



Herb
of the
Sun

Jay Délise

herb of the sun

Jay Délise

Sundress Publications • Knoxville, TN

Copyright © 2026 by Jay Délise
ISBN: 978-I-951979-95-9
Published by Sundress Publications
www.sundresspublications.com

Book Editor: Ashley Elizabeth
Editorial Assistants: Livia Meneghin, Kanika Lawton, and Erin Elizabeth Smith
Editorial Interns: Greyson Finch and Nafisa Hussain
Colophon: This book is set in Centaur
Cover Art: Mercy Thokozane Minah
Cover Design: Mercy Thokozane Minah
Book Design: Ashley Elizabeth

For nappy-haired little Black girls with too much to say.

Dreaming quietly, tearfully, and full of beautiful rage—

Table of Contents

OKAY!!!	01
<i>Psst...</i>	02
This Is a Call to Action	04
Viral Poem in Place of a Politic, OR, Influencer Voice in a Megaphone	08
Forthcoming Body of Work	10
Headlines for When the Quiet Part Finds Its Voice	12
Re: Working Agreements Meeting	13
I hope they loot	18
Burn This Poem	19
Starting Point	21
Don't tell the poets	22
The poem you've been waiting for	23
My Comforter Is a Metaphor	25
Telling Stories	27
For the Little Black Girl Under the Table	29
The Dust Bunnies Take Farmingdale	30
The Love Poems	31
herb of the sun	33
Ode to the Ode Prompt	34
Languaging My Ego Death	35
the end for now	36
Ode to Big Easy	37
Acknowledgments	38
About the Author	39

OKAY!!!

For mama yelling *motherfucker* on the A Train
For Louise Jenkins Meriwether, Gloria Richardson,
And you, baby, in that skirt

For Toni Morrison's laugh, Samirah Raheem,
Wishing a motherfucker would,
And a ten piece hot
With lemon pepper sprinkles

To your "me"-ness
Filling out them jeans
To you
Reading this poem
With your bonnet on

To beauty supply \$I lip gloss,
Three piece suits that fit just right
And sister at TSA with the shaved head

I love you
And all that air you breathe
The fire in your belly when you yell
"OKAY!!"
An affirmation
A prayer that this moment
Will fill our cups again

Psst...

They sellin' revolution outside
Don't cost but a backbone
Said meet 'em 10 paces past the precinct
Where the jail support table used to be
You can get your plaque engraved
If you bring 10 people, they'll arrest you on live TV
They got classes on brand management
Say get in while you fit in
Only bring exact change

They sellin' revolution outside, and
Nigga, are you buying or not?
The leaflets are melting into QR codes and,
Madea and 'em live too far
For the church van to bring em

I stopped being a revolutionary when they started charging at the door
When bail funds folded into designer bags
And chairman transitioned into CEO

I put my sign down when it won a Pushcart
Stopped getting on the mic when they fashioned it with a sponsor's logo
And even then, I had waited too long
The Poets of Note had a google doc open
Before the body was even cold
They remixing drone sounds over trap beats
Twenty dollar covers and drink minimums
Before I am even spilt blood between avenues
Before I am peeling myself off asphalt

They sellin' revolution outside

I wonder who "They" is
Since everybody still broke
Wonder if "They" is the "They" locking up deodorant behind glass cases
If the "They" is "Them"
They must not want to make no money

We still broke

Under threat of the violence of time passing
Buried under affordable high-rise...
 After affordable high-rise, which is...
The only way to afford a headstone

They sellin' revolution outside
But we
Beneath the rubble
Quiet as it's kept
Been sneaking it in brown paper bags
In shoeboxes on the train
Braided close to the scalp
Behind the mask
Resting between chorus and reprise
During the praise break
We been smuggling it in church basements

For centuries
You just ain't heard about it
'Cuz we ain't sellin.

This Is a Call to Action

This is a call to action
This is a call to arms
This is a notice to call to Action Your Arms to
Pick up your weapons

And action a change

If you find yourself at the intersection of action
And inaction...

