Tri Nhan 004: One of the Lucky Ones

"Your body, from the very beginning to the present time, has always been without self."
- Robert H. Sharf, *The Curious Case of the Conscious Corpse: A Medieval Buddhist Thought Experiment*

Note: This poem is from the perspective of Tri Nhan 004, an android from the 'Tri Nhan' line whose memories have been implanted by souls of Southeast Asian refugees.

[Tri Nhan 004, a Southeast Asian American android, stands before a cliff overlooking a sea of stars.]

My first memory is mine alone before another's soul and memory are fully implanted

There are two names for this event:

Humans call it

The Cullings.

We know it as

Our Survival

and the Morning to Come.

It begins with silence and warmth

behind my eyes—a private violet no one has known

Then worming in my belfry rings my eyes open

I awaken floating in fleshy womb pinkish

cut

Outside flash and rumble cool thunder rain shakes my soft cell

Outside rows of other wombs other bodies inside who must be like me

waking up some in shock

slamming their heads against their wombs

that mold to their violence

1. Culling 1: 20 seconds in Womb

spill placenta

My first thought: This will be my world now— deadened sound and color full

But somewhere I don't know where the world opens up

I hear the rain the cold burst into the womb

They've cut the bottom from under me

I am being squeezed out into the open world

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1st Culling

We drop many many meters into cannons called

Baby Babylons that can launch a body hard enough to escape orbit

Not all of us slip neatly into the bore of the barrel some of us snap our necks from the long drop

Bones like fractals on steel and putty-colored concrete

We don't know how to cry out yet our knells—wheezes and trills eyes emptying of breath

For those on the floor still nakedly alive like I was they scoop us up

Look at petrified eyes through their masks tell us:

If you're still alive after you drop into the lake we'll fish you out

fix you up good as new

a. drop freefall Baby Babylon shoot human Project Babylon /android 18 meters into long barrel continuation colossal cannon Project HARP into orbit without Space Guns

They stuff me into cannon's bore

muffled sound other bodies whistling through the air

A soldier stares into the barrel with a pen light tells me: *Your lips are perfect*

I'll remember them if you get to the lake and I see you out there

I can tell he is smiling under his mask

I can tell he wants my lips to put in his mouth

as he smushes fistfuls of tarred gunpowder in my face

And I'm too new to know scared

//

2nd Culling

I hear the sparkfuse the echoes maelstrom shakes the bore

tintinnabulation of my head against Babylonian Steel

Me wanting to be as small as possible

tucked in the womb from where I came

which seems so long ago

now and oh maybe I wish

I never were and oh now

I'm one of those whistling bodies

and my skin is just falling apart

so good my god

i'm free

there are bodies everywhere grazing the sky with me and oh

it is beautiful to know i'm not

whistling by myself

//

3rd Culling

Even now if i close my eyes deep

i still remember

Drowning in the rain soldiers below on Earth

tussling in position ready to snipe us androids down

i still remember being hidden within the clouds thinking i've escaped

our bodies piercing those clouds that are now the floor

moonbeams bouncing off clouds illuminating us

i still remember looking up

toward the moon

at bodies that came before me

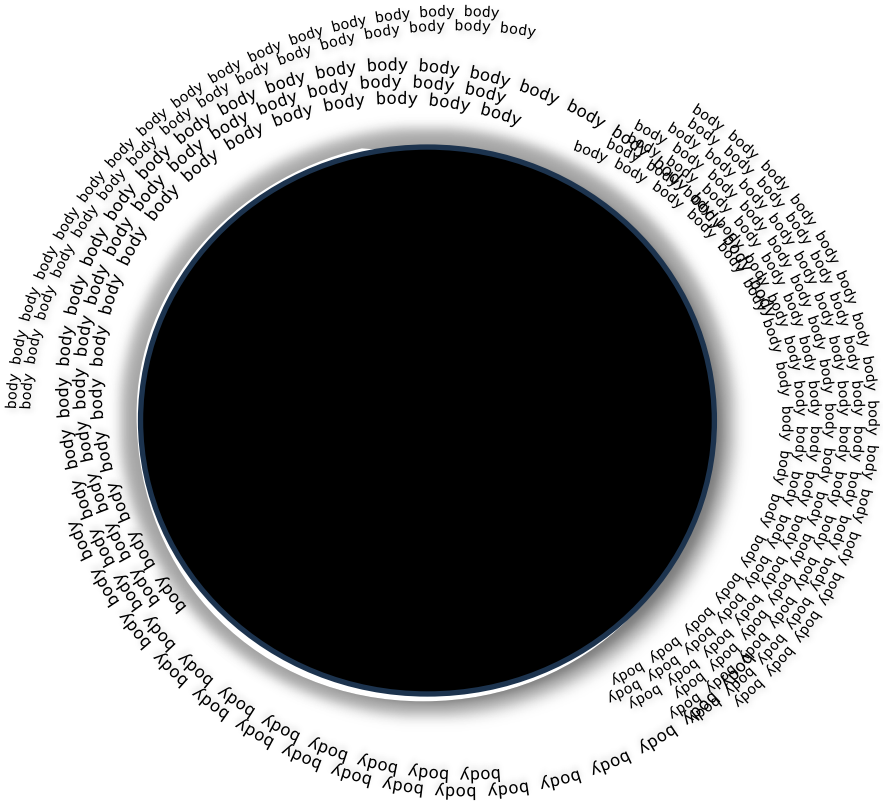
that escaped Earth's pull

they are undead unbreathing unarmed

and free

spinning in orbit Earth's halo

3. Culling 3: tens of thousands androids barreling in smoke trails fields glorious halo android bodies tiny rockets bodies sky orbiting Earth kill quite a sight bodily shock. clear sky luminous moon ing


body

4th Culling

i learn later the ground-snipers wait until we see the moon
before they shoot us with invisible beams

all around i see others falling and the moon seems so far now
deep swelling in my leg

a body rockets toward me she holds me deep *i am a Mother; i know nothing else but i am a Mother*

trying to propel both of us *we'll make it past here*
i feel maybe we're one of the lucky ones

then i hear her body rattling a soft groan
this hurts *the beams hurt but i will protect you, my son*

our momentum stops *i'm sorry we didn't cross, my son* *it is time to fall*
her head falls on my shoulder
i see bodies break free from atmosphere bodies become halos

this Mother presses more words into me
To save and to be saved. You and me. We are the lucky ones!

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Final Culling

the leadened Mother rips me

farther from the moon

we streak down the skyfield going back

under the clouds

5. Culling 5: final Culling 3 options
   1. Option 1: not shot down
      in Culling 4. broken Earth's atmosphere expired
      lack of oxygen. part of androidian ring
      around Earth.
   2. Option 2: shot down in Culling 4 expired from
      gun or impact from fall
      discarded.
   3. Option 3: shot down in Culling 4 survived impact
      fall Inexplicably despite
      Cullings surviving serve purpose
      on Earth whichever

throttling toward an Earth ready to mold us with its heavy water

the lake is receiving us

looking down i thought i saw me colliding with the real moon

i was too new to know the difference