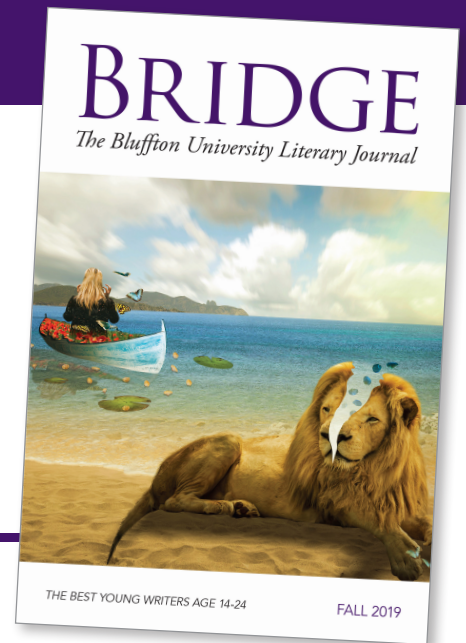


# BRIDGE

*The Bluffton University Literary Journal*



## FRENCH FRIES AND TRIG

Jean Reyes

SCENE 1

INT. KITCHEN TABLE- 3 AM

*A boy sits at the kitchen table, head laid down on open textbooks, notebooks, and pencils. A laptop is still on in front of him. MELVIN ARCHA (pronounced ARK-ah), a talented procrastinator and worthy student, jolts awake.*

MELVIN: Oh my God, it's one!

*Melvin, half-awake, scrambles for a pencil and quickly writes it down in his notebook before he forgets. He chuckles, then writes excitedly.*

Duh. Negative exponents in the denominator can turn into positive ones if you move it to the numerator. Then...

*MELVIN trails his finger down a page in his textbook to fact check.*

Affirmative...the sines and cosines turn into tangent times cotangent... and all that...

*Melvin writes his solution furiously and ends with a big circle.*

...simplifies to one. Which is exactly what I was supposed to prove. Yes!

*Satisfied, Melvin leans back in his chair and grins with sleepy eyes.*

And that's why I'm amazing. Mr. Valentine might as well raise my D to an A right now.

*Melvin rests in this position for a while, until his eyelids begin to droop again.*

SCENE 2

*MELVIN's head jerks up.*

MELVIN: I deserve a snack.

*MELVIN rises and yanks his jacket from off screen.*

Even, I'm going out for French fries!

*Even (pronounced Evan) is his older sister.*



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*It's three a.m. and she is sleeping, but he says it to feel less lonely.*

*Zippering up his jacket, MELVIN heads for the door. The door swings shut.*

EXT. DOWNTOWN SIDEWALK-NIGHT

*MELVIN walks down the street with his hands in his pockets. It's a cold night, there's no one on the street. The rusty fence, beat up trash can, and outdated lamp post are weathered from rain and shine. The sound of cars and the gentle wind is distant. Melvin looks over his shoulder as he walks, his head down.*

Scene 3

EXT. FAST FOOD STOREFRONT-NIGHT

*Melvin enters frame, the washed-out neon lights of the 24-hour food chain restaurant light the way. Melvin enters the store.*

INT. FAST FOOD CHAIN CHECKOUT-NIGHT-CONTINUOUS

*MELVIN walks up to the register, ready to order. There is no one at the register, so he waits.*

*A girl from a side table rises. MELVIN is looking down into his wallet, so he hasn't noticed the girl.*

*GENEVA, the girl from the table pushes his shoulder. GENEVA is the sassy type, who talks with her shoulders.*

GENEVA: Hey. You're late, Squirt.

MELVIN: Ohh... hey... What are you doing here at this hour?

*MELVIN knows that was lame. Visibly, GENEVA thinks so too.*

GENEVA: (with a scoff) I've been up studying for the midterm all by myself.

How about you, Baby Boy?

MELVIN opens his mouth to speak, but CORINE, the cashier, enters.

CORINE (flustered): Hi, sorry. Sorry for keeping you waiting. Um, is everything okay? Geneva?

*GENEVA doesn't break eye contact with MELVIN to answer. MELVIN is cornered by GENEVA's Gaze.*

GENEVA: Yeah, everything's fine, Corine. Melvin here was just taking me out on a late-night date after the studying we've been doing all night. Someone seems to have forgotten their wallet in their other pants.

