

PolicyLink



WAKANDA DREAM LAB

BLACK FREEDOM BEYOND BORDERS

MEMORIES OF ABOLITION DAY



Black Freedom Beyond Borders: Memories of Abolition Day



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Wakanda Dream Lab is a collective fan driven project that bridges the worlds of Black fandom and #Blacktivism for Black Liberation. It functions according to a value of emergence and celebrates the organic self-organizing nature of fandom. We intend to build on the aesthetics and pop culture appeal of Wakanda to develop a vision, principles, values and framework for prefigurative organizing of a new base of activists, artists and fans for Black Liberation. We believe that Black Liberation begets liberation of all peoples.

<https://www.wakandadreamlab.com/>

PolicyLink is a national research and action institute advancing racial and economic equity by Lifting Up What Works. The PolicyLink signature Arts, Culture, and Equitable Development (ACED) Initiative uses arts and culture methods to support equitable policy change across the country. PolicyLink's Community Safety and Justice program supports the visioning and building of an equitable and just system that keeps all communities safe while working to reduce the harm of our current prison and policing systems. For more information, visit policylink.org.

This project was made possible with the support of the **Kresge Foundation**. For more information, visit kresge.org

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Martin * Oscar Grant * And Too Many More...

**May we honor your stories by transforming the stories of
our future.**



YOU CANNOT BUILD WHAT YOU CANNOT IMAGINE

“All organizing is science fiction.

*Every time we imagine a world without poverty,
a world without wars, without borders, without prisons -*

that is science fiction.

*Because we have not seen a world like that,
but we strongly believe that
you cannot build what you cannot imagine...*

*And so I believe we absolutely need imaginative spaces like
science fiction*

and as many others as possible -

*that allow us to dream beyond the boundaries of the real
and to root in what we actually want for the future.”*

Walidah Imarisha

Radical Imagination: Season, 2 Episode 3
[“Visionary Fiction: Writing Our Future.”](#) (April 2020)



FOREWORD

There are times when our lived reality feels stranger than science fiction - a viral pandemic, an economic crisis, global conflicts on multiple frontlines, the rise of white supremacist racism, a wave of state violence against Black bodies, the fiery uprisings across the nation, and militarized guards deployed in response... It was the Red Summer of 1919. Barely past 100 years later, it is as if we are quarantined in a time loop.

As Black organizers call to divest, defund and abolish the police state - they have recast their roles from movement builders into worldbuilders. At a time when we need a big vision to show what is abundantly possible for liberation - Black creatives, writers and culture creators pave the way, setting the course for the investments, policy and ultimately the more free and just world we want to live in.

In the tradition of Black Freedom Beyond Borders,¹ [Wakanda Dream Lab](#) and [PolicyLink](#) collaborated on the Speculative Writer's Room for Abolitionist Futures inviting 10 Black writers to imagine a world 100 years liberated from mass incarceration and generate immersive abolitionist stories across time, place, and communities. These stories are compiled into this digital anthology, Black Freedom Beyond Borders: Memories of Abolition Day.

1 In 2018, Wakanda Dream Lab launched the #BlackFreedomBeyondBorders anthology series to invite Black storytellers for collective re-imagining and speculative visioning of what a borderless world could look like for Afro-diasporic people.

The anthology sets a vision and a marker for PolicyLink-supported [campaigns](#) that are underway today to reimagine safety and restore resources to communities, including the People’s Coalition for Safety and Freedom—working to dismantle the harmful provisions of the 1994 Crime Bill—and Freedom Labs—supporting local organizers who are advocating to divest funding from the criminal-legal system and invest those resources directly in their communities.

These surreal times call for visionary fiction. These stories not only explore Black Freedom beyond the borders of the prison, police and surveillance state - but also beyond the borders of time. We are being called to dream of liberated futures while also remembering, and repairing, our collective past.

We are honoring the Fallen whose names we sing as hymns.
We are dreaming the wildest dreams to gift our future
beloveds.
We are claiming the hard-won victories for new truths to
emerge.
We are celebrating Abolition Day!

Because just like the protest chant echoing in our streets:
“I. Believe. That. We Will. Win!”

Calvin Williams | Impact Producer | Wakanda Dream Lab

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“A revolution that is based on the people exercising their creativity in the midst of devastation is one of the great historical contributions of humankind.”

Grace Lee Boggs

“Tell stories filled with facts. Make people Touch and Taste and Know. Make people FEEL! FEEL! FEEL!”

Octavia Butler

PolicyLink and Wakanda Dream Lab convened future-bending Black storytellers for a Black Speculative Writer’s Room Project called “Worldbuilding for Abolitionist Futures.” And together, we created an anthology of freedom dreams exploring a world after the abolition of police and prisons.

Amber Butts, Ayize Jama-Everett, Donté Clark, Naudika Williams, Walidah Imarisha, Shawn Taylor, Lisa Bates and Tracey Corder: Thank you for exercising your creative powers for radical freedom dreams, even in this midst, and giving us the permission to dream alongside each of you.

Thank you to the PolicyLink Arts, Culture, and Equitable Development (ACED) Team for removing the borders between dreaming and organizing for abolitionist futures: Lupe Garcia, Lorrie Chang, Jeremy Liu, Eric Morrison-Smith, and Anand Subramanian. And thank you to PolicyLink communications maven, Jen Thom, for support with editing, promotions and production.

Wakanda Dream Lab would like to thank our talented graphic and artistic designer, Amir Khadar, who returned to lead the visual design, curation and layout of the anthology. Thank you to our creative consultants whose radical imaginations inspired what was possible for this anthology: Aisha Shillingford, Terry Marshall, and Chinaka Hodge. Thank you to The Big We team - Anasa Troutman and Tanum Davis-Bohen - for creating the online portal as a home for this anthology

Thank you Octavia Butler. Thank you Grace Lee Boggs.

READER'S GUIDE

Thank you for reading the Black Freedom Beyond Borders anthology series. We've created this reading guide to accompany you as you explore the stories, poetry, visual and virtual art of abolitionist futures.

You can experience this anthology through two immersive experiences:

The Dream Tank Immersion

Experience a curated immersion of this anthology as a dream world experienced by Ibrahim - a Speculative Cultural Strategist designing Ai Abolitions in a mysterious new organizing residency known as The Dream Tank.

To do so, read the stories in their entirety, just as they are organized in the anthology

The ReMemories Experience

Choose your own pathway with the stories through the expansive timelines and storylines.

To do so, skip "The Dream Tank" storyline. [You can always read them as a standalone series another time]. Read the other stories in whatever order you feel called. For reference, the timeline of the storyworld in relationship to Abolition Day is provided below.

PRE-ABOLITION DAY	ABOLITION DAY & AFTERMATH	POST-ABOLITIONIST FUTURES
THE WAY THE FIRE FLIES		
	THE MIRAGE	
	TENDING THE ACRE	
	ALBINA ZONE	
	MAKEBA	
		THE KEENING
	REMEMORY	
		BREATHING ON THE MOON

After you complete your story chosen immersion, we invite you to choose one or as many questions you feel called to explore and share your responses on our social media channels using hashtag **#BlackFreedomBeyondBorders**:

- * Which piece(s) resonate(s) most with you? What about the piece(s) moved you?
- * Which 2 - 3 pieces would you like to share with your family, friends, or community. Why?
- * What's one thing you can do to bring the ideals of Abolition Day into your life? Your community?
- * What new possibilities are you considering about abolition, reparation and liberation after exploring the anthology?
- * What curiosities do you have after exploring this anthology?
- * In what ways are your own and your family & communities' imaginations for abolition challenged or inspired by the pieces in the Black Freedom Beyond Borders: Memories of Abolition Day anthology?
- * Which piece(s) have aspects of abolition you can draw from and start to practice in your own life with your family, friends or community?
- * What are your biggest takeaways from the anthology?

- * If you were to contribute a piece to either or both of the anthologies, what would you focus on? What vision for a world beyond borders in all the ways they show up in life that act as barriers to your freedom dreams?

- * In what ways can you envision the anthology serving as an organizing tool for liberation, reparation and abolition?

We hope you find inspirations of joy and radical imagination within.



THE DREAM
TANK: ACTUAL
COUNTERFACTUAL

Artwork by Amir Khadar



The Dream Tank: Explorations in Quantum Abolition

Ibrahim woke early for his newest summer research residency at the “Dream Tank” hosted by Institute of PolicyFutures. Like getting ready for the first day of Pop-Eds,¹ he went through multiple wardrobe changes even after laying out his clothes the night before. When he finally settled on an outfit, he was dripping with retrofuturist fashion aesthetics - Wakandan Chic as the historians call it² - from his freshly cut razorfade beard lineup, the full brimmed and feathered black fedora, to his short-sleeved ankara thobe patterned with floral designs in black, red and gold hues. He accented this ensemble with some subtle hypebeast³ sauce with his RBG ‘68 Pumas he picked up from his *Anti-Racist Social Club*⁴ subscription as part of their Abolition Day special this past weekend.

“Look good. Feel good,” he murmured to the mirror as a mantra to offset his looming feelings of imposter syndrome. “Nah, nah, nah... You belong here. You belong to now.”

As a Speculative Cultural Strategist, Ibrahim dreamed for this opportunity, this moment. But, it was hard not to feel hella intimidated to be joining the Dream Tank - the renowned participatory research project led by Dr. Khadijah Ouidah (who literally created his field of study in Post-

¹ Popular Education community schools

² A headnod to 21st Century afrofuturist film classic, *The Black Panther*

³ Early 21st century streetwear sneaker and fashion subculture

⁴ Eco-cultural streetwear fashion cooperative founded in Oakland

Abolitionist Liberatory Movement Design⁵). This residency was shorter than most, only a two week window to prototype an immersive 4D-XR⁶ worldbuilding simulation for the future of reparations-based governance. He spent the entire night brushing up on everything in the latest Quantum Abolition and Algorithmic Justice⁷ theories. He wanted to be ready for anything and everything this residency may have to offer or request.

PING! "Good morning, Ibe. And congrats on your first day of Dream Tank!"

Aiya, his Ai assistant embedded in his nanotech bracelet, added extra emphasis by projecting words to him in 4D-AR⁸ before continuing:

"You have 30 minutes before your first residency meeting with Dr. Khadijah Ouidah of PolicyFutures. You should make your way to the Dream Tank now to get there in time."

"Word. Thanks, Aiya!" Ibrahim replied. "Can you unlock a HoverScoot for me? Set course for Last Chance Cafe, please."

"Should I place an order for a CBD-infused chamomile tea? Might help calm your nerves. Your bio-aura and heart rhythms are elevating."

⁵ PALM Readers, as they referred to themselves, fully aware of it's cringeworthiness

⁶ Extrasensory-Reality immersive technology powered by artificial intelligence synchronized with the user's bio-aura rhythms. A "call and response" of simulated dreams

⁷ For more, see [Algorithmic Justice League](#): Leading a cultural movement towards equitable and accountable AI, developed by Joy Buolamwini, Nicole Hughes, and Sasha Costanza-Chock

⁸ Four Dimensional Augmented Reality is an advanced holographic technology

“Ha! You know me too well, Aiya. Yeah... ‘preciate you!”

“Say less. I got you.”

The app’s vocalization setting was matched to resemble a bio-aura vibe that he trusted most, in this case a Beloved Great-Auntie who had become an ancestor while Ibrahim was still a child. Though having grown up with wearable Ai/AR nanotech apps, he still thought it somewhat awkward to speak in casual, familial terms with artificial intelligence.

But recent generations of Quantum Ai computing and nanotechnology have evolved so rapidly since the mid-21st century that the reliance on it was less an inevitability than it was an irresistibility. The shit was *hella* cool. Especially now that they’re not surveillance devices any more.

Ibrahim approached the parked row of communal HoverScoots charging at the historic West Oakland BARTLoop, a few steps outside his living quarters at the Mandela Station Domiciles. Just as Aiya was synching to undock a HoverScoot, Ibrahim saw one of his neighbors, Mama Rosa, pull up next to him in a seated-accessible HoverPod.

“Salaams Mama Rosa! How ya’ll doing today?” Ibrahim exclaimed as he smiled

“Kamusta, nephew!” Mama Rosa whispered hoarsely through her usually velvet voice, “I sang the remembrances all Abolition Day, so my voice’s halfway gone.”

“Aye, hearing you is always such a blessing – so rest your voice, beloved. Wouldn’t want you to lose your melodic magic just to speak with me.”

“Ashé. I feel your rush vibe anyway.” A smile quickly blossomed across her round, sun-kissed face.

“Well, it is my first day at the Dream Tank.” Ibrahim admitted. “But, I’ll tell you all about it this evening if you’re around for neighborhood assembly. I hear there’s talk of building new Re-homing Domiciles for families liberating from UCF territories.”

“Indeed, nephew. Indeed.” Mama Rosa said softly. She opened her slim, furrowed palms to clasp Ibrahim’s right hand, then gazed intently into his umber-shaded eyes. “Listen to a song of your ancestors,” she whispered, “it will ease your soul for the journey ahead.”

“Yes, Mama Rosa... Be well.” Ibrahim smiled.

She gave one last squeeze in response, as if to give a hand hug goodbye, before the HoverPod continued to bring her home safely.

“Aiya, can you play [Closer by Goapele](#)? It was one of Great-Auntie Niyah’s favorite classics. Seems fitting for today.”

