

Disrespectful, Americanized Know-It-All

“Respect your elders”

3 words I carry in my pocket like sharp keys that can open doors for me, but stab at my thighs when I sit the wrong way

You need your elders, it's just a fact

Believe me, I've tried picking the lock with paper clips so that I didn't have to rely on them

But all I got out of that was a chipped tooth from trying to bend wire into a tension wrench

Tension

When they say “respect your elders” they should never forget to add “within reason”

When your elders aren't that much older yet see you as an android dancing on their dinosaur bones

When your elders try to box you up and drop you off at the doorstep of the place you walked away from so proudly

When your elders suddenly become the tailors of your fate thread, and they're making a suit you just don't fit in

This is when you forget “respect your elders”

Because sure, it's selfish, but that's exactly what you need to be

My brother says I talk back so much because I'm “Americanized”

I say “brother, we're half-white”

He says “I wish we weren't”

And then I realize we are speaking two different languages

One where I say “white” with dignity and him with shame

So, brother, when you tell me I'm “Americanized” are you telling me I'm too proud of being American?

Do you see me, a tainted mut fresh out of obedience school?

Let me explain

Elder,

O wise one

O epitome of respect,

If I am a dog, you're putting me down

And I'm trying to fight back

So I bark, but I don't bite

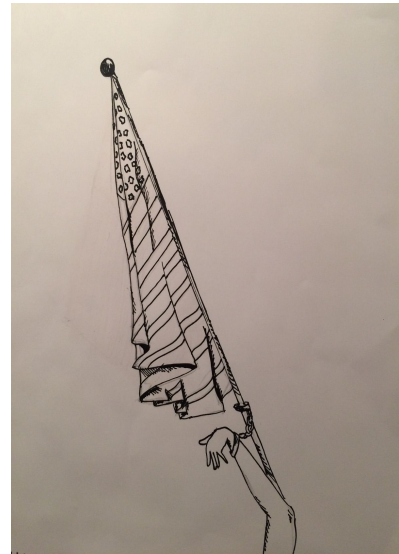
Because I still respect my elders, within reason

Why are you angry at me for surviving?

For not wanting this suit?

Brother, Father, why are you tugging at my fate thread?

I know you want to make me a sleek, white, doctor's coat



And someday I might want to wear it
But now, in this moment, I can't tell you what my future wardrobe looks like
Maybe it's a police uniform
Maybe it's a teacher's outfit
Maybe it's even a garbage man's suit like you joked about
Whatever it is, I will be the tailor
You say "if you're not a doctor I will die disappointed in you"
Father, how could you possibly?
When you see me fighting crime, or feeding knowledge to the next generation, or taking out the trash,
when I'm doing all that with a smile, you won't be disappointed.
You'll be smiling too
Brother says I have no common sense
He says this because I ripped a page from an old book I didn't know was his and turned it into
something new, something he liked, until he found out where it came from
I say, "Brother, I have straight-A's"
He says "Book smarts aren't common sense" and drags my mother from the bedroom to make her say it
to me
I already apologized, but when you kept poking me I poked harder
Mother says I can't admit when I'm wrong
The ironic part is that if I refute this, I'm living up to that evaluation
So even if it isn't true, I'm stuck in a glue trap of logic
Become a pesky fly caught in the slime of your inaccuracy
Mother, I know when I am wrong, but I also know when I am right
I knew I was wrong when I found out it was his book
But I had things to clear up
That is not me refusing fault
But I also knew I was right when I refused the lack of common sense
I mean, I physically laughed at how wrong he was
Became a hyena in the face of a snake
And sometimes, I'm the snake
Sometimes I laugh about how wrong I am
Mother, maybe I am a know-it-all
Father, maybe I should be a doctor
Brother, maybe I am "Americanized"
I'm taking it all one step at a time
Through this endless hallway that is the future
And I'm going in whichever direction feels right on my own
But you can always
Always

Open the door for me