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Tzana Saldania

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

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Among Other Things

Tzana Saldania

Honors 291H (Sophomore Seminar - Humanities)

Mentors: Dr. Karen Jolly and Frank Stewart

Who are you? A question both mundane and encroaching all at once. We ask it to our children to help them decide what they will be when they grow up. We ask it to ourselves when we are alone at night in our beds. It is a question, I believe, that can never fully be answered. However, through literature, when an author imposes this question upon his or her characters thoughtfully, dynamically, and to the point of raw reality, we begin to understand not only who this character upon the page is, but who we all are. This piece was written for an Autobiographical Writing Class at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa under the instruction of Professor Frank Stewart. It was then edited by History Professor, Karen Jolly. This is the story of my childhood, my present, and my future. It was written with the intent to flow from pragmatic narration, searingly specific first-person, and back to ambivalent, provoking second-person. This progression allows for a literary representation of how one may feel in regard to their own identity, how I feel about who I am: aware of the present, but vacillating between who I was, who I think I am and who I want to be.

It is our stories that make us. This piece is designed to highlight that even with the most guttural confrontation of our inner thoughts presently, the journey of who we are does not stop; it only stokes the fire. It is my hope that this story, my story, illuminates the ability for each of us dive into what makes us who we are and start a conversation about what that means for one another.

How deeply can I shove these earphones into my skull until it is no longer pleasurable? This, among other things, ran through my mind as a sophomore in college. My grandfather died at the start of the semester, my mother fought with her girlfriend every other week. Every other Thursday I watched my mother panic, grieve, bury, laugh, and cry. But, every day, I watched my mother love me. Among all these things, and among all these days, my father was still out of the picture. I’m sure he was somewhere, peaceful and unattached. I don’t care to wonder what it would be like if he ever knew me. What I wonder, rather, is, what it is like to know me, a daughter never claimed.

Dear Daddy, how much of me is you? When I want to punch a wall or rip the neck off a plastic bottle is that you or Mommy coursing through my veins? If I have a

Currently a sophomore at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa majoring in English, I started my college career as a double major pursuing Cognitive Psychology with aspirations to gain a PhD in attention research. With the first half of my education being science heavy, I have learned to appreciate the different ways in which we each think about problems, life, and art. I left psychology after the death of a family member and health problems of my own. Realizing English is the field which brings me the greatest intellectual and personal satisfaction, I aim now to do my best work and embrace the major fully.
baby girl, is it wrong that maybe, I should be like you and walk away because I know I can't handle the selfless dedication needed to tie her shoes? Mommy tied my shoes while you were out there smoking a doobie, and doing crack and getting arrested, not just once, but twice. Mommy tied my shoes, gave me food, made me everything I am capable of being. She did everything to keep me from you. She never tied her own shoes. I have seen her mind kicked to the ground by her own family, by her own friends, by her own lovers.

I have spent this adult half of my life running from you, Daddy. I never wanted to be you. But now, I don't know if I want to be like Mommy and be abused by versions of men and women like you.

I hear you knocking on the door of the soul she raised. My kindness, my love, my passion is being raped by the devil of your heart beating in my chest. Mommy used to tell me stories about you, you know? I've seen the videos you used to film on the HI-8 camcorder. You were jovial, caring, young; you were the best man I had ever seen; you would have died for Mommy back then. Then you tried to kill her; then me. What happened to you, Daddy? When is it going to happen to me?

When Thursday rolls around again, and I stare into the mirror, is that going to be the day you take over who I am, Daddy? Will that be the day I burst from every stitch of flesh my mother has sewn over me and become the monster your DNA instilled in me? Will that be the day I run away from everyone and everything and smoke myself into a coma on a beach just hoping for the tide to drown me if the drugs don't, just as you did, Daddy? Will that be the day I forget I have a mommy, forget I have a husband, forget I have a daughter whose laces are undone while she dangles her small feet over the garden greens, her mind not yet tainted by the missing memory of me? Will that be the day I become your daughter, Daddy?

Among other things, this is what I thought when I was nineteen. I was full of fear. I didn't know who I was. My pain was singular, like a pin on a map, I knew exactly its source, but I did not dare to ever make an attempt to follow it through. So, I hid it. Others were going through worse in their lives, I was sure. And why would I tell anyone about this? No one needs to know what they can't understand.

This is that point in the story, where among other things, I tell you I turned out fine. Got married, had two kids, and a cat and a dog that got along well. That I'll die with integrity, I made all the correct turns along all of Erikson's paths. But the truth, as the truth always is, will never be finished or go that sweet. The truth is I haven't moved. The person behind these keys at the start of this paper is the same at its end. Still hungry like a teenager, still hornier than they could candidly confess to their mother, and still afraid to be their father's daughter. I haven't moved.

When I become twenty, and fifty, and eighty-two, I'll have changed. Of course, I'll have changed. But, I won't move. Every day of my life, my daddy will be there with a familiar absence. He'll always hold a trigger to my choices whether I see the gun or not. So, dearest mommies, and daddies, and former kiddies, too; why do I write and why do you read? Why do I believe in Dickens and why do you follow my sentence's lead? Why do I have a Daddy that left me and why do we abuse our mommies? Among other things, do you think you are ready to move?