



SAY YOU HEARD MY ECHO

A PLAY ABOUT SPIRIT & SURVIVAL

IN THE DECADE AFTER 9/11

FULL PLAY ONLINE @ [YOUTUBE.COM/KZTSAI](https://www.youtube.com/kztsai)

WRITTEN BY KELLY TSAI

PLAY DIRECTED BY JESSE Y. JOU / VIDEO DIRECTED BY KELLY TSAI

FEATURING YALINIDREAM, KELLY TSAI, & ADEEBA RANA

PRODUCED BY NANCY KIM, YING LE, & ANDRE LANCASTER

DRAMATURGY BY AMISSA MILLER

DEVELOPED VIA ASIAN AMERICAN ARTS ALLIANCE CALL & RESPONSE AT FLUSHING TOWN HALL, POETIC LICENSE THEATER FESTIVAL, HIP HOP THEATER FESTIVAL, & RISING CIRCLE PLAYRISE WITH FUNDING FROM ASIAN WOMEN'S GIVING CIRCLE, NYU A/P/A, RISING CIRCLE THEATER COMPANY, & OUR 158 KICKSTARTER BACKERS. FOR MORE INFO, BOOKING@KELLYTSAI.COM.

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

Thank you to Asian Women's Giving Circle, Asian American Arts Alliance, Flushing Town Hall, NYU A/P/A, Rising Circle Theater Company, and our 158 Kickstarter Backers (listed below) for their generous support of this project.

Without you, this would not have been possible:

AJ Aguado	Jessica George	May Lin
Emelyn Aguado	Christian Guzman	Andrea Louie
Azizah Ahmad	Catherine Jhung	Brian Lu
Raquel Almazan	Mike Jou	Ryan Ludman
Anida Yoeu Ali	Emily Millay Haddad	Adriel Luis
ANAE	Elaine Han	Lyk
Piper Anderson	Haparobot	Jerry Ma
Jennifer Armas	Karen Hanna	Ari Machida
Marie Avetria	Erika Hayasaki	Alex Mallory
Maria Bauman	David Hou	Thomas Mathew
Jeanne M. Beaumont	Ren Hsieh	Pedro Martinez
Tamiko Beyer	Eric Hsu	Erica Martinez
Bob	Christine Huang	Isabel Martinez
Hetty Tonks Borinstein	Jasmine	Jackie McCaffrey
Josephine Bossenberger	Aviva Jaye	Mimi McGurl
Alicia Boone	Ayinde Jean-Baptiste	Sheena Medina
Cedric Britt	EJ Jones	Anshu Mohllajee
Diana Bui	Alina K	Daren Mooko
Jona Caberto	Kai-Ti Kao	Holly Morris
Kaycee Canlas	Clara Kim	Marq Mosier
Sarah Chang	Veena Kondapalli	Movement for the Urban
Michelle Chen	Gowri Koneswaran	Village
Victoria Chi	David Kong	Angela Munguia
Valerie Chin	ManSee Kong	Kelsay Elizabeth Myers
Young Cho	Paul Knox	Rick Ngac Ha
Esther Choi	Joann Kwah	Sham-e-Ali Nayeem
Sun Mee Chomet	KrysN	Monique NB
Melinda Chu	LR	Richard Oliver
Elaine Davenport	Emily Lam	Betty Park
Tanya Dean	Mui Sam Le	Chien-Yu Peng
Walter M. Dziduch	Amber Le	Bao Phi
Shereen Dzousa	Yen Le	Dawn Philip
Effie	Michael Lee	Ann Poochaereon
El Ra Sun	Joua Lee	Michael Premo
Marlon Unas Esguerra	Linda Lee	Jami Proctor-Xu
Elisa Espiritu	Tina Lee	Eileen Ramos
Aizzah Fatima	Katie Hae Leo	Aroosha Rana
Ivette Feliciano	Joseph O. Legaspi	Amy Roberts
Elissa French	Cynthia Lin	Kristen Rosa
Nathan Gao	Edward Lin	Jasmine Ruiz
Jamahl Gambler	Karen T. Lin	Seema Sabnani

Sabelo
Ahalya Satkunaratnam
Beto Sepulveda
Andrew Sedlak
Pushkar Sharma
Leonard Shek
Sahar Shirazi
Nailah Sims
Christine Simpson
Sachs
Joey Silberhorn
SVM

Nithya Sunder
Les Talusan
Marianna Terzakis
The Eastern Addition
Melisa Tien
San Tong
A.K. Tosh
Sabbath Troisi
Kristi Truong
HoChie Tsai
Julie Tsai
Celia Turner

Davina Wan
Alvin Wang
Greg Watanabe
David C. Wells
Helena Wong
Kristina Wong
Nelson Wong
Thanu Yakupityiage
YaliniDream
Chien-An Yuan
Gloria Yu
Joyce Yu

PRODUCTION HISTORY

This project was commissioned in 2011 by Nico Daswani of Asian American Arts Alliance for the Call & Response Series at Flushing Town Hall (2011) and the Locating the Sacred Festival in NYC (2012). The play was developed for and in close collaboration with its performers YaliniDream, Kelly Tsai, and Adeeba Rana.

It was further developed via readings and workshops with Rising Circle PlayRISE, Poetic License Theater Festival, and the Hip Hop Theater Festival. Director Jesse Y. Jou had a huge role in the development of this work throughout as did producer Nancy Kim. Producer Andre Lancaster and dramaturg Amissa Miller played critical roles in the initial inception of this piece, and producer Ying Le helped to shape the work in its later stages.

Performers Aizzah Fatima, Paige Funn-Hernandez, Simone Jacobson, and Gowri Koneswaran were also a great help in the development of the work. Jill Aguado, Doreen Kramer, JenDog Lonewolf, and Beto Sepulveda also helped in numerous capacities throughout the life of the production. Kia Corthon & Kamilah Forbes were fantastic moderators for our post-show conversations during the HERE run.

The crew of designers and technicians who worked on this piece were also the most sane, kind, professional, and caring team that one could hope for and their brilliant work helped to elevate every second of this production: Mike Skinner (Sound), Chien-Yu Peng (Set/Props), Alan Edwards (Lighting), Valérie Bart (Costumes), John Nehlich (Stage Manager), Devin Brain (Associate Director).

USE OF THIS SCRIPT & PERMISSIONS

As the play closed in NYC and two years of work by dozens of people came to an end, I knew that the audience that could benefit from this play far extended the reach of our production capabilities.

We hadn't planned on releasing a video version of the play, but I took the last couple of years to edit together our archival footage taken on five different nights of the play's performance. The interstitial choral poems for the video version were recorded in 2015 to be mixed with the 2012 live footage.

As unorthodox as it may be to put a full play online and make the script available for download, I found myself saying over and over again that I wanted this play to be able to reach that young Asian American girl who has never seen herself represented or the fatigued activist in dire need of reflection or to illuminate the stories of those who are continually affected by PTSD, sexual assault, and Islamophobia.

My writer's goal in the creation of this piece was to explore where poetry naturally occurs in the lives of each of these characters, whether in activist protest chants, prayers, raps, military cadences, or songs.

Please feel free to use and share this script for your reading or teaching purposes, or as a creative prompt to write whatever these lines or characters may inspire.

If you are interested in performing this work for full production, workshop, reading or competition, please contact us at booking@kellytsai.com, and let us know what you have in mind.

Thank you for taking the time to care and explore this work. I hope that it moves your heart and mind towards a deeper understanding and compassionate connection to the world.



September 2016

kellytsai.com
[@kellytsai_nyc](https://www.instagram.com/kellytsai_nyc)
[youtube.com/kztsai](https://www.youtube.com/kztsai)

"Say You Heard My Echo" © 2012 Kelly Tsai

CHORUS ONE

(Shadowy catacombs of NYC subway under construction. Work lamps light the stage. Outline of chain-link fence in the background. Rubbish and wreckage from which the rest of the sets are created frame the stage. The three women re-build.)

ONE: In the city that never sleeps

THREE: Call to prayer on the corner

TWO: Storefront church on the block

THREE: Temple beside the hotdog stand

TWO: Goddess circle at midnight

THREE: In the city that never sleeps

ONE: Curls of hair twist before the ear

TWO: Jehovah's witness on a bike

ONE: Amulet hangs from necklace chain

THREE: Encircle the wrist with prayer beads

TWO: In the city that never sleeps

THREE: Ancestor shrine next to Pokemon cards

ONE: Drum circles in the park

TWO: House dance until dawn spirits fly

ONE: Yoga mats drone with caffeinated om's

THREE: In the city that never sleeps

TWO: Eight million prayers held on the in-breath

ONE: Eight million prayers that may never come out

(Lights dim quick as if fuse has blown. The women turn the work lamps back on one by one.)

