



“Only Half” by Bella Cintron (published in BIPOC Voices and Perspectives Monologue Resource)

Character: BIPOC Identifying/Female Identifying

Description: a teen yelling at their mom because they don't want to have a Quinceañera.

No. I don't want it. No. Stop acting like you understand. The difference between me and you is you don't have to fit. Or even, slightly try. The color of your skin is enough. Since the day I was born I have never fit. Do you know how it feels to have kids asking you if you speak Spanish all the time? Or people at Mexican restaurants asking me to order in Spanish, or to translate for them? I'm like, here, but in some, weird, non-existent way where people only see me by half of what I am. A white biological mom. A Latino dad. Two white adoptive parents. So, what does that make me? Forever it's felt like I've had to pick and choose how to act, or speak, or even feel around certain people.

I love you guys, but you will never understand the feeling of having to pick and choose your way around life. For the past 15 years I've completely ignored half of myself. So why bring it up now. No. Let me finish. I do not want a Quinceañera, mom. I don't care about the stupid dances or dress. Half. Half. That is the problem. Don't you see? Please see for one second. You tell me I could easily blend in anywhere. But trust me, I've tried. Do you really think this stupid celebration will make everyone like me, or stop defining me by that stupid half? Do people really think I don't see them stare when I'm with you? They look at me like I'm some exotic animal. It's like everyone else is in a black and white painting and I'm that one face that's neon so I have to stand out. I'm sick of being the only kid at school that looks like me.

I'm sick of this stupid small town of people who yell at Spanish speakers, of old ladies who try to touch my hair, and desperately need to know if I'm adopted. I'm sick of being that girl who doesn't know her parents. That girl who doesn't look like anyone but still “acts white”. My life is like one big repeat of “How should Carmen identify today?” I feel like I'm playing a part and twisting my identity every day. I just don't even want to make a big deal out of it anymore. So, no. To answer your question. I don't want a Quinceañera.

“Scars” by Cassie F (published in dramanotebook.com)

Character: Gender Neutral

Description: A young person with a skin condition acknowledges all their scars and learns to embrace them.

The first time I remember being “physically hurt” I was probably 7 or 8, and I was on a bicycle. My sister left her scooter on the road, and I went crashing into it. All I saw was a blur of the ground, and then the sky, then the ground, and then sky again. My mom screamed and came running to help me. When I realized what had happened, I was bleeding from my arms, knees, knuckles...pretty much any exposed skin that you can imagine. I have scars from that one. The second time I remember being hurt is when I was maybe 9 or so. I was so dumb. I tried diving headfirst into a pool that was 4 feet deep. Yeah, you can probably imagine how well that went. I hit the top of my forehead. It took about a roll of paper towels to clear away the blood...and tears if I’m being honest. Those scars never really affected me. I never thought twice about it when kids at school would ask how I got them.

But when it comes to my skin condition, those, those get to me. I have blotches on my arms and the backs of my knees that I can’t get rid of no matter what. They won’t tan, and no lotion or potion will erase them. They just exist. I’ve had them for as long as I can remember, and I have no clue why God chose me to have them. But, that’s just how it turned out. Most days they make me feel disgusting and ugly. When people see the scars or the blotches, I freeze. I’m worried they’ll think horrible things about me.

But those splotches and blotches are a part of me. All my scratches, scrapes, and slices are. All my scars are. And in a way, I love them. They show where I’ve been, but also give me hope for where I’m going. They show how I’ve been hurt, but also how I’ve healed. I guess I love them. My scars are beautiful.

My Identity” by Rachel Wyatt (published in BIPOC Voices and Perspectives Monologue Resource)

Character: Indigenous Identifying/Female Identifying

Description: Talking about her Indigenous identity

I come from a long line of powerful women. I know so much about them, because it was very important to my mother that I know who and where I came from. One thing I wish I knew more about was my indigenous roots. I find myself reaching out to find myself but I don't even know where to start. I've gone to powwows, and done so much research, but there's still so much I'm missing. I don't know where I fit in all this.

