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Three Poems

by Tamer Mostafa

Apology to My Parents

I.

Father,
the Arabs say i am not complete,
that your brown blood
in my body is polluted
by mother's white and my
colored eyes are of the devil.

Father,
i lived cheap by searching
for ads that said "50 percent off" or more
and buying only used goods,
but always got hustled
when i had to turn a profit.

Father,
i found the limited selection
of halal meat, cooked it
until it was tender,
but the spice level proportion
always threw it off.

Father,
i tried speaking
your native language
even though i paused momentarily,
stumbled over the deep glottal stops
and "kh" consonant.

Father,
i prayed five times a day
in a mixture
of confinement and congregation
to ward off extra evils
of unstableness and split personality
that only seemed to burden mixed breeds.

Editor's Note

Guidelines

Contact

Father,
i am your son
and carry your full name
behind the first name you gave me at birth
just as tradition orders,
but i am never worthy of the full association.

II.

Mother,
the whites think too little of me.
They say your pale skin is not enough
to overpower Dad's broad nose,
deep voice, and rages
you think only Egyptian men have.

Mother,
your kin wants me to sell out,
make loads of money in some
industrial oil company overseas
or work on Wall Street so I could know
what it feels like to sit in a Mercedes.

Mother,
I ate like a good ole American boy.
Burgers, fries, and hot dogs.
Even a pepperoni spiked pizza
that I threw up when you
pressured me to eat it.

Mother,
I was pushed to only speak English
as a means of distinguishing
myself from the evil kind
screaming on the television
with bombs and assault weapons.

Mother,
the majority of this country
wants me in hell
and your family says they will see me there
on their ascent to heaven
because they love Jesus
and know how to properly worship a God.

Mother,
I am your son
and carried your maiden name
as my middle until I had it legally changed
to match father and his tradition
because there are limits I'm tired of crossing.

Catch and Release

At dawn, a fisherman sits at the bank
of a river with his box of supplies.
It's chilly, but not enough to halt
his precision as he loops the end of the line
to the bobber and folds the worm into
the jagged end of the hook.

Under the fog, he casts over the shoulder
and once the bobber hits the water,
he sits on a lawn chair drinking a hot coffee.

While looking at the trees shaped like
erect missiles on the opposite bank
and hearing the day's first stages of traffic,
he can feel the difference between a real bite
and the current underneath the surface that nudges
the line from left to right and vice versa.

When a bite does arrive,
the man leaps off the chair and alternates
between jerking and reeling the pole. He readies
the net, knowing it's going to be a big one.

After netting the catch,
he sticks his middle finger into one of the gills
and uses the other hand to free the hook
with a pair of pliers.

It's heavy and his arm starts to shake
at holding it vertically for an extended period of time.
It can feed him well, he can use every piece
from grilled fillets to fish head soup.

With his free, bare hand that smells of
night crawlers and Old Spice, he rubs the soft belly
and fixates on the area below the mouth
filled with various spots of scar tissue
next to the vacant hole he pulled his hook out of.

When he's done marveling
or when the fish's body stops twitching,
whichever comes first, he shifts it horizontally,
slides it under the surface and watches it disappear
into the fresh fusion of mud and water.

Fugue State

You come from cowering under a car
to a sleepless wander
on the streets alone at night.

The buildings have collapsed,
their foundations stripped of material
and most businesses are unrecognizable.

Nearly all bodies of water have been
dried up to the catfish skeletons stuck
in whatever mud is left.

There is nobody to go to for help,
nobody to answer the other end of the line
when you lift the payphone.

It is cold and you are
shivering in seizure without
the proper clothing to protect against
the dirt filled wind that secretes your skin.

You don't know your name.
It is not stitched on your shirt or printed
on any form of identification,
but there is your body spotted in scar markings.

You need to get checked out by a doctor
but the hospital near the city limits
has automatic sliding doors

that are stuck and click from the inside.

Through the dust bubbles and streaks
you see your full reflection standing
in a pile of scrunched Autumn leaves
and old newspapers
that should keep you warm
until somebody arrives.

Tamer Mostafa is a Stockton, California native and an alumni of the Creative Writing Program at CSU Sacramento where he studied under Joshua McKinney and Peter Grandbois. His work is defined by themes of loss, urban relations, biracialism, and flawed family dynamics. He currently lives in Sacramento with his wife and cat

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