

# UC Merced

## The Vernal Pool

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Ghosts

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**Author**

Garcia Barrera, Karla

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## **Ghosts**

It had been that home with the same arranged bright succulents the leaning against the light grainy beige walls. The same black fence that protected the front door and the two pairs of shoes that had always welcomed me. One pair had around a size four and torn around the edges. Its black color had faded into a bluish black shade. The other pair was smaller with thick encrusted mud under the bottom solace. This pair had been white but now almost resembled the same color as the other pair. I stared at them recalling when they had been worn by their owners. It had been four years since I encountered a new life. At the age of eight, June 2007, I entered the Foster Care System along with my siblings. Jessica, my only sister, Emmanuel, Alex, Kevin and I all lived in one foster home. Throughout the years, Jessica and Emmanuel were taken away and placed into other foster homes far away. All who remained were Alex, Kevin, and me.

Alex had been the owner of the faded black sneakers and was a brave little boy who was gifted in math. I was constantly jealous of him over my own struggles with mathematics. He was small barely seven years old with chestnut colored eyes and hair. His eyes are what captivated me the most. They were large doll-like and sparked with curiosity. He never called me by my name, he called me sister. Then there was Kevin, a baby in the very beginning and still left as one. He was about five years old and was the most mischievous one his white sneakers always dirty with mud stains. I had often washed his shoes which had been a great pain to clean. Often times I had been called to take care of him when he had bitten other children. His features were almost similar to mine. We both expressed our mother's features: her big rounded eyes, purple under eye bags, small plumped lips, and strong jawline. All of our hair was chestnut brown,

another gene given by our mother. Alex and Kevin were the ones I made the most memories with but didn't know how limited it was.

My foster home was a place of shelter. I don't remember warmth nor hugs. We were often given hand-me-downs. I was trained to clean and never do anything to upset the balance of the family home. Whenever I broke through the condition mask I wore, my foster dad would say, "don't cry or else you will dirty my carpet." His black eyes empty; no glint of remorse or sympathy. His wife had been reading a book turning the pages all the while I was scolded for crying. She wouldn't look at me and instead became like the object in the house-- unaffected. I was unable to feel or express my emotions.

"Karla go outside and pick out the weeds," my foster mom would order. She would simply just glance at me in a stone like stance. Her curled hair was in a bun while her children sat at the table eating cereal. Her eyes black and blank like always. I couldn't complain. If I grimaced her husband would say, "you have to work for what you eat." I swallowed hard and followed the instructions that were given, if I would have been able to eat. Her kids would glance at me as if I would say something. Their daughter's eyes were full of pity as she mumbled sorry and looked away. I had done what was asked of me and thought I needed to work for love. If I had worked hard enough, I would be someone worthy. I thought I had forever. Yet once again, life took apart another piece of my soul I hadn't permitted it to. Mercy was out of the question, and soon enough the clock struck, and Alex and Kevin left my side.

I don't recall the exact day they had gotten adopted much less when they left. I just remember the day after. It was a bright spring day, white petals swirled around the desolate park

with the same yellow faded round slide and set of tarnished rusted monkey bars. Everything looked the same as everything should have been. Morphed from the past, I could see their tiny frames running around their ghostly laughter invited me in. I closed my eyes and told myself to breathe while convincing myself that everything was alright.

The ride to school was like a buzz of noises. I slumped onto the spider webbed torn seat glancing outside the window. The same front yards of neatly trimmed green trees filled with rows of brown, beige, and orange houses nothing out of the ordinary. I have walked by them for nearly four years with the usual set of seasons. In the confines on the school bus all I remembered were the blur of images and sounds. I was never really fond of High school. It was simply a place to do homework and read as many books as I could read. Every day. I had my friends, of course, but then again, I stood apart from them in various levels.

I walked off the bus on to campus the black gates greeted me. The wind swirled around, and trees billowed in the distance. I followed the stream of students towards the familiar brick red roofs and beige walls. My first class had yet to begin and I clutched my books tightly as a memory slithered into my brain. "I don't want to go," the grief-stricken voice echoed. For a moment I was unable to see the ants of people, instead I saw his eyes. The brown folds within each other with the centered black orbs fixated towards me. The bell rung forcing me back to reality. I gripped my books; I entered my first period class with haste. I tried to focus on Homer's *The Odyssey* but the previous memories kept on surfacing. The repeated voice, "I don't want to go," bounced off in my head.