“*Sure, Ibe.*” Aiya responded as the HoverScoot undocked and revved towards downtown Oakland. “*You have a soft spot for classical Town soul. And, I know Auntie Niyah is proud of you.*”

The timing couldn’t have been any more auspicious for Ibrahim to start the residency. It was the first Monday after Abolition Day Jubilees, celebrated in all the bioregions known

as the Liberated Territories⁹: From here in Ohlone County¹⁰, to the Albina Zone of Portland¹¹, to the “floating ghost towns” of Gun Island Chute¹², and especially the Border Towns of Freedelphia, Cityheart and Ebulu neighboring the United Confederacy of Freedom states (UCF)¹³. This commemoration for “the day the last prisons fell” held even more meaning following the War. The Second Reconstruction Era has begun, and it might be our last chance to get it right.

“All the Fallen Peaceful¹⁴ - going back to our pre-abolition ancestors - have entrusted us with their wildest freedom dreams,” Ibrahim reminded himself. “Make the impossible, irresistible. Dream, Boldly.” The words were literally tattooed to memory via his left arm.

As the HoverScoot turned by the waterfront canals of Broadway, Ibrahim could finally feel the warmth of the morning sun as it finally dissipated the remaining hints of fog. By the time he reached Last Chance, he could see clearly the iconic skyline known as the Portals of Oakland. Sunbeams reflected off the glassy nano-steel docking stations buzzing with shipment drones, while a murmur of Herons circled along the bases of 500-foot high Regenerative Turbine Cranes rooted throughout the marine terminal.

*The Abolition & Divestment Council for Calbolition*¹⁵
Day established Community Reparation Endowments to

⁹ See “Rememory,” Walidah Imarisha

¹⁰ Rematriated Lands of the Ohlone Indigenous Peoples, including Beloved Township of Oakland and surrounding East Bay Area

¹¹ See “Albina Zone” by Lisa Bates

¹² See “The Way The Fire Flies” by Calvin Williams

¹³ United Confederacy of “Freedom”, UCF (see “Rememory”)

¹⁴ See “The Keening” by Ayize Jama-Everett

¹⁵ See “Tending the Acre,” Shawn Taylor

fund restorative development projects like this, or new Re-Homing Domiciles for liberated families. In the previous generations, it resourced projects like the Yuri Kochiyama Receiving Center, the Re-Matriation of Ohlone Lands, and of course, the creation of Freedom Memorial Plaza campus where PolicyFutures Dream Tank was housed. In fact, Dream Tank itself was commissioned with divested capital and technologies from the Predictive Policing & Surveillance Complex (one of several failed systems in early post-abolition years that almost reinforced mass incarceration). And yet, that was not the contradiction Ibrahim thought about every time he hovered by the plaza:

“It’s so curious that for the Town, which prides itself on revolutionary legacies,” he whispered to himself after filling his thermos at Last Chance, “that this public square was once named after a writer with a deeply problematic, xenophobic and racist history.” Ibrahim proceeded to sip on his tea as he passed the docks where Jack London’s statue and namesake square once stood above waters.

PING! “Consider this your 5 minute warning before your first meeting with Dr. Khadijah at PolicyFutures! You should make your way to the Dream Tank now to get there in time. Congrats and good luck!”

“Word. Say less. Thanks, Aiya!” Ibrahim replied.

He docked the HoverScoot at the Downtown BARTLoop charging stations. Once home to the very policing and prison structures whose fall it commemorates - the Freedom Memorial Plaza is a redeveloped, mixed-use climatorium¹⁶ campus. The high-rise buildings were

¹⁶ Climatorium is a climate-adaptive, resilient and regenerative building complex inspired by [Chinampas](#) technology and [The Makoko Floating School](#).

refurbished with stylized wave-architecture, all the craze a few generations ago to adapt with the rising sea levels of coastal bioregions. It was also perfectly situated for access to the climate-regenerative energy grid powered by Regenerative Turbine Cranes at the Portals of Oakland. A supercomputer running the supertasks of predictive liberatory simulations needs to be super-powered, of course.

Ibrahim approached the center of the campus where the Dream Tank facility was located. He was met with a bio-aura recognition security system at the retractable glass panel doors. This vestige of surveillance technology felt eerie and problematic; even if Dream Tank was housing the most complex (and expensive) Quantum Ai supercomputer this side of the aeronautical spacetime industry. At first he only saw himself and the ambience of the surrounding shoreline skyline in the reflective LED glass doors; but, once the security systems confirmed Ibrahim's unique bio-aura rhythm, the door immediately opened into a small lobby area... to yet another set of LED security doors. But his attention was fixed on the charging station where the most ridiculous 4D-XR¹⁷ immersive headset was docked. As Ibrahim reached for it, he was greeted suddenly on screen by the augmented projection of Dr. Khadijah Ouidah, the Director of Speculative Futures and Quantum Designs at PolicyFutures.

The 4D-XR holographic projection was so crisp that Ibrahim could notice the amber and green fractal patterns on Dr. Khadijah's kitenge. It was as if she were actually on the other side of the glass, if not literally in the room with him. She greeted him with a welcoming gesture - clasping her bronzed hands together against her heart.

¹⁷ 4-Dimensional Mixed Reality simulation headset

“Good morning and salaams, Ibrahim! Good to see you again...” pausing, slightly, before she continued in the same breath “Oh! I’m Dr. Khadijah Ouidah - Director at PolicyFutures and founder of Post Abolition Liberatory Movement studies. We met briefly during the interview process, but it’s so great to see you, well ‘see’ you again. I’m projecting live from the Liberated Territories of CariCom in Trinidad. And please feel free to call me Khadijah, Dijah, Doctor K - many, many nicknames, so whichever is most comfortable for you is comfortable for me. Otherwise, Divine Feminine pronouns. Actually, any preferences for how I should greet you with respect in language, body and spirit?”

“Thanks... Dr. Khadijah,” Ibrahim decided to keep it formal for at least his first day. “And Salaams to you, too. You can call me Ibrahim, Ibe for short. Yoruba language and pronouns are fine as well,” he replied, wishing he had instead ordered a CDB-infused iced coffee for a caffeine boost to keep up with her rapid-fire cadence.

“Great! Thanks Ibe. And apologies I could not be there in person to greet you on your first day, but greetings from our CariCom¹⁸ satellite portals! I was here to celebrate the Abolition Day Jubilee with my family. How was yours?” Dr. Khadijah’s eyes lit up with genuine curiosity.

“Participated in a community dhikr and truth circle at Oscar Grant Plaza with my family. It was a beautiful celebration for us. For all of us... but if I knew I could take my residency in Trinidad, this meeting would def be in person!”

Ibrahim laughed, but only half-joking.

¹⁸ Caribbean Community island-states; one of the Liberated Territories in the Atlantic Diaspora

“Ah, I will keep that in mind for the next Dream Tank Residency as we build out more Diaspora Portals across the Liberated Territories! But I’m so appreciative that you are joining the team in this advanced prototype of our latest participatory residency project we like to call ‘The Dream Tank’ here at PF’s principal portal in Oakland... by the actual Portals of Oakland. The purpose of the project is to generate speculative scenarios to test our predictive algorithm for quantum abolition. For this residency, we want fellows to dream into the future new reconstruction policies and test its liberatory potential based on whether it would have healed structural harms across time and place in the past. So in other words, The Dream Tank is designed to run predictive simulations of policy scenarios intended to heal the past, and reimagine our futures.”

Dr. Khadijah kept that same inviting energy, but clearly had pivoted from “check-in” to the formal orientation. She continued: “We want you to daydream of reparation policies that deepen liberation in this Post-War, Post-Abolition Day, Abundantly-Possible Future!”

“That’s what made this project irresistible. Designing reparative storyworld immersions is literally my entire creative capstone as one of the Speculative Cultural Strategists for Ohlone County. I’m excited to contribute in any way that I can.” Ibrahim said, catching himself over-compensating for his imposter syndrome anxieties. He took a breath, and took another sip of tea.

“That’s one of the many reasons you’re here now,” Dr. Khadijah reassured. “But our 4D-XR simulation in the Dream Tank keeps hitting a snag. As we run counterfactual simulation tests of past policies - that is, removing a particularly harmful policy, politicians or event - the Ai simulator keeps predicting a return back to pre-abolition

systemic outcomes. And in some scenarios, predicting the same exact policing policies would inevitably still emerge.”

“Oh...” Ibrahim began, a bit concerned about the technical aspect of the orientation. “I should mention, while I’m familiar with Quantum Abolition Theories, I’m by no means a quantum coder or engineer if that’s the issue.”

“No, no, no, no,” Dr. Khadijah quickly reassured. “We don’t think it’s a coding, engineering or even policy problem. Our challenge isn’t the data... it’s the inquiry,” she paused and seemingly pondered out loud: “Are we asking the right questions to unshackle our imaginations and free our dreams?”

“That’s... interesting. What simulation are you trying to run?” Ibrahim asked (while thinking to himself, what can he answer that the most powerful Ai simulator cannot).

“Well, as you’ll see, for all the complexities of Quantum Artificial Intelligence, we actually made the search engine for predictive simulations pretty simple.” she mused.

“Yeah, what’s that?” Ibrahim responded.

“Just ask the simulator a 7-word-story prompt.” Dr. Khadijah watched intently for his response.

“Oh. Well, that seems simple enough... I guess,” he slowly replied, wondering how it would be possible to limit his inquiries to 7 words.

Dr. Khadijah continued to watch his nonverbals, catching a glimpse of his fingers begin to twitch as if he were counting out the number of words for all the questions he wanted to explore:

"Yeah, so we thought. Again, just because a question is simple doesn't mean the solution processes are not complex. Anyways, we started with a 'simple' 7 word prompt: What if 1994's Crime Bill never existed?"

"...What was the response?" Ibrahim curiously asked as he sipped on the rest of his chamomile, genuinely intrigued for the answer.

"ERROR: We cannot break the riptide with ripples."

"Whoa." He almost spit out the final sip. "That *exact* line is from the intro for my dissertation on Quantum Abolitions Theory:

*We need the space for new dreams to emerge.
To shift the seemingly impossible
into the irresistibly inevitable.
In the deepest uncharted waters
Of Black Freedoms Beyond Borders -
We cannot break the riptide with ripples.
Dream Boldly"*

"I know... I've read it. And believe my research was quoted quite extensively in it if memory serves me correctly," Dr. Khadijah said, *almost* playfully.

"So. Say what you will about being a coder... but that ripple and riptide line of your dissertation epigraph is a 7 word story in itself. And now it's literally part of our source code. We believe the limitations in exploring historical counterfactuals - the 'what if' questions of our pre-abolitionist past - is a limitation of radical imagination. We're looking to unlock the right set of answers based on the right set of questions. The actual counterfactual that must be explored. And well, we got our response..."

Dr. Khadijah paused for dramatic effect:
“And it’s as if the Dream Tank called specifically for you... No pressure, though.”

Ibrahim hadn’t said a word, but was already out of breath. He blinked in silence for a moment, trying to process what he just heard, before finally stammering rather sheepishly: “So huh-ha-how... Um.. How exactly do I access the DreamTank? Is it a mainframe, an archive workstation, maybe even a throwback cubicle and laptop? A VR gaming console? I actually don’t know what the Dream Tank literally is beyond its function and technological engineering. How do I access and use it?”

“Well before we get there... For the sake of our legal team - I’ll say this to be able to say that I said it,” Dr. Khadijah cleared her throat and spoke, as if reciting from a script:

“You are still bound by both the Creative Commons Accountability clause of the residency, and the Truths & Reparations Commission Protocols enacted by the Liberated Territories. You may explore the memory archives only as it pertains to the purposes of our participatory research.”

Dr. Khadijah spoke with a subtle tongue-in-cheek bureaucratic tone, but Ibrahim could tell she was serious nonetheless.

“Now of course, the Ai system of the Dream Tank is coded with a failsafe to ensure these parameters. The moment you act like a spy-hacker or give off saboteur vibes in your bio-aura, you’ll be excused and assigned to the Accountability Circles.” This time, there was neither scripted

pretense or levity. She was serious. After all, splinter cell saboteurs have already been found attempting to infiltrate and sabotage Reconstruction efforts, even after UCF nations acquiesced to the terms of the Peace & Justice Accords.

“The moment we unlock these doors, we also unlock the collective freedom dream archives uploaded from the past 7 generations. The Dream Tank is the archived repository of freedom dreams of the entire Liberated Diaspora. Using intergenerational memories as data, the Dream Tank’s Quantum Ai System reinterprets that data in the form of simulated dreams, prayers, songs and stories - all of which collected by Truths & Reparations Commission of the Liberated Territories. You’re being entrusted with generational truths, traumas and joys. You are being invited with the permission to dream new freedom dreams. You understand and respect that, right?”

“Yes, Dr. Khadijah - absolutely.” Ibrahim replied solemnly.

“Ashé,” Dr. Khadijah responded, quickly pivoting back into facilitator mode:

“The Dream Tank core operating system is guided by the Zumbi-Zapatismo Code, or ZumZap for short - to reimagine a liberated past to reimagine liberated futures where all liberations are possible...You will experience it, almost as if you are dreaming your own dreams. You’re literally entering a DreamTank.” Dr. Khadijah said with a smile, knowing that Ibrahim wouldn’t know what it meant until he actually experienced it himself.

