

Mary Julia Klimenko



SECOND GENERATION PTSD

My father warned me about riots, keeping my head out from under flying chains and to get away fast; just don't get on the freeway traffic jams are the same as a chain cracking my head into a new way of thinking. I stared into his black irises and saw men doing the dead float and piles of dead men on a beach, burned into my father's brain. I saw him flying over his jeep, lifted by wind fleeing the bomb. I saw blood and a soldier buddy turned into a brain without a skull and other ways death can make an enraged entrance.

Saturdays he and his soldier pals legitimized drinking at noon in the bar, with wives alongside them wearing red lipstick, laughter sounding like screaming, holding their shoulders way back so breasts became the thought of the day.

Being his student of all things bad waiting to get me, my brothers were my job, if they died under my watch I'd pay hell. Our Plymouth had running boards but we weren't allowed to open the doors and cool off while we waited for them to take us home.

My mission was to open the bar door real quick, keeping daylight out and sneaking one brother at a time across the dark linoleum without being noticed. I couldn't let them pee their pants because hell to pay wasn't just one type of deal. Any failure equaled hell to pay.

If only my pigtails could have lifted my brothers and me up, holy as a rosary, and flown us away from something broken, bigger than broken beer bottles on the asphalt, something so broken I saw the same loop play over and over in my father's eyes even when my mother asked him if he wanted a "highball" and sometimes on a particularly bad night I looked and saw other ways to die. Those ways sneaked in when he was staring at me, not blinking, making sure I understood that water foaming from the faucet meant the Germans had poisoned our water supply and never to tell anyone where I live.

My stomach is a fist unable to unclench. I don't want to know my body parts can tear off, that my face can bloom into a bloody flower, that my veins could rip becoming useless ribbons, that bullets make holes in people until their screaming shakes the stars, that I could lie helpless while my blood seeped into a midnight field, that I could pray for god to help me and only hungry eyes glittering beyond the tree line would witness my father's predictions come true.