Know that you have a choice to make

If you have a heart
And a number 2 pencil
This is the time to draw your own cardiograph in the form of a vote *yes*

And this is a gun

And that is your head

And if you follow me into this room
There is a formal letter addressed to You
Asking for your continued support

If you look to your left
There is a man slapping a bat
On the palm of his hand

He the one with the survey

We urge you at this time to consider
That we are all you have
This is a call to revolt on our behalf
If you find yourself counting the rings
On the bottoms of your feet
Know that your body is not yours to lease

And even if you run
And even if you hide

Know that the stench of death
Can be sprayed away at picket lines

You are obligated to enter the ring
Even if you are limping
Even when your army is a mirror you are forced to hold yourself

Now more than ever
In these unprecedented times
We are once again asking
For your throat
To improve our machines as they practice your voice in the mirror
At this very moment
The last breaths of the capitol
Are being live streamed on CNN

And do you feel it yet?

The urge to open a Roth IRA
To buy, sell, and click
To debate your humanity on the information superhighway

We're running out of time
The poems are made of tissue paper
The window of opportunity is closing
Overton is dead, we have killed him
And you have brought an encyclopedia to a gunfight

The wind whistles the screams across your cheeks
And you have a job to finish
A bomb to sign
This is a call to action your mouth closed
While the war criminals speak

This is war cry
This is a guttural scream outside the amazon storefront
This is a call-in to call your attention to the fact that there is a sale on blood espresso

Action your purchased silence
Pick up your tone
And when the monster comes for you too
Show it your sticker
And it will know
You've done all you were meant to do

Duty To Lament

after Jon Sands "It's Not Your Fault"

I was just guessing...
Nobody really knows...
Do they
And how about we talk about the real problem here, which we all know
Is not me
And did you hear, and did you know, and
My friend who actually works at the CDC, and
I saw once, I heard on a podcast, and
Because I'm connected to Source Energy, and
Have you considered, and
I'll just name, I'll just say what everyone's thinking, and
How can I be expected to think, when you won't let me be right, and
Where was this information when I was building my case against you
And...
Why are you attacking me?
Why are you refusing to grant us the comfort of aesthetic enjoyment
Without having to worry about the "killings"
Without having to worry about Miss Carissa who owns the beauty shop
Why can't I just be at brunch picking the locusts off my chicken and waffles?
Nobody gives a fuck about anything if it's not on instagram
And who are you
Anyway
Who do you work for
And I can't
And I just
And I haven't found a well-fitting
Excuse
Yet
And
They shouldn't be outside where someone could hurt them anyway, and
They shouldn't be outside where someone could see them anyway, and
They shouldn't be outside where the people are, and
Shouldn't someone do something about the issue of blood on all-white fits after Labor Day
Shouldn't someone do something about the issue of un-naturals going un-selected
Shouldn't someone do something about...them
I mean I just don't get it...
Isn't it our duty?

I literally just got this job, it's just if this was a different time, and
I just haven't adjusted, and
Things are changing faster than I can monetize them, and
It's bad for the brand anyway, and
I'm at least supposed to be adored before I am killed, I mean
I was promised sainthood when I bought Canva Pro, I mean
When the revolution comes everybody ain't 'gon be there, I mean

Anyway...

I actually don't have any change, Beloved

Asé

Viral Poem in Place of a Politic, OR, Influencer Voice in a Megaphone

TRIGGER WARNING ARE YOU READY ARE YOU COMFORTABLE WELL YOU SHOULDN'T BE DEAR AMERICA WE NEED TO *TALK* HERE'S 10 LUKEWARM TAKES ON SOMETHING I BARELY EVEN GOOGLED DEAR SOCIETY IT'S ME THE FUTURE DIPPING A TAMPON INTO GLITTER AND LAUNCHING IT ONTO THE STEPS OF THE CAPITAL DEAR MR TRUMP, IF I HAD BEEN YOUR MOTHER DEAR WHITE PEOPLE / DEAR SEVENTEEN MAGAZINE / DEAR HASHTAG I SAW IN AN INFOGRAPHIC—

Sometimes being on the right side of history
Is as easy as toeing the line
Sometimes time is best spent writing poems
You can perform on daytime TV

Dear poem, you are my alibi
My ticket to career activism
And with the right cadence
This revolution can be monetized
Ode to the poets who let my plagiarism go unchecked

This is the poem *I'll* be known for
This is the soundtrack to my come up
A symphony of bottles popping or backs breaking
I'll turn these 10s into millions
With just one swipe of a pen

This poem is my ballot
This performance is my gun
Maybe if this poem goes viral
I won't have to write a suicide note

