

## **Trilogy of Grief**

**By Juliet de Jesús Alejandre**

### *Original Goodness*

Long before the tough swagger  
The sullen eyes behind the darkest shades  
The endless fire of your cigarette  
There was another essence,  
One that makes my heart ache in its loss: Your heart.  
I see you as a small child.  
Your being is tender and open like a morning flower,  
Your heart is full with the promise of endless sunrises.  
Your laughter comes easy,  
Falls out from your spirit  
And rolls over our heads  
Engulfs us in your joy.  
Your touch is soft and easy,  
A consequence of play and connection—no malice.  
Your witty words entertain us all,  
Yourself included.  
Your original goodness. Your essence.  
The years had buried it, but its trace  
Slipped out from under the cracks of your shell,  
Like the way the smells of *abuela's calderos*  
Drifted through the air surrounding the old house.

You hurt many.  
You too were hurt—you had to be.  
Cold and closed off.  
Your children couldn't know you.  
Our generation felt the weight of your absence  
And that of all of the others.  
Yet sometimes, we hear,  
You shared your only blanket  
On cold nights with other broken souls,  
You gave away the morsels offered to you,  
Denied yourself the taste of life—  
The nourishment that would unleash and  
Swell up your original goodness.  
You drowned it, held it under the current  
Of bitter rivers until you thought you killed it.  
You tried over and over,  
To extinguish your original goodness.  
Did you think that an OG had no right to reclaim his goodness?  
But original goodness is our birthright—  
It's the indivisible particle of our DNA.  
We *are* original goodness.  
Did you forget what your original goodness felt like?  
Regardless, those who remember you tell us stories about  
Having long conversations with you on a sidewalk,  
That you embraced strangers who

Gave you a bit of their leftover lunch,  
Or a crisp \$20 bill,  
Or who knew enough about life to give you  
A bit of their time,  
Because they saw your original goodness and  
They saluted the OG in you.  
Now that your spirit flies with the ancestors,  
May you remember to visit the heartsick,  
Mend their trauma,  
Lead them back in the direction of their original goodness,  
So that the next generation will not forget to claim their birthright.

*From afar...*

I look in the mirror and attempt to find you in my own reflection,  
I think I have your eyes. If I can remember right, they were the deepest brown  
With a hint of pain, and mischievous joy when you would tease me.

Hunger and government treaties brought us north and I grew up among concrete slabs,  
gang affiliations, and parents working the night shift so someone can be home  
when we came out of school.

I don't know your *campos*. Don't know what it's like to tend the fields, or live the life of a domestic  
servant in the home of a *patrón* with no rest or time of my own. *No sé cosechar papas. Ni moler  
elote*. That's not my life. Yet I am you.

I try to remember your laughter and the way you smelled when I saw you so long ago. Scientists  
say that the air we breathe is recycled breaths of all those who have lived on this plane. I breathe  
in and attempt to hold you deeply into myself.

The most intimate sin of forced economic migration is the canyon between hearts and souls. I got  
a call that you've joined the ancestors and Creator. Unable to travel, I am left with only emotion.  
I will not take part in the rituals that bring the relief of busy hands. I will not help choose your  
*traje*, or comb your hair, or cry at your casket, cup a mound of earth in my hands as an offering as

you are taken back into the earth. I will miss the entrancement of the collective prayers of the faithful for the safe travel of your soul.

But I promise to hold my own *novena* every day after work, among friends and family, some whom never met you before. I will tell my kids about you.

With no body to affirm the flight of your spirit to the other side, part of my sadness is that I may forget to be sad. Forget that you have passed, forget that you no longer walk the land so far away from my own steps. I fear that I will wake up tomorrow and gleefully go out for *café y pan dulce* and forget that you are not here to experience the sweetness of the day. I pray for the day when borders will not become prisons to hold families apart and that families can be united in life and in grief.

Today, I lift up my head to you and hold your face in my mind's eye and celebrate you. If there was no "you," there would be no "me." I truly am because you are and I thank you for this life. I mourn not only your passing but the life that we did not get to live together. I grieve with tears of injustice at the miles and borders between our lives and I pray that your journey will bring us closer together in death than we were able to be in life.

May you rest in peace and you and the spirits of our ancestors bless and visit us *nietos gringos*.

### *Young in Chicago*

Their guilt receives so much more attention than their innocence does...

We say, "It makes sense when kids like them are shot.

It makes sense when they get kicked out of school. Don't find work. Numb themselves with drugs.

They didn't work hard enough," We tell ourselves,

so that we don't have to work hard enough to save them.

History has been preparing us for this moment to make a choice.

A choice between a life of struggle buried by the bling of material possessions or a life of struggle where we lay healing hands on the pain.

I choose what will be best for you my children. A life where we must be healers. Because your pain is eating us all up. I fear you will end the world with your rage. We deserve it. The failing schools and dangerous streets were your inheritance, baby. I am so sorry. I choose you. I must learn to decode this pain so we can go towards the light together.