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Growing Pains: The Good, The Nasty, The Ugly

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Eastern Illinois University

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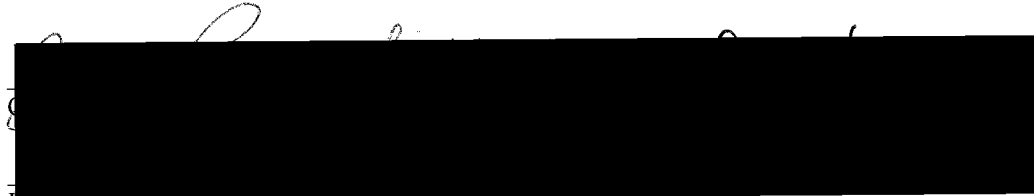
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GROWING PAINS:

The Good, The Nasty, The Ugly

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Sarah Porter-Liddell

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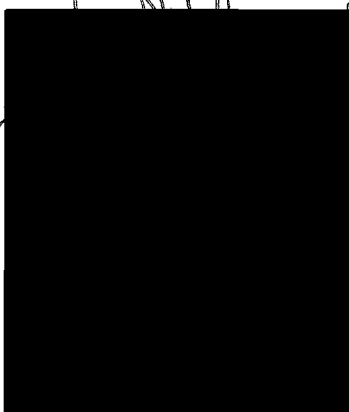
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Abstract

This thesis includes a collection of Slam and performance poems that examine issues of race, sexuality, religion, family, and life choices; including a critical introduction briefly explaining the oral roots of slam and performance poetry in which I relate the work of contemporary poets such as Alix Olson and Hattie Gossett to my own work, while explaining the effects of reading the work of contemporary poets in anthologies such as *ALOUD: Voices of the Nuyorican Café*, and how my poetry develops through the language of the poets included in these anthologies.

I'd like to dedicate this thesis to my lord and savior Jesus Christ because nothing would be possible without him. I'd also like to dedicate this thesis to my partner Jeffery McCoy because he inspires me to keep moving forward. And finally, I dedicate this thesis to my family: The Liddell, McCoy, and Porter's because family will continuously inspire my work.

I'd like to acknowledge Dr. Olga Abella, Dr. Ruben Quesada, and Dr. Robert Martinez. They are three extraordinary professors and I am truly thankful and honored to have had them as a thesis committee.

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Introduction

In its earliest production, poetry was an oral form of expression. Poetry's different vocalizations allowed it to be used across the world to express societal beliefs, tell stories, and preserve liturgies as well as pass on the histories of many people. As poetry became written, however, it began to shift away from the folk song type of tradition of preliterate societies and began developing into something that could be studied. Perhaps Aristotle's *Poetics* can be blamed for the initiation of a more academic approach to poetry that continues to preoccupy institutions of higher learning, although poetry's admittance into academia did not occur until the Twentieth Century.

Bart Baxter argues in his article "Does Poetry Matter: The Culture of Poetry" that "before the turn of the century, few poets were working in colleges...Poets were doctors like Williams, business men like Stevens [...] farmers or bankers like Eliot and Frost [...]." Then poets became professors, began earning a living, directing theses on poetry, and as W.H. Auden said in 1932, "today, writing gets shut up in a circle of clever people writing about themselves for themselves" (Izzo 24). Poetry evolved into a realm that only included academics and excluded its origin of folk song and tale, considering performance or story-like poetry less academic.

In the late Twentieth Century, however, poets began reclaiming the oral tradition of poetry, taking their poems to the people with performances at local YMCA's and cafés. But poetry as it was first performed, as song, became popular in the 70's among black youth in New York with the advent of Rapping. In her online article on *BBC*, "40 Years On From the Party Where Hip Hop Was Born," Rebecca Laurence writes,

On a hot August night in 1973, Clive Campbell, known as DJ Kool Herc, and his sister Cindy put on a 'back to school jam' in the recreation room of their

apartment block at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue in the west Bronx. [...]The legend is a simple one – but the factors leading to the creation of a hip hop culture were a fusion of social, musical and political influences as diverse and complex as the sound itself.