TWO: Lips

ONE: Words

THREE: Being

ONE: Sound

TWO: Silence

THREE: Silence

ONE: Sacred

TWO: Sound

ONE: Echo

THREE: Echo

TWO: Echo
ONE: Call

TWO: Echo
THREE: Echo
ONE: Echo
TWO: Call

THREE: What sounds like silence
ONE: Isn't silence at all

TWO: Act 1, go.

ACT ONE

(One lights a prayer candle and moves downstage right. Two & Three move ahead of One. They build a structure from the wreckage as they recite.)

ONE

(sung)

Ave Maria,
Gratia Plena...

TWO & THREE

Hail Mary, full of grace.
Our Lord is with thee.
Blessed art thou among women,
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb,
Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
pray for us sinners,
now and at the hour of our death.
Amen.

(As One arrives, lights up on scraggly, colorful corner that Two and Three have constructed: women of color burlesque photos, protest posters, mismatched table and chair, coat rack with backpack. One sits, places candle on the table, blows it out.)

ONE

(To audience)

There were so many reasons why I was dying to move to New York as a kid.

(Two & Three as childhood memories.)

TWO

Aren't you all supposed to be Hindu or something?

THREE

I saw some other people like you at the mall, but with towels on their heads.

TWO

Why can't more immigrants be like your family? Ready to Americanize.

(One pushes Two & Three away. Two & Three
resume as One's parents.)

ONE

My parents could care less. They were just happy to have something to brag about to
our family in Jaffna.

THREE

Only Americans in our town plus us.

(Change. Church. Two & Three as One's parents.
They kneel.)

TWO & THREE

Hail Mary, full of grace.
Our Lord is with thee.

Blessed art thou among women,
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb,
Jesus.

Holy Mary, Mother of God,
pray for us sinners,
now and at the hour of our death.

ONE

Me in my stuffy white dress. My brother
in his shiny shoes. Father Tom's nasally
voice. Sit, then get back up.

In my daydreams, orchids pour from
Father Tom's mouth. Huge green leaves
unfold from the pipe organ.

Stars fall through the stained glass
windows, like confetti on our heads.

ALL

Amen.

(Two dresses Three in a red scarf as Mary
Magdalene.)

ONE

One year, at every mass, I never saw Father Tom. I just saw her.
Her red cape. Her long, loose hair.

Call her a prostitute. Call her the wife of Christ.
A heck of a lot closer than Father Tom ever was or will be.

A woman that no one believed, who was the truest believer of all.

THREE

(As Mary Magdalene)

I have seen the Lord. Do you want to know what He said?

(One nods and kneels in prayer.)

ONE

Hail Other Mary, Mary Magdalene, not so full of grace.
 Somebody's Lord hopefully is with thee.
 Blessed art thou among women - at least I think so -
 Blessed would've been the fruit of thy womb - if you had so chosen -
 Holy Other Mary, Lover, Wife, Sinner before God,
 Pray for us
 Now and at the hour of our deaths
 Through our mortal confusions

(One opens her eyes. MM is gone. One disappointed. Change.)

ONE

Fast-forward. My dumb-ass brother splits to New York to be a big-time investment banker. I follow as a lowly college student, then drop-out, then bartender, then vegan baker by day, burlesque dancer by night!

(Space transforms into burlesque club. One starts a vaudevillian burlesque routine. Two is the bar owner. Three is a cocktail waitress.)

ONE

(sung)

You might think that I'm a Hindu
 Because of what I look like to you
 Out of towners guess
 I'm a terrorist au paaaaaaair.

The truth is that I'm a Catholic
 So by faith I've got you half-licked
 Just blame the colonizers
 They brought the church everywheeeeeere.

(End of burlesque routine.)

Thank you. Thank you very much.

(Two pantomimes club owner and puts a stack of dollar bills in One's hand. One counts them as the lights shift to early dawn.

One changes from her burlesque persona back to a
fatigued version of herself.)

ONE

But in the early mornings, when I walk back to my apartment on Avenue B, I feel
something on my skin like -

TWO & THREE

(sung)

Ave Maria...

(Change. Apartment. One lights prayer candle and
kneels. Two dresses Three as Mary Magdalene.)

ONE

Mary Magdalene? I start to see her everywhere in New York City streets.

(One and Three as Mary Magdalene pursue each
other cat and mouse.)

Checking out bootleg purses on Canal, hanging with skateboarders at Union Square,
flipping burgers on a halal truck on Houston, selling used books on Sixth.

(One finally catches up to Three as Mary
Magdalene.)

THREE

(as Mary Magdalene)

Do you want to know what He said?

(Change.)

ONE

My brother says he's got a temp gig for me at a finance firm downtown,
"if I don't mess it up."

(Temp office. Burlesque spotlight. Music. One's
routine is now as an office worker, typing, smiling,
shaking hands, organizing papers and supplies,
maneuvering around the desk with her bum leg.)

A few days become a few weeks. I put up a corkboard in my cubicle, thumb-tacked with
postcards of everywhere I want to go -

TWO

Venice

Sumatra THREE

Mexico City TWO

Colombo THREE

Paris TWO

Harare THREE

(Burlesque spotlight grows. Office routine with new sense of resolve.)

ONE
New routine. Morning: add lemons to the pitcher of tea in the fridge. Afternoon: fill the snack basket by the door. I get to know the people in accounting, marketing, IT, the cleaning crew.

(Change. Apartment. One lights prayer candle.)

ONE
That night, I have a dream about my corkboard. It's falling from the sky. The postcards are burning, flying...

Venice TWO

Sumatra THREE

Mexico City TWO

Colombo THREE

Paris TWO

Harare THREE

ONE

When I wake up, my whole body is sore.

(Change. Morning.)

ONE

Ten AM. I'm late. So frickin' late. Has the office called? Why haven't they called? My voicemail? My frickin' voicemail code. It's a Tuesday morning in September. The sun is bright. The sky is clear.

THREE

You've reached the offices of -

TWO

BEEEEEP!

ONE

I call again. That's when I notice...5 missed calls. From my mother?

THREE

You've reached the offices of -

TWO

BEEEEEP!

(One frantically brushing her teeth, getting organized, grabs for remote control. Television buzz.

Sounds of 9/11 newscast seem to come from audience. All three women draw closer to it, transfixed by what they see in the distance.)

ONE

My office building.

TWO & THREE

Hail Mary, full of grace.
Our Lord is with thee.
Blessed art thou among women,
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb,
Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
pray for us sinners,
now and at the hour of our death.
Amen.

(Change.)

ONE

Borough locked down. Military trucks on empty streets. I show my ID at checkpoints on every block.

(One scratches her arm. It gets more intense.)

Scratching at night. That's when it starts happening.

(Change. Office turns to coffee shop. One is busy cleaning while balancing on her good leg.)

ONE

I start working at an old hippie coffee shop around the corner from my place. I don't want to be too far. Just in case?

(One shrugs. Change. Apartment.)

ONE

Each morning, a new set of scratches.
I invest in more long-sleeved shirts.
Mary Magdalene? Nowhere to be found.

(Change. Coffee Shop.)

ONE

New routine. Morning. Come early. Set out muffins. Brew coffee. Wipe down counters. Warm up cash register. Lunch Rush. Wrap sandwiches. Dice up fruit. Dump old pastries. A few days become a few weeks become a few months become...two years?

(Three as Blu approaches One.)

THREE

I'm Blu. Here for the open mic. Just setting up.

(One motions Three to other side of coffeeshop.
Three as Blu sets up for the open mic.)

ONE

Incense. Ugh. The smoke makes me itch.
Dishes to soak. Bins to fill. Working a double shift -

THREE

What's up y'all?
Thanks so much for coming out tonight.
I'm gonna kick it off with a song you may know.
If you do, sing along.

(sung)

We who believe in freedom cannot rest.
 We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes.

Until the killing of black men, black mothers' sons
 Is as important as the killing of white men, white mothers' sons...

Something ONE

Everything TWO

Something ONE

Everything THREE

Within me. Opens up. ONE

(Change.)

ONE
 That night, I have a dream about my corkboard. It's falling from the sky. The postcards
 are burning, flying...

(Two dresses Three as Mary Magdalene.)

But as they fall, Mary Magdalene - hair loose, swathed in her red cape - reaches out. She
 catches one postcard.

