

# Imaginary Creatures

“Where do you wanna sit?” Benjamin asked. “Inside or outside?”

“Either is fine,” said Rebecca from soda fountain.

“Outside it is,” Benjamin replied cheerfully.

The two carried their slices on paper plates to the patio picnic tables.

“So, she just straight up asked you how to talk to Mexicans?” Benjamin laughed.

“Not just that,” Rebecca snickered. “But yeah, that was the gist of it.”

“How'd you answer?” asked Benjamin, forgoing the first bite in anticipation.

“Time was almost up on our meeting, so we couldn't really get into much,” said Rebecca.

“You didn't just tell her to go have a grown-up conversation with her neighbors?” replied Benjamin sarcastically.

Rebecca let out a slight laugh. “We both know it's not that simple. And you're one to talk,” she chided. “You've gone out your way to avoid the people you've lived next to for the last two years.”

“True,” Benjamin chuckled. “Did you ask her why the *mariachi music* bothers her so much?”

Forgetting the bite she had just taken, Rebecca opened her mouth, then waved a finger to ask for a minute to chew.

“We didn't have time for that,” she responded. “Basically, I asked her to make a peace offering, something small for the family. Something to open up a dialogue.”

“What'd she say to that?” Benjamin asked, brushing off the Parmesan cheese in his beard.

Rebecca looked down at her shoes for a second. “She said she didn't have time for our 'white liberal bull crap,' and left just after we finished up.”

Benjamin rolled his eyes while wiping the crumbs from his face.

“What's the name of your group again?” Benjamin asked.

“*Overcoming Racism: A Conversation for Whites on Race*,” said Rebecca.

“And she didn't know what she was stepping into?” Benjamin smirked.

“She said she saw my flier in a laundromat on Sandy,” said Rebecca.

“Did you plan to have a co-host when you started?” Benjamin asked. “Or did you just want to moderate a room full of white folks talking about racism all by yourself?”

“Just me,” Rebecca said, finishing another bite. “My friend Rachel, who's white, was going to do it with me but she has too much going on at work, now.”

“So, outside of the woman who doesn't like Mexicans, is anyone else as candid?” asked Benjamin.

“Sometimes,” Rebecca wiped her mouth. “There was an older gentleman who came to a few meetings back in April who wouldn't stop using the n-word.”

“*Like, to you?*” asked Benjamin.

“No, no, but he was confused why he couldn't say the word,” replied Rebecca.

“Hmm, I wonder why,” Benjamin chuckled.

“To his credit, he was very sincere,” said Rebecca. “He said he'd used the word all his life! And that as far back as he could remember, his daddy and granddaddy used the word, and darn it, *all the blacks say it*, so why is it so offensive when he does it?”

“You asked him to refrain from actually using the word?” Benjamin asked.

“No, actually,” said Rebecca. “The others asked him not to say it.”

“You don't say,” replied Benjamin.

“At the start of every meeting I ask participants to be mindful and respectful of the others

in the room,” she said. “It makes them as uncomfortable as it makes us. Well, me at least.”

“Nah, they just want to sweep it under the rug, make it go the way of minstrel shows. To them it's just another reminder of how fucked up things were. *Are*,” Benjamin corrected.

“I try to be more optimistic,” stated Rebecca.

“You just have more patience with white folks than I do,” said Benjamin.

“Maybe,” Rebecca replied with apprehension. “Don't you ever feel as though you have a responsibility, *being mixed*, to offer the other perspective?”

“I did,” Benjamin conceded. “I did for a long time,” he paused to scratch his neck, then continued, “but everyone has a breaking point. For me it was Tamir Rice. When there were, no charges filed after the shooting, a big part of me was just like *fuck it*. The system is broken, irreparably.” Moving quickly to the next thought, Benjamin continued, “Plus, I don't have the time or energy to walk every well-meaning liberal or naive racist through a seminar on why their behavior is problematic.”

“I understand, and personally, I go back and forth,” said Rebecca. “You might get this too but I fly under the radar sometimes. People, whites mostly, don't know what background is, so they speak frankly around me.”

“You enjoy that?” Benjamin asked.

“Kinda, yeah,” Rebecca laughed. “I feel sort of like an undercover agent. I get to hear some of their honesty and their grievances. And once they feel they can open up to me, I'm able to pull their racist opinions and beliefs to the surface. That way we can talk genuinely about this stuff.”