From this party in the Bronx rose a movement that turned poetry back into the spoken word. Laurence quotes Marcyliena Morgan, a professor of African-American Studies at Harvard, as saying, “Hip hoppers literally mapped onto the consciousness of the world a place and an identity for themselves as the originators of an exciting new art form.” This notion of mapping the world and creating a new art form is discussed in *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop* by Imani Perry, where she explains the role of the artist in hip hop, and how, in many ways, hip hop is an oral art form.

“In hip-hop tactical shifts occur within the style of metaphor, which is highly variable even within one song, as well as in the distinctive style an artist might have as an individual, or if he or she is part of a group, within the group. Hip hop music is a war of position, and the position one takes manifests itself in the performance or language” (59).

In other words, the work of the artist becomes a performance of their political message.

In the 90’s poetry as performance emerged more fully and forcefully in the artistic form of Slam poetry. In *The Cultural Politics of Slam Poetry: Race, Identity, and the Performance of Popular Verse in America*, Susan B.A. Somers-Willett explains that “far from harkening back to poetry’s preliterate origins in which the boundaries of authorship were muddied by oral transmission, slam poetry puts exceptional emphasis on the role of the author and his or her

identity” (Somers-Willett 17). Essentially, at the end of the Twentieth Century, poetry became an avenue of voice for the people— by the people— a means of politicizing the self. An example of this is Evie Shockley’s—a contemporary poet from Winston-Salem— poem “The N-Word,” found in the anthology *Bum Rush the Page: A Def Poetry Jam*. The poem is about her being called “nigger” by a white boy, and what that meant to her and the world as she understood it. She writes,

I want to write a poem
 about how this little white boy said it:
 wasn’t even talking to me:
 told his father wait—
 i wanna play on the pinball machine
 soon as the _____ gets through with it [...]
 and i still can’t say the word:
 it’s busy
 busy, you hear me,
 all tied up with quentin tarantino
 and I wouldn’t want to disturb it

(Medina and Rivera 25).

Shockley discusses a subject that is both familiar and foreign to her, familiar because she knows that people call African-Americans the n-word, but the word is so foreign from the way she sees herself that she cannot even utter it. It belongs somewhere else away from her, in the violence of a Tarantino film. This confusion and discomfort with the “n-word” is projected throughout her

poem, forcing listeners to experience with her the pain of being treated as someone of lesser value, of being seen as a “nigger” rather than as another human being. Instead of keeping the word as something outside of herself, however, Shockley claims it, to disempower those who use it to define her:

black folks got their mouths around it, chewing, swallowing, regurgitating
 chewing, swallowing, regurgitating,
 chewing, swallowing again, re-
 defining it

Still, in the end she exclaims, “I *won't* use the word,” because she is busy “deeply involved in self-definition/ and world reconstruction.” In other words, she is “*busy*” being a human being.

The poet Alix Olson also turns the personal political in her poem “Cunt Cuntry,” where she celebrates her vagina and all the pleasures it provides. While Shockley refuses to use the “n-word,” Olson takes the word used to marginalize her and redefines it so that using the word becomes an act of empowerment. She announces at the beginning of her poem, “I’ve decided to start/ Cunt Cuntry!” She then threatens, “The Cunts are coming: It’s the Cunt Revolution!” (Olson). Olson describes herself on her web page as a “spoken word artist-activist.” Even though Olson speaks her poems, her poems are actually referred to as songs, and as her web page says, she “was voted OutMusician of the Year” (OutMusic).

Marc Smith (also known as Slam Papi), the creator of Slam poetry, states that “The performance of poetry is an art—just as much an art as the art of writing it.” He also adds, “NO audience should be thought of as obligated to listen to the poet...It is the poet’s obligation to compel the audience to listen” (Smith).

