

4-4-2023

Koonja's Death from Neville's Perspective

Michelle L. Gorodisky

Follow this and additional works at: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/digressions>



Part of the [Art and Design Commons](#), and the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Gorodisky, Michelle L. (2023) "Koonja's Death from Neville's Perspective," *Digressions: Literary & Art Journal*: Vol. 20, Article 27.

Available at: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/digressions/vol20/iss1/27>

This Fiction is brought to you for free and open access by the Digressions at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Digressions: Literary & Art Journal by an authorized editor of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact nsuworks@nova.edu.

Koonja's Death from Neville's Perspective

Author Bio

Michelle is a sophomore in the DO Dual Admission program majoring in Biology with minors in Studio Art and Honors Transdisciplinary Studies. She has been involved in Digressions since her freshman year as a reviewer, and she hopes to keep artistic expression close in her pursuit of becoming a physician.

Koonja's Death from Neville's Perspective

MICHELLE GORODISKY

March 9, 2008:

I always heard the soft noises of the television coming from her living room. It ran for hours every morning like clockwork in my mother's apartment. My wife, Erin, was in the kitchen preparing sandwiches for her to eat, scooping up globs of peanut butter on a butter knife and scraping it on some whole grain bread. The blinds were closed shut, but I expected them to open once Mom got hungry. That was her signal whenever she needed something. But when the monotonous voices of the news anchors seemed to drone on longer than usual (it was already the afternoon) and the drawn blinds rattled ominously from a sudden draft, a seed of despair rooted itself in my stomach. Whenever there was a slight variance from her daily routine, I always felt my palms start to perspire and I couldn't help but imagine the worst possible scenario. My wife, all too familiar with such happenings, looked at me tenderly as if to say "Go check on her. See if she's okay." She jabbed the knife into the jar of peanut butter and handed me the sandwich on a little ceramic plate. It was quiet except for the ticking of the clock and the hum of the television, but as I reached for the plate my elbow had knocked over the peanut butter jar and the sharp clattering of the butter knife made me jump. A new wave of uneasiness washed over me as I made my way to the living room with the sandwich. I hovered my hand over the door knob, and I could feel the static energy in my fingertips from shuffling my feet on the shag carpet. "Mom, I brought food for you."

No answer. That was pretty typical for her, though. I remember when she first started exhibiting symptoms of schizophrenia. I was about to start university when I noticed her paranoia. She was convinced our neighbors in Chehalis were out to get us. My father and I grew concerned about her mental state, so we booked appointments with psychiatrists all over Seattle to give her a diagnosis. They thought it was PTSD from her time as a refugee during the Korean War, an anxiety disorder, depression, or a traumatic brain injury when she fell from the roof. I pushed the door open with a creak. My eyes scanned the room, but my mother wasn't in her usual spot on the futon. My line of vision descended to the floor, and I saw her nylon green pajamas peeking out from behind the glass coffee table on the fluffy, cream-colored rug, curled up as if she were sleeping. The television seemed to get louder and the

noise of the news channel flooded my ears. I wanted to call out to her, but I could not speak. As I rushed to kneel next to her, the peanut butter sandwich slid off the plate and onto the floor, and I gingerly touched her shoulder. I strained my eyes to see if her chest was rising up and down, and I almost thought I saw a ghost of a movement.

I heard a tearful gasp come from behind me. Erin kneeled next to me and checked my mom's wrist for a pulse.

"Can you call 911?" she asked me.

I nodded, emotionless as if on autopilot, and I called the paramedics. Numbness saturated my being, and as much as I wanted to, I could not cry. I grasped Erin's hand tightly as we waited for the paramedics to arrive. She was crying silently, and I could feel her hot tears falling on my hand. That sensation pierced holes through the film of suffocating paralysis that enclosed itself around me, like an overlay of scalding tar adhering itself to my skin. I started to feel the anguish seep through the more I stared at Mom's limp body on the floor. Just two days ago she was full of life when my kids came to visit her. She cooked up a beautiful feast for all of us, rich with nostalgic, traditional Korean dishes. Now, her animated spirit and the smell of her cooking were slipping away from me. I thought I could see her flesh stiffening up right in front of me, as if any remnants of her soul that were left were evaporating into thin air. Her hand was curved into the shape of a claw with her fingers slightly spread apart. It looked like she was trying to grab something. Someone, maybe. Maybe if I had been in the living room instead of the kitchen, she wouldn't have had to die by herself.

The paramedics took her away, and her little apartment became desolate. Erin and I watched as the ambulance drove off with Mom's corpse. The cold air bit at my skin, yet it had no effect on me. I didn't even bother grabbing a jacket to go outside. The weather seemed to reflect my emotional state: benumbed. I fumbled my cell phone out of my pocket to call my sister, Grace. I stopped talking to her ever since she started visiting a lot more these past few weeks to interrogate Mom about her past for the book she was writing. I always thought it was a bad idea to bring up her trauma in Korea, especially considering her mental illness and susceptibility to paranoid episodes. I know that Mom doesn't (didn't) want Grace writing about her past and publishing it for the whole world to see. She even asked me to remove Grace from the will, but I refused. I still felt responsible for her as her big brother. The last time Erin called her was when Mom had tried to commit suicide. She didn't want to drive an hour and forty minutes to come see her, even after my wife begged. That's why Mom had to move in with us, and Erin gave up

working for her PhD at Princeton while I put my career on hold. That's why the only times I call Grace are for emergencies.

"Hello?" she answered.

"Were you here yesterday? Did you see Mom?" I asked, urgently.

"Uh, I don't remember. Maybe...wait, no...I was there last weekend. Why?" "Grace, Mom passed away."

I tried to explain that we found her in the living room, but it didn't seem like she was processing it. All she could say was "No. It's not true..." I hung up after multiple attempts to converse with her further.

Erin and I walked back inside to the apartment to get the car keys and jackets. As I walked through the hallways, flashes of memory flooded my mind. I could see Mom having fun with our dogs at the dining table, scolding them whenever they would try to steal food from her. My heart filled with admiration and sorrow for this woman who raised me against all odds. I didn't notice the tears starting to fall as I grabbed my keys and jacket and walked to the car. Erin got in the driver's seat, wiped my cheek with her thumb, and we drove home in thick silence, taking comfort in each other's presence. The seed of despair that lodged itself in the linings of my stomach started to swell at an alarming rate, almost as if it were making up time for my late emotional response. The growing vines of desperation crawled its way to my throat, engulfing me until I had no choice but to choke on my own agony. Nothing could ease the torment of losing her. Nothing but time.

Author Statement

"In Grace Cho's memoir Tastes Like War, she states that her brother, Neville, was the one who had found her mother when she died. This scene will take place under Neville's point of view, because his thoughts about their family's situation are not examined very thoroughly throughout the memoir. Considering Cho and Neville's starkly contrasting opinions about their family experiences, I thought it would be interesting to try reading this scene from Neville's perspective."