*MELVIN slips his hands and his wallet back into his pockets. He submits to her story. GENEVA hands CORINE money.*

GENEVA (to MELVIN, sweetly) : Just our usual again? Three large fries and a sundae?

(to CORINE, smiling) No cherry, no chocolate drizzle.

*CORINE nods and puts in the order.*

*GENEVA pets MELVIN's hair and collects her change.*  
Scene 4.

*CORINE leaves to make their order.*

*GENEVA sits MELVIN down at the table.*

GENEVA: So how has studying been?

MELVIN: I wasn't studying.

GENEVA: Oh? Then what were you doing? The girl next door?

MELVIN: No! No, no. I've actually been sleeping. (quietly) Like a normal person at three a.m.

GENEVA: And that's why you're out here picking up French fries like a normal person. At three a.m.

MELVIN: You didn't have to do that.

GENEVA: (sarcastically dismissive, but sweetly) Do what? Pay? I'm eating the fries too, Squirt. I'm hungry after all the studying I've been doing alone. Pythagoras was onto some heavy stuff.

*GENEVA smiles for a moment, but MELVIN knows her sarcasm means he's in dangerous waters. GENEVA addresses the elephant in the room.*

GENEVA: What happened? This is our routine. We always study together the night before a test. We always study from dinner to midnight, grab a snack, fall asleep at my place, and walk into class the next day like warriors. We always study together. That's the only way we ever do well.

MELVIN: Geneva, I'm sorry. I-I just couldn't leave my sister.

*GENEVA leans back in her chair with her arms crossed and scoffs. MELVIN knows it is a poor excuse.*

GENEVA: Your sister? The twenty-two-year-old sister. Who is at home right now. By herself. Sleeping like a normal person at three a.m.

GENEVA: How are we going to pass this test if you don't come home with me and study? We need each other, Melvin. It's always been us.

GENEVA hold his hand from across the table.

MELVIN: I... I know... I just- I don't feel like you need me.

GENEVA jerks back, clearly offended.

GENEVA: Excuse me, what?

MELVIN: Please don't get mad.

GENEVA: Tell me.

MELVIN: Okay, but just don't get mad at me, please. Geneva, I love you.

GENEVA: (reflexively) Love you too, Squirt.

MELVIN: Geneva... No. No, I don't think you do. Don't get mad please?

*GENEVA is clearly mad, but she will let him continue. MELVIN has hurt her feelings, so she masks it.*

MELVIN: For the past two years, we've had this routine. It seems like I ruined it, but trust me, I didn't do anything wrong.

GENEVA: Are you sure? It's the last semester of Junior year. All we need to do is pass tomorrow's final and our GPA is locked. I want us to succeed, Squirt; together, like we always have.

MELVIN: And I want us to succeed too. I want us to both work for it, side by side. It hasn't been that way... and I think you know that.

GENEVA: Okay, you can stop. You say you think, but you're assuming. You're going to make me mad.

MELVIN: I'm sorry. I'm sorry, I just- you asked me.

GENEVA: Tell me what's really been going on with you. Tell me what you're really doing instead of being with me. Tell me what is more important than me, or so help me, I-

*Corine enters, carrying a tray with their food on it.*

CORINE: Here you go, enjoy. Is there anything else I do for you?

CORINE smiles sweetly at MELVIN.

GENEVA: He has everything he needs, thank you.

GENEVA begins eating immediately.

CORINE: Are you sure?

MELVIN: Actually, can you get-

GENEVA: Out?

*GENEVA makes eye contact with CORINE. CORINE awkwardly nods and leaves.*

MELVIN: The word was napkins.

*GENEVA holds a French fry up to his face and he reflexively eats it.*

GENEVA: No mess. I'm always here for you.

MELVIN: Geneva... You don't talk to me unless we're studying, or doing something

together, or unless you need something from me.

*GENEVA starts eating right away. If it weren't for brief eye contact, it would have seemed that she ignored MELVIN'S statement.*

MELVIN: Hey, I don't want you to feel-

GENEVA: Bad?

MELVIN: Please don't feel bad or mad. Also, please don't hate me, I'm sorry. It's just that you asked me, and that's-

GENEVA: (controlled) Hey, Squirt. Eat your French fries.

