

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Vainavi Kumar: Two Poems

Vainavi Kumar · Monday, August 12th, 2024

Soulmates

I am on my parents' bed because it is large and comfortable and my homework is swallowing me. My ears are swollen with a random playlist because my parents have been fighting for hours. Their fights consist of my mother screaming and crying and my father drowning in his eyebags and rubbing his face. It is hot and sunny outside which confuses me because watching your parents shatter should happen in a storm, a horrible hurricane where everyone dies. Maybe they would stop fighting then. But I know that they are stuck like this, that they will circle each other into death, that their pride will prevent divorce, that they will stab each other until blood oozes into the cracks of the floor and stains my palms. They have wandered into their room. My dad is attempting to seek refuge from the beautiful woman in pain who is following him, from the woman who is supposed to be the love of his life, but is instead the woman his parents matched him with. He has locked the bathroom door. My mother is pounding on the door, threatening to break it down, and it is so hot, I think the door might melt by itself. I laugh, thinking of my dad, exposed behind a pile of melted wood, with no more rooms to lock himself into. My mother threatens to move to India and leave us all behind. A second later, she threatens to kill herself. My father doesn't speak. My mother has slumped on the ground with her back against the door. Her face is wet with tears and sweat, and I can imagine my father slumped with his back against the door right next to my mother. My beautiful parents, slumped and hot and in pain because their life was never theirs. My music is loud and I am sweating. The sheets are touching me too much so I stand up and let the air run over me. My mother is sobbing and sobbing. I used to attempt to comfort her, but she pushed me away and looked at me with black eyes and I knew that I was the problem. I was the first child who trapped her at 22, who stopped her from using her master's degree and from leaving my father. My father will never open the door. I know this because he has never been one to admit he was wrong. He would rather suffocate to death in this smothering heat and thin air and drown in his own sweat. I walk downstairs and grab the random thin metal rod we keep in our junk drawer. I give it to my mother, who has stopped crying. She has begun to hate herself instead of him. She uses the metal rod to pick the lock on the bathroom door. It swings open and there is my father. There is my father with his face in his hands, with tears running down his face. I am taken aback because I have never seen my father cry. Not even when his sister was in a motorcycle accident and now she is not the same. Not even when his best friend died. He is only crying now, in the blinding heat and smothering light, with my mother looking at him with sad eyes.

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Anbu

It is cold and I have been freezing for years. I have come to the swings to watch them waver in the wind, so I can feel comforted by the rhythmic squeak, so I can close my eyes and hear myself laugh and feel hands pushing me. But the swings aren't empty today and I can see kids, bundled in puffers so they have no chance of getting hurt. I imagine them falling and bouncing on the ground, like an arcade ball, soaring into the air. Maybe they can kiss the crows. I can hear the children laughing and it hurts a bit. It hurts to see the dad chasing them in the park, grabbing them and lifting them in the air. It hurts to hear them squeal, pretending their dad is a monster but knowing that they love him. I pretend too. My own dad has become a solid ghost in the corner of my room, bundled in black and gray scarves. He growls at dinner and we all eat in silence to spare his fragile eardrums. He seems to forget his own fragility in his fury. He goes to work and works and comes home and works. He works so I can be here writing about my dissatisfaction with him, and I can hear him reading my words. I had to write who my hero was, and I couldn't say my mom because she is too sad, and I couldn't say my dad because I would never want to be like him.

I can imagine him being young sometimes. I remember him catching me by the arms, me flipping in his grasp. I can remember running to him when my mother forced me to shower, him soothing my irrational fears. I think of my father young, flying here with no wings, somehow drifting in a direction that could still be wrong. I imagine my mother's life if her father had chosen someone other than my father to marry. Maybe she would smile more, or even laugh. Maybe I wouldn't exist.

The swings are empty now. The father has wrapped his children in his love and placed bows on their heads. He has tucked them safely in his pocket. He is in his car, and I can feel him panic. His children are weighing him down. His pockets are heavy, and now he is wondering whether he is too young, whether he should have traveled to Austria first, whether that girl in high school was the one, whether he has cursed his children to living with a bad father, to always being silent at dinner, to writing about their dissatisfaction with him. His children are squealing in his pocket but somehow he doesn't hear it because all he can feel is himself, and now he is worried his children are too heavy.

The children worry too. They can feel themselves sinking too deep.

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