

# *K*obayashi Maru: *A* Bedtime Story

And

*D*eadlocked     ooo

By

*E. V. Noechel*

**WHY I LIKE IT:** *Poetry Editor HEZEKIAH writes... E. V. Noechel's poetry has a social conscience that just might be divinely inspired. Her subjects are tragic and masterfully composed. Permit me to be brief, they are lengthy breezes, I'll let you get started--Go... (Oh, woe betide me, I am not a Trekkie. In the event that you have the good fortune to be, you'll know that Kobayashi Maru is Trekker-talk for no-win situations. I realize having to offer this explanation, once again, exposes the limits of my qualifications. (Spacing is poet's own.) HS*

Kobayashi Maru: A Bedtime Story

*For Elijah McClain*

*part one*

Elijah, when you were being killed by marauding American police,  
men who saw you as the big bad wolf—it sounds almost comical now,  
if it weren't such a tragedy, Shakespearean, really:

you, whose violin lulled orphaned kittens to sleep, the hum  
of your bow gently pulling notes from strings, the wood beneath  
your chin purring like their own lost mothers—you,

the panting mouth of predatory death? More the gentle  
one who lifts lonely baby cats by the scruff, using his very front  
teeth, tiny and often forgotten between the canines, precise though--  
small and perfect side by side by side, to carry lost tabby infants  
back to the bed they've wandered from, controlled precision  
moves rivaling the steadiest hand of a diamond cutter.

Even as they turned you into the next lost child,  
you declared aloud your own defenselessness,

chanting your mantras of harmlessness to all beings

and your steadfast refusal to break your vows of pacifism,

even as they murdered you on the sidewalk of your own hometown,

did it feel familiar? Did you perhaps remember, once they injected

a toxic dose of veterinary drugs into your shaking arms

Tibet of 70 years prior? Did it feel the same when that life was taken

from you by Chinese soldiers in the icy Himalayan mountains

with your fellow monks' spirits hovering, the air dead yet still humming

with your chanted wishes to take the whole of the world's suffering

away with you, begging to carry its weight on your back

as your soul rides to the skies in the stomach of a circling vulture?

A pacifist facing down the heavily armed. Your declarations

of defenselessness once again your only weapon

against those determined to silence your people.

Did it ring a bell? Spin the wheel of dharma? Hum into eternity

like the low vibrations of singing bowls or the fine motor

skills that control the quiver of the violin's bow scratching

notes out of strings like the cyclic purrs of newborn kittens

against the bellies of their mothers, an endless loop

of sound that says, "I am here. All is well."

Elijah, you're their greatest fear. Strength without force  
is a monster these warriors and tyrants don't know how to fight.

*part two*

Now, as you lie on the pavement, with the warm passing up  
through your clothes and into your veins,  
may I tell you a story—a true one? Not at all long ago,

maybe a handful of years, on the same continent that caresses  
your cooling body now, there was an adolescent wolf cub  
whose entire family was killed by land management. His life was spared  
but in exchange, he was collared with a tracking device. And once a year,  
like Santa Claus they would fly to him, helicopter blades biting the sky into pieces  
with a sound like world was going to end. And his would

with high-powered telescopic rifle blasts from so far above, it must  
have seemed like the sound simply caused their heads to explode. One after another.  
His mate gravid with pups, his cubs half-grown to gawky, popping

in horrible red firework bursts right where they had been trotting  
behind him moments before, a noise rising out of White Ear—a cross  
between a yelp and a throaty deep cough as she dropped.

And the wolf would lie flat to the ground, eyes closed, expecting to be next.

But instead the nightmare noise faded away. Every time he was left  
to lick the ears on their bleeding heads, to nuzzle their paws in a vain  
effort to please make their bodies work again. Please.

In that moment, did he remember the first time at just a year old, seeing  
his parents, his sisters, and his mother's new litter wasted in a pile  
of yelps then silence while he grappled for control  
of his brain as it was forced into a helpless drugged sleep? Did he remember

waking up on the bloodied ground with a heavy box strapped  
to his neck and the bodies gone to be stretched over taxidermy forms  
in an office educational display somewhere?

That wolf must have remembered the next time it happened  
and the next time. Did he start to believe it was a disease he carried--  
an exploding Typhus to his Mary.

Now please, can I whisper one more story before you have to

go again? Please--I don't want to be

this radio collar anymore, my white skin

a deadly betrayal to the men and women murdered

all around me. How didn't I know it was happening? Not

till technology became a witness did I have a clue

that murders blossomed red and real wherever I went.

Black bodies falling all around like lost mothers, lovers,

family, best friends, strangers, my mentors, teachers, and heroes

like you. Snap snap snap and they're gone day after day the same

true story repeating itself and I didn't even know,

didn't even know this, even notice.

But I remember now. I want to be wolves together.

We can be majestic, we can fight back with our harmlessness

and our teeth. I don't know if you'll take me,

but I know I have to try. I will remember. Now.

