

An Articulate Shadow

By Mariam Mulatu

“Someday, we’ll all just be photos. Rummaged through with dirty stained fingers, suffocated in square plastic coffins, buried in photos of others or crucified onto a wall until a child pulls out the pin with their pudgy overfed hands. The pin that mercifully stabbed us into place. Letting us gently fall and swept under the rug.

If not, perhaps lugged in wallets. Shoved in back pockets, outbid by the idolized paper that surrounds us until crooked hands steal us away. Without money in this dark case, we are thrown into the trash: unneeded.

Memories of our faces will fade, and our voices will be remote shadows of whispers. Almost our true wails but never quite. The memories of us, they tried to hold onto, but it was as if they were pulling at ribbons of smoke. Always, so, so near but when this memory is leant upon, it dissipates. Forgotten in the frailty of the human mind and memory.

All that’s remembered is the frozen shock that is our pictures, the counterfeit smiles pushing away memories of real ones and poses remembered rather than dances. Photos with the smallest of imperfections already deleted or glossed over until all they have is the mannequin of who they truly knew. They are left with their ersatz while we are left to slowly decay. Our perfect self is still suspended or lost.

The few who treasure these will only be haunted, staring into the desolate, soulless eyes.

Begging the doll to scream to yell, to move, to whisper, to breathe, to blink, to twitch. If only a twitch. We in turn begging to feel, to let them understand we are there, to show we want to but are yet incapable. That our efforts are in vain but to let them know that there were in fact efforts.

There was an effort but for what.

With nothing said, we are picked up less and less. They are told to leave us, to not forget but to keep us in the back of our minds. But what use are we there, to be kept in the dark. Resurfaced and just as we open our sewn mouths: evanesced. What are photos, what are we, if not but the faces of death.”

He had finally finished talking so I looked over to smile at him, but he had already left. I couldn't be sure if he was even there at all. He wasn't here now, so I guess he never was.