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ROI

Suit of Cups

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I have a sharp edge

It has a name:

The Other One

It speaks to a part of me

remaining open to my soul

I choose not to look back

The thing about push tea

we all feel it the same way

It's the way it settles into bones

A moment that settles into bones

We feel presence in invisibility

It's from an ache offering space to most old

We all drink generations of old wounds

## Suit of Cups

Roi

## The thing about bush tea

we all cool it the same way  
It's therapeutic ceremonial  
A moment that settles into bones  
We feel presence in invisibility  
Sip from an edge offering space to meet old new realities  
We all drink generations of old wounds

## I have a sharp edge

gently rounded to fit in easier  
it has a name:  
*The Other One*  
becomes my shadow  
it speaks to a part of me  
remaining sewn to my soles  
I choose not to look back

## Collective Cup

Am I wired to love or survive?

Memory reminding me to face my shadow   rewire

Sipping that ancestral tea

Inspecting everything entering my mouth

Beginning at the beginning

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Dad made bush tea too hot. He transferred the healing contents from cup to cup. His thousand hand dance began. Cups started off together and slowly moved farther apart as he poured. The cups were close like me and dad. I got lost in the amazement of where the stream started and ended. I became a wanderer in cups of thought-- the Caribbean layer under my skin I tried to resist was exactly where I found myself -- I wanted to hold on to every single drop, learn every step of this cooling process, know everything Dad knows. His electric hands would keep whirling a few more times until sweeping heat released. Huge mug covered my face. The dark liquid burned until it cooled my insides. I held on to love's warmth. Old island aunties and tantes used to say they read cups to tell fortunes. Dad believed and so did I. He interpreted the dregs at the bottom of my cup -- *you will always gravitate toward that you secretly, most love*. The same shadow I ran from, I now want to be.

## Where's Wall-Doh?

Dusty orange light illuminated faded cream and burgundy damask wallpaper. I sat atop the second floor staircase peering down into the dining room. I focused on the wallpaper. My parents' shadows aggressively jumping. Then, everything got loud— damask swirls merging, light bent off texture.

Ma bought that wallpaper on clearance. It brought me down a regal rabbit hole where I stared at it long enough, I saw what I wanted. Everything contorted before my eyes— milk waves crashed into Guinep trees, overlapped mandorlas stared back, interlocked brain bricks, slime globs danced, sticky prints weaved new patterns. I don't exactly remember if I hated the wallpaper more than them arguing over money. "What's money?" I would run around, with a plastic Aladdin cup in tow, asking all the tantes and aunties.

*Deh Other One needs money*

A label for when my parents wanted to talk about me without me knowing they were talking about me. Every Caribbean family does it. The Other One. A silent kid undoing creases in a family fold, a piece of putty, a hysterical girlchild, a bookworm inside a semi-rotten apple, a good-but-not-good-enough. I hated the Other One because it was the veil covering my parents' faces.

As I faced that wallpaper, that moment, I did the one thing I knew I could do right. I created.

A sanctuary  
Where workers hummed in unison  
Raised voices every time the register dinged  
Overflowed with green clumps

A place where everyone knew my name  
No one called me the Other One  
I looked inside myself at Carousel  
Forgot my parents crossed an ocean  
Mixed bold colors  
Made me

I wondered if they dropped their trash in the ocean  
Careful for it to never touch me

## How to find your Wall-Doh?

### 1. Unfold from within

Accept all versions of yourself. If you don't know versions of yourself exist, find one and make it the best. Wildly chase loud and quiet truths. Never apologize for hating yourself.

### 2. Reveal yourself

Be human and god. Balance on both beams holding you up. If you feel yourself fall, show another you. Shapeshift. Constantly change in and out of skins. Scoop up the remnants and love it.

### 3. Act out your heart

Where to begin? Pinpoint triggers. Get into a flow state. Slip into awareness. Crack yourself open. Look and feel with intent. Focus and refocus until your eyes turn into love and you cherish your vision.