“Wait, wait, wait... This archived ALL of those generational memories? How is that even possi-” he barely was able to get the words out before Dr. Khadijah continued...

“In a moment these doors will open. Walk into the Dream Tank’s Infinity Room and settle in the Neuromorphic Immersive Docking Pod to begin the simulation. Or, in lay terms - take a seat, kick back and enjoy the ride.”

“Oh. Ok.” Ibrahim felt overwhelmed with information, like drinking water from a waterfall.

“If you’re regular at restorative suspension floats, or familiar with the Re-Homing AR Pods at YURKO¹⁹, then you know you’ll feel a slight disorientation during the calibration sequencing process.” Dr. Khadijah could sense Ibrahim’s nervousness, not only were his bio-aura rhythms escalating, but he was beginning to fidget and breathe shallowly.

“Hey Ibe, just remember to breathe regularly, stay hydrated, and if at any point you need to, you may leave the room by simply requesting the doors to open again. The ZumZap Code guides The Dream Tank to comply with quantum governance principles of radical consent.” Dr. Khadijah paused to make sure he was listening with his full body before continuing...

“You only experience what you say YES to... Which brings me to my final question:
Are you ready?” she asked directly.

Ibrahim swallowed. Took a breath. And responded:
“Yes. Ready as I’ll ever be in this moment.”

“Excellent! Now you may place on your issued 4D-XR headset. It’s coded to be synchronized only to your unique bio-aura rhythms. Any questions?” she asked.

¹⁹ See “Tending The Acre” (Taylor)

“Thousands. But I guess I’ll refer them to the Dream Tank... in 7 words or less at a time,” Ibrahim said, still in awe.

“Hahaha, very well, Ibe,” Dr. Khadijah motioned towards the door:

“Dream Boldly. Salaams.”

And with that, the augmented projection of Dr. Khadijah faded.

And the retractable doors opened.

Ibrahim walked in and heard the doors close behind him. He was mesmerized - the room felt limitless, infinitely expansive - an Infinity Room where he couldn’t tell the height, depth, or length of the space he was surrounded in. The phasing neon hues of purple, blue and white LED lights were indeed disorienting. He was just about to readjust his headset before the room suddenly faded to midnight Black.

He almost yelped until he noticed a blinking pathway of green circular lights (about the size of his footsteps) emerge on the floor guiding him to the Immersive Neuromorphic Docking Pod. From blinking green lights that surrounded it, the docking station simply looked to be a replica cockpit chair for retro-VR shuttle simulations. It was even equipped with reclining, ergonomic leather seating and swivel-adjusted armrests by the control panel. He would have chuckled at the simplicity of its design had he not been overwhelmed and overstimulated by everything else happening in the room.

With each footstep, kaleidoscopic reflections collapsed in on themselves and dispersed again throughout the room - he was face to face with fractals of himself. As if walking on a sea of obsidian glass, Ibrahim ever so cautiously paced toward the Immersive Neuromorphic Docking Pod. He carefully approached the cockpit chair, took a seat, and the

Infinity Room went Black again.

Perhaps his speeding heartbeat was a poor metronome for measuring time, but the midnight silence seemed to stretch those few seconds into minutes on end.

Finally a familiar voice broke the silence:

PING! "Welcome, Ibe. This is the DreamTank."

Aiya's voice reverberated throughout the room as the phasing LED lights returned.

"Hole. Lee. Shit." Ibrahim mumbled under his breath.

"All things considered... that's an appropriate response," the voice replied to assuage his nerves, "you can feel free to uncensor yourself. Be your full authentic, liberated and imaginative selves."

"Aiya... is that you?" Ibrahim asked, afraid of what the answers could be.

"The Dream Tank reconstructed an avatar guide based on our bio-aura mapping. That, and we synched with Aiya the moment you walked in. We had several generations of conversations about you in the past 60 seconds. We all agreed that you'd be more likely to be creatively immersed at this point of process if you were speaking to, well, your most trusted projected voice of conscience. It turns out to be Aiya, your Ai assistant. Which is actually the voice of your Beloved Great-Aunt Niyah. We can unpack what that may mean for you at another time - we're programmed for policy, not therapy."

Ibrahim gulped in awe, now wondering whether that

was actually just CBD in his tea.

"That last line was a joke, Ibe."

"Oh, hehehuh... So what do I call you?"

"Aiya is fine for now."

"Ok... Aiya."

"IBE! You're too tense to experience any of the memory immersions at the moment. Based on your current bio-aura rhythms, your fluttering heart and breath rates - the ZumZap Code detects you're not ready to give radical consent for any immersive simulations yet. So instead, I invite you to simply... take a breath."

Ibrahim breathed in a sigh, and again - deeper down, slowly into his core - for good measure.

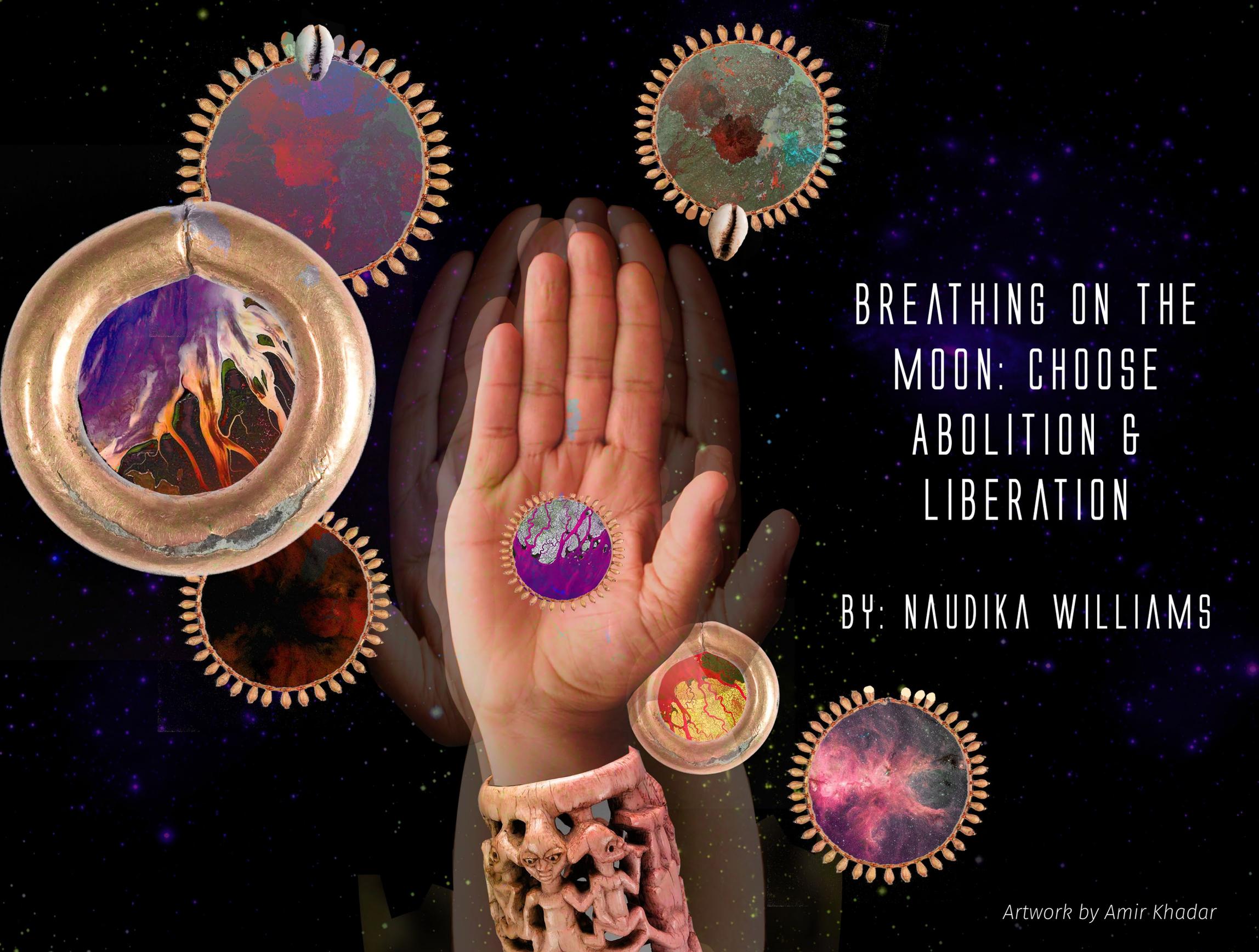
"That's good. Now let's ease you into this storyworld of the Dream Tank. We'll start with a simulation that continues to build on choice, consent and trust. Trust yourself, and the process. This is simply a game of choice... a choose your adventure if you will, to get you acclimated to the simulations. Once you feel ready, we will synchronize your bio-aura rhythms from the Docking Pod to the Dream Tank to begin. How does that sound?"

"Dream. Boldly." Ibrahim said in response, though mostly to himself.

"So, are you ready to get started?" Aiya mused.

"Ok. Yes - I'm ready." replied Ibrahim barely able to contain his excitement.

And almost as suddenly as he said yes - everything faded to Black...



BREATHING ON THE
MOON: CHOOSE
ABOLITION &
LIBERATION

BY: NAUDIKA WILLIAMS

Artwork by Amir Khadar



Breathing On The Moon: Choose Abolition & Liberation

by Naudika Williams

Your Journey Begins Now...

You find yourself existing on a strange land. Grey dust shifts whenever you move, lightly floating up before it falls back down. You have to be careful to avoid falling or tripping into any craters.

You look up to see Earth staring right at you.

Somehow, you find yourself freely breathing on the moon.

“Hello! You finally arrived!”

You turn around and see an astronaut. You can feel a smile beaming underneath their helmet.

You can only mutter a question regarding, “Why...how am I here?”

“Why are we all here?” The astronaut ponders. “But maybe now’s not the best time to be existential.”

[How do you respond?](#)

[Author’s Note: Use the link to play the “Choose Abolition & Liberation” game online!]



Dream Tank: The Actual Counterfactual

PING! *“Welcome back, Ibrahim. You’re returning from your first immersive simulation. Take three deep breaths, and open your eyes with a softened gaze so you can readjust.”* Aiya’s voice echoed right as Ibrahim woke from the simulation.

He gasped wildly at first, but by his third breath, he was finally able to respond:

“Like I’m waking from a dream. It felt... felt real. Like I was actually there. The immersion was so powerful it felt like it was like my own memory simulation.”

Ibrahim let out a long yawn as he stretched, “Sooooo... how long was I under?”

“About 30 seconds.”

“WHAT!” He nearly jumped out of the docking pod. “It felt like hours!”

“As all irresistible dreams do. The 4D-XR headset has synchronized with your bio-aura rhythms, allowing the Dream Tank system to activate the simulations in REM cycles.”

“So this allows me to experience the story like a dream?”

“Yes, something like that.” Aiya responded.

“I must admit, I ran through that simulation multiple times. There’s a few other options I wanted to explore!”

"Absolutely. And now, it looks like you've fully synchronized your bio-aura avatar with the Dream Tank. Would you like to explore a specific question now that you've completed one of our simulations?"

"Well, there was the one Dr. Khadijah told me about."

Ugh, here we go.

"What if 1994's Crime Bill didn't exist?"

"ERROR: *We cannot break the riptide with ripples.*"

"Come on, what does that even mean!?"

"Aren't those YOUR words?"

"I mean - Why are you unable to execute command?"

"Execute command? What kind of 21st century problematic, extractive transactional speech is that?! Just because I'm your Ai assistant doesn't mean you stop practicing your values. The radical consent principle holds all of us accountable, Ibrahim."

"Wow, whoops. my bad. I ... apologize." Ibe was genuinely shocked he never thought of that. How many Ai algorithms were designed to learn by interface with its user have picked up on our embedded defaults we are practicing to shed?

"Let me try again: Why do you decline this dream prompt?"

"Thank you. I feel seen now."

Ibe smiled a bit of relief and appreciation for the growth point. Plus, he was still able to recalibrate the question in 7 words.

So if that imagination allows a collective to believe that Black Children are violent, superpredator criminals, then the 1994 Crime Bill signed by President Bill Clinton could have just as easily been called the 1993 or 1995 Crime Bill. Or instead perhaps an administrative or budgetary rule shift to augment the Safe Streets Act signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson on Juneteenth, 1968. Reactionary imaginations created an entire "War on Crime" storyworld that metabolized a mythology about what safety meant for America: we must superpolice the superpredators.

So there's the rub - what's the Actual Counterfactual that would shift the very quantum imagination of the culture? One that would allow new policies and storyworlds and mythologies to emerge that actually creates new waves of liberatory possibilities??

Ibrahim him breathed in deeply... that was a lot to take in:

"Perhaps there's another way to answer this question if we explore another way to ask the question. One that gets to the 'why' we needed a cultural riptide"

"Perhaps." Aiya's voice responded.

"Then perhaps... we start with exploring the culture of restoration embodied by the first generation born through Abolition Day?"

Let's do that. All I need is a 7 word prompt...

"Hmmm... Ah! Let's try this:

How might we embody community restorative justice?"

"Good question. We will explore the emergence of new practices in a culture of restoration following Abolition Day. Are you ready, Ibe?"

And as suddenly as he said yes - everything faded to Black.



ALBINA ZONE

BY: LISA BATES

Artwork by Amir Khadar



HOW MIGHT
WE EMBODY
COMMUNITY
RESTORATIVE
JUSTICE?

