

This is Not My America
July 28th, 2019

This piece was originally grand. Making sweeping connections of metaphors to reality; blowing your minds and making you think about and question everything. Making you see things in a new light. Later on in the week, you'd think of this piece. You'd think of me. Maybe on your way to work. Or to class. Or to the train. You'd see a used lottery ticket at your feet.

My grand sweeping idea is named "The Scratch Off American Dream."

I'd make connections about how time, money, and opportunity are available only to those who can afford it. It'd be about this loaded word "chance" and how powers that be can make a game of wealth; one with too many losers. (They cheat.) It'd be about how since I've began thinking of this parallel, I've found 12 scratched off lotto tickets on the ground, a discarded symbol of hope. A used up game that someone placed all of their energy into, only to be let down. Maybe they bought it on their way to work or the train or after pay day or since they "were feeling lucky." I've noticed that there aren't as many places to buy these tickets in richer neighborhoods or mostly white neighborhoods... I think of these scratch off risk takers, who, mixed with sweat and dirt and hard work have shards of metallic gray film under their fingernail. Shards that'd eventually reveal what they'd lost and what they'd gambled.

But, this piece is about my Dad. My Dad and how he bought me lotto tickets for my eighteenth birthday. I'd think of my Dad and how he'd stare wistfully at his 13 inch television, a half empty jug of Carlo Rossi wine on the table next to him for hours on end. He'd often begin his dreams with "If I won the lotto..." His dreams made home in those ellipsis, those eventualities and "somedays."

My Dad never won the lotto.

He didn't play every week, either. He only played when he was feeling lucky and when he'd picked up a few extra bucks from a few extra jobs installing plumbing or an air conditioner or water softener.

He'd start to cry as he told me this story of when my sisters were young, no more than two or three:

One of his jobs paid him \$150 cash; he went to the bank to exchange the bills for singles before heading home. My sisters were anxiously awaiting his arrival. He showed them the bills. They grabbed them, threw them in the air and cried out, "We're rich! We're rich" He was freshly divorced, a single dad and living with my aunt at the time.

The American Dream is 150 George Washingtons dancing on the breeze.

Two small girls with bellies filled of reheated chicken nuggets and lopsided ponytails.

The American Dream lives in your back pocket.

The American Dream comes home after a long day on its hands and knees in crawl spaces,
pulls out a nickel and holds it's breath, and begins to scrape. Rushing. Hoping.
It's something about the mythology of consumption equaling happiness.
The American Dream wears navy blue t shirts with holes in the collar, cannot afford hot
water this month, but can afford cheap liquor.

The American Dream is white.

White picket fence.

White house.

White clouds.

White skin.

The American Dream is cages. Is criminal. Is outlawed wombs and republican rooms. Spit.
Strike. And terror. The American Dream is coins jingling at the bottom of the Starbucks
cup.

I scratch at the surface and break my nails
I grit hard and break my teeth
and hope like hell that this isn't it.

I have not bought my lottery ticket yet.

I don't believe in chance.

I don't believe in crossed fingers. Crossed limbs.

Cross me and all of the crosses outside the domestic abuse shelter in Joliet, IL and outside
the unsuspecting crossroads where drivers found their American Dream at the bottom of
their bottle. The click of his freely owned rifle. The growling in the pit of his angry belly.

I scratch at my skin.

So I can feel.

To reveal

whether or not I have won.

In these still streets, I stumble upon losing ticket

After ticket.

After ticket.

After ticket.

Your America is stumble.
Your America is fall.
Your America is chipped tooth on sidewalk.

I watch it, bruise and batter itself.
Break its own back and blame someone else.
I watch it point its violent fingers and growl.
Bare its teeth and scream.
I watch it: feral, in fear.

My America approaches its shadow self from a distance.
Calm breath, a reassurance.

My America does not scratch.
Will not have to scratch.

My America is compassion
My America is empathy,
wrapped fists and revolution.
Rapt eyes mist and evolution.
Built from the backs of black and indigenous slaves.
My America is therapy and celebration.
My America will not come quietly,
 but with the volume of generations
A chorus of
My America is art
My America is taco cart
on every street corner
My America is no
because I love you and I love myself

My America is beautiful and wears short shorts.
Has dimpled thighs and muffin top.
Stretch marks on display
skin, strong
expanding with all the human she holds
My America has tattoos, multicolored hair and a crop top.
My America has her nails done stiletto and will scratch out your eyeballs.
All the hope and dreams she needs already inside her.

I continue to collect these tickets because each of them are a prayer, and I consider myself a prayer collector. Together, we are God. We build and reorganize so opportunity and chance are no longer synonymous. So the American Dream is no longer white, no longer fight, no longer a game, no longer just a dream.

Thank you.