

Muse: Judge

Sheila Abdus-Salaam did not
kill herself. How could she?
She ain't a star that just
decides one day to die out,
she was a planet & some asteroid
knocked her off orbit, turned her
into another dead Black woman.

The news feeds us the possibilities
of what they know which is a kind of
whiteness that imagines Black women
killing themselves in jail cells & public
parks or a kind of world where Black girls
disappear from their neighborhoods
only to pop up later having joined
the circus or a cult.

Whiteness thinks Blackness is whiteness.
Whiteness thinks we the same. & how
could we be? We be the starved,
the overlooked, the myth whiteness
makes up to feel better about their
place in things—& sometimes we're
too loud & sometimes they decide we
gotta go, & when we are murdered we are
like a tree, no one around to hear us
fall

Listen, a judge died, she was Black,
let that not be a noiseless death,
let it be earsplitting, let it be thunderous—

A Perfect Game

To this day I still remember sitting
on my abuelo's lap watching the Yankees hit,
then run, a soft wind rounding the bases
every foot tap to the white pad gentle as a kiss.

How I loved those afternoons languidly
eating jamón sandwiches & drinking root beer.

Later, when I knew something about the blue collar
man—my father who worked with his hands & tumbled
into the house exhausted like heat in a rainstorm—
I became a Mets fan.

Something about their unclean faces
their mustaches seemed rough
to the touch. They had names like Wally & Dykstra.
I was certain I would marry a man just like them

that is until Sammy Sosa came along

with his smile a reptile that only knew about laying in the sun.
His arms where canons & his skin burnt cinnamon
that glistened in my dreams.

Everyone said he was not beautiful.
Out in the streets where the men set up shop playing dominoes
I'd hear them say between the yelling of capicú
"como juega, pero feo como el diablo."

I knew nothing of my history
of the in-fighting on an island in which one side swore
it was only one thing: pallid, pristine. & I didn't know
that Sammy carried this history like a tattoo.

That he wished every day to be white.

It is a perfect game this race war, it is everywhere, living
in the American bayou as much as
the Dominican dirt roads.

It makes a man do something to his skin that seems unholy.
It makes that same man change eye color like a soft
summer dress slipped on slowly.
It makes a grandmother ask her granddaughter

if she's suffering
from something feverish
because that could be the only excuse why
her hair has not been straightened
like a ballerina's back dyed the color of wild
daffodils growing in an outfield.

Sammy hit 66 home runs one year
& that was still not enough
to make him feel handsome

or worthy of that Blackness that I believe a gift
even today while Black churches burn & Black bodies
disappear from one day to the next the same as old
pennies

I think of him often barely remember what he looked like
but I can recall his hunched shoulders in the
dug out his perfect swing
 & how maybe he spit out something black
from his mouth after every single strike—

MUSE FOUND IN A COLONIZED BODY

III.

Trauma is inherited
They built a country on trauma
A country with a death wish
A mad country

Some days

I want to swallow a million stars
spit them out
start over—

✱

& it took me a moment to swallow

murder ::

& I wanna holler hallelujah!

slow whistles escaping through my teeth

a Black man is still dead

井

horrified at my own bitterness

to a hero in this story

I won't forget your name I will always remember

away

& to the grass

Walter's body

If I stare too hard at the world it all becomes an assembly line
 Lover, I beg you gift me a revolution—

Up on My Bougie Ass Shit

The brie cheese priced at \$30/lb
 The face cream that promises to drop 5 years
 The yoga class that suspends you in mid air
 The forearm tattoo with blackbirds
 The septum ring with emeralds
 The mattress that regulates your temperature
 The Spanish ham made from happy pigs
 The cashmere throw that doubles as a scarf
 The bottle of wine for special occasions
 let me bathe in it—
 The body massage that uses hot stones
 The infrared sauna that melts fat fast
 The first class seat to Paris
 to Dubai
 to Cape Town
 to Seychelles
 to Bali
 to Maldives

Sometimes I be up on that bougie ass shit
 A full moon is just another way for me to shift the tides
 A sunny day a vault full of vitamin D

I want to get paid to do kegels with my yoni egg in a king
 size bed after my vajacial while everyone watches—

I have big dreams for big
 things

Some days I can't stand myself I am so pretentious
Some days I fill my Anthropologie cart to the brim
& then delete

Some days I can taste the caviar on my tongue
I can feel the feathers in the bed
I can drag my lips across a gold bowl
full of manuka honey

& quiver from the extravagance of it all

Some days I say dinner at Per Se I deserve it
Some days I am made of glitter I explode—

Muse Found in LES

Something about Avenues A through D with their gaze on me all fishnet
stocking like holey & holy. & the way that if I turn on just the right corner I'll
find myself falling for a long-haired dude with a pretty mouth & a surgeon's
hands. & I still remember that one night, coming out of Nuvo how the 6'3"
Lady Gaga look alike grabbed my hand & serenaded me. So we walked to
Orchard & sat in the Taqueria for hours eating guac & drinking margaritas
talking shit about all the men whose hearts we'd broken. & we wished that
Katja had not been so crowded because we really wanted a pretzel with cheese
& to share a sizzling sausage plate & for a moment nothing else mattered ex-
cept our frantic longing for goo & salt & someone's hot skin on ours—

Hamilton Heights Starbucks

Been waiting for a Hamilton Heights Starbucks
for 10 years. Dreaming of Sunday morning papers
& poems while sippin' my triple venti half sweet
non-fat caramel macchiato to the latest coffee house
appropriate tunes. I wanna be a white girl, no cares
just lounging about with hipster black glasses & a cute
but non-threatening boyfriend waiting for me downtown
so we can hit up first Saturdays at the Brooklyn Museum
before an indie concert at the pier at dusk in fall.