One thing I've always admired about indigenous culture is how accepting they are. I emulate that in my everyday life, trying to make connections where I can. Through lots of workshops and studies done in classes I know lots about my own history that I otherwise wouldn't have even thought about.

No, I don't live on reservations, or have any sort of regalia, but one thing I do know and feel confident in is how I smudge. I find it brings me peace in this crazy storm of life, and when I do it, I feel a connection unlike anything I've ever felt, almost beyond explanation. I know someone is watching over me. I feel connected to myself and what's beyond that. My mother is the most important woman in my life. She has taught me so much about where I've come from. Everything I am, I owe to her. She makes me myself, and makes me Metis.

I know lots about indigenous culture. All together, my knowledge is just fractions, scattered into different places. What I want, what I need, is to know where I fit in. I know I'm Metis, but I can't see beyond that. I want my kids to grow up knowing more than I do about their culture, and this beautiful thing we've been gifted into. That's what it is. Beautiful. The family that it provides, the security and acceptance it brings, and the way they value each and every person in their community. It's beautiful. It's so much more than that. It's home.

“Focus” by Elise H. (published in dramanotebook.com)

Character: Gender Neutral

Description: A student with ADHD talks to their teacher about their struggles with learning

Thanks for talking about this with me Mrs. G. I know I’m struggling with focus. I’m sure you’ve heard about it from my previous teachers too. Every year, in at least one of my classes, I feel like I’m the “troublemaker.” I’m not trying to disrespect anyone or break any big classroom rules, I just can’t focus. A big distraction for me is drawing. I draw a lot. I’ll just be sitting there in class, and my brain will start creating a story, and I’ll feel like I have to draw the characters. I know I shouldn’t doodle, and I know I’m missing the lesson, but I just can’t help it. I think you should know that about three years ago I was diagnosed with ADHD. I wasn’t surprised. I kinda knew I had it all along. I figured it out when the teachers started pulling me aside and making special charts for me to help me finish my work. I eventually got medicine for it. Sixth grade, the very first year I took the medicine, was the best year of school I’ve ever had. But it went downhill in seventh grade. For some reason, the medicine just didn’t work anymore. Maybe it was the medicine, maybe it was me, but the seventh grade was worse for me than fifth grade when I didn’t have the medicine. They kept increasing the dose, but it just felt the same. I had been placed in all the advanced classes too. Everyone was so better than me at everything. I felt out of place. That’s why I was almost relieved when I was placed in regular math classes this year. I have no problem being average. In fact, that’s my dream goal. To just be an average kid. Instead, I stick out like a sore thumb. Sometimes I feel like the only one in the whole class who has problems with learning. Honestly, I’m starting to develop insecurities. It’s easy to think that everyone’s always watching you when sometimes, everyone is. Like when the teacher announces to the whole class that you got a frowny face on your chart for the day. Or when the teacher reads your hall pass out loud and your whole class knows you spent half of the period in the guidance counselor’s office. People start to ask you questions, like “Why do you have a chart?” and “Why were you in the guidance counselor’s office?” And they don’t say it, but you know they’re thinking “Is something wrong with her?”.

“Sometimes I Dream In Chinese” by Betty Quan (excerpt from *Mother Tongue*)

Character: Asian Identifying/Gender Neutral

Description: Recounting a significant dream involving the disappearance of their father

Sometimes when I dream, I dream in Chinese. Not the pidgin Chinese I’ve developed but the fluent, flowing language my father used to coo as he walked with me, hand in hand.

There is this one dream. I am walking with my father in the alleyway behind our house. I am seven years old. This is just before my father... before... My father and I are holding hands. In perfect Cantonese we talk about the snow peas in the garden that are ready for picking. Father doesn’t know it, but for the past week I’ve been hiding amongst the staked vines, in the green light, gorging on snow peas until there can’t be any more left. I’m about to tell him this – air my confession – when we come across a large kitchen table propped against the side of the garage. “A race, my little jingwei” my father says. “I’ll go through the tunnel and we’ll see which way is faster. One, two, three, GO!” We run; him in the tunnel, me on the gravel.