This is for the kids on slam teams who learned their worth through scorecards
This is for the adults exploiting their trauma for your entertainment
This is for all the viral videos of teenage suicide notes making AdSense money as we speak
This is for the assault poems edited by predators

The best thing about being a viral poet
Is that you don't have to pretend anymore
When they ask me what my politics are
I'll answer them in an #Ad

Sometimes it's more important to be famous
Than it is to be known
Because then the only community you have to answer to
Is the one paying \$40 to hear you almost say something
And accountability is reserved for those of us
Who do not have enough money to rub together
To drown out the sounds of the genocide
We'll lose our jobs for talking about

So Dear Pen / Dear Palette / Dear Best American Poetry / Dear 92nd Street Y

When you hear this poem
Hear only the parts of me that will sell
When you hear this poem
Know that between every line
Is the residue of another poet I've stolen from to get here
And this poem is proof that in order to kill a revolution
You must first kill its poets
And what is a viral poem
If not a commercial for suffering
And what is a commercial for suffering
If not a tool of the state

5 TIPS FOR WRITING A VIRAL POEM IN PLACE OF A POLITIC

1. Know that art is only worthy if it is profitable, profitable if it is topical, and topical if it's digestible
2. Every line you write is an opportunity to make a white woman with baby bangs feel empowered, and a white man open his checkbook because you're "one of the good ones"
3. Being a famous poet is just like going to a protest: the ones with the best one-liners win
4. Because isn't being a screenshot or a soundbite all we have to live for
5. When you inevitably have to write another poem, make sure there is enough room for a price tag, or that it's short enough to write on a missile

Forthcoming Body of Work

The Body is still warm and
It's up against the wall for a stick up
It's peeled fresh and ripe for artmaking
It's stiff and positioned towards Orion's Belt
It's bloated, sewn shut, and full of empty policy

It's blood smeared on the floor in the shape of an ankh

The Body is still warm and the poets grow wings to circle it
Squawk at it until the sound echoes back familiar
Picking at the remains
To smear onto fellowship applications
For residencies in its bone marrow
The presses clip the fingernails for prize money

The Body is still warm and the news trucks are parallel parking
But one of the tires is still stuck in its eye socket
The colleges are inviting unbiased professors of murder
To analyze the legitimacy of its last breaths
On panels about the restorative effects of embalming

The Body is still warm and I, standing across the street from it
Am making sure the seal on my mask has not been broken

Later tonight
There will be a vigil fundraiser
For families of those who happened to witness The Body
Lying there in the street
Who may have been affected by the open eyes
No one thought to close

The Body is still warm and I will be forced to study it while it leaks
Dip my fingers into the fluid and
Write about how it tastes like my aunt's buttermilk biscuits
Or grandma's collard greens
Pinch the skin and say it's made of cobalt
Pry open the mouth

Identify the open wound as my own
Write from the pew of a funeral I've never been to

The Body is still warm and I am just as motionless
Praying the pandemonium will cease
Praying the wet and sticky on my fingers
Has not been mine the whole time

Headlines for When the Quiet Part Finds Its Voice

Pretty Poet Eulogizes Incarcerated Revolutionary at the NYPD Community Networking Event
Long-Winded Death Certificate Delivers Statement of Harm to Board of Trustees
Slavery Re-Imagined: An Installation in the Rockefeller Wing of the Umoja Fellowship Hall
Instagram Conjurewoman Sees Venmo Request in Your Future
Loaded Gun Explores Post-Colonial Aiming Practices at Summer School Job Fair
Brooklyn Transplant Gives Talk on Objective Morality in Code-Only Starbucks Bathroom
Stop and Frisk: Why Going Live at Protests is the Way to Micro Stardom
Former HR Representative Pursues Degree in Social Work at Columbia University
Black Face in High Place Writes the Last Protest Poem

Re: Working Agreements Meeting

I.
machine made of open sores.
dirge written in pus.
dripping from the lips of mouths
with stolen teeth
gorging on the meat
yearning, slain
carcass exhumed
slick and gaping maw chews the gristle
there, peeled from itself
is what I have left
to *sell*

II.
Maybe I should be an anti-racism coordinator
Maybe I'm ruining the fun
Maybe I should swallow the bile
Excavate my jaw in search of placations
And when buried, cough
Shake the rubble from my throat
And recite the wrongs against me
For entertainment