Venice TWO

Then two. ONE

Sumatra TWO

Then three. ONE

Mexico City TWO

Then four. ONE

Colombo TWO

They're still on fire. ONE

Paris TWO

She shakes them. ONE

Harare. TWO

She blows them out like birthday candles. ONE

(Beat.)

When I wake up, no scratches. Just this once. ONE

(Change. Coffeeshop. Two transforms Three from Mary Magdalene into Blu.)

Hey. THREE

Hey. ONE

Got a question for you. THREE

Shoot. ONE

Our space fell through for our security training, and it's kinda slow here. Most of us are here already, and anyone else...we can tell them not to come. Can we do it here? THREE

Sure, but everyone's gotta keep buying: coffee, tea, something. ONE

THREE

Thank you. You're the best. Thank you. If you want to join us -

ONE

No, thanks.

THREE

But if you do.

ONE

But I don't.

THREE

(To security training participants) Did everyone sign up for the action on Saturday? We need all your info and an emergency contact - (Fumbling) where'd I put the list?

ONE

Up here.

THREE

Right. (Smiles at One) Can everyone -

ONE

(to audience)

I watch them move.

(Two & Three practice protest defense postures.)

THREE

Make your body like water.

TWO

This is how you form a human chain.

THREE

We need three more volunteers -

(One raises her hand, surprising herself.)

THREE

You sure?

ONE

Sure, I'm sure.

THREE

It's important that you hold tight. The security line.

ONE

Right.

THREE

And there's a possibility that you may get arrested.

ONE

I don't care.

THREE

See you at Times Square tomorrow at 10?

(One nods. Two & Three exit.)

ONE

(sung)

We who believe in freedom cannot rest.

We who believe in freedom -

(One feels itchy all over. She moves to scratch, then stops.)

ONE

(spoken)

Cannot rest until it comes.

(Change. Times Square protest.)

ALL

NO JUSTICE! NO PEACE! NO RACIST POLICE!

TWO

WHAT DO WE WANT?

ALL

PEACE!

TWO

WHEN DO WE WANT IT?

ALL

NOW!

ALL

NO BLOOD FOR OIL! NO BLOOD FOR OIL!
DROP BUSH, NOT BOMBS!

ONE

All I can feel is sweat, hands, the tumble of bodies. The cops come from every direction. Billy clubs and plastic handcuffs. We get separated. BLU!

THREE

Hold your ground!

ONE

The guy to my right holding the blow horn goes down, wrestling with the cops. I grab the woman to my left in the crook of my elbow. A hand behind me. The zip of plastic handcuffs. Street lamps flicker. Lights of the paddy wagons.

(Change. Paddy wagon. One & Three are riding with their hands cuffed behind their backs. Two as paddy wagon driver.)

ONE

In the paddy wagon, it's dark and hot.

TWO

(As paddy wagon driver)

SHUT THE FUCK UP BACK THERE.

ONE

Everything muffled. Skin against skin. Grumbles and gasps. In the back, a woman leans her head against the metal divider. Hair loose and long. A weary smile on her face. It's Blu.

(Change. Coffee shop.)

ONE

I help, because I want to help her. Making copies. Organizing email lists. Putting up flyers. She doesn't notice at first.

THREE

What do you think of the font on this brochure? Bigger or smaller?

ONE

Looks fine to me.

THREE

Too big or too small. I can't decide.

ONE

I don't think you've got to -

THREE

I'll make it bigger. You closing up?

ONE

Not yet, but soon.

THREE

Is it okay if I keep working while you clean up?

ONE

Doesn't matter to me.

(One hangs around. Awkward.)

So...what do your parents think of this organizing stuff?

THREE

They don't know about it.

ONE

What do you mean?

THREE

I could get arrested a hundred times, and they'll never want to know. It's our own weird version of don't ask, don't tell. Not sure what freaks them out more, that I'm queer or that I'm an activist.

ONE

Where's your family from?

THREE

Bangalore, but my mother came to the States when she was pretty young.

ONE

Oh yeah?

THREE

Sorry. Got a lot to finish up right now.

ONE

Oh, okay, cool. I -

(One goes back to cleaning. Three looks up.)

THREE

What about you?

ONE

What about me?

THREE

What about everything that you asked me, but you?

ONE

I don't remember what I asked.

THREE

Never mind.

ONE

Uh, what's your real name? It's not Blu. Is it?

THREE

(Taps her papers)

Things to finish.

ONE

Oh, yeah, cool.

(One returns to cleaning. Three returns to her papers. Three watches One cleaning, then speaks.)

THREE

Defense. My father is a defense engineer. Makes lasers to vaporize people or some crap. See. It's mutual. Don't ask. Don't tell. And my real name is Anjali, but I hate that name. It's after my great-aunt, who was a complete cunt.

(Change. Two restores table and chair to downstage right corner. Apartment. One looks over both of shoulders, kneels, lights her prayer candle.)

ONE

Mary Magdalene, where are you? Me and Blu moved in together. It all happened so fast. We were busy working on campaigns. One thing led to another, and it didn't make sense for us to live separate. I guess we fell in love, even though everything is so crazy.

THREE

Those fuckers at NYPD revoked our march permit. How am I going to do that tomorrow when I've got to - Baby, you're so cute with your prayer candles. Funny how you believe in that stuff, considering how smart you are.

(One blows out candle and puts it away. One reaches for her arm to scratch, but stops as she sees Three watching her.)

ONE

We've been so busy working for -

Iraq	THREE
Afghanistan	TWO
Sri Lanka	THREE
Indonesia	TWO
A few weeks...	ONE
For Katrina	THREE
For Fong Lee	TWO
For Sean Bell	THREE
...become a few months...	ONE
For the election	THREE
For Prop 8	TWO
For Oscar Grant	THREE
...become a few years...	ONE
For Haiti	TWO
Against SB1070	THREE
For the DREAM Act	TWO

THREE

For Egypt

ONE

Become eight years?

THREE

Baby, what do you think about the language on the mission statement for the trans worker's rights rally?

ONE

The anti-war protests have become smaller and smaller, but Blu and I are still here -

THREE

Baby, can't we get another fifteen people to volunteer for phone banking if we schedule it after the fundraiser rehearsal?

ONE

Working.

THREE

Baby, we need another five hundred dollars for van rental, if everyone is going to lobby up in Albany.

ONE

I've started to wonder though -

THREE

Baby, we have to go through the community board first. It doesn't make any sense to go through the assemblyman. Look -

ONE

Does the struggle end?

THREE

I'm so exhausted my love.

ONE

I don't think so.

THREE

Can we watch this documentary instead?

ONE

Is she on auto-pilot? Like me? Moving forward. Not knowing which way to go?

THREE

Baby, I love you.

ONE

Love you...too.

(Three occupies herself with her papers, phone calls, while humming "We who believe in freedom..." etc.)

ONE

Is it because we spend so much time together? Is it because I'm the only one still around?

(Three still humming. One pauses, touches the scratches on her arm. The moment breaks. She grabs a backpack from the coat rack and starts to fill it.)

ONE

I can't control myself. My arms, my hands, my legs, everything in me is packing to leave. Clothes, books, dishes. I don't even know what I'm reaching for.

(Three stops humming.)

THREE

What are you doing?

ONE

I don't answer her. I just keep moving.

THREE

You're leaving? Where are you going?

ONE

I keep packing. I can't stop.

THREE

But we -

(One swings her backpack over her shoulder and moves to leave. Three reaches out. One recoils. They hold each other's look. Three steps back.)

THREE

What I'm doing - What difference does it make if we're free if the entire world isn't-

Think about what you're doing.

(One leaves Three. Change. Subway.)

ONE

I am riding the train. From uptown to downtown. I don't know where I'm going.

TWO

(as MTA announcer voice)

125th, 96th, 72nd

ONE

My body won't let me get off.

TWO

(as MTA announcer voice)

42nd, 34th, West 4th St.

Canal, Chambers, World Trade Center

(Change. Ground Zero.)

ONE

I'm just one of a stream of tourists that get off at this stop.

Skyscrapers: tall, proud, fragile in the sky.

I don't see my burning postcards.

Just a bird, shuttling back and forth in the sky.

It's like any other construction site in New York, but imploded.

Cranes build inward, not up.

On the fence: a white teddy bear, a cross, a bouquet of fake red roses.

People lean in with binoculars. What they want to see isn't there.

I wanted so badly for Blu to see me...

But I'm not sure the last time I truly saw myself.

Thin lips, hands, eyes now of a woman.

