

Names:

My name is not Zafir

My name is Dagona

My name is what you call me

My name is Dagona's Dad

My name is 1.2ish billion.

They said, "Don't sweep me up, but don't keep me where I am! If I find a road, I'll let you know."

After the War:

"Hi Ono, my name is also Ono and this is for you:

My Dagona is effervescent, which is common. But she is also more kind than people are used to (the type of kindness that is trained but only makes it more sincere). She has very dark hair but it would have gone grey easy. I hope she really exists for her own sake. If she is only a story, she is much too selfless.

I was a kid when I fell in love with her. I remember my but hurt from the bleachers and my friends were far away from me. The storyman stood on the gym floor and spoke his version. His Dagona was cold and she knew boys liked it. I dreamed of her as was my wife. She held me with sticky, dangerous hands, but her skin was so normally soft-rough. I swear it was very beautiful. Then I got older, and I tried to age her with me, but I just couldn't. I began to feel uncomfortable with the age gap. It felt like my tight eye wrinkles were squeezing me blind to her. In my very last dream, we were in the war museum. We were walking quiet and holding smooth, uncalledoused, hands. I felt her slightly feminine nails sneakily scrape my palm, like she was trying to take a sample of me. Then she stepped in a glass box. She was about to lie down, but I woke up too fast.

My Dagona is a tad older but has a lot of youth. She looks at you like loving you is a natural 'of course' of the world. When the storyman stood on the gym floor, I thought he was ugly and annoying. I wish he was pointless. I wish he didn't pick my name out of the sand bucket. I didn't want the story because then she'll exist for me.

I'll go to that museum. I'll go to that spot where they say my Dagona disappeared. I'll look at that dusty doll with the name tag behind the pricey glass. To be honest, I don't care if the name is the doll's or Dagona's. She is real in me. My Dagona is sneaky and good at faking it."

Ono stopped writing and deleted it all. He curled up on an air mattress and was so sorry for trying to freeze her in words.

During the War:

"I think fake factory ash is pretty because it's light and fairy-like. I hold out my tongue like they're snowflakes."

Camille — age 8 $\frac{3}{4}$

Camille came to herself at a young age. Her eyes were too narrow, and she was very childish. When her brother went to the war, she decided he was dead. When he came back, she blamed him for proving her wrong. His feet grew weird muscles, and his face skin was loose. Everyone thought he was unfortunately old and wise. He'd spend these long evenings enjoying iced tea and TV. She'd stare at him sitting, seemingly in some sort of moment, and just hope it was a moment that would make him productive.

Camille's brother — went to high school with a beard

1. "They gawk at me like stupid crows, waiting to serve, cry, and wonder over me. It makes me feel like an object but also special. It's the same type of typical special I get from my massage chair."
2. "They're kind and sweet to me — but they kinda seem like claymations. I don't know if that makes them fake or not. Even more annoying, I'm starting to feel like there are invisible tracks under the hardwood telling everyone where to go. If the tracks go outside the house, I might be able to fix everything. Then I would be okay being clay too."
3. "I had my zoom camera during the parade; The workers have callouses but I know they're just from working out. They didn't make the weapons that saved me, but they put me there."

The Descent

Worker Damien's boots dusted up the air, scaring the night geckos into their holes. His blue jeans took in the orange city lights crawling up from the valley. His veil covered his face in a bride-like drama as they made the way down the mountain. A couple other workers were in front of him, and a drone protected their thoughtful radius.

He stopped to look down on the city. It looked nicely subdued. He wished there was a higher mountain to see the factual change that eluded him. *If that mountain did exist, it'd have no air for me*, he thought. The other two workers kept slinking toward the subtle dawn replacing the

lights. Damien stayed still, stressing out the drone. Some geckos began peeking out of the sand. He wanted to appreciate the animals but couldn't find any meaning to extract. He stared at them with a desperate warmth and then continued on.

They entered the suburbs of the city and now walked in a triangle. A group of early morning runners saw the trio. In a rushed subdueness, they shuffled and placed all they carried along the route of the workers. Water bottles, watches and earrings, glasses and shoes, made a makeshift path. It felt like the triangle was bound together by some entity connecting the three torsos. It felt woven and unbreakable but always vibrating under stress. The shape shifted in subtle degrees and angles but never enough to lose the veil that hung over them. The runners gawked at them, somewhere between religion and tradition. They indulgently hoped there was something being protected within the triangle, and kept a clear but shy distance. The workers took to the gifted path. A runner ran to inform the city.