I want a world where all those things do not spell gentrification.

Where I don't think about Cornel West being arrested in
Ferguson between my third shot of espresso & my weekly
trip to Whole Foods & for a moment I am seasick, because
Middle Passage is still happening, except now we are being
transported in police vans to prisons made just for us.

No one drinks white mochas but still it stays on the menu.

Last night, I had to bring my eighty-year-old neighbor
my leftovers because these days her foot don't work
too well & her children have forgotten her name
& cat food is just so damn expensive ever since
the C-Town supermarket got themselves an organic section.

In order to wake up each morning, I can't think too hard on this world.

Maybe I should really be careful what I wish for,
that Starbucks is coming whether I wish it so
or not. & did I mention, my 80-year-old neighbor used to be
a concert pianist. She played at Lincoln Center, her whole
life dedicated to her brown elegant fingers touching white—

wine goblets pouring out rainwater
pouring out desire like ten thousand
meteors flashing in the sky. There,

look there, somewhere between this
constellation & that, every poem I've
ever written, in the universe's library
undiscovered & weeping in the dark—

Confession

If I knew back then that I'd one day be a poet
that one day my words would matter
that one day I might mean something to someone
I might not have had that abortion in '93. Or maybe
I would have, but under a different name. Anne
Sexton taught me everything about lust & shame
but nothing about regret. No matter, when they ask
me why I did it, I'll tell them I was young
& I desperately wanted the fruit to fall far
from the tree, that is to say, my mother's face
is a red stone & I wanted to be a diamond—

MUSE FOUND IN A COLONIZED BODY

VIII.

Even though there are things
I can't let go of—your smile
at high noon, or the way you
would stare into my body, as
though I housed a whole
country there. & what's
a country in a body except a
colony? & colonization can
happen to a heart as well
as a whole people. & people
seem to overlook that love is
not a freight truck that runs
over the worst parts of us;
it is a bird watcher, face
stretched out towards heaven
waiting to spot wings. & what
do I know about heaven? The
same thing I know about wings,
I can't have it—

Complicated Muse

Last night I could've sworn I time traveled
not forward or back, but askew & slanted
It's my new superpower, how I move
through the world, never in a straight line

I want to know everything about myself
so I spend hours asking the hard questions
What city do you really belong in?
What goddess are you?
What mythical creature do you most resemble?
How many days would you survive in a zombie apocalypse?
How do you love?

Imaginings are wasteful

How we invest in them &

eventually we will break a mirror

or spill salt & all the reverie will be for naught

I want a muse with fishnet abs that can double

as a dream catcher or a mesh for capturing extinct things:

unicorns

Muse Found on Tinder

Your personal statement: KEEP IT SIMPLE, STUPID!
& I swipe because of your eyes two Neptunes
& you write to me first: *You're so fucking gorgeous, the things I'd do to you—*
& I obsess over your taut body, tight muscles over a Viking's skeleton.

& before we've even met I've written
three poems & have come twice

& I need to
see you
touch you
because when water is this free you keep the faucet running

& my sister warns me about: white boys

they will treat us
like our daddies do
constant abandonment

& I ignore her
because
I am so fucking gorgeous
& the things you'd do to me—

& when we meet I realize we're each other's fetish
& when we meet I am already contemplating the door
in the back of my mind
I am terrified of a microaggression

in bed
I'll be forced to
After all
& I need you to be this way,
that stays—
naked
remain silent
I am a coward
a man

Muse Found in Magical Realism

She was born with lace gloves on.

It was a miracle.

Her hands were light & everything
she touched turned to something
else.

It was a problem clearly,
like when she learned to walk & went
about the house turning the furniture
into dolls. Porcelain everywhere—

Let's not even talk about her father's
face, the first time she touched his cheek
it was a tree, it offered her shade
from the summer's heat.

Imagine when she learned how to kiss
she was fascinated by lips & reached for them.
Her first love sported an elephant's trunk
her second an owl's boney beak.

I want to say that at some point she
learned to control it, that when lonely
she would walk out into the city streets
touch a street lamp & a lover would appear

his beard perfect for touching. But she
was never able to, else he'd become another

thing. Her ability grew unapologetic
she touched her breasts once & they grew
two sizes with orchid faces.

& did I mention she never mastered the art
of love fickle thing, how could she?
When everything she desired always turned
out to be different.

Towards the end, she took off the gloves
to feel the world & it turned into a pile of
clovers. Having lost everything she touched
her own body & became cattle
she ate the world ate it all—