I finish first and wait, expecting to meet him and rejoin hands.

But he doesn’t come out of the shadows.

My extended hand is empty.

I wait and wait and wait. I start screaming, (in Chinese) “Father! Father! Come back! Please come back! Father!”

(in English) And then, I wake up.

“I’m Nothing” by Lorraine Hansberry (excerpt from *A Raisin In The Sun*)

Character: BIPOC Identifying/Gender Neutral

Description: A young African-American person struggles with their disillusionment

Me? ... Me? ... Me, I’m nothing... Me. When I was very small...we used to take our sleds out in the wintertime and the only hills we had were the ice-covered stone steps of some houses down the street. And we used to fill them in with snow and make them smooth and slide down them all day... and it was very dangerous you know... far too steep... and sure enough one day a kid named Rufus came down too fast and hit the sidewalk... and we saw his face just split open right there in front of us... And I remember standing there looking at his bloody open face thinking that was the end of Rufus. But the ambulance came and they took him to the hospital and they fixed the broken bones and they sewed it all up... and the next time I saw Rufus he just had a little line down the middle of his face... I never got over that... That was what one person could do for another, fix him up— sew up the problem, make him all right again.

That was the most marvelous thing in the world... I wanted to do that. I always thought it was the one concrete thing in the world that human being could do. Fix up the sick, you know—and make them whole again. This was truly being God... I wanted to cure. It used to be so important to me. I wanted to cure. It used to matter. I used to care. I mean about people and how their bodies hurt... I mean this thing of sewing up bodies or administering drugs. Don’t you understand? It was a child’s reaction to the world. I thought that doctors had the secret to all the hurts... That’s the way a child sees things—or an idealist.

“Okay, Cellphone” by Leon Aureus (excerpt from *Banana Boys*)

Character: Asian Identifying/Male Identifying

Description: Anxious for their phone to ring and hear from the girl they met

Okay, cell phone, me and you need to talk. We’ve been through a lot together. The last 6 months here have been... marginal. I’ve given your number to a few people, and so far, no one calls you but The Boys back home. This sucks for both of us. I mean, we came to Ottawa to find someone. To end The Quest. Twenty-four years old, and I still hadn’t had a serious girlfriend. Or any sort of girlfriend. I almost had you disconnected. *(pause)* Don’t look at me like that; I didn’t go through with it. And do you know why? Because the day we stopped looking... was the day we met Her. I went twenty minutes out of my way, in minus-thirty-degree weather, to walk Her home, breaking the ice in front of Her with my CSA approved boots so She wouldn’t slip and fall. She’s wonderful. *(He beams.)* I gave Her your number, and She said She’d call. So... cell phone, if ever you were going to ring, if ever you were going to make that special connection... let it be now. You’re fully charged. We’re sitting in the bathtub where you get the best reception. So... ring. *(It doesn’t ring.)* C’mon. Please? *(nothing)* She’s really special. She’s got these beautiful eyes, and really great hair, and... I’m prattling, but... the way She –

The phone rings. SHEL is startled, then fumbles the phone and picks it up.

Hello? *(pause)* Kathy! Hi! *(pause)* No, I’m not busy, just... waiting... for you. *(pause)* Oh man, that sounds lame, doesn’t it? I didn’t... uh... *(pause)* Really? Well, I think you’re sweet too...

I, CLAUDIA by Kristen Thomson

Character: Gender Neutral

Description: Finding refuge in the basement of their school

Some kids are mad when they're teenagers, right? Like in movies and at school lots of kids hate their dads. For different reasons at different times. Some kids hate their dads 'cause they want to shoot speed into their arms! Dads don't let them. Dads try to stop them. They say "I'm shooting speed into my arm and you can't stop me!" And that's 'cause they're into speed.

