

RAHUL PRASAD: Thanks Casey!

Up next, we have a performance from Adrienne Watson. A young poet based out of Seattle, Washington, Adriane focuses on creating inclusive spaces in art. Today, Adriane will be presenting an original poem centered around self-love acceptance. Please welcome Adriane Watson.

‘MOON, RECIPE FOR PROTEST, AND AN OPEN LETTER’ – ADRIANE WATSON

ADRIANE WATSON: Hi, my name is Adriane Watson, I use they/she pronouns, I’m 18, and I’m a poet.

And I’m going to do short poetry reading for you, it’s going to be 3 poems all dedicated to the people who helped me come into my femmehood and just make me a better person. This first one goes to my grandmother and it’s called “Moon.”

The moon hung bloody upon the mountain range.
Surrounded by smoke, it was the lit end of a cigarette
That hung from my grandmother’s mouth.
I watched as embers fell like shooting stars
And lit the countryside on fire.

I used to idolize her.
Dreamt of the day I would hand-roll my very own cancer sticks
And push the moon along with a simple breath.
But now?
Breathing isn’t always easy for her.

I watch, regretful, as an old woman chokes and sputters.
Until there is no more smoke, the moon stands still,
And the light fades out.

This next one goes to my father. It’s called “Recipe for Protest”

My father has tilled the soil of White supremacy.
With his own two hands, he has sown the seed of rebellion,
Brought up the crop until it shone gold like the skin of my ancestors,

And milled it,
So it could be given to me.

My father produced the wheat.
Slashed the sugar cane.
Raised the chickens and the cows.
He shook the walnuts from their trees, put the cocoa beans out to dry,
And laid them at my feet.
He has provided me with more than just teaspoons and half-cups.
He makes sure my house will always carry the aroma of freshly baked bread.
A scent he could smell from out in the fields

And he has lit the fire in the hearth
So as to draw my people home.
He has grown enough for all of us
So that we might not fall into the jaws of hunger and lose sight of each other.
I hope one day to trade places with him.
Let him sit peacefully by the fire we have built together,
And look out across the world he has overcome.

This last one is called “An Open Letter” to my family should anything happen to me. I wrote it after the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor.

If I am found dead in police custody
Know that I did nothing wrong
That not once was I a threat to myself or others
I tried my best to stay alive.
And that those responsible for my safety
Were the ones who decided I was undeserving

If I am found dead in police custody
Tell my family I love them
Tell my father that he is the one who made me strong
That my favorite memory is of him bailing me out of school in the third grade
Just because he missed me
And that he has always been my hero
And my shoulder to cry on.
Tell him that I’m proud of him.

Tell my mother I’ll miss her
And that I missed giving her bouquets of weeds

That I, in my youth, considered flowers.
Tell her I loved watching trashy reality tv with her
And listening to music with her in the car
No matter how well she knew the song,
She always came in two measures early.
Just like a White woman.
And she would say
“A day is gonna come
When I won’t be around anymore to sing the song wrong,
And you’re gonna miss me.”
So please tell her I miss her.

Tell my brother I believe in him
And whatever he chooses to do
I always knew he was the sibling with a heart of gold
And I’m sorry for terrorizing him when we were younger,
And I’d give anything to go back to a time where our biggest fear
was being caught by our parents in the middle of a cookie heist
I’d give anything to hear you call me Sissy again.
Tell him I’m sorry for leaving him alone
And that he will no longer have to share his things with me
And though I want him to make it through this world without me
I know he will look back at the time when we were children
How he used to give me wet willies and piggyback rides
And now that I am gone he will carry me
Like a child on his back for the rest of his life.

So if I am found dead in police custody,
Give my father your shoulder to cry on
The security he never had as a child.
The security he gave me.
Because too often, Black men are expected to remain calm in a crisis
Are expected to cope with the numerous injustices thrust upon them
And stand unbroken in the face of tragedy.

My father will be allowed more than a single tear
Give my mother a vase to put her flowers in
So she knows I live on
Through the things she loves
And she will hold fast to me

The same way I clutched at her skirts as a child.
She will love me,

Even if she cannot hold me.
Give my brother his lungs back,
For he spends his whole life running away from anger and towards acceptance,
But they keep on moving the finish line.

I simply ask
That when he has no air left to breathe,
And he seems ready to collapse
That those who created and continue to profit
From this unjust system carry him across that finish line
So he may be done with a race he never should have had to run
In the first place.

In short terms,
Give him a break.

And while the media may brand me a criminal
I ask you to see me as a victim of America's unfulfilled promise:
The promise of love.

Because it will become clear to me
In my last moments
That America never loved me
And when my story is shown on the news
It will not be mentioned
That I tried my best to love America
The news anchor will simply say
An 18-year-old Black woman
Has been found dead
In police custody.

Thank you.