School had passed by quickly and not before long I found myself walking by the crumbled pavement. I knew that living without my parents a possibility, but without my flesh and blood? The coiled feelings were suffocating. I wanted to scream and shout. For someone to wake me up. Instead I ran and zoomed past the green trees into the empty soccer field. Huffing all the way towards the other side of the grass. I ripped the backpack off my shoulders. My fists connected with the ground. Over and over again. Every time my fist connected with the grass, the ghosts of my past seeped through. I began punching harder and harder. Wanting to feel something, anything to distract me. I wanted to erase the giggling echoes, the eyes of my siblings, their tears, and their warmth. I wanted to forget everything.

I had finally stopped when the sun began to set coloring the sky a rusted orange. Taking a shaky breath, I brushed my swollen hands across my jeans and grabbed my belongings. Once again, I faltered my way home. Before entering through the black fenced door, I glanced down toward the old worn shoes. I stood there looking at the shoes blinking multiple times as if they would somehow disappear. My foster mom had been talking on the cell phone when she opened the door. Without so much as a hello, I stepped inside. Swiftly, I climbed up the stairs then down the white carpet into my room and I threw my belongings down. My room had been a shared space with their daughter. It was small and my bed was at the corner with Dora the Explorer blankets quite fitting for a fourteen . I laid down onto the bed. Placing my head down onto the pillow I noticed the throbbing sensation that emitted from my hands and the blue crayoned drawn names along the side of my baby pink wall.

The names lit up the veil I kept in place. As if on cue, the Ghosts started appearing. The cogs of my mind were in constant motion, but when they stopped, the ghosts began invading

with endless hunger. They had access to the deep recesses of my mind and transgressed the walls placed. Their ghostly laughter and warmth were uncanny, yet extremely familiar. They did not pity me, in fact, to them *I* didn't exist. They were fragments of my memory and unconscious of their actions. They did not mock me, nor attempted to stop the streams falling down my cheeks. These ghosts evaded everything that was personal and took revenge over the time they spent in captivity. The longer the time spent in the locked doors of my mind, the longer they took to lock back in, but that is just reality. These ghosts continued to haunt me. Every time I heard a child laugh or saw a curly black-haired poodle. If I saw something, anything that resembled part of those fragments, ghost appeared to remind me of their existence. I found myself in a storm of overdue emotions. I was indebted to myself--to these memories. When they became vivid, I covered my ears and closed my eyes, as if they'd get a hint and disappear. But they didn't because these memories did not exist in my reality, they existed from the records of my brain. My ears and eyes had been the notetakers. So, no matter how much I closed my eyes and covered my ears, the ghosts always remained within me.

Suddenly, it was as if they never left. Alex was sitting on my lap smiling reciting his multiplication while Kevin was in my arms wetting my shoulder with his saliva. I had felt the slow and calm rhythmic thud-thump of his heart beat. I reached out and touched nothing but air. I knew it was not real, but during a time they were with me. I curled into a ball on my small tiny bed and waited until the ghosts vanished. Then I fell into a deep black slumber.

The sun's rays kissed the top of my eyelashes with a soft muted light. I woke up and heard my alarm clock 7:00 am. The previous memories plummeted my mind back to reality. I remembered. The pain felt hollow yet full. It was scorching yet soft in its blows. For the fourth

time, I experienced instability within my “home.” None had been fatal, although they almost felt like it. I was happy for Alex and Kevin as well as their stability. I had mentioned acceptance. The hardest thing to accomplish. In other words, a life learning to live without them. And again, I was still in the same home all alone. Life had runaway and clutched the pieces of my soul with her greedy hands. I turned around and stared at the large blue crayoned K and oval A’s on the baby pink wall. Then I reached over traced along the letters with my fingertips. Cognizant of the silence engulfing the house and the empty shoes that remained at the corner of the entrance accumulating dust.