But I would never do that 'cause I don't hate my dad. My dad is my best friend and I get to see him every week! It starts Monday after school at 3:45. I wait for him in the park across the street from school and he is never late like other kids' parents and we do something totally bohemian together like go bowling or for pizza. And I have to say, it is the best moment of my entire life because there's so much to talk about and we're both hi-larious. Like every time I say, "I'm thirsty," he says, "I'm Friday," which is just something between us, like father-daughter. And then we go down to his apartment which is a downtown condo where I have my own room with a name plate on the door that says "Albert" for a joke and so I say to him, I say, "al- BERT"—and I have lots of posters, no pets, and I do homework and we just hang out and then I go to sleep. And when I wake up on Tuesday morning it is the worst day of my entire life because it's the beginning of the whole next week of not seeing him. So I come down here on Tuesday morning before class to get control of myself.

But Tuesday is also sophisticated because my Dad leaves for work before me so I get about twenty minutes in the apartment all by myself, which is a very special time for me which I think of as my teen time. Like, I drink juice but I drink it out of a coffee mug. I look out over the vast cityscape and listen to the top music of my time...

“Seams” by Ray Kathryn Morgen (published in nonbinarymonologues.wordpress.com)

Character: Non-binary Identifying/Gender Neutral

Description: In their studio seam-ripping a thrifted dress shirt

I buy these old clothes from thrift stores. Sometimes I dive them from dumpsters. I don't know how I choose them. It's more like they choose me. They have a certain sparkle, seem to vibrate with a secret energy that others don't. They show me what they want to become, usually we discover it together: a cocktail dress, a blazer—usually something formal, sometimes something to relax in, a mumu, or party in. Some garments speak to me and tell me “I've always wanted to twirl on the dance floor on the body of a ballroom dancer.” Others are more introverted and ask me to discover their identities. I've learned—over and over—things are rarely as they seem. There's a greater purpose than the eye can perceive, they are greater than what they are seen as.

I grew up sensing that in myself, came to know it in myself and later in fabric and thread. I've learned to sense it in other people, too... but not you. I never could. I still can't. I remember when I was five or six, watching you get ready to go out. You were a stunning, radiant woman. I remember the way your pearls sparkled with a magic iridescence that matched a gleam in your eye—like shoes to the perfect purse, or scarf. You had a secret energy about you. I wanted to be like you.

I don't want to be like you anymore. I just want to know you, who you are, who you were, who you wanted to be. I realized later that gleam was a deflection you used to distract people from what was inside of you—a hard, empty world you lived in. You didn't want the light to get in, you didn't want to be seen. You wanted to be invisible. You wanted to disappear. And now it seems you have.

“You do You” by Tatyana Miller (published in BIPOC Voices and Perspectives Monologue Resource)

Character: BIPOC Identifying/Gender Neutral

Description: Expresses how frustrating it can be to not be seen or heard and to be thought of as someone who matters less

So you want to know my perspective. You want to know what goes on in my mind. How? How will you know what's going on in my mind when there is so much tension because of diversity. We were created by one mind but we are still divided. We are not one. We are not whole. The unity in the world is divided, that one mind is divided into you, myself, and everyone else. I am less than one. You are less than one. They are less than one. Black, White, Hispanic, Indian, Pacific Islander, Asian. There are so many different people yet some people are blinded to the point where they can only see two. Colored or no color. These people can't stand the other.

Honestly I don't blame them, have your own opinion. You do you. We aren't perfect. It's fine. Until you start to become deaf and you act like you can't hear someone say they can't breathe. Or when you are so impatient to the point where you can't give someone time to answer a door. You don't want to hear do you? You don't want to see. You don't want to be patient. Some of you feel superior to the other. You do you. You have the right. You want me to tell you my life story. You want me to tell you about my mother, culture, community, what I eat on the weekend, what makes me unique, adversity. No. You do you. Leave me alone. Until you can take whatever you see, hear, whatever you have patience for, your perspective, and answer the one question no one can answer.

What makes you better than me?

I'll wait.

