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# PICKING UP THE PIECES

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India Soodan



## Our Voices

In the entirety of my sixteen years in Chicago I'm convinced I've never truly seen lights before. Late July 2018, my eyes opened. Who knew individuals shined brighter than the sparkle of the Sears tower? Over the course of three days I observed the complexity of my city intertwined with the emotional challenge of its inhabitants. Homeless line the streets during the day, oftentimes passed by like hardened grey gum on the sidewalks where they set up camp each morning. Boujee business people strut out of glossy and glistening skyscrapers, heads high and egos higher.

I was riding along the lakefront bike trail listening to music and admiring the ghosts of who people used to be when I blinked and my vision changed. At 12am in the city, people are scarce and yet the millions of lights, stretched over a few miles, proved otherwise. It's startling to realize how little one's existence is in this world filled with 7.8 billion people. What makes one man more important than the other? What makes life significant? Cruising along the waves all I saw was beauty amidst the chaos of the streets. If I were to continue west I would immediately see the ripped fences and caged minds of those trapped by the system of inequality, present nationwide, but exemplified in the grid of Chicago. Rose-colored glasses never pick up the shades of blue: the indigo of the poor man's boots, the

cerulean of desolate swimming pools, the duke blue of a girl's daisy dukes. Rose-colored glasses are only received by those who had the privilege to afford them.

In the nighttime, spiders attach their webs to whichever branch or post they begin their journey. They let go and let the wind carry them to the second destination, creating barriers of fine silver. Luckily on a bike, you don't get stuck unless you slow down. However, I slowed down. Who would have thought the spiders in the city would be as big and menacing as the people in charge of it? The school system, a sticky snare perfectly designed to mangle wings and prevent flight, leaving those stuck with nothing to do but fight; Fight the preconceived notion that you belong where you came from. It's a good thing vocabulary can cut sharper than a knife. The nights seem to hold more hours than the day. Productivity isn't limited to a certain field of work; survival is a full-time job and time doesn't slow down for anyone.

Technically our lives are measured by the amount of trips we take around the sun. When evaluating the deeper meaning, rolling with the Lake Michigan waves, I came to the conclusion that connections with our neighbors leave a greater imprint than the annual salary. Many mistake green for blue. Green rules the world. Deforestation devastates our trees but it doesn't remove our

roots. We all started as bipeds, walking the earth on two feet until guns, germs, and steel separated us. Pedaling on my Citi-bike while stealing glances at the sleeping figures on the Museum Campus was a strange time to have an epiphany but the Universe works under the schedule of no one. There's something to be said for that though, we're all unified by our lack of control.

I met a lady on the train praising God that she saw another day. I asked her if there was anything I could do to help her, despite my lack of money. A smile overtook her worn face and she shook her head. "Your voice is all I need." Somehow, in our world created by man, designed for the survival of the fittest, a voice can redefine humanity. Maybe a voice is where we started.

The Joker

Please- can't you see the children  
Underneath their masks & hoodies,  
The desire for opportunity bubbling up  
And bursting from their lips?

The Desire that scorches the rubbled remains  
Of hopes & dreams.

The Desire that ignites communal love.

Isn't it beautiful?

The choir of the ignored.

## Royalty

Ornate golden bindis decorated

My brow bones.

I sat on the dust coated,

crooked floor for upwards of an hour,

making sure each individual jewel

highlighted the shadows of my forehead.

India Kaur Soodan.

Kaur is a Sikh name given to every woman

Born into the lineage.

Princess.

In the fushia silk draped over the crown of my head,

Rippling down my shoulders I wholly felt like the royalty granted to  
me by blood.

India Kaur Soodan.

India Princess Soodan.

Indian Princess.

The soft bells tied around my ankles sang a symphony with every  
step. Bangles wrapped around my chai-soaked skin, illuminating  
every movement.

Ganesha peered down at me from his pedestal on the wall with a  
piercing protectiveness.

Hanuman guarded me in my dreams, leaping over every mountain to  
stand at my side.

In these dreams, not only am I a princess,

But a warrior.

Aren't dreams a reflection of reality?

## The Connection

Our lives are measured by  
Memories and choices,  
Each dictating the curvatures in our path.  
After our time on Earth has ceased  
Our footprints will look like little galaxies,  
interwoven and connected.  
We are biotic stars.



What are you?

Boricua?

Black?

Columbian?

Greek?

Egyptian?

Armenian?

Jewish?

Brazilian?

Guatemalan?

Pakistani?

Other.



The Hate We Give

“See? That’s why they hate us.

They want our hair.

They want our skin.”

At 13 years old, I didn’t understand why my best friend felt the way she did- why she perceived so much animosity towards herself.

And who is the “they” in question?

“They” is white-skinned people who plaster liquid melanin atop their skin- suffocating every pore.

I didn’t yet understand the fetishization of culture.