In my collection of slam and performance poems entitled, “Growing Pains: The Good, The Nasty, The Ugly,” I discuss my experiences with coming of age in an urban city, attending a predominately white institution in a rural community, and my struggles with sexuality, religion, race, prostitution, strippers, and family. Because the art of slam poetry relies on both the written aspect of the poem as well as the style of the delivery, paying close attention to how my poems work both on the page and in performance is key. The issues that concern me are similar to those voiced by poets such as Shockley and Olson, this makes my poems give voice to some of the same personal angsts, but they are centered on my personal experiences. My voice is much more confrontational than Shockley’s, and just as political as Olson’s. For example, my poem “The State of Black Men,” deals with an issue similar to that raised by Olson’s poem “Cunt Cuntry.” In her poem, Olson deals with the way women are stereotyped and dehumanized,

I'd cut through my panties, I'd shake my pube hair loose,
 I'd sign my Jane HanCunt in cursive with Cunt juice.
 I'd declare the Independence of Clitoris to Shining Clitoris,
 Proclaim the Emancipation of all Cunts—

My voice is just as “in your face” as Olson’s, for example, in my poem “The State of Black Men”

I want to see black men do
 manly shit; like play pool, drink beer,
 masturbate, even work. I watch “Martin,”
 cuss, yell, and scream in a wig, tight dress
 and a big fake ass. “The Fresh Prince” shake
 his firm ass, snap his fingers, and roll

his neck, while Uncle Phil pretends
to like women,

In this poem I strive to write about my feelings regarding African-American men, specifically comedians, who have worn dresses for fame. I comment on a few particular instances in which black male comedians pretend to be fat black women, and how these men, emasculated and feminized, are becoming the face of the African-American male presence on television.

My poems are meant to be read aloud so the audience can hear the sound and rhythm of my poems clearly. I was deeply influenced in this regard by many contemporary poets in the anthology of poetry entitled *ALOUD: Voices of the Nuyorican Café*. Each of the poets in this collection is meant to be read aloud; they demand to be heard and not just simply read. One particular poet, Hattie Gossett, resonates for me from the others. She uses no punctuation and a very strict and unusual written formation in her poems. She writes about what it means to be a black woman, and about black women's issues. Her poem "Pussy and Cash" speaks about the power of the vagina and its relation to the world and its economy. Her language pulls me in because it is strong, blunt, and she uses imagery that makes her voice loud. "Of course theres an endless pull of pussys on reserve waiting for you to/ bring them in/ to run yo household take care of yo kids or grandma or run yo business/"(Algarin, Miguel, and Holman 12). Similarly, in *The Spoken Word Revolution (slam, hip-hop & the poetry of a new generation)*, Kent Foreman uses blunt language, minimal punctuation, and form as an extension of punctuation in his poem "Chicago." He writes,

Because I'm a patriot, I love this bitch
You dig?
This sprawling, bawdy breathtaking witch

This pig,

Sometimes

She has her moods

So stoically endured by her black bastards

She broods

Sometimes

She's lonely (Eleveld and Smith 16)

Reading Gossett and Foreman made me realize my own poetry was vague. My poems lacked imagery and I was challenged to think more about delivery, as well as the way my poems worked as a written art form. I also developed an interest in the role of punctuation, and how it operates as a form of control within the poem. So, I began to exclude punctuation in some of my poems, in an attempt to grasp Gossett and Foreman's technique of imagery and sound, such as in my poem "Derek's Understanding."

I don't know if her ass

or her skirt

on her ass

made me feel

hard

Her brown skin I love

that shit

It's comfortable

relaxing,

makes my hard dick happy

happy to be hard

Gossett and Foreman gave me an understanding of imagery and language, and how they work with sound and performance. Overall, my collection of poems work at grasping this understanding: every enjambment, line length, and word choice conveys meaning and intent through a voice that yearns to be heard in order to inspire change.