“Quinn: A Monologue...” by Asher Wyndham (published in nonbinarymonologues.wordpress.com)

Character: Non-binary/Gender fluid/Trans identifying

Description: Upset because they won't let them in to see their grandfather at the nursing home

Yeah, it's me, I'm back. Hellooo. I'm not waiting anymore in my car. I've eaten I don't know how many tangerines. Let me see my grandpa. Please. It's been almost an hour and I know he doesn't take this long to get ready in the morning. Have you sponge-bathed him? Is he dressed in his purple suit? Is he ready or not?! Why are you giving me the silent treatment, pretending that you're on the phone... Today is our day, you know that. It's the one day of the month he gets to see the sailboats and eat a BBQ-pork sandwich. He's leaving with me in five minutes, and I don't care if his dentures are yucky. Can you buzz me in? Stop buffin' with that emery board and press that button. Ahh! It's like Fort Knox here! Why, why are you looking at me like that? "Like whatttt?" If I had a mirror... Yeah, I got an attitude. You and everyone here at this Senior Citizen Home, you're..not pleasant. No, you're— I'm biting my tongue. *My pierced tongue.

Let me through. When I need to see my grandpa, you shouldn't make something up, like, "He's not ready." I know what you're up to. And I'm not being paranoid. Look, it's me, his grandkid. Yeah, yeah, I'm a bit different from the last time you saw me. Got some color. But I'm still his grandkid. He's seen me like this before. My mother showed him photos on his phone. He's from another generation, but he can handle it, unlike some people... For a Christian place, you lack hospitality! Ask yourself this, would Jesus buzz that buzzer? He would. He would get off that cross right above you, and he'd carry me like a baby to my grandpa's room. Ahh! I'm helping my mom pay for his residence! So buzz the [freaking] buzzer! Nowww!

“I Contain Multitudes” by Priyanka Jha

Character: BIPOC Identifying/Non-binary/Gender Neutral

Description: 17 years old, dressed to the nines in female traditional Indian dress. Talking to the God Shiva and waiting to go back to their sister’s wedding

When I first found out about you I was nine. We were in India. Like we were every Summer, making the rounds and seeing our extended family. It was scorching. We were visiting a temple, one of the oldest in Bihar. Beautifully ornate, with statues and engravings everywhere. Of course, we had to take off our shoes. The gods clearly didn’t appreciate my gesture of respect much, as my feet burned up immediately. The hot marble felt like coals beneath my child-size feet. I must have yelped out loud because my Papa, as dad’s do, immediately came to stop the pain. He lifted me onto his shoulders. And I could immediately see all the carvings so close up. Gorgeous. They were like fallen stars. Backlit with this glow from the sun that reached through the marble and lit up these scenes so they glittered.

(They look upon a sight they see clearly but we can only imagine).

And it was you. My beloved Lord Shiva, dressed as a woman. I knew it was you by the River Ganges knotted in your hair and here you were in these gorgeous silk saris... glittering. And even then. Even then. I was a child but immediately I knew. I could sense that something had shifted. Something big had happened. Even if I was surrounded by a bigoted society, the Gods would understand.

My gods would accept me. Shiva would accept me. And my family: they’ll accept me too.

It’s funny what memories come back to you when you’re stressed. I am a proud, card carrying member of the third sex. Sure , I’m not revered. I’m not worshipped like in the time of the Vedics.

But I can, and I will, be accepted. The gods themselves have decided it.

(pause) Sorry, you’ll have to excuse me for now. There’s a wedding I have to get to.

“Dancing Queen” By Victoria Huerta (published in BIPOC Voices and Perspectives Monologue Resource)

Character: BIPOC Identifying/Gender Neutral

Description: Refusing to go onto the dance floor because they are a terrible dancer

Stop it! I can't dance, so stop trying to pull me onto the dance floor! If you dare push me into the middle of that dance circle, I will literally...! I don't know what I'll do, but I'll do something! The best I can do is jazz hands, okay? My feet don't know how to step and my body does stupid movements! I will not embarrass myself in front of everyone for the sake of entertaining you! Yes, just because I can't dance, doesn't mean I don't dance. How could I not? I love music! At three in the morning, alone in my room, I dance to my heart's content. I bop and groove like I'm in a Broadway show performing a dance number! Why do you think I listen to so many musicals? But none of that means I am good at dancing!