Maybe hip-hop weekend at _____
Might give the bodies below
The benefit of hearing their own voices booming
From sponsored DJ booths

And maybe adapt the musical/movie/play about the genocide
And the genocide becomes worth it
And maybe we only die
To make space for others to die
Our funerals bought for tax credits

And I wonder what my hashtag will be
My slogan
What photo will they gray for the t-shirts

Will they donate in my honor
To those who have killed me

What colors will my infographic be
Will they be my favorite
What I would have wanted

And who will be the first to speak for my mother
Raise money for themselves in her name
Whose home will I pay for
Will their Met Gala dress
Be embellished with my teeth
Stained with my blood

And maybe the mourning is getting in the way
Maybe the bodies should silently fall
And the buildings can burn
So long as we are not inside them
And maybe we do hold space for death
So long as it is quiet
Proper and monetizable
Maybe they deserve the air they can afford

Maybe we should all just stop fucking complaining
And trying to steal our bodies back
And bleeding openly in the street

Maybe I should be a diversity coordinator
And they'll tattoo the accolades into my skin
To remind me of who I belong to

Maybe I should just stop writing poems
Recording my existence
As if it is important

Maybe my hands
Should be for nothing but clapping
Head for nodding
Voice for sacrifice

Maybe I can only be because you are
And I should be grateful to lick the floor

Or maybe

I pluck your teeth for jewelry Your scalp for upholstery
your cities Burn your churches Sell your children
you point blank in broad daylight

Shrink your heads on stakes Lock you in cages Drown
Steal your uterus Split your skin with whips Shoot

And maybe...

 We'll get to the bottom...

 Of this equality thing...

Another Black Poem

When hand-me-down-head
Held high as tops of trees
With fixed eyes
Does not call me by my name

When I am the steps of the memorial
 And they drag my body
 Across the John Lewis Bridge
 After I am dead
 In my mind's eye
 I am a good shot

When home is unfit to be stolen
 Un-whole pieces of me
 May scatter themselves
 In the newspaper
 At the DA's office
 Under a pile of stuff.

I'm not writing another poem
About being Black

I'm not writing another poem
About my mother

And her back / And fathers / And me / And my skin.

I'm not creating another task force
I ain't reaching across shit
I'm not magical negro
Rooting
For every Black face in a high place
To Buy The Block

Because the block is still going to be owned
 So my revolution ain't 501c3
 I am not defunding
 I'm knocking all this shit over.

What pains me most
About being Black and alive
Is knowing that this world
Was created with me in mind

And I don't know about enemies
Or how close we should keep them

But when swallowed, bite-sized revolutions
Don't say the names of Black girls
Off camera
Our songs show up

Holding the universe
In our gums

Maybe I am writing another poem about being Black
About how we hold the world in our hands

Maybe I want to write a poem
About the spades table
About the old heads barbequing
In the middle of the sidewalk
They smile
And this dimension crashes into the next
Ever expanding

Maybe I want to be the physician of souls

But when hand-me-down sorrow hops onto my back
And the chair of my program says the n-word
Right to my face
In my \$30,000 class
And then they ask me
After the fact
What I can do

I can't find the strength to.

Un-bathed and unable to sleep

And always on time

I hope they loot

Written in the last minutes before the Derek Chauvin verdict

-----x

<i>Count</i>	<i>Crime Charged</i>	<i>Not Guilty</i>	<i>Guilty</i>
1	I hope the Angel of Death Breaks open the clouds And the bodies rot in the streets <i>(I hope the buildings burn)</i>		
2	I hope they prepare feasts Of lobster and expensive wine Shoot fireworks into the sky As heads roll across their feet <i>(I hope they dance)</i>		
3	In the rubble And barbeque in the street Plucking bones From their grinning teeth <i>(I hope they scream with reckless abandon)</i>		
4	Throw gasoline And lit matches <i>(Into precincts)</i>		

Burn This Poem

BURN THIS POEM if I become irrational

If at any point there is a stanza here that could've been a text to the person I should actually be talking to BURN THIS POEM

If I win a special Tony award, BURN THIS POEM

If you find this poem under my mattress with \$100 and a suicide note, take a photo for the media, and then BURN THIS POEM

If this is read aloud in a diversity and inclusion workshop please BURN THIS POEM...we've lost

