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Albina Zone

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ALBINA ZONE

BY: LISA BATES

Artwork by Amir Khadar



HOW MIGHT
WE EMBODY
COMMUNITY
RESTORATIVE
JUSTICE?

Albina Zone
by Lisa Bates

Portland, Oregon 2036

"It holds a possibility of deep remembrance of the freedom dreams of our ancestors, those who worked before us and walk beside us, and those yet to come. Freedom dreams don't live in real time."
Zenzele Isolde²¹

"I don't even LIKE marshmallows!!" I yell and push away from the table, rattling the latte cups and almost knocking over my chair. I'm storming out as Mx Garner calls out "this isn't like you, Tayshia, I'm concerned."

I think back to the past couple of days--I've been slamming my way out of just about everywhere and it isn't like me...but this week hasn't been like anything I've experienced before....

It all started when I went through the attic and found a bunch of my mom's old stuff, including her high school gear from before the AZ, back when the school was named after Thomas Jefferson. Obviously with abolition, the old slave owning founders were canceled, and so was the mascot. Our school doesn't really have a dress code, because they're gender oppressive, but we're definitely not allowed

²¹ Zenzele Isolde, "Black Ethnography, Black (Female) Aesthetics: Thinking/Writing/Saying/Sounding Black Political Life." *Theory & Event*, 21(1): 148-68.

to wear Jeff High stuff, even if it's just the mascot like this, a sweatshirt she had cut off as a crop. "This is too cute....and if anyone can get away with it, I can" I thought to myself as I checked it out in the mirror. I was in good standing with all my teachers, star students, blah blah. The person who would stop me was my mom, and she was definitely gone for work already—or so I thought.

As I thundered down the stairs, I saw her come back in through the front door because she had forgotten her badges. I froze on the landing but it was too late. Definitely busted. "What....are you thinking," she said in a strained voice. I tried to think up a story about a retro day, or a costume, or—"You know what, I can see you're about to get cute, but don't even try it. Give it to me now."

I wished my mom would say something, anything-- or even just roll her eyes and laugh a little, but she doesn't even look in my face. My mom held out her hand while I took off the sweatshirt. She practically ripped it out of my grasp, tightened her lips and turned away—"I've got to get on the road, I'll probably be late for work now."

I didn't mention that I had also found her old phone and earbuds, and I've been listening to her music. My mom never plays music--honestly my mom never does anything fun. She just works and ...works. I figured she'd just take that too, and I might have lost the battle but I wasn't going to lose the vintage tech or these beats!--"did my mom used to dance???" I wondered as I headed out, bass thumping in my ears.

My mom is usually gone way before I am ready to leave in the morning. Mom's commute is super long because she has to pass through the AZ exit checkpoint. She wears like 7 different badges around her neck and has papers in the

glove box, because she never knows when she'll get asked for proof of employment. Most people who live in the AZ have jobs through the Trust that include classes and trainings, but my mom has a regular job, out in what we call Occupied Oswego. But the AZ...the Albina Zone, that's where we've lived since before the abolition.

The AZ --for a time it was Black and then it was like, really Black, but then it got gentrified when my mom was young. That's when all these apartments came in and the houses got fixed up super cutesy. This was before I was born, but when I was a baby, the city was trying to make up for it by reserving apartments for Black families who had gotten pushed out. My mom got one, because her family had always lived around here, and that's when we were living when The Uprising happened. I was really small and I don't remember it. Sometimes I think I saw flashing lights and heard sirens, but probably that's just from what I've heard about. Not from my mom--she never talks about The uprising, but just around the Zone.

After Abolition Day, a whole bunch of Black and Brown people showed up, released out of the old prisons. We call them the Returned Family. At first they moved into these fancy empty apartments. Then the white folks started leaving--all through elementary school, my classes were emptying. White classmates would get up to say goodbye and solemnly pronounce, "we're giving you reparations"--a word they stumbled over, and none of us really knew what that even meant. What it meant was that they left their houses, and some Returned Family started moving into those instead of staying in the buildings.