If you saw me dancing, you'd think I was having a seizure! I look like a worm on drugs!

Ugh, this is why I didn't want to come to this party! I could have been at home right now sipping some hot chocolate and watching anime! Or doing math homework — you know how much I hate math homework! Or talking to my cats while I catch up on my writing! (No, there's nothing pathetic about that!) If I were at home, I could be... I could be dancing alone in my room. Yes! There is a difference between dancing here and there! Here, everyone is looking at me and judging me for not being able to do the footwork for whatever new dance is trending on TikTok. There, the only ones judging me are my cats, and they don't judge too hard.

But I can't dance! You're not going to make me dance! Remember when I had to take dance class in 6th grade, so I told the dance teacher I sprained my ankle? But he wasn't convinced, so I had to jump off a tree and actually sprain my ankle? That's the length I'm willing to go to not dance in front of a crowd! And you think I'm just going to herp de derp jingle jangle jive hop onto the dance floor because you asked nicely? Absolutely not! I don't dance!

Well... Fine! I'll dance! But only if you dance with me!

“My Hijab” by Nabeeha Mohammed

Character: BIPOC Identifying/Female Identifying

Description: Speaking about their identity and how wearing a hijab makes them feel closer to God

Have you ever experienced a moment where time just stops? One minute I was scribbling whatever I could piece together from my teacher’s lecture, wishing class was over. The next minute the atmosphere turned dark, the air in my 7th grade History class was non-existent. It was suddenly difficult to breathe. My heart suddenly started to beat in my ears. The only thing is that I anticipated this moment. My class was talking about a touchy topic that made me feel queasy on the inside: terrorists; Muslim terrorists. At that moment I wanted to blend into the bookshelves behind me. The problem was that instead of staring at me in the eye, they stared at my hijab.

It wasn’t a foreign thing for me to be made fun of because I wear a hijab. It bothered me but, not to the point where I wanted to punch someone or call them off. What they didn’t understand is the words, as a choice. The keywords being: as my choice.

One of the most frequently asked questions I get is, “Did your parents force you to wear that thing?” Even though it doesn’t seem like much, even those kinds of words are scarring. Being forced to wear it wasn’t the reason. I wore it starting in sixth grade so I could have a closer bond with God. Feeling lost in my whirlwind of thoughts, I’d always respond with, “No one forced me to wear my headscarf. It was my choice.”

At one point I started to question myself about wearing my hijab. I had flashbacks of that feeling of wanting to blend into the bookshelves; to not be seen or heard. Over time, however, things changed. I found a great group of wonderful people that I hung out with in 8th grade. In middle school, for the first time I was treated like a regular human by them. They didn’t mind that I wore a hijab or made me feel strange when they asked why I wore one. They really helped boost my confidence and made me feel pleased with myself.

Wearing the hijab is a sign of submission to God in Islam. It’s a literal gift sent from God, and I want people to not see me differently even though I wear one. My hijab makes me feel serene and at peace whenever I seal one on my head before prayer and when I go outside. In Islam it’s also encouraged for women to be modest when wearing clothing. A lot of people treat that fact negatively. On the other hand, I see my hijab as part of my identity. It doesn’t demonize me; rather, it enhances me. My hijab is a sign of beauty and a sign of peace. I wouldn’t change anything about it.

Poetry Selections

“Phenomenal Woman” by Maya Angelou

Pretty women wonder where my secret
lies.
I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion
model's size
But when I start to tell them,
They think I'm telling lies.
I say,
It's in the reach of my arms
The span of my hips,
The stride of my step,
The curl of my lips.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

I walk into a room
Just as cool as you please,
And to a man,
The fellows stand or
Fall down on their knees.
Then they swarm around me,
A hive of honey bees.
I say,
It's the fire in my eyes,
And the flash of my teeth,
The swing in my waist,
And the joy in my feet.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

Men themselves have wondered
What they see in me.
They try so much

But they can't touch
My inner mystery.
When I try to show them
They say they still can't see.
I say,
It's in the arch of my back,
The sun of my smile,
The ride of my breasts,
The grace of my style.
I'm a woman

Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

Now you understand
Just why my head's not bowed.
I don't shout or jump about
Or have to talk real loud.
When you see me passing
It ought to make you proud.
I say,
It's in the click of my heels,
The bend of my hair,
the palm of my hand,
The need of my care,
'Cause I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

“Complainers” by Rudy Francisco

The following are true stories.

