

Blossoming



By
On'Dria Gibson

The Way I Am

The way my coils nap, no need to silk like sap.
The way my lips poke as if their being stoked.
How my voice cracks when words are spoke, passion
evokes.

How the hair on the back of my neck stands when
curiosity lifts my hand.
The way my sideburns grow long, shaving cream
smooths on.

The way I look at my palms as I try to sing the song.
How each bump shoots through my skin, it's lived in
And turns my day as black as the heads on my chin.
Out of spite, I raise a grin.

Self discovery lies within the gazes in the mirror and
sounds in the room's echo.

Home

Music floats in the air as the steam rises,
making it impossible to see the imperfections reflecting
back at me. Strengthening the self-esteem, sturdy as
the beams.

Warm water drips down the drain, giving the illusion of
rain
I am baptized, a restoration of pride.
Tea tree burns my eyes as lotion glides

Father coughs up a lung in his room, Mother lies in her
somber cocoon

I step into the kitchen, nauseated from the hour-long
rinse
A cool sensation trickles down my throat, a
consciousness of bliss

Climbing the stairs into my chamber of despair,
at least I'm alone,
my bed is my throne.

Grandma's Land

He always says we should be living on his farm, living in
the house he was going to build. I think he's full of it,
none of it was real.

He didn't fix the kitchen cabinet nor did he fix the
bathroom sink, all he does is sit and drink.

He says he'd sell the cows,
Slaughter the chickens.
Fry their eggs, batter their meat, sit down and eat.
As a family? Please,
he's full of it, none of it was real.

He couldn't fix himself a proper meal,
Pickled pork and burnt veal,
There's no way he could properly kill.

He says our own sold their share,
They let it go but he wouldn't dare.

Only a few bites of land left,
He has the occasional talk with my grandmother,
but I think he should just save his breath.

A Bus Ride Awareness

I was a child, doing child-like things
Little undeveloped brain
We gathered in a chain
Parallel to a human trafficking ring
Others may have dampened pillows, tear stains

Yet for me
no trauma remains

Showing the bands of our underwear
She gave us the ice cream man stare
We didn't have the knowledge to care
Batman here, watermelon there

Newborn aware

Even now I don't understand
It's never just
a man

But the projection is blurry,
Slipping away like grains of sand

The daycare sign can no longer stand

Thank You {Redacted}

Thank you,

It's true we are a lot alike
Wanting to be seen, touched, heard, paid attention to
You established your humanity in this age of hyper
self-awareness

You shared one of the most important things ever
You are a young Black man who fled your still
struggling city

You didn't arrive with generational wealth and privilege,
only the beautiful dream of making it
Bisexual, Black man in America whose star is on the
rise

Often attacked with homophobic slurs when you simply
display vulnerability
You're beautiful

Carrying that rejection with you through life
We admire the great courage and beauty and
fearlessness in your coming out
Bisexual, Black man, broken-hearted one

Fear

She was hurt by the world's evolution.
Her mind was twisted in knots of uncertainty,
willed by the passion to create.

The world's quick changes burn her mind to dust,
only to be carried by the wind.
Her only real fear is to be forgotten,
Forgotten by those in spaces is too small reach, too
large to fit in.

She wonders what it means to live a life so pristine.
While some play in dirt and while others stay clean.
But often,
sterilization cannot save those rotten to the core.
It's the work in between fears that keep us going even
when death is near.

Starving

We are the sun and moon forever hungry—we sit by the
water day and night,
Watching the seagulls take flight

Each seashell is to be washed away and come back
again,
Lucky to be in nature's spin

The sun aches as we bake,
The moon starves as we look at the stars

We wish too that we could escape
But we can't go far in hand-me-down cars

Richard

He is her first thought,
What she really thinks of is his name.

Richard,
she whispers,
he comes into frame.

She rubs his tree trunk tresses in her brain,
but her fingertips feel his mane.

Then only his eyes she can visualize,
which reminds her of the dirt at his grave,
she feels the pain.

The Talk(s)