I.

The Good

2

I Can't Find My Shoes

I.

Her black leather flat wide
with the thick sole sinking under
the left heel, looks strange to me.
Red dirt brushes black socks
squeezing around her fat dark ankles.
A Southern bell, hidden
within city smog, eats watermelon
and pigs feet. She stares
at the Chicago skyline, remembers Itta Bena
country roads, fresh chickens, fat cows,
her home. Inside the flat's warm with thoughts
of hot Mississippi sun and perspiration residue.
This isn't my shoe. My mother's a lost country
girl walking uneven pavements.

I Can't Find My Shoes

II.

My grandmother's thin fingers
polish real patent leather
dress shoes;

she crouches in a circle
on a split polished wood floor
she shines on her hand and knees.

She warms fresh green beans and white
potatoes, dusts silver dishes, and African art
straight from the motherland.

Her pristine pots hang untouched,
her old furniture wrapped tight in plastic,
and white carpet unblemished.

Her "Kings English" raises eye brows
on white women staring at her polished black family,
in their all white neighborhood.

Her patent leather shoes,
I don't try them on. I can't fill them.

My Grandparents' Love

I.

Fifty-seven years in
my grandfather's belly brushes
the edge of the round wooden
dining room table.

He mixes Splenda
in light coffee, and complains
my grandmother cooks too slow,
but he washes the dishes
after every meal.

He tells my grandmother
she's beautiful, remembers
her walking a cow
down a dusty Mississippi road
and how he knew then
that she was his wife.

II.

My grandmother's fingers still
press into soft pie crust,
cut and mash fresh sweet potatoes,
melt butter and add cinnamon
to the best Southern sweet potato pie.

She mixes Splenda
in dark coffee, and eats
grated carrots on a bed of lettuce
while my grandfather laughs
at sports on the television.

She remembers my grandfather
wiping sweat from his forehead
under a large brown hat
winking at her and her cow,
and how she knew then
that he was her husband.

III.

Together they kiss and hug
their four children.
Attend a MB church service
every Sunday. Then pray
for their family.

They bicker over television shows,
remote controller control,
and laundry days.

But their warm house
filled with smells of sugar
clean linen, and Estee Lauder
reminds me that love can exist
beyond lust and youth.

Return

The scent of warm rain
brushes our room.
You roll over, stare at me
with your back facing the morning.
Streaks of purple, red
and burnt orange cover
your back, make lines
across your soft cheeks,
and slightly blur the brown
of your eyes. I know
your warm hand

that cups my left breast
will leave. You'll roll over,
stare into the coming day,
kiss my forehead, shower
and leave. Alone, I'll stare
through the window, thinking
of you coming home.

I know your day
will be long. Your boss, Jim,
will yell loud, drop papers,
and tell you to get coffee
before your day ends.
But I'll be happy,

remembering that your
brown coarse hair brushing my chin,
your lips against mine.
I blink. Wipe the sleep from my eyes,
walk to the window,
stare into purple, red,
and burnt orange, reminded
that night will bring your return.

Night Owl

Heavy eyelids close
when I realize my room is dark.
The day's broken,
blackness takes charge,
allows my mind to wander
into places I know well.
And all I want is to fly.

Tree-branch shadows
turn into witches with long noses.
Their feet wiggle
underneath small houses, fit for Hansel
and Gretel to eat candy forever.

Dorothy clicks her red heels,
but never makes it home,
cuz' I want to know
where her shoes came from.

The cow jumping
over the moon. Lands in my room
with milk and chocolate-chip cookies.
My favorite. Unlimited one-dollar bills
fall to my bedroom floor,
that old Tooth Fairy: Silly woman.
I still have all my teeth.

Barbie becomes my best friend.
We talk about that weird guy
who sits behind me in math class,
touches my hair, sniffs his fingers,
and inhales large breaths
to remember my scent.