My mom was always really quiet and really strict. In the buildings, all the moms had to go to classes and programs. I think they had them all along, but when the

Trust took over governing the Albina Zone, it was like every night, I remember sitting in the back of a room coloring while someone would drone on about family dynamics or saving and budgets or whatever. Anytime I whined about it my mom totally ignored me, so I figured she didn't mind. But one night when I was in middle school, a bunch of Returned Family uncles came to our apartment and packed everything up. I didn't even know my mom knew any of those guys! She didn't say a word to me about what was going on but when we went down in the elevator she grabbed my hand--I started to twist away because I was way too old for that, but she gripped hard.

The Community Coordinator on duty came across the lobby when she saw my mom was rolling a suitcase, but as soon as she saw who was carrying our boxes, she plastered a huge smile on her face. Everyone was very, very polite. But I could tell she was terrified by how fast she was blinking. We moved into a house that night and now I'm the only one who has to do the Trust programs. My mom just said it's because she needs to work, but it's totally unfair. I have to sit through all the workshops and all she says is "just do what you have to do"--usually while she's on her way out the door. Which, like I said, she always is.

"At least she had decent musical taste," I thought as I trudged up the stairs at AZ High. As the chorus "we gon'be alright!" started up, I thought I saw a flicker out of the corner of my eye at the empty stone base that used to have a statue of Thomas Jefferson sitting on it. Was that yelling part of the song?

I took out the earbuds to join my BFFs on the steps. "Heyyy what's---ooh you look mad!" yelled Bea, pretty gleefully in fact, but even though I rolled my eyes I can't be annoyed, she just loves any drama she can vicariously

experience. "Yeah my mom caught me trying to come in this old t-shirt I found..."

"BORRRING, was it ratty or something? Your mom stays pressed over....staying pressed!" she cracked herself up. Kendra looked at me a little more closely--she's quiet and way more sensitive."Wait, no, what was it?"

"Welll...it was an old Jeff High shirt with the mascot on it." Bea's attention snapped back—"WHAT! Oh my gawd, where did you even get that! Your mom probably launched you into the sun, forget all those anti-spanking seminars!"

Kendra looked really nervous, glancing over her shoulder as she asked quietly, "what were you thinking...."

"It was HER shirt" I said defensively, "and anyway it didn't have the name, just the mascot. I just wanted to...I don't know....anyway she took it. But she didn't take this!" I showed them the phone—"it's loaded with music, and y'all... was my mom at some point....coool?? Hip? What is it you teens say?" I laughed, trying to reassure Kendra with a swift hug. "Listen to THIS one"--I skipped ahead to a track by an artist called Kayela J and turned it way up so we could share the earbuds among all three of us,

Over the music I could hear some girls' voices—one so loudly it started drowning out the music, but I only had one earbud in so maybe they were nearby? I looked up curiously. I hadn't seen anyone else out here--and there wasn't anyone out on the steps... I blinked at the statue base--could they be behind it? Some weird acoustics, because I could clearly hear this voice proclaiming "I will be the crazy black girl and I will carry it with pride. I'm sorry I'm so radical that I believe that we are all equals"

—"what is this, a poetry reading?" I thought, as it went on--"

“and I’m sorry that I tear the weak bindings of your system because I believe in education and no, not this institution we send out children to now.” — other girls voices were yelling “yo girl you’re gonna kill it! Yess!”

I still didn’t see anyone. I craned my neck around and out of the corner of my eye I saw a tall brown girl in a head wrap and what looked like 3 or 4 more around her and wait, what? I could have sworn I also saw...a statue? I blinked harder and it was gone. Kendra was standing up, extending her hand to me “Ok, earth to Tayhisa, we gotta go--the music is great but we’ve got naming committee!”

