

SOMETIMES ANGELS

SHANTE' COZIER

Chapman, John Milton, and Francis Bacon

The shape was his, Poets' Whisk
and unobscured, I could not
I was born inside and just inside
and stay like the poet Lambeth
I asked my name to be
Paper change and polished edge
writing the little book down
to my childhood's memory.

That of my childhood
I pushed my feeling please, I
put like the instructions and to
my reaction was to rock her

for those as sensitive as me

My heart jumped a little
From my cradle bed, I pulled
a kernel of a ripe sun
the taste of the memory
the multiplied

My imagination was wide with hand
We could have made it a day
the world would be to know the hand was
Hence we should be it
This place was never there for me.

It's been a long time since I've seen them—
we were, my brother and I
Benny, I could see
the top of my head
you had the name of me in the
and it was there in my age.

This could be a page of
though you're done with it.

CHILDHOOD, BLACK HOLES, AND FINDING MYSELF

She jumped into her Power Wheels
and immediately I envied her.
I was box braids and pita bread
and she was the pizza Lunchables
I asked my mom to buy.
Paper cheese and packaged sauce
wearing my little heart down
in every cardboard container.

Out of my magic box
I pulled real-looking plastic flowers,
just like the instructions said to.
My mission was to trick her.
She smiled.

My heart jumped a little.
From my magic box, I pulled
a kerchief to wipe away
the irony of the moment.
She understood.

My imagination was wild with limitlessness.
We could have easily been one but
this world wanted me to learn the hard way.
History is almost like fiction.
This place was never meant for me.

It's been a long time since I've seen stars—
too much gray blocks my vision.
Bitterly sober, I wait
for the return of my mack
(or just the confidence I had then)
and to lose myself in her again.

This could be a type of love,
though grief is also colossal.

POEM BY (INSERT YOUR NAME HERE) OR WHITE SUPREMACY
STALKS ME

That impossible, that other worldly
that uncontrollable love:
I have none to give to you

I am not beautiful for a living
Instead I make art in February
because it feels right

It was me you witnessed falling
head first with knees buckled
I will die down there

I fellowship in neighborhoods where
babies stay leant out of strollers
trying to catch a whisper of the news

Another Giant has been slain
The anger has already
spilled into the streets

That night the house creaked
and I thought it was you
I am paranoid

The next day I asked my astrologer
how the fuck to be—
my chart had no answers

SOMETIMES ANGELS HAVE THEIR MOONS IN SCORPIO

*"Michael Brown, 18, due to be buried on Monday, was no
angel."
- New York Times*

*after Morgan Parker's "Let's Get Some Better Angels
At This Party"
for Dario, my brother*

Hair like a god-damned woolly mammoth
and a smile like the greatest day ever
He is the future of this wretched world
quietly standing firm in his skin

He is always one gummy bear away
from overdoing it. And one Mystic iced tea
away from drinking himself into REM
A dream that washes away the shame of sin

Baptized in the bathtub. He is bristling
with youth, sliding into manhood
and wet with upright
downright, knuckle-headedness

Forgot his debit card pin number
Lost his phone in an abandoned building
Overdrew his account
Almost lost his cool

And still he dresses himself in Kente cloth caps
with brightly colored Vans
camo pants and wax print bow ties—
style that startles the iris

Color him green and red and black or gold
Pet his head to show him that you care
Give him tools to sink his daily sorrow
Value his life

One day he will quote Garvey
and eat his spinach
and carry rose quartz in his pocket
to remind him that love still exists

It may take him awhile
In the meantime, he will pray
for a summer job at GameStop
and throw his hopes into the ether

TO MOM, FROM CHILD

In a world where they genetically
engineer my vegetables
so that those too
taste like chicken
I choose to only trust you

You would never do me like that
Your countryside upbringing
always delivers me into rooms
where Ovaltine tea
and warm breadfruit awaits

I used to think I could out condescend you
simply because you could not
subpoena my thoughts
But I predict you will one day
You're so perceptive

That is why yesterday
I begged you to conjure
a brighter future for me
Another one with greater freedoms
and not the one you had in mind

when you told me to study hard
and finish school
so that I could get a good job
not the one where I marry rich
and live lush and comfortably either

I'd rather a future where you take me
to an unknown planet or farther
somewhere out of this galaxy
because maybe my fair share
lies there waiting for me

A future yearning to welcome me with
energy that will ignite my celestial spirit
I want to see the way its atoms
move quickly together
creating something like matter

Matter. Like remember how every time
I tell you what music I want played
at my funeral, you say that you
will die before me anyway
and why even does it matter?

Like that. A significance
yet to be conjured. But you grinned,
squeezed my shoulders and called me silly
My ears still ring with the sound of your laughter—
loud, joyous and embarrassing

THE ANCESTORS BEEN WAITIN' FOR THIS ONE

I only stumbled over a broom
covered in cowrie shells
And already, we are kin

But it was an accident
I was only following orders
Turn left,

easy right, about-face
pivot, halt.
And there you were

brewing with anger
I've been told that
dancing helps

Luckily I came prepared
with my conga drum
tightly packed in my purse

Quick, no one is looking
Let your feet say
what your mouth cannot

The ancestors been
waitin' for this
Compliment them

I watch you with curiosity
You acknowledge me
with wide eyes

We are engulfed
by the swamp of our fears
I whisper to you

As a gift
I will build us a rocket ship
to blast out of this big

beautiful, amazingly sad place
and into another dimension
There we could truly be alive

Wouldn't it be nice
to feel something
you've never felt before?

