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NOT SO MINOR FEELINGS

written by Reshmi Dutt-Ballerstadt July 2, 2020



It is time to get a little personal. It is time to talk about feelings.

Silence about feelings. It is time to disrupt this *problem* with silence that Cathy Park Hong says “it can’t speak up” and that is “why it’s silent.” She calls these *Minor Feelings*. It is a brilliant book and you must read it. But that’s not the point.

It is time to break some silences. Layered silences with these *not so* minor feelings. Feelings like a parenthesis with unclear citations.

Silences resulting from that chasm between the speakable and the unspeakable.

Silences about our history – yours and mine and how history repeats itself. How histories disrupt *our feelings*.

And then there are silences resulting from masking what the ears can hear, the eyes can see, yet the mouth can’t speak.

Silences, like trauma metabolizes.

And you are about to lose yourself standing against that white picket fence. *Alone*.

But trauma does speak, like a kind of jumbled mumbling. Still masking the facts from fiction to suit the colors of our reality. A reality to construct that one grammatically correct sentence using the word white. Whiteness.

We are *almost* white. An impossible love affair with whiteness and white spaces. An abusive love affair that we can’t seem to leave. Our history.

It’s time to remember. Remember small things.

Forgetting scars. It would be callous to not remember. To not remember is moral callousness.

Remember the time when your mother insisted that you stand under her umbrella? A black umbrella. You were wearing a light magenta frock with a white frilled Puritan collar, red Mary Jane shoes. All mismatched. When you didn’t listen, she grabbed your wrist and pulled you in.

Your mother’s skin is like lightly baked pottery. She was not your father’s first choice. They have been married for 23 years.

Remember the time when your father looked at your mother when that Black man at the mall at J.C. Penny's said, "Sir, how is your day going?"

You have never forgotten that silent exchange with no words between them. You saw your mother grabbing her bright green purse with that golden latch shaped like a "S" more tightly. Just like how she grabbed your wrist.

And then there were other, *not so* subtle moments.

Those conversations when your mother quickly closed the patio door so that your all white neighbors would not hear your father screaming. "I will disown you! You cannot do this to us!" he said.

Your parents had just found out that you were dating a Black man. They didn't even ask his name. *They didn't even ask his name.*

Later that week your uncle took you out to dinner and you waited for him to broach the conversation. He didn't say anything. Right before he dropped you off, he looked at you. His eyebrows locked together like a tight braid. His eyes spoke the language of distance, or distancing. And right before you were about to leave the passenger seat, he said, "Have you checked into his criminal records?"

You just left.

But you could never tell *him* what your family really thought. You avoided meeting him within 10 miles of your home. And then you just avoided *him* and *him*.

2020. *Your daughter, your son and even your biracial grandchild are protesting.*

It is time to witness. Witness your own disdain towards those who stand behind chain fences. Not the white picket fence, like yours.

And dear daughter, while protesting on the streets may not be easy, protesting inside the house may be even harder.

But it is certainly time to confront *that* uncle of yours and even your father who said that they will disown you if you married a Black man, or a Muslim, or a Sikh, or a Chinese. What did their god tell them about the "broken or scattered?" The Dalits.

Don't spare your mother. Your mother, my mother, their mothers -- all just stood there, silently. As if they were invisible. Flashbacks of that green purse she held so tightly keeps coming back.

It is time to tell them that they can no longer stand on the sidelines and keep watching CNN and keep thinking that they are not affected.

A bag of Skittles. A boy playing with a toy gun. Just dancing. A young girl in a bright bikini. Just walking. Small coffins. And they keep saying "we are not affected."

But that's them. Let's talk about you.

What have you done in the meantime? The protest you joined last week will slow down. Fade. Like music eventually does.

The truth is you have done little besides listening to *their* music or jazz and raving about your upcoming trip to New Orleans and hoping to find your Denzel Washington. Yet you don't question why you want to stay closer to the "safe quarters" rather than "Desire" -- a neighborhood marked as "dangerous." "Black people live there," as your family would say. They are murky. End of conversation.

And this is not to discount the pain you have felt or *feelings* as you witnessed the public lynching of yet another black body being mobbed by police. *Literally mobbed* like you read in your tenth grade history book.

It is also not to discount the fear or discomfort you feel as you watch the riots, cities burning, rubber bullets,

red blood on masks and imagine the protesters coming closer to your neighborhood. *And* destroying your white picket fenced property.

I get it. This is all you have here in America and you are terrified of losing it. You want protection. You want to be protected. That's why you chose to live in a neighborhood where there are not too many *of them*. That's why you chose to live in neighborhoods where the schools are safe, highly rated, and you imagine your children blending in these picket fenced white spaces.

You would *never* live where George Floyd lived with his family. So many George Floyd's. The names now have become countless. They are all black. *Black people* as your grand pa always said. You remember your mother clutching that bright green purse and exchanging glances. You never forgot.

It is time to redress and this ain't going to be easy. It would require some looking at *them* in their eye. It would require more unmasking. It would require breaking the chain of that amplified silence. It will require some unwiring, rewiring, reconnecting with discontinuity.

"Let's keep our heads down." "Let's just look away." "Dick and Jane. *Dick and Jane* and the white picket fenced house. Brown. Harvard. That attempt to perfect the sentence with the word white. Whiteness.

Complicity is also a word. Like white.

You will never be *white*. I will never be *white*. They will never be *white*.

Whiteness kills.

Complicity kills.

The protest from the streets need to come home. A homecoming without the drums. Or the marches.

0 comment



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