

A Ghost Story
By Itzel Basualdo

According to my mother, I used to be obsessed with death as a child.

Never mind Christmas, Halloween was the national holiday in my book - a night filled with possibilities of engaging contact with the metaphysical world and eventually flying away on my broom towards the moon.

I read a lot then, and occasionally picked up a book or two on how to reach out to the no longer present (one wonders now how nobody questioned the sanity of an eight-year-old). Most methods proved ineffective of course. I thought perhaps I was too young, but empirical evidence corroborated with the idea that maybe spirits were never drawn to my dainty, pink bedroom because my \$2 motion detector was never set off. I was disappointed.

I had other methods in mind, however. I sealed short letters written to my dead grandmother, and climbed savagely onto my backyard fortress, designed exclusively by Fisher Price. I threw the letters up into the sky with all the might a first grader could possibly possess, a strange sensation as I could've sworn my arms were about to fly off. My hopes of the wind picking up the papers quickly vanished, to my dismay, as the papers dwindled slowly onto the ground.

But I remained hopeful that some elusive current would pick up the stationery, it's destination clearly the heavens, and deliver it to "Abuela Titi," who I assumed was lounging on the plush, white cloud sofas that abounded heaven. I'd leave the scene immediately, rushing back inside the house and pretending I never did such a thing, because I understood that all things magical worked with eyes shut, closed curtains, sometimes behind closed doors. After a week, I'd decide that I had given the spirits, angels, and the divine forces enough time to get to work, so I inspected the floors and rummaged through the untended ferns, only to find my letters soggy in dirt, a testament to my neighborhood's fauna and weather conditions, my curious inquiries about life away from earth illegible.

I gave up on routine witch calling which consisted of two friends and me sitting on a trampoline past our 9 PM bedtime, summoning the broomstick ladies through cackles and chants when Halloween approached. I quit dressing like vampire, and opted to be a more evil force on October 31st, a nun, and decided that a cardboard and Crayola marker Ouija board did not have sufficient legitimacy to attract even the ghost of a fly.

The footsteps came years later. I lay in bed on a weeknight, my house as silent as it possibly could be, with the AC unit humming loudly in the background. But I heard them, pressing lightly on the tile, coming towards my room. I expected it to be my younger brother, annoyed by the faint light escaping beneath my door, but nobody made it to the door. Footsteps, precarious and aware of the sleeping, I heard them nights on end. But nobody believed their existence, nobody believed me, and I shoved headphones

into my ears to shut them out night after night, which I later realized wasn't enough.

It was still dark and through the wall I could hear the muffled voices from the TV in the next room. I imagined maybe my mother, desperate to keep us tidy for school, woke up earlier than her usual 6:30 to stiffen and straighten out our uniforms. But I could not hear the iron glide over the ironing board, nor the steaming noise that accompanied it. I can't remember the exact hour anymore, but it was far too early in the morning for my mom to be up, the light in the room wasn't on, only the TV, so I got out of bed and walked hesitantly with crackling toes to the next bedroom.

I passed the open door and found the TV running by itself. It was tuned into paid-programming; the blueness of the screen and blackness of the hour filled up the room and created crevices of shadows and silhouettes that begged for the presence of a viewer. I shut off the television and headed back to my room befuddled when it hit me.

The hairs on my body shot up and I crept into my bed shuddering because it was April 18th, and nobody remembered that April 17 was still her birthday. Abuela Titi wasn't lounging in the white heavens of above. I thought maybe she had been the footsteps, checking on me as she used to before she left. But I knew that on this particular night she had been sitting on her bed, just trying to watch TV.