



CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY

MARTIN LUTHER
KING, JR. DAY
WRITING AWARDS

JANUARY 20, 2020

Carnegie Mellon University

Center for Student Diversity and Inclusion

Dietrich College of Humanities and Social Sciences

English

21st Annual

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Writing Awards

Carnegie Mellon University

January 20, 2020

Acknowledgments

The 2020 Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Writing Awards are cosponsored by Carnegie Mellon University's Dietrich College of Humanities and Social Sciences, the Center for Student Diversity and Inclusion, and the Department of English. For their generosity and support, we thank Richard Scheines, dean of Dietrich College, and Andreea Ritivoi, head of the Department of English. Additionally, we are grateful to Modern Languages, Student Affairs, and the Vice Provost for Education for cosponsoring our 2019 Fall Speaker Series.

Thank you also to the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, Cohen & Grigsby, Michael Szczerban and the Hachette Group, and Shilo Rea and Champtires for their financial support of the awards.

We extend our deepest gratitude to the Pittsburgh-area educators who dedicated their time and energy to help students organize, revise, and submit writing for the contest, and to all students who put in the time and effort to write about difficult, challenging issues. We value each and every submission as a voice against intolerance and discrimination.

Jim Daniels
Thomas S. Baker University Professor of English
Founder and Director, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Writing Awards

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Writing Awards Team

Aditri Bhagirath, student, Department of Computer Science, preliminary judge
Samantha Colavecchio, administrative assistant, Center for Student Diversity and Inclusion

Joss Green, student, School of Drama, preliminary judge

Angela Januzzi, marketing and communications specialist, Department of English

Stefanie Johndrow, assistant director, public relations, Dietrich College

Maureen Rolla, administrative coordinator and preliminary judge, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Writing Awards

Naomi Shimada, student, Department of English, preliminary judge

M. Shernell Smith, interim director, Center for Student Diversity and Inclusion

Jesse Wilson, designer, Dietrich College

Department of English Staff Members

Eyona Bivins, administrative coordinator

Mike Brokos, assistant director of first-year writing

Laura Donaldson, assistant director of undergraduate programs and academic advisor

Jen Loughran, assistant director of graduate programs

Vickie McKay, office manager and special projects coordinator

Nick Ryan, business manager

Participating High Schools

Allderdice High School, Avonworth High School, Baldwin High School, Bishop Canevin High School, Central Catholic High School, Hampton High School, Imani Christian Academy, Lincoln Park Performing Arts Charter School, Montour High School, Moon Area High School, North Allegheny High School, Oakland Catholic High School, Pennsylvania Leadership Charter School, Pine-Richland High School, Pittsburgh CAPA, Pittsburgh Milliones/University Preparatory School, Pittsburgh Obama, Pittsburgh Science and Technology Academy, Propel Braddock Hills High School, Ringgold High School, Shady Side Academy, Vincentian Academy, Winchester Thurston School, Woodland Hills High School

Participating Universities

Carlow University, Carnegie Mellon University, La Roche University, Saint Francis University, Slippery Rock University, University of Pittsburgh, Washington and Jefferson University

Table of Contents

High School Poetry

First Place: “hey beautiful” by Ella Engberg	2
Second Place: “An Ode to the Dark Skin Black Girl” by Eliyah Roberts	4
Third Place (tie): “Twisted Face” by Bryanna Luster	5
Third Place (tie): “I Hope I Can Be Heard Now” by Greyson Scurco	6

Honorable Mentions

- “Fractured City” by Shelley Demus
- “Ode to Deportation Jokes” by Juno Elio Avillez do Nascimento
- “Luck” by Amelia Staresinic

High School Prose

First Place: “Confessions of a Biracial Disabled Woman” by Diana Putri Lozinger	8
Second Place: “The Baader-Meinhof Phenomenon” by Feride Radzhapova	12
Third Place: “What Distance Does” by Lily Weatherford-Brown	15

Honorable Mentions

- “Mental” by Margaret Balich
- “The Walk from Slavery to Freedom” by Oladunni Bejide
- “The End of My Epente” by Benjamin Gutschow

College Drama

Special Drama Award: “YoUr EnGllsH iS sO GoOd” by Paloma Sierra **20**

College Poetry

First Place: “the fancy media company uses the word ‘slave’ to describe machines controlled by the master computer” by Joss Green **31**

Second Place: “Quality Inn” by Isabel Yoon **32**

Third Place: “Nehemiah” by Cameron Monteith **33**

Honorable Mentions

“Seasons” by Q Quaye

“Thanksgiving” by Ethan Rhabb

College Prose

First Place: “To the boy who gropes me in seventh grade” by Julia Hou **38**

Second Place: “Reservations Optional” by Serena Gillian **40**

Honorable Mentions

“You Cross My Mind” by Victoria Avery

“Uneasy Bus Rides” by Erezi Ogbo

To read the high school and college honorable mention selections visit:

www.cmu.edu/dietrich/english/mlk

Due to the high number and quality of the overall submissions, we also recognize the following students for the best entries from their schools:

High Schools

Allderdice High School: “Blue Six Pointed Star of David” by Omri Raz
Avonworth High School: “If I Need a Label” by Toni Keller
Bishop Canevin High School: “A Day of Equality” by Theresa Skindzier
Central Catholic High School: “Now What Do You Think?” by Amari Smith
Hampton High School: “Ready and Waiting, Waiting and Dreaming” by Robin Troup
Imani Christian Academy: “Untitled” by Isaiah Anderson
Montour High School: “My Family Shaped Me” by Zoe Brunick
Moon Area High School: “Roses and Rape, Thorns and Mistakes” by Madison Carter
North Allegheny High School: “A Tomato Party” by Meryem Marasli
Oakland Catholic High School: “Miss Mulatto” by Jordan R. Scott
Pennsylvania Leadership Charter School: “Just Because” by Maggie Kudrick
Pine-Richland High School: “A Story of Discrimination” by Camille Grier
Pittsburgh Milliones, University Preparatory School: “Springtime” by Caio Gomes
Pittsburgh Obama: “Mixed Emotions” by Reggie Branson
Pittsburgh Science and Technology Academy: “auto-erotica” by Anasia Gurley
Propel Braddock Hills High School: “Dear Racist” by Aurianna Moore
Ringgold High School: “Remembrance” by Roderick Wilson, Jr.
Woodland Hills High School: “Just Ask Me” by Johnna Hill

Universities

Carlow University: “Human Gross Anatomy” by Cameron Short
La Roche University: “In the Eye of MLK” by Maurice Harvey
Saint Francis University: “Below the Sun” by Jack Weidner
Slippery Rock University: “A 20th January Day” by Alawna Mallory
University of Pittsburgh: “Broken, Broken Record” by Ellyana Gomez
Washington and Jefferson University: “White Kids Only” by Jordon Harris

High School Poetry

hey beautiful

Ella Engberg

Autumn is cool and serene today
fiery leaves caught in their graceful dance of falling,
cradled by puffs of refrigerator wind.
Today is for short sleeves and long pants,
the sun's nimble fingers tingle my bare skin,
the breath of almost-winter flushes my cheeks red and raw.
Each step is exhilarating, my body swaying side to side
with the wind and with the trees, back, forth, there is music in my hips
and life in the soles of my shoes.

