

MIDDLEGROUND

A MAGAZINE FOR MIXED IDENTITIES STORIES AND VOICES.

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There are hidden pieces of bone in my mother's breath: she spat out fragments of history for her children to augur. The mystery of my childhood loomed in her silence: where am I from? When my son will grow to know himself, what country will he call home when home is a constant leaving?

*this is where the river bends
the wind stole the laughter from my cheekbones
scattered it like ash across continents
who knew that when I left, my shadow would not follow?
who knew that my body contained so many borders?
lost languages forsaken for English syllables
even when a country spits you out
turns you into baggage never claimed
forgetting that you birthed nations
long before they destroyed them
carried the book of God in one hand
gun in another
raised children the way a country raises a flag
we offered songs to honour the dead
even when our countries spat us out*

I came here when I was 18 with two suitcases and a draft date for the military. Leaving my homeland was complicated, painful. My older brother and I reunited and became legal guardians to our younger brother. We lived in a tiny apartment with no furniture and a crazy dog. The corridors smelt like wet sawdust. We found ourselves in the open, gaping mouth of the City. We ate dinner on the cold kitchen floor in our too-thin winter jackets. A decade later, I'm archiving these stories so that I can one day tell my son how much strength his mother and his grandmother and his great-grandmother had. More than anything, migration demands resilience.

*the leaving came swiftly
I arrived while still drowning
I tried to flee a history that won't goodbye
there will always be a swelling in my heart
that no passport could ever quell
home -
nights of praying
steeped deep in the knowledge that some journeys*

MOVIES TO YOU.
NEVER TRUST QUEER PEOPLE WHO ARE WHITE AND GET
DEFENSIVE ABOUT THEIR WHITENESS.
PERHAPS WE SHOULD'VE STAYED.
YOU CAN LOVE SOMEONE YOU HAVE ONLY MET THROUGH A
SCREEN.
NEVER FALL IN LOVE WITH AN ARTIST OR A POET.
ONLY LOVE PEOPLE WHO EITHER MAKE YOU LAUGH OR WHOM
YOU MAKE LAUGH.
BE MORE PATIENT WITH YOURSELF AND WITH OTHERS.
PERHAPS WE SHOULD'VE STAYED.
DRINK LOTS OF WATER.
LEARN TO MAKE A COMMITMENT TO YOURSELF BEFORE TRYING
TO COMMIT TO OTHERS.
LEARN TO EXERCISE BOUNDARIES.
NEVER RUSH A RELATIONSHIP.
TAKE TIME TO BUILD TOGETHER.
IF SOMEONE ALWAYS TRIGGERS YOU DON'T TAKE ON THEIR
PROBLEMS DON'T FEEL OBLIGED TO ALWAYS SUPPORT THEM IF
THEY DON'T DO THE SAME.
AS JUDGE JUDY WOULD SAY BEAUTY FADES, DUMB IS FOREVER.
DON'T GO DOWN ON PEOPLE WHO DON'T GO DOWN ON YOU.
YOU DON'T HAVE TO KNOW EVERYTHING.
YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE FRIENDS WITH EVERYONE.
PAY ATTENTION TO WHO UPLIFTS YOU WHEN YOUR DOWN AS
MUCH AS WHEN YOU ARE UP.
MANAGE YOUR EXPECTATIONS OF YOURSELF AND OF OTHERS.
ANYONE WHO HURTS AN ANIMAL FOR FUN AND NOT FOR FOOD
IS UNUSUALLY CRUEL.
EVERYONE IS TRYING THEIR BEST.
I'M TRYING TO LOVE YOU BUT YOU ARE 19.602KM AWAY.
PEOPLE WITH ROUGH HANDS ARE BEST KIND OF PEOPLE.
PERHAPS I SHOULD'VE STAYED.

