
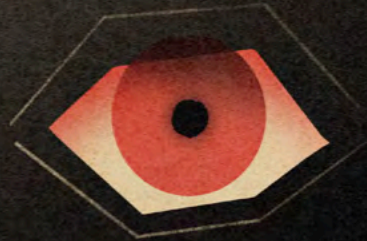
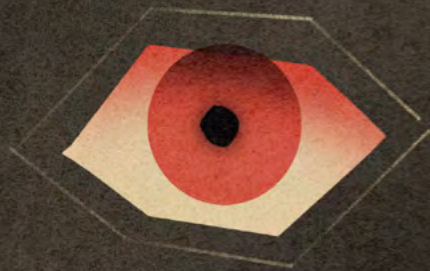


# ALIVE AND PARANOID

ISKRA BOOKS  
RED POETRY SERIES 



D. MUSA SPRINGER

ALIVE  
*AND*  
PARANOID

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ISKRA BOOKS  
US | UK | IRELAND  
[WWW.ISKRABOOKS.ORG](http://WWW.ISKRABOOKS.ORG)

*Iskra Books* is an independent scholarly publisher—publishing original works of revolutionary theory, history, natural science, poetry, and art, as well as edited collections, new translations, and critical republications of older works.

ISBN-13: 978-1-0880-1840-8 (*Hardcover*)

**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

Cover Design and Typesetting by Ben Stahnke  
Interior Photography by D. Musa Springer

D. MUSA SPRINGER

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ALIVE  
*AND*  
PARANOID





*I felt bad for the next three or four years, to tell the truth, and those were the years when I wrote most of my poetry. (For my best poems were all written when I felt the worst. When I was happy, I didn't write anything.)*

—LANGSTON HUGHES, “THE BIG SEA”

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ONE  


THIS BOOK WAS WRITTEN IN THE HAMSTER WHEEL, in the sense that D. Musa Springer penned these poems not in leisure but in labor—in spite and because of the sleepless hustle America demands. Such hustle—against the backdrop of a racist, capitalist society—was only survivable because of the poet’s own impulse for writing verse. And such an impulse imprisons many poets, consumes them, forcing them to write on the bus to or from work, against the harsh blue light of a smartphone, in the breakroom of an office or a fast food chain, or against the ticking, unforgiving clock.

When poetry is written for survival, not luxury, it is not conventionally marketable: Springer will not be invited to orate at anyone’s inauguration and only after these poems are defanged and decontextualized will they be advertised on MARTA’s subway cars, if ever. Still, even fresh-off-the-press, this book, with its ruffled feathers and tall, wild grass, offers weaponry and wisdom; insight into the material conditions that forces poetry (as an act of unabridged honesty, as an act of refusal) to be born. This isn’t to say that a line from a poem can replace bread or shelter, of course, but to assert the importance of such a refusal in the face of political and cultural hegemony. A hegemony that, in today’s world, shapeshifts and can look a lot like... us.

“Counterinsurgencies,” Springer tells me on the phone, “the co-optation of our movement,” was what compelled them to publish this book of poems. “Celebrities making millions of dollars off of Black death.” The materiality of *Alive and Paranoid* is what makes it so vital, especially in a literary economy when much of the poetry on the shelves is theater and performance; when much of the “revolutionary” and “anti-racist” poetry rec-

ognized by the literary world was written on expensive couches, in expensive houses, in oblivion.

Springer's "poetry of purpose," is personal and incendiary, it gloats and it weeps, and, most importantly, it is not neatly-trimmed to fit within the borders of a sparkly billboard screen in Times Square. It is blunt and unconcerned with platitudes. *Alive and Paranoid* journeys through Atlanta, Cuba, dreamscapes of Palestine, and the sonic values of hip-hop, offering a kaleidoscopic look, even a sense of liberty, into Springer's life  
IN THE HAMSTER WHEEL.

—MOHAMMED EL-KURD  
JERUSALEM, OCCUPIED PALESTINE

## TWO



IT'S TRUE. And nobody wants to say it, but we artists take ourselves far too seriously. This is not an unfounded criticism, because the call is definitely coming from inside the house. It's the result of the various contradictions that all of us must contend with under neoliberal capitalism. It's not that artists, poets specifically, across time have not had to battle with misplaced ego, main character syndrome, and intense savior complexes (because they certainly did). It's more that the specific economic and political orientation of our time (neoliberalism) drives us toward monetizing every single aspect of our lives, including our identities and our art. In the United States today, there is no shortage of "Black and proud" literary works; they are literally pouring off of the displays and shelves in your local bookstore.

Someone no less the wiser could look at this moment on the surface and call it a new "Renaissance" of sorts, invoking the histories of people like Langston Hughes, or figures of the Black Arts Movement like Gwendolyn Brooks and Amiri Baraka. But this is a deception. We have lied to ourselves for much too long. Somewhere along the journey toward "diversity," "representation," and "inclusion" we forgot that we were at war with capitalism, with imperialism, with ourselves.

And so the art we put out to the world is beautiful! It's dark skin greased up under blue lights. Neat cornrows braided defiantly from hairline to neck. It's kente. It's diasporic, complete with the obligatory mentions of the mango tree in the neighbor's yard of days past. It's creative. It's sassy. It has a degree from Spelman, or Morehouse, or Howard. It's so Black and proud, and it's become borderline counter-revolutionary.

So, what is the role of the Black artist? And is it even fair to ask such a question? “All is fair in love and war.” Our friendship only knows one way to make it out alive: organize, organize, organize.

For us, *Alive and Paranoid* is more than the artistic ramblings of a friend. It is hours and hours of ki kis, criticisms, and disagreements passed back and forth on Whatsapp and in person. In these pages, you will find many reflections that Musa wrote live and direct from Havana, Cuba, where people have been struggling under the weight of 60-year-old economic sanctions placed on the country—with the intent to kill.

Musa wrote these poems while there in solidarity with family they have built on the island over the past decade as an anti-sanctions organizer. On many of those trips, they arrived with less than 12 USD in their bank account. We know this because we are the ones who had to check for them (because US banks are inaccessible from Cuba.)

You will read about settler colonialism and solidarity with Palestine. You will read about Atlanta, a neo-colonial nightmare built on top of the bones of Indigenous peoples and the muffled cries of a forgotten African nation.

Just as it is intimate for Musa to release these words to the world, we feel we are also inviting you to read, through our eyes, how we have watched our homie take on mental illness, faith, love, and media corporations out to steal their labor and their light. How we have watched Musa wage war on their own memory in order to forget things too expensive to remember, and remember things too expensive to forget. Sometimes this nigga is writin’, sometimes this nigga is rappin’, sometimes this nigga is preaching, and sometimes it’s all the same.

If it is true that the best art is made from just living life, we hope that you will enjoy this art born out of the fight to birth one worth living!

—ERICA + SALIFU







# these pages **are** not **special**

---

i, the poet, am not special,  
nor are the words, emotions,  
and experiences expressed here.

written between bouts of bitterness, political misery, paranoia,  
mania, compulsions, protest,  
and the dismal adventures of coming to grips with the fucking  
uselessness of my own ambitions,  
this is a book of thoughts as clear and concise as i could possibly  
make them,  
and nothing is special about any of it.

nothing particularly new is held in this collection of cold pressed  
sensation.  
my pen documents waves of grieving responses to the burning  
world.  
nothing more, nothing less.

truth terrified me into writing many of these diatribes, and in truth  
there is a warmth  
which at times heals, other times burns, and in any case is not so  
special.  
we must fight the urge to make the truth seem special.  
we do not have to exceptionalize the truth, an experience, nor an  
emotion to honor it  
and we must fight the push to do so and call it poetry.

the only place where my thoughts make sense anymore is inside  
poems,  
where i am able to express my self however i need to  
where my sentences may flow without intrusive hurdles,

compulsive doubt, stammering guilt, or stuttering memory,  
and a brake pad slamming “i forgot what i waz about to say”  
is nothing more than a break in a single line of poetry.

what is special, however, is that you, dear reader,  
may find yourself reflected within some of the lines;  
mirrors hiding among the stanzas may ask your forgiveness,  
and daggers lying along the way may remove themselves from your  
path.

this small stack is an open flesh wound of a boy  
navigating a world endlessly against him  
well acquainted with death but never inviting it for dinner  
exploring what it means to live within hell  
knowing heaven is around the corner with patience  
obsessing over that which cannot be changed alone  
dying to know the meaning of rebirth  
struggling to string together a sentence or two  
unable to see or breath through thick anxious clouds  
still somehow maneuvering as if stillness is not an option  
and planting seeds at every turn desperately trying to regrow sanity.

this book is nothing but whispers which i have already given to the  
Earth  
forged through THE CREATOR, righteously burdened by my ancestor’s  
air.  
is nothing, this book. you is you, and i is i, and none of us is THE  
MOST HIGH.

(inside these curved walls i speak to YOU)



1

The ~~poem~~<sup>Art</sup> was a dream that was inside  
and tired of being inside of an Amerika that  
up and make music and be mad and be close  
and bleed and hide his tears and love his Kount  
and dress like he's in a hip-hop video and  
showed him how to plant a garden and keep  
to kill himself or how not to hate how his fi  
or how not to feel alone ~~and~~ worthless when the  
to burn everything down when the rage started. He only  
one pulling the trigger. The anger consumed him because  
teach him to teach himself how to be himself and be  
he drowned a few times because no one ever dippe  
the water and he kept saying he wouldn't drown  
was never too sure what box to put him in, so it ju  
told him to work hard to get to the top but no m  
hurt and feet got sore and eyes grew dry and nose  
the gold at the top of the pyramid. Dad didn't like  
feel the full ~~part~~<sup>part</sup> when ~~the~~ gave ~~it~~ them to  
smelled like lemon pepper wings and a 40 and the  
about crashing into a tree every time he got a  
~~part~~ feels much more like a letter or a  
was writing and talking to Allah but  
if it was his hands or his heart that w  
to ~~write~~ free the poem stuck in his head and b

of a grayish-black boy who was frustrated  
kept asking him to be still and quiet and look  
ed and not be too queer and pray 5 times a day  
ry and speak english and turn his music down  
all his diary a journal But they never  
it alive. They never learned him how not to want  
ngers got caught in his hair when he played w/it  
guys he likes pass on him for white guys or how not  
stopped believing in God long enough to realize she was the  
he wanted the world to teach him to day-dream and  
his hair and be his nail polish and tick his tears and  
d his feet in the water to show him how to stay above  
again but capitalism had other plans. The world  
st put him at the bottom of a pyramid scheme and it  
atter how much his grayish-black hands bled and head  
bled and dick got tired and spine broke he was never  
his ~~poems~~ and ~~dad~~ Mom said she did but never even  
o her! So eventually the poem became a dream that  
e driver's side of a '96 Honda Civic that he thought  
n the highway to head to the masjid and this  
call for help or a prayer but he thought he  
it was you who kept answering me He asked  
made him hurt so bad and what he could do  
he got tired of waiting for the world to respond and



---

the poem art was a dream that was inside of a grayish-black boy who was frustrated and tired of being inside of an Amerika that kept asking him to be still and quiet and look up and make music and be mad and be closed and not be too queer and pray 5 times a day and bleed and hide his tears and love his kountry and speak english and turn his music down and dress like he's in a hip-hop video and call his diary a journal but they never showed him how to plant a garden and keep it alive. they never learned him how not to want to kill himself or how not to hate how his fingers got caught in his hair when he played with it or how not to feel alone and worthless when the guys he likes pass on him for white guys or how not to burn everything down when the rage starts. he only stopped believing in God long enough to realize she was the one pulling the trigger. the anger consumed him because he wanted the world to teach him how to day-dream and teach him how to teach himself to be himself and be his hair and be his nail polish and lick his tears and he drowned a few times because no one ever dipped his feet in the water to show him how to stay above the water and he kept saying he wouldn't drown again but capitalism had other plans. the world was never too sure what box to put him in so it just put him at the bottom of a pyramid scheme and it told him to work hard to get to the top but no matter how hard his grayish-black hand bled and head hurt and feet got sore and eyes grew dry and nose bled and dick got tired and spine broke he was never the gold at the top of the pyramid. dad didn't like his poem art and dad mom said she did but never even read the full poem art when I he gave them to her. so eventually the poem became a dream that smelled like lemon pepper wings and a 40oz and the driver's side of a '96 Honda Civic that he thought about crashing into a tree every time he got on the highway to head to the masjid and this poem art feels much more like a letter or a call for help or a prayer but he thought he was writing and talking to Allah but it was (you) who kept answering. he asked if it was his hands or

his heart that made him hurt so bad and what he could do to free  
the poem stuck in his head and he got tired of waiting for the world  
to respond and

I'D RATHER BE  
ALIVE AND PARANOID  
THAN DEAD AND RIGHT.