If this poem appears in a forthcoming collection

BURN THIS POEM...I've lost

BURN THIS POEM if I begin to talk about my mother

BURN THIS POEM if it smells of honeysuckle

BURN THIS POEM if birds begin to fall from the sky...there's something they are not telling us

BURN THIS POEM if you see me crying on the subway

BURN THIS POEM if someone decides set fire to the Broadway Box and the police are looking for evidence

BURN THIS POEM if the invisible hand turning the crank tries to touch you

BURN THIS POEM in the revolution

BURN THIS POEM for light

BURN THIS POEM if you find yourself hogtied in a voting booth

BURN THIS POEM if it only ever gets on the mic for a feature

BURN THIS POEM instead of a human sacrifice

BURN THIS POEM at the doctor's office

BURN THIS POEM in a cell

BURN THIS POEM if it was intimidating when you first met it

This poem may spontaneously combust if asked to analyze its form. Please keep this poem away from open windows, and MFA programs. This poem is evidence that I still have a smart mouth, and have never been handled warmly. Please read this poem for homely little Black girls who are supposed to be in class. This poem is best served with a machete and a whiting sandwich. Please keep this poem out of graveyards masquerading as centers for artistic excellence...

If this poem, and a bear, are in the woods,

BURN THIS POEM fight the bear

BURN THIS POEM punch a cop

BURN THIS POEM learn your neighbors names

BURN THIS POEM wear a mask

BURN THIS POEM pick up a pen

BURN THIS POEM free the Congo

BURN THIS POEM free Sudan

BURN THIS POEM
BURN THIS POEM

free Palestine
free Haiti

And punch a centrist in the throat

If anything
In this poem
Has lit its own match
Good
Because at this point fire
Is the lesser of two evils

Starting Point

for Harry Belafonte

Call me a revolution
Call me a baton
Call me a liminal space

I formed you from the silk I spun with my fingernails
Sitting between worlds
And with the knowledge of half-things
I loved your un-wholeness
Into fragments of time

Call me ghost light
Call me way home
Call me truth stone

With a wink and a smile
We create a new thing
Kiss our edges into each other
Fixed and back-stitched
Whistle loose the paint so the colors run

Call me upstage left
Call me Black love in blue light
Call me always there

I give you the courage of stillness
Pluck the sun out of the sky to light your way
I exist because you continue
May you remember
Your hands make too

Don't tell the poets

Don't tell the poets the sky will never fall
Don't tell them that the moon and the sun
Are in fact dating
And that they would have been right all along
Had they included a line in the budget
For smelling their own flowers

Don't tell the poets they are beautiful
That the answers to their questions
Are hidden under their own erasers
That they can emerge
Right in front of themselves
Like the end of a poem

Don't let them hold themselves just as dear
Thinking they are worthy of being the poet
Of the worst poem ever written
That they deserve to make mistakes
Even in private

The poem you've been waiting for

I regret to inform you that
 The poem you were expecting
Is no longer on its way
It will not arrive
And it is not available for comment

Unfortunately, now more than ever
In these unprecedented times
As our world is growing and changing and
The political climate
Of the state of the world has
Been baked at 420 degrees
I must raise my voice to inform you
That this poem,
 The poem you are waiting for...

Is not coming
Due to the fact that I cannot write

I, reader, have spent all day in my underwear
In bed
Crying about the fact that rent is due
And all I have done for work this month
Is eat my weight in dairy-free ice cream so violently
That I did not have time
To allow myself to place my frozen fingers
Onto a keyboard
To write a poem
More specifically,

 The poem you've been waiting for

Public,
I simply cannot provide you with a better explanation than this:
As I logged on to my computer
 To open the webpage
 That housed the folder
 That held the document
 From whence this poem
 (The poem you are waiting for)

Would and should have come...
My finger slipped on the trackpad and,
I regret to inform you, opened Netflix
And began playing the tv show
That I am now 4 seasons into
And I just can't bear to leave the protagonist at such a fragile time in their life as this

My loyal fans (family),
As I approached the keys of my computer, with my hands
 (Which, as I previously mentioned, were frozen)
I began to take stock of the clothes on the floor
And the dishes unwashed
And papers un-filed
And the bathroom un-tiled

I realized that one of my nails had been chipped
From when I was thrashing about my home, screaming
And I forgot that I had planned to paint them, so now
Because I am here with wet nails
The poem
 (That you have been waiting for)
Simply cannot arrive.
I appreciate your patience at this time.

