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Natasha represents the young poets, like Amanda Gorman, taking their place as the new voices of America. She holds a pen in one hand and a hatchet in the other. . . behind her back. The power of the written word must be balanced with the means of self-protection.

The Capitol insurrection on January 6, 2021, left Gorman terrified to read her poem at President Biden's inauguration later that month. She did not just have butterflies; she had legitimate concerns about becoming a target of violence. She feared for her life. In a New York Times op ed, she wrote, "I *did* know at the inauguration I was going to become highly visible — which is a very dangerous thing to be in America, especially if you're Black and outspoken and have no Secret Service." Family and friends suggested she wear a bulletproof vest and "be ready to die." Her mother, believing the magnitude of the risk, practiced crouching and shielding Amanda from bullets.

As the Greatest Generation fades out, and my group of Boomers begins its descent, I fear we have done too little to prepare and protect our children and grandchildren as they look to forward justice, create beauty, and manage the responsibilities of a troubled nation.