

Superpower

My love is strong like my mother.

My love is so big it needs a new name.

I been chewed up in the mouth of a man.

I been promised & lied to & real
close with the floor & my tear ducts
& still

my love know how to fill a room.

My love is a superpower—got it from my mama,
who gave me her blood & my daddy's
last name. I am named after a love
that refused to break. I am proof
of what survives / depression / death /
I inherited myself / I'm an endless
well / clear water / the surest you ever drank /

I look in the faces of men who left
& say *It was an honor to be loved by me.*
You have no idea / the worlds I built / while humming
a song that used to kill me. I know
my voice / know what this spirit is capable of /
It is an honor to be loved by me.

When my love was spat on & bullied,
twisted & made ugly by unworthy hands, men
who did not love me but wanted
things from me / I could have chosen to float /
to believe in drifting / & homelessness /
& anything that makes me less rooted /
to this earth / the thing is / I was made
for this / held together by warmth /
& a stitch of light / guided / by my mother's hand /
& my daddy's voice / in the wind / I was made
from this.

I couldn't leave my love if I wanted to.
It's the truest thing I ever learned to do.

Bearer of the embarrassing smile,
keeper of all my teeth, I say
I love you & my body says
We know how to do this.
I've been alive, here,
unrequited, here, & there is nothing wrong
with carrying a love bigger than you /
a superpower,
thread connecting everywhere I've been
with everywhere I will go,
& I am blessed to know
I am blessed to know.

We Never Did This to be Beautiful

we've picked a color to make her happy / honey blonde or burgundy / a hollering red / blissful obsidian / a dreamy lavender / after the wash & waking / of each strand / with something to keep moisture / I touch the scalp with ease / bring only good gifts / & listen to the singing in my lower back / neck / arms & wrist / when I conjure the souls of these digits / to practice / my pinky gives me the most pain / when I am braiding / shouts at its bend / ties yarn or kanekalon / at the square root of someone's head / someone who I love / & my shoulders hunch in defiance / & my forehead oils itself anew / & my knees bring their grievances / to the top of the bloodstream / & here / is my body / wilting in reverence. / if I could / I would destroy every memory / of standing in a mirror / with brush & head half done / the feeling of needing help / & no one to ask for it / I don't know what the world expects / of little Black girls but / it isn't / freedom / to know oneself intimately / to take pleasure in our many transformations / grow 18 inches of weave in the span of a few hours / & be recognizable only to those who love us whole / & consistently / I make braids or conversation / & the head I am working leans & aches / we cue a movie / coo a humble song / & ours is a texture architectural / mimicking the forest & its triumphant green / I take the shape of trees / I am as old as the unshed leaf / every spruce cedar & pine is showing off for me / & all my sisters deserve the sun's reach / the wind's kiss & howl / atop the scalp / proof we are the earth's earliest kin / shapeshifting for protection / & when we are done / I slip each end through a candle's light / or cloth and burning water / a small flame prayer / sent up in smoke / or sealed & soaking / in the center of my hands / this I learned / this I taught myself / a secret I pass to all I love who mirror me / I don't know what the world expects / of little Black girls but / we never did this to be beautiful / though we did become so / in the process