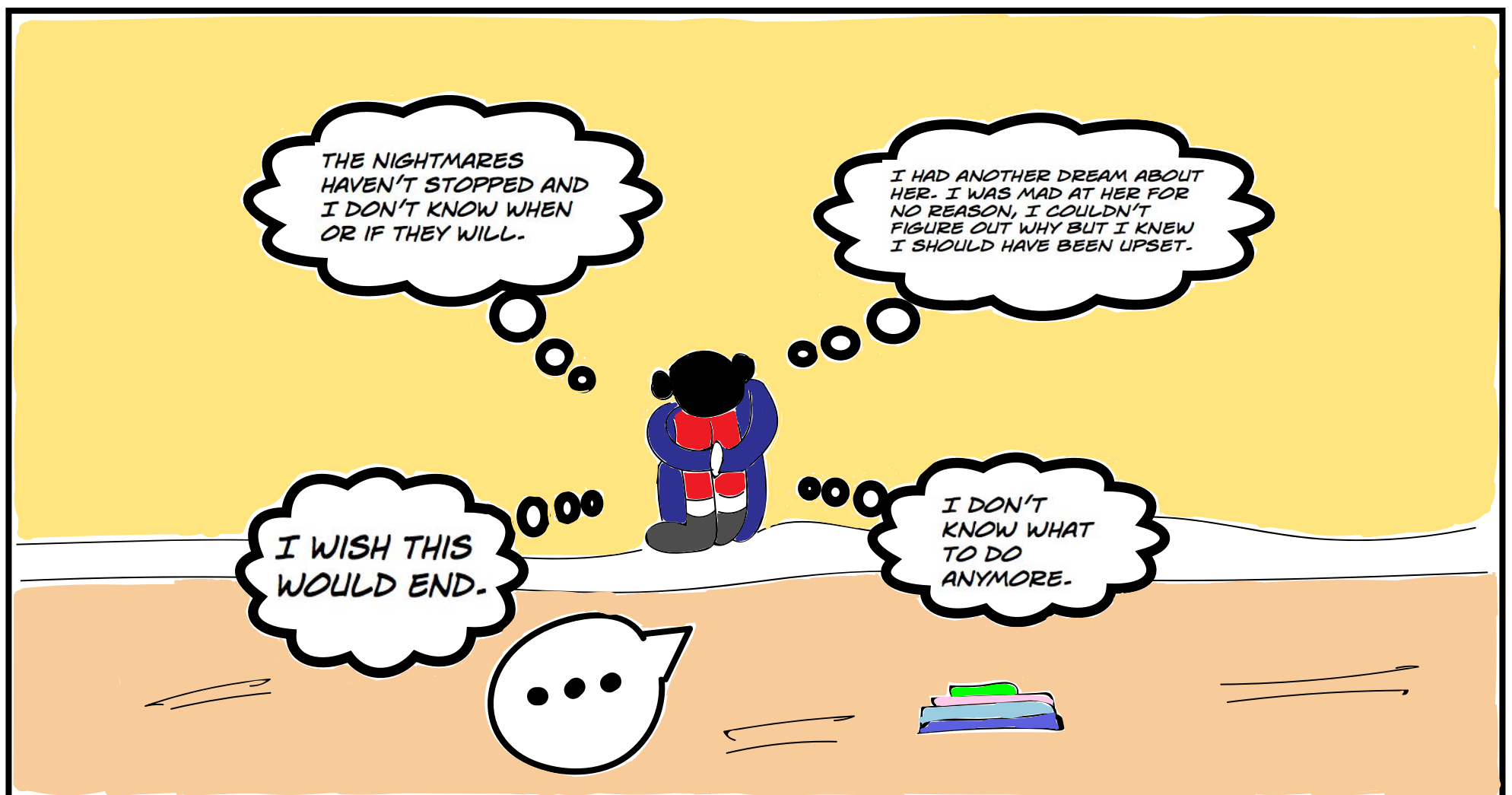
WHEN I STARTED COLLEGE, I WAS STILL WITHDRAWN DESPITE BEING AWAY FROM HOME. I HAD JUST BEEN LIVING WITH MY MOTHER AND LITTLE BROTHER AND THINGS FELT GOOD FOR THE FIRST TIME IN YEARS. I WAS ORGANIZED AND ON TOP OF MY WORK, SURROUNDED BY AMAZING FRIENDS. I HADN'T FELT THE PAIN OF MY BIRTHMARK IN A LONG TIME. UNTIL ONE DAY, I RECEIVED ONE OF THE MOST DEVASTATING PHONE CALLS OF MY LIFE. MY HOUSE HAD BURNED DOWN. EVERYONE WAS SAFE BUT...



