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PARADOX

BY RICKY BARAJAS

Alabama didn't appeal its interracial marriage ban until like 2001 or something. I was born in 1995. This country never wanted people like me. Questions and comments about my identity gave me the anxiety of celebrity life without any of the perks. People ask things like, "So... which are you really?" Applications are the worst—having to reduce yourself down to a check box never feels good. I've always been expected to choose, as if my two halves don't make one whole.

Growing up, for me personally, in retrospect, was an interesting experience. I never knew where I belonged. One time, my grandma made me a sandwich and I wouldn't eat it because, "Miracle Whip is for black people." Little did I know. People are always hounding me because I don't speak Spanish. I can't dance to save my life. Who the hell knows what the hell to do with my hair?

Being mixed is my second grade teacher not even trying to pronounce my last name right. It's getting called a nigger in my ninth grade Spanish class. It's people not thinking that I'm related to my cousins, and it's being told that my family is an abomination in a gas station by some random old woman in Kansas who felt like she was important enough to share her commentary on my existence. It's going to a friend's house for the first time, and seeing a confederate flag on their ceiling, and wondering if I was ever actually friends with that person.

When I was eleven, my uncle got pulled over on his way home from work and got arrested because my suitcase was in his trunk. They said it had to be stolen because my uncle is black and "Barajas is a Mexican name, so he can't be your nephew." My mom lost a friend to her marriage with my dad. Her best friend from childhood just stopped talking to her.

There's a lot of pain involved in deciding—but one day I realized that I don't have to. Not everything about it hurts. I got a lot more music. The food is pretty nice, too. I just got tired of thinking about myself in checked boxes. I can't be one or the other because I am both. I have my dad's eyebrows and my mom's smile. I only have one face though. I got one ear from each of them, and they're not the same size, so headphones never fit right. That's okay though. Everything that I am is the combination of both of them. My body is made of puzzle pieces drawn from different boxes, but I am still a masterpiece. ▲



ART // ROBERT PEREZ



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