May 26th 2003 Aron Ralston was hiking, a boulder fell on his right hand. He waited four days, then amputated his arm with a pocket knife.

On New Year's Eve, a woman was bungee jumping in Zimbabwe. The cord broke, she then fell into a river and had to swim back to land in crocodile infested waters with a broken collarbone.

Claire Champlin was smashed in the face by a five pound watermelon being propelled by a slingshot. Matthew Brobst was hit by a javelin.

David Striegl was punched in the mouth. By a kangaroo.

The most amazing part about these stories is when asked about the experience they all smiled, shrugged, and said “I guess things could have been worse.”

So go ahead.

Tell me that you're having a bad day.

Tell me about the traffic. Tell me about your boss. Tell me about the job you've been trying to quit for the past four years. Tell me the morning is just a town house burning to the ground and the snooze button is a fire extinguisher. Tell me the alarm clock stole the keys to your smile, drove it into 7:00 AM, and the crash totaled your happiness.

Tell me! Tell me!

Tell me, how blessed are we to have tragedies so small it can fit on the tips of our tongues?

You see, when Evan lost his legs he was speechless. When my cousin was assaulted, she didn't speak for forty eight hours. When my uncle was murdered, we had to send out a search party to find my father's voice.

Most people have no idea that tragedy and silence have the exact same address

When your day is a museum of disappointments hanging from events that were outside of your control, when you find yourself flailing in an ocean of “Why is this happening to me?”, when it feels like your guardian angel put in his two week notice two months ago and just decided not to tell you, when it feels like God is just a babysitter that's always on the phone, when you get punched in the esophagus by a fistful of life, remember that every year two million people die of dehydration so it doesn't matter if the glass is half full or half empty, there's water in the cup.

Drink it, and stop complaining.

Muscle is created by repeatedly lifting things that have been designed to weigh us down. So when your shoulders feel heavy, stand up straight and lift your chin – call it exercise.

When the world crumbles around you, you have to look at the wreckage and then build a new one out of the pieces that are still here.

Remember, you are still here.

The human heart beats approximately four thousand times per hour.

Each pulse, each throb, each palpitation is a trophy engraved with the words “You are still alive”.

You are still alive.

Act like it.

“Accents” by Denice Frohman

my mom holds her accent like a
shotgun,
with two good hands.
her tongue, all brass knuckle
slipping in between her lips
her hips, all laughter and wind clap.

she speaks a sanchocho of spanish and
english,
pushing up against one another,
in rapid fire

there is no telling my mama to be
“quiet,”
she don’t know “quiet.”

her voice is one size better fit all
and you best not tell her to hush,
she waited too many years for her voice
to arrive
to be told it needed housekeeping.

English sits her her mouth remixed
so “strawberry” becomes
“ehstrawbeddy”
and “cookie” becomes “ehcookie”
and kitchen, key chain, and chicken all
sound the same.

my mama doesn’t say “yes” she says
“ah ha”
and suddenly the sky in her mouth
becomes a Hector Lavoe song.

her tongue can’t lay itself down flat
enough
for the English language,
it got too much hip
too much bone
too much conga
too much cuatro
to two step
got too many piano keys
in between her teeth,
it got too much clave
too much hand clap
got too much salsa to sit still
it be an anxious child wanting to
make PlayDoh out of concrete English
be too neat for her kind of wonderful.
her words spill in conversation
between women whose hands are all
they got
sometimes our hands are all we got
and accents remind us that we are still
bomba, still plena

say “wepa” and a stranger becomes
your hermano.
say “dale” and a crowd becomes your
family reunion.

my mama’s tongue is a telegram from
her mother
decorated with the coqui’s of el campo.
so even though her lips can barely
stretch themselves around english,
her accent is a stubborn compass
always pointing her toward home.

