



Emily Grant is a senior majoring in Urban Studies and minoring in Spanish and Latin American Studies. She is co-founder and leader of Spanglish (a Pittsburgh language exchange community), Assistant Bicycle Coordinator at the Pittsburgh Department of City Planning and Global Ambassador for International Studies Abroad. Before applying to graduate school, she would like to spend a couple of years in the workforce to get a better understanding of what direction she would like to take as a career. It was her tango with love that inspired this piece, but it was the collaboration of two writers that stilled its presence in time.



Merritt Wuchina is a senior at Pitt, majoring in English Writing and Anthropology with certificates in Global and Latin American studies. She has written for *The Pitt News* and *The Original* magazine, worked as a jazz DJ at 92.1 WPTS for four years, and played the saxophone in Pitt jazz band and various groups in the Pittsburgh area. She is currently an editorial intern at *Sampsonia Way* magazine as well as a public relations and marketing intern with the Silk Screen Asian Arts and Culture Organization. She also volunteers as a Spanish for Beginners instructor at the Carnegie Public Library. Upon graduating, she plans on looking for work at a nonprofit. Eventually, she hopes to return to school and travel again to South America.

FORBES & FIFTH



I Want to Love and Be Loved in Big Cities¹

Three years ago, on my first visit to the Carnegie Museum of Art, I read this message on a blue cloth bracelet that hung from the wall of an interactive exhibit. These thin cloth bracelets contained a collection of unique wishes that would come true after the band fell off from wear and tear. I tied it on my wrist. An artist might have designed it, but it was my wish — *I want to love and be loved in big cities*. So for two and a half years it clung to me. I both noticed and ignored its presence; it shriveled into my skin, a thin blue line that circled my wrist like the vein running in the opposite direction. Sometimes I would pull on the strings, trying to make it slowly unravel, but for the most part, I left it alone. I always felt that the day it left me would be extraordinary: I found it lying on the floor while eating tomato soup one night, unnerved by my acceptance letter to Buenos Aires. It was almost a day like any other. In a box of mentos, I folded the ribbon between the broken friendship bracelets of childhood and the “do you like me?” notes from middle school — *unos recuerdos finitos de mi ninez*. Here, in the most ordinary moment, I would be unwound.

It's 12:38 and the buzzer jolts the silenced apartment. *Pipa* knocks on my door to let me know that a package has arrived for me. I shuffle to my bedroom door and thank her. The door shuts quietly.

I sit down on the bed and open the package: *Muma's* cupcakes, all perfectly made with a baker's touch, right out of a *postre* magazine. I sigh. I love cupcakes for their finite sweetness — an unexpected moment of joy. But today, I have very little appetite for savory moments. A note wrapped kindly in a ribbon around the box reads, “To my sweet Em: wishing you a very happy birthday. Love, Mom.” I shut my eyes and everything is silent. I can hear my erratic breathing — the kind of breathing that precedes tears. I let my whole body feel the pain of my true birthday present — missing the warmth of someone to share this fleeting sweetness with me.

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As I sit on the park bench, waiting for him to arrive, my body shivers with a non-existent chill. Words keep buzzing in my head in whatever language seems fit, but I can't escape the phrase: *todavía estás enamorada con ella y no me querés*. You are still in love with her and you do not love me. Everything else doesn't seem to matter. I have no argument to make him change his mind, to stop him from attending her going-away party, leaving me alone on my birthday. I have nothing. He arrives, filled with tears and sorrow, apologies and guilt, but it doesn't change anything. I hand him the Edgar Allan Poe book he lent me: I am the tell-tale heart, beating silently below the floorboards. I kiss him good-bye and walk away. I have no memory of what happens next because to him, I do not exist. The world I created with him is shattered because it was never real: a void of hope and desperation, longing and lust. The box of cupcakes remains untouched as the plastic "*Feliz cumple*" candle tilts to the side with swirls of dulce de leche mocking me like an off-kilter smile.

Three months later, as we lay in bed, his fingers trace my belly and my arms, memorizing every inch as we dose off peacefully. A different kind of void fills my silence: a sorrow that longs for endless time — that this moment does not end. I learned to forgive, as he learned to love again. I lean into his ear and ask him how to say cupcakes in Spanish. He has no idea, so I describe a *tarta chiquita, como si fuera una tarta individual... glaseada a perfección*. He raises his eyebrows with interest. I tell him when we wake up from our *siesta* I want a cupcake: something sweet and savory; momentary and finite like us.

Today, as I sit in my parent's country home, I rummage beneath my clothes and *Historias de Horror* by Edgar Allen Poe and pull out my box of mementos, the ribbon looking more tattered and frayed than I remembered. The writing has long faded and the wish only survives as an etching in my memory. As I drive into the sunset instead of descending into the subway, as I look up at stars instead of streetlights, and as I fall asleep to a chorus of crickets instead of bleeding sirens, love and loving in the big city has never felt so far away.

My birthday is next week and I am filled with bittersweet memories. I begin to imagine a couple sitting on a park bench exchanging *te quiero* for the first time. I smile to myself: a new beginning. But I no longer feel his fingers tracing a shape of a heart on my skin. I can only imagine the goose bumps I used to feel.

This year, my mom ordered an ice cream cake that reads, “To sweet endings and new beginnings that don’t necessarily melt away.” Now, I have a new bracelet that I bought. It’s thick and sturdy with a pattern of multicolored squares. I pull the strings together. I take a match and light the ends to form a hard, waxy bond. With a singed connection, the bracelet won’t break until I choose to put it away in my box of mementos, an ordinary memory stilled in time.