workkkk

oatmeal in my bowl

work

tea in my cup

work

turn the lights on

work

heat in my vents

work

gotta feed the cat

work

open up the laptop

work

~~pay all my taxes~~

work

take my medicine

work

gas in the car

work

condoms and lube

work

work

work

water in my faucets

work

head on a pillow

work

work

work

asthma inhaler

work

food in my belly

work

talk on the phone

work

water the plants

work

more medicine

work

work

glasses for the nighttime

work

a fresh retwist

throw in a fresh fade

work

no movie theater

work

gotta pay the barber

work

low on groceries

work

gotta doctor's visit

necesito pay the plug

w or k

work

y necesito pay rent

work

want some new books

work

but need clothes on my back



work  
 pain in my chest  
 work  
 lotsa student loans  
 work  
 ache behind my left eye  
 work  
 dinner every night  
 work  
 lexapro, workworkwork work lamictal, work  
 w o r k  
 mirtazapine w w  
 ork ork  
 all this debt  
 work  
 justa lil bit of weed  
 wo rk  
 a lil bit o life  
 w ork  
 and a whole lotta deathwork work workkrowworkkrow work  
 work  
 coffin  
 work  
 funeral  
 work

shadow, or reason x i don't be  
online **as much** anymore

---

the grey cat—russian blue, eyes green—  
with a baker's dozen different nicknames  
on a good week / who makes cameos  
in computer screens a little too often /  
whose affection is but an act of faith /  
don't give a shit about a blue bubble  
or a green one and don't play social  
media games / can't use an iphone  
android / nor name a brand aloud  
and don't care to learn how to  
properly use a laptop or  
check a bank account  
on her watch while  
talking to A.I.  
about dinner or  
about money or  
about the weather  
or her packed schedule,  
but she somehow knows  
that when little baby cousin  
crawls towards the staircase  
on his wobbly play-doh knees  
she needs to get his attention  
and get him away from there fast /  
she knows how to pop baby's hands  
when he reaches for the balcony railing  
and she didn't need a `google_search` or  
an infectious teek tawk tutorial to learn it  
nor did she need the good deed to be seen  
by a digital audience tapping their approval.

first **class**

---

the sweat  
from nervous jitters  
will salt the skin.  
charger cords  
to tie that ham hock thigh  
right on up—  
pass the Muthufukin pepper!  
i'm cookin over here!

i walk by and see dinner  
scrolling on an ipad  
making sure not to  
catch any eye contact.  
they know their crimes  
or some other blood  
got them in that seat.

they know deep down one day we'll call that bluff  
we'll baste their asses with travel size wine bottles,  
keep silver cutlery on us and always a sharp knife  
to use when the peanuts and pretzels ain't enough.

# the **end** of the fucking world came

---

again in May [that] year.

nine minutes and twenty-nine seconds

stretched to hours, broke to days, forced into months.

it sounded the same way the end of the world always sounds

it looked the same way the end of the world has always looked

for a moment it felt like the end of the world is supposed to feel

the pessimists missed it again, not knowing that

the end of the world looks like fire and steel and muscle,

not tenured talk and panels and academic immunity and nihilism.

and the optimists and the humanists missed it too, the end of the world,

spending too much time and energy and magic

trying to convince evil of itself, trying to convince evil of goodness,

trying to convince the prison wardens of the power of love,

trying to convince the prison guards of the power of the vote,

trying to convince prisoners of the power of patience

instead of telling patience to move the fuck out of the way.

others puffed themselves into obscurity, drank themselves anxious,

fucked themselves numb, prayed themselves away from the view of the fire.

some scribbled books about "looting" and "primitive accumulation"

and transubstantiation and race and transmogrification

and criticism and critique of the criticism and

responses to the critique of the criticism  
for jobs in the criticism industrial complex  
and hefty checks from the conversation industrial complex.  
others thinkpiece'd the end of the world into a million pieces  
filling pages of internet with Black death,  
while some were busy pouring tear gas solution  
in our siblings' eyes and passing community inhalers  
through thick tearful gas clouds and lost eyesight from rubber bullets  
and forgot the ability to tell if the blood on their chin was from  
a pig's baton or if they coughed it up or if it didn't belong to them at all  
or if it got onto them when they were kettled and snatched up  
in the crowd while running back to base to re-organize.  
i knew it was the end of the fucking world when we heard more from  
those that spoke about bricks but never built a home, never threw one,  
who talked about r/evolution but never held a gun or a hand,  
who never had to rob peter to pay paul or set fires to feel warmth,  
than those who know what it means to look a cub in the eye and shout "alhamdulillah!"  
because you know it will one day become a lion, or a panther,  
and that this beast could very well bite off your hand too  
if you aren't ready and careful.  
when everywhere we turned freedom dreams were all we heard

and silence befell those who had already seen the world end a few times  
and suffered because of it, i knew it was time for  
the end of the fucking world<sup>1</sup>



---

1 First published in *Hood Communist*, 2021.

rivers & the **sea**

---

when he passed over the mighty Mississippi,  
he realized the ancestors' rivers he knew:  
the Congo, the Nile, the Niger Delta,  
and a few more, said Langston Hughes.

i read his words one scorching Matanzas day  
on a locals beach full of natural hair,  
surrounded by strangers, friends from far away,  
and a revolutionary smell filling the air.

no tourists in sight, and i blend in.  
they spit rum as offering for the orishas,  
thank the taxi driver with cigarette grins,  
and invite me to play ball in the sand.

in Africa, Hughes says, he wasn't Black,  
wasn't white neither, and wasn't African.  
they didn't know what to do with him  
and he ain't know how to feel about it.

on *Playa El Tennis* they don't know  
what to do with me neither:  
honorary member of revolutions ago,  
anemic guest returning with fever.

pale on the outside, dark in the heart,  
one cuban says to me passing the lighter.  
i could never say that in the states,  
but he indeed saw an african heart.

deep waves whisper stories of the ages:  
love interrupted, jumping ships in tears,  
and through the ebb and flow of time,  
i'm tethered to my forebears here.

if Hughes saw rivers of ancestors past,  
then i sit here writing as i witness the sea.  
in all its glory, i come to know the waters  
and how they stole something from me.<sup>2</sup>







(sickle specters:  
what's mine is ours,  
and what's yours is ours,  
and what's ours is everyone's,

only if we acknowledge  
what's theirs is ours,  
and really mean it  
when we say it,  
and then do  
something  
bout it.)

## and this city is a fiery **grave**

---

*Atlanta showed me my first pig carriage in flames.*

*I am learning how to pour gasoline on discourse.*

—MOHAMMED EL-KURD

atlanta taught me a poem's a dead man walking, that wordy flesh is already dead by the time it hits your hands. atlanta taught me what it iz, what it ain't, and what it's gon' be: chalky hands tie tight strings at the ribcages, through ankles and fingertips, just behind the neck up through the forehead, and with puppetmaster precision sit back and enjoy the show. glass all under my eyelids from staring at storms through the window. glass under my gums from them days chewing on history. atlanta pulled up its shirt and showed me a bruise shaped like a grave. atlanta peeled back its skin, sat me down, crunched the numbers, explained that child murders have turned a profit since '79, and '79 before that, and '79 before that, and so why would they stop grinding the bones now? i didn't know a death more intimate than witnessing a chameleon impaled mid color change. some called it a tragedy, others called it casual and made dua in lemon pepper wet. there's stammered memory in the water here. atlanta taught me to teach my damn self. taught me to sell a dream, steal a hope, and buy a buck. that angels got good aim, too. this city eats its martyrs, celebrates when they let go of its teeth. it teaches its young to fake life and hide all that dead in their eyes if they want to survive. that highways are rest stops for crowds of protested bones. that a city can be a company's personality trait. that an acquaintance is an acquaintance, and you ain't no friend until you're dead. i place the microphone to the grave and chuckle. the crowd uncontrollable as it

laughs and bobs its head through another death called tuesday blues. the dirt has seen this all before, the laughter masking tears, and asks if we've seen the gas prices.





---

(chewed on too many rose thorns  
smelled too much tear gas  
felt too many winters this year

without an umbrella for too many storms  
sat passenger seat for too many crashes  
gave more than i received in return this year

got handfuls of busted lips and gnashed my teef away  
wondered about the thousands of different ways  
tonight's daft poem could have turned out

(words used to build the mountains  
i'd climb up and now they dig  
trenches i fear i cannot escape)

dreamed too close to the sun  
melted into ashes in the wind  
missed too many jummahs this year

gripped skin scrawled with calamity  
lashed out at life more than death  
trudged in useless trauma this year

and still, all i know is all that i am:  
nothing but a pebble drowned  
beneath life, gazing upwards.

a deep, rolling sigh  
creeping down the side  
of the glass on a hot day.)

and we will dare to slay  
these malevolent giants—  
downright dastardly dragons—

if perhaps for nothing more

than to swing like children  
in the charred rubble  
of their decaying ribcages



verzuz, or the interconnectedness  
of that **politician** popping up  
on yo screen

---

the kkkinton empire shouted 'super predator'  
into the weather that gave me fucking asthma  
and rained down a baby jail state psychiatric hospital  
immigrant detention center border detention facility  
in school suspension room holding cell  
metal detector and black site in every hood,

that same short heel pant suit wearin woman  
that authorized child soldiers in southern sudan  
called amerika the midwife of that country's birth  
before arming all sides and slapping it on the ass with  
sanctions,  
whose foundation made millions in haiti made millions in  
amerikkka  
made millions off families having to pay jpay for phonecalls  
and emails  
who made millions off the amerikan brutality wrought onto  
Qaddafi,

i'm supposed to care what the fuck they have to say?  
i'm supposed to sip earl grey and crunch kale wraps  
while they play political marionettes with my nerves?

i'm expected to peacefully pet puppies in the park  
while they pour gasoline in my shoes like a jaded ex?

one way or another their signatures make it to  
the prison cells that enrage black children  
put black blood in white bank accounts  
pays apocalypse a christmas bonus  
keep police on the streets  
paid by the same signatures  
that draft weapons deals that launch  
the same tear gas in Palestine in Atlanta  
the same milky terror found in Haiti in Harlem,

backed by the same capitalists building buildings  
on uneven trade and colonized foundations  
with support from billion dollar nonprofits  
and million dollar celebrities  
who tell us to vote blue  
even though we're  
seeing red,

and we're supposed to care what the fuck they have to say?  
we're supposed to wait with coupons in the self-checkout line  
while they use bloodied banks to buy the building next door?  
we're expected to play pattycake in a wintery voting booth  
while they calculate the cost of counting the dead this time?  
while they put a price tag on a lung, a headshot, and a retweet?

they trade their deeds in leashed rappers, not dollars,  
profiting from billion dollar social media corporations  
profiting from billion dollar streaming corporations  
profiting from trillion dollar technology corporations  
profiting from million dollar sweatshop clothing brands  
profiting from capitalist empires profiting from imperialism  
profiting from gentrification profiting from prisons profiting  
from,

me

sitting on my damn phone livestreaming the event,  
(something... something... election...

but this time kkkinton's in blackface<sup>3</sup>)

while they tell us about the power of a vote and the evil of a  
riot

before the blood on the sidewalk even dried,

before their next single dropped and the checks cleared

before wakanda and lion king hit streaming services

before the fires stopped before the blue vest popped

before the feds rolled up at our doors,

we're supposed to care what the fuck these people have to say?

---

3 Refers to Stacey Abrams appearing on a Verzuz battle in 2020, in the midst of uprisings, to tell folks to vote blue. This poem was written that same night.

## 65 years, **give** or take

---

the flight always a family affair,  
cigarette hands and coffee breath  
smelling up and down the aisles.

figures in tight handmedowns traipse,  
speak as lively as their clothes colorful.  
you'd think they weren't strangers.

we traverse unblocked seas,  
waves older than any empire  
worshipping Yemayá from below.

no landing is without a round of applause—  
for the wheels to touch down here  
is to again loudly defy death.

i look out my window with anticipation,  
unable to ever forget that every arrival  
is to escape momentarily capitalism's clasp.

here, *chisme* is a currency  
worth more than pesos:  
some call it revolutionary vigilance.

some barely whisper about the death in their rice,  
while their neighbors have too much to say about it.  
others don't know who to be mad at, but mad they are.

the trash is piling up on Enfanta again—  
*no hay combustible, no hay* garbage trucks.  
billboards everywhere denounce the blockade.

many sell *maní* from their front doors  
because it's sweeter than anything else  
the island has to offer them right now.

the pizzas have a bit less cheese and sauce every time,  
but still i walk along Neptuno each day for lunch  
to devour one on the sidewalk under the hot sun.

warriors in an unwanted dance,  
they just want a little milk, shoes that fit,  
coffee, ibuprofen, eyeglasses—sovereignty.

Maritza's smile reminds me that for 65 years give or take  
these people have all gnawed on death's bones  
and washed it all down with life for breakfast.



