

Content warning: sexual assault/violence, kidnapping, drink spiking, homicide

## **Born as Yours, as His**

The day I came out screaming and crying  
is the day they found the intern dead.

You all saw it playing on TV as I was born,  
unfair  
because brother's birth featured  
just 12 hours of *Seinfeld*.  
A girl becomes a walking target  
From the first second of their breathe,  
Essentially slapped into existence  
And pushed into everything that follows.  
You knew that, from the verdict of the ultrasound  
to when I finally made it home, bundled in your hold,  
your daughter's face and drool and spilled formula  
against your chest. Breaths,  
like drops of innocence pressed  
against blankets and bibs, just like the rest.  
Only it was days after

Chandra Levy, May 22, 2002.

She and the many other girls who made their  
way to Dateline or Amber Alerts or crinkled and ripped  
posters on Walmart bulletin boards—college freshmen  
trying to make it home, wobbling and practically  
wrestling with their heels against the sidewalk,  
women with drinks and short skirts and dresses and *drinks* ...  
hands and pills of others not where they're supposed to be,  
deep voices, cat calls, men *this close* to pulling her into their car,  
nighttime and stars and dim lights, running across puddles in alleyways  
with men that chase the trail behind, close like the wet footprints she once owned,  
or  
Daylight, watch her,  
prowl across window sills  
and peer in because it's his zoo,  
Or across the pavement of flea markets,  
cat eyes, cat calls catch her off guard,  
Or spot and track her from a bush, blended in  
with the natural—they're everywhere you are:

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NYC, Chicago, maybe around the corner,  
down the street and they're trying to get *me*.

That's what you told me, that he is

Always there, keep you eyes peeled because  
they're watching like a hawk, like Doctor T. J. Eckleburg,  
a god where his glares are nothing *but* sin,  
always waiting to pull you into their palms and pin  
you down.

Please, *please*, slip and fall into his ice water-blue gaze.  
*You're so beautiful for me. I need you, now.*

For the next 18 years, I lived under your eyes,  
In the backyard, a small block of pavement,  
Surrounding by a green lawn— the itchiness of the grass,  
my only escape. I couldn't ride my bike past 5 PM,  
even on summer days when sunlight survived until 9.  
You insisted I'd be bundled up in neon, green as a glow stick.  
As if my clothes could kick back or signal the National Guard.  
Instead of karate lessons, I received the kidnapping 101 at home:  
Scream *help* so loud your voice leaves your body.  
Bite their hand off.  
Draw blood.

*Stockton: Breaking News.*

*Kristin Smart,*

*Cal Poly, 1996.*

Our bodies are always in danger.  
It was already over for me, before me.

But you don't know that  
the short skirts I wear,  
the concoctions of rum and coke,  
the men and women I want to kiss,  
the nights I walk in the scent of pine,  
the moments I share, swaying to their heartbeat or  
the jazz of jam sessions in coffee houses,  
the roast and caffeine and energy fill me to the brink,  
won't kill me.

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The eyes that require perfection  
will strangle me until  
my very last breath....

*Author's note: With the rate of sexual assault on campus, I often think about how womxn are born into and raised to be scared of the world around us. That we are always on the defense with the war on our bodies. Even with similar dangers that men can face, we are sheltered and protected without choice while men have far more freedom to do what they want. For example, cis het men tend to feel more safe walking around at night and do not need help or be on-guard at parties. Rather than addressing the root of the problem in how our bodies should be respected, society places the burden on us, and we have to bring this trauma or acknowledge risks in every space we enter. It's suffocating. A burden is placed onto womxn the second we enter this world, screaming and crying, and we carry it with us into adulthood. Every generation before has sustained this burden, so much so this protective nature toward daughters is instilled in parenting. Ultimately, this poem delves into how growing up in fear stunted my growth and required extra attention to embark on new experiences.*