**“My Father’s Coat” by Marc Kelly
Smith**

I’m wearing my father’s coat.
He has died. I didn’t like him,
But I wear the coat.

I’m wearing the coat of my father,
Who is dead. I didn’t like him,
But I wear the coat just the same.

A younger man, stopping me on the
street,
Has asked,
“Where did you get a coat like that?”
I answer that it was my father’s
Who is now gone, passed away.
The younger man shuts up.

It’s not that I’m trying now
To be proud of my father.
I didn’t like him.
He was a narrow man.

There was more of everything he
should have done.
More of what he should have tried to
understand.

The coat fit him well.
It fits me now.
I didn’t love him,
But I wear the coat.

Most of us show off to one another
Fashions of who we are.
Sometimes buttoned to the neck
Sometimes overpriced.
Sometimes surprising even ourselves
In garments we would have never
dreamed of wearing.

I wear my father’s coat,
And it seems to me
That this is the way that most of us
Make each other’s acquaintance—
In coats we have taken
To be our own.

“Kissing in Vietnamese” by Ocean Vuong

My grandmother kisses as if bombs are
bursting in the backyard,
where mint and jasmine lace their
perfumes
through the kitchen window,
as if somewhere, a body is falling apart
and flames are making their way back
through the intricacies of a young boy’s
thigh,
as if to walk out the door, your torso
would dance from exit wounds.
When my grandmother kisses, there
would be

no flashy smooching, no western music
of pursed lips, she kisses as if to
breathe
you inside her, nose pressed to cheek
so that your scent is relearned
and your sweat pearls into drops of gold
inside her lungs, as if while she holds
you
death also, is clutching your wrist.
My grandmother kisses as if history
never ended, as if somewhere
a body is still
falling apart.

“Times I’ve Been Mistaken For A Girl” by Alex Dang

1. Ever since I was tall enough to reach the phone perched and mounted against my wall, I was old enough to answer it. And every time I did, I was always greeted by somebody on the other end calling me “ma’am.” And for the longest time, I thought they were saying man because I was cool and hip, man.
2. When entering high school, I found a correlation between girls finding I was cute and long swishy hair so I grew my hair out like how optimists never cut their dreams down or how dreamers never trimmed their hopes short but this lion's mane became and remained a gender mystery to some store owners asking my girlfriend and I “So. How are you ladies doing tonight?”
3. I was always a crier. And with a brother manlier and tougher than I, it wouldn't be strange to hear “shut up or buck up.” Uncomfortably familiar with loneliness. Hearing “Stop being a girl” was a terrible mantra that I just got used to like “I will never amount to anything” or “I will die alone.”
4. The very far from the truth, my mom believes gay to be synonymous with the feminine so it wouldn't be odd for her to question my sexuality due to the clothing I wore or how much time I spent on appearances. “Why don't you go do boy things?” “How are you going to take care of your wife?”
5. When my father found out that sometimes I like looking at boys, he told my mother that he lost a son and I can't help but think about my sister who's
6. My mother always complained about having two sons and no daughters.
7. My sister was born in May of 1991 but
8. Died three days after her birth due to complications.
9. My mother didn't want to have any more children after that but
10. My father said he had a feeling and I don't know what that feeling was but I think it was
11. That he wanted to have another daughter.
12. I didn't come out the way they expected.
13. I think I was a failure before I was even conceived.
3. I was always a crier.
14. I was always so mad at myself for being so sensitive.
15. Why wasn't it okay to play house with the girls?
16. I was never good at cops and robbers.
0. I was a disappointment before I even began.
12. I didn't come out the way they expected.
12. I didn't come out the way they expected.
12. I didn't come out the way they expected and now I'm at some very bull of a number wondering if it still makes a difference. My hair is shorter. My voice is deeper. And I still might not do things a boy does. Instead, I do things a person does.