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## Deadlocked

Jason was 10 when he was messing around  
at a friend's house, and the  
friend found and fired his father's  
poorly hidden gun right into Jason's belly. It's a story  
that's become such a trope, I almost don't want  
to write it down because it no longer makes you  
cringe the way I want it to. Does it help or hurt  
if I add that I always tried to be away from home  
when Jason would come over to play with my brother's  
action figures and trains and drink Kool-Aid and chomp  
down Little Debbie cakes with his mouth wide open,  
twirls of icing and devil's food churning into a dark brown smear  
like dirt in his mouth? It would make this awful, wet chuck-chuck  
sound when he chewed. Chuck-chuck  
chuck-chuck. It totally grossed me out. But  
do you care less or more about his sucking chest wound

when I add that he was a dreadful whiner and I was a teenager  
just trying to hold my head together between the hormones stretching  
my body into something it didn't used to be and my family  
tumbling into its own private nuclear winter all around me?  
Something like a chuck-chuck-chuck can be enough

to make you wish someone was dead,

but not really. I never imagined how he'd look  
in the initial confusion at the bowling ball punch  
to the point about one fist below the solar plexus  
or when he saw his small intestine for the first time.

He was just a dumb kid. I didn't want him to bleed  
confused and cold, mesmerized not only by the amount and color  
of his spreading blood, but also by the look on his  
friend's face, crumpling like a toddler

wailing for his mother. Jeezus.

But don't worry. He's okay now. He's like 40  
and probably has his own irritating, spoiled  
kid some other teenager is avoiding



when her brother invites him over to play  
video games or some shit. He probably

has his own gun now. Jason I mean,

though it could be the kid too. People  
do that, don't they? For target practice or shooting  
small, unimportant animals as a bonding  
experience, something to share with your dad, right?  
He didn't die after all. Life goes on.

More guns get bought. It's life.

My friend's cousin's family didn't quit hunting  
When he shot himself in the head at 11 years old  
Because the older kids ignored him,  
And I don't know what happened to the pistol  
After it went off in the hand of my mother's student's  
Mentally handicapped sister when she cleared his name  
From mom's roster right in the car beside his own mom,  
Just rifling around in her purse for gum. One

letter changes everything forever. Could his killer  
even comprehend why he was never coming home  
after getting carried away in a confusing rush of flashing  
lights after everything turned into red. Red lights  
red blood, red car, and the stick of burning  
cinnamon Big Red gum she finally found and curved  
into her mouth while the men carried the boy away  
his face now just red red red. Leaving behind a soaked  
red car seat. Could she understand, a compromised  
toddler, why her mother's face is red all the time  
now and there's an empty bedroom in their home?

I wonder what happened to the gun

After the day does a 180 and there are bits of brain  
to clean off the window when the police  
are gone and the world goes quiet. These are just a few  
the ones I know within a degree or so of separation.

Nothing ever changes for the guns. Blameless

as the children who set them off, they  
keep being bought and carried and stashed and stolen.  
I don't even know what I'm trying to accomplish  
with these words on paper, temporary as the bang  
that makes eardrums wail, thin as the moment after it  
  
when everything turns red and goes quiet.

### **THE POET SPEAKS:**

*Re: Kobayashi Maru: A Bedtime Story*

*For far too long we've been told fairy tales where black men are big bad wolves and white women, babes in the woods. At the same time corporations that have much to profit off of our public lands have been making wolves out to be monster killing machines when their entire species as we know it has been changed forever--their bodies and minds made everything they are--as a response to our species' relentless persecution and attempts to eradicate theirs over centuries. As a Buddhist pacifist, also diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, and a vegan animal rights activist, Elijah's murder hit close to home. Despite so many similarities, would I have been treated the same, put down in the street with veterinary meds for having my mental illness triggered? Probably not. I am a white woman. It's expected that we will fall apart in a stressful situation. That we will be scared. That we won't fight back. We are automatically seen as victims. Black men are seen very, very differently. Even ones who literally lie down and die when attacked, repeating over and over that they are not a threat, that they are pacifists devoted to the gentle treatment of all species. We can't keep believing in made up stories intended to lull us back to sleep.*

*Re: Deadlocked*

*I'm not sure I can say much more about Deadlocked that won't just sound like something everyone's heard before and practiced catchy rebuttals to. That's why I wrote it. We are the children who keep getting shot. We stand there looking confused and hurt and horrified every time it happens. The guns are just there being guns, doing what guns do.*

**AUTHOR BIO:** I have been the recipient of grants and residencies from the North Carolina Arts Council, the Vermont Studio Center, Headlands Center for the Arts, United Arts Council, The Culture and Animals Foundation, and I-Park. My poetry and other works can be found in multitudes of magazines, literary and otherwise, and my fourth and most recent book of poetry is available via Foothills Publishing of NY

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