

Cathartic Reminiscence

"It was impossible to talk human, to be human, to act human, to express ourselves like a human being... I have no animosity... But I do hope for my grandchildren and great-grandchildren that life for them will be a little more humane." - Helen Colin, Holocaust Survivor, USC Shoah Foundation

To revive the rivers spilling
 from ghetto cities, delusioned child
chin sticky with bubbling blood
 skin taut over sedimentary bones.
To feel honey sugar coating my tongue,
 wash it clean of decaying fibers
slip the ocean's welled tear in my throat.
 Remember this: she killed
her own crying baby yesterday,
 choked him quiet.
and we tried to look away as her arm stiffened
 harbored her sacrifice; I'd like to forget that.
To cleanse the streets of bodies
 limbs twisted in a tango of death.
To liberate me from smothering my nose
 under straw mattresses, watch
infants tumble off the balcony
 push the mother down after.
To suffocate this air of loss.
 Remember this: mama said humanity
could never harm another human being.
 Remember this: daddy died with
a loaf of bread and a prayer in each hand.
 To run after my sister without shepherds
lodging canines into heels. To flee the barbed wires
 of lipstick slurs and bile
distilled of syllables. To reclaim dignity
 from the men who bathe us in chlorine.
To ask without consequence.
 To love without consequence.
Remember this: brother's skull split
 open at my feet, trenches in the flesh
I ask myself every day *why?*
 why did this happen? I remember
his crumb-coated fingers, touch them,
 intertwine them with mine at night. Yes.
I'll even forgive that.

Artist's Statement:

My name is Claire Nam and I listened to Helen Colin's testimony. During Helen's video, I was shocked by the vividness of Helen's memories, and felt her pain when she spoke about her family. However, the most memorable moment for me was when Helen smiled and said, "I know no strangers because everyone I touch always remains a friend of mine. Because I love humanity! I still love human beings." Helen's desire to love everyone even after her traumatic experiences is truly beautiful. In *Cathartic Reminiscence*, I tried to capture her tragic memories and end with her willingness to forgive.

Sources:

USC Shoah Foundation, dir. *Holocaust Survivor Helen Colin Full Testimony*. 2016.

"Remembering Holocaust Survivor Helen Colin on Her Birthday." USC Shoah Foundation. Last modified April 14, 2017. <https://sfi.usc.edu/news/2017/04/14786-remembering-holocaust-survivor-helen-colin-her-birthday>.