

Ghosts

By Dariel Figueroa

My family members, they're ghosts. The homosexual, filmmaking uncle; he visits sporadically to drop facts and opinions skewering or praising some new piece of visual art. The ghost of entertainment. My father; "Don't do that," and "I failed in life so you could learn from my mistakes." The ghost of regret. My mother; "How are you feeling?" and "Do you need any underwear?" The ghost of free undergarments.

They pass in and out on whims of advice. No cohesion, no godfather. A ragtag group of fractured soldiers marching past my tent in spurts, poking their heads inside every now and then. This is the aftermath of an atomic bomb blasting away all ties, all semblances of what a family should look like. The Irish-Puerto Rican half brother and sister, the blonde hair blue eyed nephew, the younger Argentinean-Italian brother, the Columbian step-mother, Italian-stepfather, my Americanized South American mother, me. Raised in Philadelphia amongst African Americans, how much more confusing could one's existence become? Am I an anomaly or the result of a generational rapture leaving behind windows full of flailing limbs at the Tower of babble? Help me down from here.

My skin feels opaque; it was dark at first, and then a shade of butterscotch emerged. Now my reflection shows a filmy paleness only identifiable by the thing serving as my background. I am a wall with a picture on it, I am a desk, I am disappearing. I do not talk with a Latin twang, my hips do not move that well to salsa music, I cannot dance a jig, I have no clue how to make lasagna, my Columbian coffee is instant, and I can do little more than bob my head to rap music.

Perhaps it is not my family members who are ghosts, it's me. I am the genetic mishap, a stream of oil passing its way through a monstrous mechanism trying to find its way to the bottom, gears stripping and milling my being until all that is left is water, clear and tasteless. I am a copy of a copy. A facsimile.

With anger in my heart I sometimes skirt the edges of reality in hopes of forgetting what it is I'm *supposed* to be. We're all supposed to be something. Everything has labels. Non-GMO, organic, kosher, SALE, 100%, Grade A, purified. I am nameless and without labels.

I rummage through the souvenir stand looking for a keychain with my name on it. I see Mickey Mouse next to names like Daniel, David, Derrick, and Dante. Where am I? Where's my glowing announcement that I belong to a group of people with appreciation for all things Disney. Where is my two dollar certification of social acceptance?

There are times when my skin fills itself with color. I see it starting at my feet. I turn my hat backwards and listen to Tupac; my knees turn golden. I sit down and fill my belly with platefuls of yellow rice and rusted beans; my thighs darken. I wear jewelry, swallow helpings of spaghetti and meatballs and talk loudly with my hands; my chest is no longer see-through.

These instances soon pass though, and they become reminders of what an outcast I truly am. I've lived in many homes, none of which felt like a place I belonged. My hunger to fit squarely into one place is a vain effort for comfort in a time when racial melding is becoming the norm. Nothing is unto itself. Everything is everything.

They say eventually that something as granted as red hair will no longer exist. We will all become a race of sun-soaked beings similar in color and language. The signs are everywhere,

and my generation is the one to suffer with the task of watching what little culture is left instilled in us wash away into a sea of grey blood.

I try my best to hide my fading hands and eyes from onlookers. My mother spoke too much English to me as a child; therefore my Spanish is less than subpar. Sometimes I can't understand what my father is trying to say to me when he speaks his native language. I have to use an online translation website to correspond with my grandmother living in Argentina. There are instances when I knowingly refrain from stating my heritage for fear of being asked to translate something. If I am Hispanic, then I am the lowest form of such a thing.

My reflection no longer exists. I am an outline, a stick figure, an empty cartoon character. I should welcome this upcoming new form of existence, one where everyone is the same. Perhaps then, I'll fit in.