

nox (*noun*) — the desire for the buds of two extremes to blossom and grow abreast, instead of having one wither out.

“What *are* you?”

By my seventeenth summer, I was asked this question three times—

only counting the ones asked through their mouths.

When asked through their eyes,

the blanched rightist has syrupy pancakes in their sockets, as if I am only one of them,

the sun having only kissed my blank snowy canvas.

The benighted leftist is a friend at first sight, as if I am only one of them,

the shredded talons of a crown having only sucked the bronze fluid out of my veins, as seen in viral hospital beds.

Would either of them accept me

if my pores were drilled into the outer layer of skin

as much as its hue is drilled into my genes?

Can the human genome ever be pure?

Even if the earth tainted their palms,

its star-flooded skies lasering through the silver mask on their lips?

They said, of course—

but only through their eyes.

I am half my mother,

and half my father,
yet I am a half-breed.

They peered into my own crib, furrowing their brows at the abstract art:
squiggly lines of *yin* crisscrossing the static lines of *yang*
over my chest as a target.

Their stares pierced its center,
splitting the skin of my body
into the hollow veins of a cracked skull.

The rightist and leftist recruiters grabbed either hand,
stripped the one seam striping my body,
and abandoned the material world, clutching their halves of one deflated teddy
bear.

The discarded stuffing was a pillow fluffed for the heart,
the three-worded question having hardened its applesauce texture
into one of a crystallized brain.

At that moment, the crystal numbed the whole operation:
the fresh fluid that once thundered through the ventricles
and knocked against the chambers in playful banter
soaked into the cells, the tissues, the muscles,
lingered its fingers, dried,
and the art project became so tough
that even the flesh-eaters would've starved.

The carnivores choked over their lungs bubbling in their necks
as their knee on one
melted into the crater of the nightly concrete,
as seen on television.

They say, “I stand with them, I stand with you,” as they kneel,
only to capitalize on the flooding of freedom.

Safety troops, donned in lab coats, suits, and button-downs
stumbled their way into the house of the baby’s room,
pounding their feet up the staircase
as the *What are you? What are you?*’s of the two extremists were drilled—
shouting from the living room, spluttering from the dining room.

The soldiers scurried back down from the source of capture.

One of them, whose thumbprints bled into the crafted diorama, sighed in relief.

“This heart used to be so fresh, but it’s aged so quickly.

The people are going to love this at the museum.”

Even in the same forgotten house, *yin* and *yang* shook an earthquake into their half of the
limbless shell of flesh,

as if the tremors were made to see that a human being is alive
instead of the earthly cradle itself.

“So, what *are* you?” they asked, as children in the museum often did.

“Like, are you black or are you white?”

“I think I’m of the human race, just like you,” the sign, which was next to the glass box of the heart inside, reads in quotes.

But the add-on question already proves
that their hearts were not fresh enough.