

They call us Alien

My mom came to the U.S when she was 14
Hair thicker than her accent
Crossed planes of desert with nothing but a canteen of water and the prayers she kept in her side pocket
Grew up here cleaning toilets in houses she'll never get to live in

Had 7 children, her first at 19, when I was younger I remember learning our multiplications together
Watched Barney the purple dinosaur like it was the gospel
Never thought of our lives as awful until someone told us it was

We bounced from place to place so much you'd think our lives were a 25 cent bouncy ball
Dispensable and cheap
Being thrown into a million directions
Eventually being forgotten under the couch cushions of life
Being suffocated by the constant weight of others

Being safe and secure is a luxury we cannot afford
not that we can afford any other luxury either when my mother makes less than minimum wage
More than she's used to but not what she deserves

Immigrant students are treated like mutants
Being told they are denied financial aid and in state tuition because of their "status"
They say this like it's supposed to be an apology
I've had it with them saying "maybe there are some borders that can't be crossed"
The exhaust of fighting between deportation and diploma has weighed down our minds and our spirits
Might as well be phantoms of ourselves they way they make us feel transparent
but we will rise

At 3am, the night of the elections my face still glossy and wet from tears I asked my mother if she was worried she said
"Mija I am too tired to be worried"

Her favourite things to draw are planets and stars when I asked her why she said
"When they call you alien enough you start to feel homesick," she says I wish I could fly far far away until I can't see my past anymore"

Dear immigrant individuals
Who came here clinging to their mother flower printed aprons
You are the stars shining
You are luminescent
Making your own light even in the darkness
Even when your darkness is something you're trying to get away from
because it has hurt you the most out there
You burn so brightly the sun can't look at you for too long
So wear your sunblock cause our brown skin deserves some protection once in our lifetime
And if our stories turn into tragedies maybe we can make in on the lifetime channel maybe then people will care

Keep fighting
We need you
We care for you
We love you

“They call us Alien” by Cristina Hernandez – Gage Park High School, Chicago