The gears of his bicycle click-clack, whine behind me,
leisurely emerging from behind the trees like a tortured ghost.

When he calls to me from the other side of the path
my neck bobs a nod and offers a curt smile in return

keep walking, keep walking
usually people hold no threats
but I have been taught to always be scared.
Morning, afternoon and night are danger
a world of men is a world of danger
so keep your head down and keep walking,
and always be prepared to run.

*hey beautiful . . .
what's up, miss?*

tell me, what's up, beautiful?

I feel the opposite of beautiful
when his words latch onto my skin like sticky, assaulting hands,
the creaky, gasping laugh of his bicycle taunts me
and the sky crushes down on my shoulders.

*hey beautiful,
you have that long, pretty hair . . .
I love your long, beautiful hair . . .*

my body is frozen and now the leaves are not dancing
but falling down dead from the sky.

I wish myself far away, anywhere but here,
but somehow everywhere I turn he is always following,

whistling slowly, tauntingly,
creaking bicycle winding down the curving path,
falling, crumbling leaves framing his face in a fiery halo.
He forever circles closer, closer, no matter how far, how fast I can run.

hey beautiful . . .
hey beautiful . . .

SECOND PLACE

An Ode to the Dark Skin Black Girl

Elijah Roberts

I look down at my hands
And all I see is dirt colored flesh
I mean my skin is the color of soil
So of course I would know how deep underground I was created

The oils that run through my veins and the copper under my nail beds
Never seem to expire
Because my body is my greatness
And it's as tough as the indestructible souls that came before me

The golden hues that are painted on my thighs
And the curly cues that were put upon my head for purpose
Have more body than the ocean's strongest waves and are hotter than the world's
volcanic lava

Underground I am one with nature
With the ruins all around my figure
We got diamonds embedded in our minds and golden mines implanted in our eyes
You can even say we are the golden children
Because us black girls were one of nature's greatest creations

And I'm talking to the girls with the deep dark skin who hide under the trees
I'm talking about the girls whose words sound like luscious, sweet honey straight from
honey bees
I'm talking about the girls whose skin twinkles in the moonlight, it just glitters and gleams
I'm talking about the girls whose skin is smooth as butter, and smells of rich cocoa
I'm talking to the girls whose strides overflow with rhythm, like you can hear a beat in
each step
I'm talking to the girls who think like philosophers and speak like engineers, write like
artists, and
whose singing kisses our ears
I'm talking to the beautiful dark chocolate girls
Because you girls
You black girls
You dark skin black girls
Y'all are beautiful
You are smart
You can do anything

THIRD PLACE (TIE)

Twisted Face Bryanna Luster

I picked up the white tag on the ripped blue jeans.
My fingers trailed across the black price number
printed at the bottom of the tag.
The old white woman in Macy's gave me a dirty look.

My mother and I, both standing shorter
than the average female for both of our ages,
browsed among the Levi Strauss clothing
that was my brand since birth.
My mom picked up a shirt. Like usual
I didn't like it. I told her that I didn't like it.
The white woman appeared around the corner.
She searched the shirt rack, but I could tell
that it wasn't shirts she had been searching for.
It was the article of clothing that she thought
could have been hiding in my mother's purse.

My mother worked hard for what she had,
for all of the things that she'd been able to give me.
What a shame for her that she had to suffer
from the pain of being different in this world.

My mom asked me to try on the jeans along with
other jeans and shirts she had let me pick out.
She told me to hurry up. She was always impatient.
I'm almost done, I replied. I came out of the stall.
These are good, I said to my agitated mom.
We left the dressing room, the old white woman
asked if we needed help.

We continued shopping, even after my mom
whisper-shouted at me for not having much sense of what I like.
The line was as long as Rapunzel's hair, but we had no choice.
The sooner the better, but it wasn't until later
That we got near the front of the line.

What's with the face? The old white woman had an attitude.
My mother could've told her that she was rude, inconsiderate.
She could've said it was her attitude that caused her twisted expression,
but she said, *Oh, nothing*. It had been nothing at all.

THIRD PLACE (TIE)

I Hope I Can Be Heard Now

A poem about my voice on testosterone

Greyson Scurco

I've always been a little bear cub,
feeling my paws crunch the twigs and mulch of the floor.
Seasons are changing, frost is setting in,
and I rise up on my hind legs,
head high, speaking up for the first time.
I hope I can be heard now.
I'll let my growls grow, my echo
rumbling through the trees.
The sound curls between pine needles,
and knocks cones to the ground.
I know I've made it,
I am home.

High School Prose

Confessions of a Biracial Disabled Woman

Diana Putri Lozinger

When I show my family photo, I get a mix of different reactions. Some say that it is a lovely picture and leave it at that, but mostly, I get the standard questions: So they are Muslim? What do they think about you being a Catholic? Is their country dangerous? Are the women forced to wear *that*? I've learned that with many Americans, there is a deep misunderstanding about what Islam is and who Muslims are. They might think that the precepts of Islam call for fanaticism, oppression of women, child brides, and that the countries in which they live in are dangerous and have strict laws and cruel ways of punishment. That is simply not true. We cannot forget that since the beginning of time, religion has been a prime excuse for inexcusable acts of violence.

My mother is an immigrant Muslim woman from Indonesia, now an American citizen. She entered this nation with my American father, with no notion of what the people were like or what to expect. She had to build a brand new home here. She had never even seen snow before, and the first place she lived in America was Salt Lake City, home to the best skiing in the country. She learned, simply, that people are people. The neighbors brought housewarming gifts and introduced themselves. When the neighborhood heard that she was pregnant with me, they threw her a baby shower, even though she had only lived there for a few months.

But being different is still hard. In my own life, I can remember when Christians have told me that they are praying for my mother's conversion. I'm careful about who I talk to about my background and my mother, because I don't want a confrontation. I am very proud of my heritage. I could talk about how much I love Indonesian food or traditional clothing, sure. I've engaged with those things almost daily for my entire life. It's not uncommon for my family to have a meal with teriyaki chicken and pasta, together. What is important to me, however, is to understand the events that are happening in my mother's country.

As a small child at three and six years old, I went to Indonesia but didn't remember nor understand much. I remember not even knowing how long the flights were: about 25 hours, split up by transiting in at least four different airports. When I finally went to Indonesia as a teenager, I met my family for the first time in years. Many of my relatives cannot speak English, and I cannot speak Indonesian, but I still feel a deep connection to them. They support my faith, and I support theirs, because both of our faiths call for love and service to others, regardless of their background. I became obsessed with learning about the country's history, politics, and religion. I care about these topics deeply within the context of America, so it only made sense to understand them in the context of Indonesia. Being knowledgeable about the country made me feel more connected to it, my mom, and my heritage.

