

HUSH LITTLE BLUE GIRL (INTERLUDE)

Hush little blue girl, don't say nary a thing
You know how to conserve energy for spring

Mama's lived through freeze that chokes bloom
Taught you to build an interior room (just for you)—

A sovereign space outside of time
A direct conduit to the sublime
the unruly & unconfined
Designed & divined with only you in mind—(*oh my, oh my*)

Hush little blue girl, learn to distill the sounds
Of a dying empire. Be like fungi: cross-talk below ground

Get good with being muddy—

Embrace soil.

Grow wild.

EPISTLE

But I guarantee that I will spark the brain that changes the world. And that's our job.

— Tupac Shakur, 1994

I.

Dear Tupac,

You are scattered like jazz across these states—
sorrowful note in Baltimore;
syncopated bruise in Harlem;
gravel-mouthed moan in Oakland;
a mustard seed in Compton.

You are always already a thefted body—
torso dislodged from neck & its bullet wounds;
fingers plucked for preservation;
skin flayed, stretched for book binding;
golden tongue gifted to rough waters.

You are the material evidence of survival
a lifetime of resurrections
a discharge of hauntings
a flashpoint
the roam & wander of post-bop
a brilliant star streaking wild across the sky.

You are the ring shout of a radical tradition a prayer a self-fulfilling prophecy
a manifestation of the ecstatic
the stuff of elegies & uprisings.

You are the sound a ghost makes when it returns to a body.

ON COMING OUT AT SEVENTEEN

“First time I got the full sight of Shug Avery long black body with it black plum nipples, look like her mouth, I thought I had turned into a man.”

— Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*

When on the verge of ripening into plums,
Some girls dream of sunsets & of other girls
Some girls dream of bursting beneath darkening sky
Some girls dream of her body as book while
Tasting the bitter of their own skins
When on the verge of ripening into plums
Plucked to be eaten or preserved
Through gentle pressure & a slight twist,
Some girls dream of bursting beneath darkening sky
Split to open center & amaranthine flesh,
Pruned back to unharmed parts
When on the verge of ripening into plums
In the middle of concrete cities where fruit
Coats pavement & smoke shadows the moon
Some girls dream of bursting beneath darkening sky—
Water her roots; Cut back her branches &
Turn her full-faced to sun
When on the verge of ripening into plums—
Some girls dream of bursting.

THE DAY PRINCE DIED

How could you, babe, leave me in the dark?

— Prince, “Dark”

the day Prince died she devolved n2 muteness / returned 2 stubborn silence
/ sucked her thumb / curled n2 herself / lashed out @ ne1 bold enuff 2 ask
how r u? / wander-wondered / danced profusely / returned 2 a time when her
name was Desire—pronounced Desireé / when everything was erotic / when
everything was beautiful, strange & they were faggots / when she fainted b4
the 4th encore & revived by the finale / when he was ageless & she was agile
/ they risked it all / leapt w/ abandon / landed in deep plié / full 2nd / graceful
as Alvin Ailey dancers n revolution—revelation / she always landed on her
feet / let the music b her guide / 2 getting off proper / she fucked girls / she
fucked guys / liked fucking herself most / didn't believe in nasty bodies nor
sin / knew her body & what 2 do / knew the difference btween feel right &
feel wrong / found a creamy center / said i would die 4 u / said nothing
compares 2 u / said i wanna be ur lover baby / jacked them off b4 blotting
her black lipstick / she married a man / she married a woman / she was always
alone / said i don't understand y u have 2 hurt me baby / hurt me in the dark