

Monologue commissioned by Ju Yon Kim for Company One Theatre (Boston, MA) and the AAPI Community, for an Asian-American female.

A Supermanifesto

by Aditi Brennan Kapil

Superman was the most rah-rah American superhero, right? I mean he's literally red, white, and blue. Though technically he's an alien, but we forget about that part, cuz he's just the most cornfed, brave, democracy loving, defender of the defenseless. And you raised your sons to believe that his was the image in which they were made, right? That they were the anointed sons of the US of A.

See, I know this, because I studied Superman, like I studied you. I wanted to fit in, and what better way than to read your foundational myth? But I've been giving it some thought, and here's what I've figured out: *you're* not superman. **I am.** Think about it:

On my home planet -- when the bombs fell, when the military massacred my family, when centuries of colonialism stripped my people of generational wealth, when other people's wars got fought on my land -- my parents put me in a makeshift spacecraft and sent me far, far away. To make a better life for myself. They sent me to a Kansas cornfield, to New York, to San Francisco, to Atlanta, but wherever I landed, I was an alien.

And they warned me: conceal your identity. Don't fly, they'll shoot you down. Don't be too strong, they'll beat you down. Ignore the slurs and spit and fists, turn the other cheek, live a good life, make us proud. And I did, I kept my head down, I started a business, I lifted up my community, I provided jobs, I raised my kids, I raised my grandkids, and I kept hoping America would live up to its myth, for *them*. But I was never really out of danger...

See, I have this one weakness. My kryptonite. The shards of my homeland that you use against me, the distorted mirrors that reflect me through a lens of racism and misogyny, not as I am -- Superman -- but as *you* see me: temptress, exotic, submissive, expendable, naked, dead. Everywhere I turn, movies, billboards, the news, there it is, that twisted reflection, sapping me of strength, stripping me of power.

Like Superman! I mean the parallels are nuts. I don't know, I think I've pretty much made my case here. Which brings us to the next question: *If I'm Superman...* Who are you?

There's that frame, always near the end of the comic, when Superman (that's me) has defeated the villain, and in spite of everything, has raised beautiful sons, put her daughter in college, served her country in uniform, hit up karaoke night with her girls, fallen in love, given joy, celebrated and uplifted... There's that frame, towards the end, as Superman is looking away and waving to all the people she's rescued...

... and the POV switches: and you see, foregrounded, the villain... you thought he was down, but he's lifting himself off the ground, he grasps a weapon in his sweaty hand. And the villain is weeping, and he's spitting, and he's angry. And he makes this speech all about what he's owed, and how it's all Superman's fault he didn't get it, and it's not fair, because he was promised that he was the most beautiful, the smartest, God's chosen one, it was supposed to be *him*... and it's Superman's fault that his life isn't better, it's Superman's fault that he's lost and scared, and the villain points his weapon at Superman, and...

(BEAT)

... see, I'm thinking you maybe shouldn't have told your sons that they're Superman. Or at least you should have explained it better, I mean read your foundational myths, people.

(Back to the story...)

See, once in a while, Superman gets hit. But I always come back. Because I'm the most American things there is. I'm Daoyou Feng, Hyun Jung Grant, Suncha Kim, Paul Andre Michels, Soon Chung Park, Xiaojie Tan, Delaina Ashley Yaun, Yong Ae Yue. And I'm not alone, I'm every community that holds up the flag against centuries of violent white supremacy and misogyny: I'm Stop Asian Hate, I'm Black Lives Matter, I'm Queer and I'm Trans, I'm women, I'm Latinx, I'm Indigenous and Immigrant peoples everywhere. You keep coming at us, up Capitol steps, with voting restrictions, with "China-flu", with every damn manner of inventive superweapons, you keep trying to take us down. And once in a while, we get hit. But we come back. Because *we're* Superman. We're the most American thing there is.

Sidenote to the anti-semites out there: Superman was created by a couple of Jewish kids whose parents fled Europe to escape persecution, so yeah, *we're* definitely Superman. Not you.