“Again,” Benjamin chuckled, “I think you're pretty courageous.”

“I don't see it as being courageous, just necessary,” said Rebecca. “A lot of these people

don't actually have any friends, or family for that matter, of a different race. For whatever their reason, they've interacted with very few people of color. Our group is a sort of safe space for them to express their feelings or to discuss whatever might be confusing for them. I don't know if they trust me because I'm light skinned and sort of racially vague. Could be. Most of them just want to be able to talk about race without upsetting anyone.”

“Brown and black people, you mean?” Benjamin laughed.

“Unfortunately.” She shook her head. “But I use that to my advantage. I let them speak their mind and then, together, we unpack what they said.”

“Are there a lot of tears?” he asked.

Eyes wide, Rebecca nodded intensely.

“How do you do it?” asked Benjamin, smiling.

“It's something I've been grappling with a lot, lately,” said Rebecca. “Do we have a responsibility as mixed people to bridge the gap? We've talked a lot about this but I know your opinion has changed over the last year.”

“Right.” Benjamin nodded. “I am still working it out but I don't know,” he looked off to the side, “*at what point does it bother them enough to act?*”

“White people?” she asked.

“Yeah,” replied Benjamin.

“I'd say that's an unfair generalization to make,” said Rebecca.

“It is, it is,” he agreed, then continued, “But it's like I told my roommate, who's white, after the Tamir verdict. If white people hated racism half as much as they say they do, then black kids wouldn't be getting gunned down for playing with their toys in the park.”

“But most of the whites I talk to, many of whom are relatives, will shut down whenever

things get heated. Collectively, we need to be able to foster a healthy dialogue, one where both parties can explain themselves.”

Benjamin nodded unenthusiastic as he bit into his crust.

“You don't get excited sometimes?” she asked.

“How do you mean?” he asked.

“To be mixed right now, in this moment,” said Rebecca, eyes full of excitement. “We can be the bridge. With everything that's happening in the news and all this tension. Who better than us to speak up? What are we always talking about? How we exist in the space between and we see things from both sides. And you think about all the interracial marriages and all the new mixed babies coming up.”

Benjamin listened with tempered admiration.

“This is our time!” Rebecca proclaimed.

“But we can't be the answer,” Benjamin replied, forlorn.

“*Why not?*” asked Rebecca, rhetorically.

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Rebecca arrived early for dinner and caught her mother in a tug of war between meal prep and the last of the laundry. “I'll take the basket and you check on the stove,” Rebecca instructed her mother. “*Dad,*” Rebecca called to her father, channel surfing and oblivious from his recliner, “*wanna give me and mom a hand?*”

“Yes, yes, I'll be over in a moment,” he swatted in Rebecca's direction.

The retired couple lived in the suburb of Gresham in a large home with an excess of bedrooms, a spare living room, and more televisions than people. Her father was an anesthesiologist who emigrated from Nigeria during his schooling, and her mother, a white

woman from New Mexico, taught high school Biology for most of her career.

Rebecca set the laundry on her parents' bed, then followed the garlic aroma into the kitchen. A tray of green beans was laid out atop the burners next to the potatoes. Through the stove window, Rebecca watched the buttery chicken glisten in the heat.

After wiping her hands with a rag, her mother hoisted herself onto the counter top and poured herself a glass of white wine. She asked, "How's your week been?"

Rebecca sighed. "They let Terry go."

"*Shut up,*" her mother frowned. "What are they going to do until August?" Her mother froze for a second, feeling guilty. "I'm sorry, did you want a glass?"

"Sure," said Rebecca. "And I don't know. I've spoken with Kelsey already and all my options would be lateral moves."

"Hang in there," her mother offered as mild assurance. "Here you are." She handed Rebecca the glass and returned to her perched seat. "Dinner should be ready in ten or so."

"I'm fine. I had a late lunch anyways," said Rebecca.

"How's the support group?" her mother asked.

Confused, Rebecca asked, "Support group?"

Her mother looked as puzzled. "Your discussion circle," she said, and lowering her voice, "y'know, for *white people*."

"Oh!" Rebecca laughed with ambivalence. "It's going. We're in our fourth week and it's been interesting. We get men and women from different walks of life and they really open up. In a room full of strangers, too. Then I do my best to handle it with as much grace as possible."