(Two dresses Three as Mary Magdalene. Three comes to stand behind One and puts her hand on her shoulder.)

Mary Magdalene.

(One closes her eyes, goes to reach for Three's hand. When she does, Three is gone.)

One feels something in her pocket. She reaches in. A postcard. She holds it up to the light.)

A postcard. Completely intact. Of the city skyline.

(She flips the postcard to face the audience.)

Of New York.

CHORUS TWO

(The women restore the previous set to the wreckage of the shadowy subway catacombs. Work lamps glow. The women's pace and movements are even more jagged than before. By the end of the chorus, they have unearthed a turntable and a crate of records that are placed downstage right.)

ONE: We've got no time for memorial poems
THREE: Remember it today, but forget tomorrow
TWO: News cycle regenerates
THREE: At the speed of the refresh button

TWO: Citizen journalists snap
THREE: Ten thousand photographs a day
ONE: HD video and a million words
TWO: Glutted channels of information

ONE: What is past
TWO: Is actually present
ONE: What was left behind
TWO: Cannot be divorced

THREE: What sounds like silence
ONE: Isn't silence at all

THREE: Dual chamber
ONE: Dual reality
TWO: Duality

THREE: Kickback
ONE: Ricochet
THREE: Rather be

ONE: She would rather be
TWO: Call
THREE: Echo

TWO: Call
ONE: She doesn't like
TWO: The silence at all

THREE: Act 2. Go.

ACT TWO

(Change. Hip hop club. Old school boom bap.)

TWO

Welcome to Tuesdays at Triangle Bar. That's Cray on the 1's and 2's. He still spins vinyl, none of this MP3 ish. That's Dobie on the mic, one of the sickest MC's. Used to be kind of whack, but he's worked really really hard. That's Maria, one of the best b-girls around. She won all-city last year. That's Sock, the bartender. It's my first night back.

(Club dissolves.)

TWO

Wait. Not yet. I'm not back yet.

(Change.)

TWO

Creaky door of Baba's Cadillac. Chinese opera on cassette. Thunder heavy in the sky. Fat raindrops on the passenger side. Sisters squawking in the back seat. No one talks about Mama.

(Beat.)

TWO

Twitchy click of the turn signal. Cats at the pizza shop yelling -

ONE & THREE

AI-YO!

TWO

Shake of the 7 train. Fan air blowing. Stop in the driveway. Come back home.

(Beat.)

TWO

My sisters are a wave of perfume. They go tic tic tic up the stairs.

THREE

But she wasn't even the best on American Idol.

ONE

You crazy?

TWO

Baba behind them. Behind me, my rucksack - buckles and straps dangling. My boots scrape the stairs. It's wet outside. Street lamps buzz. Gas in glass haze. Yellow.

ONE

Wan'an Jie Jie.

THREE

We're glad you're back home.

TWO

Wan'an. Baba nods, climbs the stairs.

If Mama was here, she and my sisters would be playing mah jong until 2 AM.

I would be in my room. Baba in his study.

The sound. I just miss the sound.

Part of me wants to sneak off to the Triangle Bar. Probably not the smartest thing on my first night home. Just the same old cats bobbing their heads in break beat meditations. No worries in hip hop's temple.

(Pulls a necklace from under her t-shirt.)

TWO

Right before I left for Iraq, Baba gave me this. A little insurance to hang next to my dog tags. Guan Yin, the Goddess of Mercy. (Pause) He should have given me Guan Gong, the God of War.

(Crate of records and turntable downstage. She moves towards it.)

TWO

My vinyl! I've missed the touch, the feel of the ridges. My Tito Puente and Nina Simone.

My BDP, Common, Latifah, Tribe. My ipod kept me alive out there.

A bunch of soldiers had combat playlists: Slayer, Metallica, Eminem.

Songs to juice them up for battle.

Not me. I needed my vinyl with me. My boys from the Triangle Bar. I needed Queens.

I needed home.

I just want to hear that needle make contact. I just want to hear the sound.

(Sound of needle on record. Change. Next morning.
Two in push-up position.)

TWO

I wake up this morning.

ALL

Huh!

TWO

Still thinking that I'm in my barracks.

ALL

Huh!

TWO

Ready for my morning mission.

Huh! ALL

I realize that I'm not where I think that I am. TWO

Huh! ALL

I roll out of bed and hit the floor. TWO

Huh! ALL

Trying to take cover. TWO

Huh! ALL

I see my old stuffed unicorn staring back at me. TWO

Huh! ALL
(Softer)

Nothing but marbles for eyes. TWO

Huh! ALL
(Softer)

I realize where I am. TWO

Huh! ALL
(Softest)

Pretty stupid, huh? TWO

(Change. Cell phone rings.)

TWO

I report on Tuesday for my health screening zero nine hundred and transition class starts on Wednesday? The address again? Affirmative. Thanks so much.

(Change. Doctor's office.)

TWO

Not a scratch on me. Sprained my ankle early in my deployment, a viral infection and a case of food poisoning but other than that. Nothing. No blood. No burns. No broken bones. It's all a miracle. Dehydrated. Fatigued. Who wouldn't be? Low on iron. My body. I've still got all of my parts. Attached and moving.

(Change. Park.)

TWO

I go for a run at the park.
I know it sounds crazy, but some times when I was running,
that's when Guan Yin would speak to me. Something about the trees. The way that they
lean in to me. The air in my lungs. I can feel her lift me.

(Beat.)

TWO

I lap all the uptight marathoners cross-checking their times with their pulses. It feels so good. (Hears a rumbling sound) There's a rumble in the ground. Is the whole park going to crack open? Little kids, soccer players, the ice cream man, everywhere. (Hits the floor) My face is in the grass. The sky is spinning. Guan Yin!

(Blare of truck horn.)

TWO

She's gone. (Pause) Maybe a truck?

(Change.)

TWO

I call my mother in Shanghai. Mama, ni hao ma? Yeah, I'm back now. Meiyoun wenti. Everything's fine. Don't worry. Get rest. I'll be fine.

(Change. Veterans Affairs Classroom.)

THREE

To be able to apply for your benefits, you need to fill out the following forms -

TWO

What is she saying? I thought I already filled out those forms.

THREE

And if you are in need of medical assistance or counseling you'll have to notify -

TWO

Wait, I didn't get down what she just said.

THREE

And there may be a wait list for those services. If any of you have questions, please proceed -

TWO

Damn. I'm late to pick up my sisters.

(Change. At crate of records and turntable. Hip hop instrumental beat drops.)

TWO

(Rapping)

Weapons pointed everywhere around me
 Sand colored camo to rep for the Army
 Think you being slick just try to disarm me
 I got another trick just wait for the click
 If you even think to harm me

Being back home, another part of the mission
 When I take the time to just sit and listen
 What to do next well that's my decision
 Won't hold my breath, I'm nuclear fission
 Division division division division

(Change.)

TWO

Guan Yin, last night, Baba's hand was on my arm as he led me back upstairs. When morning came, I didn't know what happened. But my feet were still dirty. Fill my lungs. Help me breathe again.

(Change.)

TWO

Guan Yin, last night, Baba tried to lock me in my room so I wouldn't get out. He said the neighbor found me outside, that I thought I was still in Iraq. I don't remember it at all. Were you there?

(Change.)

TWO

Guan Yin, same thing. My legs are so restless at night. They want to move. Sometimes, I want to run, but I don't know where to. I breathe in, but I don't feel you anymore?

(Change. At crate of records and turntable. Hip hop instrumental beat drops.)

TWO

(Rapping)

Feeling like a five percenter, 'cause a five percenter see
Everything that you and me are too afraid to be
Living in fear night and day ain't no other way to flee
Endure, ignore how you lived before
Know that death is knocking on your door

(Change. Cell phone rings.)

TWO

I finally call my girl Kai back.

ONE

Girl, you would not believe, I know, I'm as big as a house, right? I didn't know how to tell you all this. I'm such a terrible writer. I can't write a letter for shit, and I didn't want to bother you with all my silly drama. What've you been doing since you've been home?

TWO

Regular stuff. Trying to get back into school.

ONE

Alright, you do that shit. You totally deserve that.

TWO

Yeah, I think so.

ONE

When do classes start?

TWO

Still figuring that out.

ONE

Have you met Thea yet?

TWO

Who?

ONE

My boyfriend.

TWO

The baby daddy?

ONE
Yes.

TWO
No.

ONE
Everything is such a blur. Life's been so crazy. You'll meet him at the baby shower.
You're coming right?

TWO
When is it?

ONE
Next Sunday.

TWO
Right.