I realized in my psychology class last year that, because of my cultural background, I have a different set of values that is distinct from most people's. We were learning about cultural dimensions, a theory proposed by the social psychologist Geert Hofstede. The theory is about how each society's culture influences their members to hold certain values. Specifically, Hofstede came up with six binary ideals. The most

recognized dimension is individualism and collectivism. In a collectivist culture such as my mom's, people are attached to their families, and they have collective responsibility for all of the extended family. In an individualist culture such as America, we value individual responsibility, independence from parents at an earlier age, and freedom of self-expression. I've grown up with a mix of both ideals. Another dimension, "power distance," relates to either accepting and promoting hierarchies or lacking any hierarchies. The East has a strong power distance, and my Indonesian influences have taught me to show my utmost respect to my teachers and elders. However, the West has influenced me to have more personal relations with my superiors, such as my elder family members and teachers. This was the first time that I recognized that my mom and my dad have taught me things I would not have received in a "monoracial" or "monocultural" family. I'm proud of being biracial. I learned from an early age what multiculturalism is really about: the idea that everyone benefits from increased exposure to diversity and worldwide thinking.

An amazing thing about Indonesia is its national motto, "*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*," which means "Unity in Diversity." There are hundreds of native languages, cultures and ethnicities that are now all celebrated together. While it is a majority Muslim country, its national symbol is from Hinduism, being a nod to its ancient heritage. The holidays of all of the major religions are celebrated. I can only hope to inspire a type of coexistence like the kind in Indonesia within our nation, but the only way to do that is to spread each and every one of our cultures without fear.

Another more personal struggle I've endured is a disability. I had an aneurysm at age eight. It caused my right side to be severely weakened and spastic. My right side was completely paralyzed at one point, and I had to learn how to walk, talk, and eat again. To this day, my hand remains paralyzed. I have many orthopedic problems and pain, all caused by my spasticity and weakness. However, it is almost invisible, which means that when it is visible, people might be quick to judge the actions that I take, or can't take. For example, my leg often shakes uncontrollably and my arm will retract like a T. rex. Sometimes, I've felt sympathy directed towards me. At worst, I've felt disdain directed towards me, because someone thinks that my involuntary actions are weird.

I've felt marginalized ever since I was a little girl. Of course, how do you expect little kids to understand why I was in the hospital for two months? Most kids just thought that as soon as I was back at school, I was completely better; it was just like when they got the flu. I remember that when I would tell kids about my paralysis, many would say that I was faking it. They would say that I was joking; there's no way that I could have it. I remember a few kids pinched me or hit me, of course without any warning. I don't have loss of sensation in my paralyzed limbs.

I felt isolated for a long time. The typical, "no one understands me" garbage that pre-teens say? That actually would, and to be honest, still does apply to my life. Most people my age aren't limited in their movements; their movements are effortless. They have yet to understand what it is to "count their spoons": to make sure that you

don't waste energy throughout the day by making automatic calculations in your head to conserve your energy ration, just to accomplish everyday living. While most don't fret about everyday activities like typing or writing, I worry about them sometimes. I know that I can't do these activities when I'm tired late at night without my hand and leg involuntarily contracting and causing pain. This is just one of the many examples of the challenges I face, that no one even cares to know about, but it is real. "No one understands me" because most people don't experience paralysis or spasticity or know just how frustrating these conditions can be.

I can still remember in a biology class when we were talking about genetic disorders, and someone said that it would be more ethical to abort someone who would have a disability. The rationale? Because their life "would be sad." I wanted to dig myself into a hole rather than stand up to this person. I go to a small school. This person knew about my condition because I had been very outspoken about it. Sometimes I don't even want to be outspoken about it because when I elaborate in class about any of my identities—be it my race, disability, or even the music I like to listen to—it falls on deaf ears. Typical high schoolers think that they know everything and are "woke," but when I speak about my experiences of isolation, they'll just start whispering about other things around me. They have better things to do than hear me get on my soapbox. Am I really invisible? They care about mental health and think that it's so important, while making fun of neurodivergence and making casual remarks about longing for suicide because they have a test to study for.

Because my disability is mostly invisible, I don't usually tell people until I want to. If a personal experience is tied into our conversation, then I tell them. Then they mostly freak out. This leads me to downplay my long, dramatic, crazy medical history, saying something like, "I'm completely fine now," or "I'm used to it now." While that is true, I am through with downplaying it: it was a hell of a journey with three major operations and procedures bi-yearly at least. Many would be surprised by this, but the most aggravating comment that I get, pretty frequently, is that I look completely normal, and that I shouldn't be so down on myself. I shouldn't call what I have a "disability." My favorite: call yourself differently abled instead, doesn't that sound better? While I may look, in their words, "completely normal," my internal workings are not, and I need to be able to acknowledge that. I also think about how bigoted the implications of using the word "normal" are. I think that when people react negatively to disabled people (whether it be with disdain or with pity), it is because when they imagine if they themselves had a life-altering disability, they imagine that their lives would be bad: on a scale from *just more difficult* to *not worth living*. They project their own ideas of what disability means onto us. The truth is that whether someone is born with a disability or it develops later in life, most individuals just learn how to deal with it until it becomes their "normal".

Sometimes I think about how much better my life would be if I was "normal"—able bodied and neurotypical—but then I realize that my accomplishments, perspectives, and values are unique because of both my strengths and my weaknesses. So many of

my interests and experiences stem from having a stroke as a child, from my interest in psychology, to my volunteer work at children's hospitals. I call it a disability because I'm realistic, but I don't want that label to make anyone feel sorry for me. Disability isn't something you overcome, but something that you learn to live alongside, and I want my use of that word to represent how much more I have to adapt and learn to live with it while still being able to live my life like everybody else. I can sew and play piano with one hand, and I can paint my nails by myself, even with my limited motor skills. I've had to adapt in every physical aspect in my life, and I am currently adapting to driving. But I've never seen having to adapt as an impossible struggle. Everybody struggles with something, whether it be discrimination or a personal battle, so just because my life is harder than most people's my age, my life is still worth living.

The Baader-Meinhof Phenomenon

Feride Radzhapova

Ever since I was little, I would always get into petty arguments with my parents over what I wore and how I acted in public. Being unrestrictedly myself was important to me because it gave me the sense of control I thought I could not live without. This stubbornness and confidence that was always in the back of my mind was restrained after an interaction with a boy in the neighborhood playground one summer day. All of my peers were playing tag and goofing off when suddenly a boy who was bigger than I was grabbed my neck and pushed me down into a headlock position. As he laughed boldly, I struggled in his arms and no longer felt like anything was a game; my air was cut off, my face turned red, and my eyes teared up. He finally released me and I immediately sought our mothers to tell them how he tried to hurt me. They both simply bantered and laughed at my face, commenting on how we would make a “good old married couple” because of our “chemistry.” I was frustrated and felt so disgusted by the words they spoke. A random boy managed to constrain the mindset my parents had worked so hard for years to instill in me. This was the first time I had realized what being a Turkish girl in a Turkish society meant. It meant I would almost never be taken seriously because of my gender. I realized this from my own mother, and that was the worst part of it all. I realized that when people learn about the realities of toxic masculinity and sexism in their youths, they start hearing it from the mouths of those who are closest to them.

