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3 poems

Azya Nicole Lyons

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3 POEMS

Azya Nicole Lyons

Penny Wise

There is a certain intimacy between
the predator and the prey.
The hunter and the hunted.
Can you feel it? I can.

I can hear your labored panting,
even though you try to mask it.
The sound of a cornered dog.
Does that make me the dog catcher?
I didn't catch you, did I?
No.
You fell into my lap, with your need
for validation and a cure for the lack thereof.

I know I scare you.
The fear my presence gives you has
steeled every muscle in your body,
save your lungs.
Your delicious fear; tasty, tasty terror.
Really, a treat.
You shouldn't have.
Oh, but you will.

I'm getting tired of this game, Billy.
Georgie didn't give me this much of a
hassle. Georgie wasn't a hassle at all.
Billy, don't you miss Georgie?
Don't you want to see him?
I can take you to him.

Do you want to float, Billy?
Georgie floats.
Don't you miss Georgie?
I'll take you there and
you'll float too.

Biloxi Mississippi

May 31, 2003.

Biloxi Regional.
There you are.
Sweet little baby.
Brand new, innocent,
naive to the troubles
of childhood, adulthood,
and everything in between.

There is your mother,
her exhaustion almost palpable.
She looks at you and smiles,
her eyes too tired to crinkle at
the edges. The huffing holding her
chest hostage is an homage to
you, to your life, to your breath.
Through her labored inhales,
she cries. And so do you.

Cry, little baby.
Let her know how cold you are.
She'll hold you closer.
Let her know you're hungry.
She'll feed you.
Let her know you love her.

And she'll love you too.

The Ballad of Black Folks

With a line adapted from Dante's *Inferno*

You pledge allegiance to the flag of a nation
that turned a blind eye
when three white officers
shot and killed
a black EMT
during an unwarranted raid
as she slept.

You pledge allegiance to the flag of a nation
that actively ignores
black men
when their last words
are muffled
by cotton-covered knees and cop-coms.

You pledge allegiance to the flag of a nation
that refuses
to acknowledge
the fact that young black men
are being ripped from their homes
stripped and strung
in trees like lanterns.

You pledge allegiance to the flag of a nation
where jogging is a death wish
where going home is a death wish
where driving is a death wish

where waking up in the morning and leaving
your home is a death wish.

You pledge allegiance to the flag of a nation
where liberty and justice
are only given to those
that look nothing like me
and call it patriotism.

How unpatriotic of me to want nothing to do with it.

Need I remind you that the white men who
fought for your freedom came adorned with a pointy white hat?

Or that the only reason white people care so much
about The Holocaust is because they saw the victims
every time they looked in the mirror?

Or that Mr. Lincoln only broke those chains of bondage
because he wanted to protect his caucasian counterparts?

But you didn't learn about that in school, did you?
You didn't know that the police force was originally called "slave patrol".
You didn't know that the incarceration system was established the year
black people were liberated by the Emancipation Proclamation. You didn't know
that the 13th Amendment wasn't ratified in MS until 2013. Did you?

You see, your education was drenched in bleach,
fading the colored to white and forgiving the sins of your heroes.
But their transgressions are not yours to waive.
They committed crimes against those of us that have the sun
stitched in our skin. They pillaged, raped, and left
us to build a country on our broken hide.

I have forgotten what it is like to not hate
the nation from which I hail.
I have forgotten what it feels like to look at the flag with pride.
Because when you say America, you think home of the free
land of the brave.

But to me, America is a holding cell.
America is a traffic stop gone wrong.
America is unwarranted raids, broken oaths,
and legalized slavery.
America is racism materialized.
It's freedom for fascists,
it's *abandon all faith ye who enter here*.

So, forgive me if I refuse to respect the flag of a nation that refuses to respect me.

AZYA LYONS is a senior at Mississippi School of the Arts. Her play "Togetha" will be produced by ENOUGH: Plays To End Gun Violence this December. Her poem "Why I Live at the P.O" won an honorable mention in the 2019 Ephemera Prize. She likes watching Netflix, sleeping, and clowning her friends.