“I Won’t Be Marginalized by Online Harassment” **By Kelly Marie Tran**

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Editors’ note: The actress, most recently known for her role as Rose Tico in *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* deleted her Instagram posts that summer in response to online harassment. Here she speaks out for the first time.

1 It wasn’t their words, it’s that I started to believe them.

2 Their words seemed to confirm what growing up as a woman and a person of color already taught me: that I belonged in margins and spaces, valid only as a minor character in their lives and stories.

3 And those words awakened something deep inside me — a feeling I thought I had grown out of. The same feeling I had when at 9, I stopped speaking Vietnamese altogether because I was tired of hearing other kids mock me. Or at 17, when at dinner with my white boyfriend and his family, I ordered a meal in perfect English, to the surprise of the waitress, who exclaimed, “Wow, it’s so cute that you have an exchange student!”

4 Their words reinforced a narrative I had heard my whole life: that I was “other,” that I didn’t belong, that I wasn’t good enough, simply because I wasn’t like them. And that feeling, I realize now, was, and is, shame, a shame for the things that made me different, a shame for the culture from which I came from. And to me, the most disappointing thing was that I felt it at all.

5 Because the same society that taught some people they were heroes, saviors, inheritors of the Manifest Destiny ideal, taught me I existed only in the background of their stories, doing their nails, diagnosing their illnesses, supporting their love interests — and perhaps the most damaging — waiting for them to rescue me.

6 And for a long time, I believed them.

7 I believed those words, those stories, carefully crafted by a society that was built to uphold the power of one type of person — one sex, one skin tone, one existence.

8 It reinforced within me rules that were written before I was born, rules that made my parents deem it necessary to abandon their real names and adopt American ones — Tony and Kay — so it was easier for others to pronounce, a literal erasure of culture that still has me aching to the core.

9 And as much as I hate to admit it, I started blaming myself. I thought, “Oh, maybe if I was thinner” or “Maybe if I grow out my hair” and, worst of all, “Maybe if I wasn’t Asian.” For months, I went down a spiral of self-hate, into the darkest recesses of my mind, places where I tore myself apart, where I put their words above my own self-worth.

10 And it was then that I realized I had been lied to.

11 I had been brainwashed into believing that my existence was limited to the boundaries of another person’s approval. I had been tricked into thinking that my body was not my own, that I was beautiful only if someone else believed it, regardless of my own opinion. I had been told and retold this by everyone: by the media, by Hollywood, by companies that profited from my insecurities, manipulating me so that I would buy their clothes, their makeup, their shoes, in order to fill a void that was perpetuated by them in the first place.

12 Yes, I have been lied to. We all have.

13 And it was in this realization that I felt a different shame — not a shame for who I was, but a shame for the world I grew up in. And a shame for how that world treats anyone who is different.

14 I am not the first person to have grown up this way. This is what it is to grow up as a person of color in a white-dominated world. This is what it is to be a woman in a society that has taught its daughters that we are worthy of love only if we are deemed attractive by its sons. This is the world I grew up in, but not the world I want to leave behind.

15 I want to live in a world where children of color don’t spend their entire adolescence wishing to be white. I want to live in a world where women are not subjected to scrutiny for their appearance, or their actions, or their general existence. I want to live in a world where people of all races, religions, socioeconomic classes, sexual orientations, gender identities and abilities are seen as what they have always been: human beings.

16 This is the world I want to live in. And this is the world that I will continue to work toward.

17 These are the thoughts that run through my head every time I pick up a script or a screenplay or a book.

18 I know the opportunity given to me is rare. I know that I now belong to a small group of privileged people who get to tell stories for a living, stories that are heard and seen and digested by a world that for so long has tasted only one thing. I know how important that is. And I am not giving up.

19 You might know me as Kelly.

20 I am the first woman of color to have a leading role in a “Star Wars” movie.

21 I am the first Asian woman to appear on the cover of *Vanity Fair*.

22 My real name is Loan. And I am just getting started.