The Baader-Meinhof Phenomenon occurs when the thing you’ve just noticed, experienced, or been told about suddenly crops up constantly. This phenomenon applied perfectly to my experiences leading up to today. My journey of becoming aware of the discrimination faced by women and girls in American and Turkish cultures has helped me to realize that the only way to improve those inequalities is through actively pushing against them. My social media accounts are filled with my views on toxic gender roles and inequalities between groups of people in general. Anybody who knows me or has even heard of me knows I am a feminist and that I will always speak out for what I believe in. I have no shame in contributing to a movement that, at the end of the day, fights for every human’s rights to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness.

The earliest injustice I noticed was toxic masculinity. Toxic masculinity is when a teen boy learns to suppress his emotions in order to seem “manly” to others. It is a boy being able to get away with being violent because “boys will be boys”—like how the boy who put me in a headlock got away with dragging me through that trauma. It’s not to say that that trauma is something I think about every day and night, but it happened, and I hope that boy learned from his mistakes. In Turkish culture, toxic masculinity is a man making fun of a married one for asking his wife if he should go out with his friends and for another married man buying his wife makeup because “that’s gay.” Halfway through Turkish weddings, the men’s tables are empty because they’re all outside taking smoke breaks, and if you’re a man and still seated, you are seen as an outcast. If a man is loud and social and involves himself with every aspect of the culture, he is seen as confident and as the ideal husband. If a girl is the same thing, she is seen as obnoxious and difficult to control. The same characteristics mean very different things when they apply to

separate genders. My family, like any other, has dinners that are filled with communicating the recent gossip and talking about our days. When I hear the way they speak about the role of a man versus the role of a woman, I wonder how I could have been so blind to their old-fashioned views for the majority of my life.

Toxic masculinity and sexism go hand in hand in Turkish culture. At the end of the same dinners, the elder of the family makes a short prayer aloud. She will pray that her grandsons will become educated in grand universities and make something of their lives. She will pray that her granddaughters will find amazing, preferably wealthy, husbands. The contrast is clear between the elder's expectations for her grandsons and granddaughters. This was a very recent and shocking discovery of mine. The last phase of the dinners is cleaning up. The girls and women will always be the ones picking up the dirty dishes, washing them, putting away the leftover food, and vacuuming the carpet. Not once in my life have I seen a Turkish man clean the dinner table, or help set it in the first place. It's just not a part of their "manly duties." Women and girls are belittled, no matter what they accomplish in life. If you ever add up all of the things a Turkish woman will accomplish in her life, she will still not get as much credit as a Turkish man will for all of his accomplishments. She has a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering? That's great for her, but she still has to be the "woman of the house"—she needs to cook and clean and raise her children, typically without the help of her husband, who is traditionally only the bread earner. Turkish society looks down on any couple whose roles are reversed—it makes a mockery of them simply because they don't follow the typical gender roles.

The religion of Islam teaches us that heaven is at the feet of our mothers, symbolizing that they should be respected and deserve the best of everything. This concept is typically lost when culture becomes involved, and I cannot stress how much religion and culture are two separate things. Women are underappreciated despite what Islam may teach. One summer day, my parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and I were enjoying the beautiful Atlantic Ocean on an Ocean City beach. A woman with a nice figure walked past our group, and then began the shameful and inappropriate comments from my aunts and uncles. Of course, they were more subtle and toned down because of the presence of children, but the way they spoke about the woman was disgusting. They never even met her or spoke to her, yet they degraded her in the span of two minutes. This was the first time I had noticed anything like this. The only thoughts going through my mind were "she might be a sister, a mother, a granddaughter, she has her whole life ahead of her" and, most prevalently, "she's a daughter." I was a sister, a daughter, and a granddaughter. I had my whole life ahead of me, too. If they could speak so easily about a stranger on the beach, are those the things they would have said about me if they did not know me? These thoughts made me feel nauseous, but they were eye opening to the fact that my family could be just as ignorant as anybody else.

These events that I witnessed sum up the struggles every Turkish girl goes through while growing up. The Turkish culture seems restricting, but I only pulled out the most extreme examples of toxic masculinity and sexism that I noticed. The examples are

more typical of the older generation of Turks who are more traditional, but the Turkish millennials and post-millennials are changing the culture and society for the better. Young adults are more open to ideas of feminism and equality between genders, and hopefully, when they have children and become crucial parts of families, they will pass down the concept of appreciating women and hold males and females to the same standards. So many young Turks are finding their paths in life, and I can only hope that they do not stick too closely to their elders' traditions. It comes down to a conflict between yourself and society. The only way to pull out of some of the toxic traditions and gender roles in the Turkish and American communities is to actively resist them and teach the newer generations otherwise. Teach them to have more open mindsets and more open communication. Teach them to tolerate others despite their differences instead of looking down on them because they are not the same. By actively resisting toxic masculinity and sexism in any society or culture, people can become more informed and educated to create a more equal and peaceful society.

What Distance Does Lily Weatherford-Brown

Freshmen year is the year I come out as bisexual, attend my first Pride parade, join GSSU, and date a girl. It was a glorious domino chain. The first person I formally come out to is my mother, in the passenger seat of her car, while we are driving home from the grocery store.

“Hey,” I say.

It’s hot outside, the end of summer, the AC’s blasting and my hair is slicked to my face with sweat. My mother’s hands drum the steering wheel as a full 30 seconds of silence go by.

“Hey?” She grins. I catch her eyes flick across to me. “Are you alright?”

I don’t remember how the rest of the conversation went, but I remember her pulling me into a hug across the shift handle, and the desperate force of the hug. I’m not relieved or weightless that day in my mother’s car, I think because I had always assumed my parents would accept me. We just smile at each other, mumble “I love you,” and bring the groceries in the house.

Pittsburgh is 914 miles away from Clinton, Arkansas, and so my parents moved 914 miles away from their families and then had me. Pittsburgh and Philadelphia form little blue bubbles, afloat in Pennsylvania’s red sea. I’d like to think it was like a beacon for my parents, that in many ways rural Pennsylvania reminded them of home.

When I come out in freshmen year, I feel dangerously safe. Homophobic sermons, hate crimes, and F-slurs happened in a place 914 miles away. The first time the concept of me being “other” in my own family even crosses my mind is mid-conversation with my girlfriend. We’re talking about my twinge of Southern accent, and I tell her about my Baptist preacher grandfather. She grimaces and says, “Oh boy, what was *the conversation* like?”

I smile and laugh it off because I can’t answer. It’s a conversation I’ve never had, not out of fear but out of instinct. I feel the same way in that certain moment during a horror movie when the camera focuses into pitch black nothingness for a few seconds. The music swells, my heart races and I know that some terrible thing is about to appear in the dark. Every time I approach the subject of my bisexuality, I feel that feeling.

We visit my grandparents for Thanksgiving in Tennessee, a halfway point because those 914 miles make for a 14-hour car ride. One of my little brothers needs to pee real bad so we pull over at this Sunoco. There’s only one bathroom in the place and there’s a line of people waiting, real John Deere wearing, backwards cap, loose-skinned Southerners. I try not to make eye contact because that always leads to the eye dip and the nervous sideways smile. At some point in trying to find a way to pass the time, I finally land on a rotating shelf of bumper stickers. They range from “Country girl” to “Dirt lover” to “Politically incorrect and proud,” but they all have one thing in common, camo print and the distinct crossed lines of the Confederate flag.

