

Minerva Foundation - Learning to Lead 2015

Kelsey Savage - *Composite Poet*

You Came Here, Quiet

You came here, quiet.

You were the President of the Eco Club,

you once ran a thirty-hour famine
on a teacher's strike
with two friends, no adult supervision
and raised eighteen thousand dollars,

you've been fundraising for an orphanage in Mexico
you hope to see with your own eyes
this summer.

But *these*?

These are not part of who you *are*, you say,
they're just things that you've *done*.
You say you are not a leader,
you just came here to learn from some.

You say leaders are easy to spot:
Power suits. Briefcases. Aritzia executives.
A straight spine. A clear voice.
They have the rapt attention of
every room they enter.
Leaders have a corner office in their smile
and they can't remember the last time they were scared.

You came here, quiet.

You stepped into a space of concrete
and polish
beneath a sky of paper boats,
looked around at a sea of new faces
and heard that familiar voice whisper
from the honeycomb in your chest:
"Why am I here?"

You know doubt like it was your mother tongue.

They had you break away into smaller circles
like cells dividing in an effort to grow
and after a song of nerves climbed
the ladder of your ribs

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you rock
 paper
scissored
 your way into defeat,

and that's when you were chosen to be
the first one to speak.

You came here, quiet

because you'd heard from your career counsellor
your English teacher
your Vice Principal
that being near natural leaders could give you a north
to point your quiet compass heart to
because graduation isn't far off and the question

"What do you want to do with your life?"

knocks like marbles in your stomach
a sea of glass and panic
and you were really hoping to just take some notes
and gain some insight from these other brilliant girls

but instead you were picked first to speak
and you were every shade of worry
and even more of fear
sitting in front of four kind faces
eyes patient
there was no way you could fill ten minutes all on your own, you thought.

You came, here, quiet

and then you started to
 speak

and at first your story didn't follow a straight line
coming out crooked, ultraviolet
like a toddler's colouring book
but those faces were still patient,
those eyes still spot-lit on your every word
and pretty soon you found yourself

sharing

about how you grew up with no fashion sense

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you felt oddly angled, off-shaped, awkward
you never sat with the cool girls at lunch
but always wished you could

sharing

about the hospital ward
and the day you made that passing compliment
about the bouquet in the window sill
and suddenly you and the elderly woman they belonged to
were swimming in a fog of her life stories
and you listened so long you made your mom wait in the car
fifteen minutes after she was meant to pick you up

sharing

about how many years
you lived with bad posture
before you found yourself beneath a surgeon's knife
and then, without hesitating, you were lifting the back of your tank top
to show the scar to these new faces

sharing

about how you watched the idea of family
collapse at your feet
when you were thirteen
 how you've been trying to piece together
 a new one
 ever since.

You came here, quiet

and soon learned that had nothing to do
with not having something to say
and everything to do with feeling
heard.

Do you know the origin of the word *story*?
In the 12th century
it meant *happening*.

Your story is everything that has ever happened to you.
Your story is still happening.

All we are is our stories.

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You didn't think these small puzzles amounted to anything grand,
you didn't know if you would have called it
a journey to leadership
just small pieces of courage you've been collecting
like loose change in a jar on your bedside table
for a rainy day.

It was then that you were asked to stand
at the front
and those four kind faces
became a dining hall of voices
calling out words like
 fearless,
 rebel,
 advocate,

marker in hand, you were crying,
realizing
they came here to listen
 to you

and just by speaking
you had led them out of their own quiet selves.

See, there's this myth of leadership
we were hoping you would unravel.
A myth is a story of divine beings
revered as sacred,
but once the actors are no longer gods
once they become human heroes
it is no longer a myth.

The power suit. The corner office.
The Aritzia executive.
The myth you've been taking apart
this is not the only story of a leader.

You may still feel like the thirteen-year-old,
angled, anxious
standing on the outside

but do not soften this sunset.

You are also the six-year-old
singing on the bus, making friends with strangers

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the grade three girl on the playground kissing the foreheads
of crying friends, hoping they feel better

the toddler your parents called *devil child*
jumping from kitchen counters twice your height
because you hadn't learned to be scared of flying yet

you are a compass, spinning
still seeking your north
magnetized by the pink fluff
 the marshmallows
the bright eyes
 the sweet, the salty,
the horrible bosses.

You are the balanced scales.
You are the two-way street.
You are the jet pack.

You are looking at the word *leader*
and seeing it isn't about
when you think you might be one
but deciding when to realize you already are.

You came here, quiet

and you learned just how much you have to say
when no one interrupts you.