

# THE CATALYST

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# CAT-ALUM

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Hello! I'm Ricky—Ricky Ricardo if you're Lucy.

My journey with The Catalyst began back in Winter 2016. A friend of mine was an editor and talked me into joining, and in The Catalyst, I found comfort, I found a place, and I found my voice.

I was the Managing Editor back then. Little did I know that all the time I spent fiddling with layouts instead of doing my homework would pay off when I wandered into the office of the Santa Barbara Independent, and landed a job as a graphic designer. Things really ran full circle once they let me start writing there too. Seeing my work in print gives me a feeling that is indescribable. It's something I got used to feeling back in The Catalyst, and it's something that I feel that i will be in pursuit of for my whole life.

# JUST ANOTHER TOY

YOU'D THOUGHT THAT THE ONLY REASON that she didn't want you to have one was that she didn't want to spend the money. It's not like you were a child anymore. So when you found the toy gun, discarded by one of your neighbors with a larger armory at his disposal, you were elated. Not because he littered; that was bad. But because he'd littered, you had suddenly come into fortune, and you could finally play with the other boys in the neighborhood during one of their wars where they gleefully shot at each other with plastic bullets. Any time you'd ask for a toy gun, your parents would tell you no. They weren't the type to explain themselves much. Once they had decided something, that was it. But any time you saw the boys playing, you wanted so badly to join them that you'd ask again. They'd spend hours out there, hiding behind mailboxes and cars and those green metal boxes that have warning labels all over them but you still sat on anyway. You weren't quite sure what was so fun about it. After they were done, they often complained about the pink welts that the small plastic bullets left on their skin. You didn't know but you wanted to, and now you could.

You didn't have to play with the gun long to realize why it had been left behind. It was broken. The sliding piece used to load the chamber fell off every time you tried to load it, and the spring in the magazine was worn out and wouldn't push the little plastic bbs up into the chamber. The previous owner had given it a bad spray paint job, and it was a mottled blend of blues, purples, and oranges. But, as the saying goes, one man's trash is another man's treasure. You spent most of your time tinkering with some model car or LEGO set, and you thought you were clever—at least more so than the rest of the neighbor kids. Your favorite bedtime story was the Minotaur in the labyrinth, and as you filtered through your father's tools that you shouldn't have been touching, you imagined yourself as Daedalus in his workshop. A small piece of wire, the spring from a clicky-top pen, and some super glue ended up being the winning combination of items for the fix. It didn't take you long before it was in working order again. You smirked to yourself because this supported your theory that you were clever. Now that the gun fired without falling apart, you began to scavenge the neighborhood looking for ammo. You couldn't show up to the next battle armed and unprepared.

You were outside when she came home from work that evening. You were proud of the work that you'd done. You didn't think to hide anything from her. She hasn't noticed you yet. You watch as she cuts the engine and steps foot out of the car. Her shoulders sag, and you think about how tired she looks. So you decide to surprise her with your refurbishment, thinking that she'd be proud of your craftiness. Maybe that would make her smile. Instead of you, her eyes dart to the toy in your hand. The hairs on your arm raise to points in anticipation as the exhaustion in your mother's face flees and a snarling rage quickly takes its place. She closes the distance between you two in a matter of seconds. Her head is cocked to the side, brow furrowed, nostrils flared in indignation, and eyes reflecting the fire of the sun. You had no idea that she'd react this way. You didn't know why this was happening.

"I told you no," she hissed. Your throat becomes gnarled

and tight, and your heart begins to thump in anticipation of punishment. A small "But," begins to sneak its way from behind your brace encrusted teeth. The daggers in your mother's speech pierce it before it can take flight, and she says "No buts." She holds her hand out, voice now silent, but still speaking volumes from her body. You choke back a sob and keep your eyes cast to the ground, trying to steel yourself into anger as you begin to walk to her. You've been letting it build, just enough to let her know that you are not a willing participant in this situation, but not enough to escalate the situation more. The face that greets you when you look up sucks the heat out of you before you can unleash the worst of it upon her. It seems that the fire you saw before really was just a reflection. She's trying to blink back tears right now. Your shoulders drop, and you meekly hand her the hunk of plastic that's covered in flaking paint. She turns sharply, and you listen to the sound of her heels clack into the house. You wanted to demand she explain herself to you. You wanted to run and snatch the toy gun from her hand and save it once again from its destiny to end up in a landfill. You wanted to feel like you belonged in the neighborhood with the rest of the boys. Resentment fills you as you return to your house, embarrassed and ashamed, hoping that nobody witnessed the event.

You eventually forgot about the resentment, but one day you realized you had never let it go. That is until one day you came home and flipped open your computer screen to read about Tamir Rice. He was twelve. Younger than you were when you found the gun. That weighs on you as you remember the moment. You wonder about that poor boy and his family.

You begin to cry. The tears don't come with sounds. They just flow out, tracing your face and running down your neck. You wonder why the officer thought it best to shoot. You wonder if the officer thought of anything at all. You wonder what made the officer so afraid of him. You wonder what people see when they look at you. You wonder if this is why your mother reacted that way...You wonder if this is why...You wonder. You realize it is. You think about how much she loves you. And you can't help but think of how she must have felt to see you like that. You only ever blamed your mother for hurting your feelings. You never considered that she was trying to protect you.

You think about all of the other black boys like you that didn't make it home. You think about Emmett Till and about his mother. The way that your mother clung to you after George Zimmerman was acquitted for murdering Trayvon Martin comes to your mind. You've gone to the gas station at night to get candy and tea. That could have been you, you think. You think about your sister that likes to play her music louder than your ears can handle sometimes, and you see Rekia Boyd. You think about your uncle's five daughters, and you can hear the news anchor reporting about the shooting of Aiyana Jones. You wonder where it is safe to be black in America. Is there anywhere that you and your family can live in peace? ▲