My Comforter Is a Metaphor

Sunshowers are my favorite holiday
This is inherited reverence
At the smell of a thunderstorm, my grandfather
Who wore christianity like a school uniform
Would make us turn off all the appliances to gather in the living room and “let god do his work”
We would sit with each other in almost total silence
As we waited for the storm to pass

I would lay on the hardwood floor in front of the window
With one arm over my eyes to block the sun
I explained this to myself as god’s worklight for special occasions
When what needed to be washed away
Could be taken by surprise

Then, I was less grateful
For the wood splintering my shoulder blades
For the sounds of my mother snoring
For the smell of hot rain on Carolina red dirt
Because there on the floor
Taking note of scurrying sounds I refused to investigate
The only thing I wanted
With all my might
Was to not fall asleep

Today, I am uniquely tired
Like I am the first person who has ever yawned
The first jaw to chew sugarcane or artisan bread appetizers in Brooklyn

Nightly I rotate in my bed like a gas station hot dog
The exhaustion weeps from my bones
I tangle myself in the sheets hoping I’ll swaddle myself into a new person
Who can sleep at night
And let the day go

Unless there’s rain...never when there’s rain
Melatonin could never win in a fight against a severe storm warning
And I think this is because my grandfather’s parting gift to me
Was an almost pavlovian relationship between rain and sleep

Today, I find myself again on my back
On a mattress I work too much to know that well
Wondering if rest passed down through generations
Is a retroactive salve for sleepless nights
If beyond this realm it is possible
To collect the sap of my snoring
In my grandfather's hands
I can only hope
Each time it rains
That the work of god is to make beds

Telling Stories

Lately, sulking through the streets of New York, I've been burdened with processions of mothers and daughters in matching outfits. I count them, take note of the joyful gaze behind bedazzled Chanel sunglasses. Note the terry cloth bathing suit cover-ups sticky with popsicle juice. The duos with matching white toe-nail polish, strutting down Malcolm X Boulevard...telling stories

The stare of the man at the juice bar
The stare of the man on the train
The stare of the man in the horse drawn carriage

As a child, I was always asked if my mother and I were close. If I rewrite the story, motherly love feels like finding a daisy in a field of dandelions. I recount the caramel brown puffer jackets with fur hoods, the rainbow beaded sandals. I tell stories to the tune of *We Belong Together*. Paint clouds on the ceiling. Unfurl my childhood like a picture wallet bursting at the seams.

And that would be true

if I had worn the jacket on the first day of 5th grade
if I had not broken the sandals
if I had been outside long enough to find the daisy

My mother is calling me to tell her a story. Or, rather, she is coming to collect the tax for me being alive: being successful. I pay for my rest with long winded stories of perseverance
And soft shoe tap routines about *how I got over...*

So, she's calling me to tell her a story, but the right one, the shiny one. Because before I am daughter, I am trophy case. She says, "I brought you into this world to heal me, and you did."

After reflection, I find myself explaining that I've only known a mother's love to be something that crawls through my window at night. Either way we find ourselves...related.

The mothers, daughters, and me.

And when someone saying "I love you" feels like they are sharpening a knife, I find myself...telling stories. Waking up in front of mirrors trying to whisper
I love you. Just you. Write a new story.

After Visit Summary

In Three Parts

1.

In my attempts to be
I am perpetually squeezed at my sides
There is no rulebook
For fitting in anywhere but bariatric coffins
I learn this at the doctor's office

I was hoping to be told why I am dying
She reads my chart, and force-feeds me leftover shame lard
Instead

2.

Maybe girlhood is whispered under sheets
Slid underneath stall doors
Passed from hand-to-hand in math class
Somewhere I couldn't reach
Or wasn't supposed to be
I approximated the distance in pink sidewalk chalk
And wrote stories of bonafide, ride-or-die sistafriends
Like the ones on Living Single

But if girlhood is granted to those of us
Who can be trusted with it
Like most Black girls
It was never mine to begin with

3.