But daylight blinds the magic,
destroys illusion. Sun beams
changes my hair to a short bob cut,
disturbed by hair oil and humidity.
My wings collapse in my back, and it's
back to the nasty lunch sandwiches,
and white milk.

II.

The Nasty

You Only Live Once

Your Smirnoff bottle lies flat,
spilling near your head,
dreams of a wet Saturday.

Vomit by your mouth
soils the carpet. Chunks
of tortilla chips, red salsa,
weed brownies, spread
on your shirt.

You remember
 two girls,
Heather and Amy,
 you think
followed you home.

Their tight skirts,
the light beer
on their breath,
they staggered
to your empty room,
 remind you of a night
 in high school,
 three girls;
 one took plan B,
 the next morning.

You search for the condom,
lost in tussled sheets,
 messy hair
 and morning breath.

Note by your lamp:

YOLO.

Reggie

Skyway 8 reminds me
 you crazy bitch. Reminds me
 reminds me, reminds me
 reminds me with my memory still—
 focused on purple rain dripping
 by the window.

Red, gray, blue—I remind you,
 blow black, purp-ple, blue, blow
 back, blow back, back blow
 this loud, I blow Reginald—
 I blow green, in between minutes
 broken minutes, lonely
 minutes. Timeless. Reginald.

You crazy bitch,
 hand me my purse, my coat, my food.
 Remember the twenty dollars you lost,
 I owe you—and for fifteen minutes
 with Reginald, client two—he always pays
 for two shows. Put on red, gray, blue--
 blow on pink pale parts, wrinkled
 skin folded with nasty pubes. Greasy
 skin soiled with sweet sweat, sipping
 cheap gin staggers over one memory
 too many times, same room,
 different women. They all remember.

I do.

*Black, purple, blue marks
 all around my eye. Fat lips lick
 stiff neck lines lying fast
 on a brown nasty gray bed. Rest
 peace-full-me on semen. See
 men don't respect the profession,
 confess-on me what their women,
 mothers, lovers, won't do. I do
 remember Reginald, rough nasty plus
 nasty, tough--- nasty, nasty, nasty
 dreams abused. I'm use-d to
 that.*

He likes red, gray, blue—
 panties bras, hats—yesterday's pussy
 stench clings with funky residue.
 Do you remember lonely nights

in Skyway 8?
Simple Answer

Simply put, he stresses
you out. Takes control
over everything. Makes messes,
clings constantly; a filthy strong hold.

Greasy brow raised high,
he questions every moment.
Stay clear of that
fat evil man. That shy
evil grin. That cat
daddy. Tell Billy bye.

Getting Money

Her lips pucker tight
and dry. Her eyes
closed, she breathes heavy

while withered, tired hands attempt
to caress her back
beneath her bra strap.

Grown men blow kisses
to her thick lips, tickled with light liquor.
Their lustful stares

stare blindly at her bold breast
wide hips. Their pants grow
thick, they grip and imagine

the sweet taste of their sweat
dripping off her hard nipple.
Looking at the ceiling fan spin

above her, she pushes
a limp man aside. She doesn't know
his name, doesn't remember his price;

never forgets his touch.
Walking Halsted alone
she remembers her dreams,

then forgets them.
She's taught herself
reality pays bills.

Empty Money

Diamond Star gripped a red bra
holding triple A titties
in my face. Grabbed a dollar
from my fiancé's mouth,
and shook her small ass on a pole
larger than her body.

I grabbed a glass of water,
pretended I was drinking,
and listened to grown men groan.
Grab their semi-hard dicks, tug,
and flick their tongues at Diamond's
kiddie frame, mix-matched bra
and panties, with long white tube
socks with red bows, as she danced
towards the middle of the stage.

She moved fast to country
music, and wiggled her back
to "dem strippers."
She stepped hard
across a wood floor,
in plastic heels. Confident,
she bit her lips, and removed
her bra. The light shined on her
eyes. Empty, she stared,
at empty front row seats.