"Does it ever get heated?" her mother asked.

Rebecca rolled her eyes while taking a drink. "At least twice a meeting."

“*Why?*” asked her mother. “I know it's sort of a confessional situation but I'm just curious.”

Rebecca exhaled, "Let's see: *Are all white people racist? Is it racist to pay attention to someone's race? Is it racist not to pay attention to someone's race? Can you still say 'oriental'?* What about all the white people shot by police? *Is Black Lives Matter a hate group? What about black-on-black crime? What about freedom of speech? What if your family was Irish and came over after slavery? What do I do if a friend or family member says the n-word?*”

Her mother listened with dismay, opening her mouth twice, before finally stating, “All of this stuff is sorta beyond me. I wish we would’ve talked to you and your brother more when you were little, but honestly I didn't know what to say.”

“Mom, it's fine,” Rebecca waved.

“No, it's not,” her mother replied firmly. Seldom did she take this tone with Rebecca. “I didn't know. I came up in an era when we didn't look at people by their color. You weren't supposed to. But now with all the shootings and the tensions and protests. We thought we were past all that.”

“It's okay,” Rebecca assured her mother, now visibly perturbed.

Rebecca wrapped her arms around her mother. “You did the best you could and I love you and it's okay.” She smiled, then kissed her mother on the forehead.

The two held one another for a moment before her mother hopped down and resumed dinner preparation in a hurry.

“You make me proud, you know that?” said her mother from the cabinet. Turning around, “With the work you do and your passion.”

“Alright, what's this I hear about you arguing with white people?” said her father,

sauntering into the kitchen.

“Thanks mom,” Rebecca blushed.

Her mother handed her the plates and silverware. “Set these, would you?”

“Yes,” Rebecca replied. “I’m not arguing with anyone, dad.”

“What was the group you were speaking about a moment ago?” he asked. “What you were telling your mother.”

“It’s a conversation on race and racism for white people. I told you about it,” said Rebecca.

“Black Lives Matter?” he asked. “Don’t tell me my daughter’s an activist now?”

Rebecca laughed, “No dad, it’s not that kind of group.”

“But you’re getting the white folks riled up.” He chuckled to himself.

“Stop being a stinker.” Her mother nudged her father as she passed behind him. “You know that’s not what she does.”

“People come to my group to share their feelings and ask questions they find too difficult or uncomfortable to ask elsewhere,” said Rebecca, mildly defensive.

“White people have so many emotions, they cannot manage them all,” her father chided.

“Remi!” her mother shouted from the bedroom.

“It’s true!” he taunted. “I was waiting in line at the store last week, and a very distraught white woman came in to make a complaint. The woman was sobbing and red in her face. Apparently, a shopper left their dog in the car with the windows up. She was so disturbed she could not finish her sentences. And get this, she wanted the store manager to give her permission to break the car window,” he laughed. Her father had a deep, rich laughter that filled the house.

Rebecca rolled her eyes. “You don’t even like dogs.”



“I don't,” he chuckled.

“What is it you'd always tell Brandon and I? *Owning a pet is a luxury?*”

“It is!” he replied from the sink as he filled a glass of water. “Question?”

“Yeah, dad,” Rebecca replied.

“Why Black Lives Matter?” he asked. His tone was genuine, though Rebecca was ready for surprises.

“Uh, what about them?” she asked.

“It's your father's new obsession,” said her mother, emerging from the bathroom. “He's convinced the Obamas are secretly donating millions of dollars to the organization.”

“I suspect a few more major donors, as well,” he replied, resolute. “But that is not why I asked. Why *black lives*? Why the focus on black? What is black? I'm Nigerian, not Kenyan, not Algerian.”

“African-Americans, dad,” said Rebecca.

“What is African-American? My passport says American. You are an American,” he proclaimed.

“Dad, I'd prefer we didn't get into anything tonight,” replied Rebecca. “Can we have dinner and keep the conversation topics light?”

“Yes, yes, of course,” he said, brushing off the request. “But one last question, this is not me being facetious. Why do they hate police officers?”

“*Dad*,” Rebecca moaned.

“Really. I've known many good officers since I moved to the United States. When I first arrived in Tampa and I was lost, roaming the downtown, unable to speak much English, it was two police officers who helped me find a hotel to stay at while I arrange my affairs. They

checked in with me every week.”

