

Aliya Uteuova

“Sage”

I want to show you the land,  
Where people are free,  
like sage,  
growing in the steppe.

I want to show you the place,  
Where land does not exhaust you  
And color does not define you.

I want to show you the life,  
Where peace is returned  
And decency - restored.

A world where hope is regained  
in yourself, in humanity  
This is, after all  
“The land of liberty, and justice —  
for all,” they say,  
“You have a Belmar road,” I say,  
Where a wall separates  
The rich and the poor of St. Louis.

To the right there is a store for dog accessories,  
Attached to an aesthetically pleasing coffee shop,  
With people inside, Snapchatting their faces away.  
Through the cafe window — the wall is unnoticed  
The wall behind which there are municipal housings  
And a gas station is the closest place to buy food —

Fried chicken.

A Whole Foods, however, is right across the wall.

With cameras outside it, pointing toward the wall.

A 14-year-old Lily,

Saved up all her allowings

Ironed her best, ivory shirt she got for Christmas,

The sleeves are a bit short,

but that's okay, she'll put on her sparkly bracelets to detract the attention

From the fact that the shirt belonged to someone else before her.

Lily took out a book from the library,

Anna Karenina

She stepped into the cafe, ordered hot chocolate,

And as she waited for this over-priced cup of Nestle powder,

She looked at her surroundings, taking everything in.

People on their phones,

People gossiping with each other,

People refreshing their Facebook feeds,

People holding hands,

Aretha Franklin playing on the record player

She saw one of those before,

Although that one was actually "retro."

Lily got her hot chocolate, took the window spot, opened her book,

And then, through the window,

she saw the wall,

behind which was her home.

Her mother would be back at five, she had to return soon,

And soon came soon enough.

Sometimes I wish I never left my home  
A nest, where I am just another sparrow  
and people don't ask me which nest I belong to.

Where are you from?  
Bangor, Maine — I joke  
Of course they don't believe me,  
I look too different, sound too different, act too different.

So you want to stay in the U.S. after you graduate?  
I don't know, maybe.  
Why did you come here then?  
Oh, here it goes.  
Did you come here on a student visa?

No, I don't want to stay here.  
Because I am too afraid to live in a country,  
where psychopaths can carry guns.  
I am too afraid to live in a country,  
where it takes a school shooting to discuss gun laws.  
I will not raise my children,  
In the land that does not teach them about the place their mother comes from.

The only thing I am guilty of,  
is wanting to learn.  
Eager to write, to report,  
in a place where freedom of speech, and press  
is engrained in the Constitution.  
What a privilege it is, to speak your mind, loud and clear,  
and not be afraid to be jailed anymore  
A privilege misused.

You know what,  
 I am not smiling, nodding, and forgiving this ignorance anymore.  
 He is a college student.  
 He has access to knowledge.  
 He should know where Kazakhstan is located on the map.

Breathe. Just breathe.  
 Just wait until you get to your dorm.  
 And call your parents.  
 No, you can't wake them up, silly,  
 wait for five more hours.  
 By the time you get to bed  
 It will be morning there,  
 and you'll update them about everything you learned today.

About the Incarceration of Japanese-Americans in WWII  
 About *Brown v. Board of Education*  
 About a Gandhi scholar you interviewed  
 Who met Nelson Mandela (how awesome!)  
 And reassured you that peace is worth fighting for.

My parents listen  
 Eagerly, holding on to every word,  
 Adding their commentary to my concerns  
 My worries are incomparable to theirs.  
 Yet they still, somehow, find the best in everything, in everyone.  
 "We love you, you make us proud, everyday,  
 Just keep going."

And suddenly,  
Everything becomes clearer  
As if the glass in my glasses  
has been wiped clean.  
And there's no blurriness, no scratches anymore.

I want to show you the land,  
Where you can feel the warmth of morning light,  
lingering through the red and yellow leaves,  
of trees.  
Trees planted by your ancestors,  
Greeting you.  
Rivers filled with sweat and tears of your ancestors,  
Embracing you.  
Your soul — breathing again.

What's your name?  
Call me Human.  
Where do you come from?  
A place called Maine  
— I can see that.