"where you guys from?"
I stared at Diamond. Her thin
lips, her makeup
smeared, her hair damp, in lose
wavy curls. I sniffed the air,
at least she didn't stink.
"Chicago, huh? Never been.
Never been nowhere,
nowhere but Neoga."

Diamond walked away.
She turned, looked back,
and smiled. Her song ended.
She held a single
dollar, tightly clutched,
and waved bye.

You Thought You Walked For Virginitv

Haibun

You stand on my porch, staring at me through the window. Sweat soaks your chest, glistens on coils of brown hair shaped like tiny puff balls. Your soiled tank-top sticks tight around your round stomach. A wet ring circles your nipples and armpits. Your hair clingy with perspiration, and the skin on your pink lips peel in the hot summer heat. You wipe your sweaty hands across your sweaty face, smile at me, and ask to come inside. The cool air from my apartment hardens your nipples. You move close to me, smelling salty and sweet.

fifty blocks you walked
to prove my virginity
was what you most wanted.

III.
The Ugly

I Can't Help

I yell "wikkity-wik-wik-wee-uu,"
and my dogs come running.
They jump, leap, and lick
my face like they haven't seen me
in years.

Their tails whip the air,
smack my legs, and leave
red marks on my brown skin,
reminders that they love me.

Their red tongues run
across their sharp teeth,
their stomachs growling.
Long droopy eyes stare
at an empty Purina bag.

The clothes in my closet
barely hanging, fall in a pile
next to a full laundry basket.

My fridge bare and cold
buzzes loud, making my stomach
growl.

My cabinet door swings
open, a can of evaporated milk
peaks from behind green peas.

My hands shake
when I rub the tops of my dogs
heads. These large mouths,
wide eyes and pink noses
depend on me.

And even though I want to,
even though I need to,
I can't feed them now.

High School

Week day evenings we fill the number 4
Cottage Grove bus seats
with foul language, sunflower
seed shells, now and later
wrappers, and hot bodies.
While 9-5's stand, frown
and complain about our fights, loud
talking, and cellphone speakers playing
"Say Yes" until every girl is wet
with young anticipation.

We wait hot or cold on 49th
at 7:45 am for security to search
book bags, bodies, and back pockets.
The metal detector buzz
clings to a cellphone battery
tucked in a sock or underwear.

We fight in school hallways,
eat nachos at lunch,
skip class to do nothing.
Walk by 51st street projects,
the smell of piss sinking deep,
then laugh and cry at our homeless
project families forced
to live in group homes
after they destroyed 51st street
projects.

We play spades
behind abandoned buildings,
stare at 47th covered in cardboard,
gang signs, and open crack houses,
then pretend we understand
who we are.

The cool kids
wear gold chains, air force
ones and stolen Jordans.
The nerds read Wright, wish
on Whitman, and hide
in bathrooms from bullies
who cry because they're lonely.

Our teachers teach life like
it is a necessity. Teach us
we need to survive, by any means.
We steal money
to ride trains, then watch
our siblings, pretend
to be parents,
have sex like adults,
without worry.
Without question.
But we beg
for attention, love, understanding
or communication. We never
trust. We never
fear.

We walk alone at midnight,
sneak in R-rated movies,
steal food from Arabics,
write graffiti on Chicago
transit. Laugh at our violence.
Love in private, cry in silence,

wait hot or cold
at 7:45 am for security to search
book bags, bodies, and back pockets,
for the metal detector
to buzz on a cellphone battery
tucked in a sock or underwear,
for hot meals, real
meals, talk to real friends,
escape our poor projects,
learn life from teachers,
and pray that we finish,
hope that we make it alive
to graduate.

Preparing for Marriage

I.

Thirty-seven years
of marriage in the drain
and my father still calls
my mother fat.

My mother still cries
in the bathroom. Prays
to God for my father's
salvation, and begs Jesus
to make her family whole.

II.