She said she was born in Egypt. Her skin was dark, her hair was always braided. We made fun of her and her family. “Why do your brother’s share shoes?” “Why didn’t you get new clothes over the summer?” He played football. He was big and dark. He bit his fingernails to nubs and sometimes his knees would ash. We made fun of him. “You were in the oven for too long” “When are you going to lose weight?” “Why are you so dark?” We grabbed and groped. We grilled and roasted. Why were we taught to hate each other? To sexualize one another in just elementary school. Of course, we smelled, sweated, and stained. Of course, we had naps, tangles, hair we couldn’t simply tame. Of course, we weighed too much or not enough. Some of gifted and talented, others not so much. Some of us didn’t speak English, some of us didn’t speak at all. Some of us were gay, some of whom were taught to hate. We as black children have to go through a series of unlearning, teaching ourselves a new reflection of how we should be viewed in this world. We as black children must take on the responsibility of understanding race and sexuality through our lenses instead of the ones shaped by society. Not all of our parents gave us “the talk(s)”. Sometimes one was neglected for the other. They leave parts out. It’s the reason our men kill black trans women. It’s the reason our men are so violent to dark-skinned girls. It’s the reason our men feel like their gender is something to prove and not something to be. It’s the reason our women fear trans women. It’s the reason our women feel superior to dark-skinned girls. The “talk(s)” should transcend being pulled over by a police officer or how to not be a statistic. How to not be a teen mom or drug dealer. What if your trans daughter gets a gun pulled on her by her own? What if your gay son doesn’t make it home? Do you black parents fear for their safety as well, or just the cis black sons that you cradle and coddle, rewarming their bottles?

Mother

Mother would slave in the kitchen all day, her cinnamon-nutmeg kisses sent me off to school and her butter-honey hugs greeted me each afternoon when I got home. Each day I would arrive with grass in my hair, undone ribbons, and cracker crusted lips. She used to rub my knees with the aloe she got from our neighbor whose name has drifted away, I hated its urinal-like but the cooling sensation against my bloody scabs brought me ease.

While Mother ran the house and sold sweets out the back door, Father would work out in the field. He talked very highly of his boss, something Mother couldn't stand. "No matter how close you get to that white man you ain't gon ever be like em!" she said. "Well, why would he invite me over to dinner?" he said. "So you could wash the dishes!" she said while howling and rocking back in her chair, amused at herself. Then father would storm off, drinking again.

One night it got so bad, I just didn't want to hear it anymore. So to soften each blow, I crawled into the closet, with my tattered rag doll, Ana, hand-crafted by Mother herself. As the screams got louder and louder I squeezed Ana's bean-filled limbs as I tried to fall asleep on top of a pile of fresh linen. I heard glass shatter and then a powerful door slam, I could feel the house vibrate then settle. The storm had finally ceased. I crawled onto my bed, heart still racing, I felt the coolness of the night. I shook and shivered but soon as I heard Mother begin to laugh a heat trickled down my spine to the tips of my toes. "Sorry-ass negro" she said, her cackling sounding like exploding kernels over a hot stove. I smiled to myself, finally able to shut my eyes.

I remember the next day Father didn't come home. And he never did again, strangely enough, I didn't miss him. Mother made me clean the fermented strawberries off the wall while she swept up the broken jars. "That was a week's worth of wine, I'll need you to pick some more at noon," said Mother, wiping the sweat from her brow. She sat down at the dining room table, rubbing her protruding belly, a tear fell from her eye. I brought her a damp wash rag to wipe her face, then she stretched a sweet smile. We giggled in unison. "When is it gonna be done, Mama?" I said quietly. "She'll be here before you know it, sweetheart."

Today I stare at my daughter's picture that covers the dent formed by the jar and I can still see the pale pink stain below the picture frame. Soon to be covered with white paint to appeal to white faces. Each lived in crack and crevice, each loose cabinet, every wiggly doorknob will be trend-transformed. They did it to the family church down the street, they did it to every liquor store at the end of each block. Mother would want me to fight, she would want me to keep what is rightfully mine. But there's nothing I can do, for they have already won.

Boxes moving in, boxes moving out. Unfamiliar faces wrap items I haven't seen moved in 50 years. They try to be careful with their touch but to truly be careful you must have a sense of compassion, a tenderness inside you. A sort of tenderness my father didn't have due to his inability to see life past his profession, past the power he would never possess. I cannot blame my father nor these unfamiliar faces, only the bosses that control their will.

Rose Water

She entered the classroom with the look of a doe in a hunter's gaze. Her hair raised to the ceilings and her nose stretched across the room. An irredeemable contrast to them but pure delight to me. There were only twenty negro students at Daniel Boone High, she now makes 21. "Alrighty class, we have a new student. Um, ah, what is your name again, Miss?" "My name's Merry, Merry Washington" "Okay, there you go class, Miss Merry Washington is new in town, let's be very kind and show her some respect." She makes her past my desk, invisible rose petals follow behind her. She sits down in the seat behind mine, I can feel her warmth on the back of my neck. I turn to talk to speak to her, "So where are you from?" "I'm from Nashville" "Well why did you move down here, it's so dry, so boring." "My mother got a really good job offer at the soda plant. And I don't think any place is boring when the right people are there." "I don't think the right people are here, just white people." She laughed, I stared. I hadn't seen such a thing in my life, I could sense the purity in her soul, a farm girl. Living within a decaying city, withering away each time the wind blows can make you disillusioned by the beauty that lives beyond the outskirts. Merry looked at me with not confusion but curiosity, I didn't want her to find me out but I had to explore what could be. In the fairytale that lives deep in my mind, after years of repression, I could finally go below the surface of that world but not so far that I'd drown. There is something divine in our race that links us toward each other even in a sea of beige-colored folks. And not only as a race but as gender, there is something ancestral about the way we find comfort in those who mirror ourselves. Simply because it feels good, simply because it's out our control. My attraction to Merry was not something sculpted within my mind but created thousands of years ago when our past selves first laid eyes on each other. She and I would roam the bushes, wear leaves and animals skin over

