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# First-Gen Voices: Creative and Critical Narratives on the First- Generation College Experience

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Soon enough my knees gave out, I collapsed. I looked down into the water and I saw my reflection, I hadn't seen it in days. What stared back at me was alien. I could no longer support myself on my knees. Into the water I went. Was I going to die? Whatever would become of me I accepted my fate and floated to the bottom. The blue tint of the water overcame my vision and in a moment of bliss and acceptance I breathed in, my lungs filling with water, weighing me down further. This is what death felt like. I hit the bottom of the lake and I felt something. For the first time in months I could say I felt happy. The worries of this world no longer weighed me down. I felt free.

Coughing I regain consciousness. I immediately feel the pain, not in my lungs, but in my soul. I couldn't move an inch and everything was dark. I soon drifted into unconsciousness yet again. As I regained consciousness, my legs and arms bound. Gathering every ounce of strength I had left in my body I tried to scream, "Help!" but all that came out of my mouth was a pathetic whimper. Trying again I was able to whisper the words. Soon, thereafter, I heard the *clip clop* of military grade steel toed boots approaching me. Not being able to recognize the origin of these sounds in the dark I whimpered once again, only to be greeted with a truncheon to the back of the head. I tried my hardest to remain conscious, I was able to make out two separate voices. I couldn't, however, recognize what language they were speaking. One got closer and closer to me. The first thing I noticed was the leather shoes, he hadn't been the one who hit me, the person who did was still in the shadows. Then I noticed his lab coat, extending to his knees. His name tag read "Special Testing Lab." As the delirium from the strike to the back of my head consumed me I fought to stay conscious to see my captor's face. All I got to see was the glare of his glasses, hanging off his elongated, crooked nose.

It could have been months, weeks, or days; I was out for a long time. I preferred these periods of unconsciousness. When I came to, the lack of light and my thoughts were consuming me. My own mind seemed to be destroying me. How could I have left them, just like that? These people I had once considered to be my friends, I ran away while they stayed behind to protect me. They'd all sacrificed their lives for me and I had nothing to show for it. Here I was, a sack of bones in an indiscriminate random place, having tests done on me by some mad scientist and his crazy assistant. Not wanting to think these things anymore I begin to move in my bonds, and try to make as much noise as possible, trying to lure the man with the truncheon to strike my head once more.

My body shocked awake. I was greeted by the pungent smell of industrial cleaner and the haze of the bright fluorescent lights. My olfactory and visual senses were in uproar, after what seemed like months with no external stimuli my senses began to run rampant. I began to get a migraine; the odor and sight were killing me. Closing my eyes only saved me from half the torture. No matter how

much I shook or whimpered this time the guard wouldn't take me out of my misery. I turned to the guard for help, he simply smiled and let me squirm, "I thought those from the rebellion were supposed to be strong."

After what felt like ages I began to get used to my surroundings. Slowly opening one eye at a time I noticed what was around me. Everything was covered in white tiles, the floor, the ceiling, and all of the walls. All except one. The one I was facing. It was what looked to be a mirror, but I could tell it was one way glass. I was being observed. As I looked into my reflection I noticed something odd jutting out of my arm, looking down I noticed I was connected to an IV. This is how they were keeping me alive, pumping just enough nutrients into me to keep my heart going, but not enough to nourish my body. I don't know how much longer I can survive like this, I don't know if I want to survive like this. How? How could I end my suffering? Escape? Not an option, the door was behind me and if they were taking time out to observe me there's no doubt in my mind there would be guards. Why? What did I know that they wanted? The Order had already stamped down most of the rebellion across the country. And why would they want me, I wasn't a big player in the war; I only handled a gun once when Sunny told me to.

I felt tears roll down my face, and soon enough, I was weeping. Sunny was dead, he'd sacrificed himself for me. My best friend, my brother, my protector. He'd assured me we'd come out of this alive. "GOD DAMNIT SUNNY!" The first real words I'd uttered in what felt like ages. I cried myself to sleep that night, only I didn't do much sleeping.