Newly wed friends just brushing
a year argue over money,
love and lies. The husband plays
video games to relieve stress.
The wife is lonely; begs
for friends, needs attention.

They pray each evening,
read The Bible every morning
and eat dinner silently.

III.

My fiancée ignores me
when I'm angry. Yells
when he's frustrated,
masturbates when he's lonely
and buys me gifts at random.

He waits,
for July twenty-fifth
of twenty-fifteen.
The day he can fuck me,
without having to repent.

Church

Little brown girls sit
in the first church pew,
close to the altar.
Their faces shine
with Vaseline rubbed deep
into their copper skin,
and woolly hair—
smells of hot iron resting
on a gas stove sizzling
close to small necks.

Their white dresses pressed
stiff, white dress socks
with wide lace rims hug
their small crossed ankles.
They fold their tiny gloved
fingers, pretend to understand
the “word,” clap and imitate
the cries of dancing sinners
on the pulpit.

They leave,
watch their praying mothers
suck dick, fight, and drink.

They hide,
from abusive fathers
clutching the bible
to their chests.

They sit, adult women
fingering the anticipation
of hot kisses and forbidden
bathroom sex with a deacon

and the pastor’s nurse,
who sits left of the pastor
all in white.

Watching White Boys

I talk too fast

right?

So I dig my thick fingers
past my big brown coils
and scratch my dry scalp.

Those red faces

look angry.

Biting their lips,
smiling uncomfortably,
and blinking

real hard
and real fast.

They keep looking at me.

The tone of their voices

call me dumb

illiterate

un-academic

and ghetto.

I look too dark

right?

So I wear bright colors
like green, pink, or yellow
tee-shirts and pants.

So you notice me.

Maybe you'll actually
agree with me,
on something,
anything.

But that stiff body language

looks unaccepting.

You don't believe I belong;
that's clear.

And you just can't stomach
that I might say something
important.

And *that*,

white boys,

makes *you* sick to your stomach

right?

In Court Against My Landlord

The moment I walked in
I knew you hated me.
Your face flushed red, your tight
white lips pinched dry, rubbed
slowly against your front teeth.
Your body rigid
against a straight wooden
chair. Arms folded,
fingers crossed, eyes focused
on my nose, pretending
to look me in the eyes.

I saw a white man,
a white man that hated,
a white man that hated me.
You saw a black girl,
who lives in your complex,
uninvited, and her fiancée
staring you directly in the eyes,
dare you to lie;
lie before the judge and witnesses
that she owed you. That she
was indebted to you. And somehow

the brittle bite to your jaw
and the tremble in your voice
reminded me I was indebted
to you. The scratch
in your throat, the coldness
in your body language,
and the confidence in your lies,
reminded me that your whiteness
your privilege
and your maleness
indebted me.
I felt I owed you.

a tricking bitch.

I cannot stand.

Lazy bitches are forceful.

They sneak into your families,
live their lives watching,
and preying on your success.

They stay content
doing

and being
nothing.

They work hard
at not working at all.

The State of Black Men

I want to see black men do
manly shit; like play pool, drink beer,
masturbate, even work. I watch "Martin,"
cuss, yell, and scream in a wig, tight dress
and a big fake ass. "The Fresh Prince" shake
his firm ass, snap his fingers, and roll
his neck, while Uncle Phil pretends
to like women, and Eddie Murphy's thick
lips, fat body, and loud mouth yells
at "Norbit." These men are doing shit.
Womanly shit. They are fat, loud, black
women. I should have known black
men don't do shit, don't exist
not on our televisions.

To My Rapist

You touch me; like
you want me,
like you want this
to be memorable.
Like love. Rough hands
slide across my back,
scrape my skin. A sticky
wet tongue, on my neck,
hot breath on my ear.
Your body,

behind me.
Crown Royal leaking
through your pores—stench
like old gasoline—heavy.
You smile, knowing I'd
bury my face into a pillow,
then cry.