Parade Day (4+free admission)

1. Ash Day:

Air raid sirens rattled the city windows and city folk. The bomb shelters stayed dusty and locked as children scrambled to their cubbies. They stood at attention, but their knees vibrated with excitement. The teacher spoke: "We have reports from the hills that three workers are coming into the city. Gather your gifts; we'll guide them to the boulevard." The students shot into a line by the door. Their cute eyes traded glances between the window-spotted sunshine and their overlapping crushes. The teacher's twenty-something hand gripped the door. She smiled toward the line with disarming lipstick. "And please don't forget to be happy. Do your jobs but be happy. They are really here for you."

2. Sarah:

"What if they work for me? Not for the war effort, or the dead, or the moms. The moms are taking up so much attention these days. I would be a mom but I don't want to be like them. However, I do like my mom. She remembers someone who remembers when hand work was common. Now it's so special and sweet and sexy. Oh, and it's smart. But it's like, who were those idiots back then? When something is common it's \$0, but then it's suddenly worth a bunch of millions? Not me. I see past the numbers. That's why I'm *Ms. Time Machine*, because I see you for what you are. Today, just this once, I ask, you'll work with me.
Loving with all love,
Sarah

3. Mr. Mayor:

0702 Hours: "Every time they come down that mountain our sons start acting like fake men. I still shower with them and wrap them up in overpriced Turkish towels. I hold each with each arm, their spines curling like little caterpillars. Then I pass them to you for pajama duty. Yes, I pass them to you for pajama duty and that is what happens."

0703 Hours: "I'm sorry for writing it out but it helps. As we age, memory no longer feels like something good for elections and emotions. Now, I look back and only see still frames sketched out on sticky notes. My imagination flips through the stack, and it stitches together a scene. My shower duty must be 200 notes. 180 are dedicated to them plastering my shaving cream on the shower tiles, and then hosing it down like firemen. I still have the 200. But my hands hold bloated old man fingers, and I struggle to flip through fast enough.

0715 Hours: I don't need new memories you know that. I don't need the past to change. I hate history because it's too fluid and gooey. I'd rather the past freezes the mud under me, and kills the uncertainty in me.

0718 Hours: Heading now to the parade. I'll be home late. The workers want to discuss war bonds. They think because they walk backwards and watch history make them, that we all have the same fortune. We'd all be better off just enjoying our money now.

4. Leyte and her stereotypical art studio

Leyte started a recording of herself. She tried to make it sound improvised, and thought it would be good for cheap museum headphones after she's big time: "Sometimes I take a ladder to look at my man eye to eye. I try to peer deep into the 2D visor, but his eyes never come out of the black. He is reclusive like that. I think it's a very masculine thing. But, being a knight, I know his chivalry tempts him to come out. I made his head so long ago, I forget if I painted eyes underneath the paper. Sometimes I think the answer is important to the sculpture's life. Other times, I don't think this. Regardless, I like hunting for that very beautiful warm grey gaze. Those times when I know I see it, I remember looking at the half moon; One eye thinks I can see the dark half (and it's just faded). The other eye disagrees, and thinks my mind is just filling in the blank. But the truth is, his eyes exist when I want to be watched."

Leyte stopped the recording and sat on a swivel stool. Its leather was cracked up but not tired-looking. She rolled over to her 6-foot-3 knight and began applying tissue paper to his thighs. Her eyes were transfixed and showed promise. Then, the air raid sirens vibrated the windows, and Leyte blinked. *Yes, please yes but please not yet*, she thought. The workers came early, and the knight wasn't ready for a parade. Leyte had to make a decision: Present an unfinished gift or come with nothing.

The outside sounds of stampedes and screams paralyzed her. Time was passing too fast for her sanity. Curled up on the floor, she cried into the hardwood gaps, and it felt like losing the best of herself. Then Leyte looked at the knight. The man was so tall and ugly, like an unfinished skyscraper. The armor sat on him so well you knew he had strong shoulders. Leyte's tears streaked and gleamed the metal aesthetic, and her quivering moved his broadsword like a rattlesnake. The image was scary, but in the fear, she realized she'd been making a boy the whole time! He was stronger than most men, but a boy nonetheless. Tired of his frustrating power over her, she lit him afire, and like all vows, reduced him to words. The cardboard armor didn't work, Leyte wrote on her paper, and it became clear that his eyes existed in a frozen wink. She stuffed the paper in her bra, wetted the ashes, and left.