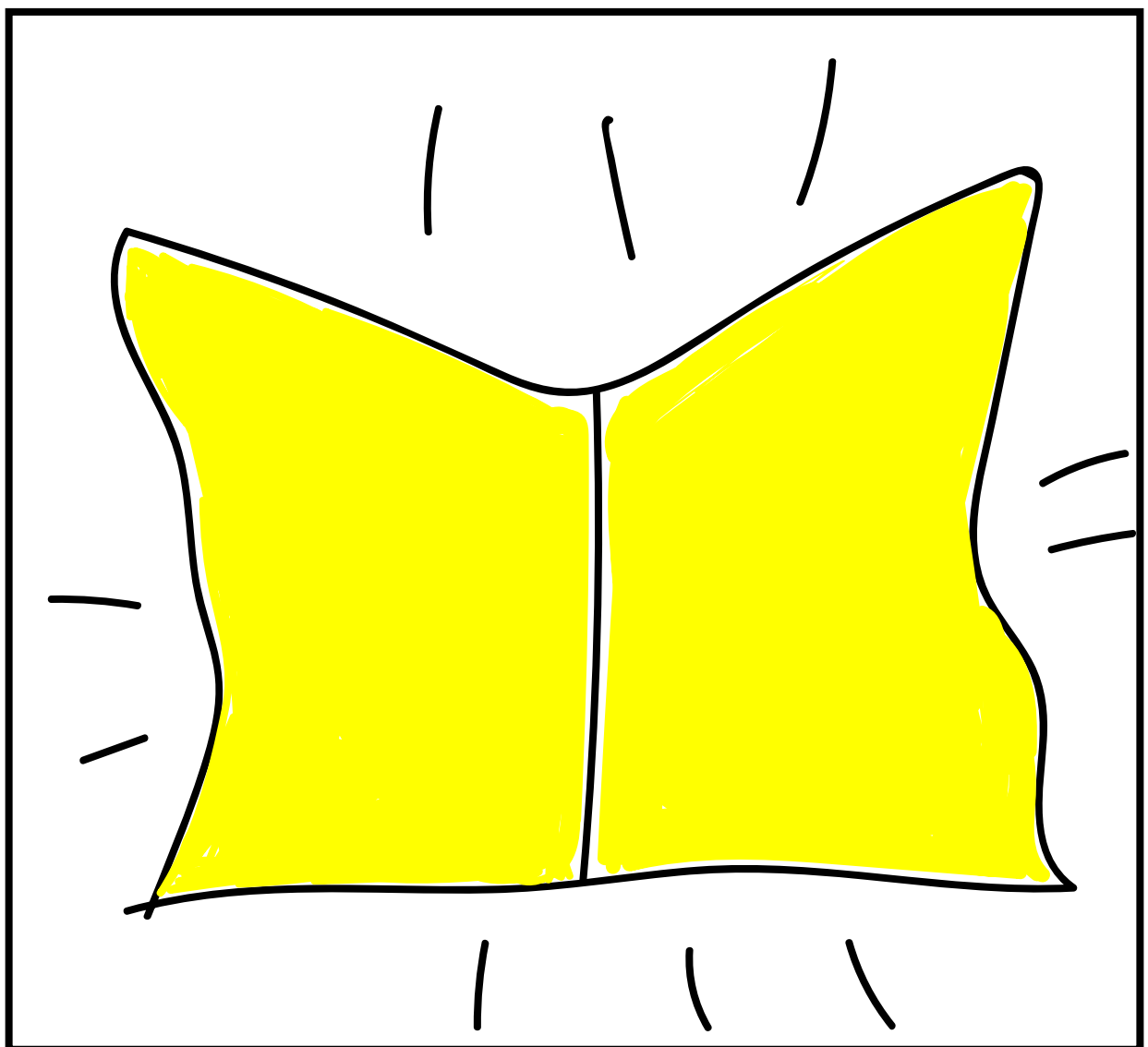
WE LOST EVERYTHING...