(stare  
in  
the  
eyes  
of  
your truth:  
i  
hope  
it  
don't  
**nightmare**  
you)



\*[...] we're like a **family** here

---

and they always say it without  
realizing how much they admit  
in that stupid little sentence.

like family won't fuck up your mental  
snatch the food right outta your fridge  
and leave you sleeping cold in a '96 honda.

like family ain't capable of fuckin you up  
to the point you never wanna see they face again.  
like a cousin never made your stomach turn.

like half the planet ain't running around right now  
mad at the world mad at the mirror mad at they daddies  
mad as hell at their families and takin it out on all us.

like we don't all got an uncle or two  
with a jaw we still wanna rock one good time  
for that dumb shit he said years ago.

how insidious it is that my paycheck is  
what diamonds are to a snake's eyes  
or a jewel thief or a colonizer on the continent

or a marketing team  
to their consumption addicts  
or to them crackers snappin the whip.

and they have the cauliflower audacity  
to look me direct in my baggy ass eyes  
and really feel it deep down when they say [...]\*



i don't believe in hell but i do believe in fire  
(and i believe in my desire to never touch it again)  
and i believe in heaven but i've been told  
it doesn't believe in me (some shit about sin)

and i believe in praying five times a day but  
i know that on certain days half those prayers  
are asking what They meant in surah al-baqarah  
when They said HE's always with those who are patient

because sometimes patience is a liberal muthufucka  
you've got to pick up and move out the fuckin way  
and other times patience is compromise is death  
is a smiling politician you gotta mow right on over

is a boss you gotta chump off on the sales floor  
is a dangerous seat at the table in a house of ashes  
is salt in a bleeding throat is being quiet and polite  
while they take forks and eat away at your flesh

is whoever them muthufuckers are that put biden-harris-  
(hillary-obama-cortez-omar-pelosi-abrams-sanders-buttigieg)  
campaign signs over the faces of black people killed by kkkops  
on the wall outside the white house where revolution didn't  
happen.

is i lost you yesterday, is i lost myself today  
is i lost patience, is i lost self is i lost my cool is i lost my  
fuckin job  
is i lost the batteries to my sanity/ lost the code to the safe

lost sleep  
lost my wallet lost my watch lost my camera and my phone  
lost a lot to the fire/ lost my way lost my hope and my filter  
lost you, lost my desire to crawl back into myself  
and smile at broken mirrors/ lost you yesterday lost the war  
lost my muthufuckin train of thought and marbles

(but i damn sure won't lose or admit defeat to an empire  
that has lost to guerilla fighters in jungles, embarrassed  
by free breakfast programs and black book stores)

is a kkkkingdom of krooks that lose every single night  
as the sun sets on a free matanzas,  
sending jokes in gq suits to fail in caracas,  
whose name conjures burning flags, guttural spits  
in tehran, in beirut, in ramallah, in pyongyang,  
in atlanta, in port-au-prince, in accra, in kingston, in every  
prison.

i don't believe in hell but if one exists then surely  
it's full of them patient muthufuckas  
preaching peace in the face of fire  
poisoned water stolen land a melting earth  
drone strikes sanctions and asthma attacks







---

a southern sky weeps with passion  
as it comes to know  
its child:

her red clay  
birthed brown  
umber beauty.

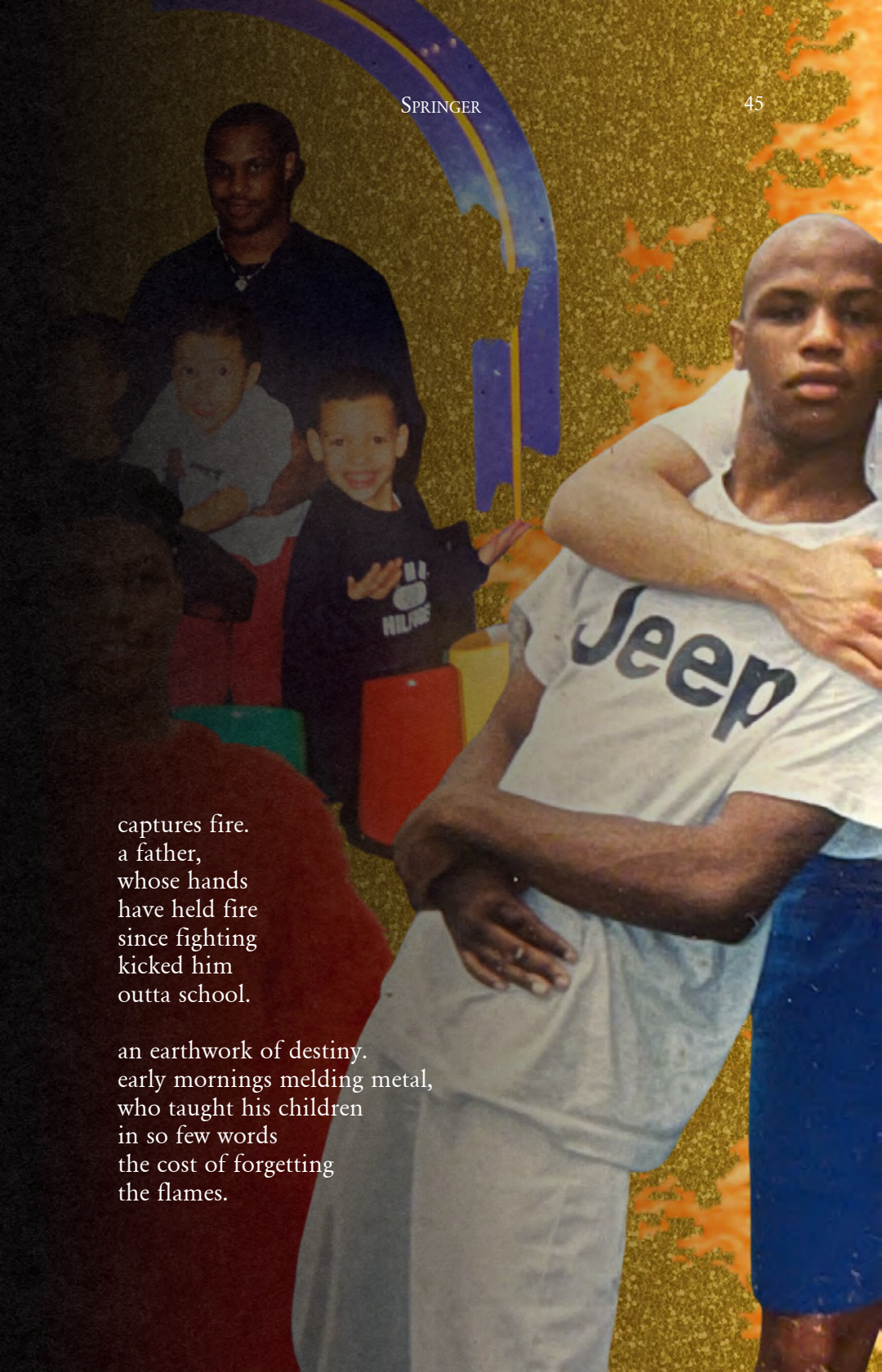
all the leaves  
whisper histories  
of softened summers  
and sweet springs  
and palms

now calloused  
with coffee bean hands  
and wedding rings.

my father,  
a beer of love and laughter  
poured into a falcons jersey.

wide smiles  
burst from him,  
stored, patiently awaiting  
debut since childhood.

a welder,  
works with fire.  
a child,  
whose father



captures fire.  
a father,  
whose hands  
have held fire  
since fighting  
kicked him  
outta school.

an earthwork of destiny.  
early mornings melding metal,  
who taught his children  
in so few words  
the cost of forgetting  
the flames.



(this one's

for DeShawn.

and Monte.

and Kiwan.

and DeLa.

and Nico.

and Keith.

and M\*\*\*\*\*. i still call your old phone number sometimes,  
just to hear you on the voicemail.

i don't leave messages often, because i fear the day it says "this  
mailbox is full, goodbye,"

and i know it will feel too much like another endless departure  
from you.

but when i do speak to you, i weep love. my tears miss you, and  
i pray they fall into the ocean

and the ancestors deliver them to you. i pray. i pray. i pray.  
i pray. i pray.

i drive by your home sometimes and laugh at how terrified i was of the barking cocker spaniel in your garage. your mother's soul embraces me from the driveway and i still feel her every grief from years away. i remember where you taught me to play basketball, how we'd cross through backyards and over fences and run from the rottweilers just to get to our special hiding spot.

the kisses on my neck remain soft after these years. i trace that spot with my fingertips and remember our childish lips exploring each other under the indigo of a summer night. the wind reminds me of how fresh

your love smelled, and i release my sadness into it again and again and again.

this one's for you.)



# dissertation for dead scholars

---

*No thesis existed for burning cities down at such a rampant rate.*

—COURTNEY LOVE

no thesis needed for twistin knives  
at such a rampant rate.  
no docs and no fucking dissertations  
on unaliving pigs in a righteous rage.  
no powerpoint presentations for thumbs  
only bleeding on the page.  
no research fucking committees  
for breaking the homies from the cage.

all them freedom dreams  
and they still nightmare you.  
most likely to let  
the alphabet boys  
multi-hyphen you.  
most likely to let  
the rifle boom  
frighten you.



## i can almost **remember**

---

that singsong taste, a salty slowdrawl across mytongue  
always landing on a perfect lil sweetspot.

shabby two by fo's with deep copperrusted nails  
holdin sunbathin watermelons, dark p-cans,  
tomatoesandapples, peaches too if we was lucky,  
all existing to be praised by youth. a roadside divinity.  
that battered strandboard stained with thick letters  
slowly scribbled across with permanent marker:

good god get them bad boys fromthespoon  
to that styrofoamcup clothed in brown bag,  
get them goobas toottha nearest register  
grab a few of 'em georgiapeaches too—  
weigh it up. cash only. smiles appreciated,  
tips even better.

wet hot pot of shell sucking spicy nutty goodness  
sitting in my lap that gush of kongo's nguba  
between my teeth a rush of carver's legacy  
hitting all the spots smacking loud and then hushed.  
joyful goodstuff. gullah godsend sold by the pound  
paid in quarters and crumpled dollars, devoured.

*you ain't eatin em right, babe  
 you gottapop the whole thang in your mouf—  
 like this—*

he watches hungered eyes examine the cup  
 finding the best one / natural instinct  
 plucking it from its spice bath into my mouf  
 with the skill of a southern assassin.

*put it right there and bite, but not too hard  
 just enough to break that outersbell  
 justenough to slurp thajuices out  
 enough ta get to tha meat.  
 no worries        bout a mess—slurp!*

swollen laughter underneath a noisy georgia sky reminds me:  
 time and distance and my own neglect stole these from me.  
 he asks, why we don't really see them around anymore?

*how does a lil hot boiled peanut compete with capitalism?*



## gum budget (2:195)

---

cutting it out / yanking it from my throat  
with slight hesitation on my end / was the best decision i made /  
(like yo parent tying up yo loose tooth to a door /  
you trust them / just to slam it shut)

picked my first pinch / against the lips at fourteen  
seeds planted by my own fingertips, all dreamt up alongside tattoos  
and shady alleys, backstage at *the seven venue* laying my head against  
the speakers' vibrations / til it hurt but helped to not feel for the moment /  
when escape was an outlet unafforded / those smooth moments between drags  
/ felt like peace.

strong roots don't die easy. sometimes killing can be a challenge / and they withstand  
neglect better than a paranoid boy / even when you cut the fruits off,  
prune the leaves back / chop at the wooded branches /  
until you're left with a stump to grind /  
and instead of grinding that stump you leave it as a cautionary tail  
to stumble over as many times as it takes.  
/ and even then, the roots still remain  
still grow beneath the skin / scattered veins of brown blood /  
sprouting new life through the neglectful winters.