“Nice,” I say dryly, elbowing my brother in the side. He doesn’t understand, and

how could he? A nine-year-old like him would read the stickers and say exactly what my brother said:

“What’s wrong with it?”

I know he can’t possibly understand the ripping in my chest. I know he is far too young and naïve to see the Confederate flag and feel the switch flip on your fight-or-flight. He won’t glance at everyone else’s glances in that Sunoco bathroom line. He is only nine years old; he *shouldn’t* know.

When we get to the hotel we’re staying at in Tennessee, my grandparents line us up and give us long hugs. This time I do feel a kind of relief, a slower release as if someone made a pinhole in my chest and my grandfather is squeezing all the helium out when he hugs me. At Thanksgiving dinner, we sit in the hotel’s restaurant and I pick away little by little at the grizzled fat in the turkey slices and the lump in the mashed potatoes. They are talking about Christmas time.

“Lily has a winter formal coming up,” my mother says as she wipes brown gravy from the corners of her mouth. My grandmother brightens.

“Oh, do you have a date?” She asks. My chest tightens. Usually it’s easier to just shake my head, or say I’m going with friends.

“I’m going with Caroline.” It now feels like the music has begun to swell in a horror movie and I am staring into the darkness.

“Oh.” There is a pause in conversation after the Oh, and then my grandmother moves on to asking about the boys’ grades and what they hope Santa leaves under our tree. Nothing ever leaps out of that space in the dark. The music continues to rise with no resolution. My grandmother will ask no more questions about the formal. My grandfather will fiddle with his hearing aid and the both of them will act as if nothing was said. It is their instinct as well to avoid this conversation, something they’ve excelled in since they found out my dad didn’t take us to church. Baptists believe that once a child has found God, they are saved forever. My dad went through so much saving as a kid that I think they gave up on the rest of us. It makes them sad that they will be up in heaven with my father watching my poor gay ass contort in eternal damnation. But, oh well, what more can they do?

They’re not homophobic though! They didn’t cast me out or scream at me or recite the Bible. They didn’t even talk about how much it hurt them for me to turn my back on my family. They keep their distance. They watch me in quiet recognition, especially when I dye my hair or post photos from the Pride parade or when I wear pants instead of a dress to my grandfather’s sermon.

“You look so much more ladylike in dresses! What will the boys think?”

I will turn into a little Christian doll for them. When we go to visit, I will not talk about my girlfriend, not even when we break up. (It’s a phone call breakup. We both cry. Caroline has her own personal trouble, too. I don’t tell her about my grandparents.) My next partner after Caroline is a boy. My grandmother asks questions again.

“What’s he like?” she says, her voice very alien through the speaker of a phone.

“Quiet? Nice. He’s nice.”

“Does he go to your school?”

“No, he goes to Central Catholic.”

“Oh!”

This *oh* is so different. There’s no silence this time. She asks if I love him and I laugh and talk about high school relationships being temporary. Without Caroline it’s so much easier to be around the both of them and I hate it. I avoid personal details, and I do not correct them when they call a male friend my boyfriend. I will keep my mouth shut when my grandfather talks about the travel ban or the trans Army ban or the great Trump wall.

We drive to that halfway point in Tennessee, and by the time I make it I am a husk of myself; a cicada shell with the insect long gone, flying north for the summer. Every conversation has become the can of worms I know by instinct not to open. They’ve spent their whole lives 914 miles away and every time they speak to me it’s like a culture shock. I do not hate my family. In a lot of ways I love them too much to look at them hard enough to hate them.

While at the hotel for Thanksgiving, my grandfather decides he wants to go shopping for a knife. My father goes searching around and finds Tennessee’s self-proclaimed “Largest Knife Store in The World!” and a Google Maps trip later, the whole family is piling out into what looks like two warehouses t-boned together like a trailer home. My mother holds my hand and presses her thumb hard into my palm. It’s a gesture of solidarity. I am unnervingly calm.

The knife store is a grand armory. The whole first floor is rows of handguns and semi-automatic ammunition in glass cases, the tops of the cases lined in rows of knives and hatchets. The walls are covered with MAGA banners and six-foot-tall Confederate flags and Gadsden flags with their great big serpents staring down right into my chest. There is a pristine white robe and hood behind glass in the very center. It’s like a ghost, glowing in the bright florescent overheads with an informational placard floating next to it on the conquest of the KKK.

When I look at the state flag for Arkansas, I start to notice a resemblance to the Confederate flag. The X of white stars is snapped in two, and the pieces reassembled into a diamond. If my gaze moves quickly past the Arkansas flag, it morphs in my periphery. I feel deep fear in my own grandparents’ home as I pass the flag that hangs above the hymnal on their piano. I worry my queerness will seep out into the air and they will sniff me out. At night sometimes, I dream of the closet doors in my grandparents’ hallway. It’s as if my vision zooms there, I feel a certain sinking feeling, the music swells and then a mummified Confederate soldier leaps out. He is knocking cans of preserved fruit onto the ground. He is screaming so loud his necrotic skin breaks away in leaflets around his

mouth. His grip will tighten around my throat, and he is chanting,

“God hates the gays, the queer. He hates you! We hate you!”

I will call out to my grandparents for help but they just catch eye contact, dip their gaze, and give me a little sideways smile like I’m a stranger in a Sunoco.

For a long while, I can’t process everything. There’s a huge staircase going down into a lower floor and I see the telltale signs of a children’s area; stuffed animals, board games, little plastic soldiers on shelves. I follow them down the stairs like a homing beacon. In the back there are rows of bumper stickers which take up an entire wall, as far as the eye can see. Travelling down the aisle, I see pride flags behind huge red x’s. “Homosexuality is a social disease”; “Under God’s law the only right gays have is the right to die”; “The solution to Gay Marriage is the noose!” What’s more sickening than their messages are the children running in front of them unbothered, playing with stuffed bears and toy rifles. A little boy pops the cork out of his little plastic gun at me and yells,

“Pow! Gotcha!”

Is this what they do while we’re 914 miles away? Is this what lies in the silence between my grandmother’s questions? When she just says “Oh” and dips her eyes and smiles, is this what flashes across her grey matter? I spend 15 minutes waiting outside on a bench fighting the urge to hurl on the front steps of the Largest Knife Store in the World.

“Are you alright?” my mother asks. She’s giving me an opening to smile and nod. I shake my head. I mumble something about reading things in that warehouse, about feeling sick. My grandfather says something that I can’t get out of my head. It’s not that different than what my brother said in the Sunoco, but it’s his tone of voice, without innocence, like a threat.

“Well, what was wrong with it?”

College Drama

SPECIAL DRAMA AWARD

YoUr EnGllsH iS sO GoOd

A ten-minute choreopoem

Paloma Sierra

CAST OF CHARACTERS

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER, a speaker for whom English is their second language, who may or may not speak with an accent when conversing with others in English; a friendly acquaintance to MONOLINGUIST, yet on the same professional and/or educational level.