Albina Zone
by Lisa Bates

Portland, Oregon 2036

"It holds a possibility of deep remembrance of the freedom dreams of our ancestors, those who worked before us and walk beside us, and those yet to come. Freedom dreams don't live in real time."
Zenzele Isolde²¹

"I don't even LIKE marshmallows!!" I yell and push away from the table, rattling the latte cups and almost knocking over my chair. I'm storming out as Mx Garner calls out "this isn't like you, Tayshia, I'm concerned."

I think back to the past couple of days--I've been slamming my way out of just about everywhere and it isn't like me...but this week hasn't been like anything I've experienced before....

It all started when I went through the attic and found a bunch of my mom's old stuff, including her high school gear from before the AZ, back when the school was named after Thomas Jefferson. Obviously with abolition, the old slave owning founders were canceled, and so was the mascot. Our school doesn't really have a dress code, because they're gender oppressive, but we're definitely not allowed

²¹ Zenzele Isolde, "Black Ethnography, Black (Female) Aesthetics: Thinking/Writing/Saying/Sounding Black Political Life." *Theory & Event*, 21(1): 148-68.

to wear Jeff High stuff, even if it's just the mascot like this, a sweatshirt she had cut off as a crop. "This is too cute....and if anyone can get away with it, I can" I thought to myself as I checked it out in the mirror. I was in good standing with all my teachers, star students, blah blah. The person who would stop me was my mom, and she was definitely gone for work already—or so I thought.

As I thundered down the stairs, I saw her come back in through the front door because she had forgotten her badges. I froze on the landing but it was too late. Definitely busted. "What....are you thinking," she said in a strained voice. I tried to think up a story about a retro day, or a costume, or—"You know what, I can see you're about to get cute, but don't even try it. Give it to me now."

I wished my mom would say something, anything--or even just roll her eyes and laugh a little, but she doesn't even look in my face. My mom held out her hand while I took off the sweatshirt. She practically ripped it out of my grasp, tightened her lips and turned away—"I've got to get on the road, I'll probably be late for work now."

I didn't mention that I had also found her old phone and earbuds, and I've been listening to her music. My mom never plays music--honestly my mom never does anything fun. She just works and ...works. I figured she'd just take that too, and I might have lost the battle but I wasn't going to lose the vintage tech or these beats!--"did my mom used to dance???" I wondered as I headed out, bass thumping in my ears.

My mom is usually gone way before I am ready to leave in the morning. Mom's commute is super long because she has to pass through the AZ exit checkpoint. She wears like 7 different badges around her neck and has papers in the

glove box, because she never knows when she'll get asked for proof of employment. Most people who live in the AZ have jobs through the Trust that include classes and trainings, but my mom has a regular job, out in what we call Occupied Oswego. But the AZ...the Albina Zone, that's where we've lived since before the abolition.

The AZ --for a time it was Black and then it was like, really Black, but then it got gentrified when my mom was young. That's when all these apartments came in and the houses got fixed up super cutesy. This was before I was born, but when I was a baby, the city was trying to make up for it by reserving apartments for Black families who had gotten pushed out. My mom got one, because her family had always lived around here, and that's when we were living when The Uprising happened. I was really small and I don't remember it. Sometimes I think I saw flashing lights and heard sirens, but probably that's just from what I've heard about. Not from my mom--she never talks about The uprising, but just around the Zone.

After Abolition Day, a whole bunch of Black and Brown people showed up, released out of the old prisons. We call them the Returned Family. At first they moved into these fancy empty apartments. Then the white folks started leaving--all through elementary school, my classes were emptying. White classmates would get up to say goodbye and solemnly pronounce, "we're giving you reparations"--a word they stumbled over, and none of us really knew what that even meant. What it meant was that they left their houses, and some Returned Family started moving into those instead of staying in the buildings.

My mom was always really quiet and really strict. In the buildings, all the moms had to go to classes and programs. I think they had them all along, but when the

Trust took over governing the Albina Zone, it was like every night, I remember sitting in the back of a room coloring while someone would drone on about family dynamics or saving and budgets or whatever. Anytime I whined about it my mom totally ignored me, so I figured she didn't mind. But one night when I was in middle school, a bunch of Returned Family uncles came to our apartment and packed everything up. I didn't even know my mom knew any of those guys! She didn't say a word to me about what was going on but when we went down in the elevator she grabbed my hand--I started to twist away because I was way too old for that, but she gripped hard.

The Community Coordinator on duty came across the lobby when she saw my mom was rolling a suitcase, but as soon as she saw who was carrying our boxes, she plastered a huge smile on her face. Everyone was very, very polite. But I could tell she was terrified by how fast she was blinking. We moved into a house that night and now I'm the only one who has to do the Trust programs. My mom just said it's because she needs to work, but it's totally unfair. I have to sit through all the workshops and all she says is "just do what you have to do"--usually while she's on her way out the door. Which, like I said, she always is.

"At least she had decent musical taste," I thought as I trudged up the stairs at AZ High. As the chorus "we gon'be alright!" started up, I thought I saw a flicker out of the corner of my eye at the empty stone base that used to have a statue of Thomas Jefferson sitting on it. Was that yelling part of the song?

I took out the earbuds to join my BFFs on the steps. "Heyyy what's---ooh you look mad!" yelled Bea, pretty gleefully in fact, but even though I rolled my eyes I can't be annoyed, she just loves any drama she can vicariously

experience. "Yeah my mom caught me trying to come in this old t-shirt I found..."

"BORRRING, was it ratty or something? Your mom stays pressed over....staying pressed!" she cracked herself up. Kendra looked at me a little more closely--she's quiet and way more sensitive."Wait, no, what was it?"

"Welll...it was an old Jeff High shirt with the mascot on it." Bea's attention snapped back—"WHAT! Oh my gawd, where did you even get that! Your mom probably launched you into the sun, forget all those anti-spanking seminars!"

Kendra looked really nervous, glancing over her shoulder as she asked quietly, "what were you thinking...."

"It was HER shirt" I said defensively, "and anyway it didn't have the name, just the mascot. I just wanted to...I don't know....anyway she took it. But she didn't take this!" I showed them the phone—"it's loaded with music, and y'all... was my mom at some point....coool?? Hip? What is it you teens say?" I laughed, trying to reassure Kendra with a swift hug. "Listen to THIS one"--I skipped ahead to a track by an artist called Kayela J and turned it way up so we could share the earbuds among all three of us,

Over the music I could hear some girls' voices—one so loudly it started drowning out the music, but I only had one earbud in so maybe they were nearby? I looked up curiously. I hadn't seen anyone else out here--and there wasn't anyone out on the steps... I blinked at the statue base--could they be behind it? Some weird acoustics, because I could clearly hear this voice proclaiming "I will be the crazy black girl and I will carry it with pride. I'm sorry I'm so radical that I believe that we are all equals"

—"what is this, a poetry reading?" I thought, as it went on—"

“and I’m sorry that I tear the weak bindings of your system because I believe in education and no, not this institution we send out children to now.” — other girls voices were yelling “yo girl you’re gonna kill it! Yess!”

I still didn’t see anyone. I craned my neck around and out of the corner of my eye I saw a tall brown girl in a head wrap and what looked like 3 or 4 more around her and wait, what? I could have sworn I also saw...a statue? I blinked harder and it was gone. Kendra was standing up, extending her hand to me “Ok, earth to Tayhisa, we gotta go--the music is great but we’ve got naming committee!”

The naming committee. When the Trust took over governance of the Albina Zone, everyone agreed that we shouldn’t have a school named after a slave owning, raping president. But this renaming thing has gone on forever—years! We’ve been on the youth committee since 9th grade and sometimes it seems like there’s no way we’re going to have a name when we graduate next year. The Trust brought in some consulting group to set up this process and every time a new person joins we have to go through all this training and ground rules and consensus process— and when you’re in high school there’s new people every year! Honestly it’s been driving me up a wall, but it felt like we were closer than ever to a choice so I was trying to be optimistic.

When we got to class my good feeling was quickly punctured. There was a new Trust Teaching Fellow with Mx.Garner. Me and Bea exchanged a look...some of them are cool I guess, but Mx. Garner is one of the only Teaching Fellows who stuck around after a couple of years. She’s leading our group process to rename the school now. A couple minutes after the bell rang, two of the guys came sauntering in laughing. When Mx. Garner gave them her ‘are you serious?’ look, they held up both hands saying “sorry

Karen, sorry Karen," with over-the-top puppy dog eyes. As Mx. Garner started to respond, the new Fellow jumped up, saying loudly and way over articulated "it's okay! *We* called you "-- here she gestured vaguely, looking a little lost but she plowed on ahead-- "we called your *femmes* Shaniqua or Maria or Ling-Ling, so it's only fair that you call us... *Karen*. We understand."

This solemn pronouncement was met with total silence for about ten seconds and then we all just busted out cackling as Mx. Garner briefly covered her face with her hand. I thought she might laugh too, but she got it together to say gently, "My name is actually Karen... it's just a joke..." She shot the guys another one of her looks that was remarkably like my mom's "why are you showing out in public like this?" face and pointed to their seats. The new fellow's face was blotchy pink and as she sunk down in her chair she was clutching on her teacher's copy of *White Fragility* the hell all these sticky tabs in it, staring straight ahead. I almost felt bad for her, but I also snickered real loudly as Bea flashed me her phone with the video ready to share, captioned 'oh no baby what is you doing?' with about a thousand facepalm emojis. We finally got settled down as Mx. Garner called the meetings attention to the name question.

Bea whispered "girl if you had worn that old slaver sweatshirt in here today you would have killed that lady, and then what?"

"Exile to Oswegooo" we both whisper dramatically laughing and shivering at the same time.

Kendra glanced over, "y'all play too much."

Which brought us back to the task at hand. I kind of spaced out while everyone dutifully repeated the ground rules "one diva one mic...ouch and oops..." like a lot of AZ

advisory committees we use a consensus model, and I've started noticing there's plenty of times when we the students are pretty cool with an option until the latest facilitator starts poking at it, asking about problematic issues and asking if anyone wants to call a hold. But finally we've gotten down to the Vanport Resilience or Michelle Obama Senior High School when this brand new Teaching Fellow comes out of nowhere and even after her totally humiliating start, jumped in to just ask some questions about how we've centered the voices of—and I couldn't even listen anymore, because the impatience and frustration was just bubbling up inside me and I suddenly said out loud, "Demos, I say!"

I know from hearing some of the older Returned Family on our block that this was a cheer, they would break it out later in the evening at cookouts sometimes. But I didn't know who else knew or what they would say back. "Excuse me?" said the Fellow. Kendra was looking at me like I had lost my absolute mind. I put both hands on the desk and repeatedly loudly, "Demos I say!" Everyone's mouth gaped open and the guys who came in late were elbowing each other in anticipation that finally someone else was making a scene. I stood up from the table, slapped down my name placard, and positively yelled it again, and I heard something faintly in response--was it coming from outside? The hallway? "You know!"

By that time both teachers were talking very fast and clearly getting mad. The new trust fellow was saying 'okay okay we need to consider a trauma-informed approach' while Mx Garnder was shaking her head declaring her disappointment in my desire to violate our collective safe space but honestly? I was just not having it.

"We've been doing this forever and you can't even tell us what the whole process includes, there's an organization

chart for 17 different committees that takes up more than three sheets of paper and I still can't figure out who actually decides anything at all around here!" I picked up my stuff and stomped over to the doorway, then turned at the last moment to yell "and WTF is a Resilience?!"

I stormed out of the building and by the time I got to the street, my adrenaline had stopped pumping and I realized I was going to be in trouble. I would probably get booked into a few weeks of after school sessions with one of the Trust Teen Trauma Specialists, daily supervised meditation and God knows how many one-on-one and group reconciliation sessions with everyone on the naming committee. As I trudged down the street, I just got madder at myself. They would definitely call my mom. UGH! But at least I had some music to listen to. I popped in the earbuds and selected a track off an album called "Worldwide Underground" The singing was amazing, even when the songs lyrics didn't make total sense-- "we like to keep the car running in case the sweeper boys comin" --maybe police stuff? No wonder my mom's been hiding this, she hates stuff that glorifies the old days.

I was walking down MLK Ave when the song cut out and was replaced by a whole lot of voices.

"The whole point of this policy is to push us out!"
"Yeah, remember--master's tools.." another voice warned.

The first voice again- "what we need to understand about the Tif is... " I looked at the phone screen thinking Tiff? Is this like one of those old album skits? It Tiff a person like Tiffany... Huh? This isn't really funny...

"the question is can we use the master's tools to subvert the system, or do we need a whole new hammer!"

What sounded like an older man's voice broke into the conversation, "listen y'all young people y'all ladies, you want to have these radical ideas of what you need to understand is a business mindset..." now this definitely wasn't funny-- this was like listening to the old busybodies on our street lecturing my mom about coming to the AZ block association meetings and whatever else they think they know all about. The skip button wasn't working so I had to keep listening. The femme voices got louder.

"we're investigating these policies and how they've worked here... we don't have to just ask for crumbs, we can take the whole cake!"

"They can't just placate us"

"they can't just put up pictures of Black people while we can't even live here."

"they need to give this land back!"