## ALIVE AND PARANOID

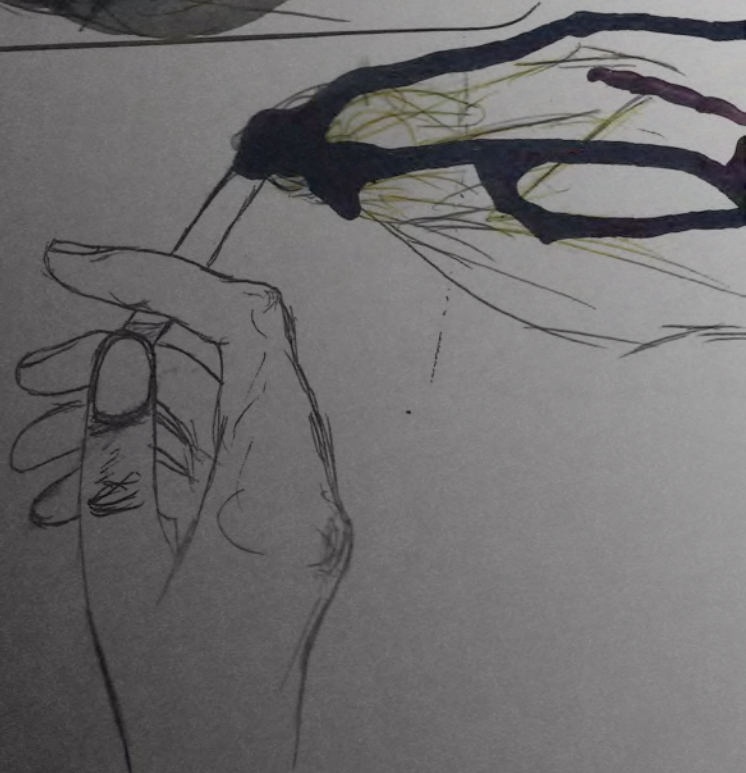
i must devote my substance to ALLAH's path /  
 resist the desire of my hands to throw me into destruction.  
 no redemption for the compradors of the self / nor sellouts to the dunya.  
 my lungs are by design / that i may breathe, by design / that i should do good,  
 by design /

/ yet i would be a liar to poetry / and a thief to the truth  
 if i did not admit to myself or god or / Whoever is listening  
 that not a day breaks without thinking about /  
 that peace:

/ when i don't see someone with one and feel compelled to join /  
 where i don't think about it and then want to do it / or feel the roots still lingering in my throat /  
 egging me on / knowing i'd rather trip over roots every fuckin day / than rip them up.  
 after a long day at work at Redf\*\*h when i have to chew on a toothpick or a natural unrefined tip curled  
 up in my mouth / because i miss the oral fixation / the candy  
 you slosh around with your tongue during lunch break / that you think about for hours.

/when you try to split it with a friend and the guilt / sets in too quick /  
 you take a deep breath and say *alhamdulillah*, / *i will just stick with my hands*  
*hovering around my head / my face / all day and this increased chewing gum budget*  
 and remember that the knife to cut it out / yanking it from my throat  
 / was the best blessing God gave /





and i'm **not** trying

---

to cheat death  
i want to eat it  
a full fucking plate—*desayuno*.  
i want to look greedy with all the death  
stuffed on my spork spilling from my mouth  
shoved in my fridge that i'm not sharing  
that i'm heating and salting until it  
becomes the ocean and drowns me  
that i'm grabbing from all around  
and stashing in tightly locked vaults  
hoarded with passion in cupboards  
pantry shelves for my tongue only.

i washed it down drinking misty, shadowy silhouettes  
and gargling the fucking desert last time  
and i wanna do it all again this time:  
pop a handful of doubts  
in my mouf for fresh breath just in case  
i finally meet face to face again with  
THE MOST HIGH, or The Linoleum Floor



## when they get **me**

---

will i be unloading bags from my car  
picking up the heavy ones for my partner  
laughter and music still spilling from open doors  
when they get me?

will i leave blood stains  
on the floor of a mosque  
or watch the guards laugh  
as i beg for my inhaler?

where will it happen?  
somewhere they knew i would be  
somewhere i knew they would be  
somewhere i knew not to fear  
somewhere i trusted too much?

would it be a bomb hidden in my mailbox?  
a rush into my home? my job?  
will it be when i let my guard down,  
hit the blunt with my sisters  
and bike across the city as if  
the world briefly doesn't hate us?  
will i know it's coming (will i  
feel it?) or will instinct fail me?

will my mother be okay?  
will she get an insurance check?  
will they mail her  
my bloody clothes  
like they did Pat Rodney?  
are others at risk? could it spread?

if they try but fail,  
what next?

will i be forty years  
incognegro in camaguey  
with my guard down  
when they get me?  
will i reach forty?

or or or maybe i will be on the frontlines  
under the heat of summer clashes  
in a blaze of black bloodied glory  
the kids who drank spoonfuls of revolution  
will speak of for generations to come,  
right?

will they catch me on the run?  
will they get me in hiding?  
will they find me in the safe house  
surrounded by steel, gunpowder,  
burner phones, a hundred copies  
of that pesky little red book  
and about a dozen revolutionaries  
who didn't know when to give up?  
will they drop a drone on us  
smack dab in the middle of the  
same hood that raised me?

what will they tell the media  
to tell the people  
to turn them against me?  
will they say i stockpiled weapons  
or will they say i had *real* bad ideas?  
will they get me all alone  
wasting away in a prison cell,  
eaten alive by bed bugs  
and state-sponsored shanks?

how will they justify it?  
will they even need to  
if they've already got me?

will i be able to get  
a few of them first?



## head bone (**snuffuhnassi**)

---

head bone connected to the neck bone connected to the chest bone connected to the stomach connected to the hip bones connected to the leg bone connected to the foot bone connected to the boot bone connected to the steel toe connected to the pig's face connected to the pig's bones connected to the steel toe connected to the pig's face connected to shoe lace connected to the pig's brain connected to the fascism connected to the white house connected to the bullets connected to the concrete connected to the curb connected to the stomp connected to the stomp connected to the stomp connected to the stomp connected to the stomp connected to the crunch connected to the blood connected to the steel toe

hair line connected to head bone connected to the eye brows connected to the skin connected to the mouf connected to the teef bone connected to the smile connected to the charm bone connected to the tan suit connected to the shoulder bone connected to the torso connected to the arm bone connected to the wrist bone connected to the layups connected to the media connected to the paperwork connected to the pen connected to the signatures connected to the drone strikes connected to the weddings connected to the drone strikes connected to the jummahs connected to the mosques connected to the hospitals connected to the drone strikes connected to the drone strikes connected to the homes connected to the lives connected to the victims connected to the oil connected to the money connected to the land connected to the

sanctions connected to the fruit connected to

NGOs connected to militias connected to the  
lithium connected to the coups connected to the  
copper connected to the NED connected to the  
cobalt connected to the banks connected to the  
coltan connected to the cellphones connected to the  
diamonds connected to the loans connected to the  
gold connected to bananas connected to the  
rum connected to the cigars connected to the  
revolution connected to the sanctions connected to the  
spies connected to the coups connected to the  
power connected to the sanctions connected to the  
death connected to the pen connected to the  
signatures connected to the cages connected to the  
children connected to the border connected to the  
drugs connected to the wars connected to the  
CIA connected to the layoffs connected to the  
wrist bone connected to the magazines connected to the  
photoshoots connected to the drone strikes connected to the  
mouf connected to the president connected to the  
tan suit connected to celebrity connected to the  
liberals connected to republicans connected to the  
democrats connected to hegemony connected to the

brain bone connected to the heart bone  
connected to the rib bone connected to the  
stomp connected to the steel toe connected to the  
stomp connected to the stomp connected to the  
stomp connected to the stomp connected to the  
hips connected to the liver connected to the  
genitals connected to the blood connected to the  
veins connected to the muscles connected to the  
lungs connected to the air connected to the oxygen  
connected to the lungs connected to the clouds  
connected to the land connected to the landfills  
connected to the waste connected to the plastics

connected to the oil connected to the business  
connected to the air connected to the water  
connected to the faucet connected to the lead  
connected to the bladder connected to the stomach  
connected to the gut connected to the skin  
connected to the eyes connected to the ears  
connected to the mind connected to the mind  
connected to the mind connected to the news  
connected to the capitalists connected to the  
wars connected to the drones connected to the  
bombs connected to debris connected to the  
pain connected to the profit  
connected to the landfills connected to the asthma  
connected to the cockroaches connected to the asthma  
connected to the cancer connected to the deaths  
connected to the lives connected to the lies  
connected to the market connected to the map  
connected to the world connected to the empire  
connected to the colony connected to the plantation  
connected to enslavement connected to—



title **lodged** in between  
a coherent thought's teef

---

*we are not the same / you ain't messin' with my intellect / so your  
best bet / is just to keep it on the internet*  
—CAKES DA KILLA, "DON DADA"

1.

met a sheeta paper down at parchman  
who told me all about the time  
he got crinkled up real nice  
and thrown in the bin.

2.

when you try too hard to connect all the dots  
you end up looking like you were the target  
in an unwanted game of dive bar darts.

3.

everybody forgets they ain't learn  
that alberta got shot too  
in that same church pew  
where she directed the choir til '92:  
her name wasn't martin  
and neither is you.

4.

you been coughing diff-rent  
ever since the tear gas that summer  
and good luck on tryna get a check from that:  
kinda fucked up isn't it?  
your work speaks for itself

if you gotta stay quiet for a bit.

## 5.

they waited til ramadan began  
to really throw it all at you.  
played their strongest hand  
and really thought you'd fold:  
little did them weak duds know  
they went low but you stay lower  
you take shots like a vested bolder  
and stay on the line with the most high  
fast with folks who fought battles so colder.

### 5.1

you met the creator ina waffle house bathroom  
they asked for your repentance in blood or sweat:  
you were too scarred to break iftar's neck  
and too scared to storm to your tomb.

### 5.2

in the parking lot life and death  
and every thing in between  
took greedy bites out your liver  
put some in pockets to save for later  
slurped on your femur something mean  
just to spit you out like a dozen spoiled wings.  
how the fuck did you get caught up in the gunfight  
are you allowed to ask around is the feds in sight?





Tenleytown  
Trash  
202-311-5555

WASTE ONLY

**CAUTION**  
HARDWARE  
WASTES ACCEPTED  
**CAUTION**  
**DO NOT PARK**  
DO NOT FILL ABOVE TOP OF CONTAINER

FLUC

hellog's

---

pops

were my favorite

and the box was

big and cheap

so we got 'em

often enough /

crisp

smacks against the tongue

sweet something toof curling

texture sent from heaven

signed sealed delivered

by coupons, clipped

with patience

goodstuff

bowls of the goodstuff /

milky, crunchy, sugary goodstuff

pops

too common in the kitchen

pop for my mouth,

talkin too grown /

talkin slick

talkin back

talkin troof

talking in church

(even though that man

can get up there and run his mouf

and get applauded for it?

all my black ass got was

popped /  
 in the slope of the driveway  
     by the hands of a styrofoam mother  
     who feared the parts of her own creation  
         which she could not claim as her own /

popped  
 for talkin like that  
     for hanging with them  
     for putting that status up on myspace  
         with the words spelled like that  
     for looking just like him in the face  
         laughing just like him /

pops  
 at breakfast when we had  
     no time for a meal /  
         pops  
         for dinner when we smiled  
             through another 'breakfast for dinner'  
         pops when the leftovers stretched  
             inches beyond a plastic wallet's reach /

pops  
 on the way to wednesday night church  
     and my arms remained crossed  
     like that man hanging on that wall  
         pops in a parking lot / pops when i was ungrateful  
         pops, because i got em too and i turned out just  
         fine  
             pops when all my darkest moments  
             were milky white  
                 and all i could think about  
                 was going to /

pop's,  
 who i'd see on the weekends

to atone for the stench  
of colonizer fingerprints on me  
/ pops, whose lips like thunder and lightning  
in the sky  
would sound the same way my lips sounded:  
rounded, full of clay, but with more  
bass,  
and everything i had to shed  
was embraced with ease, not /

pops  
to teach the dog a lesson  
same one can't tell the difference  
between a tail and a chew toy  
supposed to learn something  
from /

pops  
like dusty damn hand-me-downs  
that you stuck with  
cause you don't know no better  
and don't have the time right now  
to know no better cause you got  
a Black kid that's 16 years apart from you  
and two full time jobs and you're  
considering  
another / pops  
just like your mom before you  
and hers before her and /

pops /  
all the goodstuff  
all the goostuff all around  
even when pops wasn't around /  
pops / all the goodstuff all around  
all the time all the places / pops  
the easiest,

tax-free option  
 the supper we slept to  
 and rooster we woke to  
 all the goodstuff  
 pop / at new years for good  
 luck  
 because we don't have much  
 time  
 / pops /

because you're bowl's getting empty  
 pops / pops / pops  
 that big yellow ass box  
 i got tired of it / pops  
 like it was that different  
 than a whip  
 pops like if i could do it all over again  
 go back and pop right back / i would  
 / pops / like i oughta sue  
 hellog's  
 pops / like the word alone  
 makes my brain wanna go  
 pop







# settlers, Atlanta, GA (May 2018)

---

a boot on my car, untameable time,  
late for work, a bad fucking day.  
outside my civic window, egg whites  
canvassing at me with a clipboard.  
    cauliflower in a khaki tone tells me  
    to vote blue for black lives.  
    teef talks about saving the future  
    as if it's something we share.  
        printer paper in my face  
        waiting to be crumbled.  
        what's snow meant for  
        if not to be stepped on?  
            porcelain squirms something serious  
            when the response lets em know  
            glasses of milk used to get spilled  
            on these here sidewalks not long ago  
            and maybe we should bring  
            that back.