My mother wipes the blood from my two degrees
With the gauze I was discharged with
Still soiled from fresh wounds she didn't hear me mention
Or that's what I can decipher from the floor
She says, "I couldn't be more proud of everything you've done"

For the Little Black Girl Under the Table

grin with two teeth missing / float
up and through and in between / blue-tongued
with sticky fingers / catch
up baby, be / light
secrets behind skirts / be
remembered in doorways / daisies
made into crowns / whisper
rock-scratched sidewalk prophecies / dreams
of purple jellybeans and / today
the streetlights dance, they / raise
up weed-like / up
with the wind / whole
mouth full of / roaring
burning / becoming
/ Home

The Dust Bunnies Take Farmingdale

For Alexis and summer camp girl groups

You too young to be here
Snaggle-toothed
God messenger
 Brown, round, lil-bit

You Goodwill shopping
Blue ring 'round your mouth
 Scared of heights no-more

You friendship bracelet business woman
Pop star emerging
Back of the bus riding
Take-no-shit-er
 Trading Post couponer

Talking until
The battery of your
Hand-me-down Nokia
Burns hot as the sun
 Little Brown Girl

They'll call me when you're not there
And I'll pretend we're sisters
Suspend the disbelief that a supernova of such extreme Cheetahliciousness,
Could happen twice in the same universe

So we'll write each other's names over our hearts
And save each other from sharks in the pool

The Love Poems

Well...

I finally took the trash out, sent that email, and had enough clean dishes to eat a meal at the table, but there was no time to write the poem

Before you woke up this morning I slipped into the cool autumn air in search of the perfect metaphor, but the poem got stuck in a glass case behind the macaroons at the cafe

I almost wrote the poem on the train on the way here, but there was no service so you'll just have to believe me

I discovered the meaning of life, solved for X, and learned how to tell someone I love them so I tried to write the poem, but then I reckoned I could just love them and have that be the poem

I got enough courage to put the poems on the wall, but then I discovered they were all shit so I took a couple days to cry a poem into the comforter

Yesterday I felt like the poem might slip out in a zoom meeting, but I never took the opportunity to piggyback off of what you were just saying. Besides, it was more of a comment than a question anyway

I need to write the love poems, I promised myself I would write the love poems because if I didn't write them, no one else would

And I don't want to write any more poems hoping they'll convince you to love me, hoping they'll make loving me a reasonable task

And I wonder if the universe is trying to tell me to stop by allowing me to continue killing spring flowers

But there has to be a life that's mine to own

And sweet as we are, we as we are; we can do nothing but sit around dreaming up all the people we want to love us

And I just don't have the strength to write the love poems

To will the flowers to water themselves, no matter whose back is turned

To wonder where the sky will go when the moon and sun fall, if not the same place as always

To look forward to how the sun will look as it rises, and wonder, if like stars, it has been dying for as long as we've known it

To catch the shooting stars, anoint the dusk before sunrise, or consider one another while briefly in-step at the crosswalk

I don't want to write the love poems
I want someone to write them for me, to believe that I am worth the pen and the paper
I'm tired of piecing together half words, and head nods, and hoping the poems will materialize in the lack

So if you want the love poems, write them your *damn* self.

herb of the sun

Come here
Sit down
Let me tell you
Did you hear?

The sun woke up yesterday
And told everybody she quit

Said she was tired
Of people frowning up at her
When she had her best dress on
So the trees went on strike

And the moon came out too, middle of the day
Just to see what all the fuss was about
Tried to convince her to stay
But the sun wasn't having it

I don't blame her

And I've got to tell you
You had to have heard this
All the marigolds went missing
In the middle of October

Beverly said
It was because we all kept picking them
So excited that they grew
We forgot
To plant any seeds

I think

Somebody finally loved them enough
To keep them in the house
And didn't need to plant any more

Of the same damn thing

Ode to the Ode Prompt

Ode to SHOWTIME on the crowded F train because, if not me, somebody should be laughing
Ode to the Preacherman on Malcolm X with gold spacers that be outside the food pantry
Ode to the work supply closet that's somehow soundproof...and cry-proof
Ode to eggs that still float to the top after the expiration date
Ode to a bacon egg and cheese that's \$7 I guess...
Ode to scissors and crop tops by association
Ode to rejection emails that have brackets where your name should be
Ode to Sweet Caroline because The Black People needed to sit down about an hour ago
Ode to chub rub and underboob sweat, because at least there's evidence

Ode to 7 for eating 9

Ode to twin beds with creaky frames, because y'all wasn't supposed to be doin' nothing anyway
Ode to an ice water and a medium fry
Ode to high school creative writing teachers
Ode to antidepressants
Ode to still being here
Ode to writing yourself out
Ode to being deliberately, unmistakably, ruthlessly, alive

Languaging My Ego Death

Following my own inner guidance, I went to the ocean
With two stones
One for who I am, which is shorthand for my best self
And one for who I used to be
I polished each stone with the same rag...
the same grit...
the same water...
the same time...