“I know, dad,” said Rebecca, empathetic. “But it's not just about the police.”

“But who would you call if there was an emergency?” asked her father, confidently.

“Okay,” her mother butted in the conversation. She spoke lightly, “I think we need to take a step back.”

“No, but I would like to know,” her father persisted. “If some of your possessions are stolen or you fear for your safety, will you call the police?”

Rebecca bit the inside of her lip. “Dad, I would really appreciate it if we could not talk about this right now. I respect your feelings and I'd prefer if we could have a quiet family dinner.”

“Yes, yes, I suppose,” her father grumbled, spreading a napkin across his lap.

Rebecca took a seat at the table while her mother pulled the chicken from the oven.

“How was your day?” Rebecca asked.

“I went to Best Buy to look at new televisions,” said her father, unenthusiastic.

“Oh yeah?” asked Rebecca.

“Yes, and they had their teenagers follow me around the aisles, again,” he sighed, speaking slowly at first then faster with agitation. “For fifteen minutes, I cannot get a single employee's assistance, but from the corner of my eye I can see them watching me, making sure I won't hide anything in my pockets. And when they finally approach me, they direct me to the discounted televisions.”

Rebecca listened with sympathetic ears. It was painful to imagine her father, a man who maintained a regal authority even in white Reeboks and an old sweater, relegated to the level of a criminal simply because of his skin color. As she listened, Rebecca wondered, “How long before

he connects the dots?”

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“So, what's up?” asked Neal, nudging her arm. “How's your week been? Did you do anything for the fourth?”

“*Long*,” replied Rebecca. “Depressing.”

The two stood in line for concessions. Rebecca wasn't hungry but the salty smell of popcorn was tempting.

“How come?” asked Neal, cheerfully.

“All the stuff with Alton Sterling. I've just been sorta out of it all day,” Rebecca sighed.

“Alton Sterling?” Neal shook his head, unaware.

“Alton Sterling,” said Rebecca. “He was shot by police for selling used CDs. For CDs,” she repeated.

Neal's expression was a mixture of disappointment and discomfort. “Where did it happen?” he asked.

“Outside of a convenience store in Baton Rouge,” said Rebecca.

With mild excitement, Neal asked, “Louisiana, *right*?”

“Yeah,” answered Rebecca with a sharp glance. “He was unarmed, too.”

“Was there an altercation?” Neal asked.

“I'm not sure,” replied Rebecca. “I read that police got a call, went to check it out, and now a father of five children is dead.”

After a brief pause, Neal shook his head. “Not surprising it happened in the South.”

“What makes you say that?” Rebecca asked.

Neal took a second to arrange his words. “*Y'know*,” he eyed her with a heavy expression,

then speaking softer, explained, “slavery and the KKK and all that.”

Rebecca exhaled deeply, “But these shootings don't just happen in the South. Oscar Grant was in California and Eric Garner was in New York City which are by all accounts liberal regions of America. It's dangerous when we exempt ourselves from racism. This happens in all fifty states.”

“Well, hold on,” Neal interjected playfully. “That sounds a bit like an overgeneralization.”

Rebecca gazed down at her shoes as she spoke; it was easier that way. “If it happened in only thirty states, would that change things?”

“I'm not trying to offend, *really*. It's just a lot of the time when I hear people discussing this stuff it tends to be argued purely through raw emotion. I'm attempting to stand back and be more objective. And selfishly, I'm hoping to save some of the heated conversation for after the movie,” he joked.

“I'm perfectly fine talking about this,” Rebecca assured him.

“I'm just saying this happened, what, like a few hours ago?” Neal asked. “I try not to get too worked up before all the details surface.”

With her frustrations approaching a boiling point and seven minutes until show time, Rebecca retreated into herself. *Better to let things simmer while they watched*, she felt defeated. Neal had picked an art film, with an all-white cast, about a white girl navigating the underworld of Los Angeles' modeling scene. She found it vapid and uninteresting and didn't stay long after to discuss.

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On the bus ride home, Rebecca scrolled through the updates on her phone. Social media

was on fire. Once back, she plopped down on the couch and continued reading. The arc of emotions had already carried her from shock, to grief, to anger. The living room was silent, the lights were on, but a storm raged inside her.

Half an hour later, her roommate Kelly descended the stairs and fixed herself a drink in the kitchen. Rebecca watched her from the corner of her eye, and as Kelly crossed the room again, she felt the words rise up in her as though they needed to be heaved out. “*Have you seen the news?*” she asked.