---

muslim niggas but the strap stays crossed.  
might lose our minds but we never take a loss.  
no sanctuary in the wild wild west  
wipe the sweat from your neck  
(when talking to ALLAH show respect)  
atlanta boys came to jummah with a TEC  
converted up norf, then brought it out west.  
told him watch his neck, now he's praying fajr with a vest.

might have done it good but my niggas did it best.  
(move more white than gentrification  
move more black than gentrification  
haram with the clip, total damnation  
run up a check like sanctification  
get it right back, accumulation  
never worried about a reputation)

fuck your assimilation and white ass civilization  
we move in unity like radical Haitians  
we real cool like tropical vacations  
pigs left a kufi crooked when bodies got wasted  
now we bust back til someone's faceless  
we the bomb, the blunt, the lost patience,

the dhikr, the prayer, fuck a federal agent,  
tie an edgar and a hoover up in the basement,  
we don't go to court, tooly makes the statement  
talk to the feds and you can get faded  
fuck your affiliation and the investigation,  
fuck your arraignment fuck your temptation,  
fuck your complacence and pig stations  
fuck incarceration and your entire nation.

Beanie Sigel with a mic and bean pie  
push a camel through a needle's eye,  
we're the best that it gets. fuck your epithets  
we're vicious, we're the end of the West.  
nigga we are the threat. we are the threat.  
grill bacon like we get waffle house checks.  
put your dogs to sleep like we are the vet.  
poke pork with a fork like it owes us a debt.  
take the palms of their hands for our cigarettes.  
agitate all three k's in amerika so it never forgets.  
so it never forgets. my nigga, we are the threat.



my dad taught me  
**everything** i know

---

and said that he would never ever  
teach me everything he knows  
and if i know one thing fasho  
it's that if i don't escape  
(by any means  
whateverso)  
i'm gonna  
fucking  
blow

tried to crawl underneath  
saw no way to get over  
couldn't get around  
nothing left for me  
to do but to go  
straight thru  
and burn it  
all down

wallahi on everything—life,  
(death even fucking closer)  
if i don't make it out soon  
then i ain't making it out  
alive and there's no  
seeking closure

i don't have to tell you what happened to  
the landowners and dead sinners  
who became beef stew  
in habana when revolution flew:

bullets came thru and they knew  
the bird had to bid the nest a quick adieu  
because vengeance like rent became due

i promise i don't need no fuckin guidance  
and anyways, it's not like you could provide it  
but if i wake up tomorrow with the air still violent  
i'm not going out silent, i'm pulling up with the violence  
man this shit's about to blow, and it just can't decide when

what do you do when once again  
the dopest dope still leaves you feeling hopeless hopes  
and you don't drink don't smoke no smokeless smoke  
way too close to being dead and broke to not chew  
chew chew when they wanna see you choke  
chopped and screwed, mad unprovoked  
cough undiagnosed, life uneven yoked  
death around on every fuckin corner  
reminding you can get poked  
just a few likkle keystrokes  
away from your name  
on an airbrush t-shirt  
looking cheap and  
tear-soaked

who teaches the wind to calm the fuck down for a second?  
who teaches my eyes to keep looking straight ahead  
when i drive by that tree that calls my damn name?  
who teaches heartbeats to turn to weapons  
when existence is again being threatened?

what can you take for the paranoia tremors at night?  
who do you call for endless bleeding of the mind?  
what do you do when there's no end in sight?  
where do you hit if yourself you must fight?

who teaches the sky to cry and crack

and who taught me how to breathe?  
i want a word with them  
for what they did to me  
and i want a word with my dad  
for teaching me everything i know  
and not teaching me everything he knows.





and once again i find myself here  
 at the place where the margins fold inward  
 returning to that same tenseness  
 that last time left my mental splintered  
 (and again it is now swelling within me  
 at what feels like an uncontrollable speed  
 like an engorged belly exploding,  
 or where a river turns to sea)

*i cannot eat any more death--  
 my jaw is sore my teef  
 are breaking my ribs  
 are bursting,*

(help me, please)

it is my job to write. it is my job to write.  
 it is my job to right. it is my job name.  
 it is my job to dwell in chest-deep rages.  
 it is my job to free truths from their cages.  
 and it is, once again, my job to bleed  
 to create my self again from flesh unfreed  
 and remind again of the poplar trees  
 and the ropes swinging in the breeze  
 (and the bodies that still hang today  
 that haunt all of time and space)

of the corpses that could never decay  
of the blood waiting in the doorway  
of every home built on stolen land  
the blood on every single pigs' hand  
the names and faces of the damned  
who will one day rise from the soil, sea and sand  
by revolutionary means we may not yet understand.  
everybody knows when i break  
everybody knows when i ache  
it's in everything i create, everything i write.  
everybody knows when the waterfall dries  
we gotta go back to the lake and revise.  
i'm still learning to come up with a plan  
to deal with it without revealing my hand  
to get back to making without breaking  
and smiling wide without faking.  
i'm doing everything that i fucking can  
but all's been damned since i went to mississippi<sup>4</sup>,

#### GODDAM

---

4           Inspired by Nina Simone's stunning protest song "Mississippi Goddam," this poem was written while I was in Mississippi filming for the documentary " Parchman Prison: Pain & Protest." My first time in Mississippi, my time spent there was incredibly emotional, and it made me reflect deeply on my role as a journalist and documenter.



---

we've gotta bring back muthufucka  
not "motherfucker!" or whatever  
i mean *muthufucka*  
like the repo muthufuckin man  
like who is this muthufucka rollin' through my neighborhood  
like this muthufuckin cracker  
we had to tear this muthufucka up  
that muthufucka has my money  
like the dj's playing my muthufuckin jam!  
and it's time for you to shout your favorite part  
like *get back muthafucka! you don't know me like that!*

i'm talking about the *muthufucka*  
that carries the same energy as  
butch queens slipping *bitch* out their moufs  
when something tastes like oolong

like *run for cover muthufuckas*  
like waiting on the muthufuckin train  
like waiting on your late muthufuckin check  
as in the white muthufuckas holding up your money again  
and "black banks" can't do a muthufuckin thing about it  
again  
like we're higher than a muthufucka  
like who is this muthufucka?  
like these muthufuckin snakes  
    on the muthufuckin plane  
off with their muthufuckin heads  
like make that muthufucka hammer time  
'cause that's what a muthufuckin monster do,

MUTHUFUCKA!

the apocalypse<sup>5</sup>

---

was rhodesia was israel  
was the united east india company  
was new zealand and australia  
was jim crow and jim jones  
was human chattel and slave patrols  
was the bureau of indian affairs,  
millionaires and billionaires.  
it was the six hundred and thirty-five thousand  
tons of bomb and napalm dropped on korea  
was the flavor-aid nine hundred and nine  
people drank in the guyanese jungle  
was the stripes on my ancestors' backs  
was the stripes on your ancestors' backs  
the cherrytree george washington never cut down  
was protests turned photo ops  
was marches turned magazine covers  
was burning precincts turned representation  
was the gap in madonna's teef  
was the bullets in robert olsen's gun  
was the smoke and rubble left at 6221 osage ave  
was the wounds in Assata's back  
was enemy of the sun found sitting in  
George Jackson's cell after his murder.  
the apocalypse was Marsha P. Johnson's body  
found floating in the hudson river  
was canada and was germany  
was the dutch was the portuguese  
was amerika's grip on Cuba and Venezuela and  
Hawaii and Puerto Rico and Guam and  
Iraq and Haiti and indian residential schools  
was the miami gusanos cheering for Fidel's death  
was Tony McDade's last breath  
was Kalief Browder's last breath

was Sandra Bland's last breath  
was Nat Turner's last breath  
was Muhlaysia Booker's last breath  
was Sankara's and Lumumba's last breaths  
was Winnie and Mumia's prison cells  
was the taste of blood filling Fred Hampton's mouth  
before they dragged him into the hallways  
and left him lying in a pool of blood.  
the apocalypse was trump  
was obama and biden and hillary and bernie  
was eisenhower and carter and hoover and  
cleveland and washington and taft and lincoln  
was diamond, lithium, oil, cobalt, coltan,  
gold, tungsten, and copper in the Congo,  
was JUNE 13 1980 when gregory smith  
gave Walter Rodney the walkie talkie,  
was enslaved poems illegal to be written  
was Harriet Powers' quilts  
was Dave the Potter's encrypted messages  
was the failure of the maji maji rebellion  
was hijabs snatched and weddings bombed  
was fourteen-year-old James Doxtator's remains never found  
and you reading this poem not knowing his name  
was fourteen-year-old Giovanni Melton  
snatched from life and the world not caring  
because no body ever cares  
when you're young black gay and dead  
was Human  
was internment camps  
was blackwater mercenaries  
was mao's last poem  
was Fanon's leukemia  
was Bob Marley's melanoma  
was Gamba Adisa's breast cancer  
was Eleanor Bumpurs shotgunned  
against her kitchen wall by rent marshalls  
was the barracoon.  
the apocalypse was already here,  
it has been here, striking in plain sight,  
it is not a thief in the night we must watch for

nor an impending catastrophe we must manage  
but an infestation so large, so vast in sheer numbers,  
so incalculable in the lives it's collected  
and audacious in the histories its stolen,  
that we think it has yet to arrive.



## (the weight

---

of the apocalypse is heavy, and we all carry it even if we don't realize it.

We, as in butch queens, the gworls, creatures of the night, and shady theydies.

We, as in niggas, niggettes, and nigglets from Angola to Atlanna.

We, as in the wretched of the soil plucked pruned and sold at shop.

We, as in the tragic mulattxs struggling to pick a place on the same damn wall.

We, as in the muthufuckas on the other side of a pig's gun.

We, who buss back.

We, as in i was on free lunch and handmedowns and got bullied for that shit.

We, as in the meek struggling to inherit a doomed earth.

We, who were forced to make a home of the shadows when everything light tried to kill us.

We, who inhale sulfur and chew rust to pay for  
bread and milk.

We, who navigate blockades, apartheid walls, and  
ghetto birds to give birth.

We, who become acquainted with the quality of  
our own blood and call it survival.

We, who hear talk of western culture and with in-  
stinct pull out our knives—or at least make sure  
they're within reach.<sup>6</sup>

We, who carry the weight of the ocean, and the mil-  
lions of apocalypses who chose waves when land was  
no longer an option, know the dents in our shoulders  
intimately.

We carry it with us daily.)



---

6 Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*: “But it so happens that when the native hears a speech about Western culture he pulls out his knife—or at least he makes sure it is within reach.”

for **Tort**—

---

a barrage of bullets,  
someone died.  
some protested,  
others just cried.  
cops did that thing  
they always do  
and lied.

a bacon cast iron in flames,  
red ink sprayed against walls,  
another hashtag added  
to the symphony of names.  
glass crunched under piggy boots  
received more sympathy  
than a defender of tree roots.

them piglets look us in the eyes  
and speak claims of 'terror,'  
while right here on peachtree  
and auburn every night,  
folks lay their tired heads  
on cold sidewalks streets,  
for them no tears nor fright.

a diaspora of pain  
pushes a city to break  
once again, and again,  
and for those slain,  
to the streets we take.

some protested,  
others became untied.  
a few even decided  
it was finally time  
to get unified.  
cops did that thing  
they always do  
and lied.



## dreaming of **days**

---

distant, cautiously captured in unrealized mediums  
framed in unknown and terrifying futures  
with an intrusive but welcome  
calmness:

sown pits and potted seeds will have burst  
through dirt in ritualistic dance,  
offering and relinquishing for years—  
trees growing for memories' sake  
and memories sake, only  
to litter the front yard just once more  
with fruit before the summer ends.

i look at every leaf and forever recollect  
the rich taste of your lips with nectar all over them,  
watching you stand beneath that tree and lick  
your fingers like only i had ever seen you do,  
the homes i made for you between the moon  
and my embrace while these leaves watched.

in the shade my children  
one day ask  
how we survived  
and i tell them  
we had no other options.

in the darkness my children  
one day ask  
about those  
who did not survive  
and generations of tears fall.

in the breeze my children  
ask for that  
banana pudding  
i used to make for them  
all the goodstuff that came with it  
but the memory will no longer be  
mine to keep safe and recreate.

in my home my children  
one day ask  
about the days  
i could not breathe  
and i will let them know  
that to even be touched by  
the breath of the Most High  
was to know that my lungs  
were no more mine than  
the wind and the olive trees.

their children will find me some days  
and walk me back inside from the tree.  
home will be a old, tacky mesh of  
earth, militant green, soft lavender, black bruises  
and they will ask in giddy, kiddish tongues,  
how we preserved. how we persevered.

never reserve truth from them—  
 as apokalyptic as it was  
 how we waded in unreality,  
 time bloomed burned and melted  
 before we chewed on it like taffy and snarled,  
 got cavities and truth aches  
 truth canals and fillings,  
 how we glyphos/ate dystopia for breakfast  
 scrolled thru coppercobaltaluminamironlithium coiled  
 blood diamonds for sport.

i'll let them know real estate agents,  
 millionaires and landlords and cops  
 (yes, the ones they heard of in those stories)  
 and other criminals, crooked crackers,  
 politicians, and bounty hunters  
 all had reality shows  
 with dazzling production quality  
 and budgets bigger than i'd ever know.

they will laugh and their friends may not believe  
 the ramblings of an old deaf beard and kufi  
 resting atop what's left of bone and pale skin.  
 so i'll press on:  
 we had movements that felt like life and death,  
 moments that felt like movements,  
 and life that didn't look much different  
 than death on most days.

we had to pay for everything  
to everyone white and some of us even  
ate roaches and took beatings and taunted death  
on national fatback television screens  
to pay for medical bills, college, groceries,  
a home, attention.

i didn't walk to school in the snow for miles barefoot  
but i damn sure did work my knees away  
for them loans.

