

For Things Unknown but Longed for Still

My heart has always trilled
for things unknown,
but longed for still.
Found by surprise,
beating fervently next to my sister's
and inside the chest of my mother,
I was bestowed with a name meaning "purpose"
to commend my prophesized existence.

Years later at the age of eight
with a roller book bag that clinked too loudly in the hallways
and a face perceived too young to be adorned with glasses and worry,
my default stance resembled that of a bird —
with arms crossed against my chest,
elbows jutted to the side,
and an inclination to fold into myself—
I existed in the spaces left behind by others
in between shoulders,
at the edges of circles,
and in passing thoughts,
I was ready to take flight when prompted.

Yet my history was deep rooted—
creaking in the hulls of slave ships
destined for the Caribbean,
found inside my Trinidadian grandmother's orphaned breath,
and aching in my illiterate grandfather's hip
as he harvested Jamaican sugar cane till dawn's tilt—
it found refuge in my parents' hearts
as they arrived to this land
and let the New York City lights engulf them into bliss.

Time passed and bore me,
but let insecurity take a hold of me.
Born to a man who never demanded anything
and a woman who knew more of sacrifice than greed,
my parents would urge me to see what they had always seen for me,
a world full of opportunity waiting for me to stretch my wings.
But most days,
bent over middle school library books
and often overlooked,

I dreamt of a world my voice could one day tumble through
and a land where people would believe in me too.

Years later, my painful pursuit for educational opportunity
landed me in a sea of white demography
and a place where my voice was always lost in cacophony.
My eyes grew weary
trying to find its image in a place
and in a world
trying to block it.
My fifteen-year-old skin
morphed into the shade of happily never after
and my Transatlantic features
were often mistranslated
and caricatured onto white canvasses.

Some days, my heart would beg for me to shed it,
yet on those days,
my mind would revisit the times when my two year old hands—
plump with youth and possibility—
built wooden block structures taller than me,
giving me the impression that I could build anything.

By seventeen, with a body scathed in scars
and held together by metal bars,
my heart still trilled for things unknown but longed for still.
Until the day, I learned to use my heart as a touchstone.

Under Himalayan sunflowers that always waved to greet you
and in pairs of loving eyes,
I began to speak my over a decade old truth
and time stood still
as I began to start the life journey of extending
the limbs that had been so painfully folded by others.
I know now that I can exist fully and
that there is as much beauty and hope in people as there is fear.
And that everyday—like gravity—
everyone is slowly drifting towards one another
and how we are all going to be a part of each other one day.

I know all of this,
but I am still figuring out
what it means to be human

and free in this tumultuous body.

Most days, I still have inclinations to fold into myself,
but I am still learning
what it means to take up space unapologetically
and to speak from the heart passionately.
Every morning, a free bird opens its mouth to sing
while rising to heaven on gentle breezes.
What a wonderful way to live life,
to be so full of hope
that you can transcend anything.

Nia Goodridge
Deerfield Academy