## Carousel

Mind traveler into imagination

I giggled, squealed, transformed my Play-Doh

I blended and molded bright, grainy balls

I finally had control over something

I created a grocery market

Called it Carousel

Gluey white walls, colorful Gumby-like figures

Bare minimums - eggs milk bread - fused into each other

A cash box with green clumps inside

My doh dollars and coins were pulled pressed smashed stacked

I rolled out benjamins

Squeezed sense out of every bill

My doh dollars were real to me

They were as real as food stamps

My money could get my mom to the supermarket fruit stand meat shop

My money could help bodegas accepting EBT to cover hot food

Carousel was equal opportunity energy

Everyone had the same chance at making it

A sanctuary

Where workers hummed in unison

Raised voices every time the register dinged

Overflowed with green clumps

A place where everyone knew my name

No one called me the Other One

I looked inside myself at Carousel

Forgot my parents crossed an ocean

Mixed bold colors

Made me

I wondered if they dropped their truth in the ocean

Careful for it to never touch me

## My Momma's Trip

My parents left Trinidad to come to the states. Crumpled native passport pages. Eggs left unfertilized. Hands stained from T&T Guardian. Tonka bean strings woven into teeth. Sun tanned leather skin traversing through life. Carnival rhythms coded into muscle memory. Gyrating to Kitchener on a negro. It took a village to pack a suitcase. An even stronger village to be left behind.

My Indian mother left with a negro to turn over in a new bed and whisper nigga man, make a dougla baby whose blood lines divided like Neapolitan ice cream, become an accountant in love with figures. A figure slowly faded into NYC skyline, freedom blended into Brooklyn Bridge's draping cables, cloaked naivete, dreams, sight. Sunday's meal, callaloo void of dasheen bush boiled down with vicarious trauma. Monday's coffee run, finally ordered Anthora's cup of joe the right way even though joe's been part of the family.

My Indian mother raised up that dougla baby on Circle Lines revolving around liberties, Strand dates stacking versions of self, Lemon Meringue fluffy kisses, and Corona-soaked lime wedge smiles. Filled the dougla baby's memory bank with American credits.

My Indian mother left home so my story could not be hers. So my state could not be hers.

## Planted

Wintery schoolyard mornings  
We dived into an encompassing cold  
Our faces drenched with Vaseline or Tub O' Butter  
We were competitive beams of light  
The parents who cared more added more grease  
Us Caribbean-American peas were shiny forces  
I was a force because of Ma  
She tapped into her blood's roots to lift us  
Ma commanded Americanism

She learned to  
sew up holes in winter socks  
bubble wrap windows to evade cold  
fiercely drape opinion on her body  
spin records into gold  
scoop dirt out from backyard bathtub  
get her little pea a good zoned education  
scatter coconut chips and table salt on snow

Ma wasn't ready for that isolating numbness

She made home in the kitchen to combat coldness  
Gracefully shelled fresh peas by hand  
Young & the Restless played in background  
She effortlessly zoned out  
Moved delicately tough coverings aside like her needs  
Smooth round green pieces fell into shining silver bowl brought from the island

I questioned whether the peas were worth the struggle

The genesis of her young pea planted here

Anchored in resistance

Submerged in rich soil while new ground was paved

The seed sprouted resentment

for being scattered across two lands

for being the reason why life moved through her like Senna

for her attempts to wield power over me

for ensuing struggle

Within that space of resentment, I now see her love

There were quiet truths exposed when she shelled

I felt her passion to serve, her power to give place a meaning

Her battle to spiritually and physically survive

I never shelled with her

I can still hear her deep breaths as peas hit the metal bowl

I wonder if some of the drops were tears

## Slurpee

Does anyone ever choose only one Slurpee flavor?

My Slurpee is always densely layered

Colors bleeding into each other

Always in imminent danger of brain freeze

Attempting to block out memory even though the brain feels nothing

Cold rushes comfort me

Binary of red and blue introduces intense iciness

Memory flows back to habit nail tics, popped nearest pills, stumbled home, friends

dropped like good habits, forced encounters that left impressions

Did not want to come back to life

Where anxiety stretched me

Piercing thoughts played on loop

Crash head-on into time and presence

I pause

Sniff

Inspect my cup

Grow into observer

Slurp away the chilling solitude

Allow tastes to settle on my palate

Taking it all in

**"I'm Psychic," said Jimmy**

"You from Brooklyn?," I heard his strong voice dominate over Broadway and 12th street.