(when their minds wander  
because their crazy grandparent  
never learned to shut the hell up  
and tells them same stories every time)  
i'll let them know, too, about the days pulsing with heat  
the lush of nature and natural laughter in our hair  
pillows of smoke and greens on baltimore grass,  
how we passed and puffed like it would be our last  
the way we loved loudly with tension and energy,  
shared poems worried together and ate fruit  
stared apokalypse in the face another muthufuckin time  
and took lovely little pictures by the rocks  
grounded, or how sometimes after a few hours together  
the world didn't feel like it was poisoning us,  
like time wasn't in the air at alarming rates.

i will let them know that friendship sustained me  
carried me and us, friends  
who nurtured for a season before leaving  
those who stayed thru the fire  
or rinsed away in ash  
and those who brought trouble as well.  
how i knew my right hand less than  
some comrades to my left  
how we could look around  
and see death stalking all of us.  
the bombs that did not go off  
the bullets that bounced off bones  
the shattered teeth, bloody eyes,  
bruised minds, tired spines,  
the wounds we could not fix  
the gashes we could not mend  
the cuts we could not repair  
the lives we could not salvage,  
the breaths stolen in the dead of night  
that i could never get back  
the carnage:  
handfuls of flesh and chained wrists  
pools of deep red and black blood  
we waded through until it all became normal,  
the last kiss i gave a dead lover  
before throwing my bricks.

humans incarcerated nature,  
 i will say with smoke pouring from my nose  
 and they will look dazed in confusion.  
     how else do you explain  
     the veins of our existence  
     imposing on the earth all around?  
 i'll point to the sidewalk, the powerlines,  
 the park where a parking lot used to be,  
 the strips of green between airport runway  
 where they now barefoot kick soccer balls  
     the dumpsters of beheaded flowers  
 the rails we hold onto as we cross our paths  
 the leash folks walked their dogs on  
 the fences erected for their own sake  
 and the violence they maintained.  
     nature, too, was imprisoned.

when the candy of innocence wears off  
 and i'm told the children must rest their eyes  
 i will wrap them in love  
 and hold them there for a few moments.  
 silence. nothing but the sound of breathing.  
 nothing but the exuberance of quiet rest  
 and potential energy will exist in the doorway.

    i will shed warm, gratified tears,  
     knowing the blood of my youth  
     sweat of my life and pain of struggle  
     was for nothing at all  
     if not for this child's peace,  
 to see them baked in protection and horizons,  
     wrapped in unfamiliar calmness,  
     choking on no peach pits nor on time,  
     wholly acquainted with the patient goodstuff  
 which i was never able to know or hold on to.

in the final moments before my eyes close,  
again dreaming of days unfamiliar  
when my lungs were weak  
blood boiled like peanuts  
apocalypse as routine,  
them days still distant  
more than the dreams  
in the eyes of the youth,  
i will calmly welcome the idea  
that nothing was done in vain.





---

no more starvin for affection  
from niggas  
that wouldn't feed me  
even if they could  
no more lettin the lavender lullabies  
sleep me thru fajr  
no more missed prayers  
no more puttin deja vu under my tongue  
and trippin on yesterdays  
no more chewin on thorns  
but callin it planting roses  
cause shit gets red either way

no more breakin blood  
and callin it poetry  
no more tirin two thumbs  
and callin it revolutionary  
no more runnin from lemon juice in wounds  
no more lettin wounds fester neglected  
no more believin the wolves  
are licking the wound  
to help heal it  
when i can see flesh in their teef  
no more wounds

no more suffocatin on the unsaid  
no more fear of what's said  
no more startin over  
when persistence  
is the harder choice  
no more pushin thru  
when rest is the harder choice  
(no more hands on my body

that don't touch my soul)  
no more free work no more free work  
no more budgets  
no more pickle juice  
no more daggers no more grinnin  
and no more bearin it  
no more of what i deserve tasting like guilt  
when it should feel like gold  
no more analyzin and criticizin and problematizin  
and theorizin for the sake of hearin my own voice

no more excess  
no more handshakes  
no more fucking zoom calls  
no more "baby imma do right this time"  
no more, baby. i'm so damn tired.  
no more

RE/SOLUTIONS

## don't wake **me** up

---

when i sleep  
it's like tomorrow came  
and passed me by  
and i didn't care to notice

when i say  
don't wake me up  
unless it's an emergency,  
me dying don't count.

when i snore  
it's in spite of my boss  
and my boss's boss  
and the big boss too

so don't wake me up  
til Mao wakes back up  
and sends over the ammunition,  
til the Pan-African Liberation Forces  
are ready to takeover washington

don't wake me up  
til that homeless person

pissin on lincoln's monument  
has a bed to lay in at night  
and he's totin a 45  
in the people's liberation army

i'm not just restin my eyes  
this time i'm fucking sleeping,  
so don't touch the fucking remote  
unless k!ng's out the pin  
and the klintons are in the bin.

you think i can afford rest?  
in this here dying economy?  
whatever sleep you see me steal  
was won with enough blood  
to cover every doorframe in egypt,  
so don't wake me before tomorrow does.





times are getting rough and my callouses are getting tough  
and i don't know if this month the freelance shit will be  
enough

so puff puff muthufuckin pass before this blunt  
becomes our last  
before we have enough time to realize they're right on  
our ass

you hear them drones hovering over the grass?  
they're coming fast  
so baby let's have a baby before biden does  
something crazy

let's have the niqah in the neighbor's  
backyard real quick  
then we gotta split, i think i heard 'em  
pull up with a stick

fuck it baby let's get married right here in our yard where it's  
shady  
you been a lover a partner sometimes a nuisance sometimes a  
friend

but more than anything a comrade and you're that til the  
very end

whether we go out with a pool of blood on the  
floor where we pray

or in clothes with dirt stains or shotup in the  
driveway trying to get away  
i think it's safe to say they've got us either way  
so whatever comes our way

our only choice is to just say fuck it  
let's have baby, baby  
before they torture us until we go  
batshit crazy

until the truth becomes hazy and our eyes become lazy  
and we can't open them anymore, fuck it baby let's—<sup>7</sup>

7           Inspired by the title of the song, "BabyLet'sHaveaBabyBeforeBushDo-Somethin'Crazy," by The Coup.





## one **eye** open

---

two more closed /  
 put this on the back cover of my memoirs  
 that yall publish after i'm dead,  
 when folk talk about my influence  
 the same way they could have when i was alive.  
 use these words for my posthumous awards please /  
 while i'm in jannah watching clowns claim me.  
 when assholes publish my journals and unfinished sketches  
 without my consent / like they did with Basquiat and Van  
 Gogh  
 and Kahlo / put this poem on the back cover  
 and call it a cold day in hell.  
 when the cadillactivists come and go  
 crash their films sets and red carpets  
 throwing red paint on their blue vests,  
 don't let them know peace in life  
 if i can't meet peace in death  
 don't let me pay their bills / with death /  
 if i couldn't pay my rent while alive.  
 when yall put me on the shelf in the bookstore  
 next to killary and koates  
 or some other liberal i hated  
 and sh\*\*n king writes my eulogy,  
 remember me as a pretty bitter nigga  
 who wanted to burn it all down.

when the riots arrive and the fires start,  
 my white mother may go on cnn or msnbc or  
 one of those news channels / i spent careers hating /  
 and speak of peaceful protests in my name:

you have my permission to remind her  
that the child she gave and lost  
was prepared to give and lose it all  
and would do it all again should the chance arise /  
so the word 'peaceful' doesn't need to come from her lips.  
one eye open, two more closed.  
if they put my face on a t-shirt  
make sure it's airbrushed,  
cut it into a crop top and wear it to a protest.  
let the dudes who set up tables and sell shirts  
outside of the metro stations make a good  
profit from me / until the next person  
needs to be screenprinted and sold.  
send a few shirts to trump and to obama,  
i was always sure they had similar taste.  
please don't let them think-piece me, goddammit.

my hair was my prized possession,  
so burn that on the steps of the whiteness house  
and tell them thanks for the ride  
or bottle it and ship it to someone who cares.  
at my memorial when people cry in pain for me  
more than they made eye contact with me / in life  
charge them by the minute. tell them they can  
purchase video if they want to add it to their reels.  
use the money to buy my mom a book on revolution,  
get justin, cj, and avery some new shoes,  
and buy carlos that helmet case he always wanted  
before it's time to put me in the ground.  
when they throw dirt on my name  
plant a damn seed, grow some lavender,  
and keep shit moving.





2



“endure patiently what befalls you /  
surely this is a resolve to aspire to”

everybody talks about wanting a plate  
until it's time to pick up the fork and fucking eat

if you say you want to kill me  
i respect it more if you mean it

if you hit me you better kill me  
because when it's my turn  
i'm not hesitating nor missing

if you say you want to hurt me  
i'll take it more seriously if you do

if grief is proof of love  
then this rage is proof of existence

life is proof of death  
and cigarettes are evidence for satisfaction

imagine, someone tries to rob your home  
but just roasts you for having ugly shit

because you thought if you could afford to buy it  
then it must look nice

you aspire to a resolve you'll never achieve because you're  
addicted to stimulation and speak like the braying of a  
donkey.

## obsessive note #22

---

what happens if i tell (YOU) how paranoid i really am?  
if i say aloud that i'm fucking terrified of the dunya's shadow  
and standing on uneven ice is growing exhausting?  
what happens when i can't outgrow the feeling?  
    that i lock my doors in multiples of fours  
    but i ain't *crazy enough* to tell folks.

no matter how empowered the .45 makes me feel  
or how safe the security system pretends to be  
there's still a sticky paranoia underneath my heel.  
like if i didn't cook it then i don't want to eat the meal,  
to sleep i need something way stronger than chamomile.

when do they start worrying? when do they lock me away?  
how much worse can it get, how much of insanity's foreplay?  
losing weight, pacing, breaking, gripping,  
questioning myself steadily,

desperately seeking clarity.  
is there a line  
and if so  
have i crossed it already?

## i **scare** myself

---

some times  
leaning  
too close  
to the blade  
of my own heartbeat.

trembling  
my bones  
as they realize  
the bass of that  
wheezy organ  
thumping away.

*i can't think and breath  
at the same time some times  
when the nebula of thoughts  
is too heavy on my neck.*

how the fuck else  
do i say this,  
if not in poetry:

some times  
suffering  
too close  
to the surface  
of life's window  
trembles your foundation,  
until you begin sinking fast  
waste-deep into capitalism's  
deadly old colonial quicksand


struggling just to get out the landfill.

*i used to share carelessly  
about the shadowy doubts  
i battled, but this shit right here?  
beastly unlike anything i've tamed.*

i'm supposed to pay \$50 for a session  
magically find \$125 to see the psych  
(7 minutes 13 seconds on the dot)  
another \$210 for the meds  
do it all again next month  
and the next after that  
when i can just write  
this poem right here  
free of charge?

some times i strike fear into my own gut  
scared about that cloud on the head  
churning out thought after thought after  
thought, intrusive, endlessly supplied.





(why can i only tell You about this in **poetry** and **prayer**?  
why do the words come out so difficult in speech,  
but smooth on the page?  
what are You trying to teach me  
by taking away my lips,  
my mouf, my **voice**,  
hurdlng my thoughts?)



8

ontological dust,  
or their **overall** uselessness

---

they dream of dust.  
dying in life  
for a taste of  
dust.

cups filled with despair  
that will make them want  
to focus the rest of their lives  
on getting more  
despair.

pages of poetry knowing no reason  
for existence beyond the  
page.

sharp forks of representatives  
shoved down the throats of gulls  
until the metal pokes through skin  
(again).

i knew decay had death for me  
the same week i salvaged the bones  
and had nothing to show for it but more  
death.

we all knew the fucking heat death had for us  
in the very moment we carnaged the body  
and had nothing to show for it but more  
heat.

days where the blessing  
is that it just fucking  
hurts.

they dreamt of dust  
and instead got  
ashes.

they asked for crumbs  
and instead got  
ants.

they looked towards the ground  
and missed warning of the  
rain.

they set their sights on dead days  
and so they became  
lifeless.

we chewed on mustard seeds  
and shared sweet dates  
until dreams surpassed  
sand.

we died in the name of deliverance  
and emancipation grew from the  
dirt.

we gave ourselves over to the night  
and from it birthed jet black new  
life.





