

My dreamer and my despair walk into a bar

You know the one
Right off of wanna-be road
Near the end of possibility?
My dreamer notices the energy in the room
Immediately struck with infinity
Each voice, each empty seat is a doorway
And her feet are both left
Paralyzed by the magnitude of it all

My despair brushes past her
Takes a seat almost
Immediately he's been here
Before he knows the ways of the comers and goers
Here for cheap thrills or the quick one-ups
He bides his time
Since the bartender will inevitably drop by
He keeps his gaze on the countertop
Beneath his elbows as his lone mind wanders.

My dreamer, see she's really something else
Never mind her mind telling her that
He's a lost cause
She doesn't believe in lost causes
See she entered this bar looking for a challenge
To the way things are
She likes a challenge
She always feels capable
She walks up and introduces herself
To my despair.

We Became

Darkness descends on the home.
 Candles paint little Black faces in gold.
 The flames dance along to the song of the draft breezing through the room.
 Stories form motion pictures in the minds of young children
 whose imaginations run wild.
 Back when time and imagination were all we had,
 we'd run through the yard
 big as giants, brave as lions,
 light as fairies, fierce as wolves.

When they tell you that you can be anything you want to be
 it sits on you sooner than you think; it stays with you like a guardian angel,
 protection from the hate the world may have for you.

Boy, keep your chin up,
 Dry your eyes, wipe your face,
 You're too special to let this get to you,
 You're too strong to let this damage you,
 You've got family standing next to you,
 And you can truly be anything you want to be.

so we did.
 so we did.
 we became seekers
 what is truth, love, purpose, home
 we became healers
 and protectors
 and creators.
 creating a world to call home
 we became masculine
 and feminine,
 we became fluid,
 we became shapeshifters,
 we found home in our own skin.

we constantly became, and became,
 again, and again,
 like water.

MyCareer Mode

Minister David, a.k.a. Dad, asks me
 “what’ll you make of that degree?”

A real thinker of a question.

I’m seventeen again
 A lot less peach fuzz on my face.
 I sit down in front of the TV screen
 Switch the input to HDMI
 Pick up my controller
 Load up NBA 2K
 Breeze past logos and cutscenes
 And tap on MyCareer Mode.
 New Save. Let’s start from the beginning

I’m eight years old again and sitting in front of a TV set watching Nickelodeon
 The Naked Brothers Band is jamming:

“I can be anything I wanna be,
 I can be anything I wanna be”

I’m like, shit, yeah me too!
 But probably without the expletive
 I was eight and the son of baptists.

Fast forward a bit

I’m at the award ceremony for the Dallas Public Library Youth Poetry
 Competition

Performing a poem I wrote called “I Could Be”.

This little Black boy from Oak Cliff is inducted into the city’s 12th annual youth
 poetry competition finalists’ anthology for sharing a little poem
 that felt like a big infinite possibility,
 an incantation

in which he spoke it into existence:

“I could be anything I wanna be”

Inspired by those naked brothers from the TV show.

They tell me healing and becoming are not linear roads.

Well, that's a damn relief because every year it seems I dig up my history and it tells a different story. Suddenly today I realize that I've spent two decades becoming someone I no longer recognize

And the roadmaps I thought I had are now in a language I no longer understand.

I use poetics to make meaning of this language I don't understand:

Occupation.

Gender.

Love.

Ancestor.

My career might be a poem:

Tastes like a sour patch on my tongue
 It starts so, so sour
 It's hopefully sweet before I'm all gone
 I was born a little reckless
 And impatient.
 You know that about me.
 I want to be a part of a revolution
 And I know how much that frightens you
 And disgusts me.
 The revolution tastes sensational on my tongue
 Tastes like freedom
 Tastes like oat milk and honey
 When I know in reality
 That the finish line is far from certain
 And the process is much less pleasant
 Something more than momentary
 But hopefully not forever.
 Nothing is forever.
 Even water is finite.

Maybe my career will be like water,
 Like water memory

And I'm a river of memories and lessons and losses and love flowing as a tributary into one much larger river of memories and lessons and losses and love.

See I heard a bell once or twice,
And she taught me all about love and it made me think, for real:

i've been saying i love you since like seventh grade? And not just to family, to other people i thought i was truly in love with?

i got molly-whopped by bell hooks' words and now
i don't think i even know what love is anymore, or ever did for that matter,

But I know what love feels like, you feel me?
And I know I love love; I love loving

And so maybe I don't know what I'm gonna do in this world but I know what my career feels like, you feel me?

My career will feel like loving my lineages and loving tradition and loving this earth and loving learning and loving future-formation

Will feel like warm brownies and tight hugs

Will feel like mint leaves and spicy water

Like laughing so hard we might pee ourselves

Will feel like deep breaths full of clean air

Will feel like dancing in the moonlight to shake off the day.