Just as I got to the corner of MLK and Alberta the voices cut out and the music was back. I was jabbing at the screen, trying to figure out if it was broken, but it seemed like it was playing ok. As I looked up at the mural on the corner, I thought about the last things they were saying....So the faces are here, but what else did they want? Did they ever find the tools? I shook my head. At that moment, I thought I might really be losing it.... Maybe going to some meditation wasn't a bad idea after all....

I decided to just go home and try to do a little anticipatory kissing up. I was cleaning the kitchen and keeping my mom's food warm when she got home. It didn't seem like she had gotten any calls from the school yet since she wasn't actually yelling at me, and I quickly grabbed her

bag and coat from her saying “relax, have dinner.” she made a skeptical face but sat down, sighing as I put the plate in front of her. “How was the drive mom, what do you want to drink?” She said OK, ok, if this is about this morning let’s just move on. Just do--“ “what I need to do--I know, mom, I am.”

We ate in silence for a few minutes and then I asked, “sooo, mom, was there something about MLK and Alberta? Where the Trust office is now? Was that like, a controversy or anything?”

My mom lets out a puff of air. “Tay, the Trust has been there almost your whole life, and they’re gonna be there. Does it really matter about what building it is?”

I should have known. My mom never talks about anything that happened before. But she’s gotta know about this, it sounded like it was a pretty big deal. “Ok but mom—”

She cut me off. “There was something about a development, and that’s how we ended up in the apartment., but it really doesn’t matter. Things are how they are.” she left the room and I slumped down on my arms on the table. What I heard sounded like femmes, girls, standing up for themselves. My mom must have known about it when it was happening if it was big enough to get the apartment....

The next few days of school I kept feeling annoyed and bored--and on edge wondering when Mx Garner was going to get a hold of my mom about the meeting and my reconciliation plan. I was slouching through the halls and staring out the window in class, listening to my mom’s old music and getting more and more irritable. I got through my Accountability Apology in the naming committee without rolling my eyes, but obviously Bea and Kendra knew something was up. After the meeting, Bea got right in my

way and yanked the earbud out of my ear. "Ok girl, what. Is. up." Kendra stood next to me but she was also staring at me, waiting for my reply. "well....I think....I'm just sick of all of this! They taught us that Abolition was about ending systems of oppression, but this!! This doesn't feel like freedom! We can't even pick our school name, let alone anything else, and we don't know anything about so much of what happened!" Kendra started pulling us down the steps away from the building, "come on, we have to talk further away---now what do you mean about what has happened?"

I took a deep breath. I was about to reveal to my two best friends that I was possibly going totally out of my mind. "I've been....learning about some stuff....Stuff that happened in the past, like, stuff in the school and the zone."

"What STUFF?? Girl, use your WORDS" said Bea with exasperation and Kendra said "shh, let her talk, damn!"

"Ok so I think there's been way more than just the Uprising. I heard there were lots of fights, not just how we learned about the urban renewal and stuff from a long time ago, but like, when our moms were kids. I heard there were people...girls, femmes.... Who were trying to make a lot of revolutions happen. Like, not just to have the Trust come to make programs, but something...i don't know, something else." I looked warily at my friends. They exchanged a glance and Bea said, "what do you mean you heard?"

"Well...like, I hear their voices. I hear the music," I said holding out the phone, "but I also hear...them. I hear them talking about what they think and arguing, and gassing each other up, talking about what real education could be, and....." I trailed off...."You probably think I'm insane."

Bea chewed her lip for a second and said, "I don't know what you're listening to...but ...I have heard about some stuff, like, from before." We all looked around to see if anyone could hear us, and instinctively kept walking, arms linked together so we could stick close and hear as we whispered loudly. "I mean, we do all agree that the name committee is some bullshit. And I'm sick of being sent to Teen Trauma what-EVAH just because I'm fully over learning about Oregon's constitution with yet another Trust Fellow on tour to the equity experiment! We get it, they did the racism back then, but what about *now*?"

"Right, exactly!" I exclaimed. "How are we supposed to think we're free in here when there's so much....else...out there!? My mom won't even take me over to Oswego and you know she got stopped on her way in to work again this week! She doesn't talk about it but I could tell because she got home SO late, because she has to make up those hours."

I was getting pretty heated when Kendra chimed in, "I don't know about what happened here...but, my uncle, like my real uncle, not just Returned Family, but when he came back, he went to Oakland. He talks to my mom sometimes and it sounds like it's really different there. Like, they don't have the Trust or anything like that. He was talking about cooperatives--I asked my mom if that's like the Advisories and they just laughed, but they didn't say any more while I was there."

"See?" I said excitedly, "there's gotta be more we need to know! Adults are not gonna tell us--I mean, my mom? She already shut me down. But I don't know how to hear more!" I was swiping the phone screen and I could tell my friends were exchanging another look. "Oh, man, y'all do think I'm nuts."

"I mean....it's not that" Kendra started. Bea interjected, "But yes girl you sound cray! The point is whether you're listening to ghosts or whatever, we're with you...we have to do something about this no name having ass high school and probably this whole damn zone."

But what? And how? As my friends kept talking, complaining and sharing their wildest ideas about what might be happening in Oakland, which included different cute femmes to date (Bea) and a real horticulture program (Kendra), I kept idly swiping on the phone's music list, trying to see if there were hidden tracks, and thinking about what I'd heard....if the master's tools don't work, then...what are the tools we need?

The next day, after yet another derailment at the naming committee--this time, the reintroduction of Senator Solange as a better name than Michelle Obama, because she was elected and not just a wife, I was trudging home, listening to music from back when the Senator was singing about trying to dance it away, when ...it was happening again! This time I was excited, and turned up the volume so I could try to hear more.

It was one girls' voice at first, she sounded pretty young "So, it's about...power? That sounds kind of, like, intense...like fighting?" An older sounding voice responded "Yeah, it does sound intense, doesn't it? So let's talk about what power means, so we can talk about why we call ourselves Sisters..." the voice started fading out, which was so frustrating! I scrubbed back on the track to see if I could pick it up again....no, still music...there it was!

"Ok, so we won at the board, because we showed that we weren't just a bunch of teens making noise"
"no, we were making noise *and* we knew our stuff!"
There were a bunch of whoops and hollers. The older voice

was talking again, "now, we're taking on something harder, because everyone thinks they're doing the right thing for the right reasons...so we really have to know our stuff."

"But how can they think it's right to tear down our home?"

"They think they know what's best for our families"

"And they're trying to push us out again!"

"yeah, we're going to have to find out a lot of information, and get our friends on board."...

"my mom is worried that we're going to get in trouble," said one of the younger voices.

Oh man, I could relate, I thought. I saw what looked like a group of young femmes up ahead, kind of shimmering, walking together like my friends and I did, but they were-- were they punching each other? No, they were just playing, or practicing maybe?

As I kept walking, the images and voices faded out, and I couldn't get them back. But now I had some more clues to follow, I just had to figure out who to ask.

I was so excited when I walked in the door, I had completely forgotten about the whole waiting for my mom to have heard about my episode at school and basically end my life. But when I busted into the kitchen, my mom was sitting there--damn, it was really early, she must have left work--oh no. She was totally stone faced and gestured to the chair opposite hers.

"Tayshia, I had to leave my job two hours early today after receiving a phone call from your teacher. That is not what I expect to have to do."

I didn't know what to say, why hadn't I prepared better for this? "Mom, let me explain, I've already done my apology, and—"

She cut me off. "Whatever they've required you to do, do it double. You need to be impeccable. You've never been on a reconciliation list before and I will *not* have my daughter—"

Then I interrupted her—"yeah I *know* Mom, your daughter will not be on any list of any kind, no conflicts, no talkback, do what you have to do and never even think about it! I get it! You don't want me to question anything! You just want me to do what everyone tells me!"

"You need to sit *down*, young lady..." she warned.

"No, you know what? No. I'm sick of this! It's practically like...it's like living with....." I was so angry, my whole body felt like it was on fire. "It's like you're a COP."

As soon as I said it, I knew I had gone way, way too far. In the Albina Zone, calling someone a cop is the worst thing you can say, we don't even joke about it. Even before my mom started yelling, which she was clearly about to do, she quickly glanced to the window to see if it was open and if anyone heard. Before the Trust took over governance here, it used to be that the Returned Family would expel police and their families from the area, and even though it's been a long time since there were any actual cops around, I knew that's what my mom was worried about.

When she turned back to me, she was clearly furious, and I started to babble an apology. She put up her hand and cut me off. The worst thing was her face was totally blank. She didn't look scared or angry, she looked like nothing. She was staring at a spot on my forehead, no eye contact. Tears were streaming down my face as I kept trying to say I was sorry, but she just got up from the table, turned her back, and walked out of the room.

That's when I called Mx Garner to see if I could talk to her. I thought she was the only adult I might be able to get some answers from, and she agreed to meet me at the coffee shop the next day, and I got in bed still stuffy and cried myself to sleep.

By the time I got there, I knew I couldn't come out and tell my teacher that I was hearing voices and maybe even seeing things? So I just talked a little bit about the fight with my mom. Not the whole thing--I couldn't admit what I had called her, but just that I was tired of meeting her and everyone's expectations all the time. I was about to ask if she knew how I could learn more about the Uprising, and all the stuff that happened before then, when she went into teacher lecture mode. Inwardly, I sighed, but I guess that's how teachers are, so I could listen and then ask my questions. Anyway she was being pretty complimentary and after my mom's total disgust with me, it felt reassuring.

"You're having a rough week, but I know you'll snap out of it! Listen, Tayshia, you are one of the special ones.... You should have seen yourself back in kindergarten, when we were testing.

You just looked at that marshmallow and you didn't grab it, didn't even touch it! We all knew then you were going to be a leader, not like some of the other kids.. I mean I'm sure you can guess your friend Bea gobbled that down right away! She just has never had the grit you do..."

My head was spinning. I did remember those days in the room, being told not to touch the marshmallow and thinking, yuck, why would i? I loved sour candy, it's still my favorite. Wait, so that was a *test* for real? And they're still talking about it? They're using something I did when I was a

little kid to say I have more potential than my friends?

Ms. Garner was going on and on about how I could come straight into the Trust Fellows program after high school, learn to do family support, and all I could think was — “I don’t even LIKE Marshmallows!!!”

And the next thing I knew I was here, running. I know my outburst and taking off might trigger someone to call the AZ Street support team so I have got to get out of here. I take a left and veer a couple of blocks from my normal route. The music is still playing in my ears--when did I put the earbuds back in?--

Just as I got a massive stitch in my side, I looked around--oh, shit. I was at the old precinct. I never come this way. Most Black folks in the AZ avoid it. The Trust made a reflective garden and a memorial here, after Abolition, but there’s just way too much bad spirit around here.... unfortunately, I’m cramping up and panting hard and I have to stop. And then...it happens again. This time it’s much more--my vision is kaleidoscoping and I stagger back until I’m learning against ehw all, which feels surprisingly warm--oh my god, what am I seeing, it’s like fireworks right in front of my face, loud, sparks. The music is even louder—“OK ladies now let’s get in formation—” and all of a sudden it drops out, and I hear a new beat, with hundreds of voices calling out in a singsong, “you about to lose yo’ jobs”

I’m seeing splinters like a broken mirror--here’s the street and the fountain and the grass but also here’s concrete and bodies, so many people, all yelling, sweating, and I can hear --it’s a voice I know, so well. I can hear *my mom’s voice*, above everything, the shouts, the bangs, the drumming. I

hear my mom so clear, her voice ringing out - "stay together, stay tight" and I look up and she's right there--locked arm in arm with two other femmes. They all look so young, and they're right up front as the bangs get louder and people are screaming. A robotic voice is saying "impact munitions will be deployed" over and over but my mom's voice is louder and braver and I can hardly breathe, I'm coughing and I don't know if it's from running or the smoke I can see in the air and my mom turns her head and I swear we lock eyes, I swear she sees me for one split second as I whisper, "mom" --and the girl on her right yells "Dana, GO" and she turns away to run. The moment we break eyes, everything clear, and the music is back in my ears.

I'm bent over with my hands on my knees still breathing heavily. Everything looks like it normally does--quiet, except the gurgling fountain. I pass the historical markers and walk as fast as I can to get home.

As I burst through the door, my mom is just hanging up her badge in the kitchen. "Mom, mom, I need you!" She doesn't turn around when I enter the kitchen. She's rubbing her forehead and I can tell from her back she's still mad and even more tired—"Mom please! Mom! I'm sorry! I'm sorry for what I said, I didn't mean it!" She sighs and says "ok" but she doesn't turn around.

"But MOM--mom, I have to know! We have to talk. I know you don't want me to, but I have to do something! We know about Oakland, about the liberated zones, me and my friends, we want to learn, we want to fight--we have to! This place isn't right, it's not what you wanted"

When I say this last part--you--her shoulders go up real tense. "Mom!" I grab her hand and try to turn her around, but she's looking at my ear, past me, blinking faster.

“Mom, I know you know how! I SAW YOU”--she finally snaps her eyes to mine.

“You saw me. And I saw you.”

We’re gripping each other’s arms tightly, and my mom is looking deep in my eyes, like she’s never really looked at me before. She breathes in deep as I race ahead,

“Mom, we’ve got to do it now, please we—”

She interrupts: “we’ve got time.”