“No, what's up?” replied Kelly.

“You haven't seen anything about the shootings?” she asked.

“No,” Kelly shook her head casually. “What happened?”

“Baton Rouge? Minnesota?” asked Rebecca. “You haven't heard anything?”

“No,” said Kelly, this time her tone was serious.

“Two more black men were shot by police. The first was Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. That was yesterday. He was selling CDs outside a convenience store and two cops held him down and shot him. He was unarmed,” explained Rebecca.

“Oh, my god,” said Kelly with her hand over her mouth. She took a seat on the steps.

“Tonight, it was Philando Castile in Falcon Heights, Minnesota. They pulled him over because they thought he looked like a robbery suspect, and after warning them that he was reaching for his wallet, they opened fire on him.”

Kelly gasped.

“Yeah.” Rebecca nodded. “His girlfriend live-streamed everything to Facebook from inside the car just after he was shot.”

The room was quiet for a moment. “*Everything's so fucked these days,*” Kelly sighed as

she shook her head slowly.

“This isn't something new, though,” Rebecca stated coldly. “It keeps happening and keeps happening, over and over-and-over-again.”

“Well, I mean like the system and everything,” Kelly was quick to offer. “Like the cop, or cops, that shot these guys in Minnesota and Arkansas? Louisiana?”

“Louisiana,” said Rebecca.

“Right, like those cops probably won't even be indicted or anything,” said Kelly.

“No, they probably won't,” said Rebecca. “But like what are *you* going to do about it?”

Taken aback, Kelly asked, “*Me?*”

“Yeah, like I wanna know what you're doing,” stated Rebecca, bluntly. Her question seemed silly on the surface but was wholly sincere. “I wanna know what you plan to do.”

Flustered, Kelly replied, “Well you just told me about all this, I don't know. I guess I'll have to read more.”

Offering a sarcastic smile, Rebecca asked, “But I mean, *what are you really doing to help?* Being educated is great but all the information in the world won't do you a whole lot of good if you don't transform it into actions.”

The atmosphere was tense. The two had talked about racism many times before, but this tone was in stark contrast to their usual back-and-forth. Rebecca no longer considered her words; they sprang forth without any effort. The anguish had eroded her restraint. Her questions came down like a hammer, with each blow more satisfying than the last. She knew it was unfair, but it felt good and necessary. It could have been any white friend, Kelly just happened to be present.

“I post the things I see,” stated Kelly. “And I go to the community meetings when I can. I went to the last one when you asked me.”

“That was five months ago, though,” Rebecca replied, sharply. “Like what are you going to do now?”

“I guess I’m just still figuring out the best way for me to help,” Kelly calmly replied.

Rebecca laughed. “This isn’t about big, heroic gestures. It’s about showing up and speaking out.”

“I get that,” said Kelly with mild annoyance. “And I always treat every person I meet with respect and kindness. It’s who I am.”

“That’s not enough,” Rebecca shook her head.

“Why not?” Kelly asked.

“You’re fighting racism only so long as it’s within arm’s reach,” replied Rebecca coldly.

“I said I want to do more,” Kelly reiterated. “I just don’t know what I can do right now.”

How many times had her white friends uttered this after a tragedy? Rebecca lost count. “Just so we’re clear,” she said. “While you’re figuring out the best way to help, black people are still getting shot by the police and you’re still benefiting from your white privilege.”

“I get that, but—” said Kelly before she was cut off.

“Do you?” Rebecca fired back.

“I do! But you act like I don’t care about this stuff,” said Kelly.

“If white people hated racism as much as they say they do, then black people wouldn’t be getting shot by police. Daily. And that’s just one element of systemic racism. That’s what you don’t understand. We need you to speak up. Like now,” said Rebecca.

“But where do I go to help?” said Kelly, defensively. “I really just don’t know what else I can do.”

Rebecca chuckled. “You have so much power and you don’t even realize it. You’re white

and people will *actually listen* to you. You don't see that your voice has the potential to reach a lot more people than mine. You can speak up.”

“I get that,” replied Kelly, sharply. “I'm sorry,” she apologized. “I promise I'll find some better ways for me to get involved.”

Rebecca nodded while looking away. There were tears in her eyes she wanted to conceal. The silence between them was painfully loud.