No turns, no fury
Just life
No one wants this more than us

MAGIC CANDLES

She has to admit
today does not feel
like an unjust day
It feels more like her birthday

The pressure in the air
does not feel tight the way it does
the morning after yet another child
has been murdered

That is a relief. The knot
of complexity that usually develops
on her forehead can choose
another day to afflict her

Today, she feels, will be different
Often she can be found
racing to the local civic center
where she passes out flyers

in protest of the latest inequality
There, her white allies watch
and sit quietly because
maybe there is no urgency

This time she will consider its truth
She will plan her time strategically
and perhaps waste it
if the spirit moves her

Today, she does not need to
pack light or travel with water
or wear her walking shoes
She simply can breathe

And yes, she will lay with her feet up
drawing circles in the sky
She may even cut out a heart
and put it on her sleeve—

for metaphors' sake
She is silly like that
Still she is beyond determined
to put her grind aside

She may devise ways to topple
this system of oligarchy
But still struggle with
organizing her google docs

She is not perfect
She has stopped trying. Instead
she will toast to the present
breezy as it is

Thanking the gods
for such a generous day
Maybe she will remember to
genuefact to the birds in the morning

But for now she will give them
her utmost attention
They too deserve it
Hopefully today will end with cake

MONKEY

Everybody wants to talk and show their ass like a monkey is what you said when the family drama became unbearable. I did not laugh. Not because I detested the family discord, but because I imagined that monkey with ass out pink, obnoxious and exposed to the world. Sometimes my heart is put in the same position. I forgot the flesh is weak.

WHAT I SEEK

Everyday I try
to reconcile
melancholy
while bearing
this assault
upon my person

What I seek perhaps
is not in the sky
Perhaps I should
put my head
in the sand perhaps
It is in the core
of the earth waiting
there patiently perhaps
for me to uncover it

The earth is heavy
enough now
to fall out of orbit

AFTER SHE IS CALLED A LIAR | RECIPE FOR
RECONSTRUCTION

after Lorna Simpson's "Waterbearer"

I said, it is perfectly acceptable
to be officially life-tired.
Just swear to set the soul free.
Remember that joy doesn't always
come in the morning just
because they said it would.
Encourage yourself to
come back from going insane.
Intercede like clockwork
when your anger arrives.
Where is your discipline?
Who will plead with you?

Do not confuse the cries of the universe
with those of your neighbors.
Always remember that no,
the universe does not whimper,
instead it screams through the wind.
Feel it on your skin; it is a slap.
Return it if you are bold enough.
What is appropriate?
Who will approve of you?

They will always discredit your memory. Still
feel how you feel. Remember to hold your truth
like you would hold water. Ask them,
Will they give up their power?
Will they tell their children that you exist?

I AM A HOUSE THAT SWALLOWS

*After Danez Smith's "Poem where I be a house, hence
you live in me"*

I am a house that swallows pain the traditional way.
I must bury it alive in the folds of my throat.
Nothing will stop me. Not insanity in December.
Not a marathon of non-indictments. No inability to
get out of the bed.

I will act my part and shelter the children from the rain. Keep
them warm from the cold of outside hearts.
Support them on all sides, just like a good house.
Me and God don't have the same duties. Unfortunately,
this is my work.

Outside, the wind whirls
and whips in a fight
against me.

I cry
because today is a day
like none other—
the people carry on
but you
are unremembered.

And I am reminded of who I am.
Just like an old house
built on weak ground,
I, too, will collapse.

SHE

She believed there was nothing
better than sequins

so she adorned herself in them
from ear to mid thigh.

Can she live and party and bullshit?
Must she drag her little truths around

like the lamentation of weights?
She hides them from the bouncer

at the bottom of her purse. She
holds on to her last wisp of inner power.

She knows they can't have it all.
On the way back home, the train

conductor tells her to please help them
keep an orderly train by not giving.

She vows to give with her dying breath.
There never was any night in zion.

THE ART OF THE CURE

The mortar and pestle
she used to mix
the herbs
was all that was left.

A trail of her essence
lingered behind
for weeks
afterward.

But it was the healing
in her hands
that I yearned for
most.

The wisdom
in her knowing,
the wealth
in her prowess.

It was she
who I wanted to
learn from.
I tried.

In my sickness
I took a quantum leap
into the unknown
in search of my cure.

But she understood
the ways of my mind
and found me there
alone in the blackness.

Note:

*Learn to understand
compassion
the way she does.*

The smell of the remedy
stuck like honey
to the bottom of the pot.
“Healing stew” she called it.

I was relieved by the shock
it gave my body and
the way it allowed me
to lift my head afresh,

leaving behind the heaviness
and fatigue. The way
my eyes lost the film
of goo that once coated them.

The way my dreams
mimic the fibers
of reality again—
I thank her.

I am what she
taught me to be.
Encouraged,
despite the world.

POWER AND SADNESS AND SCIENCE

You are interested in power
and sadness and science
A triad of reason—
An entanglement of hope—

You feel sorry that angels
have to compete
You hide your angst with
daily foundation

(Always hoping to sweat very little)

In your father's house
there are many mansions
No sin can enter there
But in your house

there are rooms with skeletons
that lock you out and small
crevices that possess
versions of the truth

With a smile sly like
the texture of wire
you solve for X
and decide to believe

One day you'll wake
and see abundance
One day you'll forgive yourself
again and again

Poems from *No, Dear* and *Small Anchor*

You are allowed to pause
and collect your thoughts
A trial of reason—
An encouragement of thought

You feel where the words
have to go
You take your time with
each word

(Always keep your eye on the prize)

In the end, it's all about
the words

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you solve for X
and decide to believe

One day you'll wake
and say ah-ha
One day you'll forgive yourself
again and again

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