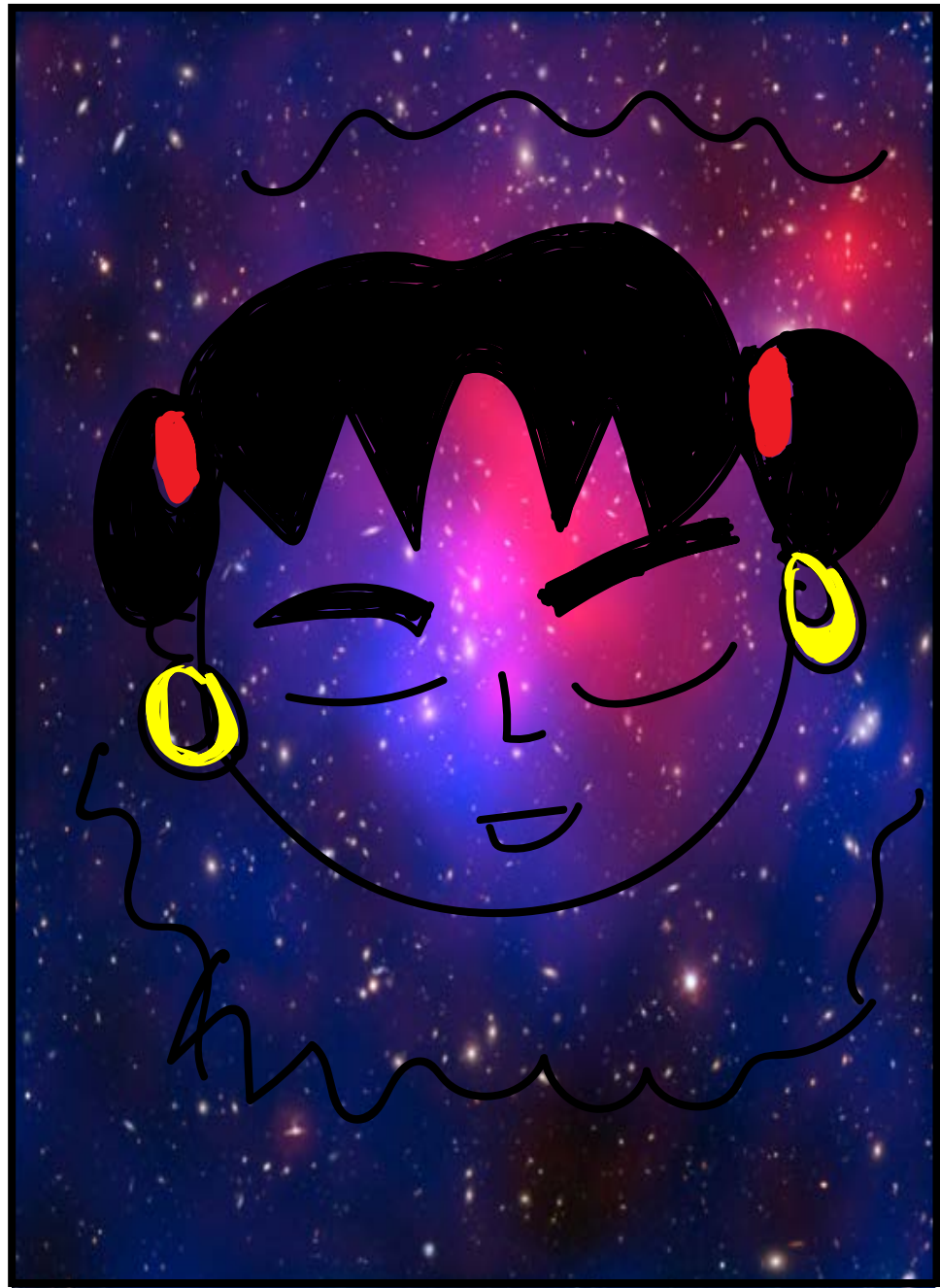
I FELL EVEN MORE INTO ISOLATION. NOT EVEN READING COULD PULL ME OUT FROM THE DEPTHS. I WAS TRULY LOST WITH NO DIRECTION. I TOOK TO WRITING AND FILLED MY HEAD WITH ALL THESE THOUGHTS BUT FAILED TO VERBALIZE THEM LIKE I NEEDED. I KEPT HAVING DREAMS OF FLAMES ENGULFING MY FAMILY AND I. THE FIRE NOT ONLY TOOK EVERY PIECE OF MY CHILDHOOD AWAY, BUT ALSO MY SENSE OF BEING GROUNDED. I SPENT MOST OF MY TIME ALONE, AWAY FROM THE PEOPLE WHO CARED ABOUT ME. I NEEDED TO HEAL IN SILENCE.



IN THAT MOMENT, EVERYTHING CHANGED. AND THAT CHANGE WOULD AFFECT MY WHOLE LIFE. MY BOOK BEGAN TO GLOW AND IMMEDIATELY POPPED OPEN, ENGULFING ME WITHIN ITS PAGES. THE NEXT THING I KNEW, I CAME FACE TO FACE WITH ALMA FROM MY STORYBOOKS. SHE CLAIMED TO REPRESENT RESILIENCE, INNER PEACE, AND MY HERITAGE. I WAS WHO SHE HAD BEEN WAITING FOR.