“They” is dark-skinned women who live in a society socialized to think that their skin is inherently bad. Inherently ugly.

I didn’t yet understand colorism.

Too many times have Black men spewed filthy justifications as to why they don’t mess with Black women.

As if putting another woman down us a compliment to me.

Do you know the womb you came from?

I didn’t yet understand that despite the trials I’ve faced being mixed that I am a benefactor of the systems in place.

While the system is working by design,

we must keep our eyes open.

The Drought

Stop crying.

Stop crying. Don't cry.

Stop crying. What are you crying for?

Why? Stop crying. I'll give you something to cry about.

The staircases in my house had minefields buried beneath the  
wooden planks.

One misstep,

One accidental slip of the foot, and the explosion would find me like  
a heat-seeking missile.

A right answer never existed in his eyes. There was no crying aloud.

My mom called it a shutdown.

A blank stare- a refusal to open my mouth.

She didn't know what was happening.

Years of conditioning can build a barrier.

It took years to remember how to cry.

An Ode to Generational Trauma

The pitfalls of being different,

Of being unknown- other.

Always falling into the constant comparison of struggle.

I'm privileged in the sense that I never had to worry about what or  
where I'm gonna eat next.

My mama grinded her whole life supporting those around her,

Pushing through the tests of perseverance.

She's winning and losing at the same time.

She done lost herself in the process of making sure me and 'lil bro are  
gonna be alright.

My dad and I got issues and I hate to fall into that stereotype.

I'm tired of chasing the approval of other to fulfill the lack of love  
and attention in my life.

A much as I want to blame him I've learning I can only control how I  
react.

React to the fact that my family for stripped from me.

I've got no community to surround me.

The whole world is suffering,

Funeral hymns are resounding,

Little babies are starving,

Plastic and carbon emissions have got the earth choking.

I can't erase the pain by toking,

I can only create.

Form masterpieces through the analyzation of my scattered dreams.

Form connections with the divine and sentient beings around me  
with outstretched hand and an open heart

To bring us closer together rather than push us farther apart.

## Hydration

The sun provides no warmth for my skin,

Only a squint for my eyes.

I want to grow but how can I when the environment doesn't allow  
for flowers?

Where is the rain?

Maybe it comes from within.

## Om

I feel my grandmother in Lake Michigan.

I hear her voice echoed in the cry of the gulls, "India is here."

Is she there?

Life, Death, Destruction, and Rebirth is the

Constant rhythm of the Universe.

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## Semper Fi

My father never acknowledged his brown skin.

His identity was that of a marine and American.

The number one lesson he preached was that life isn't fair,  
And either you pick yourself up by the bootstraps or live on welfare.

There were never any shades of gray.

“You can't help people who don't want to help themselves.”

It slides off the tongue so easy when you've always been financially  
supported by either your parents or your wife.

And yet I understand him.

Understanding doesn't necessarily mean agreement.



My Song of Sunshine

*You are my sunshine,*  
My grandmother's voice  
is hushed by the foam of the waves.  
Her fingers delicately reposition  
a ringlet of hazelnut behind my ear.  
The seagulls croon along with her,  
weaving patterns with their wings  
underneath the gold in the sky.  
*My only sunshine.*

*You make me happy,*  
We are balancing on the stilts that are our legs.  
Cathie's closed eyes peer up at us from the funerary box.  
Her lips are glossy and her makeup is done,  
but it doesn't hide the death that has settled  
underneath her skin.  
The younger boy next to me sheds tears  
of musical notes and lyrics  
and we all harmonize.  
*When skies are gray.*

*You'll never know dear,*  
Eyes of moss and mud gaze deeply into mine  
and beauty beams from the smile  
of the boy on my side.  
The wind nips our fingers and the silver bench  
bites our rears.  
An earbud connects the side of his head  
to mine and I flutter.  
*How much I love you.*

*So please don't take*  
I listen to the song that has frolicked

through my memories.  
Pebbles of laughter,  
salty drops of mortality,  
and clusters of sweet lip caresses  
whirl beyond the retina of my eyes.  
I reflect.  
*My sunshine away.*

## Honey

Does love grown weary like overused denim?

At what point?

Now I know honeymoons only last until the honey runs dry,

But do the bees shrivel up with it?

It terrifies me that someone might fall out of love for the same reason  
they originally dove in it.

There's the fear that strong willed might turn into annoyingly  
stubborn.

That conversations that once overflowed might

Turn into a dwindling trickle

## The Puzzle

I've been rewriting my brain,  
Reconstructing every synapse soliciting my peace  
Like pieces of a puzzle,  
Pondering the proper parenting  
Of self,  
Realizing we project pain, anger, anguish, joy.  
We pair every thought and emotion  
With the principles we were raised upon.  
Our paths are perfectly human.  
Perfectly flawed.

