

On Defrosting

By Jeanette Ruiz

I was once full. Hands caressed my handles at the very least three times a day. Although they touched only to use, I still enjoyed their warmth. My insides were cold, especially my brain... actually... it was frozen. I suffered from an eternal state of brain freeze, stuck in one place, constantly repeating the tasks of yesterday. The only talent I knew was how to preserve things, how to keep them alive, well, at least until they went bad. At times whole worlds were growing, blooming, evolving within me. Sometimes I'd keep things in for years. The stench wouldn't reveal itself until the lid was lifted, the pressure often threatening to explode the cover. Still, I fed the restless hands that touched me. They were always opening and closing me, putting things in and taking things out. At times, late into the night, hungry eyes gazed deep inside of me longing for something unknown.

For years I gave and gave but my heart remained cold. Until one day, at a Thanksgiving dinner, after being stuffed with too much turkey and dishes meant to express gratitude, I just couldn't keep anything in anymore. Perhaps the silky gravy was melting my frigid walls. Each day I became less and less cold. No longer could I keep cool enough to preserve the rotting contents I contained. It took so much energy to stay frozen, to stay put and to hold so much inside. I defrosted slowly and with every melting drop, I gradually filled with happiness.

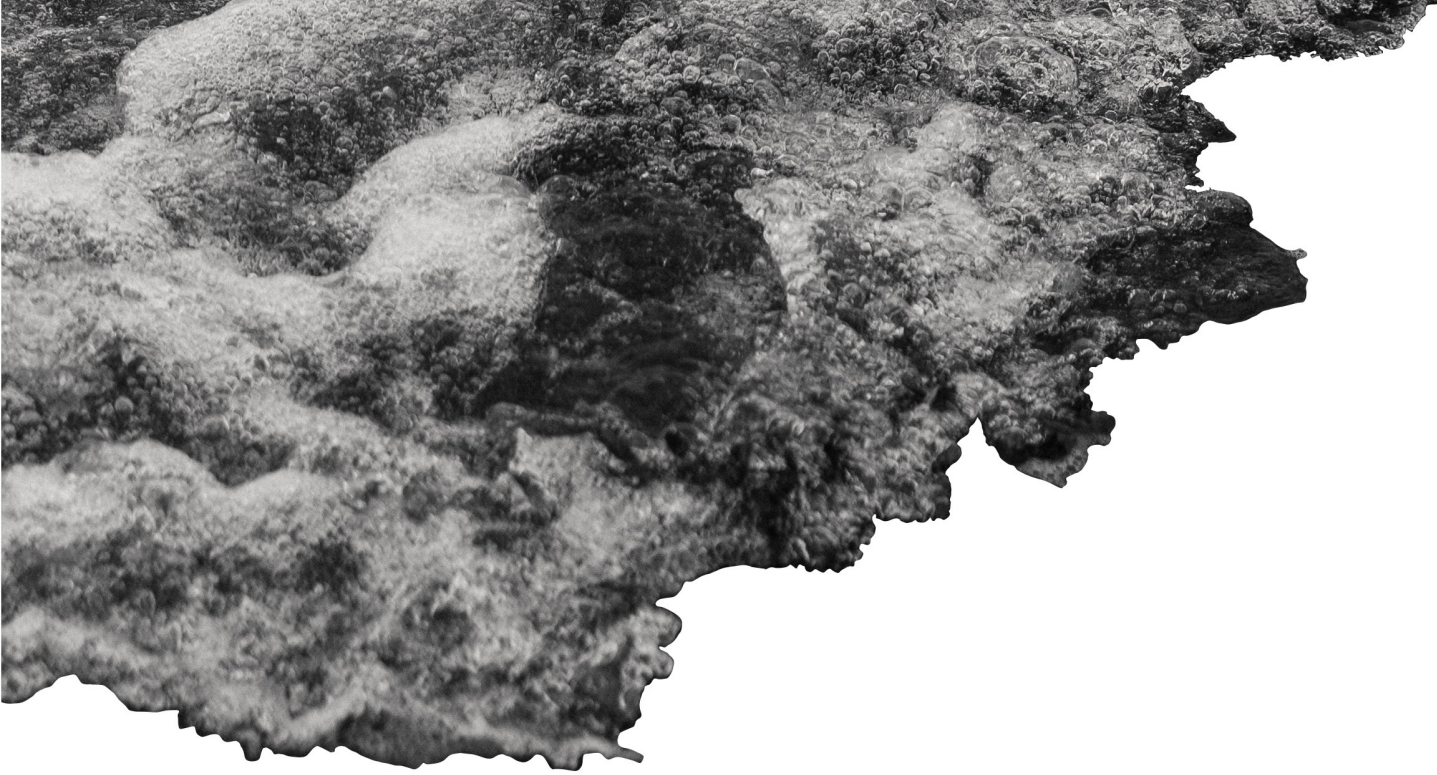
However, the hands that always touched, stuffed and used me, failed to enjoy that I had grown warm. So, they replaced me with another. She was tall, slim and had two vertical doors that stretched out like arms ready for an embrace. She had many more compartments than me and knew how to stay cold. No matter how many times they touched her, opened and closed her, she always played it cool.

The badges I held, the sweet notes, even the photographs were all taken from me and given to her. A dark corner of the basement became my new home. Wine, spirits and beer were given to me but I couldn't handle the alcohol. Eventually, they just got rid of me altogether. They pulled the plug, my insides leaked uncontrollably. The last remnants of all that I had been keeping in, frozen for so many years, finally spilled out. I was free, unattached, unstuck, no longer paralyzed but immensely lonely. Not to say that I wasn't lonely before, it's just that this type of loneliness was foreign to me. No one and no thing ever touched me anymore.

That changed when a shiny, metallic pair of claws scooped me up and placed me on a ship. There I sat tall atop a high pile of trash. Reeking decay, occasionally masked by the scent of salty sea breeze, filled the air. Above me birds circled across open skies, while waves from below gently rocked me. I didn't know where I was headed. Nevertheless, I felt unusually confident. Even if it stank, this was my empire of trash. I titled myself Queen of the Unwanted.

On my voyage, there was a raging storm. Suddenly, as it so often happened in my life, I was removed from my throne. I plunged into the depths of the ocean. Schools of debris surrounded me. The salt corroded my skin. Water filled me until I burst. My entire face came off, my front sank into the darkness underneath. You could see all that was inside of me, which was nothing.

I am a survivor though. The currents purged me faceless yet safe onto the shore of the most beautiful beach that I had ever seen. Although I had always been magnetically drawn to beaches, my only knowledge of them came from postcards. And now here I was laying on my side decorating an actual sandy shore with my foxy, boxy, corroded shape!



From my distorted view, I tried to take in the stunning sight of the seashore, to reflect on the same ocean that nearly buried me with ancient treasures. While distracted by faraway thoughts from the here and now, I felt the touch of a pair of hands on me. Each one gently yet firmly grasped each side of me. The grip of palms seemed like a distant, blurred memory. I couldn't recall the last time someone felt me. At first I shivered, even though the setting sun warmed my rusted skin. Relaxation washed over me. He was merely helping me up. Under the fiery tangerine sky, he stood me up and there I was, a bit out of place but finally no longer cold, no longer frozen.