ONE
You'll really like him. He's not like other guys

TWO
Well, that's good. Where'd you meet him?

ONE
Over at the Triangle. He's cousins with Big Kal.

TWO
Eesh, and that didn't make you go running?

ONE
He's family now.

TWO
So that's still going on?

ONE
Yup, same old cats, every week.
You'd think we were all still in high school.

TWO
"You're either a b-girl or a chickenhead."

ONE
One of the two.

TWO

Big Kal is such an idiot. When I think of all the stupid nights that we spent there, just watching them spit. We could have been doing something better with our time.

ONE

Like what?

TWO

Like...whatever.

ONE

Beats me too.

(Change. Late night.)

TWO

Guan Yin. Yen Lo Wang, the god of the underworld, is looking for me. He has my papers. He's waving a file folder at me. He says it's my time to come to Hell. Guan Yin, can you do anything? Help me breathe. He's seen me with those bodies. He's seen me covered in blood. He's going to take me.

(Beat.)

TWO

I am in the middle of the street. No shoes on. My sisters grab both of my arms. We're going back in.

(Change. College Registrar.)

ONE

We don't seem to have you on file yet for this semester.

TWO

Are you sure?

ONE

Did you make your deposit yet?

TWO

I thought that I did. I need to check.

ONE

Go over to Window 5. That's for the bursar. They need to handle that, and you need to go to your adviser's office first. You may need to petition to those professors to get in those classes.

TWO

Thank you.

(Change. Late night.)

TWO

Guan Yin, is it crazy? I'm homesick. I'm homesick for the war? How can I go to sleep when I know my company is still out there? I went to the grocery store this morning, and it was so full of food. Cans stacked to the ceiling. This kid was trippin' because his mother wouldn't buy him a second candy bar. There was all this food. Everyone looks so big and healthy. All the colors so bright.

(Change. Hip hop club. Old school boom bap.)

TWO

I finally make it to the Triangle Bar. I feel like I'm noddin' the whole night. 'Sup? 'Sup? 'Sup? All the usual suspects. It's almost like I never left. There's some terrible dude hogging the mic with a fanny pack on right now. Oh, Jesus Christ Almighty, Buddha, Allah, everybody - it's Big Kal.

THREE

What up little soldier girl?

TWO

Hey Big K.

THREE

Made it back in one piece.

TWO

Mostly. What's good with you?

THREE

You must have been kissed by a lucky star. A guardian angel.

TWO

Shut the fuck up will you?

THREE

Damn, just saying, we missed you.

TWO

We?

THREE

I and the other fine patrons of this bar. Why you gotta be all angry and shit? You and Kai are like a bunch of vipers. Looking like money but all fuckin' pepper spray when you open your mouth. Glad you're on our side. Rat-a-tat-tat. (Pause) I'm just playing with you. Seriously sis, welcome home.

Thanks. TWO

Must be strange. THREE

What? TWO

Being back. THREE

You know, I just wanted to have a beer in peace. Get out the house. TWO

Not talk to anyone. I know. Don't think that I don't know how you roll. THREE

(Beat.)

Kai's having a kid, you know. TWO

Yeah, my cousin's the daddy. THREE

You wouldn't know that if it weren't your cousin. TWO

You wouldn't know a lot of things if a lot of other things. THREE

Brilliant. TWO

I try. What you up to now? THREE

Back to school. Normal life. TWO

Normal life. Yeah. THREE

(Change. All are running in cadence. Sung in military cadence, call and response.)

TWO

(Sung)

I want to be an airborne ranger. Living a life of guts and danger. Airborne ranger.

ONE & THREE

(Sung)

Airborne ranger.

TWO

(Sung)

Guts in danger.

ONE & THREE

(Sung)

Guts in danger.

THREE

(Sung)

I want to be a paramedic. Shooting that funky anesthetic. Paramedic.

ONE & TWO

(Sung)

Paramedic.

THREE

(Sung)

Anesthetic.

ONE & TWO

(Sung)

Anesthetic.

(Change. At crate of records and turntable. Two is smashing all of her records, destroying the turntable.)

TWO

He shouldn't have done that. He should never do that.

THREE

Jie jie, what's going on?

ONE

I don't know. Baba?!

THREE

He's not here yet. He's still at the store.

TWO

You don't understand. You don't understand what they can do to you!

THREE

What the fuck is going on?

ONE

I don't know. You tell me. Just hold her down.

THREE

What happened?

TWO

I could've killed him.

ONE

Jie jie, what's going on?

(Change.)

THREE

Guan Yin, thank you for bringing Jie Jie home. But I have to ask you, did you forget a part of her? It doesn't feel like all of her is home. Please bring her all home.

(Change. Military psychologist's office.)

TWO

So I see you once every six months.

ONE

Yes.

TWO

What's that supposed to do?

ONE

To give you a place of reflection. Some kind of support.

TWO

I could be dead by then.

ONE

Do you think so?

TWO

You could be dead by then.

ONE
Is that what you think?

TWO
What do I need to do to upgrade my discharge?

ONE
Come to these sessions. See the appropriate officers. Some paperwork. What do you think of that?

TWO
Let's just get this moving.

ONE
What were the terms of your discharge?

TWO
On the books or off the books?

ONE
Let's try on the books.

TWO
Unsatisfactory mental condition.

ONE
And off the books?

TWO
There were a lot of people with unsatisfactory mental conditions.

ONE
So you don't think that's why you were discharged?

TWO
That's the reason they found to discharge me for.

ONE
What else could be the reason?

TWO
So I have to come to these sessions, and you determine my mental condition?

ONE
Have you been having nightmares? Paranoia?

TWO
Yes.

ONE

What was your role during deployment?

TWO

I was a truck driver. Artillery. Checking for bombs. Infantry would pull us when they were short. So that would be searching houses, people, foot patrols.

ONE

And how do you feel about your time there now?

TWO

Mixed.

I always wanted to be a part of history. You know, do something that mattered?

Nothing can prepare you for out there. Not movies. Not anything.

It's like a car crash that never stops moving.

How do you prepare for a car crash that never stops moving?

ONE

How do you prepare for something that has a continuing traumatic impact?

TWO

You stop noticing. You stop listening. It's easier that way.

Good training for everything else.

ONE

What do you mean?

TWO

If I can live through that, I can live through anything.

But I don't know if what I'm going through right now...if you can call this...is living.

ONE

How's it been being back in New York?

TWO

The same. But different.

My sisters are the same like they always were, but they're different now - because I'm different.

ONE

How are you different?

TWO

I used to think that I could protect myself, but now I know certain things are out of my control. We can be sitting right here, and what's to keep a mortar blast from blowing us up?

ONE

We're in Manhattan.

TWO

Doesn't matter though. One second, you're drinking your coffee. The next (Snaps fingers) the person next to you is bleeding from the neck. I didn't even see the worst of it.

ONE

You didn't?

TWO

No. Other people got it a lot lot worse.

ONE

So why do you think you were discharged then?

TWO

Factors beyond my control.

ONE

Like?

TWO

Why don't we talk about what's going to happen now?

ONE

Okay, what is going to happen now?

TWO

You know, I've never been to a therapist before, but I think I'd be getting farther with a talking bird.

ONE

Now, why is that?

TWO

Because with a talking bird, at least I know that I'm talking with myself. Here there's some idea that you're actually a living breathing person who's going to tell me things to make things different. Do I need medication?

ONE

That depends.

TWO

On factors beyond my control.

ONE

To some degree, yes, and how do you feel about these factors being beyond your control?

TWO

Fine.

ONE

Fine.

TWO

Yes, fine.

ONE

You've been losing weight since you've come home.

TWO

Yes.

ONE

And unable to sleep through the night?

TWO

Not unless I want to end up in the middle of the street.

ONE

And what is it that you find when you wake up?

TWO

The world is the same, but I'm different. What I know about the world is different. I know you talk to us all the time, so you probably hear the same thing over and over again, but it doesn't make any sense. It's like we drew a little chalk line in a circle and said, "Here, suffer." and "Here, just act like everything's fine in the world."

ONE

And your cycle?

TWO

Irregular. Like everything else.

ONE

Any sexual relations since you've been home?

TWO

That's the last thing on my mind.
It's crazy. Guys over there who want to date a girl.
You're either a whore, a bitch, or a dyke to all those guys out there.
I slept most nights with my rifle pointed towards the door.

ONE

How many men were in your company? How many women?

