

Monologue commissioned by Arena Stage (Washington, DC), for a South Asian female.

MOO

by Aditi Brennan Kapil

(Young South Asian woman in fatigues, chopped hair, grinning. She faces the audience, holding a piece of paper, looks at the audience like it's a camera with an operator.)

MOO

So it's on? Ok, so I'll, ok so um...

(She glances at the paper)

...question number one, name:

Private First Class Mukherjee, 296th Brigade, Support Battalion, Company B.

But I go by Moo, cuz I don't eat cow and these clowns can't pronounce a name longer than 2.5 syllables. So I got my superstar name ready, and I say Army name gives you cred, watch out, 5 years tops, you'll hear me on the radio. India's got great music, great hip hop, people don't know that, I'm bringing some of that stateside, some of that Moo First Class poetry. I know it's harder for women in that business, but hey, I'm in the army, surprise me, no really.

Question 2... huh...

(Moo thinks)

Yeah, I mean, I don't know... I mean... so like according to this 5th grade history text book I'm reading to, I don't know, prepare for any American History pop-quizzes that may be in my future, so I'm studying up, right, back in the Civil War, they like fought all over their hometown battlefields, in grainy black & white, and it was all godawful, but in the end freedom reigned, right?

And you know those kids didn't have a prayer, so what they did, in 1864 they put 'in god we trust' on the currency, cuz they're gonna die no matter what, so the least the US government can do is put a prayer in their pocket. Cuz shit is ugly out there.

And I mean back in 1860, at the start of the Civil War, the top 10% of Americans owned 50% of America's wealth, and how did they get so rich? By not paying for labor! I mean and they fought for their zero minimum wage workforce, they fought hard for that American dream!

But yo, it's all better now, because now, in 2013, the top 10% own only 86% of America's wealth! Hey now. I see a discrepancy here. That shit ain't equal! But see my point is that's why we come here, right? That's the crazy. *That's* the American dream, that inequality! We want us some of that inequality! Or an equal shot at it at least, you know?

(off camera person interrupts)

What?

I am following the questions, it says Question 2: "Why'd you enlist?" You want me to answer or no?

So I know my dad wanted him some damn inequality, but he's like a shitty planner so we come over on vacation and then we just stayed. So we're illegal, there, Boom, I said it. There's your answer.

So my option was like get married to a US citizen, which is how we roll, with the meetings over tea and the parents making fake conversation for you, it's like medieval, but I got no desire to get married, and if you get fake married that's just one more stage of illegal you got going, so option 2 is army.

One year in the army, and I'm eligible to become a US Citizen so long as I got the language, which I got, and some basic US history, which I'm on that, what else am I gonna do to kill time out here. See that's old school a different way, pay your dues to the Union in blood. You gotta prove your loyalty, your commitment, see I get it.

But my family's all like "you'd rather go to a warzone than marry a boy?" and I'm like shit yeah, don't ask don't tell, alright?

Life liberty and the pursuit of happiness, right? That's the goal?

Well what's the point if I've already given all that up?

So I'll take my chances, yeah.

(off camera person interrupts again)

What?

No, I'm gonna be famous man, gotta be legal to be famous, otherwise you're just stupid and the IRS takes everything. Or, I don't know, but I'm pretty sure it's a problem. And I plan on getting paid. And hey, if I consecrate this ground with my blood...

(Moo trails off.)

You know what's weird, we're like a day's drive north of where I was born. So if I'm dead it's like I never really went anywhere. But if I'm not dead... I mean that's the point, right? If I'm not dead...

(off-camera person asks a question)

What, there's more?

(Moo reads)

Question 3: what do you miss most about home?

Our freedoms, man! And our high quality inequalities! I can't wait to get back to those! But first, it is for us to be dedicated to the unfinished work of those who fought so nobly, in grainy black and white. Except now me and my friends, we're bringing the color to the black and white pictures, putting some brown power in the mix. Maybe a little bit of red, can't be helped, that's the deal. Gotta pay your union dues, like they did back then, and we still do now.

And that's cool, cuz I want in, right? We all want in. We are highly resolved.

To fight for our freedoms. My freedom to top some music charts. My equal rights to some personally beneficial inequalities.

If we all just pay our damn dues then the American Dream shall not perish from the earth. It's never been free, it's always been on someone's back. I'll take my turn at the bottom and then I'll take my shot. Which maybe sounds stupid, but I mean back in 1864 there was no immigration policy, just show up, grab a gun, you're in, and you'll probably end up dead. American, and dead. And they still kept coming, I mean what kind of moron immigrates into a civil warzone, but they just kept coming. Why? Because they wanted to believe so bad, and no one else makes those promises like America does. The promises that make you want to believe, that you'll be the one, that you're special, no one else calls you special like America. Like they shed blood for that promise, for that equality promise, died by the thousands to believe in that, that all men are created equal. I mean and there's the promise, and then there's the reality, but no one else is even promising that level of fantasy! I mean America knows how to make a girl feel good, she knows just what to say, you know? To make you fight for her, go in a back alley and take a broken bottle for her...!

We keep our wars off-site now.

Equipment's better.

Whatever, I like my odds.

And I don't think about getting shot up. Actually, just mathematically, my odds are probably better of making it through my tour, than of me making it to the top 10% of serious wealth. My girl plays the field, making promises to 300 billion plus Americans daily, and we're all ready to fight for her. So yeah, this is the easy part, surviving my tour.

But watch for me in 5 years, topping the charts. Moo First Class! Cuz I'm pretty sure I'm special for real, she whispered in my ear and told me so.

And see, I'm gonna be just fine, cuz check it-

(pulls a bill out of her pocket, shows audience)

See that? I got a prayer, paid to me by the US Army. "In God we Trust." Holdover from back when things were way worse, so we're all connected like that, right? Little prayer in my pocket... in your pocket...

Anyway. Alright, how's that? Did I answer the questions?