I was tired, but I didn’t even consider stopping. Rain crashed down on every inch of my body. The water washed away the trash that rested on the ground. Chunks of garbage were plugged into the huge holes that covered most of the streets of Caracas. I recognized the weird unpleasant smell of “parrilla” mixed with garbage and dog’s urine. The old buildings seemed like they were going to collapse at any moment. Still, we made it downtown. People stood on their balconies, holding posters of the President Chavez. They yelled with dreadful faces, and threw trash at us. How can they hate us so bad?

We were fighting for our rights and what we loved most in our country. I walked along with the other seven thousand people. I could see the soldiers on the other side. At least three hundred soldiers blocked our way towards the president’s house “La Casona”. They were staring into the distance. Their eyes looked empty with no emotion, holding guns in their hands, waiting for us to get closer. Keep going! Keep going! We encouraged each other.

In front of me were three girls. The first one on the right was blonde. In her left hand she carried a colorless Venezuelan flag. It was black and gray, which represented mourning, and she had freedom written in white all across her arms. She was walking firm, young and full of life and bravery towards the soldiers, as we all were. The second girl had short red hair. She had a white shirt that said: “FORGETTING IS PROHIBITED” in bold black letters, and the third girl had the palms of her two hands up high showing the word “PEACE” on them. I paid attention to everything around me. I felt the energy and love for our country that connected all of us. For a moment I took my attention away from the three girls to find my best friend.
“Juan!” I yelled. His eyes met mine but after a few seconds, his eyes opened wide and his expression changed to terror. I turned back slowly and heard gunfire. “POOM! POOM! POOM!” Someone pushed me down from behind. I hit the floor, hard enough to hurt my elbows. In front of me I could see the Venezuela flag with dots of blood. I knew the girl was still conscious, but I could tell by the look on her face that she was in terrible pain. The bullet hit her on the left shoulder. The blood was spreading fast, and I noticed it had reached my fingertips.

Juan and I crawled towards her. I heard the other two girls screaming desperately: “Vanessa! Vanessa!” Juan ripped his shirt and put in on her back to try to stop the blood. Four more shots went into the crowd. Everything was in chaos around us. People were hitting each other, screaming, running, panicking. The soldiers were about a mile away from us, still standing the same way they had a few minutes before. I realized that the shots weren’t coming from the soldiers; they were coming from inside the crowd.

“Vanessa!” I heard again. I took a deep breath and shouted: “Here she is!” Their faces turned in shock. They threw themselves to the ground near me, where I held their dying friend in my arms, gasping desperately for air. Others came to help pick her up from my arms. Juan carried her towards his car. I stood up from the ground still in shock. My mind was completely blank. The sound became blurred. Everything stopped. My hands and clothes were covered in the most vivid red. The color still felt warm, while the rain slowly washed it away. I glanced down. On the wet pavement lay the Venezuelan black and gray flag, covered with Vanessa’s bravery.

Frankchesska Fortoul was born in Los Angeles, California. At the age of 8, she moved with her parents to Caracas, Venezuela. During 2006/07 she was part of a student movement against the Venezuelan government. Currently she attends Santa Monica College and recently joined the Student Writing Collective. She works at a law firm in Santa Monica.