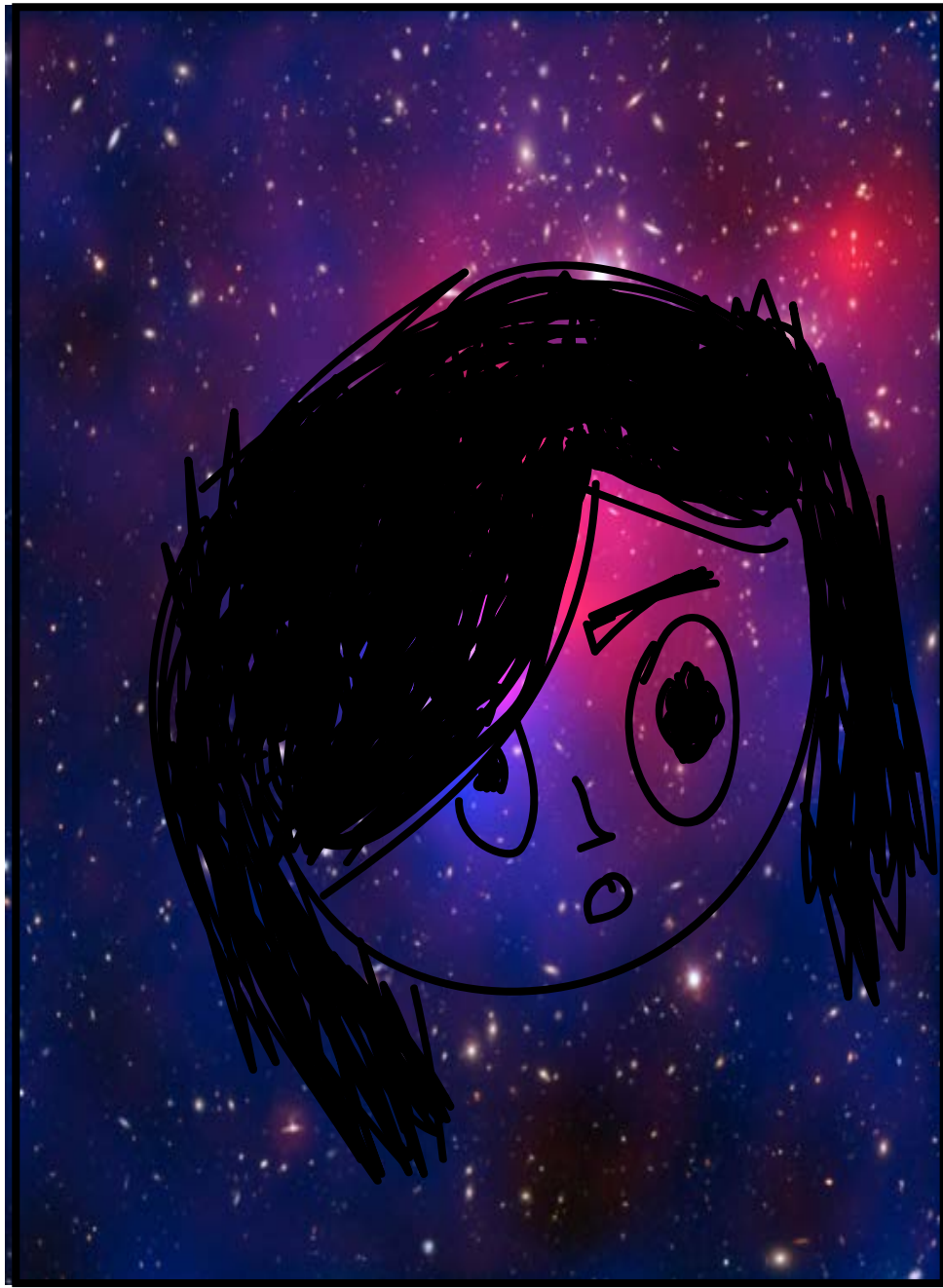






EVERYTHING FINALLY MADE SENSE FOR ME. MY BIRTHMARK HAD BEEN MY STRENGTH ALL ALONG, AN INTERNAL GUIDE KIND OF LIKE A GPS BUT LESS ANNOYING. THE STORIES OF MY CHILDHOOD WERE MY HISTORY AND I WOULD BE FOREVER PROUD OF REACHING WHERE I AM NOW. MORE WORK WOULD NEED TO BE DONE, BUT I WOULD SOON BECOME A SUPERHERO NOT ONLY FOR MYSELF BUT FOR OTHERS TOO!

ALMA HAD TOLD ME SHE WAS EVEN WITH ME WHEN I HAD THE DREAM ABOUT GETTING A HAIRCUT THAT LOOKED LIKE AN EMO/"CAN I SPEAK TO THE MANAGER" BLEND. I WAS UTTERLY CONFUSED. BUT THEN SHE TOLD ME THAT WITH THE POWERS OF STRENGTH AND FLIGHT ALONG WITH THE ABILITY TO CONTROL FIRE AND SOUND WAVES, I WOULD BECOME...