TWO

19 women. 140 men. One soldier told me that during Viet Nam, they had prostitutes, and this war, they have us. Whole cases of pornography would show up at the base. One minute, your team leader is offering you two hundred bucks for a hand job. The next minute, his life is in your hands. Yours is in his. (Pause) You've got to put it aside. You've got to keep moving.

ONE

And were you able to keep moving?

TWO

For the most part. It was another soldier. Another soldier reported that I was attacked.

ONE

So you were attacked, sexually attacked by another soldier?

TWO

Ma'am. I was a soldier with the U.S. Army.

ONE

Yes, I know.

TWO

I should have had my weapon.

(Change.)

Two

Guan Yin, I called Mama last night in Shanghai. She was crying on the phone saying that she should have never left. I told her that I was fine. I don't know what my sisters and my father have been telling her. (Pause) I tried to meditate last night, but all I could see was a dark sky covered with gray clouds. I was somewhere between sleep and awake, when I saw you. You had my battle helmet on, and your lotus bloom grew bigger and bigger across the sky. You had a semi on your lap...and you started shooting. I felt the bullets rip through my shirt. Kai was with me and Mama. Guan Yin, you with your big pale moon face, picking us off one by one. When I woke up. No words. Silence. The room was swallowing me up.

(Change. Cell phone rings.)

TWO

Kai has been calling me again.

ONE

Girl, what's the deal? Are you coming through to this shower or what?

(Beat.)

TWO

Baba is almost like a ghost himself. Especially after I busted up everything in the living room. He seems afraid of me.

(Change. At crate of records and turntable. Both demolished. There is no music.)

TWO

(Rapping)

In the absence of sound, in the vacuum of sound
My heart becomes an ocean in this vacuum of sound
My life becomes a drum skin, as the fist moves to pound
My love is a shrunk piece of me, the silence slows down

(Change. Kai & Thea's apartment. Baby shower.)

THREE

OH MY GOD! You're here.

ONE

Hey mama - Thanks for coming through. You remember my cousin Leena right? I know I've been blowing up your phone.

TWO

It's cool. Hey, I couldn't decide between the dinosaur squeak and learn and the milk maid double suction action super hero pump. So I got you both.

ONE

Got it. You're gonna help me be super-prepared.

TWO

Trying.

ONE

Make yourself at home.

THREE

How long has it been? A year, two?

TWO

Eleven months. Give or take.

THREE

It's felt like forever.

TWO

Nice place.

THREE

It's Thea's place. He should be here soon.

(Beat.)

TWO

The walls are plastered with pictures of Kai with this guy. This guy that I don't know. All the girls: curly hair, flat-ironed hair, French manicures, open-toed shoes, push-up bras, lipstick, lipgloss, hoops.

THREE

(In military cadence)

Left, left, left, right.

TWO

Everything pink, glittery, tissue paper and ribbons.

THREE

(In military cadence)

Left. Left. Left. Right.

TWO

Bathroom?

ONE

Around the corner.

THREE

(In military cadence)

Left, left, left, right.

(Change. Kai & Thea's bathroom. SOUND of gun blast.)

TWO

This is the sound of a nine.

(SOUND of gun blast.)

TWO

This is the sound of a twenty-two.

(Silence.)

TWO

This is the silence before an IED's about to
This is the silence before an IED's about to

(KNOCK on door.)

ONE

Honey, you alright? Baby's standing on my bladder right now.

TWO

Just a second.

(Two emerges from bathroom past One. Change.
Back to baby shower.)

TWO

Sorry -

ONE

No problem.

THREE

When she comes out, we're all gonna sing -

TWO

I've, I've gotta go -

(Change. Apartment elevator bank. Two presses
buttons hard.)

TWO

The elevator can't come fast enough. I start down the stairs.

(Two is running.)

THREE

1-1000.

ONE

2-1000.

TWO

3-1000.

THREE

4-1000.

ONE

5-1000.

TWO

6-1000.

THREE

7-1000.

ONE

8-1000.

(Change. Outside.)

TWO

Back on solid ground. Still daylight. My cell vibrates in my pocket. It won't stop.

(Change. Subway station.)

TWO

Underground. Anonymous like everybody else. Retreat. Hands in pockets. Heads cocked back. Mouths open. Eyes asleep. Eyes sleep. An old vet walks by asking for change. His eyes red. Stubble on his cheeks. He wears a worn out BDU with dog tags around his neck. I've got nothing on me, but my keys. I'd give them to him. My room, my life, everything. (Pause) He passes me. He moves on to somebody else.

(Subway doors open and close. Change.)

TWO

Guan Yin. The goddess of mercy. How would you know what suffering is? You don't have to worry about eighteen levels of Buddhist hell. You're an immortal.

Were you with me? When my squad members shut me in the shower stall where no one could hear me? Were you there when they did it to me again?

THREE

(Military call)

Attention!

(All come to attention.)

TWO

Sharpen my pencils.

TWO & THREE

Iron my clothes.

ALL
Create a new life.

(Beat.)

TWO
And the record plays.

ONE
And the record plays.

THREE
And the record plays.

TWO
On.

(Change.)

CHORUS THREE

(The women restore the remains of the crate of records and turntable to the wreckage of the shadowy subway catacombs. Work lamps glow. The women's pace and movements have found a cool release. By the end of the chorus, they have unearthed three chairs that are placed centerstage, which the women can occupy throughout this act.)

ONE: Peace within prayer
THREE: What flows must also ebb
TWO: The swell is built to overwhelm
THREE: When you stand by the shore

TWO: A finger's grip grows tighter
THREE: The harder that you love
ONE: The precious can disappear from under you
TWO: Be left an empty space that's dug itself out

ONE: Hear my echo
THREE: Hear my call

TWO: The test of the true believer
THREE: That what is mortal will perish
ONE: At some unknown moment in time

TWO: Your body will escape you
ONE: And also your mind
THREE: Peace and pleasure pause

TWO: On the tip of the tongue

THREE: What cannot be promised burns

TWO: The canister of oil empty

ONE: Letting go

THREE: Letting love

ONE: Letting life

THREE: Letting song

ONE: Letting sound

TWO: Letting it soar

ONE: Let it penetrate

THREE: It cannot hide

TWO: Hear my echo

ONE: Hear my call

ALL: All we have is time for renewal.

ONE: Act 3. Go.

ACT 3

(Change. Subway. Three seated holds brown paper bag in her lap. Two & One are fellow subway riders. Three in direct address to audience.)

THREE

Dewey Decimal System. I know you're afraid of it. A lot of people are. But there's no reason to be. It's a classification of the universe of knowledge right at your fingertips. How you gonna be mad at that?

ONE

Ten categories

THREE

Further sub-divided into

TWO

Ten sub-categories

THREE

One hundred total categories. Not perfect. But not too shabby either.

TWO

120 Epistemology, Causation, and Humankind.

ONE

782 Vocal Music.

TWO

954 General History of South Asia, India.

THREE

For example, 330 equals economics. .9 equals geographic treatment. .04 equals Europe. 330.94 For European economy, but 325 if you're looking for international migration. Isn't that easy? Now, let's see if we can read this train in Dewey Decimals. The "No Smoking" sign.

TWO

613.85 for smoking.

ONE

But 362.396 for smoking addiction.

THREE

Okay, how about that woman with the engagement ring?

ONE

395 for wedding plans.

TWO

But 793.2 For wedding showers.

THREE

This biker over here?

TWO

796.6 For biking.

ONE

384 for bike messengers.

THREE

It's a little sticky, but you know. Ammee used to bring me to the library every week of the summer to work on my English, and I loved it. I loved the smell of the books, the feel of the books. Not too many brown girls back then, which is why I wanted to be a librarian. Wouldn't it have been great to have had -

TWO

Parvati in the coming of age story where she falls in love with the high school quarterback who is also the immigrant boy next door?

ONE

Marie Luz as the one who slays the dragon and comes home to her lola's arroz caldo?

TWO

Ming as the detective in a string of mysteries about stolen bubblegum, mixed-up identities, and vandalism at the museum?

ONE

306 Culture and institutions.

(Change.)

THREE

You could say that I got it from my father. He was a great poet in Pakistan. Well I think that he was. I found under my parents' bed a whole stack of his poems, all in Urdu.

ONE

What the eye cannot see
Erupts in a blossom of sensation
Truth soon comes to its purpose

THREE

(In Urdu)
What the eye cannot see
Erupts in a blossom of sensation
Truth soon comes to its purpose

THREE

When he came to the United States, he put that all behind him.

TWO

646.78 Families and parenting.

ONE

290-298 Islam, but there's a little bit of debate over that.