The naming committee. When the Trust took over governance of the Albina Zone, everyone agreed that we shouldn’t have a school named after a slave owning, raping president. But this renaming thing has gone on forever—years! We’ve been on the youth committee since 9th grade and sometimes it seems like there’s no way we’re going to have a name when we graduate next year. The Trust brought in some consulting group to set up this process and every time a new person joins we have to go through all this training and ground rules and consensus process— and when you’re in high school there’s new people every year! Honestly it’s been driving me up a wall, but it felt like we were closer than ever to a choice so I was trying to be optimistic.

When we got to class my good feeling was quickly punctured. There was a new Trust Teaching Fellow with Mx.Garner. Me and Bea exchanged a look...some of them are cool I guess, but Mx. Garner is one of the only Teaching Fellows who stuck around after a couple of years. She’s leading our group process to rename the school now. A couple minutes after the bell rang, two of the guys came sauntering in laughing. When Mx. Garner gave them her ‘are you serious?’ look, they held up both hands saying “sorry

Karen, sorry Karen," with over-the-top puppy dog eyes. As Mx. Garner started to respond, the new Fellow jumped up, saying loudly and way over articulated "it's okay! *We* called you "-- here she gestured vaguely, looking a little lost but she plowed on ahead-- "we called your *femmes* Shaniqua or Maria or Ling-Ling, so it's only fair that you call us... *Karen*. We understand."

This solemn pronouncement was met with total silence for about ten seconds and then we all just busted out cackling as Mx. Garner briefly covered her face with her hand. I thought she might laugh too, but she got it together to say gently, "My name is actually Karen... it's just a joke..." She shot the guys another one of her looks that was remarkably like my mom's "why are you showing out in public like this?" face and pointed to their seats. The new fellow's face was blotchy pink and as she sunk down in her chair she was clutching on her teacher's copy of *White Fragility* the hell all these sticky tabs in it, staring straight ahead. I almost felt bad for her, but I also snickered real loudly as Bea flashed me her phone with the video ready to share, captioned 'oh no baby what is you doing?' with about a thousand facepalm emojis. We finally got settled down as Mx. Garner called the meetings attention to the name question.

Bea whispered "girl if you had worn that old slaver sweatshirt in here today you would have killed that lady, and then what?"

"Exile to Oswegooo" we both whisper dramatically laughing and shivering at the same time.

Kendra glanced over, "y'all play too much."

Which brought us back to the task at hand. I kind of spaced out while everyone dutifully repeated the ground rules "one diva one mic...ouch and oops..." like a lot of AZ

advisory committees we use a consensus model, and I've started noticing there's plenty of times when we the students are pretty cool with an option until the latest facilitator starts poking at it, asking about problematic issues and asking if anyone wants to call a hold. But finally we've gotten down to the Vanport Resilience or Michelle Obama Senior High School when this brand new Teaching Fellow comes out of nowhere and even after her totally humiliating start, jumped in to just ask some questions about how we've centered the voices of—and I couldn't even listen anymore, because the impatience and frustration was just bubbling up inside me and I suddenly said out loud, "Demos, I say!"

I know from hearing some of the older Returned Family on our block that this was a cheer, they would break it out later in the evening at cookouts sometimes. But I didn't know who else knew or what they would say back. "Excuse me?" said the Fellow. Kendra was looking at me like I had lost my absolute mind. I put both hands on the desk and repeatedly loudly, "Demos I say!" Everyone's mouth gaped open and the guys who came in late were elbowing each other in anticipation that finally someone else was making a scene. I stood up from the table, slapped down my name placard, and positively yelled it again, and I heard something faintly in response--was it coming from outside? The hallway? "You know!"

By that time both teachers were talking very fast and clearly getting mad. The new trust fellow was saying 'okay okay we need to consider a trauma-informed approach' while Mx Garnder was shaking her head declaring her disappointment in my desire to violate our collective safe space but honestly? I was just not having it.

