

Nikki Delamotte Award for Outstanding Narrative Writing

2022 Award Winner

“March for Justice, March for Us”

By Olivia Wang

“Mama! They doing it now! They won’t let Jimmie Jackson die in vain! They is gonna march!”

I holler with glee, they are gonna march. We are gonna put back a fight, albeit a peaceful one.

I still cry out in delight, “Mama! Mama! Can’t you hear me? We gonna march for our rights! Ain’t no black man just gonna get murdered by the police like that no more!”

The door burst open, my mama’s eyes shooting into my soul. She pushed me. Hard.

I slam into the wall, “Ma-”

“Listen, boy, I don't know what you're going on about but this marching nonsense is exactly that, nonsense! You are not going to go to some peace wanting march up over the middle of nowhere only to get your dumbass head blown up!”

It's a struggle to process Mama’s words, her cruel, cut-throat tone evaporating all my sunder. I came up with a meek response: “Ma, it-it’s not in the middle of nowhere, it's r-right here over the Selma bridge.”

Her eyes shoot daggers at me, “Oh so just cause it's some Selma march, you think you ‘bout to go? Don't be stupid, let those preachers martyr themselves, but I will not let you be one of those sacrificial lambs”

“Mama, what do you mean? This is something bigger than lamb sacrifices and shiz, can't you see? Mama, we fightin’ for our rights,” I cry, “You’re being fuck-”

A million needles of pain shoot across my cheek. A stinging sensation I've only ever felt once when Tania shot her hand across my cheek cause I gave her gum as her birthday gift.

It don’t feel good.

My other friends say they mama beat them daily to keep 'em in check or if they Mama don't they Daddy will. Sometimes their daddy even beat their Ma's but my dad ain't around. He worked in the North and sent money back down. Even when he was around though, he never hit me. I tremble, my entire body furiously shaking. I pinch my eyes closed, afraid to see Mama's face. She must really hate me I think, yet I know it's not true, Mama is just scared. Scared to fight for our rights, scared to let me go out there, scared like how she was scared I'd die riding a bike for the first time, or scared I'd get into a fight and die the first day of high school.

But I rode that bike and already been through hundreds of days in high school.

I wanna join the Selma march.

Slowly opening my eyes, I stare back into Mama's cold gaze. I simply nod my head at her shaking hand and without a word, I leave.

Sunday is the march and Sunday is the day Mama tells me to stay home and not to leave under any circumstances while she goes to work.

But how can I stay at home doing schoolwork from a colored school that gets the white schools used textbooks and while Mama is forced to the back of the bus by them whites? How? I simply can't.

I will go to the march.

Sneaking out the window I run to the blocks before the bridge and I join the peaceful crowd. The crowd clambers the sidewalks since they will get beaten if they don't disturb the roadways. But even shoulder to shoulder they rise in resilience. Pushing forwards. I join up at the back of the line. Getting here physically wasn't too much a trek, but mentally I do struggle knowing Mama's plight. She is wrong to be so afraid of them whites that she won't even speak of the marches but I know she ain't wrong for loving me, so I stay at the back. Today I won't be a martyr but I will be one of the many that band together and fight.

Slow and Steady, we rumble on. But even from view at the very back, I can see the progress. I can see the bridge. I can see... a familiar yellow pressed suit and laced-up women's hat.

Mama and Papa.

It's them, I just know it's them. Tears gently gather in my eyes, and together to form long streams down my cheek not unlike how Ma and Pa at the front and me in the back band together to form this fiery stream. A stream headed towards justice, but even with the fervor of my black pride flowing through my veins, my love for Mama and Papa overwhelm me with emotion.

I know that to them, I'm everything. That's why Mama would never let me go, she can't stand the thought of me hurt, but here as I march forward all I can think is.

“Can't you see, you're my everything too?”

My love yearns for them to be with me, in the back of the line, subtle and safe, but I'm proud of them, so, so proud.

So we march on, on for our freedom.