our bodies with fangs around our necks. Now we sit in our mother's jeans and grandmother's old sweaters and talk in our own language to one another. "So why don't you come over tonight, Merry. I can tell you about the town. You know, the good, the bad." "Now why would you invite someone over who doesn't even know your name?" Oops. "I hadn't even realized I didn't introduce myself. My name's Mahogany Jones" "Oh like that Diana Ross movie!" "Yeah, I guess so." "I wish I was as pretty as Diana Ross. And had her wardrobe, the dresses she wears. What a lovely woman" "Uh yeah, okay." If only I could tell her she was as pretty Diana Ross and that her beauty transcended the need for the lush life and glamorous clothes. "Don't get me wrong, I sorta like how I am now but it would be nice to have something more than this right?" "More than what?" "You know, serving them, trying to be like them. Why can't we wanna be like ourselves?" And I had no response, why were we so eager to cross over into their spaces? They aren't so eager to cross into ours, and when they finally do we no longer have ownership. When I got home from school that day, I waited and waited for Merry to stop by. I just couldn't wait to see her. My mother worked late tonight so of course, we have the house to ourselves. Not that it would matter much though, what does my mom even know about me? Merry finally arrived at around 5:30 in the evening. She arrived and everything was awkward at first, I couldn't make out the words "Hey, how was your first day?". I think I was more nervous at that moment than when I first saw her that day. I told her I'd make us a snack, she said she wanted to watch, how could I say no to that? She watched me as I soaked the strawberries and grapes, making sure they clean enough to be eaten by her. Then I started to slice these beautiful, fresh hand-picked crimson apples. She watched the blade go up and down, I grew more and more nervous as she watched my fingers. Her eyes permeated throughout my body, I could tell she was trying to figure me out. "Why don't I help you? I'll cut the

strawberries and rinse the grapes, I think they've soaked enough." She grabbed a knife and got to work, my eyes fixated on the quick motion of her hands and I almost forgot I was working with a sharp blade. I made a small cut in my finger, Merry quickly grabbed my hand and placed my finger in her mouth. My heart thumped like hooves on a track, I was taken aback by her actions. She looked me in my eyes and said, "Jesus are you okay? You're bleeding all over the place." I just gazed deeply into her eyes and then pulled my finger away slowly, applying pressure to the small cut. "Oh it's nothing serious, there's not much blood." "You should've been more careful, you know?" "Yeah, I guess I was just distracted." "Where do you keep the band-aids?" "In the Bathroom, top medicine cabinet with the mirror." She came back a few minutes later with the band-aids with such a nurturing demeanor, much different than before. "You know I can put a band-aid on myself, right?" "Oh, sure and I bet you can tie your shoes too!" We laughed together. "Thank you for being so kind and patient with me. I don't know if I'm giving off the right impression." "Girl, please, you don't have to worry about that! You're the only friend I've made so far. Well, you and the little white girl who offered me a puff of her joint on the bus today." "That's certainly an offer you can't refuse, that was very generous of her." "Yeah too bad you don't ride my bus. When I got home I had to spray myself down and change clothes before my mother thinks I been smoking" "Hey what is that you're wearing, it smells amazing." "Oh, it's just rose water. My grandmother makes it for me. I can bring you some if you'd like" "Um, yeah sure, I'd like that very much, Merry." And so the hours went by and we just lied in my bed. Watching tv until the news came on. She said she had to get going by 9:30, I can't believe her mother let her stay out after the street lights came on. I offered to take her home, at first she declined but I insisted since it was so late out. The thick dark sky melted over our skin and the moon

glowed between our eyes. We felt safe holding each other hands, nothing about the night scared us. When I reached her porch the light was on, I knew her mother would be waiting on the other side. Merry grabbed my wounded finger and gingerly pressed her lips against the band-aid. We said our goodbyes and my affection for her grew each step I took home. I crawled into my bed and placed my head directly where she laid hers, with the rosy scent entering my nostrils and soothing me to sleep.



On'dria Gibson is an upcoming senior at Louisville Male High School. She has been interested in the arts since she was a child. She started writing short stories and films during her freshman year. She then moved on to poetry and song sophomore year. She plans on majoring in filmmaking and creative writing in college. Afterward, she plans on having her own indie film distribution company highlighting the works of black women and LGBT.