MELVIN: Gen, I'm sorry. I just-

GENEVA: Eat your French fries, baby boy.

MELVIN: No, Geneva, please listen to me.

GENEVA sets down her food and looks him in the eye. Her stare is intense.

GENEVA: Eat your goddamn French fries or I will hurt your feelings.

*MELVIN is at a loss for words. He watches GENEVA eat the ice cream and the fries. She is avoiding his eyes.*

MELVIN: ...Gen?

*GENEVA pauses eating and glares at him. MELVIN begins eating, and GENEVA resumes. They eat in silence for a moment.*

MELVIN: I'm sorry, I can't. Geneva, I love you, I'm sorry. I just don't know how to feel when your words and actions don't tell me the same thing.

GENEVA: Stop talking to me, I don't love you.

MELVIN: No, Geneva, no. Don't do that.

*GENEVA sets her ice cream down.*

GENEVA (*singsong*): Stop talking to me, I don't love you.

MELVIN: No, Geneva, please I'm sorry don't-

GENEVA: I'm just saying what you said earlier. Were you lying earlier? Did you lie to me?

MELVIN: No, Geneva don't-

GENEVA: Listen here, Archa. It's always been you and me. Since freshman year, it's always been you and me. Every homework assignment, every test, every sports tournament, it was always you- and-me.

MELVIN: It still is you and me.

GENEVA: Really? Is it? Where were you today instead of helping me study for tomorrow's trig final? What were you doing instead of answering your phone? Who were you doing instead of calling me back? We're supposed to be at my house right now, French fries up to our noses, with Pythagorean identities in our faces. Don't you care about our grades?

MELVIN: (Exasperated) Today? Just today? I was at home, in my house, sitting in my kitchen, in the third chair from the

wall, two textbooks cracked open, laptop overheating in front of me, Wikipedia staring at my notebook, graphing calculator beeping for me to change its batteries, trying desperately for six hours to find a solution to that one trig proof you've been stressing over for the past three days.

*GENEVA keeps her face neutral, and eventually MELVIN heeds its warning.*

MELVIN: (scared) Oh god. I'm sorry. I'm so, so, so sorry. Please don't get mad. Please, please, please don't.

GENEVA: Melvin?

MELVIN breathes quickly as he sinks back into his seat, eyes cast down.

MELVIN: Yes, Geneva.

GENEVA: I am going to ask you a question, and I will be very, very angry if you don't answer honestly.

*MELVIN (SIDE PROFILE) looks up at GENEVA and gulps.*

*GENEVA (SIDE PROFILE) looks back at him.*

GENEVA : (*calm and gentle, but blunt*)  
Do I love you?

*MELVIN'S expression is a mix of confusion, fear, and sadness. MELVIN blinks quickly as if tears might form. He cocks his head to the side, trying to understand.*

*GENEVA neutrally eats her ice cream and French fries, ever so oftenly making eye contact with MELVIN, just to remind him that she is still expecting an answer.*

GENEVA: Remember, I want the honest

answer, or else I will get mad.

*GENEVA shrugs one shoulder and continues eating. MELVIN is clearly confused and stressed about how to answer.*

GENEVA: I'll repeat the question: Do I love you? Hint- it's a yes or no.

*MELVIN looks at her, trying to make a decision on what to say.*

MELVIN: (*quietly, voice cracking*) No.

*GENEVA eats a French fry. Her expression is neutral. Then, GENEVA nods. MELVIN looks like he's going to have a breakdown.*

*GENEVA swallows her French fry. She finally looks at him, and he flinches, ashamed.*

GENEVA: Okay.

*GENEVA rises from her seat, ruffles MELVIN's hair, and leaves for the door. MELVIN grabs her arm and stops her for a moment.*

MELVIN: Wait. What? Where are you going? What was that about? Tell me. Was that a test?

GENEVA: A test? Baby boy, you need to study for a test.

*GENEVA attempts to leave, but MELVIN stops her again. It's a rare occurrence where Melvin touches her without permission first.*

MELVIN: Gen. Gen no, I said the wrong answer, please get mad at me. Please, yell at me. Prove me wrong. Geneva, get mad at me.

GENEVA: *(with a smile)* No, Squirt.