Parade Day +0

Wallets, purses, toys, and tools barricaded each side of the boulevard. The three half-hidden workers appeared around a bend, and the crowd went wild. Damien kept the triangle's humble composure. 500 meters down the street stood the mayor, ready to greet them into the city. Men proposed to their girlfriends in the mass, and people hung like yo-yos from the skyscrapers — harnessed up to get a good view.

Leyte was sweaty and rudely working her way to the front. People spat at her along the way, and knew they've all been there before. Leyte neared the barricade, and saw a dad hold a daughter on his shoulders. She smiled for the sake of it. But a man mistook Leyte's smile as an advance, and he worked his way near her. He groped her, and the knight's poem fell from her bra. Leyte shook him off, but not before Sarah picked up the paper. As she was handing it back, she noticed Leyte's desperate eyes, and in curious greed, read the first couple of words:

*This mountain I've built is all for you
The rocks are extra rocky for you
And the stream water will make you second-guess war—*

Leyte couldn't hold the man away, and no one cared much. Sarah ran toward the barricade, struggling over a tumbling mound of leather wallets, credit cards, and premium metal credit cards. *It's mine, it's me, and they'll love me for it*, she thought. The parade asphalt looked even darker up close and was famous for having no potholes.

Taunting/admiring Sarah, one side of the boulevard ooed, and the other awed (but it was more because it was fun). Sarah held the crumpled paper high. "My words, for my worker bees!" Sarah yelled. The crowd laughed, and her overweight body began waddling toward the workers. Her eyes were transfixed on Damien, with her head sternly shaking up and down in a sort of mini war dance.

The paper never dipped below her head. She was not into sacrifice or passion, but enjoyed the thought of the paper being her leftovers. The drone killed her with a thin needle to the head. Her corpse laid 50 meters from the workers. Not breaking pace or neck tilt, their veiled faces looked at their feet approaching Sarah. Damien bent down to her, flashing his toddler-like toolkit hidden under his mini skirt, and strapped to his jeans.

He read the poem aloud, in a subdued George Washington way:

*This mountain I've built is all for you
The rocks are extra rocky for you*

And the stream water will make you second-guess warm baths

*If you don't believe me, dig it
Parts will be honestly hollow and genuinely fake
Others conditionally full and frozen.
But all the dirt will be worker brown
just the way you like it*

From my Son and Love

The crowd was silent, and Damien liked it: "If you zoom in too much, it's only pencil. If it's too far out, it just looks like some art. It's that sweet spot, where even the most amateur work can capture something alive."

The crowd was still silent, as if they all waited for each other to speak for them. Then one did; Camille's brother went over the money-filled barricade. The workers only looked like faint, faraway sticks.

He stared at Sarah's vague body and thought: *Thank you, thank you, brother. I bet we shared continents, and maybe even a large shipping container or two. That shit was just training for now. This is my tropical beach vacation and homebody bedrest wrapped into one.*

In love with adrenaline, he started running toward the workers, who resumed their walking. As Camille's brother ran and ran, he saw the drone teasing in and out the clouds. He stopped still. He always knew it was above, but seeing it brought a deep respect for its chilled, subtle strength. *I owe you my life, drone, several times over. I always thought you just held the missiles and needles. I now see you for the bones under your muscles*, he thought.

In a silent protest, he gently lied down in the middle of the road and looked up. He watched the harnessed spectators, friendly drone, and perfect clouds. They all simultaneously shifted, swayed, and sailed against the light blue sky, like a babyhood mobile. The crowd sounded deaf in him, and the workers were no cause for concern.

He thought to the drone: I hate them, yes. My brother is dead, yes. But I just wish your batteries made exhaust. Because I'd like to try you, and I'm tired of the air you keep clean.

While in his dreamy clarity, Camille's brother made a game of trying to spot the drone's needle. There never was a needle. Only the worker's sand-brown boots came (they lifted up and down over him). It all felt very much like impending doom, but it also all happened so fast. The needle still never came, and then he was just a boy lying on the ground, naked and neutered.

200 meters down, the podium was dolled up with tarp-like ribbons and makeshift steel. The Mayor stood there. His face was fat but tender, and his sensitivity unmatched. He saw his boys

standing with their classmates. They actively ignored their crush on Camille and yelled at the workers to kill her brother.