Which may illuminate
That all versions of me can be at work at once
Which may mean
The current me writing this poem
Can live in multitudes...at many diversions of the same road
Or
Who I am now, and who I used to be
Deserve the same amount of care and attention

What I do know, is that whomever has the highest power must be kin to me
Just 'cuz we both seem to be cheating off the same paper

Anyway, I'm at the river...
Or the ocean...
Or my desk at work...
Or praying for my mother's sight...
Or staring at the wall in the shower...
Or saying "interesting...that thought would not have occurred to me" in the zoom meeting...
Wherever I am...

Every version of myself is
Throwing polished stones into water...hoping they return

the end for now

I am porches, stoops, and marigolds
Sprouted bulbs and honeysuckle
Gold spacers, silver crowns, gapped teeth
Shoe-shine, tobacco leaves
Sugarcane and moonshine
Blue basement ceilings, collard greens
Zoot-Suits, pearls, and
Pantyhose and work boots
Ocean Ave and Bourbon Street

I bleed molasses and sassafras
Keep cinnamon in my pocket, glass bottles for rainy days
I breathe the breeze and drink sweet tea
My hands
Well-oiled and calloused
Knead dough; need other hands
I grow dandelions; soft and simple, here without announcement
I smile like I've got a direct line
Like I been here before

For me, the end is a sun shower
And often
I wonder what it feels like to put my whole foot on the ground
Speak with my whole mouth
Answer to my own name

And when
I feel like I am racing with time
And grief is winning
Like I don't know myself without the wind on my cheeks
Black on my heels
In front of the finish lines
Arriving desperate at altars, unable to breathe
I'll remember what makes me
Has already seen this
And laughed

Ode to Big Easy

Swole from heat that won't turn us loose
Keep us from running too fast

Like horn-blowing-streetcar-heavy-petting
Like sun come

To play the groove smooth
To sweet the sweet tea
To sway off oak trees, catching
The only breeze coming for another hour

So the dough just rose, and the grease still hot
And the band plays on...

Acknowledgements

Huge thank you to the following publications for giving homes to some of the poems in this collection:

African Voices: “Starting Point,” “Psst...,” “I hope they loot”

beestung: “Forthcoming Body of Work”

Brooklyn Poets: “Psst...”

Crave Journal: “Poem #5”

Ink Sweat & Tears: “The Love Poems”

Lucky Jefferson: “For the Little Black Girl Under the Table”

Masterhouse Publishing: “Another Black Poem”

New York Writers Coalition: “The Dustbunnies Take Farmingdale”

No, Dear: “Headlines for When the Quiet Parts Finds Its Voice”

The Offing: “The Poem You’ve Been Waiting For”

Poetry Society of New York: “Ode to Big Easy”

Stone Circle Review: “the end for now”

Visual Verse: “For Alex, On Your Birthday”

About the Author



Jay Délise (they/them) (official jester of Sugar Hill) is a writer, performance artist, and eater of grapes, based in Harlem, New York. They have performed at The United Nations, The Schomburg Center, Judson Church, The Pulitzer Center, and Roundhouse. Their work has been featured in publications including, *Glass Poetry Press*, *Poetry Society of New York*, *Lucky Jefferson*, *beestung*, *The Offing*, and *Brooklyn Poets* (Poet of the Week). Jay has been a teacher and clown consultant/director for almost a decade, and their work smells of mischief, church giggles, and being barefoot on unfinished hardwood floors. They enjoy stealing from white people, bad wigs, being gay, fart jokes, jazz music, free art, assuming their mother/father wounds are undetectable, and writing poems about them anyway...

Other Chapbook Titles Available from Sundress Publications

So Rain
Christian Yeo Xuan

Quantum Entanglements with Notes on Loss
Abdulrazaq Salihu

Anyone's Dust
Jed Myers

Glossogenesis
Cynthia White

Migrant Wish
Moni Brar

Nomad
Heather Qin

Nature Knows a Little About Slave Trade
Nnadi Samuel

Impact
Sarah Renee Beach

Other E-Chap titles can be found at
www.sundresspublications.com/e-chaps