When my days got really heavy,
They told me I should go see bout therapy.
Therapy told me fuck around and find out.
Therapy had them hands.

My therapist told me maybe I should become a therapist

I had to let her go.

Her advice was too expensive.

American sick care and I'm not sick enough to get help.

Sometimes I hate this place so much that I wish the U.S. of A would finally let me go,

decide I'm so unamerican for wanting to breathe free

that I am no longer welcome here, and I can be free of
the burden of assuaging my citizenship.

Then I can finally return to the sea, to see my family.
I could be free of the gaze that makes my pleasure feel like a spectacle,
I could return to this body wholly.
I could return to see the sun, not as a ball of scorching flame
But as the source of all my energy
See the sun in me
And the light I might shine
The light that little boy who wrote that one poem for that one competition
way-back-when saw inside him
That little light of mine
Tucked away beneath layers of low expectation and urban apartheid and
be-like-Christ syndrome.

My career, like this poem, is unfinished
And unsure
And mosaic
And pluripotent
A word I learned in biology meaning
 It can be anything it fucking wants to be
 Meaning don't fucking ask me,
 Meaning what do words mean anyway,
You tell me a picture's worth a thousand of em'
And although you tell me my words are powerful
You told me my actions speak louder
So let's fuck around and find out together.

Sorry for all the cursing, Dad.

Slow Grieving'

I've never cried more than when I lost you.
We lost you.
Unimaginable.
Even before we were able to find you,
you were already gone.

The distance in time between
our last hug goodbye
and your burial;

The distance in space between
You and I.
I was up in California,
You were still making it work in Texas.

So many assumptions and questions
Clouded the air between us.

A labyrinth unsolved and a song unfinished.

Were you happy in the days leading up to the accident,
the moments before you were struck?
Why did it take the officers six months to identify you to us?

Guilt is hefty.

In grieving you, the levy broke within me.
I began a rivering, overdue.
All the emotions I chose to bottle,
A beautiful, pitiful performance.
The wounds I hid,
All of myself I chose not to show
To deny,
All of me was torn loose.

The rains, my tears,
The tears of our sister

Of our father
Of our mother
Of our brothers
Shedding so much
For so long.
Your passing planted willow trees.
Your passing left me fractured.

I thumbed through your drawings,
read the letter you left for our parents when you ran away.
I never felt closer to you than in those relics of your mind.

I made you an ancestor.
I built you an altar.
Adorned it in your stones.
I made sacrifices for you.
I dedicated my art to you.
I tried to bury the pain.
I subsumed the essence I believed you to carry.
I tried to be mature about it all.

“we kalo” in my father’s tongue
“God is your strength, lean on him” in my mother’s
meaning “you move forward”

Grief is slow-moving,
maybe even on the timescale of galaxy formation.
I don’t think I’ll ever see life in the same way you did
before you passed on.

I grieve slowly.
I lay down my shovel.
I give up my sorrows.

Altar Call

This one's for the grandmothers
 I never met
 Who tried to fashion saints out of sin;
 Who's saltwater skin dried brittle
 on opposite sides of the Atlantic;
 Who's children found each other
 on the bridge-way toward their heaven,
 And built a home from their ashes
 And hid their scars in the attic
 So that little feet could be unburdened.

To the fathers once young enough to taste sugar,
 To know sweetness,
 come to me.
 Lay down your swollen arteries
 beneath the edifice of your legacy.
 Lay your head on my chest
 and water my skin in your tears.
 Make claim to the promises you made to yourselves.
 Claim the promises you made to your children,
 to your wives,
 the ones you kept,
 the ones you did not.
 You are whole and broken here,
 at my altar by the sea.

For the family I cannot know,
 I shed myself raw under candlelight
 humming soft and bowing low,
 tuned into your echo.
 I watch the water on my altar
 I receive the message through the medium.
 To the ancestors,
 wherever you are,
 I dedicate my toils to you.
 I reclaim unity:
 Umoja.

Bathe me holy.
Wash me numb.
Cleanse the taste of soap and sin from my tongue
as I wrestle with the pains of broken men
and exploded dreams
and shattered hearts who were told they couldn't love
the way the whole essence of their being begged them to.

Take me to your river.
Lay me down beneath the water.
Can you breathe for me
with lungs cleared of soot and ash?

Take me to the coastline.
Reach a hand from below and I'll take it,
show me the depths you reached in your escape
to freedom.
Back to life.

Take me back,
To the land that knew the birth of our people
before it knew our death.

To a world that is listening:
Do you hear the trickle of the water?
Do you hear the splashing of waves?
Do you hear the cry of earth mother?
Can you feel the rain?
What can we do
to protect our waters?