But the Mayor did not know they were related, and when Camille cried, he thought she possessed every human good possible. When he looked back at the twins, he shamefully only saw them as wax figures. Feeling that self-disgust now made purpose too expensive, he resigned everything meaningful in his life and wandered into the dry hills.

Damien's Diary

To the gods and moms, I declare meaning.

Things are meaningful because I declare them to be.

My meaning is not in work, love, or ease. It is not peace or activity. Meaning in the sharing of these things... Yes, I think that this is where I will place myself.

Meaninglessness chases me fast and naturally. But it is not true because there is no reason for such truth. I am not a practical person, but if meaninglessness is meaningless, can they just please cancel each other out?

Medium Beauty

A tiny creek fed into a water mill, slowly powering music boxes and chime bells. Roofs made of fancy red clay supported various tiny flags that soaked up the last of the sun. Camille stood on the factory floor and touched the still machinery.

"Can I make you something?" Damien asked from the rafters. His face was handsome with boring eyes.

"What can you make?" Camille responded.

"I can make any consumer good, albeit at a low scale."

Daisy looked at him and spoke: "I want something that is for my 13-year-old age. I want it to be girly, but womanly when I need it. I never want to feel nostalgic about it. I want it to be easily worn down and useful."

"You sound like a stereotype of adult-speaking child protagonists."

"I'm a girl."

"Yes, yes, well, I was thinking like a hairpin or something..." Damien said.

“Would a hairpin accomplish this?” Camille responded, now looking down at him. She was weirdly far away, like sitting on opposite ends of a dining table. Therefore, she could not make eye contact, but spoke with a close softness.

“I don’t know. I’m only a worker,” Damien replied.

“I thought you’re black-boot soldier?” she said mockingly.

Damien walked up around the rafters, toward Camille. He took his time and spoke: “We both walk on the same conveyor belts.”

Beside her, he looked at the air: “Things like war, they give us our hands again. At the same time, it makes our will all trapped up in fortune cookies. If your arms are long enough, you might be able to grab stuff you like along the way, before you get made into something else. That’s why I asked for you.”

Camille spat on Damien’s cheek. He didn’t flinch. It put her in observation.

“It’s not sexual,” Damien said. “Rarity is always special, and rarely important. When I saw the mayor leave, I looked back at the footage. The sight of you crying made my head tilt up and down like catching the light of a diamond.”

“I’m not special or important. It was my brother you humiliated.”

“I know,” Damien said shamefully. “Me neither.”

There was a lull, and Camille decided to be selfish. She thought of her fingers tilting up Damien’s chin. “I want to speak to you softly or rudely. As a trick or defiance, it doesn’t matter. Yet, I still can’t choose which one, and every next word is just my word. And for your words, I don’t know their meaning...”

Damien replied: “It’s a world of reasons and justification. These are not the same as meaning. The war has many good reasons and yet is meaningless. When you think big or small, empty beauty is all over, ready to be filled. If you think medium, cause and effect take over. And suddenly, we’ve planned ourselves into a deafening despair.”

Camille stepped away. Her body looked scared, but she was very attracted and wanted to see him wholly. “Is work medium or beauty?” she asked.

Damien continued like he was talking to a daughter older than him: “In my youth, they used to hate workers. In my older youth, it got rare and coveted — then loved. Not quite sure what happened in between those things. I guess the leaders saw the potential. Now, the people I used to be a part of don’t even seek work themselves. It’s become exalted to a gross airiness.”

A silence let the music boxes trickle along until Camille said, "Make me something."

"I think they know I don't touch tools myself, but choose to ignore it."

"Shut up and make me something," She replied.

"I need time to think about what you wanted," Damien said.

"Forget that. Just make me something."

Damien kept looking sad, but he was actually brainstorming. He picked up his head, with its thin, grey-brown beard.

"I'll make it extra empty. You have a lot to fill it with."

For The Equality of Everything

"Hey Inaya. Some scattered thoughts of mine. Maybe one or two could be refined for the announcement:

The world I was raised in was unequal. You know, like all pasts. But our inequality breathed a thoughtful beauty. We said no and pulled laws up from heaven and down from genocide.