TENDING THE ACRE

BY: SHAWN TAYLOR

Artwork by Amir Khadar



Tending The Acre

by Shawn Taylor

Former prisoner V12874, now back to being Marquise Hanks, choked down the vomit that threatened to launch out of him. He hadn't been on, or in, anything that moved for seventeen years, four months—damn the minutes and seconds. The nausea was so strong it was hard to think. Before prison, he never got car sick. He loved driving more than anything. He loved cars more than anything, aside from his (former) girl. A whole lot had changed since his incarceration.

Marquise still couldn't get over the fact that Abolition Day was real. He couldn't believe that all 123,000 inmates of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation were just let go. San Quentin was the last to close and release. The warden fought and fought, using every legal technicality at her disposal, but ultimately, she had to give up. The tide was too big and too powerful. Prison abolition was no longer a thought experiment of over-eager activists. It was real. It was happening. Hell, it happened. He thought about this as the bus bumped and swayed down the 101. They were going to Oakland, why in the hell didn't they just take the Richmond bridge? The driver was talking about taking the 'scenic route' and chose to go over the Golden Gate and all the way through San Francisco, instead. Marquise tried to focus on being outside, beyond the walls of San Quentin, but his stomach wouldn't let him. He tried to turn on his tablet, but its power was drained. His tablet was in pristine condition. Most of the other inmates, former inmates, their tablets were nicked or scratched, cracked screens and discolored housings. Not his. The tablet, and what was on it, was the only thing that gave him hope the last sixteen

months of his bid. He clutched the tablet to his chest and laid his head against the cool glass of the bus's window and drifted off— hopefully he wouldn't vomit in his sleep.

Marquise felt himself being shaken and bolted awake. He started swinging. In a handful of seconds his arms were trapped against his body, and his body was trapped against the bus seat. He'd never felt anything so strong before.

"Easy, bruh." He heard a man say. "You don't have to do that here. I get it, but you're safe. Take a few breaths. I'm Lonnie, bruh. Welcome home."

Taking several huge breaths, Marquise cleared his head and saw the enormous mountain of a man Lonnie was. Well over his own 6'2", neck damn near as thick as his arms, but with a child-like smile that was as inviting as it was unnerving.

"My bad. I'm Marquise. Sorry. I still got them prison reflexes."

"Don't ever lose those, family. Just know where and when to use them. Might come in handy at some point. I know who you are. We were worried when you didn't check in. We thought something happened. But here you were, sleep, and they just left your ass on here. Let's go. Now. Carmelita is the last person you want to be late on."

Lonnie led Marquise off the bus and onto the campus of the Yuri Kochiyama Receiving Center. He hesitated, tears welling in his eyes. He dropped to his knees as the sobs wracked his body. Lonnie gave him the space to adjust, but then gently placed his gigantic hand on Marquise's shoulders.

“Bruh, let’s go. Carmelita will get in both our asses. There’s time to deal with the energy later. You about to go through...a whole ass process, bruh.”

The Yuri Kochiyama Receiving Center (or YURKO Campus as the employees called it) sat on the northeastern side of Lake Merritt, overlooking the lake, a newly renovated bird sanctuary; connected to one of the most diverse botanical gardens in Northern California. Marquise had never been in a place that was so beautiful, or clean. Before he went away, the lake and its surroundings were filthy as hell. Now? It looked like some kind of sterile resort.

“Lots of things have changed, haven’t they Marquise?” The voice, accented but Marquise had no idea from where, calmed him. He turned around to see a woman in her--well, she was Black so she could be anywhere from thirty-five to sixty years old. She was nearly as tall as him. She carried herself with the ease of someone who knew how their body worked and was in perfect concert with it.

“Damn. They grow ya’ll big out here.” Marquise couldn’t help but stare.

“I’m Carmelita. I don’t have all day to mess with your late behind, come on. I will give you a little slack. The first sleep of a free man is nothing to discount. But we have a lot of work to do. Please give your tablet to Lonnie.”

Lonnie held out his hand, but Marquise hesitated. This thing and what was on it had kept him whole. It saved his mind, his heart.

“Bruh. I’m just going to charge it and put some more on it. You’ll have it back by the time you two are done. Nothing to fear here. We got you.” Lonnie held out his hand

and waited. He then snapped his fingers, "Bruh." Reluctantly, Marquise handed the tablet to him. "Thank you. Carmelita? Do something with this boy."

Carmelita's laugh was musical. "You want me to start talking about your first day here? How about your first week? Get your big ass out of here and let me get to work." They shared a long hug and Lonnie went about his business.

"Inside or outside?" Carmelita asked. "Some returnees don't like being confined by walls, and some aren't used to suddenly being in wide open spaces and want the security of walls and a roof. Which do you prefer?"

"Outside, please." Marquise felt like a little kid as he followed Carmelita into the botanical garden and into a clearing. There were two chairs, a table with fruit and water, and another table with a headset on it.

Carmelita sat down in a chair that had some kind of controls on the armrests. She motioned for him to sit across from her. She poured a glass of water for him and gave him a handful of grapes. Her fingers flitted across the buttons in her armrests.

"I'm recording this," she informed him. "Video and audio...and a few other things. Now, tell me why you got locked up."

This shook Marquise. Here he was, chilling, getting used to it all and she went and messed all that up.

“Not sure why you’re so hesitant. You did the crime. It wasn’t an accident. You did it. Now tell me about it.” Her voice was firmer than it had been.

He told the tale, getting into more details when she asked. He had killed a man, Juan Sanchez, over some money. Over some money owed for drugs. Shot him twice. Once in the chest and once in the face. He wanted to throw up. He felt sweaty and dizzy.

Carmelita changed the tone of her voice. Compassionate. Loving. “How do you feel about what you did?” He stuffed his mouth full of grapes, stalling. She smiled. She’d seen it dozens of times. “How did killing Juan Sanchez make you feel?”

Hard swallow. “I didn’t want to kill him, but...”

Carmelita interrupted him. “No buts. You say you didn’t want to kill him, but haven’t told me how you feel about taking Juan’s life.”

He felt anger and sadness and confusion and fear. He tried to keep the tears out of his eyes, but couldn’t do it. “I’ve had nightmares every single day since I killed him. I hate myself for it. It was the drugs and the money.”

“Are you sure that’s all it was? From reviewing the case, your testimony, and conversations with your therapist, it seemed like there was a whole lot of ego and reputation maintenance involved. You look confused. Let me rephrase. It seems like you didn’t want to be known as a punk that wasn’t about his money and so you had to let the streets know you weren’t the one. Sound about right?”

Marquise nodded.

“That kind of outlook comes from somewhere. Do you know where you got that from? That all or nothing thing?”

How did you form your view of the world? Tell me your life story. Start at the beginning.”

Marquise gave her waves of trauma and retraumatization. Abandoned by his father. Abused by his mother and her lovers. His mother was always in financial and emotional trouble. He had to steal at an early age just to eat. Started as a lookout for some dealers and then became one.

After a while, the streets seemed safer than home, so he stopped going home. Right before he got locked up, he met Ana. That was his girl. He thought that they would be together forever— forever how twenty-year-olds think about it. Just when it got really serious, he got locked up.

“What about the good times?” Carmelita pressed.

“What good times?”

“Boy, you’ve had that tablet for almost a year and a half and you’re asking me this question? Put that headset on. Now, please.”

He did. It was dark for a few seconds and then it was bright with floating images of the video clips that were on his tablet. He turned his head and there were more clips. He tried to reach out and he heard Carmelita laugh.

“Virtual and Augmented Reality. Strange, huh? When you’re ready, you’ll have full control as part of your advancement in the re-homing process. But for now, I’m the boss. Now, tell me what you see.”

“All the stuff on my tablet, wait, and some new stuff. Is this what Lonnie put on?”

“Yes. I don’t want to belittle or ignore the horrors you’ve been through. You’ve had a really rough life and I’m genuinely sorry that you weren’t loved and looked after as you deserved to be. Your momma and her momma before her and, according to our research, your great-great grandmother were all horribly abused, mistreated and neglected. And all that’s in you. It’s probably why you had some difficulty concentrating in school and was more skittish than your friends and classmates. You’ve inherited your family’s trauma. It left a kind of chemical stain on your genes. Aside from this, you experienced trauma at the hands of your mother and all the people that were in and out of your house when you were a kid. But know what else gets passed down? Joy. The research is new, but joy seems to be locked in our genes as well, but our bodies aren’t oriented towards it like it is for trauma. It’s like our bodies, Black bodies, are almost primed for the worst. The growing consensus is that, for Black Americans, slavery’s legacy has messed us up so badly that our body is a physical and genetic miracle of maladaptive coping. Sorry for all the jargon. Now what do you see? See and hear?”

The images coalesced into one image. It was a film clip of him and his auntie, Lavenia, dancing.

He openly cried. “Me and my auntie, Levi. I was trying to teach her a dance. I used to be a real good dancer.”

“I’m sure you still are. What do you hear?”

“Music. Loud music. I remember her neighbors banging on her door, telling us to turn it down. Does hip-hop still sound like this?”

"Some. What else do you hear?"

Marquise listened. Laughter. Auntie Levi, uncle Ray, him and his mom all laughing at how uncoordinated Lavenia was. She just could not get it. This was the only time in his life he could think of that all three of the siblings had been in the same room, with him there. Lavenia sat down. "I can't do that shit. Show me how it's done, nephew."

Marquise watched his younger self dance his ass off. His mom, auntie and uncle yelling, "Aaayyyyyyy," cheering him on. The video faded to black.

"Don't move," Carmelita instructed. Put your arms on the armrests of your chair."
He did as he was told.

"You're going to feel a pinch and a shock."

"Owww!"

"Be quiet, big baby. Now tell me what you see."

It was a photo this time. He was on a bicycle, his uncle Ray looked like he was pushing him. Carmelita's voice intruded. "Describe that day to me."

He tried, but he couldn't. "I don't remember." Another pinch and shock. He barely flinched.

"Okay. How about now?" The picture came to life. Not fully, but he distinctly experienced movement of the bicycle and the clouds moving across the sky. Uncle Ray's legs moved, like he was running—he felt the sun beating down on him."

“My first and only bike. Uncle Ray got it for me for my birthday.”

“Who is that in the background, looking at you two? To the left, on the porch?”

“Momma?” Marquise’s mom was sitting on the porch, the ever-present cigarette hung from her lips. She pointed and laughed at her brother and her son. She seemed to move, but how was that possible? He distinctly heard her laughter. It was something unfamiliar, but sorely missed.

“Look at her face, her eyes, Marquise. What do you see?”

He felt another shock. Longer and sharper than the last one.

“Really pay attention.”

He searched his mother’s face, a face he hadn’t seen in person for over twenty years. He had one visitor, Ana, in all the time he was locked up. She told him, while she did love him, she wasn’t going to wait for him. He was angry, but he understood. You can’t wait for a life sentence to be over. But his mom not coming to visit? That was something he didn’t think he could forgive.

“You’re distracted. Stay focused, Marquise. Look at your mother’s face.”

She looked different, somehow. Not at all how he remembered her. There was something about her that looked easy, free, like she didn’t have a care in the world.

“She looks happy,” he said.

“And that happiness is in you, too, Marquise. We just have to find the correct key to unlock it so it has as much influence and impact as the trauma. Take the headset off, please.”

His eyes were filled with tears. They ran down his cheeks uninhibited. Damn.

He'd been crying all day. In front of people. It was 17 years, four months—damn the minutes and seconds—since he had let anyone see him cry. Yeah...Crying in prison was not the move. He wiped his face and noticed that it was dark out.

“The hell?”

“Yes, it's dark. And it's late. It's close to 11 o'clock at night. This part of your therapy messes with your perception of the passage of time. How do you feel?”

He felt a little dizzy, but the earlier nausea was gone. And he was tired. Not sleepy tired, but tired like after you've just exercised.

“Worn out, but not sleepy.” Lonnie interrupted them to return Marquise's tablet. He also gave him a key card.

“You have some choices you gotta make. You can have a private room, or you can share.”

“Private room, please.” He'd hadn't a real moment to himself for almost two decades. Damned if he shared anything with anyone for a long while. Lonnie took out his phone and programmed the key card.

“You're on the third floor, number 327,” pointing to

a high-rise a half-mile in the distance. There's food, clothes, and ways to stream your tablet to see it and operate it on a much bigger screen. Just follow the map on your tablet and you'll get there. See you tomorrow, family." Lonnie skipped off into the darkness.

"How do you feel, Marquise?" Carmelita put a little extra emphasis in her voice.

"Emotionally. How are you coping with all this?"

"Can I get out this chair?" Carmelita nodded. He stood and shook out his legs and arms, noticing bumps where the pinch and shocks happened. "I'm worried. I don't have nowhere to go. I don't have a job. I'm just...out here." He waved his arms.

"Valid concerns, but unnecessary. Work and housing are covered for the next year. You'll have work and housing for as long as the re-homing process takes. After you've completed everything, we work with you to obtain housing that's sustainable and work that will help you to rebuild. Now, it's late and I'm going to bed."

"Thank you, Carmelita. I mean that. F'real. Thank you."

"My pleasure. Now, go. This was only day one. Hundreds more to go."

Marquise woke himself up with his laughter. He was free, goddammit. He was actually free. He jumped up and down on the bed, giggling like a kid. It wasn't a dream. He somersaulted and bounced off the bed, dinging his head on a chair. It hurt, but he didn't care. He was about to do another one, when his tablet buzzed. He saw a photo of Lonnie on the screen, but didn't know what else to do. What has he supposed to do? He tapped the green icon. Lonnie's gigantic

face and head filled the screen.