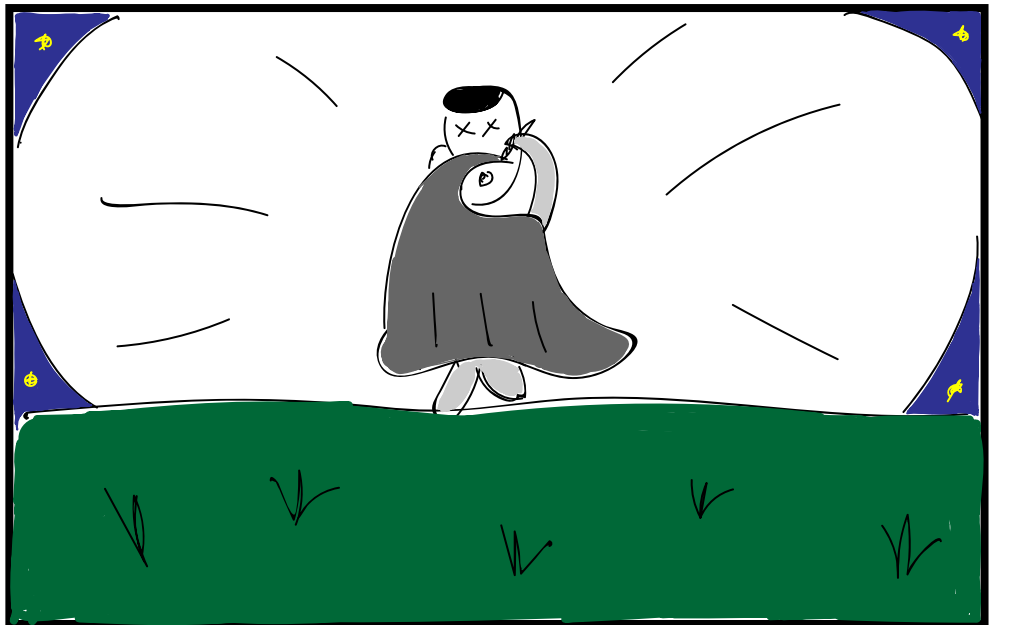
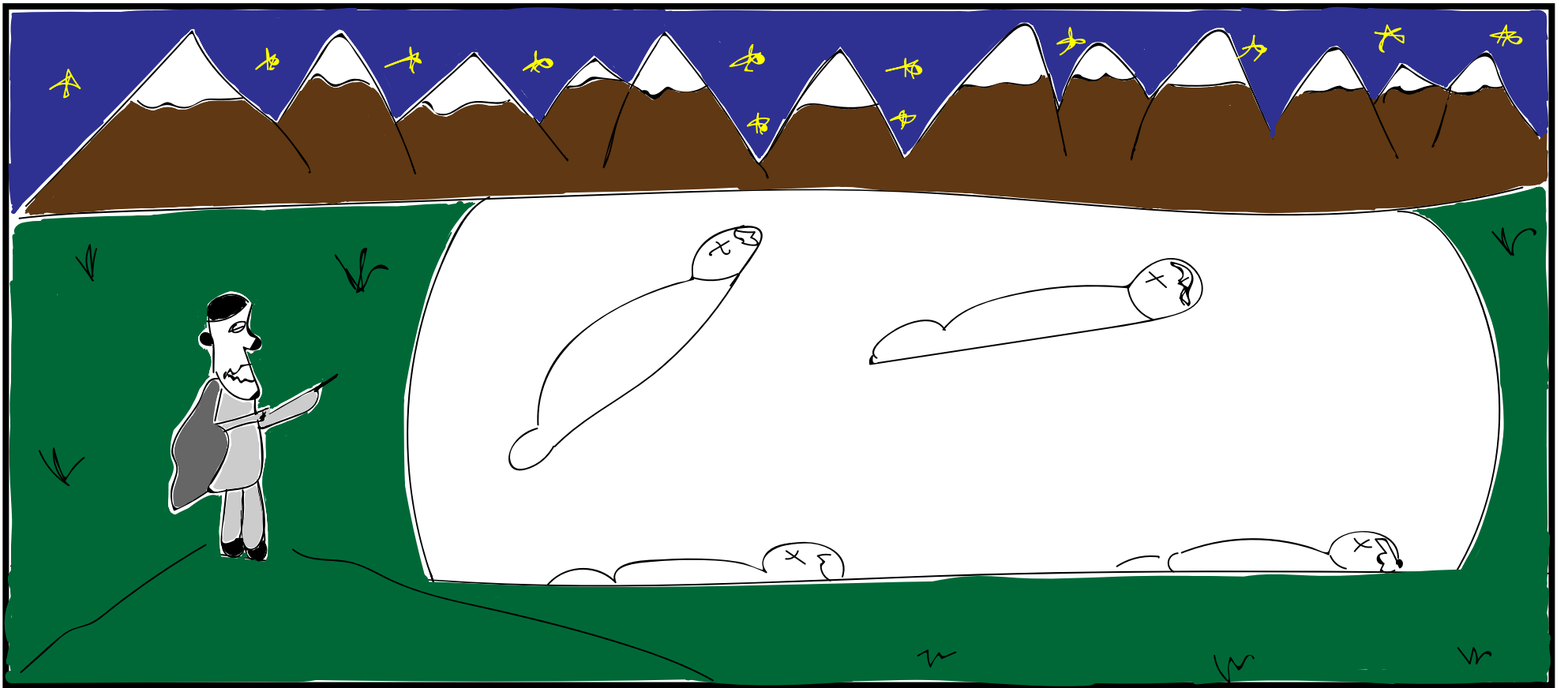