MONOLINGUIST, a native English speaker who only speaks English, who's part of a greater collective of native English speakers; a friendly acquaintance to ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER, yet on the same professional and/or educational level.

MONOLINGUISTS, greater collective of native English speakers.

SETTING

A professional and/or higher education setting.
(Ex. A library, an office, a court, other)

PRODUCTION NOTES

// signals an interruption, or where the next line by another character begins

A professional and/or higher education setting, crowded with MONOLINGUISTS, each involved in their own activities.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER and MONOLINGUIST are involved in a friendly conversation. This conversation is either mimed or mumbled, incoherently.

UNTIL:

MONOLINGUIST

But your English is so good!

The room freezes along with everyone in it, except for ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER is dumbfounded—“Did they just?—yet reacts silently.

The silence is kept up until it becomes unbearable and the moment, uncomfortably awkward.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER
(to self or to audience)

Every time I hear this statement
my world stops
as it is revealed to me that
finally
after speaking fluent English
for what is now . . .

(counts, first mumbling then loudly as they reach “20”)

- 1 . . .
- 2 . . .
- 3 . . .
- 4 . . .
- 5 . . .
- 6 . . .
- 7 . . .
- 8 . . .

9...
10...
11...
12...
13...
14...
15...
16...
17...
18...
19...
20 years!

after 20 years of speaking
fluent English
for the first time
my English is
—AT LAST! —
so good
—or at least,
good enough to be understood—
and worthy
of such a great compliment

*MONOLINGUIST restarts their dialogue, AND/
OR is joined by a second MONOLINGUIST in their
dialogue.*

*MONOLINGUISTS also unfreeze and restart their
activities during the length of MONOLINGUIST's
dialogue.*

MONOLINGUIST

But your English is so good!

MONOLINGUIST and MONOLINGUISTS freeze.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

And every time
I hear this statement,
I try to make sense of it,
yet can only bring myself to play dumb

since the statement
only makes sense
if I play the part that it suggests
—that of a dumb—
a person who lacks the abi//lity to speak—.

*MONOLINGUIST(S) restart(s) their dialogue, AND/
OR is joined by another MONOLINGUIST in their
dialogue.*

*MONOLINGUISTS also unfreeze and restart their
activities during the length of MONOLINGUIST's
dialogue.*

MONOLINGUIST

But your English is so good!

MONOLINGUIST and MONOLINGUISTS freeze.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

Every time
I hear
this statement—.

*MONOLINGUIST(S) unfreeze(s) and restart(s)
their dialogue, AND/OR is joined by all other
MONOLINGUISTS in their dialogue.*

MONOLINGUIST

But your English is so good!

All MONOLINGUISTS freeze.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

Every
time
What bothers me
is not the statement itself
but what underlies it—
how it matters
not *what* I say

but *how* I say it,

How
NO ONE
is really
listening—.

*All MONOLINGUISTS unfreeze and restart their
dialogue.*

MONOLINGUISTS

But your English // is so good!

All MONOLINGUISTS freeze.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

Every time
I hear this statement
this implied
condescension
that deems my speech
adequate
BUT //
Unacceptable

*All MONOLINGUISTS unfreeze and restart their
dialogue. A MONOLINGUIST is the only one to get
closer to ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER in what seems a
consoling manner.*

MONOLINGUISTS
But your English—.

*ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER doesn't hesitate—
they do not allow an interruption. Instead, they
continue their dialogue:*

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

... from monolingualists
who have not
the ear or will

to understand sounds other than their own,
yet who are quick to compensate
their ignorance
with backhanded compliments

*ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER cues in all
MONOLINGUISTS, mocking them as they speak:*

MONOLINGUISTS

But your English is so good!

*ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER cues out all
MONOLINGUISTS. They freeze.*

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER
(swears in a non-English language of their choosing)

FUCK!

(in English)

Sometimes I hear this statement
and I swear—.

Beat.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

What is worse
than hearing it
is that
Sometimes
I actually listen

“But your English is so good . . .”

and I believe
my accent
to be a noise
that cancels my voice.

And I swear
to never speak again,
And take a vow of silence.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER is silent for 10 seconds.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER
But my English is so good!

MONOLINGUISTS
But your English is so good!

MONOLINGUISTS envelop ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER in a dance. They speak in place of MONOLINGUIST, interchangeably.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER joins in, slowly.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER
(to a random MONOLINGUIST)
Do you really think so?

ADDRESSED MONOLINGUIST
It is.

A MONOLINGUIST
(with a so-so gesture)
Good good.

A DIFFERENT MONOLINGUIST
So good!

ANOTHER MONOLINGUIST
Your English is so good!

MONOLINGUIST
So good!

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER
Good? My English?

ANOTHER MONOLINGUIST
Soooooooooo
gooooooooood!

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER
Good?

MONOLINGUIST

Good.

MONOLINGUIST
(pronounces slowly)

GOOD.

MONOLINGUISTS
(spell it out)

GOOD.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

Other times—.

MONOLINGUIST
(pronounces slowly)

YOUR.

MONOLINGUISTS
(spell it out)

YOUR.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

When I hear this statement—.

MONOLINGUIST
(pronounces slowly)

ENGLISH.

MONOLINGUISTS
(spell it out)

ENGLISH.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

I do entertain—.

MONOLINGUIST
(pronounces slowly)

SO.

MONOLINGUISTS
(spell it out)

SO.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

Its false validation.

MONOLINGUIST
(pronounces slowly)

GOOD.

MONOLINGUISTS
(spell it out)

GOOD.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

Thank you!

MONOLINGUIST

It is

MONOLINGUIST
(pronounces slowly)

GOOD.

MONOLINGUISTS
(spell it out)

GOOD.

Thank you.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

ALL MONOLINGUISTS
(spell it out and/or pronounce slowly)

GOOD.

Other times—.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

ALL MONOLINGUISTS
(spell it out and/or pronounce slowly)

GOOD.

I am too tired.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

Too tired
to play dumb
or to pretend
to be flattered

ALL MONOLINGUISTS
*(spell it out and/or
pronounce slowly; they
repeat as needed)*

GOOD.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

too tired to speak
and not be listened to

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

Too tired
to be
good.

ALL MONOLINGUISTS
*(pronounce slowly; they
repeat as needed)*

GOOD.

All characters reset to their starting positions and actions by the end of the word “good.”

The conversation between ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER and MONOLINGUIST continues from

where it stopped:

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

GOOD.

UGH.

Wow.

Thank you.

Your English is pretty good, too!
How are you so good?

END SCENE.

