

# THE MAN WHO WASN'T MY FATHER

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## i. Sixth Day at Camp Crame

Late August 1990, some time in the afternoon. Perhaps the shadows on the grass outside have grown longer. But I am not sure. The walls here are painted the color of ginger. A mat in the corner farthest from the door. There is nothing else in the room. Maybe it is the same outside. Outside. Out there, they are watching my daughter. They know things: what she wore, where she went, how she cries when no one is looking. I want to break something. But there is nothing here that isn't already broken.

## ii. The Mirror

They used to hang something here. Splinters around the hole where the nail used to be. The ghost of a rectangle on paint, fainter than a scar. A square of yellow light pinned to the wall. The hours spent staring at it, willing it to move. And it does. Wall heaves, nail hole yawns open. A gaping mouth, jagged teeth. Mostly, it just stays in place. A day where nothing happens. My daughter visited yesterday. Her voice was the sound of glass breaking. I tried to look at her but the water kept spilling and spilling from her eyes.

### iii. What Solitary Means

I never know when the lights will go out. Not that it matters. All I have here is a pack of playing cards. I cannot see them in the dark but I like to feel their smooth faces. The worn edges like velvet, like the cheeks of my daughter. When she is afraid, when she is asleep, she looks just like her mother. In this place, it is easy to forget. This heart is the mole on her forehead. This spade is the birthmark on her arm. I play this game all night, in the dark. Drawing the same cards over and over again. I always win.

### iv. What Was Taken Away

Swiss army knife, broken blade, tweezers and toothpick missing. Six hundred pesos in my wallet, grey. Elephant leather. Two ID cards, my keys to the house. Remind your Lolo to change all the locks. My camera. Socks with holes, white bacon briefs. My shoes. Is today a Monday? Brown corduroy pants, blue polo shirt. A soiled blue hanky, blood will never wash off. The pen you gave me on my birthday. Is it time to go? Wait. Your grandfather's watch is twenty minutes fast.

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