(the angels couldn't get god  
to order them a taxi in time.  
said they couldn't get to me  
sanctions—oil shortage in heaven.

demons ran so muthuhfuckin fast,  
i got away for a little while but  
all my years of track and field  
didn't prepare me for that race.

i told the mirror if i failed a third time  
then i wouldn't tell a single soul.  
and if i succeeded i would tell  
everyone—simple math.

felt like the moment when a character  
stares directly into the glassy camera,  
realizes that their next move will  
alter the entire trajectory of their life.

then the dream ends.  
a consistent failure, per usual.  
a mouthful of dusty disaster  
losing to life once again.)



---

(i suffered quietly like i was told to do.

i suffered loudly—they said it would feel good. i suffered in words,  
in photographs, on and off cameras.

i suffered alone and in groups, in the underground among harsh  
whispers and flaccid truths,  
surrounded by people i love, some who wanted to kill me. others who  
merely held me while i birthed sorrow.

i suffered enough for handfuls of tomorrows and i suffered enough  
to put yesterdays to shame.

i suffered in face masks, bubble baths, and on planes. i suffered with  
my passport in hand

and i suffered in a kitchen full of comfort food. in poverty. in black  
and, unfortunately, in white.

i suffered enough to share with an entire village. nervously, out of the  
way. on display. ambiguously.

no matter how i do it, even when quietly, alone in a corner, away  
from the world, it's never enough.

i never run out of suffering and it never runs out of me.)

**title** somewhere under my african  
authoritarian **communist** boot

---

*I am nonchalant to the bullshit! (Yeah)*

*Yes, all of my thoughts are intrusive!*

[...]

*I'm only here to smoke more blunts,*

*And spit on racist cunts!*

—RICO NASTY, “INTRUSIVE”

everywhere disorder and confusion!  
it's a jungle out here, have no delusions!  
word to the Mr. Monk theme music!  
a jungle out there, said Randy Newman!  
the jungle's in my head and it's protrudin!  
yes, all of my thoughts are intrusive!  
my last asthma attack was abusive!  
i like to live my life very reclusive!  
i dream of pulling triggers over bullshit!  
so don't make me do it!

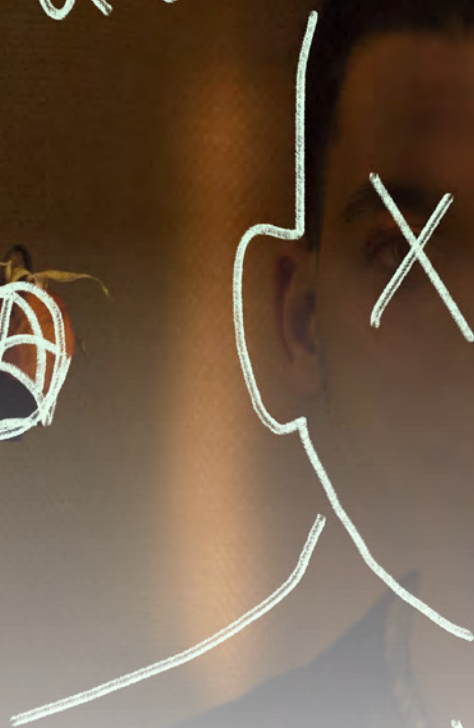
my thoughts might drown me  
in the deep end!!  
they like to grab my ankles  
when i'm sinkin!!  
i'm your favorite writer's favorite writer,  
i know you peep'd it!  
garden full of snakes, cut the grass,  
i grim reap'd it!!  
all that fake love,  
yall can keep it!!!!  
i'll keep talking to my self  
before i entertain a weak bitch!  
discipline saved me  
now i really don't see shit!  
you bitches really suck,  
yes yall can eat shit!  
if you see a crow one day  
then think of me and eat it!!

fuck your bullshit sophistication!  
i'm not here for academic patience!  
you bitches need an authoritarian vacation!  
i'll stomp your degrees and education!  
make a bonfire from all your publications!

*I wish death on all of you bitches.*

—RICO NASTY, "SWAMP BITCHES"

Dead



Insied



**seen**

---

the snap of a camera  
clicks in the distance,  
but i'm too busy  
to notice.

spent too much time  
searching for mirrors  
and calling it love,  
so now when a mirror looks at me  
i can't make sense of what i'm seeing.

i remember when i had to be in class by 8am,  
clocked in at my day job at 3pm,  
the night job around 11pm,  
organizing every weekend,  
nothing in between but crinkly dollars,  
handfuls of dreary dreams, bad friends,  
and a nap in the back of a 96 honda civic.

i had days that fully convinced me  
i wasn't supposed to see the night,  
nights where i would have lost myself  
in another mirror if i hadn't seen the light.

to be seen was a lilac wrapped dream,  
believed eyes on me was a need,  
even when the sharp snips of attention  
pushed me towards busting at the seams.

years later smoking in a room of love  
i got asked by a kind stranger  
why i was more of an observer,  
a listener, a fly on all walls  
no longer needing to be seen  
but addicted to seeing:

the cost of being seen  
is invisibility, funny as it is.  
seen until see-through.  
until the mirrors crack  
and 10 years bad luck ensues.  
speak. write. think. run. jump. do.  
them years in the grind  
all leave people's minds,  
eventually, you ain't nothing  
but an object in blue.

you'd get tired of being seen, too.





it's getting bad again.  
*and i don't know why*  
 or how to explain it but i feel my self  
 falling from the edges once more.  
 i ran from it for years and was successful  
 until my heels wore to the bone: 96 honda crashed

i always feel cut down in the winter  
*but this time ALLAH pulled up my roots*  
 and that other other kind of cold set in,  
 bled into spring, and i felt the worst nearby.

i was supposed to be iron. i didn't notice the signs /  
*and it damn near left me for dead on a d.c. bench*  
 with no time to save my self / for me to  
 step in when i could have quelled the pain.  
 now i wait by the phone. avoid clutter. i pray  
 and cherish your voice. hold polaroids tight.

plant when i cannot harvest,  
*gasping for air, or begging for a slice of silence,*  
 whichever fucking comes first.  
 the compulsions return, i know  
 they're here to stay—

**IT'S GETTING BAD AGAIN**

# lumpenproletariat **blues** for MonteCarlo's platinum blonde wig<sup>8</sup>

---

*He loudly proclaims that he has nothing to do with these Mau-Mau,  
these terrorists, these throat-slitters.*

—FRANTZ FANON, *THE WRETCHED OF THE EARTH*,  
“CONCERNING VIOLENCE”

(i've known ghosts and ghouls who walk like heaven depends  
on it; pot holes deep enough to admit they want to ruin those  
who pass over them; grains of sand strong enough to acknowl-  
edge how unlikely it is to become glass. we bonded over roads  
diverged apokalyptic pasts and seeing everything in red.

the last true drag queen i knew was a bad bitch that could swish  
pepperspray like listerine and always heard her music playing  
on chevy radios in heaven when others couldn't hear it /

*inna lillabi wa inna ilaybi raji'un.* i found my way to where the smell  
of her incense runs away and left bundles of roses, lavender,  
plums, saffron, and gold for her to carry with her.

weirdos kept me sharp and safe when the textbooks dulled my  
edge, and the closest i've gotten to god was when she asked if  
she could bum a cigarette with her hand already stretched out  
towards me. she knew death and rocky horror and didn't give a  
single fuck if i thought she looked greedy. she told me so much

about life, i ended up learning about death.

she showed me nights where the air feels crowded<sup>9</sup> and triggers aren't pulled yet bones somewhere crack all the same. first time a shadow realizes Fanon ain't talkin' butter knives: same night a blade itches to press against the musty neck of a colonizer.

i've heard stories of sheiks who put down the good book and picked up a piece of metal when time came. i've watched clowns and carnies throw stronger punches than those creeps in suits and ties who wear masks in layers, and i've seen high-heeled jokes snuff a crinkled sheet of porcelaine paper from underneath thirty six inches of platinum blonde synthetic with ease.)





(i forgot to **breathe.**

i lost my breath screaming  
and begging every  
trying to talk through  
through the paranoia  
weathering every s

reaming and yelling  
one else to **inhale**  
gh the tears and work  
bia and all the fears  
storm in every wind

meanwhile, I **gasped** for air.)



the breaths that i steal /  
 waking up feels surreal /  
 especially when dying /  
 keep it real i'd be lying /  
 when only dead bodies /  
 cause who protects me /  
 who stops the bullet /  
 who turns the knife /  
 who asks where i been /  
 and wipes blood off my chin /  
 but hey, maybe I'll never win /  
 can't let the devil in /  
 but when the wind blows /  
 i'm wasting no time /

depend on heaven's mercy /  
 and the blessings are blurry /  
 feels like less controversy /  
 if i said the shit don't hurt me /  
 seem to be protest worthy /  
 when me and death are flirting? /  
 if the blood's already squirting? /  
 when no one's observing? /  
 when the paranoia sets in /  
 when i lose my mind again? /  
 maybe I'm settlin' /  
 I'm a comic book heroine /  
 make no comparisons /  
 going out like a

SUICIDE VETERAN



---

i breathe often. (but never enough.)  
    gold curled all in my hair—  
    waiting to be cut but knowing  
        i am not eager to pawn it,  
    armed with shadows of doubt  
    that fall over contours of sorrow  
    like the stripes on my backside.  
i breathe often. (but never enough.)

stench

---

i rinse myself five times daily  
intentions pure pouring water  
from my hands over my face,  
yet the stench never evades me.

my therapist always jokingly says  
showers are a big problem for me  
but i see nothing so wrong anyways  
spending an hour or two scrubbing.

in the sun i embrace the burning,  
hope the scent is singed from my skin.  
nature doesn't have to dig deep within  
to hear these thoughts squirming.

cast my face towards the earth,  
a hundred brothers in the room  
all facing precisely eastward:  
anxious, i wonder if they can smell it too.

the days when the imam comes down from the pulpit,  
crosses his thobed legs atop one another,  
gives the khutbah from the floor at eye level,  
terrify me, because i wonder if he'll catch a whiff.

i remember 14, leaning out the bedroom window  
my arm perched on a sill, knees on a chair,  
sneaking sips of cigarettes thinking i was so clever,  
as if the smell didn't latch onto my clothes.

toothpaste stuck on the corners of my lips,  
i scrub something furious and brutal  
trying to make my breath please my chin,  
and yet still, all attempts remain futile.

if i can smell it, they probably can too.  
consciousness of the SELF, a worldly thing.  
drown me in sanitizer, i don't care if it stings.  
when that don't work neither, what am i to do?

in the same fashion i wear strong cologne,  
roll oils on my wrists, keep my neck sweet,  
all in hopes that when i hug my MAKER  
he doesn't smell the dunya on me.



## curb meet **stomp**

---

*And then they come out like roaches  
p-p-pecking away like vultures.*

—NICKI MINAJ, “LAST CHANCE”

if you stare too hard you'll see the rats  
the roaches the ants in all the cracks

look too long you'll see the bony little tails  
and tiny nails scattering along without fail

mister officer, i don't gotta own this car to fuck in it  
ya ALLAH, i run from the dunya with a foot stuck in it

if you stare too long you'll see the rats  
and knowing they're there will ruin your day

i don't know why the piggy had his head in the way  
who told his neck spleen and face to take that bullet?

get too lost in your thoughts lose your head  
take too long to answer wind up dead

hit the blunt too hard you'll see THE CREATOR  
miss too many court dates see the undertaker

say the wrong thing and lose all your paper  
let your guard down prepare to meet your MAKER

if you stare just enough you can see the rats  
running back and forth on their little tracks

running underneath drive thru car wheels

fighting off all them dangerous alley cats

scuse me sir, i was getting my dick sucked in that seat  
a whole metro here why the fuck you gotta sit near me?

them rats pray to the same god as me  
whether they fucking realize it or not

if you stare with your good eye you'll see the rats  
and spend a good while wishing you didn't

(leave my vicinity with their head dented  
don't talk about it but really did it)

raised my voice at THE MERCIFUL got my throat slashed  
talked down to myself got my shit mashed

hit me with that taser little piggy i need to feel something  
put me down great Ar-Raheem show no mercy

i looked too closely. saw the rats.  
and in this world you can't unsee that





(when you're done apologizing to the emotions you've silenced:  
find me. when you're done running your blood through coffee filters:  
find me. when you're finished prosecuting dead air: find me.)



ocd vlog #7

---

my adhan rings from the creases of my palm now,  
startles the part of my self baffled by peace  
corporate ads intrude across the quran app  
/ digital divinity asks for a subscription price

notifications fall from the top of the screen  
when i watch the weekly jumma livestream,  
anxiety pushes my breathing beyond its limits  
when i throw my face into buzzing masses

i speak to YOU / between a raging sea  
and the peaceful quiet of your nearness  
i rinsed skin wet something obsessive to get here  
embraced whispers of ancestors against my cheeks

intrusive is the shadowy stench of the dunya  
washed, spiraled down the drain  
as i arrange myself to face YOU  
dhuhr interrupted by the inescapable heartbeat

/ an inimitable worry within every breathe  
damn near dead from the compulsions,  
intrusive is the anvil above me

with its breathtaking weight

(and somehow, each time without fail  
You lift that weight with such ease  
cast doubt that it was ever even there  
hold me tightly clutched at the heel)

stammered breathing, botched heartbeat  
melt into the sea of prayer around me,  
unmoored by the room's determination to YOU:  
free cognitive behavioral therapy five times a day.



