

Staceyann Chin

Elsewhere/Trini Girl/Jazz

↪ **Tonight I Want to Be Elsewhere** ↪

Tonight I want to be elsewhere
more so in that warm place
pulsing with the temper of my people
they understand my snap-elastic words
collapsed into the undulating heart of a rapid dialect
broken down to expose the memory of a stone love blues
and a dawta rocking steady in a blood-red pum pum shorts
worn only under the heat of a Jamaica December

I loathe the lilt of my acquired accent
and though I still say *schedule*
when I speak of being in Everette
or Adrian or Tiffin on Tuesday

it is difficult to remain honest
because some people will never believe
anything you say

A girl in Wenatchee Washington
tells me I fuck women by choice
black mothers need to pray more for their black sons
she said
racism is a choice the victim makes
and God will do everything to save us

God will always send his anointed to touch the unprotected

When I was exactly fourteen years and two months old
a preacher man told me I had glorious breasts for a body that small
young black girl that I was
I was flattered by his attentions
might have had sex with him
if his mouth did not smell like feet

And it's funny
how we grow out of things like that in a foreign country
lovers need only be breathing
the older we get
the more grateful we are for the lone phone call

from Atlanta
or Austria
inside the dark of this America
a faraway voice can sound like a window
and if you say it just right
New York becomes a prayer
for those who need to belong to somewhere
anywhere is better than here
where the dialects merge soft into one another
like the dark flesh we label inferior

Under the cruel tongue of an unforgiving fire
I walk softer in strange places
my body disguised in Texas
in Washington DC
nobody recognizes me in Cincinnati
I could be anyone in Cleveland
just another body in the line-up
strange bitch with the funny accent
I'm just another immigrant
on the run
been moving so long
my feet don't need direction anymore
this is just another night
I am just another immigrant

wishing I was someplace that spills
the warm tears of my people
they understand my words
without the need for the cool
apologetic
and too often
imprecise translation

↪Trini Girl: for lynne↪

Trini girl
with you grandmother silence
twisted tight into the roots of your copper locks
 the follicle a shade darker than the tips
 wish you could tell me
exactly where the color hurts
 when the great light of mornings
 dark showers and see-through
 tears are not enough to hold you
together
 let me hold you
 sometimes
 let us
 mourn the loss of some lover or other
together
 be dazzling beyond the lyric of rhymes we turn

like tricks to convince each other
we are surviving

I know you are surviving

I recognize the Toni gleam
in the slow pivot of emotion you carry in your mother's
mother's indifference
spine ramrod straight
backbone upright and unending
body perfect between us

I am grateful for the parallax
of wet in your eye

my own vision is frequently obscured
tears/island love song/ the rescue/the constant
the cooing "hush girl- everything go be alright"
too often you pull away too fast
but when you know my shoulders
have stopped the heaving the sloping
the need for things I have not learnt to say

I wish you would stay longer
sometimes
wish I could ask how the night went
or how you swallow the sorrow alone

the clear uncertain saliva rushing
off your back

How do you stand the lack of warm
in your bed

your white sheets stained
only with the scent of memory

wish I could ask you the questions
we seem to raise
only in metaphors

But I have long learned to hold you
close with clever knots of dyed
hair tied into the known performance

I have accepted your grandmother's silence

I have learned to recognize the gleam
in the tiny flash of light that no longer haunts me
it just makes me want to hold you
more now
because I know you cry

↩ Jazz ↩

These walls of unthinkable opportunities
curve close around our mounting ambitions
performers pushing against performers
publishers pricing the fruits of our strange struggle
towards honesty

There was a time
when rebellion and poetry
required nothing to sustain each other
poets dwelled among poets
who were willing to die for the word
we were writers wanting to live for little else
these overused clichés were lines
we all believed in
we were just looking for a better way to write them

Back then
I would have challenged
that Jamaican woman in my doctor's office
shouting that
“faggot-ism is a disease we need to be cured from”
without thinking I would have moved
to correct that wrong
with so many black faces in that room
I would have known how important it was to be out

But these days
my lips are stuck to the ass-crack of that mini-dick
executive deciding how much I will earn this year
I can't seem to forget
that he could easily make me
the first famous Caribbean-American-lesbian-diva
 have me cuss you out in two languages
 tell you 'bout yuh modda-fucking-bumbo-raas-claat-
 two-face-nigger-bitch-homophobic-racist-cunt-self

that image
is easy enough to digest
for those plugged into the idiot box
revolution is acceptable as folded into programming

We all have been closing our eyes
against this flash of light
the religious right keeps blaming on the poor Muslims
ignorance is the greatest danger we can pass on to our children
Kermit and the Cookie Monster are not enough anymore
Sesame Street was never that diverse anyway
 it was never ok to be green
no racism on that multi-cultural blue screen

Back when Big Bird was sporting spandex

I wasn't an almost American yet
red stripes and blue and white stars
still stood for universal freedom
back then

I was steady grooving' to Langston
and Braithwaite
and the blues
back then
hope was the blood that fuelled our veins

I want to make my way back
back to when the laughter was more than the joke
back when freedom-fighters were yoked
by callused hands and careless feet
back
when art
and the Man
were two separate issues

Back when writers wrote
what they wanted regardless of money
back when the blues were laced with something sweet
 like the war cry of revenge
 and the writers
 called that shit Jazz
and white people still wondering how that nigger noise got up
under their skin

and the dancers called it

Jazz

the future

was a flexible skyscraper we all were constructing

Jazz

black bodies moved sexy

under the cover of an assumed night

and I want to write like that

Jazz

without the pomp

without the ceremony

without the bony hip of some MTV model competing with my pen

I want to travel

back to way back when the blues

was the ache of a landless people

back when the dust was not so thick over these dreams

I want to live

the baseline of that forgotten generation

hear the screams of Billy

and Nina

and Zora

and Jazz

want to go to bed with Coltrane

and Miles

and Domino and Jazz

Fuck you Mr. Big Time Record producer

Duke Ellington played his Jazz

Fuck you Mr. Casting Director

Charlie Parker played his Jazz

Fuck you Mr. I'm gonna pimp you for you art

till we can no longer make money from you

I will not let you

kill the rhythm in my

Jazz

I am going to play it

Jazz

play it—even if I die poor

unmarked grave—Zora

away from my own people—Nina

gonna play it

like Nina

like Ella

like Sarah

like Jazz

like freedom

like fighter

like fuck you

like jazz

like freedom

like fighter

like fuck you

like jazz

like freedom

like fighter

like fuck you!

Like jazz...

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