College Poetry

FIRST PLACE

the fancy media company uses the word “slave” to describe machines controlled by the master computer

Joss Green

my school bus used to drive past a youth prison every morning. i would sit in the window seat directly behind the driver and wait for Western and Lake where i searched for the bodies of the imprisoned boys pressed against the glass. i would count each face, memorizing them, so i could draw them to mind as i prayed at the dinner table that night. i spent 3 years of high school, studying the faces of the boys, learning the beauty in each one. now, my best friend makes theatre in the concrete building on the corner of Western and Lake where some of the boys spent my entire high school career. Every time i see one of her shows, the boys feed us cookies that some 14 year old's made us for 60 cents an hour. each of their faces starts to glow when i thank them. every single one of them could have had a future just like mine, one that involved a fancy university that can afford media servers just like this one. the boys, they all look at me like i'm a pipe dream, they look at all the visitors in that same misty way. like we could just up and disappear and they wouldn't be surprised. every single boy in that place is loved and deserves to be shown that love loudly. i sit in this classroom full of white people and they casually throw around the word “slave” like i haven't had that word etched into my brain like some sort of sick branding. i am everywhere but in my seat, anything but focused. i try to remember the faces of the boys that i would memorize 5 years ago, baptize them all “wanted,” give them the space to be whatever they desire, to roam wherever they want to roam, even if it's only in my brain. my white classmates have never known slavery. they have never looked it in the face and known that they are lucky to not be in the concrete facility, right along with boys who look just like you. these white people will never understand just how inherent this type of survivor's guilt is. i've spent my whole life regretting my own freedom.

Quality Inn

Isabel Yoon

The cheapest hotel
in this landlocked
town had such
small
elevators.

Mom and I
우리운전사착했지?
were soft-spoken.
엄마오늘너무재밌었어.
Our whispers
cramped
방에서맛있는것먹자.
among the rumble
간식뭐있지?
and dings
of that
elevator.

//Speak English//

He looked down.
Pulled his hat lower.

Mom and I
could not look
at each other.

Shame is loud in silence.

Maybe one day I will forget
your hat, your voice.
But I cannot forget
my silence,
my naked black eyes
detached
in the hotel mirror
that night, the
yellow stain and
her mother, our bloodied
tongues cut silent
in that suffocating
elevator.

Nehemiah

Cameron Monteith

The day I came out to my mom
she wept in her bedroom
with the door closed
loud and fierce into the night
and held her hands together
catching tears and clasping prayers

I kept my door open
but stayed in my bedroom
knowing who I am
but afraid to walk outside
even in my home

I sat on the wooden floor
my leather-bound Bible in my lap
finding the verses where being gay
was seen as a sin
and writing them in my notebook
and marking them in the Book
out of some spite against her
or my entire family
or some self-affirming sadism

my uncle says bitter things
about the “fruits” and “fags”
small things that cause everyone
to laugh
how my family all joke at the dinner table together
about being hit on by a homosexual
yelling about the accusations that they are one
while I sit silently in the corner

my grandfather
has disowned his sister
after being invited to her wedding
(her first marriage
after her divorce with her husband
and then rediscovery
finding that she loved women
and now loved herself)

this denial of not going to the wedding
happened a few years ago
my grandfather believing that
she doesn't know who she is
that anyone who is "gay"
is either confused or cursed
by the demons and the Devil

how would he think of his grandson
knowing that those glass words cut
along his skin

my pastor preaches fear Sunday morning
in the church with doors wide open
my mom whispering prayers
that only God and I can hear
of how I'm in denial
and can still be saved
or cured

the pastor
she spits into our eyes
and yells warnings
of the "gays"—of me
all too lustful to know any better
the poor fools
like rotting tangerines
who only exist
on back alleys and in barber shops
flamboyant and falsettoed
living their lives in sin

my mother prays for herself
eyes closed
my eyes closed Sundays too
muttering words to Him
on his day of rest

I ask Him to take away the guilt
to explain away the shame
to myself and my family
I ask for there to be pride in the pride community
to end the uproar without riots
the cries without tears
our parades another's block parties
gunfire and brimstone
another dead fag
another dead friend
I pray with heavy eyes
pleading to Him
if I could stop trying coats on
in the dark

I ask Him
and I hear in response
a silent pulse
this echo myself
and something else
some thing greater
something quiet
but still there
breathing ever still

This is my peace
with my God
sewing my own wounds
with needle and threaded verse

I was baptized outside a Rent-A-Center on Easter Sunday
My mother, My church singing psalms that day
And I sank into the tub
wearing only white
believing that God was there for me
for Us
soaking in the water
letting it fill my lungs

The morning after I had come out
my mom and I didn't recognize
what had occurred the night prior
But her door was closed
is still closed
her knees to the ground and back arched
head bent and words soft
her son in denial
destined for Hell

my door still lies open
my bare feet on the kitchen floor
and I say "Hello."

College Prose

To the boy who gropes me in seventh grade

Julia Hou

You only do it because you know. I have Styrofoam for lungs, packing peanuts—sound waves thud off the sides and fade away. Sometimes after class, I put my head in my arms, rest my forehead against the cool of the desk. When Ms. F— calls on me and asks me a question about the American Revolution, I stammer and she has to ask me to speak up. You snicker.

You do it because you see me bend over my notes. Because I turn red around boys and correct their grammar. Because my friend A— flirts with you, clumsily. Because I have a nice ass.

Because when I am about to graduate university, I will pass by a group of college boys, strangers, in the alleyway, on my way to class from my apartment in Pittsburgh. They will stand out, even before they notice me: a flock of consolation. “Why did she cheat on me?” “I dunno.” “Forget her.” “Koreans, man.” I will squeeze past, my hands buried in my pockets. “Should I go after her instead?” Loud, unafraid. They will laugh, a hungry dissonance.

You do it because I am in seventh grade, and unused to being a woman. You don’t even do anything bad. You only touch me, pinch my backside, your thick fingers eager. At first, I believe you brushed against me by accident. I shift in my chair, inching away, but your hand follows, a wild dog stalking prey.

That night, I analyze every second. The way your hand rested on the seat of my chair. The way you retreated when Ms. F— passed by. Shouldn’t I want to be touched? To be the center of someone’s attention? I expect flames and passion, a stirring, but there is only unease.

The next day, you surprise me by touching me again. I edge away so that half of me is hanging off the seat. Ms. F—’s voice fades into the background and all I remember of that class is the way you stared straight ahead, your other hand near the crotch of your sagging jeans.

You do it because in high school, my first boyfriend will be sweet and kind and entirely unlike you. When he touches me on the arm, there will be electricity, something closer to the fire I expect. Five months in, we will lie in my childhood bed in Queens, and he will slip his hand under my shirt. Immediately I will think of you, and go tense and silent, numb. He won’t notice. I won’t tell him.

You do it because I will go on dates where the thought of going back to my place sends a warning chill throughout my body. I will be fine with kisses—but wandering hands will stir up a cloud of panic. In college, with a boy in summer Berkeley, far from home, we will kiss in the dusty stairwell of an art museum. Instead of looking at the paintings, he will look at me, snake his arm around my waist and squeeze. I will want to rip him from my body. But there is no guarantee he would let me.

We won’t have chemistry, but at the museum exit he will eye me expectantly, like I owe him something for his time. And then we will be at his apartment, a dimly lit, endlessly messy college student apartment, and he will pull off my shorts, then his, his eyes dark and hungry, almost wild. I will push him away, say stop, stop please.

Miraculously, he will let go, allow me to dress and stumble out of the building, shaking and muttering apologies and wondering what the hell is wrong with me, until I am almost a block away.

