

JEEVAN ANTHONY NARNEY

An Adoptee Abecedarian

And I'm not sure how to begin my story, sobbing or chanting,
because it's not like I'm terminally unique like my counselor once told me,
considering I can name countless others who were
dressed to be sons and daughters again after who knows how long.
Everyone who knows me knows that the moon mothered me first.
First parents of mine hardly trackable, and I'm not sure I want to know,
given the facts, what difference would it make in reconciling a taxed identity?
Heaven only knows, if you believe in heaven. I'm okay, by the way.
I do want people to stop, drop, and drink their tea with me and, listen:
Jumping to the conclusion who is my real family is not anyone's interview.
Keeping secrets is not a tradition in our family of five enfolded in a game of *Ticket to Ride*.
Leaving myself in the dark only means I'm waiting to see who enters my room first—
my blond mother or the desert light, both I confuse, both I do not refuse.
Never have my parents been identity-thieves of my brownness. They are
only out to ask if I will take sugar in my tea, will I take milk, will I take a walk with them.
Please then, including the BIPOC community, too, waiting for some white sin to be said,
questions about how I was treated will only have me asking how you take your tea.
Remember me as the Indian who can't scold white people very well.
Sorry to anyone whose story is not one to smile about. I can smile miles into mine.
They've been too true gold to me to open-mic white savior accusations.
Understand my missionary kid mother from India has kept me from
vanishing in the dark by talking over the silence and finding me
worrying about my body until she says, *All right, let's go spend*
X amount of time outside. My mother, invading my privacy with her chai and devotion.
Yes to Scrabble with her for which I often get the blank letters. She's why I believe that
zebras will marry lions one day because blood is only blood charting us along.

I Could Have Been a Teaboy in Bangalore

I could have been a teaboy, my grandfather once told me,
if I had not been adopted.

I picture myself being stuck in a brothel,
being toyed with and turned upside down honestly.

If I had not been adopted
you'd know it. I'd be banging on your taxi window to be let in.
Being toyed with and turned upside down honestly
is only one option of suffering for the world is a large place.

You'd know it. I'd be banging on your taxi window to be let in.
But even though I've a good life now,
anxiety is only one option of suffering for the world is a large place.
Self-care is popular now but loss can never be an afterthought.

For even though I've a good life now,
I want to genetically edit out all that could compromise me.
Self-care colors you bath salt-blue but loss can never be an afterthought
when you had a schedule of hands who held you only to let go.

Family Studies

I have this nesting doll on my mantel.
It has a whole Indian family in it.
I've played with this since I was a child.

Open the nesting doll by removing
the father's head.
The mother's head will emerge.
Remove hers, a sister slips out. Do it again —
a son you will scoop out.
One last time,
a small baby brother sneaks out smiling.
Hold him
between your index finger and thumb — gently so.

I'm the small baby brother.
Let's go on an Easter egg hunt.
Let's hide me again.
It won't take long to find me,
I was a screamer like no other.

I woke the mockingbirds I swear.
I woke up the moon, the stars, and the town.

I carry around this nesting doll wherever I move.

When I had my first tornado scare,
I packed up my picture frames,
but quickly took the nesting doll
and put it in my pocket.

I'm insane with tenderness.
And yes, it always comes apart
in my pocket like a cracked egg.
I'm very protective of what I don't know.

I think that I'm the small baby inside, but
I'm not. I forgive them.

Family Reunion

You should see me when I'm around
Indian people.

I want to tell them we should be friends immediately.

I want to tell them what a friend
you'd have in me like the song goes.

When I make a friend from India,
I act like I've met royalty.
I act like they have some secret recipe
they have to give me.

What I would do for a meal with my biological household.

Don't get me wrong,
I love my adoptee family.

But I imagine us all meeting each other by accident.
In Bollywood film style,
 the music heightens.
There would be dancing. Flashy lights.

Party guests hiding their giggles.
I'd take my white mother by her hand
and point her to my Indian mother.

I'd have so much to say—
how I grew up in a cotton farming town.
That I played clarinet in high school.
That Dad worked in a plant.
That I have a mom who can make chicken curry.
Those parents watched me a teen
live in a world where I couldn't
quite put a finger to the skin I hold.

My mouth would blurt out
what I've wanted to say all my life—
Thank you.

Taking a Break from Being a Hypochondriac

My mother threatened to fly out to spank me
if I googled one more disease
I thought I had because I spent the day trying
to match my symptoms to what I'd read online.
I laughed and thought,
*Gosh, please fly out here,
spank my heart back into rhythm.*
I want to throw out my phone
that is reading my mind and recommending
how to keep my lungs in sync in the air.
Leave my mother for that work. She can tell
me how to spring clean the gut, restring the nerves.
Let her be my sing-along without the subscription.
My mother, who has taught me that prayer
problem-solves nothing, but can make you
tender, disquiet you into a giggle.
I'm worried people don't take pleasure in secrets anymore.
I don't want my future child's childhood to trend on Twitter.
I don't want my feelings about the universe to go viral.
I want my shadow to syrup in the starry dark alone.
I wonder what my guardian angels drink to keep sane
after hearing my plea, plea like the last piano key.
My mother thinks angels are huge,
and I think they are the size of fireflies that kids
trap and put into a jar, believing they've caught in action
God masking his face in fire.
The real thing's been saved of you: starlight, your skin
for the night, your blood rowing through you.
I'm like my grandmother,
who was not afraid to die but was afraid of dying.
She liked to tell me how I cried and cried because
I didn't like going outside. Now being inside
too long feels like being an unwatered houseplant
not yet stroked by these strained hands.
I've heard from a student
that her dad can make good wine from dandelions.

I picture her dad pulling them
out of the ground before we buy into
the cheap trick that, if we blow on them,
our dreams will come true.
I don't usually drink, but I'll grow tipsy to praise
the scattering stopped and jarred to ferment.
Someone join me next to the salt rock charged.
You can kiss me
with the tornado warning still on your lips.
Let's kiss
until our bloodlines show up on our skins.