After a moment Kelly spoke, “Well, I'm going back up to my room. If you need to talk about anything else, I'm here.”

Rebecca, still looking away, nodded once more.

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When Rebecca woke in the morning, sunbeams cut through her blinds. She didn't go back to sleep after hitting the snooze button. She didn't get up either. With the comforter pulled up over her head and an arm protruding out, she scrolled through her social media news feed. Videos of the victims' grieving families were circulating. Several notable musicians and actors had already weighed in. Once up, she moved slowly. She stood in the shower for a full ten minutes before washing herself. Later on, as she prepared breakfast, tears ran down her cheeks.

Around the office that day, people were talking. Most of her co-workers were glued to their phones when she arrived. But they weren't alone; they were doing it in groups. And they were smiling. Somewhat perplexed but still shaken, Rebecca went to her desk and began her work day without any of her usual greetings.

Around ten, she pulled herself from her monitor, walked around the corner to the office kitchen, and made a cup of coffee.

“Have you caught anything yet?” asked Steven as he entered the kitchen.



“I’m sorry?” Rebecca asked, confused.

“*Y’know?*” Steven waved his phone.

The two exchanged blank looks.

“Oh, so, you’re going to judge me on this,” Steven laughed.

“I’m sorry,” Rebecca spoke softly. “I don’t know what you’re referring to.”

“Pokémon Go!” Steven proclaimed.

“Oh,” Rebecca replied, feeling a slight revulsion. “*There’s a new game?*”

“Yeah! You can download it right on your phone. It’s like crack, I swear,” said Steven, sifting through the coffee mugs in the cupboard. “I was up ‘til one-thirty last night.”

Rebecca rubbed the ball of her palm over her eye socket. “That’s not my thing,” she said, politely.

“C’mon, we’ve already got some office teams going. Breanna, Tyler, Bethany, and I are Team Red,” said Steven enthusiastically. “You could be with us.”

“Honestly, Steven, there’s much more important things I have to worry about right now,” said Rebecca, taking large gulp of coffee.

“Okay,” said Steven, disheartened. “Well, if you change your mind, let me know.”

Rebecca walked away before Steven finished his sentence. She had no desire to be rude but knew if she stayed any longer, she would be.

It became clear, as she moved through the hallways, how engaged her white co-workers were in the game. Men and women laughed as they scoured the office, boasting about their rankings and congratulating one another on joining the game. Even the mail carrier was comparing stats with the receptionist. They were, by all appearances, joyful and ready for the weekend to come, ready for cook-outs, ready for happy hour. The alternate reality became

frightfully apparent to Rebecca. While she held back, with all her restraint, the deep, sorrowful aching to cry out, uncertain for the safety of her brother, her father, her cousins, the only things they cared about were imaginary creatures.

The lump in Rebecca's throat grew until she found herself choking on sentences, barely able to compose herself. She took the elevator to the sixth-floor bathroom, where she could cry without having to worry about a co-worker hearing. Afterward, she gathered her things and decided to take the afternoon off.

She felt unsafe on the bus. She showed the driver her pass, strode down the aisle, and took a seat, all without the slightest attention. And yet she felt unsafe. She couldn't remember ever feeling so unnerved on public transit at one in the afternoon. Her fear wasn't rooted in any one concern, but that *anything* could potentially happen. It was an ugly, awful way to feel about her city.

Halfway home, her phone vibrated in her pocket with a text from Benjamin.

“Hey, just wanted to check in and see how you're holding up?” he sent.

Rebecca read the message and smiled, nearly losing her grip and descending into more tears. “I left work early,” she wrote back. “I had to get out of there.”

“That's probably for the best,” Benjamin replied. “You shouldn't be there, today. You should be at home taking care of yourself or with your people.”

“I can't stop crying,” she replied.

“Me too,” Benjamin wrote. “I've cried three times today, already.”

“Why do they hate us?” Rebecca replied.

“I love you,” wrote Benjamin. “And you're important to me.”

“Thanks,” typed Rebecca after wiping her eyes. Feeling awkward but also reassured, she

wrote back, "I love you, too."

A minute later, Benjamin typed back, "There's a march against police brutality happening tomorrow night. Starts around 7pm at Yamhill and 10th. Round nine hundred folks have confirmed. Can you make it?"

"I'll be there," sent Rebecca, wasting no time.

End