

*the truth behind killing monsters*

whenever we had family get-togethers, my cousin momo & i would play buffy. one of us would pretend to be a vampire slayer, while the other had to be a vampire. we never dressed up in '90s black-jeep-metallic pants or tried to look like the characters, which often made our parents confused when they tried to understand our game: they just saw two kids wearing looney tunes t-shirts running into the street, calling each other nonsensical names, like kakestos, sharpening sticks into stakes, fighting. that's what we did most—we'd punch and kick at each other, even bite. sometimes too hard, forgetting the other wasn't a trampoline. we also fought about how you could kill the dead. stakes killed vampires. magic killed vampires. guns could kill about anything. but poison couldn't work. it would just rain-drop out of the undead. *at best*, according to momo, *it could leave someone with maggot brain*. i didn't agree with her—poison would make anyone's stomach cherry-bomb open, dead or alive, movies said so. a few times we tried adding special effects to our game. when we staked one another in the heart with a wooden stick, we'd throw dirt from the ground all around us, pretending to become dust. which would sometimes get caught in our mouths, in our eyes. one evening, after playing & running inside for dinner, i watched momo stuff her face with rice & beans, with dirt still saltshaken on her clothes, in her hands, & i thought about my favorite buffy one-liner i'd recite whenever i killed momo—*i'm buffy & you're history!*—& i'd think that history didn't disappear when someone died like the show made you believe. you could see it on your clothes, in your hands, in momo's fingers. even if you shake it off & it falls to the floor, it'll attach to someone else's shoe & walk into the world, still living.