THREE

How you divide knowledge depends on how you know knowledge. Each subway car is like it's own library. Each person with their face in a book or an e-book. Each person is a book. It's true. I do judge what they're reading. But just because I want them to have something that's good for them.

ONE

The Hunger Games instead of Twilight.

TWO

Song of Solomon instead of The Help.

THREE

All of these heads bowed, almost as if in prayer. Finding a place to expand into entire worlds. When everything else is so damn crowded. Don't you think so Aisha?

(Waits for response, nothing.)

Today, I took the day off. The library will have to survive without me.

My nanaji is coming from Pakistan, to live with me, my parents, my sister, my cousin P who's always on the couch.

I haven't seen Nanaji since I was eight. I have a child's memory of Pakistan, of Lahore.

ONE

Riding on my uncle's motorbike.

TWO

How my jean shorts felt so heavy in the hot air.

ONE

Dust on my skin and the man selling sweets from a wooden truck on the side of the road.

TWO

Nanaji's hands that were so big and wrinkled.

THREE

Ammee told me that he started off in the country, moved to the city, worked in factories, and then opened his own stationary store. I remember as a girl the little translucent sheets of paper he'd hold out to me and my sister. They were so pretty in the light.

Will he recognize me? I don't know, maybe he'll just think that I'm some Trini or Dominican girl? He probably doesn't even know what that is.

I brought him samosas from the store on 75th Ave, because the flight from Lahore to New York ain't direct, and it ain't short. Something like 21-22 hours long.

ONE

Please note the emergency exits 1, 2, and 3 during the course of this flight.

THREE

I don't think he's ever been on an airplane before. I figured he'd be hungry. Ammee keeps saying that it'll be safer for him to be here with us. -

TWO

362.99 Personal Safety.

THREE

But he's old. He doesn't even know the language here.

ONE

428.44 English as a Second Language.

THREE

I guess I wasn't fully in support of it. No, not really.

What do you think Aisha? Will he be protected? I hope so.

(Change. Airport. Moments later.)

I figured today, I'd go with a mix of old school, new school. I didn't want Nanaji to feel uncomfortable, but I feel a little bit like a fraud. All covered up like this.

ONE

Excuse me.

TWO

God, I'm in a hurry.

ONE

If you can just get me on the next flight -

THREE

910.202 Travel - Handbooks and Manuals.

TWO

Excuse me, Miss, we're going to have to put you through additional screening.

THREE

Yellow alert.

ONE

Ma'am, please step to the side, we're going to have to run your bag again.

THREE

Orange alert.

TWO

Stand here. I need to check your hair for restricted items.

THREE

362.287 Transportation Security Services.

ONE & TWO

Random security check.

THREE

I'm hoping that Nanaji won't notice any of this. That he'll feel only what I felt in Pakistan but in reverse. Taste the blandness of the food. Feel extremely short and small. Notice weird things like how pretty lottery tickets are or how the skyline is jagged like a small range of mountains.

In his picture on my phone, he looks -

ONE

Stern with both hands on his knees.

TWO

He sits in a wooden chair.

THREE

My stomach is tightening. My palms are getting itchy. I feel a scratch at the back of my throat.

Then, I see him.

(One as Nanaji.)

His front right tooth is missing. He's wearing a polo shirt with baggy pants that stop above the ankles and flip flops. He brought the airplane blanket folded over his arm. Skinny and jangly, not like the photo at all. He's carrying his bags. He cries out:

ONE

NAWASI!

THREE

The whole ride home. We share the samosas, speaking in broken Urdu and even more broken English. I point out a bunch of things to him that he won't understand or recognize just to fill the space.

TWO

That's a ranch that's run by Black cowboys.

These are the halal pizza shops.

Here is a place that has all vegetarian Jamaican food.

(One pantomimes Nanaji throughout this section.)

THREE

He nods and smiles. Bits of samosa flake all over him. He dozes off from Utica to Hoyt. We're almost home. He only brought one carry-on and one suitcase. I've lived in the same house since we came to Brooklyn. I am the worst packer in the world. I can't imagine being able to squeeze all that I own into this little square of stuff.

TWO

One pair of shoes.

THREE

Five shirts.

TWO

Two pairs of pants.

THREE

I'm so much more nervous with him with me. What happens if he looks someone in the eye and he doesn't understand them? What if it's one these crazy America is for Americans types and they think he's a terrorist or something?

TWO

305.8 Xenophobia.

(Change. Block / house.)

THREE

The train pulls up to Ocean Avenue. Nanaji makes a beeline for the bodega and buys a Diet Coke. He sips it through a straw.

The block is calm today. No motorbikes or kickball games.

There is a grey haze in the sky, that I don't understand - not today, when it's supposed to be sunny.

(One & Nanaji enter the house. One gestures to the room upstairs. Nanaji ascends. Three watches.)

All I want to do is dive into my books. Head back to the library.

Because Nanaji is here, my sister and I are shackled up in one room like we used to when relatives visited when we were kids. But I'm 25 and she's 17, so it's not cute anymore.

(Change. Library. Three doing librarian tasks.)

THREE

When I was a kid, my parents didn't let me out of the house too much. I could only go as far as our yard. So it was me -

ONE

And Nancy Drew.

THREE

Me -

TWO

And Encyclopedia Brown.

THREE

Me -

ONE

And Bannicula.

THREE

Me and Aisha too. Aisha, the wife of the prophet. She was literate. A breadwinner for the family.

I was too young to read the Qu'ran very well, but whenever I got tired of being at the back of the mosque, Aisha would find me, play with my hair.

At home, we'd play hide and go seek all day, every day. Hiding in the bathroom. Dancing on the fire escape. Opening jars in the kitchen. Between the pages of a book. Any book.

Time for afternoon prayer.

(Three gets in position of afternoon prayer.)

During du'a, I pray that Nanaji doesn't miss Lahore, that he doesn't miss the rest of our family, that he doesn't miss home. Why was I the one that had to pick him up from the airport? Even my little sister's Urdu is better than mine. Ammee and Abba - Now, that we've got him, he'll never go home.

(Change. Sound of television.)

THREE

On TV, there's coverage of the Norway massacres. A guy, 32 years old, picking off people left and right, because he's afraid of the Islamicization of the West. He's even quoting Gandhi to encourage the Hindus to expel the Muslims from India. Oh, Aisha, where are you? I need you right now.

TWO

I'm right here. What's going on?

THREE

Nanaji has come to live with us, and I don't know what to do right now.

TWO

What is there to do?

THREE

Nothing, but wait.

TWO

Wait. For what?

THREE

For something bad to happen.

TWO

Why wait for something bad to happen, when you can help something good happen?

THREE

I don't know what you're talking about.

TWO

I'm talking about you silly. So afraid of what will happen to your Nanaji, and not ready to -

THREE

This fear comes from a place.

TWO

What place?

THREE

When I was a child, I never really thought about being Muslim. It was just something that we were. Now, I think about it all of the time.

TWO

Nothing wrong with that.

THREE

There's everything wrong with that. I can't even move. I can't even - I'm so paralyzed. I'm a librarian! I want people to know things. I want people to know the truth about us.

TWO

But you can't have everyone know about you.

THREE

Why not? I want everyone to know about us. That we're not terrorists. We're not -

TWO

What other people think that we are?

(Crash from upstairs.)

THREE

Nanaji!

(Three runs upstairs. One as Nanaji is on the ground. Legs and arms up in the air.)

THREE

Aisha! Help! Aisha? My only job was to get him home, and now I've already killed him. Aisha?

TWO

He's fine. He's fine. Look, he's fine.

(Nanaji blinks at Three and starts laughing. Thre helps him up, and he's still laughing.)

He brushes off his skinny behind and walks to the bathroom. Still laughing.)

TWO

See.

(Change.)

THREE

Aisha, Nanaji is starting to get comfortable. Maybe too comfortable. He's leaving stuff all over the house, and I'm always the one to pick up after him. He and Abba have started fighting about everything from cricket to politics to New York rats versus Lahore rats. Ammee is just trying to keep her head on straight. My sister - She's such a spoiled brat.

TWO

Sounds like it's time to move out.

THREE

That's ridiculous. Who's going to make sure Ammee gets her medication. Sis barely finishes her homework without me. Cousin P never eats after the late shift, and Nanaji -

Aisha? Aisha.

What in the - Ugh, gone again. So convenient. I wish I could do that Poof.

TWO

What the eye cannot see
Erupts in a blossom of sensation
Truth soon comes to its purpose

THREE

What? Aisha? Off. She's doing whatever she wants.

(Phone rings.)

