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A Case of Danger

Margot Kelley Rodriquez

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Commentary

Poetry for the People

Poetry for the People is a program at U.C. Berkeley designed to promote political and artistic empowerment of students. Under the direction of June Jordan, students learn the art of truth telling. They learn that telling the truth is a necessary and healthy way to create powerful and positive connections among people. Poetry for the People has developed community programs at Berkeley High School, Mission Cultural Center, FCI Dublin Federal Women's Prison, and most recently Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. The following are submissions from student teacher poets.

A Case of Danger

Margot Kelley Rodriguez†

I forgot you like me proper
in my place against the wall
like some kind of trophy
you brag about to your friends
a real live mixed-blood
on display
I slam my door shut
when your friend defends
the eight cops down the street
with their guns drawn
and pointed at the brother in his car
who knows if he moves
he might not see his wife again
and my anger becomes
an eye-rolling affair
excused as my bad attitude
"she gets that way sometimes"

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† Margot Kelley Rodriguez is a student teacher poet with Poetry for the People. She recently self-published her first collection, *angels en la arena: angels in the sand: revolutionary poems*.

you groan when I insist
we cross the street to watch
make sure
the cops dont crack
dont slam
dont shoot the man to the ground
you call me stupid
but you don't know cops
and you don't know bullets
and you don't know
that an audience of college girls
can save lives
you rather hide in the house
where you assume the guise
of expert on racial affairs
quoting people who wrote
about 60th and Market
about where I grew up
telling me what happened to me

I forgot you like me proper
to intimidate your friends
yeah a real mixed-blood
but you only like my music
if you know the song by heart
you only like my words
if you think of them first
and you only like my people
from a distance
across the street
in a car
about to explode.

The Executive Order 9066

Margot Kelley Rodriguez

you hide behind words
like incarceration deportation
to soften the blow of the baton
to muffle the screams of those
damn (fill in the blank) foreigners

you race to wipe out
the next subversive terrorist

with sticks and kicks

you break the bones
of those ghetto kids
in the name of some twisted form
of neo-nazi justice

and anyone who doesn't come
in the right pre-packaged all-star container
needs to "go back where they came from"
or at least get out of sight
right?

Behind the wall of wire
Behind the media hype
of alien delinquent
predator spy
a young girl clings
to her mother's dress
imprisoned
by the fold of her eye

dinner party

María Poblet†

my mother watches waiters
 doesn't notice the sequined women sitting beside her
 until one of them leans over
 laughter and champagne spill fresh on her lips, she asks
 what about your family dear
 my mother sells tupperware from door to door she answers
 my father cuts cows into steaks
 the ladies stop laughing
 my mother sits up straight
 clears her throat

Ghafflah*

María Poblet†

on the way to recess Lisette reaches up and tugs my sleeve
 teacher, my mom says I look like Selena
 don'tcha think?
 with narrow eyes she stares at Maricela
 sideways and up and down
 pulls out her pink plastic mirror
 teases her thick black hair
 and looks to me for approval

Maricela shoves her aside
 with the full force of her nine year old body
 what about me? she demands
 holding a bootleg tape of Selena's last album
 next to her left cheek
 eyes wide with question

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† María Poblet serves as Artistic Director of Poetry for the People Bay Area.

* In Islam, Ghafflah is the sin of forgetting one's divine origins.

I try to invent a second star
some way to split the compliment
to even out their fight

but I can't.
and
in the peeling gray hallway of Eastman Elementary
neither can they.

Haiku

Yunjong Suh†

Husband sets a plate
For the first time for his wife
Just after she dies

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† Yunjong Suh graduated from U.C. Berkeley in 1998 with a degree in Psychology, and now works with Poetry for the People Collective. She commits to bridging communities, particularly ethnic and racial communities, with the hope of contributing to a truly democratic multicultural society.