# La Sirena





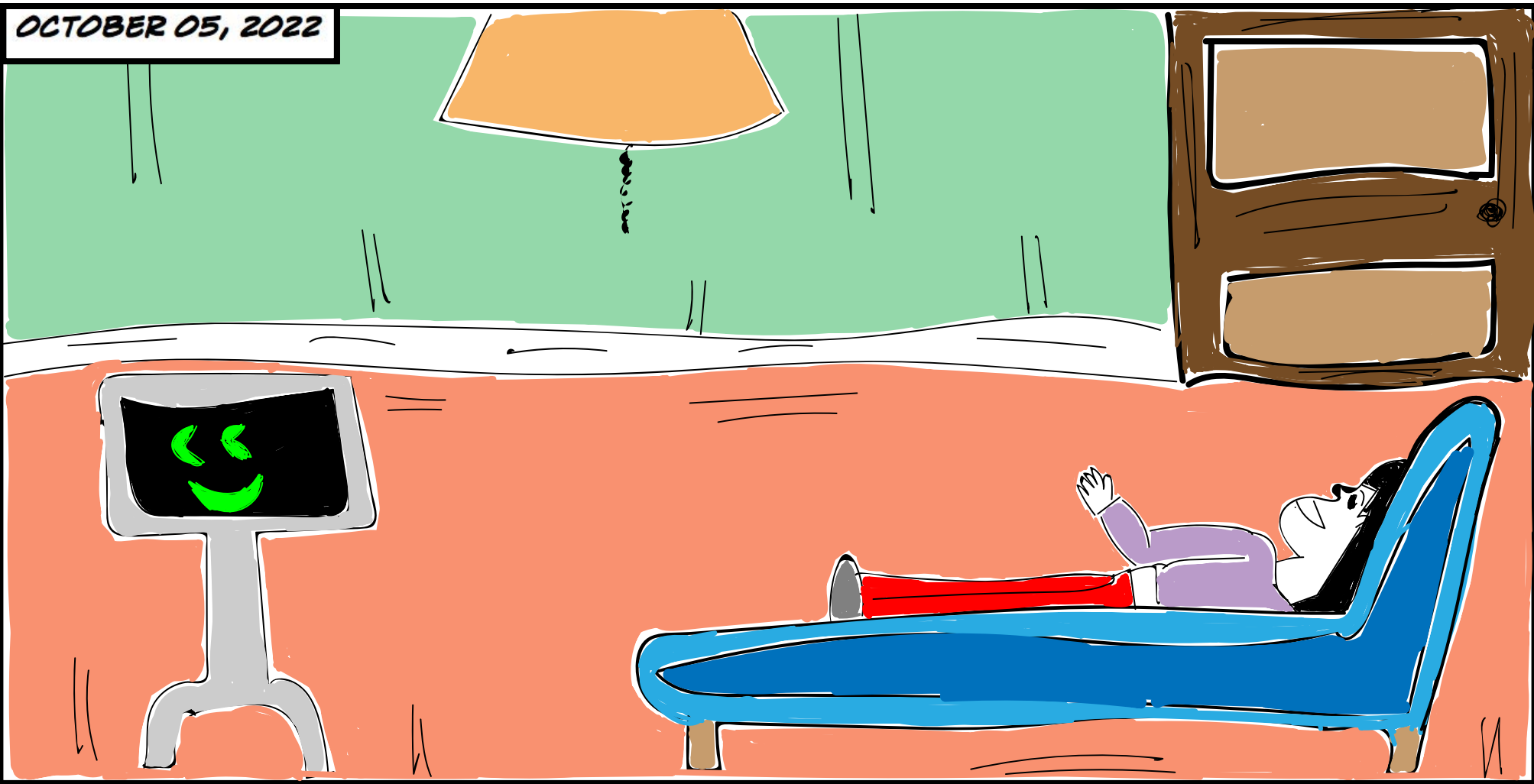


MY FIRST VILLAIN WAS THIS MAN DRESSED ALL IN SILVER. HE WOULD SEND PEOPLE INTO THIS DEEP SLEEP AND THEY APPEARED MUTE, WRAPPED IN WHITE CLOTH. WITH A SIMPLE SCREAM, I BROKE HIS CURSE BEFORE FLYING OFF INTO THE NIGHT, SHOCKED I HAD DEFEATED MY FIRST VILLAIN. MY POWERS WOULD NEED MORE WORK, BUT NEXT TIME I WAS GOING TO BE READY FOR ANYONE OR ANYTHING. BECAUSE OF ALMA AND HER TRUST IN ME, I MUST CARRY ON HER LEGACY AND FIGHT FOR MYSELF AND EVERYONE AROUND ME.