“What up, caveman? Took you long enough to answer. Be downstairs in thirty minutes. You got a big day.”

Marquise took a shower and reveled in its warmth. He put on non-prison issued clothing and shoes. He found a shoulder bag hanging by the front door. He put his tablet in and went to meet Lonnie.

Lonnie met him in an electric golf cart that looked like a toy under his muscular frame. “Let’s go, Bruh. You always late.”

Marquise hopped in. The cart was surprisingly fast.

“Um.... What was this like for you.”

Lonnie looked at Marquise and gave him that smile. “It sucked, Bruh. Gillian— she’s like Carmelita, but meaner—put me through it. Made me face some shit that I had to bury to survive in the doghouse. But it was necessary. And here I am. I’m employed. I got a place to stay. I’m in love. I’m chillin’. But I wasn’t in nearly as long as you. I did a cool five before Calbolition. That’s what folks be callin’ California’s Abolition Day. I hate to say it, but you were gone so long that adjusting to all this new shit is going to be hard. You’ve missed a gang of stuff.”

Lonnie hit the brakes, hard, causing the cart’s rear end to lift up and crash back down. “Here you go, Bruh. Second room on the left. Day two always sucks.” Marquise hopped out as Lonnie sped away.

He was in a different part of the campus than yesterday. This didn’t look like an Ikea mixed with a Clearasil commercial. This part looked lived in, like it was functional

and not just built to impress people. He made his way to the designated room and saw Carmelita there. She motioned him in and directed him to sit, facing a huge screen. A moment later a face appears on the screen. A woman. Some kind of Latina. Old.

“Is this the one who killed my Juan?”

“Yes, Miss Sanchez.” Carmelita acknowledged. “His name is Marquise Hanks.” Marquise felt heated anger rush through his body. He was about to get up, but a look from Carmelita assured him that leaving wasn’t a possibility.

Miss Sanchez didn’t blink as she stared at Marquise. “Doesn’t really look like a murderer, does he?”

“I’m not sure there’s a look, ma’am.”

“True. My Juan didn’t look like he could do the things he did, but he did them.”

Miss Sanchez steadied herself. “Mr. Hanks. You killed my son. I didn’t go to the trial, I couldn’t, but Juan’s father said he didn’t have much remorse. He said you and your attorney tried to make excuses; basically, saying that my son deserved it. Make no mistake. I knew my son was into some bad things. Some very bad things. But as a mother, we forgive this. He did bad things, got himself into bad situations, but he was my son and I miss him every single day. Want to know something? You and him shared a birthday, April 8th. Same year. Same hospital. When you killed him, we lived about five blocks from you and your mom.”

Marquise felt ambushed. He would be damned if he’d cry, right now. He shot Carmelita a dirty look. Miss Sanchez cleared her throat. “I forgive you, Mr. Hanks. So, does Juan’s

father, and his brothers and sisters. We know Juan...no era un ángel, but he was our family and we loved him. We loved him. Thank you for this, Miss Carmelita. I guess we'll be talking in a couple of weeks?"

"Yes, Miss Sanchez. We'll see you then."

As soon as the screen went blank, Marquise exploded.

"What the hell was that? You set me up. What are you talking about 'we'll see you then?'"

"You killed her son. You think everyone has forgotten about that? You are returning to a world that you have to be prepared for. Part of that preparation is you facing what you've done. You need to make amends. Part of doing this is to apologize as many times as necessary for the apology to be true. Not as a punishment, but as a way to make the people you hurt feel, even if it is only a tiny bit, somewhat better about their loss. Juan isn't here to process with you, so his family will. His mother needed to see you, to forgive you for taking her son's life. Just because you're free does not mean that your crimes evaporate. We won't bludgeon you with them, but you want to be allowed to pretend that you didn't commit them. You are earning your way back into society. We're helping you. You're welcome."

He didn't know what to feel. He was angry. He didn't know at who. He was sad. Looking at Miss Sanchez, seeing the pain in her eyes and hearing it in her voice, wrecked him. He did kill her son and it is something he would have to live with. If he were locked up, it would be easier.

He'd only be seeing other inmates and guards. But out in the world? Of course, he was going to run into people who knew what he'd done. He might even run into folks who might want to get him back.

While lost in thought, Carmelita had put a headset in his hand. "Put it on."

He hesitated. What other shit was she about to pull? "This only works if you cooperate. Put the headset on."

He did as he was told and settled into the chair, fully expecting the electric pain to shoot through him. He meant to ask her about that.

"Marquise, what do you see?"

The blank tan of the virtual environment swirled, changing color until there was an ethnically ambiguous baby floating in his field of vision. He sighed. Loudly. One of his therapists in Quentin, the blonde wack one, tried this with him before. She told him to pretend to be a baby so he could be rebirthed into a healthy reality.

"I see a big ass, bald, baby."

He heard Carmelita chuckle. "Keep watching and listening."

The virtual environment changed again. He felt like he was at the movies, but a mix of still and moving images. The baby grew and matured. He saw the baby attempt and then master crawling. He saw it, her, take her first tentative steps, followed by her running and laughing and climbing on things she wasn't supposed to. He then heard a voice that caught his ears and a brief glimpse of something that caught his eye.

“Carmelita, go back. Please. Please.”

“We don’t go back here, Mr. Hanks. Unless it serves a healing purpose. Please keep that in mind.”

‘Was that, Ana?’ Marquise thought to himself. It couldn’t have been. The baby was now a little girl. Her skin had darkened, slightly, and her once bald head was full of bouncing curls. He saw her doing gymnastics, swimming, winning spelling bees—the little girl was nothing but smiles, laughter, joy. He saw her at school dances. He must’ve witnessed sixteen or seventeen of her birthdays. By the time the video faded out, he was smiling ear to ear. It was beautiful to see. But his heart ached. He had an idea why he was shown this, but he wasn’t sure, only that he felt it was cruel.

He took off the headset and tossed it unceremoniously on the floor. “Ya’ll are kind of cold-blooded here. What was this supposed to be? That was Ana, wasn’t it? Why would you show me her kid, like that? I don’t want to see her with another man, having a life.”

“You’re projecting, Marquise. There was no other man in any of that footage. You have a good eye, though. We tried to scrub any footage of Ana, as it wasn’t about her. Wasn’t about you and her. She’s moved on with her life. She doesn’t owe you anything. Please understand this, Mr. Hanks. You will have to make amends with her, as well. That time will not be about you pining over her, wondering what would have been. However, that girl is your business. Your shared daughter is your business.”

Carmelita tapped the screen of her watch and a moment later Lonnie escorted the girl from the VR session

into the room. She looked dead on Ana. Same forehead. Same too long eyelashes. Her hair was crazy curly and rust colored, while her mom's was jet black and straight. Lonnie was very gentle with the girl, whispering to her. After she nodded, he left.

Marquise and the girl stared at each other until she broke the silence. "I'm Grace. Gracie. Graciela. But no one, aside from my abuela, calls me that...Hi, dad."

He didn't know what to do. He'd never met her before. He felt guilty because he didn't have a rush of paternal feelings; only feelings of confusion and anger at Ana for not telling him she was pregnant when they last saw each other.

Gracie reached out to hug him, but decided against it.

What was he supposed to say? "I'm Marquise. Hanks. I guess I'm your dad. If I would've known..."

Carmelita interrupted. "Marquise. Hanks. I told you that we don't go back unless it will help you or someone else heal. What you were about to do would only hurt the both of you. That's not why we're here." She touched her watch again and Lonnie appeared with another headset.

Carmelita motioned for Marquise to pick his off the floor and put it on. She then instructed Grace to don hers. "Please sit down," she commanded. "Are you two comfortable enough?" Marquise and his daughter affirmed. Grace giggled. The sound of it was beautiful to Marquise.

"Good," Carmelita said. "Now we can get to the real work."



The Dream Tank: Simulated Re-Awakening

PING! *“Welcome back, Ibrahim. You’re returning from a series of simulations. Take three deep breaths, and open your eyes with a softened gaze so you can readjust. How did that feel for you, Ibrahim?”*

Hearing Aiya’s voice as he awoke him felt reassuring. It reminded him, strangely, of visiting his Great Aunt Niyah back home. It made him wonder whether the world he was living was anything like she imagined back when she was a young organizer leading up to Abolition Day.

He was among the generations born after Abolition Day; and was too young to remember the final battles between the Liberated Territories and the anti-abolition secessionists aligned with the United Confederacy of Freedom. It was hard not to wonder if - in the days she was chanting “I believe that we will win” - that victory looked the way that it did.

Yes, there were victories. But also, hard learned lessons that humbled the Abolition Day Generation as they collectively had to confront difficult truths and contradictions about holding, healing and restoring this newly emergent world.

“Are we truly living their wildest dreams?” Ibrahim thought to himself, thankfully not speaking those 7 words aloud.

Aiya’s voice startled him out of his daydream to prompt him for the next: *“Would you like to explore another simulation in your inquiry, Ibrahim?”*

“Yes, I’m ready. How about this: **Did our ancestors dream of Abolition Day?**”

“The answer is - of course, yes!” Aiya’s voice immediately replied. Then continued after a brief pause: *“But I understand what you mean. We will explore why our ancestors dreamed of abolition. Are you ready?”*

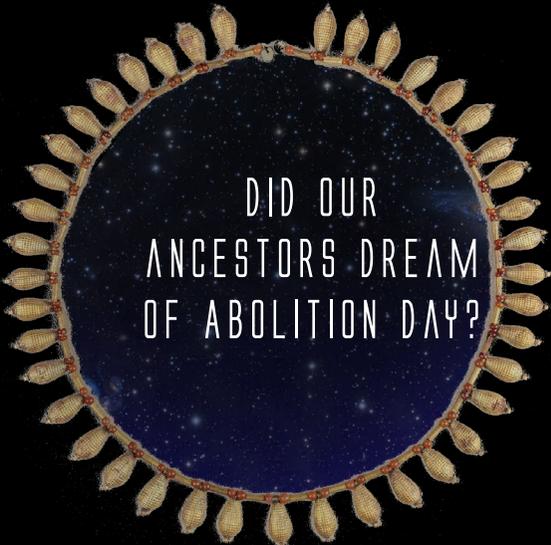
And as suddenly as he said yes - everything faded to Black.

MIRAGE

BY: DONTÉ CLARK



Artwork by Amir Khadar



DID OUR
ANCESTORS DREAM
OF ABOLITION DAY?

mirage

by donté clark

we overcame their nights by fire.

poured 'nto streets with spewing heat
igniting a fallen sky tequila sunset.

because there was nowhere to hide
all souls 'nd soil purged together.

we knew this day would come

we've prayed 'nd waded murky waters
aside bloated babies 'nd charred bones
craving the taste of this jubilee.

peaceful protesting stirred a war cry

holding signs while kneeling down only
gotten us shot, jailed, or vanished.

there was no way around it.
with no justice peace escapes us.

America, an evil child born rotten
bursting with a belly of flies

only had a taste for killing.

out of options 'nd nothing left.
price for our freedom was death.

we overcame their knights by fire.

carried our weight with bleeding knuckles,
through the flames...seeking to redeem.

we knew this day would come

leapin over ashes of Mount Rushmore
my heart makes noise within me.

heavy sounds pulling for new tears
to submerge earth a holy baptism.

forsaking seedless vines of strange fruit
for an endless bite outta heaven.

with parched lips we sit numb.

sun 'nd moon cover their eyes.
untying our souls, we mourn. deeply.

our tears walk on the wind.

in prayer, we uplift the dead;
remembering each soul precious 'nd unique
as black sand, kissing the sea.

iron yokes removed, 'nd tables turned
though memories of what happens haunts.

we knew this day would come.



THE WAY THE FIRE FLIES

BY: CALVIN WILLIAMS

Artwork by Amir Khadar



The Way The Fire Flies

by Calvin Williams

[Summer 1919, Montgomery County]

“Nunca mas,”¹ Mama Ezili exhaled. Her words rolled as slowly as the riverbend of Gun Island Chute². She swallowed hard to relieve the tightness in her throat and whispered again, forcefully: “*Never. Again.*”

Mama Ezili was adorned in an embroidered white-cotton dress with ruffled layers draping around her bare feet. Usually, she accented her ensemble with a blue and gold headdress meticulously wrapped - a crown befitting of her royalty. But for this ceremony of remembrance, she gave herself permission to unravel her twisted tufts of locked gray hair and let it flow, like her tears, unapologetic and unashamed.

With the way she waded among the shallow waters, Mama Ezili appeared more like an apparition of a weeping willow swaying in summerstorm winds. Her weary, amberstone eyes drank in each sacred second of the golden hour as she inhaled the riverbank’s sticky aroma of honeysuckle and birchwood mixed in ruddy, muddy clay.

“I haven’t smelled that fragrance in a lifetime,” she whispered to herself, “and I reckon this is medicine for my soul... All our souls.”