Swelling inside. You spill
stories of your past; previous
lovers, lies, envious women
who wish they were “lucky”
enough to have you
between their thighs
cooing, moaning, whispering
things they won't remember.

I grab the bed post,
dig into the white sheets,
stained with my blood,
search for a way out,
to be rescued
from my stolen virginity.

You finish,
stand and smile at my body
drenched with your sweat.
You look back,

at tear stains lining my face,
your cum on my cheek.
You grab your clothes,
then leave.

Derek's Understanding

I don't know if it was her ass

or the skirt

tight on her ass

that made me feel

hard.

Maybe,

her brown skin,

I love that shit.

It's comfortable,

relaxing,

makes my hard dick happy.

Happy to be hard

On Fleek

That young nigga pants was hangin'
 low underneath his ass. Asked'm
 "nigga, you gay?" He said "nah."
 I said "nah? Nah? What is that? You
 ain't gay? Pull ya paints up then fool."
 That nigga turned around. Twisted
 his lips and licked his fingers.
 He was eating them Hot Cheetos.
 8 in the damn morning, drinkin'
 a "Hugs" juice.

I stood up out my porch chair,
 walked close to the steps rail
 and that nigga stuck his hand
 in his jacket, started pullin'
 something out.
 I dropped my sandwich,
 threw my hands up, like "nigga,
 you gon' shoot? Gon' shoot.
 I'm ready to die."
 He pulled out a Suzie Q,
 unwrapped it, and ate it.
 Ate like he missed dinner,
 for a week.

"What is nah?" I say.
 He swallowed the Q. Took a sip
 of that nasty sugar juice. Licked
 them brown fingers. Rubbed
 his other hand through his fro,
 looking nervous. "Shidd,
 I'on know, old man." I stepped
 off my porch, closer to that boy.
 Look'm dead in his dirty face.
 His tired eyes. "Eyes too young.
 Too young to be tired."

Then asked'm if he was hungry.
 That nigga shook his nappy head;
 prideful. Said "Man nigga,
 I'm on fleek." He turned away
 and walked to the bus stop.

I waited till the bus got close,
 walked me and my sandwich
 to the stop. I dropped that sandwich,

right next to'em. He looked down,
grabbed the sandwich, then nodded.
Whatever on fleek was,
that nigga didn't have it.

Looking for Better

I looked on Youtube
and black women were huggin'
white men and black men
were complainin'. Talkin'
bout "look! see there! black
women datin' white men
act completely different
than the normal black girl.
They submissive to they man."

I thought I would respond
to that Youtube video,
until I read a Yik Yak post
talkin' about "all lives matter
it's 2015, black people
need to stop acting
like they are victims."

I felt overwhelmed.
Listenin' to a recording
of an unnamed Indian man
tellin' the world "black women
aren't important, the least
desirable of all races,
the laziest of all people."

I searched Google
for something inspiring,
something uplifting. Then I saw
her. Michelle Obama. Holdin'
up her right fist, smilin',
yellin' "Black Girls Rock."

(In remembrance of) Percy Day

Staring at you lying still,
without life,
made my walls of armor
break. You always said “Sarah,
you strong as hell.” I
don’t see that now.

Your casket swallows you
whole. Your head, sinks
into a plush pillow. Your pale chin
buried into your chest.

Your eyes closed, breaking the
glances we shared. The gloss,
and hazel that reflected
dreams of having a wife,
and children. Seventeen when shot,
you just wanted to graduate high
school.

You were proving to everyone,
and me, that you weren’t “the kid
off the block,” slanging, dreaming,
and stepping away from a future.

Always writing; always rapping
about everything you loved
or hated. Fear of your son
to be. Being a dad.

You’d listen
when no one else would.
Your ears strong, your eyes
magnified, by the innocence you
lost in your youth.

You were supposed to be here,
with me.

I matter

You stare at me like
my life doesn't matter, but
#BlackLivesDoMatter.

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