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My Mother's Body

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My Mother's Body

Abstract

On Friday, April 20, 2018, Gettysburg College students organized a campus-wide walkout to protest all forms of gun violence as part of Gettysburg College's first annual Peace and Justice Week. Over the next several days, SURGE published the poems and personal testimonies of the student speakers who participated in the event.

Begin in *sukhasa*—easy pose—with your legs crossed the way children used to sit during show and tell before they had to worry about what position gives them enough time to stand and scramble toward the door when the shooting starts. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Gettysburg College, gun violence, education, teaching, exercise, yoga

Disciplines

Civic and Community Engagement

Comments

Surge is a student blog at Gettysburg College where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at surgegettysburg.wordpress.com Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that -isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

MY MOTHER'S BODY

April 27, 2018

Begin in *sukhasa*—easy pose—with your legs crossed the way children used to sit during show and tell before they had to worry about what position gives them enough time to stand and scramble toward the door when the shooting starts.

Now roll forward into tabletop, hands and knees, to practice remaining calm and steady when hiding under tables, desks, piles of tiny bodies. Make sure you pull your belly muscles in; you don't want to hurt your lower back.

Place your right foot at the top of the mat and sweep your arms up into *virabhadrasana* —warrior two—front knee bent. Keep your legs nice and strong here, chest broad and proud, ready to fight off the ~~terrorist~~ white man.

Fold forward into *paschimottanasana*. Breathe deeply here; not too loudly, though, so he doesn't find your hiding place.

When you're feeling low on energy, you can always sink back into child's pose, *balasana*, into the dirt.

My mother's lungs make a clean whistle. Untouched; no cigarette smoke.

She nourishes them with

d

e

e

p

ujjayi breaths:

inhale, halfway lift

exhale, forward fold.

One day, when she slips inside the grass,

she might leave them to a dying child

a desperate scientist

if blood is not pouring from a bullet

hole.

My mother's spine has roots

below her garden

where once she carved an air pocket womb,

a home

for carrot fingers and corn silk hair.

She protects her children with the rose's barbed wire.

She plucks them from sprouting pumpkin seeds.

My mother wants to till the soil long enough

to see her saplings bend beneath

ripe plums instead of wither

into another winter.

My mother's hands cannot stop a rifle,

but my mother's body can be torn apart by it

long enough for her students to escape

into the hallway

and spill out of the building

and tell her story to the newspapers the next day.

My mother's lips will recite her favorite poem as she dies:

Forgive me. They were delicious.

So sweet, and so cold.

My mother has exercised for an hour every day that I have been alive. As a kid, I would thump downstairs where she rolled around on her yoga mat, and I would sit and watch, finding ease in the way her breath matched her movement. A calmness like muted gold used to settle over the room with a heavy, contented

sigh. Sometimes, I would mimic the shapes her body made, but most of the time, I preferred to just be there and feel protected.

Now, we go for walks, for she cannot stand to be inside anymore. When we inevitably get to arguing after half a lap around the lake we always visit, my body and mind are both moving too quickly to keep talking. I breathe heavily. I lag behind.. Better to let her go, then, let her ramble about the things she cannot tell my dad (*he just doesn't get it*) and the things her students do (*this one keeps missing class*), the things she hates about the president (*Jesus fuckin' Christ*) until she realizes that we have actually been agreeing the whole time. I do not feel quite the same kind of comfort hearing her ramble that I did watching her do yoga, but I still feel protected. That part never charges. By the end of our walk, she has worn herself out because the more she cares, the faster she moves. I drive her home.

My mother's body is strong. Her arms sweep her through *chaturanga*, her legs hold her steady in the warrior postures. Her belly carried two babies, though her heart must carry hundreds by now, with more piling in at the start of each semester. She remembers all of their names. Sometimes, they come for Thanksgiving. My mother's heart is her strongest muscle.

It shows. The refrigerator is plastered with crayon scrawl and hand-drawn cards; *Thank you, Ms. Alissa; Happy birthday, Ms. Alissa; We love you, Ms. Alissa*. She does not tell me how many lives she has changed, but I can garner a pretty good guess. That she loves her students as much as she loves me does not hurt. That she would step in front of a bullet for them does.

There is a school shooting in February, and when we get halfway around the lake on our walk, she is still silent. She is supposed to be talking by now. My back nearly breaks carrying the dead weight of her fear.

My mother fears that she will not be able to protect everyone. If only she knew that all it takes is going down to the basement, rolling out the yoga mat, and breathing. We would all be safe. If only she stayed there forever, never went back into her school that could any day now become a death camp. Always, I was protected by that muted gold light, and now, I want it to cover her.

Is it selfish that I do not want my mother's body to become a shield?

The card I do not want to hang on the refrigerator: *we miss you, Ms. Alissa*.

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