THREE

Hello? Yes, where did you find him? Hold on. Just hold him there.

ONE

Holding

TWO

Holding

THREE

Holding on. Nanaji was wandering around a fabric store ten blocks from our house. He asked the women there the directions to get back home. To his house in Lahore. I don't say it. My sister doesn't say it. My mother doesn't say it.

ONE

392.196 Alzheimer's.

THREE

My father doesn't say it.

TWO

616.83 Dementia.

THREE

Some days, he is as clear as a blue sky and other days, grey, which doesn't make sense, because today is supposed to be sunny. I look at him. He looks at me. I don't think he sees me though.

(Change. Auntie's House.)

THREE

The auntie from across the street calls me over to help cook for her guests. A man in a black leather jacket eats peanuts in the living room. The other aunties don't think that I can understand them, but I do.

ONE

He should sue like those other men did.

TWO

How many days was he in there?

ONE

That's why he's talking to the lawyers.

TWO

But are these lawyers going to be able to get what they got.

ONE

They got over a million dollars.

TWO

But that was split up between five different men.

ONE

Divide that up over hundreds and that's nothing.

TWO

Something is better than nothing.

ONE

Nothing divided up over hundreds is still nothing.

TWO

He's alive isn't he? We're healthy, aren't we?

ONE

Until the next attack occurs?

TWO

Let's eat. Can't we just enjoy ourselves and eat?

ONE

You enjoy yourself and eat.

TWO

How many days was it?

ONE

249.

TWO

That's almost a year. It takes less than a year to lose yourself.

ONE

And this is Brooklyn. This happened in Brooklyn.

THREE

I ask the auntie what they are talking about. She raises up her hands and shrugs. She piles the vegetables in a bowl and tells me to go home. I nod to everyone as I leave. The man who I can't place waves to me, and I go home.

(Change. House.)

THREE

Ammee, who is that man over across the street? Did he live here before?

ONE

What man?

THREE

Haven't you seen him? He's skinny. He wears the leather jacket.

ONE

That sounds like your auntie's brother.

THREE

He doesn't live here anymore?

ONE

No, I think he got deported.

THREE

Why?

ONE

I don't know. I don't ask. He used to work at the deli around the corner.

(Change. Library.)

THREE

Putting the order in for new books. Organizing the area by the computers. Glitch in the new check-out system. Literacy program starting upstairs. I hope my sister has Nanaji all taken care of. Time for a little research.

(Sound of computer keys clicking.)

ONE

Ninth floor, Metropolitan Detention Center.

TWO

80 29th Street, Brooklyn, New York.

ONE

Operated by the US Federal Bureau of Prisons.

TWO

Holds 3,000 inmates.

ONE

Turkmen vs. Ashcroft

TWO

A class action civil rights lawsuit filed on behalf of

ONE

Muslim

TWO

South Asian

ONE

And Arab non-citizens

TWO

Who were swept up

One

By the INS and FBI in a racial profiling dragnet

TWO

Following 9/11

ONE

84 in New York alone

(Three reading.)

THREE

The officers at the Metropolitan Detention Center taped a t-shirt to the wall with an American flag that read -

ONE

These colors don't run.

THREE

And proceeded to slam the faces of those suspects of 'high interest' into the wall. The t-shirt was stained with the blood of the dozens of men held without bail without access to communication or legal support.

TWO

These colors don't run.

ONE

But people do.

(Change.)

THREE

I want people to know things. I want people to know the truth about us.

TWO

You can't have everyone know about you.

THREE

I want everyone to know about us. That we're not terrorists. We're not -

TWO

What other people think that we are?

(Change. Library.)

THREE

When they started to put up video cameras in the neighborhood.
When they enforced the color codes at the airport.
When they came knocking at the door.

They took my father away in the middle of the night.

Told us we weren't supposed to say anything.
I don't know if you believe me as I'm saying this.

The Dewey Decimal System has ten different categorizations, and there's a reason why this system was picked over all the others - politics.

When the Twin Towers fell and I was on my way back home from school, boys would shout:

ONE

THIS WAS YOUR FAULT!

THREE

We got in a fight at school about who Osama Bin Laden was. I could feel Aisha pushing them back, tipping my chin upward, pushing me to open my heart.

Those days when Abba was gone, everything I heard was filtered through the telephone, filtered through words that we could say and not say.

See what I'm saying? Information. It's all about how you categorize the information - Once you've picked a system. There are nuances to those systems. They teach you how to learn. How to navigate the world.

Aisha came to me. I was 15, and I felt like our rug was going to roll up and throw me out the window. I wanted to pull out all the telephone lines, but that would lead to the outside. Wouldn't one of those surveillance cameras see me?

After Abba returned, he was mostly the same, but he didn't go to meetings. He didn't go to social functions. He sat around the house and did crossword puzzles. He kept all of his phone conversations very short.

I have to tell Nanaji. Does Nanaji know?

(Change.)

THREE

Nanaji is sitting by the upstairs window again. Today is a blue sky day. He is tapping the glass on the windowpane. He seems like he has a song in his head.

I have books. I have magazines. I have newspaper photo copies.

It's dangerous. I want to say. It's dangerous, Nanaji, stay inside instead.

He notices me hovering by the door. He waves me in. I drop everything on the bed.

He smiles at me and points out the window. The man in the leather jacket is getting in their family car with a bunch of suitcases.

Nanaji pats my hand. I feel stupid. That everything I brought is useless.

How will he understand what I am saying?

My parents won't say anything. My little sister doesn't know. They don't see what I see. They want to exist just -

TWO
(as Aisha)

Without the information.

THREE

Without knowing

TWO
(as Aisha)

Not knowing, why know?

THREE

Nanaji beats me to the punch. He starts looking through the newspaper clippings I brought. Turning them sideways and upside down.

(Two as Aisha comes to stand beside Three.)

Aisha doubles my strength, makes me feel brighter inside of myself. Nanaji begins to speak. I try to make out what he has to say.

ONE

You are a good girl. I thought that the United States would ruin you, but you're a good girl. Trying to take care of your parents. You try to take care of me too. Nervous, just like your Nanni. So busy taking care of everyone else. No one takes care of you.

THREE

(In Urdu)

You are a good girl. I thought that the United States would ruin you, but you're a good girl. Trying to take care of your parents. You try to take care of me too. Nervous, just like your Nanni. So busy taking care of everyone else. No one takes care of you.

THREE

He closes all of my books on the bed.

ONE

My eyes aren't as good anymore as they used to be. My nose is not as strong as it used to be. My bones aren't as thick as they used to be. These, I've given to you. This isn't the first time we've had to run. I don't have many days less. Even less than I remember. These days now are for you. Even if you run. Your faith is inside you. I live on in you.

THREE

(*in Urdu*)

My eyes aren't as good anymore as they used to be. My nose is not as strong as it used to be. My bones aren't as thick as they used to be. These, I've given to you. This isn't the first time we've had to run. I don't have many days less. Even less than I remember. These days now are for you. Even if you run. Your faith is inside you. I live on in you.

THREE

He leaves me in my old room, surrounded with all of my research. I think he went downstairs to get something to eat. I rub my fingers over the photocopies. The ink smears. The paper gets soft between my hands. Aisha, I want to wrap myself in paper. To cover it all over the world.

TWO

But what will that do?

THREE

Not sure. So you're back now?

(Beat.)

TWO

Where else would I be?

(Change.)

CHORUS FOUR

(Lights rise to a warm wash. Work lamps glow. Chain link fence in background is in now in clear view. Women restore chairs to the side, but the wreckage, under new light, is no longer what is broken, but simply what has been cast aside. The women repopulate the stage with these items, creating portraits of life in assemblage, tying some items to the fence in memorial.)

ONE: In the city that never sleeps

THREE: We've got no time for memorial poems

TWO: What flows must also ebb

THREE: A finger's grip grows tighter

TWO: Goddess circle at midnight

THREE: In the city that never sleeps

ONE: The hand drops from a fist

TWO: What was past is actually present

ONE: What was left behind

THREE: Cannot be divorced

ONE: Hear my echo

THREE: Hear my call

TWO: Hear my echo

ONE: Hear my call

THREE: What sounds like silence

ONE: Isn't silence at all

ALL: All we have is time for renewal

TWO: Eight million prayers held on the in-breath

THREE: Eight million prayers that may never come out

TWO: Lips

ONE: Words

THREE: Being

ONE: Sound

TWO: Silence

THREE: Silence

ONE: Sacred

TWO: Sound

ALL: Say you heard my echo

ALL: Say you heard my call

END OF PLAY