## smokin roaches

---

how you know you gotta problem

*smokin roaches*

look on yo face is so damn solemn

*smokin roaches*

filter to the back of the throat,  
parsin through the ashtray  
saddest troof i ever wrote

*smokin roaches*

convincin myself that the scraps  
are sumthin more than leftovers

*smokin roaches*

and just maybe perhaps  
this lil bit will help me get over

*smokin roaches*

even tho i know that dope equals death,  
still out here pinchin pennies for grams  
knowing it could be my last breath

*smokin roaches*

i know what it does to my head,

know it brings me one step closer  
to agents of the state  
hitting me with that infrared

*smokin roaches*

including those who deserve it,  
makin body bags outta alphabet boys  
tell em all to 5 times observe it

*smokin roaches*

that's how i know i gotta problem





PRINCIPE



ALGERIE

LIBYE

EGYPTE

RITANIE

MALI

NIGER

TCHAD

SOUDAN

ERITRIOTI

QUINTE

BEASO

NIGERIA

R-C-A

ETIOPIA

R-C-I

GHANA

TOSO

BENIN

CAMEROUN

R-D-C

DUSIM

KENYA

SOMALIE

GABON

CONGO

RUN

BURUNDI

ANGOLA

ZAMBIE

MOZAMBIQUE

NAMIBIE

RS-A

ZIMBABWE

SWAZI

LESOTHO

MADAGASCAR

MAURICE

i shot **myself** with a sawed off

---

in the chest  
in a dream  
last night  
and died.

in my nightmares,  
i always survive.

# let me make **one** thing clear

---

: they do not leave

they may be shushed  
down to a mum hum  
but they do not leave

they may argue violently  
among each other endlessly  
but never walk away /

matches under my ear  
hanging from my eyelids  
but they're never gone

they ask for fours  
they demand, not ask  
i count in fours

and when i don't give it to them  
they eat at my lungs  
until i just concede  
and give them four

they don't leave, ever  
bedbugs on a mission  
fleas with a plan

lock the door again  
*it didn't feel right*  
do it again, now

listen for the death,  
*it's coming around soon*  
you know it's true

breath wrong and die  
again and again and  
again and again, death

hefty doses of lexapro

and lamictal and trazodone  
only maim, never kill.

i have watched them  
spoken with true ferocity  
as they swing and  
swing and swing and  
swing from one side  
to another, and another  
and still never leaving /

they have chilled me  
into choosing death  
when i chose  
threes over fours /  
they have tasked me  
onto anxious ledges  
for daring to breath  
out of line /  
and have forced me  
to add slanted lines  
to the stanzas /  
which break the pattern

i expect no understanding  
delivered from any body  
who still patiently waits  
for the voices' departure

they never, ever do.  
no suffocation ends them  
no compulsion pleases them  
no magic prays them  
no dream unbirths them  
while they nightmare you.

they wade into conversations  
uninvited, always, of course  
demanding an attentive audience.  
they never, ever leave.



HELP! i accidentally told **my**  
therapist too much and now she  
wants to lock **me** up!

---

and if i'm going out  
best believe  
it will be on  
my own fucking terms

and if i'm down that bad  
for long enough  
just put me  
six feet under

and when the bullets fly  
don't say i didn't warn you  
or that fucking flag outside  
what it was gonna to come to

and when the anger  
has nowhere left to hide  
it'll turn inward on me  
and eat me from the inside

i'll cut my wrists and die  
before i let some foul shit slide  
before i let the pigs do it  
i'll grab the handle and drive

lexapro and lamictal won't stop  
them drones overhead  
risperidone ain't done a damn thing

for the voices in my head

it's a compulsion  
if i scrub my hands  
but it's casual politics  
when they shot my mans

it's a crime  
when i sell grams  
but business as usual  
when they draw prison plans

i'd rather slit my wrists than check myself in  
and just to be real fucking clear:  
you can gon ahead and send them pigs  
but i'll be dead by the time they get  
here



#233

---

these drafts rarely make it  
past my fingertips

i suck my digits  
until i taste bone

spit the words from my lips  
marrow onto paper

broth of emotion and salt  
salve for sadness in the throat

from experience i stumble  
unsure of past and future alike

phrases fumble, feet unstable  
as i try to put into lyric:

the touch of your madness  
slices of softness against me

i wade in troubled words, waters, and thoughts  
struggling to capture the prayer of YOUR beauty

## insomnia note #3—6:15am

---

dear friend,  
i've fallen in love  
with the dark dirty dismal  
corners of the nighttime

the moon's underbelly is warm  
pulsing with dreary life  
shaking in unease and hindsight

i grew accustomed to colorful calamity  
crashed pasts and car wrecks,  
something about the blood  
brought me some sanity

my eyes laminated  
to the corners of motel lots  
workers turning dollars to cigarettes  
learned me by name

when sleep antagonizes me,  
i get my ass up and out  
and into trouble:

traded death with a dealer in an econo-lodge  
dealt favors for a muslim one floor up  
saw a back blown out with the door wide open  
watched someone get robbed in the lot  
barely made it out alive too many times

the night is the bottom of a serpent  
with the gloss of fresh death against it,  
when you let the night lead  
you never stop moving

i can't tell you how many times  
my fight or flight kicked in  
and i just had to see it through

how many nights fear kept me alive  
up close and always personal with doom  
the way i foam at the mouth something obsessive  
for a slice of excitement should be outlawed

staying up like this  
waiting for the night  
to run into the sunrise  
should be illegal



insomnia **note** #6—4:27am

---

dear friend,  
i saw another crash tonight  
you were the first person  
i thought to tell  
because when i called you  
that one time i crashed  
you were the only one  
who didn't tell me to go to hell

there was fire coming from the hood  
with thick red liquid dripping from a forehead,  
another holding the bottom of their back in pain  
and someone else frantically on their cell

i walked over to ask them if they were ok  
and they didn't know what to say,  
i offered support until help arrived  
but they seemed offended by the gesture  
like they was too scared  
as to why i was up and out on foot  
at this time of the nightmorning  
to dare accept any solace from me

the look on their faces frightened me, too



# insomnia note #17 — 3:45am

---

dear friend,  
last night i watch a knife  
slice a flesh wound  
into the edges  
of a black man's ribs

it felt so surreal  
like watching adam  
trying to snatch  
his rib back

i laughed on accident  
when my therapist told me  
insomnia can be deadly:  
it hurts your brain  
stresses your heart  
forces them to work overtime  
can progressively get worse  
until your mental deteriorates

everything moved in lackluster motion  
when he pulled the blade from his jacket  
a flash of rusty silver and black plastic  
captivated all attention in a split second  
war of words turned to blood soaked blows

if it wasn't for insomnia  
i wouldn't be here  
in this situation  
in this parking lot

with a piece of gravel  
lodged in my slides

i wouldn't be a witness  
to the crimes of the night  
nor on the edge of life  
every time i get the chance,  
maybe that's what  
makes it so deadly



# insomnia **note** #33—5:13am

---

dear friend,  
there's a point in each night  
when the moon sloppy kisses the earth  
that few people are lucky enough to know

the sky a bright blackish purple  
wrapped in peaceful silence  
as it prostrates to make salat  
before the morning comes

i buzz around the neighborhood  
basking in its moonful glory  
quiet feelings fall on a loud mind  
few cars pass by, streets clear

the rush of a train persists in the distance  
a cat races into the stealth of the shadows  
trees present themselves in new form  
death quiets its whispers in my ear for a moment

fleeting, this moment always already too short  
silence disrupted by early morning commuters  
the loud crash of a sunrise above barking dogs  
as the moon loosens its lips from the earth

if i could marry these moments, i'd be the bride  
if i could swallow the silence whole, i would gulp  
if they could hook an IV bag up to my arms  
and inject me with this peace, i'd rush to the ER

**insomnia** note #34 — 4:05am

---

dear friend,  
tonight i realized  
something i already knew:

the highs all eventually dull  
with age and experience,  
but the lows  
can always  
dig lower

## talk is **clutter**

---

is the stumble from hoarded boxes blocking pathways,  
is dusty knickknacks, small glass things no one needs  
ornamental plastics, collected commodities clumsily displayed,

piles of news and papers collecting dust on shelves,  
is cheap clothes fallen from hangers, scents unidentifiable,  
is items lost and hiding and found unopened.

action is a silent thing that heals wholly.  
silence is an active thing that can fold,  
that can hold, that can bring sage  
to rooms in desperate need of cleansing  
and clear paths for itself. is a lavender calm  
that's as angry as it is tearful. is a prayer rug.  
and i am so tired of the clutter.

re:birth

---

i am not transforming into  
a new or better person,  
my eyes are not birthing  
new nor unseen life.

i am simply healing back to  
who i am supposed to be.  
and maybe that process  
looks to you like renewal

rather than a return to the source  
in the truest sense of the phrase,  
but let me assure you  
i'm healing all the same.



i'm healing all the same.



## afterword



in the most consequential sense possible, i haven't spoken to the world in a while. i've written tweets here and there, maintained a steady stream of writing on my blog, published a few articles, spoken at protests and conferences, had my name appear in some peer-reviewed journals, recorded some podcasts, sat on a couple livestreams. but creating content, it must be said, is not the same as speaking to the world.

i have not stared the earth in its stunning face and spoken directly to it in many years. the last time i did so was *Grayish-Black*, when everything from organizing, mental illness, and identities were somewhat new to me; that book was an attempt at something i'd only realize within shuddering moments of embarrassment rereading it for the first time years later. in truth, i'm proud of the person i was when i wrote that collection, but earnestly recognize that *he* is dead and gone, and not coming back.

a lot has changed since the last time i had something to say. i almost died a few times, my anxieties developed anxieties, i touched a battlefield of sorts, and ultimately got scarred watching a lot burn down. friendships—which i would have bet my life on at one point—suddenly singed away to ashes from flames; revolution came and didn't happen right in front of my face; i watched book deals, recognition, speaking gigs, podcasts, dope, and, at times, mere pats on the back buy off an entire generation of would-be organizers; decades of counter-insurgency has made itself as ubiquitous as the glyphosate in our morning oats. i lost more friends, family, and comrades in the last few years than i could count on my hands, and everything just kept moving so quickly. i got trapped in a saga of some of the worst, most exploitative, racist workplaces i've ever experienced in my life—from

so-called communists, too.

even more pressing and present this time around, i suffered health crises—some serious shit that shook me down to my core. there were weeks where i couldn't leave my room, moments when i wanted to try to end it all once again, and days that stretched for years. in an alexandria emergency room, i thought they were going to let me die on that hospital bed; they left trash lying on top of me, my arms poked and prodded in every direction and unable to move the shit off me; they forced me to pee in a bottle in a public room, despite me telling them i'm Muslim and it's important that i have privacy, all because they were *certain* i was on drugs; i overheard the nurses whispering laughter at my pain. just a week prior on a bench in gravely park, a homeless man with a beautiful smile and soft hands saved my life. i'm still trying to make sense of it all, and am grateful that i had the discernment not to live-tweet my pain and signal to the hyenas that i was wounded.

i'm not sure how much of this note is making sense to you, the reader, or not, but that is also part of the problem: you go through enough mental breakdowns, fight enough futile battles, give too much of yourself in the name of organizing for a stunted revolution, and your brain don't work the same way no more. i don't think the way i once did, and i can't speak the good word like i used to, and it's a challenge to write like i used to. my mind stutters. it's littered at times with intrusive thoughts, bloody doubt, and morbid paranoia. i used to form sentences worthy of gold, now sometimes i struggle to form words worth a lump of coal. so is life.

times is changing and i am too, and it is this reality which lends itself so graciously to poetry. i write poetry, so much poetry, every single day through muscle memory without fail, because if the vinyl of my thoughts scratch, it's simply an excuse to go to the next line. there is something i am afforded in poetry, being prepared to kill myself, as Lorde once said, and it feels sublime. the poems in this collection date mostly between 2019 to early 2023, and they tell stories and observations and thoughts and experiences that i don't know how else i would express if not through the power of the poem.

any mistakes or future self-embarrassments found henceforth, then,

are all my own, and are in no way a reflection of THE MOST HIGH whose perfection has guided me through the worst times imaginable. and should a single line in any piece of poem touch you, that too is but a reflection of THE MOST HIGH's imprint on me.

enjoy.

—D. MUSA SPRINGER  
2023







I'D RATHER BE  
**ALIVE AND PARANOID**  
THAN DEAD AND RIGHT.

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