Running through the forest I hear the bombs go off, mortars landing to my left and to my right. This heavy metal thing in my arms was just slowing me down, but I couldn't leave it. Sunny entrusted it to me. "Take it and run!" he'd said to me. Run. That's all I was good for, Sunny was fighting off the hordes with just his handgun and here I was, with his rifle, running. I kept and kept on running for what felt like hours. Just running, running from my friend, running from my life, running from the world I'd been so anxious to defend. I keep on running as my surroundings melt, the gun disappears from my hands and the floor disappears out from under. I keep running, not being able to stop. Running from Sunny, running from my life, running from my dad. With the same speed and manner the background of the war disappeared out from under me, the scene of my father and I sprung forth. I was in our house, eating dinner with my father, just the two of us when the door was busted down and they came in. I'm confused by the ruckus and see a look of concern on my father's face. My father leaps toward me and leads me to our refrigerator. As he pulled it back I noticed a small door. He pushed me through it and told me to run. Running I hear the gun shots and fall to my knees.

I look up and stare into the eyes of the man with the lab coat. His cold grey eyes seem to look through me. He's in the room with me, observing me, just staring into me. *Clip—clop*, the sound his fancy shoes make as he walks around me, observing me from every angle. I try and direct my gaze at him as he circles me, but I'm too weak to crane my neck. I hear a clicking sound as the door opens and he leaves. "I have to get out of here" I think to myself, but there appears to be no way out of this room. I see no vents, no trap doors, nothing. I'm stuck here. Unless I can get out through the back, but that just seems impossible, I can barely hold my head up, I wouldn't be able to make a run out of here. Think, think, think. I look everywhere but still nothing. I begin to panic as my heart rate picks up. Think! I can't die in here alone; this can't be the end of my story. I look around again, but now it feels like my heart is about to break out of my chest. What can I do? Why am I here? My frustration reaches its peak when I look at my left arm. The IV! I try to get my face close to my arm, pushing forth for a chance to escape, pushing forth for them. When I get close enough I open my mouth and clamp it down over the IV and in one swift motion that uses up most of my energy, I yank it out of my arm.

Where am I? Why is everything so dark? My arms and legs are no longer bound. I made it! But, where exactly had I made it? I was walking freely in a dark passage way. Why can't I remember what happened after I bit out the IV? It could be from shock or from the lack of nutrients my body experienced after the event. Regardless, I was here now and I had to get out of this hallway. I begin to walk down it for what feels like an eternity. As I walk, I begin to feel a light breeze caress my face. I hasten my pace, a breeze means an exit! In the distance I begin to identify a speck of light. I'm running now and the light gets bigger and bigger. With a smile on my face and tears streaming down the sides of my cheek I made it to the source of the light, a keyhole in a door. This door is my ticket out of this place. I open it up and walk outside. The light is blinding. As my eyes adjust to the sun I notice a lake about twenty feet away, I sprint toward it and dunk my head in the water, drinking as much of it as I could, enjoying the freedom. Wait. Something isn't right. I can't get my head out of the water. I try and fight, but it feels like something is holding me down. I keep on fighting until suddenly my head breaks out of the water.

Taking gasps of air I open my eyes. The scientist is lingering over me with what looks like a pitcher of water in his hands and a smile on his face, "Finally awake I see." I was lying down on an angled board, my legs were angled above my head and a towel was over my mouth. Water boarding. The last thing I remember before passing out is his smile, those crooked yellow teeth above me, as he pours more water down my nose.

I wake up, this time no nightmares plagued my unconscious sleep. Still in the same room, still bound up. The IV that's connected to my arm is wrapped in

tape all the way up my arm this time, the bag contains a strangely colored liquid, it's a dark red, no longer clear. I wonder what it could be. Looking around the room not much has changed, the room is as clean as ever. The one way glass is still in front of me. I rest my head back and look up, again, nothing. This bleak room is all I have. It's the only thing that I can call mine anymore. I have no idea how long I've been in here, but I'm almost sure what I once called home is now obliterated. My county was at the center of the fighting. My house had been a meeting place for the rebels. Everything I once knew and held as truth is gone. The only thing I have is the room, the chair, the lights, the smell, and the bonds. This is all I know anymore. This is my truth. This is my home.

"So how do you like it?" The scientist asked me again, I couldn't hear him the first couple of times he asked, I saw his mouth move, but couldn't hear him. "You've been awake for about twelve days, I don't know about you, but I'd say that's a record." Had it really been that long? It felt like minutes. I look to my left and the IV bag that was full minutes ago was now empty. Twelve days. Twelve days without sleep, had I really stared at my reflection in front of me for twelve days? "Well looks like that's the end of this trial, it appears to be wearing off." The scientist took the bag off the hook and walked away. How could they do this to me? They put me in a catatonic state without me ever feeling any different. I have to get out.