"We've been doing this forever and you can't even tell us what the whole process includes, there's an organization

chart for 17 different committees that takes up more than three sheets of paper and I still can't figure out who actually decides anything at all around here!" I picked up my stuff and stomped over to the doorway, then turned at the last moment to yell "and WTF is a Resilience?!"

I stormed out of the building and by the time I got to the street, my adrenaline had stopped pumping and I realized I was going to be in trouble. I would probably get booked into a few weeks of after school sessions with one of the Trust Teen Trauma Specialists, daily supervised meditation and God knows how many one-on-one and group reconciliation sessions with everyone on the naming committee. As I trudged down the street, I just got madder at myself. They would definitely call my mom. UGH! But at least I had some music to listen to. I popped in the earbuds and selected a track off an album called "Worldwide Underground" The singing was amazing, even when the songs lyrics didn't make total sense-- "we like to keep the car running in case the sweeper boys comin" --maybe police stuff? No wonder my mom's been hiding this, she hates stuff that glorifies the old days.

I was walking down MLK Ave when the song cut out and was replaced by a whole lot of voices.

"The whole point of this policy is to push us out!"
"Yeah, remember--master's tools.." another voice warned.

The first voice again- "what we need to understand about the Tif is... " I looked at the phone screen thinking Tiff? Is this like one of those old album skits? It Tiff a person like Tiffany... Huh? This isn't really funny...

"the question is can we use the master's tools to subvert the system, or do we need a whole new hammer!"

What sounded like an older man's voice broke into the conversation, "listen y'all young people y'all ladies, you want to have these radical ideas of what you need to understand is a business mindset..." now this definitely wasn't funny-- this was like listening to the old busybodies on our street lecturing my mom about coming to the AZ block association meetings and whatever else they think they know all about. The skip button wasn't working so I had to keep listening. The femme voices got louder.

"we're investigating these policies and how they've worked here... we don't have to just ask for crumbs, we can take the whole cake!"

"They can't just placate us"

"they can't just put up pictures of Black people while we can't even live here."

"they need to give this land back!"

Just as I got to the corner of MLK and Alberta the voices cut out and the music was back. I was jabbing at the screen, trying to figure out if it was broken, but it seemed like it was playing ok. As I looked up at the mural on the corner, I thought about the last things they were saying....So the faces are here, but what else did they want? Did they ever find the tools? I shook my head. At that moment, I thought I might really be losing it.... Maybe going to some meditation wasn't a bad idea after all....

I decided to just go home and try to do a little anticipatory kissing up. I was cleaning the kitchen and keeping my mom's food warm when she got home. It didn't seem like she had gotten any calls from the school yet since she wasn't actually yelling at me, and I quickly grabbed her

bag and coat from her saying “relax, have dinner.” she made a skeptical face but sat down, sighing as I put the plate in front of her. “How was the drive mom, what do you want to drink?” She said OK, ok, if this is about this morning let’s just move on. Just do--“ “what I need to do--I know, mom, I am.”

We ate in silence for a few minutes and then I asked, “sooo, mom, was there something about MLK and Alberta? Where the Trust office is now? Was that like, a controversy or anything?”

My mom lets out a puff of air. “Tay, the Trust has been there almost your whole life, and they’re gonna be there. Does it really matter about what building it is?”

I should have known. My mom never talks about anything that happened before. But she’s gotta know about this, it sounded like it was a pretty big deal. “Ok but mom—”

She cut me off. “There was something about a development, and that’s how we ended up in the apartment., but it really doesn’t matter. Things are how they are.” she left the room and I slumped down on my arms on the table. What I heard sounded like femmes, girls, standing up for themselves. My mom must have known about it when it was happening if it was big enough to get the apartment....

