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Coqui

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Alessandro Zanghi is an Architectural Thesis student from Mount Kisco, NY, who comes from a Sicilian/Puerto Rican/Ecuadorian household. He not only writes poetry, but is also involved in a variety of artistic mediums, including clothing design, photography, film, music and various forms of visual art. His work tends to explore race, interpersonal relationships, environmental sustainability, and the reuse and repurposing of discarded objects.

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I'm writing about this night I had an asthma attack back home over winter break. I awoke in the middle of the night unable to breathe so I went to my bathroom to sit in the shower and breathe in the humid air to help open up my lungs. While I was sitting there the humidity and water reminded me of Puerto Rico (Borinquen in Taino) and my memories of the island and thoughts of my ancestral connection to the land gave me comfort. The idea that I could travel there just by simply turning on the faucet and sitting in the humidity felt magical to me in that moment. By the time morning came around my lungs had opened back up and I went to sit outside on the steps of my house and watch my neighbors start their day and leave for work. In that moment I was reflecting on my experience that night and how in a time of fear and pain, my cultural heritage and ancestry had helped me through it. I would always have the strength of my culture and the perseverance of the Puerto Rican people to remind myself that that strength is within me as well.

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A betrayal on a biological level
My lungs torn open
I wallowed in bed, too sick to move my head
In that moment, I began to feel light
What little air squeaked through the night
Coming home was always accompanied by a shortness of breath
An uncomfortable asthmatic episode that lingered for only a few days
But this wasn't shortness
It was a lack
I awoke two hours later

Panicked...

Panting...

I was a child again, begging for breath
Pleading for anything except
death
Making deals with myself
That if I survived this, I'll tell you how I felt

Huddled on the floor of the shower
Warm water beaded down my skin
I closed my eyes, let the steam in
Shrouded in a thick mist, I emerged on the other side
in Borinquen

I took your place in the past
You purified me
I deified you
I carry you in my look
What the sun gave, I took
Comfort in your memory
My lungs mirrored the lapping waves on your shores
Slow, gentle and rhythmic
The shadows began to roll back, the light of dawn allowed me to see
My gasps no longer resembled the sounds of
coquis

With the clarity that followed that sleepless night
I watched the world turn on
I was invisible
The world taught me to be divisible
That my adversaries were invincible

Or so they seem

You taught me a deep breath is a dream
And weakness is stitched in the seams
But that's what binds me together
And I'm waterproof in this stormy weather