I must have been asleep for days. They had enough time to clean up my wrists and ankles, they'd become raw from the bondages. Here I am again. In this damned room, in this damned chair while the world is crumbling around me. The rebellion must be dead by now, along with Sunny. The rebellion was killed just like my father. The Order's cold hands have reached into all of our lives for so long that it just feels normal. My father would talk of a time when privacy was respected, a time when owning a gun was a right and not a felony, a time with blue skies you could look into without the fear of a bomb being dropped on your head. It seems that these past ideals died along with my father. The Order has taken everything from me but my life and even that they hold in the palm of their hand. I can't keep living like this. I have to get out. I have to think of a plan. The door is behind me and it only ever opens if the scientist or his goon enters. I have to find a way. *Think think THINK!* There must be a way, some way that I can get the door open and leave this place. I have to do this.

I wake up and I feel a pit in my stomach. I'm still here. I don't remember going to sleep. Something's wrong. *Click.* Someone's opening the door. *Clip clop, Clip clop, Clip clop.* I look to my left and see the scientist. He has a fresh IV in his hands. "Need food." I could barely hear myself mutter the words. "Food" This time it was louder, but the scientist still didn't turn. Gathering up everything I had inside me, "Food!" came erupting out of me with a force I hadn't heard in my voice since the day I arrived. *Clip clop, Clip clop, Clip clop.* The scientist

approaches me. *Clip clop, Clip clop.* “Did you say something dear?” I look up and see the scientist’s twisted smile; his long crooked nose looked like it was broken at one time, his teeth looked like they hadn’t been brushed in eons, and his breath smelled like putrid cat urine. “I said did you say something, now answer me!” As I try to express my need for food the scientist slaps me, the cold rubber of his gloves is a welcome feeling. The contact of his hand against my cheek only gives me hope, it reminds me what it was like to feel something, anything. “Food” I uttered. “Imbeciles like you don’t deserve food. You’re fodder, once we’re done with you you’ll be killed like the rest of them.” With that he left me.

“...killed like the rest of them.” The rest of them. I’m not the only one. This is happening to other people, other brothers and sister from the rebellion. Sunny. I have to break out of here. I have to find strength. Thoughts of my father rush into my head “You have to be strong for yourself, when I am not here to defend you I need you to be strong.” I am strong. I can break out of here. *Think think think.* Next time the scientist comes in here I’m going to rip the IV from my arm. Hopefully he tries to fix it at the moment, then I can try and grab onto him and have him force me out. Or I could try to push the food idea again, hopefully the nagging will coerce him into abiding me. When they bring in the food they’ll probably feed it to me, I can’t try anything crazy the first couple of times because they’ll be suspicious so I have to try and make this food delivery a recurring thing. On the fifth time I am fed I will make my break for it. I’ll try and bite the hand that feeds me to create a distraction, then after I’ll bite onto the fork and yank it free. Once the fork is free I can grab onto it and start to remove my bonds with it. I’ve only seen two people in this place ever so if I work fast and free one hand I can stab the scientist in the eye and wait for the guard by the door. When the guard opens the door I’ll jump up behind him and stab him in the neck. After that I’m free. It’s that simple. Yes, yes that’s my way out. The only problem now is—*click.*

The door is opening again. This is rare, the scientist only comes to me when my IV is running out, but he recently replaced it. *Clip clop, Clip clop, Clip clop.* The scientist pulls up a chair in front of me and I notice something in his hands. It’s a tray. “Now we can’t have you getting all dirty can we?” He places a napkin on my lap. This is it! He’s feeding me real food. He took pity on me! Now, I can’t be too excited or he’ll know something’s wrong. “Now close your eyes, this is gonna be a surprise.” I close my eyes and I hear the container open. The smell of food infects my nasal passages. The smell of chicken with carrots and rice fills up the room. My mouth waters, but still I keep my eyes closed. “Now, open up.” I open my mouth and I feel the cold of the spoon hit my lower lip. *Click.* Someone just opened the door, is the guard here? I open my eyes and have my sight met by the scientist. He’s smiling his crooked smile when I realize that no one opened the door and the cold metal I felt on my lips wasn’t the spoon.