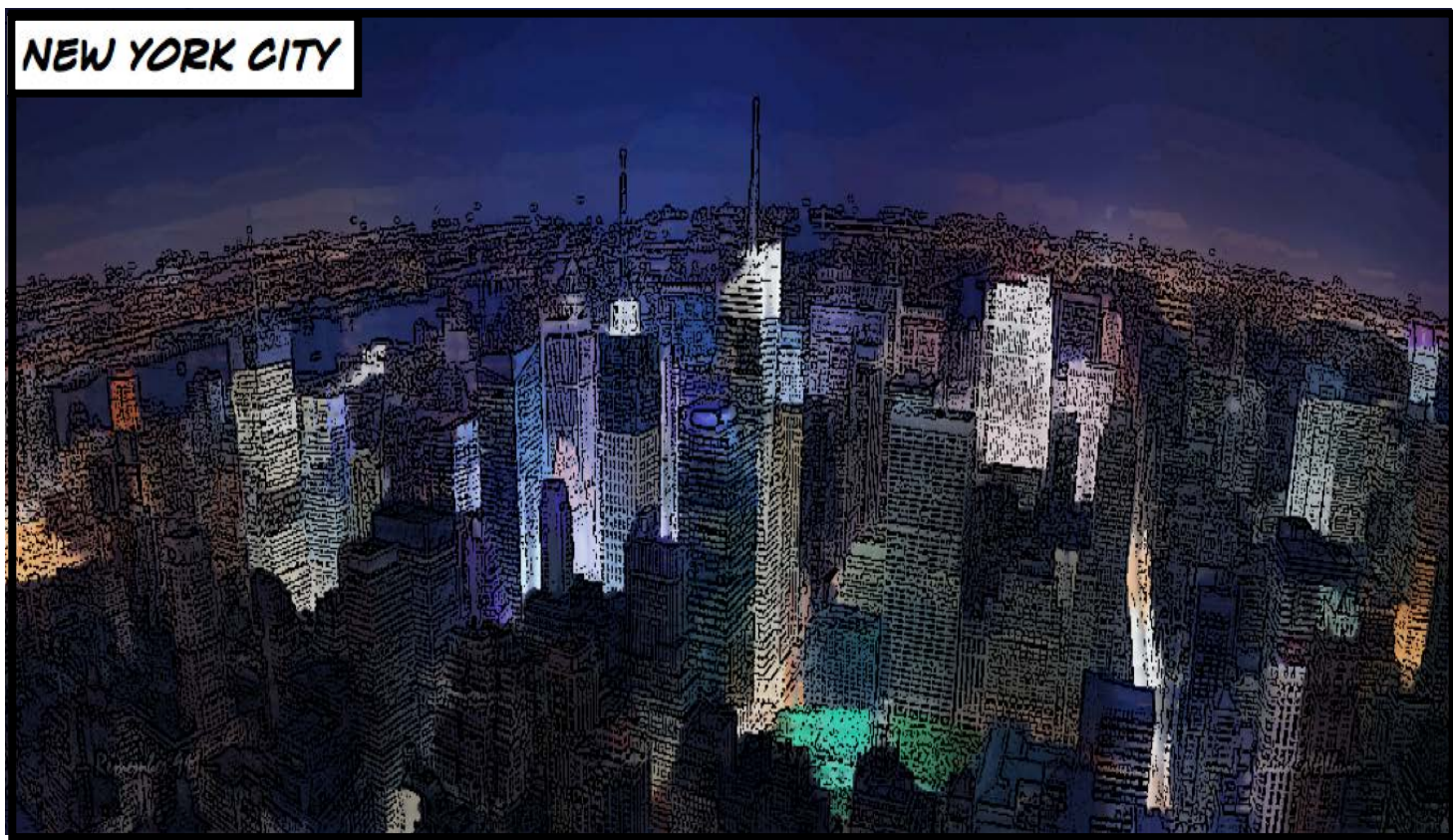




OCTOBER 05, 2022



NEW YORK CITY



CRIMEFIGHTING HAS BEEN QUITE A WHIRLWIND. I CAN'T BELIEVE I'M ACTUALLY "LA SIRENA" EVEN THOUGH IT HAS BEEN YEARS SINCE I FIRST MET ALMA AND SHE GAVE ME THESE POWERS. THE MAN IN SILVER KEEPS COMING BACK WITH OTHER VILLAINS BUT I'M ONLY GETTING STRONGER. I'M ACTUALLY IN THERAPY WHICH I THINK HAS ONLY MADE ME STRONGER. NO ONE KNOWS MY SUPERHERO IDENTITY, WHICH I THINK IS BEST FOR NOW. I NEED TO BE STRONG FOR MYSELF FIRST AND FOREMOST. I STILL WRITE EVERYTHING DOWN, BECAUSE NOW IT'S ONE OF MY HEALING PRACTICES. I'M NOT REALLY SURE WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS, BUT I DO KNOW THAT I WILL KEEP FIGHTING AND GETTING STRONGER.