Traveling and buying were so nice and unique and I remember it. Plus we actually saw our contradictions and wished wealth upon all the world. In achieving this, it turns out no one wants to be the loser anymore. Now, add in all that synthetic stuff and the continents don't need each other's things either.

Yesterday we were so close to the levelness of all things... It's a sensual thing, feeling so close for so long. Today we will feel that euphoric, equal ideal and bear its violent cost. Tomorrow we'll get nice and used to it.

good luck, I'll watch the announcement.

-yours, that old, honest grifter fellow:)

War Logs

Councilman Harper (silver fox)

"When trade is more expensive than war, the choice is easy and natural. It forced our mandate. Workers represent the resultant selflessness. Does he?"

Councilman Idura (old with muscles)

"His tenderness does not exclude him from service. You can't have one without the other."

Councilman Jeany (knits while thinking)

"This Damien fellow? He divulges nothing to her one already knows. He says nothing to make people care otherwise."

Councilman Szczeki (blond and kind)

"I feel sorry for him and I think he should go. If it's risky enough to get our attention, it's never worth it."

Council Inaya

"I've been to Los Angeles, and I've seen him. He is actually very handsome... He will do what is individually lovely and collectively just. Sometimes these things cradle each other."

In The Right Name of Everything

"Oh Camille, I do think you should leave and raise a family in the desert," Damien said.

"Again, I'm 14," Camille responded.

They both sat in separate sofa chairs. The sun was bright but the room was old carpeted, and dark. You could see the dust float around.

"I know you're 14. It might seem stupid now, but the bombs will come here. It's best to start now."

"I should literally be at school right now," Camille said.

"Why do you think I come down from the hills less? Because I'm old and tired or because there is nothing left to inject into people? The leaders, they believe in the equality of doom just as much as prosperity. And just as much in controlling us as they do in letting us finally rest."

"Your words still mean nothing. I won't let people I don't know control me and run me into nowhere. I know I'm young and wrong, but young people must be wrong for a good reason."

Damien looked at the sun dust in the air. He blew a subtle blow and watched the particles dance around.

"So you won't leave?" Damien asked.

"No, I won't," Camille replied. "Is this why you dragged me out of class?"

"Well, I did actually finally finish your gift..." Damien added

"Really?!" Camille chirped. "Can I see?"

"Yes, yes, of course. Yes. Close your eyes." Camille closed them, hands held out.

Damien placed it in her hands.

"A doll, aren't I a bit old?" she said.

"Trust me, this is one of those youthful wrong moments. I know what to make."

Camille took seconds to process. She felt the doll's stitching and looked at its dated style.

"It's yesterday's and tomorrow's look," Damien said.

Camille said nothing.

"I spent most of the time thinking about what you'd like. Couldn't think of anything. So I started thinking about your specifications. Still nothing. Then I thought about the Camille in you. Dolls are always such dolls, and they get dusty, but their faces never age."

Camille felt nothing, but more of a good nothing.

"This is a very good gift, Damien. I'm flattered by what it means you think of me, but it isn't too much." She paused. "Isn't that a weird thing? How a gift can somehow be too much? Who came up with that rule? Not me, that's for sure."

"I think I'll go back to school now," Camille added on.

She gave a little wave and conscious smile toward Damien. When she opened the door he shot her in the back of the head.

Damien curled up next to her body and thought: *My darling, my little darling, better me than the bomb.*

After the War:

Another Additional Future For All

Ono thought a lot to himself: *Who is protecting me in all this equality? My temper is suave, and my family is very short and fat. I want it to be her, but I know she is too young to reach god status.*

School keeps telling me to make my own Dagona tale, but I love her just the way she is. My one wish is to either kill my knowing I can love her more, or let me do it already.

Dagona, you are too close to me, and I think I'm talking to myself. And you are too far away for me to respect your charred bones. Just please put yourself in the middle. That must be where the leftover love is.

I now know the doll is only a fiction. Just another story to distract others, so you can spend more time with me. I wish I was there when the war ripped into you... War was such a collective thing, and should be respected for it.

Ono paused his thoughts to snort some drugs and then continued:

War. What a thing. What did they ever get rid of that for? I'd rather have one big moment, than this terrible constancy.

Then, Ono bursted out of his wooden chair and began running into the half-dead streets. "Bring me way back when, when borders, and countries, and wars leveled the ground, instead of these million potholes!" he yelled.

Until this day happens, I'll dream for the next Dagona — and when she comes, I'll finally let you age.