You continue to do it, relentless. When we exchange pleasantries at the beginning of class, I am lulled into believing that you are human, that you will stop. But we sit, and in the span of 10 minutes your hand finds its way to my seat, your leg inching closer and closer every time. Soon your knee is rubbing against mine, black denim bleeding into blue.

You know I won't say anything. You know there's no consequence. You know that despite everything that happens, in high school, you're going to have a Chinese girlfriend. S— is from Elmhurst, a friend of a friend. In Queens, we all know each other. In hushed whispers we will wonder if she knows what you did in middle school, if we should tell her. But it will feel so long ago, and you will be popular—a football player with enough charisma and drugs to last you years with your friends. You know I wouldn't dare.

You know that one day, I will interact, all the time, with men eager to bond with me—Uber drivers and strangers on the street who will greet me with “*ni hao*,” then launch into stories about their Chinese girlfriends and ex-girlfriends. They will pull out their phones and show me pictures of young, polished Asian women, their skin paler than mine, their eyes bigger. And I will smile, polite and docile, and laugh, because I don't know what else to do, because I don't know what they want from me.

You do it because for me, it is shameful, and for you it is something to boast about. You do it because you know I am afraid to tell anyone—my friends, my parents, my teachers. Because who would believe me? Who has the power to make you go away without trouble? Because you, right now, you are quiet and easily hidden, and to disturb the status quo is to make trouble, to stand up in front of everyone I know and expose my shame.

You do it because you know, years later, I will still think about you and remember you, though surely you will have long forgotten about me. In crowds that are mostly men, I will pretend to be washed and clean, smart and confident. Alone, I will wonder if I am where I am merely because the men wanted a woman around. If Asian was a safe choice for them.

But then again, maybe you don't know. You don't know. You do it because you're bored, tired of class. You think you're doing me a favor, as the first boy who will ever touch me like that. You have nothing to lose. You do it because you're in seventh grade, horny, seated next to a nice, quiet girl, and really, why not?

Reservations Optional

Serena Gillian

My family and I have one Italian restaurant that we absolutely adore called Vaso's. The waitstaff knows us and our orders even to the point where they decide themselves whether or not it's worth telling us what the specials are. My father, who always orders the same stuffed veal special, only has to ask, "So, ya'll got it tonight?" and every waiter knows exactly what he's talking about.

Owned by Greek immigrants and staffed by people from all different parts of Latin America, the restaurant feels like a representative slice of life in today's United States. The place is tiny, housed in what used to be an old BBQ shack. As part of my hometown's historical buildings initiative, the owners of the restaurant were required to leave the old Dixie Bones neon sign up. The sign is not only misleading but also reminds those who visit of this town's past. Typically, as you go farther north in Virginia, the visuals of Confederate flags, Robert E. Lee statues, and other relics of "Southern Pride" begin to dissipate. However, in the historic city of Alexandria, these things still stand, protected by the people's dedication to "keep history alive."

At Vaso's, it is absolutely required that you make a reservation. When you walk inside, there are just five small booths lined up against the right wall and a smattering of café-like tables to the left with a small, square bar in the back corner where the alcohol, register, utensils, and everything else not housed in the kitchen lives. Due to its popularity and miniscule capacity, our family has always called the restaurant and reserved a table at least three days in advance of when we planned on eating there. This ceremony made the dinner something that we all looked forward to after the call was placed.

The last time we went to Vaso's was to celebrate a number of noteworthy updates. My brother had gotten into the college of his dreams, I had gotten into grad school, and it was right around my mother's and my aunt's birthdays. Unfortunately, my father was working a late shift at the hospital that night and couldn't join us. Although his absence was felt for a number of reasons I'll get into later, this was a dinner we were all excited for. For days we'd been dreaming about heaping bowls of al dente spaghetti smothered in meat sauce and plates filled with pita, hummus, tzatziki, and olives.

Upon arriving, we found the restaurant was, as always, packed. A Hispanic man with spiky, gelled up hair and a big smile on his face made his way towards us. He'd been working there for years and had immediately recognized my family. After wiggling past other waiters and narrowly avoiding a collision with a busboy, he made it to where we were standing. Immediately noticing that the tall white guy who usually accompanied us was absent, he asked, "Where's Dad?" We chuckled and told him he was working late. He gave a sympathetic shrug then told us that he'd have us seated as soon as one of the booths cleared out, pointing to one right over his shoulder. So, we awkwardly stood in the doorway, trying not to look right at the table we were promised and staying out of the way of patrons and waitstaff.

After about 15 minutes, the family at our table started getting up and the staff swooped in to start cleaning. Just as the busboy moved away from the booth to take his first bucket of dishes away, a group of four older men and women came through the

door behind us. Dressed to the nines in crisp polos, sweaters, and khakis, they walked in as if they owned the place. Practically running us over, they pushed their way into the restaurant. Without stopping, they gave our brown family a once over, pushed past us, and all sat down at the not yet cleared table. The spiky haired waiter looked at the table, gave us a quizzical look, then walked over to the group of people who had since made themselves quite comfortable.

Due to the hubbub in the restaurant, we couldn't hear what was being said but only saw fingers pointed at the waiter and heads being shook. The waiter, looking wounded, walked back to us and told us that the group that had taken our table refused to get up, even once informed that the table belonged to us. A little frustrated, but wanting to take the higher ground, we said it was all ok and thanked the waiter for confronting the patrons in the first place.

We were eventually seated in another booth and, feeling humiliated, spent our dinner trying to fathom why this group of people felt that they were entitled to whatever they wanted. One theory came up again and again as we sat picking at the food we had initially planned on demolishing, "Is it because Dad isn't with us?" My meat sauce congealed and grew cold as we tried to express the injustice we felt to one another. My mother who had become accustomed to such treatment after decades of maltreatment from my father's white, Southern parents, told us we should just brush it off and enjoy our meals. My aunt, whose fury was only being contained for our sakes, spoke in a harsh whisper. "Why did they deserve to sit wherever they wanted?" "Why didn't they need reservations?" "Why did they feel that they could tell an employee that the rules of his establishment were meaningless?" "Do they do this at every restaurant they attend?" We were all beginning to think not.

The waiter cleared our dinner plates and asked if we'd like to see the dessert menu. What would have typically been a resounding yes became a murmured "No, we're too full." My mother quickly paid the bill and we made our way for the door. Hearing insanely loud laughter, I looked over my shoulder. The group that had taken our table was guffawing, throwing their heads back without a care in the world, surrounded by at least two empty wine glasses each. Frustrated, I turned around and walked out the door with my family.

It was dark outside now, and, looking down at the black pavement, I could see the neon reflection of the Dixie Bones BBQ sign overhead. What once felt like just a chubby pig humorously misplaced over an Italian restaurant now felt more oppressing and foreign than ever. It was no longer an amusing relic, but an active symbol. It reminded me where I was and what some people who lived here saw me as. In the town I grew up in, I was not welcomed or respected by all. My presence and my interests were only validated if my white father was by my side. Even in spaces like Vaso's, made possible by the beautiful diversity of this country, white people still held the power.

UPMC
LIFE CHANGING MEDICINE

cohen &
grigsby®

 hachette
BOOK GROUP

CHAMP  TIRES