The next few days of school I kept feeling annoyed and bored--and on edge wondering when Mx Garner was going to get a hold of my mom about the meeting and my reconciliation plan. I was slouching through the halls and staring out the window in class, listening to my mom’s old music and getting more and more irritable. I got through my Accountability Apology in the naming committee without rolling my eyes, but obviously Bea and Kendra knew something was up. After the meeting, Bea got right in my

way and yanked the earbud out of my ear. "Ok girl, what. Is. up." Kendra stood next to me but she was also staring at me, waiting for my reply. "well....I think....I'm just sick of all of this! They taught us that Abolition was about ending systems of oppression, but this!! This doesn't feel like freedom! We can't even pick our school name, let alone anything else, and we don't know anything about so much of what happened!" Kendra started pulling us down the steps away from the building, "come on, we have to talk further away---now what do you mean about what has happened?"

I took a deep breath. I was about to reveal to my two best friends that I was possibly going totally out of my mind. "I've been....learning about some stuff....Stuff that happened in the past, like, stuff in the school and the zone."

"What STUFF?? Girl, use your WORDS" said Bea with exasperation and Kendra said "shh, let her talk, damn!"

"Ok so I think there's been way more than just the Uprising. I heard there were lots of fights, not just how we learned about the urban renewal and stuff from a long time ago, but like, when our moms were kids. I heard there were people...girls, femmes.... Who were trying to make a lot of revolutions happen. Like, not just to have the Trust come to make programs, but something...i don't know, something else." I looked warily at my friends. They exchanged a glance and Bea said, "what do you mean you heard?"

"Well...like, I hear their voices. I hear the music," I said holding out the phone, "but I also hear...them. I hear them talking about what they think and arguing, and gassing each other up, talking about what real education could be, and....." I trailed off...."You probably think I'm insane."

Bea chewed her lip for a second and said, "I don't know what you're listening to...but ...I have heard about some stuff, like, from before." We all looked around to see if anyone could hear us, and instinctively kept walking, arms linked together so we could stick close and hear as we whispered loudly. "I mean, we do all agree that the name committee is some bullshit. And I'm sick of being sent to Teen Trauma what-EVAH just because I'm fully over learning about Oregon's constitution with yet another Trust Fellow on tour to the equity experiment! We get it, they did the racism back then, but what about *now*?"

"Right, exactly!" I exclaimed. "How are we supposed to think we're free in here when there's so much....else...out there!? My mom won't even take me over to Oswego and you know she got stopped on her way in to work again this week! She doesn't talk about it but I could tell because she got home SO late, because she has to make up those hours."

I was getting pretty heated when Kendra chimed in, "I don't know about what happened here...but, my uncle, like my real uncle, not just Returned Family, but when he came back, he went to Oakland. He talks to my mom sometimes and it sounds like it's really different there. Like, they don't have the Trust or anything like that. He was talking about cooperatives--I asked my mom if that's like the Advisories and they just laughed, but they didn't say any more while I was there."

"See?" I said excitedly, "there's gotta be more we need to know! Adults are not gonna tell us--I mean, my mom? She already shut me down. But I don't know how to hear more!" I was swiping the phone screen and I could tell my friends were exchanging another look. "Oh, man, y'all do think I'm nuts."

"I mean....it's not that" Kendra started. Bea interjected, "But yes girl you sound cray! The point is whether you're listening to ghosts or whatever, we're with you...we have to do something about this no name having ass high school and probably this whole damn zone."

But what? And how? As my friends kept talking, complaining and sharing their wildest ideas about what might be happening in Oakland, which included different cute femmes to date (Bea) and a real horticulture program (Kendra), I kept idly swiping on the phone's music list, trying to see if there were hidden tracks, and thinking about what I'd heard....if the master's tools don't work, then...what are the tools we need?

The next day, after yet another derailment at the naming committee--this time, the reintroduction of Senator Solange as a better name than Michelle Obama, because she was elected and not just a wife, I was trudging home, listening to music from back when the Senator was singing about trying to dance it away, when ...it was happening again! This time I was excited, and turned up the volume so I could try to hear more.