I gave him a crumpled dollar and an eye smile as I was about to speed past.

"Yea," I murmured in dismay.

*How do you know me?* I asked myself as synapses fired.

*He has me*

"How yah know?," little Brooklyn twang since I'm exposed.

"I can tell."

Is it my accent? Didn't say a word when I stuffed the bill in the cardboard box. Is it my thick waves held together by my rice and peas and oxtail hair tie? Or, is it my walk- the kind of walk where there's enough weight on my right foot, just enough BOP on the left, so he knows I burned one with the homie on the block last night.

Yea, it's definitely my walk, has to be or the nigga gets messages from cat bones and chicken lips.

His name is Jimmy, and he borrowed Santa's jacket.

"Do you know the state of the black man?," he asked me.

*Do I know the state of the black man?*

"I might know a thing or two."

*I can hear the drum echoing in my head*

"Can you see Brownsville from where I'm standing?"

*I can see it*

"You know what it's like to not get in your own building?!"

"But why?" with shrugged shoulders.

"The drug dealers had it!" eyes wide, semi-bulged, "Oh yeaaa, they had it all right."

Teeth looked like piano keys about to play the illest blues someone's done heard on that corner in a minute.

Piano keys chewed on dollar pizza.

"Imagine that in the 70s?! You walk into your building's courtyard and you can't get in- not allowed and shit."

"How come?"

"They had it. Once they had it, you couldn't walk up in there! You waited, yeaaa, you waited until they was done."

I time traveled with Jimmy on that sticky Tuesday evening. I listened intently as Jimmy's piano keys spat out word after word of his Brownsville story. I swung on every word, awakened. As Jimmy's story unfolded, like a paper fortune teller, he filled in the gaps with piano keys still chomping on pizza while extending the other hand to collect wrinkled bills, no change, people knew him on that corner and they knew what he needed.

His narrow frame shifted back to face me as he kept switching his position to capture bills.

"Yea, Brooklyn (that's what he called me), where was I?"

Jimmy seemed like a man full of mystery and honesty.

A Santa impersonator who transformed a corner into a small world presented in a radical voice decrying all the edges of poverty-- exploitation, displacement, victimization-- neatly wrapped in his innate dopeness.

A piano keys smiling soldier who powered through the commodification of his small world.

Jimmy softly said, "I'm psychic. Come see me again, Brooklyn."



## GARVEY

Marcus Garvey Park Village was an imperfect stage for drug trade nexus. Conjured beef sliced hearts and simple living. Who owed who. Who stepped on who. Who spit the truest lies. Locked out residents silently weep but never flinched in the face of realities of little ones swept up in that small world. It was a territorial feud served on the rocks with red splashes added to faces. Next rounds got too real, too close to common bonds, too close to identities. Homes and lives got invaded. Folks forced to survive on any level they could reach. Leveling up and leveling over became the new games on the block. Those reddened faces left with courage and permanent soul wounds.

When that courtyard got too full, things got taken

an 11 year old boy  
teachers went packing  
garbage bags ablaze  
slashed medicaid  
welfare programs left out to dry  
bullet hole wine glass left empty

buildings demolished brick by brick  
unhinged doors left leaning on corners  
safety stripped from communal stoops  
courtyards turned to drop-offs  
waxy windows obstructed views  
broken vessels left unfilled  
neighbors' skins were the new jackets

## We ain't leaving

*We say a prayer for street eyes that remain closed*

Niggas suspended in grey skies  
Only thing left alive is fear, elevated egos, words that bond  
Flesh becomes bread crumbs  
Skin and solids turn to mush  
Drink their wine to finally experience richness  
Taste hints of forgiveness notes of celebrating life

*We see 'round the corner*

Bodies scattered in the street  
Bodies pushed up on other bodies  
Bodies prepared for impact  
Bodies judged with one look

*We say beware the ground under feet*

Asphalt crackin'  
Sidewalkin'  
Sidesteppin'  
Soul movin' quicker than steps  
Much is at stake  
The field beneath will shake  
Fall through cracks nigga boy  
That's what they want

Back to rush hour zone  
I can feel the bystander effect  
Eyes peking at me  
I shrink and expand like a Slinky  
Waiting at you to stop doing bad