THE  
END!



Katrina Martinez  
 Professor Rosario  
 04 December 2017

## Comics and Healing: *La Sirena* as Visual Storytelling

### Artist Statement:

Katrina Martinez's cartoon, chibi-inspired style of drawing has consistently allowed her to tackle rather serious topics of memory and trauma in a much easier and digestible way. While she tends more to creating the written and analyzing the visual, she has recently taken up a direct role in creating visual pieces to accompany the written. She often centers herself in her work, reflecting on specific events and memories from her own life to create a more personal attachment to the final piece. Combining her life experiences with her interest in History and Latinx Studies, she focuses heavily on narrativizing her life as a Diaspo-Rican woman using alternative storytelling methods like the graphic narrative. Some of her previous projects include: a Twitter thread about how she conceptualizes democracy with appropriate reaction images and GIFs; short comics either as an origin story or about her relationship to her brother; imagining the future through a paper fortune teller; and sampling passages from her diary for a short visual piece on silence. For the author-artist, visual storytelling remains one of the most effective methods for its blend of verbal and visual narratives that can exist both separately and together.

An avid lover of comic books from an early age, she began with reading *Archie* and *Young Romance*, before branching off into superhero stories such as *The Amazing Spider-Man*, *Iron Man*, *The Flash*, *The Green Arrow*, and most importantly, *La Borinqueña*. The comic form allows for visual sequencing that subsequently allows the audience to absorb pieces or the entirety of the narrative at once. Her comic book *La Sirena* deploys a traditional comic book



style with specific superhero conventions to recount experiences of childhood trauma and how we engage in healing practices. Told from the perspective of “Katrina,” she first takes the audience back to her childhood to offer context for how she became quiet and withdrawn before moving to a much larger traumatic event which ignites her transformation into a superhero. In a moment of her seemingly greatest weakness, she becomes her strongest self. She briefly defeats a villain before bringing the audience back to where the story began and finishing with an overview of her current life. *La Sirena* incorporates narratives of memory and healing to reflect upon the mental and emotional work she has already completed so far during the semester.

#### **Notes on Craft:**

The comic book *La Sirena* recounts the story of a young woman becoming a superhero, realizing her strength from traumatic events in her life. Primarily based off of examples in my own life, I wanted the story to ultimately apply to anyone who is in search of healing. Throughout the semester, I have done extensive work with my therapist in exploring new and more effective methods of internal analysis and how I am a superhero. While no single narrative should ever represent all stories, I believe *La Sirena* approaches difficult topics of childhood trauma and mental health as pieces of an identity. Thinking back to the themes of the class and how we conceptualize democracy, my understanding of personal democracy stems from my belief in every person’s untapped power and strength. Theoretically, democracy relies on the power of the people to legitimize governmental authority. In practice, authority figures have historically drained people of their collective power in favor of personal interests that have silenced dissent and revolution. Much like “the man in silver” in *La Sirena*, these authority figures have relied on people not fully understanding their inner power and thus more easily



individually falling to the oppressor. Maybe in a different world, everyone could understand themselves as a superhero with immeasurable powers.

For the physical creation of the piece, *La Sirena* heavily utilizes edited photos and physical drawing through Adobe Illustrator to tell a story about how we can use trauma and memory to make ourselves into superheroes, figurative or literal. Some of the photographs came from Google Maps or the internet in general while the others came from childhood or were taken on my phone. The written narrative was done through Comic Life 3 software to capture the traditional comic book font and speech/thought bubble aesthetic. I screenshotted pieces of the text and copied them to Adobe Illustrator and created panels around the text after. Using a stylus pen, I drew the panel layout and some of the panels themselves as well as physically colored in whatever I had drawn. Additionally, I used the Comic Life 3 software to filter the photographs or images from the internet in the final comic book. Throughout the project, my lack of artistic ability proved the most pressing challenge. However, I did incorporate a number of filtered photographs to alleviate some of the aesthetic burden. The sheer amount of internal reflection and feeling comfortable enough to visually document some of the more traumatic content proved incredibly emotionally taxing and forced me to take long breaks during the creation. The process of storyboarding, transferring, and coloring was an entirely new experience that I had not fully realized until I was in the middle of the project. Ultimately, I learned that as open and extroverted I can be, that I still have much more healing work to do.



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