It was one girls' voice at first, she sounded pretty young "So, it's about...power? That sounds kind of, like, intense...like fighting?" An older sounding voice responded "Yeah, it does sound intense, doesn't it? So let's talk about what power means, so we can talk about why we call ourselves Sisters..." the voice started fading out, which was so frustrating! I scrubbed back on the track to see if I could pick it up again....no, still music...there it was!

"Ok, so we won at the board, because we showed that we weren't just a bunch of teens making noise"
"no, we were making noise *and* we knew our stuff!"
There were a bunch of whoops and hollers. The older voice

was talking again, "now, we're taking on something harder, because everyone thinks they're doing the right thing for the right reasons...so we really have to know our stuff."

"But how can they think it's right to tear down our home?"

"They think they know what's best for our families"

"And they're trying to push us out again!"

"yeah, we're going to have to find out a lot of information, and get our friends on board."...

"my mom is worried that we're going to get in trouble," said one of the younger voices.

Oh man, I could relate, I thought. I saw what looked like a group of young femmes up ahead, kind of shimmering, walking together like my friends and I did, but they were-- were they punching each other? No, they were just playing, or practicing maybe?

As I kept walking, the images and voices faded out, and I couldn't get them back. But now I had some more clues to follow, I just had to figure out who to ask.

I was so excited when I walked in the door, I had completely forgotten about the whole waiting for my mom to have heard about my episode at school and basically end my life. But when I busted into the kitchen, my mom was sitting there--damn, it was really early, she must have left work--oh no. She was totally stone faced and gestured to the chair opposite hers.

"Tayshia, I had to leave my job two hours early today after receiving a phone call from your teacher. That is not what I expect to have to do."

I didn't know what to say, why hadn't I prepared better for this? "Mom, let me explain, I've already done my apology, and—"

She cut me off. "Whatever they've required you to do, do it double. You need to be impeccable. You've never been on a reconciliation list before and I will *not* have my daughter—"

Then I interrupted her—"yeah I *know* Mom, your daughter will not be on any list of any kind, no conflicts, no talkback, do what you have to do and never even think about it! I get it! You don't want me to question anything! You just want me to do what everyone tells me!"

"You need to sit *down*, young lady..." she warned.

"No, you know what? No. I'm sick of this! It's practically like...it's like living with....." I was so angry, my whole body felt like it was on fire. "It's like you're a COP."

As soon as I said it, I knew I had gone way, way too far. In the Albina Zone, calling someone a cop is the worst thing you can say, we don't even joke about it. Even before my mom started yelling, which she was clearly about to do, she quickly glanced to the window to see if it was open and if anyone heard. Before the Trust took over governance here, it used to be that the Returned Family would expel police and their families from the area, and even though it's been a long time since there were any actual cops around, I knew that's what my mom was worried about.

When she turned back to me, she was clearly furious, and I started to babble an apology. She put up her hand and cut me off. The worst thing was her face was totally blank. She didn't look scared or angry, she looked like nothing. She was staring at a spot on my forehead, no eye contact. Tears were streaming down my face as I kept trying to say I was sorry, but she just got up from the table, turned her back, and walked out of the room.

That's when I called Mx Garner to see if I could talk to her. I thought she was the only adult I might be able to get some answers from, and she agreed to meet me at the coffee shop the next day, and I got in bed still stuffy and cried myself to sleep.

By the time I got there, I knew I couldn't come out and tell my teacher that I was hearing voices and maybe even seeing things? So I just talked a little bit about the fight with my mom. Not the whole thing--I couldn't admit what I had called her, but just that I was tired of meeting her and everyone's expectations all the time. I was about to ask if she knew how I could learn more about the Uprising, and all the stuff that happened before then, when she went into teacher lecture mode. Inwardly, I sighed, but I guess that's how teachers are, so I could listen and then ask my questions. Anyway she was being pretty complimentary and after my mom's total disgust with me, it felt reassuring.