I believed I could live but I'd been cracked all along

We emerge onto street level  
My chest split open as I push you  
My heart strapped in with you  
The shadowy staircase swallow you up

## No Poetic Justice

Bronx Aunty is making Cecina to create home, connect to a lineage, mourn her son. She drapes thin meat slices over a clothesline hanging in home front window. Secret to air drying, moisture. There is a delicate balance between water leaving surface and water leaving layers. Her son is an immigrant detainee transported to a Pennsylvania penitentiary. Everything hung in the balance his first day there--smells, voices, emotions, bodies, futures. The intake area, a massive space divided by fake walls, filled with stacked bunks. Other detainees were rounded up from all over, stories heard beyond the whispers, salted wounds left open, souls stripped, suspended in a climate for everyone to think they are cuts off the same bone. Green jumpsuits moved back and forth gradually folding into a continuous roll. A Salvadoran jumpsuit had been deported 4 times already. He came back every time. A political party hunted him. He witnessed wars, people burned alive. That same night, an immigrant jumpsuit lost his life to a permanent jumpsuit. He cleaved right through him over a frozen PB&J. Trim cuts exposed in the light -- prison companies backing politicians, retirement funds backing prisons, electronic monitoring backing ICE, cheaply made toiletries backing God. Custodial staff left to clean the mess. How quickly a green jumpsuit turns into a carcass. If only his aunty could do the honors of hanging him up for the last time. She would place him away from reality, sever any remaining anguish, and place a bucket to catch his voice even though dirty buckets contaminate the contents. Aunty would use cold water to cleanse his body of all the excess from the system. She would be forced to use their cold water — recycled sewage pumped with chlorine. On the surface, the water appeared fresh. Skin deep, society left hung out to dry. At the end of it all, the aunties and jumpsuits would gather at the body. The remains are lives without lifelines and beings carrying on under any system.

## SAY SOMETHING

4 train crawls out tunnel making space for ruminations. My Utica Ave. to Grand Concourse frame squeezes against metal bars, while an Orthodox Jew is cupping his faith.

*It's showtime.*

Chiming, stalling, jerking, begging is singing, preaching is saving, blood is covering tracks.

Boy contorts body to Afrobeat. His blackness becomes a straphanger. I clap. My 6 month old daughter claps. The boy understands the struggle when his fitted remains penniless.

I gaze at poster: IF YOU SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING

Focus shifts past the pole ahead of me, the many faces staring through each other, the hands brushing others off like they're about to sting.

A better phrase: I SEE MY LIFE, I SAY I CAN'T

I tried getting educated on my blindspots for my daughter. Make your world move in the opposite direction of mine. As life squeezed me and you, I tried squirting lemonade through engorged breasts. You latched on to my liquid soul that fueled your deep hunger cries because it wasn't enough. I thought me and you could still be fly after WIC, vouchers, and more than one job. I was wrong.

I wish I exhumed you from this weary body. Placed you in another's sympathetic arms. I would inspect the space you once occupied. I would grieve long and wail until it lasts in this body. When I'm done, I'll grow again and plant seeds on my womb's floor birthing a new me.

A transcended version of me who my own gut would crave.

Back to rush hour zone

I can feel the bystander effect

Eyes poking at me

I shrink and expand like a Slinky

Yelling at you to stop doing bad

I believed I could save us but I'd been cracked all along

We emerge onto street level

My chest split open as I push you

My heart strapped in with you

The shadowy staircase swallows you up

## GUINNESS

We must bring our own cups  
Raise each other up  
Like our moms raised us  
To coat women bellies with Guinness  
After making babies  
Dark liquid soul juice  
Brings milk and power  
To raise radical black girls and boys  
So they feel good, speak loud, step into all souls' boots, occupy space and explore it

We must fight to keep our pulse strong  
Keep us on the road of coconut oil

We must raise cup to cup  
Allow our tongues to be eyes  
Just like our ancestors did

ARCHIVE, a series of four chapbooks published in 2019-2020

*Busted Models* by Meher Manda

*Hearing/s* by Tyler Morse

*isn't devotion* by Duhita Cori Kresge

*Suit of Cups* by Roi

Each of the poets approached the series concept by culling from personal or institutional archives. Together, these texts create a library of archival experiences.

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