*MELVIN shakes his head.*

MELVIN: No, Geneva, please. It's always us-you and me- don't do this. Please don't do this to me, I'm sorry. Geneva you love me, I'm sorry, please get mad at me. You love me, Gen, you love me.

GENEVA: Melvin Archa.

*MELVIN sobs.*

GENEVA: You remember that trig problem we couldn't figure out over the phone? The answer you kept guessing was completely wrong, but you believed it was correct? That's exactly how much certainty you had in your "no".

*GENEVA leaves MELVIN in his seat. MELVIN breaks down crying, face in hands.*

TO:

*EXT. FAST FOOD STOREFRONT- NIGHT-CONTINUOUS*

*GENEVA EXITS THE RESTAURANT.*

*GENEVA walks on the sidewalk for a few paces, and then stops.*

*GENEVA'S NEUTRAL "I'M FINE" EXPRESSION CHANGES INTO DESPAIR.*

GENEVA paces for a few moments *before putting her hands on her knees and letting*

*out a deep sigh. She stands up and puts her hands on her head, pacing again. She stops again, puts her hands on her knees again, breathing heavily and deeply. Her head droops.*

*GENEVA yells.*

*SMASHCUT TO BLACK:*

*INT. FAST FOOD CHAIN TABLE- NIGHT- CONTINUOUS*

*MELVIN stares at Geneva's empty seat, across from him.*

MELVIN (V.O.) As much certainty as that stupid math proof. I hate math. I hate math, but I love her.

*MELVIN picks up a pathetic French fry, looks at the fry, sadly.*

MELVIN (V.O.) : Why did I say no?

*MELVIN bites the French fry in half.*

*CUT TO:*

*EXT. FAST FOOD STOREFRONT- NIGHT-CONTINUOUS*

*MELVIN exits the restaurant with a brown bag in his hand. He walks out of the frame. GENEVA is long gone.*

TO:

*EXT. DOWNTOWN SIDEWALK- NIGHT*

*MELVIN walks home, looking forlorn.*

MELVIN (V.O.): The answer is one. The math problem says, "one equals" and then a whole bunch of fractions, with a ton of

three-letter trig abbreviations and ugly X's and Y's. The point is to change all that ugliness into the simple number one.

TO:

*INT. APARTMENT- NIGHT*

*The jumbling of keys is coming from the other side of the door. The door swings open and MELVIN enters. He takes off his jacket, tosses it offscreen, and reaches into his brown bag to eat a French fry.*

MELVIN (V.O.): One. One is the loneliest number. TO:

*INT. KITCHEN TABLE- NIGHT- CONTINUOUS*

All of MELVIN's study material is still on the kitchen table. MELVIN eats more French fries and enters frame. He sits down again and stops chewing when he looks at his notebook and sees the giant number one he circled earlier.

TO:

*EXT. PARK- NIGHT*

Everything is silent. GENEVA is in the park, having a breakdown. Yelling, kicking, screaming, crying. She punches and kicks a tree repeatedly.

TO:

*INT. KITCHEN TABLE- NIGHT- CONTINUOUS*

*All of MELVIN's study material is still on the kitchen table. MELVIN eats more French fries and enters frame.*

He sits down again and stops chewing  
when he looks at his notebook and sees  
the giant number one he circled earlier.

TO:

*EXT. PARK- NIGHT*

*Everything is silent. GENEVA is in the  
park, having a breakdown. Yelling, kicking,  
screaming, crying. She punches and kicks a  
tree repeatedly.*

TO:

*INT. KITCHEN TABLE- NIGHT-  
CONTINUOUS*

*MELVIN is sitting back in his chair,  
restarting his computer. MELVIN looks  
over all the work he wrote for the math  
problem, trying to pick up where he left off.  
He nods to himself.*

MELVIN (V.O.): One. I'm sure of it, and  
I'm right. I think she would have agreed  
with me. The proof is right in front of me.  
It took me a long time to realize it.

*MELVIN is fixated on his math homework  
and eats a French fry without even looking.  
He reaches into the bag for another, but it  
is empty. He crumples up the bag in his fist  
and leaves it on his notebook. He diverts his  
gaze from the complicated math to the piece  
of garbage.*

MELVIN (V.O.): Geneva loves me.  
I'm sure of it, and I'm right. I'm sure she  
would have agreed with me.

BLACKOUT