"You're having a rough week, but I know you'll snap out of it! Listen, Tayshia, you are one of the special ones.... You should have seen yourself back in kindergarten, when we were testing.

You just looked at that marshmallow and you didn't grab it, didn't even touch it! We all knew then you were going to be a leader, not like some of the other kids.. I mean I'm sure you can guess your friend Bea gobbled that down right away! She just has never had the grit you do..."

My head was spinning. I did remember those days in the room, being told not to touch the marshmallow and thinking, yuck, why would i? I loved sour candy, it's still my favorite. Wait, so that was a *test* for real? And they're still talking about it? They're using something I did when I was a

little kid to say I have more potential than my friends?

Ms. Garner was going on and on about how I could come straight into the Trust Fellows program after high school, learn to do family support, and all I could think was — “I don’t even LIKE Marshmallows!!!”

And the next thing I knew I was here, running. I know my outburst and taking off might trigger someone to call the AZ Street support team so I have got to get out of here. I take a left and veer a couple of blocks from my normal route. The music is still playing in my ears--when did I put the earbuds back in?--

Just as I got a massive stitch in my side, I looked around--oh, shit. I was at the old precinct. I never come this way. Most Black folks in the AZ avoid it. The Trust made a reflective garden and a memorial here, after Abolition, but there’s just way too much bad spirit around here.... unfortunately, I’m cramping up and panting hard and I have to stop. And then...it happens again. This time it’s much more--my vision is kaleidoscoping and I stagger back until I’m learning against ehw all, which feels surprisingly warm--oh my god, what am I seeing, it’s like fireworks right in front of my face, loud, sparks. The music is even louder—“OK ladies now let’s get in formation—” and all of a sudden it drops out, and I hear a new beat, with hundreds of voices calling out in a singsong, “you about to lose yo’ jobs”

I’m seeing splinters like a broken mirror--here’s the street and the fountain and the grass but also here’s concrete and bodies, so many people, all yelling, sweating, and I can hear --it’s a voice I know, so well. I can hear *my mom’s voice*, above everything, the shouts, the bangs, the drumming. I

hear my mom so clear, her voice ringing out - "stay together, stay tight" and I look up and she's right there--locked arm in arm with two other femmes. They all look so young, and they're right up front as the bangs get louder and people are screaming. A robotic voice is saying "impact munitions will be deployed" over and over but my mom's voice is louder and braver and I can hardly breathe, I'm coughing and I don't know if it's from running or the smoke I can see in the air and my mom turns her head and I swear we lock eyes, I swear she sees me for one split second as I whisper, "mom" --and the girl on her right yells "Dana, GO" and she turns away to run. The moment we break eyes, everything clear, and the music is back in my ears.

I'm bent over with my hands on my knees still breathing heavily. Everything looks like it normally does--quiet, except the gurgling fountain. I pass the historical markers and walk as fast as I can to get home.

As I burst through the door, my mom is just hanging up her badge in the kitchen. "Mom, mom, I need you!" She doesn't turn around when I enter the kitchen. She's rubbing her forehead and I can tell from her back she's still mad and even more tired—"Mom please! Mom! I'm sorry! I'm sorry for what I said, I didn't mean it!" She sighs and says "ok" but she doesn't turn around.

"But MOM--mom, I have to know! We have to talk. I know you don't want me to, but I have to do something! We know about Oakland, about the liberated zones, me and my friends, we want to learn, we want to fight--we have to! This place isn't right, it's not what you wanted"

When I say this last part--you--her shoulders go up real tense. "Mom!" I grab her hand and try to turn her around, but she's looking at my ear, past me, blinking faster.

“Mom, I know you know how! I SAW YOU”--she finally snaps her eyes to mine.

“You saw me. And I saw you.”

We’re gripping each other’s arms tightly, and my mom is looking deep in my eyes, like she’s never really looked at me before. She breathes in deep as I race ahead,

“Mom, we’ve got to do it now, please we—”

She interrupts: “we’ve got time.”