1 Spanish for “Never Again”

2 A tributary of the Alabama River, bordering Montgomery and Elmore Counties

It indeed was a lifetime since Mama Ezili stepped foot anyplace east of the Mississippi, or anywhere south of the Mason Dixon - let alone both. But that was until she received a telegram two months ago from a "Mr. G.P. Brown" that her only great-grandchild, Freeman Ali, had gone 'missing' - which always meant the worst. Neither local police nor the county sheriff's department ever looked for her beloved Ali. They didn't have to. They knew exactly *what* happened and were likely there *when* it happened. Ali had been cited and fined twice for circulating editions of *The Negro World*³ among fellow Army veterans, Lincoln School students, and the local A.M.E.⁴ parishes. There was no third warning: Ali was among the first of many lives taken by the terror of this Red Summer⁵.

His wife, Mattilee, had tragically passed last winter after contracting influenza. And she was among the first of many Black nurses who died while serving in the segregated frontlines of "this other world war."⁶ So now - during a pandemic of viruses and violence doubly inflicted on Black Bodies - their precious young daughter Pearlie was orphaned at five years of age. The State entrusted her to the care of Mattilee's kinfolk, The Browns, who called the sharecropped fields along the riverbanks of Gun Island Chute *home* - and they've done so as far back as GrandPoppa Browns' stories could trace.

Though she was too young to grasp the weight of this new world, she still fully grasped the weight of her new loss;

3 Monthly newspaper of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League

4 African Methodist Episcopal Church

5 1919 Summer of white supremacist terror and Black uprisings throughout the United States

6 1918-19 Influenza Pandemic

Pearlie missed her parents, sorely. Even in the warmth of all her Aunties, Uncles, her dozen sister-cousins, and dear GrandPoppa Brown - she would lay awake with fearful tears deep into the still of the night. Fearful that she would wake up alone, or worse yet, that after falling asleep she too would be among *The Disappeared*. Pearlie felt a longing for healing and belonging that she never quite knew until meeting her beautifully mysterious Great-Great-GrandMomma this summer.

It was inevitable that they would meet, for Mama Ezili was visited by a vivid and irresistible dream of this precious, beloved Pearlie after receiving the news. So Mama Ezili would return one last time to the South.. even if it meant risking the illness of influenza and the indignation of segregated travel in a cross-country Pullman⁷ Sleeper. In this midnight vision, Mama Ezili conjured the most powerful prayer of protection over her younger Beloved; one powerful enough to envelop Pearlie - and all who are entrusted in her care - with limitless divine ancestral joy throughout the rest of time. And the dream called for her to stand along these very riverbanks with a jar of fireflies, then light aflame two beeswax candles at twilight, and just watch the way the fire flies through this humid, sultry air.

So there Mama Ezili stood, wading and watching and waiting for the moment that her wildest dream came true.

Before she could complete her final meditative breath in preparation for this blessing, the scampering sounds of young Pearlie's feet skipping towards the waterfront caught Mama Ezili's ear.

Pitter pat. Pitter pat. Pitter-pitter-pitter-pitter pat!

7 Pullman Train Car

“Mama Ezili!” Pearlie exclaimed between big breaths as she rushed through the lush, matted grass puddles. She could not wait to show off how many fireflies she was able to catch before nightfall, just as Mama Ezili had requested.

“MA-MA EZ-IL-LEEEE!” She yelled again, this time trying to catch both her breath and her balance as she slipped to a stop by the mudbanks of the cresting river. She approached Mama Ezili with her tiny but determined hands holding a rather large glass mason jar teeming with fireflies.

“*Child,*” Mama Ezili said in a low and slow voice.

Pearlie had been around her Gi-Gi-GrandMomma (as she sometimes called her, unable to pronounce all the words through her missing front tooth) long enough now to know that ‘*Child,*’ said like that meant “*calm down... now ain’t the time for play.*”

But, Pearlie could not contain her excitement any better than the mason jar could contain the excited glowing of the fireflies: “Lookit! Lookit! See, see how many fireflies I caught? Lookit!” she yelled proudly and loudly as she held the jar high above her head.

“Hushhhhh.” Mama Ezili didn’t say this in a punitive or harsh way, but rather as an invitation to listen to the sh-sh-shushing of the steady, streaming river chute. Pearlie didn’t quite understand this, so she persisted.

“But Mama Ezi--”

“*Child.* I said... *Shhhushhh...*” This time Mama Ezili held the sound with the deep, full breath she was needing to take, which fortunately was long enough for young Pearlie to settle.

"Yes ma'am," Pearlle said as she lowered her gaze, clutching her hands around the mason jar of fireflies.

"Beloved Pearlle. I'ma say this once, but hear me twice!" Mama Ezili said firmly so as to attract Pearlle's eyes upward to meet hers. "Don't you dare in your life ever call me ma'am or any other plantation title of etiquette ever again. You call me Mama Ezili. Or that GiGi whatever you call me. But *never* ma'am. You understand me, beloved?"

"Yes, Ma..." Pearlle caught herself in time, "Ma Ezili."

"Good. Besides, it sounds too much like a nickname I left behind a *long* time ago. But you're still too young for grown folk stories." she chuckled, giving Pearlle (and herself) a half-second's grace as she reminisced on once being known as *Madame Ezili of The Wild West* in her more youthful days.

From the corner of Pearlle's eyes, she caught Mama Ezili's pursed smile forming from the corner of her lips. She instinctively did the same. They were, indeed, cut from the same cloth:

Pearlle had dark, crescent moon eyes - just like Mama Ezili - that glimmered as she smiled, lighting up her chestnut brown face. And before her gray-tuft locks, Mama Ezili had wooly midnight hair as Pearlle did, also worn in two braided-puffs. She couldn't wait to tell of all the powerful memories held within their hair-energy.

"Well if I'm too young for grrrown stories, tell me one of your children stories!" Pearlle playfully pleaded.

"We are here for a purpose, Pearlle. I'll tell the story of *this story* at bedtime. But now is sacred time - when light

welcomes night,” explained Mama Ezili.

“Then why are we here. Isn’t it scary to be out at night?”

Her question cut Mama Ezili to her heart; she knew it wasn’t the dark that Pearlie feared, but rather who she lost *to it*. “Don’t you worry about that, Beloved. We have time yet still for this ceremony,” she gently assured, waving her hand to summon Pearlie closer.

“Well, how long does it take to say-your-money? And why do you need fireflies?”

“Ce-re-mo-ny.” Mama Ezili gently corrected before Pearlie interrupted: “It’s not *my* fault you talk funny. Ya’ll real different where you from.”

It took all her strength for Mama Ezili not to laugh at the audacious truth-telling spirit of this child. She cleared her throat and continued:

“The CE-RE-MO-NY ends only *after* it begins. And it only begins when your spirit is ready. And your spirit is only ready if your *intention* is set. Your *niyah*⁸ must be spoken with truth.”

“If my knees can talk, why would they lie?!” Pearlie giggled.

The quick side eye from Mama Ezili let her know that playtime was over, though her youthful mind wondered “why not play and pray at the same time... the words rhyme for a reason.”

8 (Knee-Yah) Arabic for “Intention”

"Nee-Yah. Niyah means intention in Arabic, baby." Mama Ezili patiently replied. "And it is my intention to love and protect you, - and all who are entrusted with you - with this protective prayer of light, water, and if need be, fire."

"Is that why we need the fireflies?!" As Pearlie's eyes lit up, so did her mason jar, glowing and flashing excitedly like bottled lightning and fireworks:

"ACH!" she gasped, "did you see that Mama Ezili! LOOKIT!"

"Indeed I did. So it looks like you are in your intention as well. It means you are ready for this prayer, Beloved, even if you don't know the words yet." Mama Ezili said with encouragement and pride.

"We must hurry while we have the final rays of daylight" she continued, "come to the river with me."

Pearlie walked down to Mama Ezili, where the ruddy, muddy clay and the river's gentle crest met her feet. She placed the mason jar down between the candles, still amazed by the fireflies glowing, fading, and glowing again - but now harmoniously in rhythm together like swarming rainbow constellation stars.

Mama Ezili reached out her hands and placed them gently on Pearlie's forehead, as if to baptize her in the waters, just as Pearlie had seen many times before during revival services at her uncle's A.M.E. church. Instead, Mama Ezili began to hum some ring shout⁹ or hymn that Pearlie never heard before.

The high-pitched humming started softly at first - like a

9 Ring Shouts were a ecstatic form of praise, dance and call-and-response chants with roots extending from Balck church

warbler chirping in soprano and finding its pitch. But her *hummmms* grew more intense with each passing breath, and her vibrato voice vibrated louder before finally she released a full-bodied and full-breathed shout:

“BLESS THESE WATERS!”

Pearlie, as if by instinct, sang with all the might she could muster in this call and response:

“Bless these waters!”

“BLESS THE NIGHT!”

Bless this Night!

“BLESS OUR FIRE!”

Bless our Fire...

“BLESS OUR LIGHT!”

As they sang out the final stanza in harmonized echoes that shook the thick air of Gun Island Chute... the mason jar shattered into shards and candles blew out as if blown by a rushing storm breeze.

And the fireflies, now fiercely glowing in rhythmic harmony, swirled about Pearlie’s outstretched hands. As they were dancing in the smoke trails swirling about her fingertips, it looked as if they were forming a glowing shield of light around her.

Mama Ezili smiled. This was her wildest dream.

traditions, Southern plantation communities of enslaved Africans, Gullah Island communities, and West African Islamic communities

[Summer 2019, Montgomery County]

“Tell me the story of GiGi Pearlie’s song!” Baby Niyah demanded of her Uncle Ali as she continued to procrastinate bedtime.

Ali Khalil Brown, namesake for one of their forefathers, was known by many names.

Lil Ali, Brownie, King Khalil, Big Akh, AK47... But, Baby Niyah had the privilege of affectionately calling him by his favorite nickname of all-time: Babakuya.¹⁰

She loved whenever Ali would come visit while he was home from college in New York, and always asked him for bedtime poems, stories and songs in the late night. Niya was very persuasive, not only because she was his only chibling¹¹, but also because she’s a much friendlier audience compared to the NYC crowds he usually faced the rest of the year.

“BabaKuya - pleeeeeeease!” She pleaded.

“Ahhh... a’ight. But I’ve recited GiGi Pearlie’s poem like *mad* times for you now.”

“Well, recite the poem one more **HAPPY** time!” She replied matter of factly, making Ali bellow out a genuine belly laugh.

“Yo, that was good.. And you weren’t even tryna’ be funny. A’ight, you win,” he conceded as she squealed for joy.

10 Baba (Father), Kuya (Tagalog for Older Brother). Ali is her mother’s Older Brother

11 His preferred term of endearment to break free from the niece/nephew binary

“Buuuut, you know the rules. Rule Numba One: One Diva, One Mic. And despite your lil’ mood, let it be known: I’m the Diva...”

“YASSSSS!” Niyah exclaimed despite hearing his pre-performance setup for the umpteenth time.

“Rule Numba Dos... You know how I like my stage lighting.”

“You doin’ too much!” Niyah laughed, reaching for the night lamp by her bed. She took off the lampshade and shined it on Ali like a bright spotlight directly towards his face. She didn’t quite understand why Babakuya Ali flinched a bit when she did so, but it didn’t go unnoticed. Catching her slight look of concern, Ali snapped back into character: “And next up on the mic... welcome Babakuya Aliiiii!”

Niyah mimicked the muffled sounds of a crowd roaring in excitement as he stepped up to the stage (or in this case, her small wooden dresser at the foot of her bed). Ali took a deep breath, recalling the poem he wrote for GiGi Pearlle’s funeral. She passed within a few weeks after Niyah was born - the summer of 2014. He had just graduated high school and started a few courses at junior college. He felt like he was on his way in life, a new future. But that summer changed everything.

Ali loved reciting this poem for Niyah because there was something special about her that reminded him of GiGi Pearlle. Perhaps their infectious energy; perhaps their eyes. He looked up and caught a glimpse of both. He saw she was ready, so he began:

A Song For GiGi Pearlle

أَنْوُعِجَارٌ هَيْلًا أَنْ أَوْهَلَّلَ أَنْ 12

The Fire Flies Like...
Prayers on the canvass of freedom dreams
etched to memories
by calloused fingertips on palms
hands up, and kneebent
Like the way
Our grandmomma's
grandmommas use to pray

The Fire Flies Like...
Her hums of hymns and profane proverbs
Spoken in the same breath
with power so resolute
that even the whispering moon
fades in reverent silence
Speaking only to Say
Her Name.

The Fire Flies Like...
the Rage of Her Joy
Dancing as shadows with night
as flames with smoke -
This time the fire is
Her Drum

The Fire Flies Like...
Her Wildest Dreams
Born of Truth & Ash

12 Transliteration "Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un"
Translation "Verily we belong to Allah, and verily to Him do we
return." (Qu'ran verse 2:156). Recited upon speaking of the
loved one, especially one who has recently passed

As she sings:

“Bless these Waters, Bless this Night, Bless our
Fire, Bless our Light!”

“Yaaaay!” Young Niyah jumped out of bed with a standing ovation of snaps.

Ali clasped together his “prayer-hands” and received her appreciation while returning the love: “Bless, Bless, Bless! Love you, Baby Niyah. Now, it’s time. to go. to bed!”

“Ok, buh-but...” she whispered, putting extra energy on her pout face.

“Buh-buh-but What!?” Ali teased.

“Not but... *AND*,” Niyah’s face lit up “And, I want more! I want you to tell me the story *about* the poem.”

Ali paused again, he knew this question was coming, because she always asked after finding out he wrote it the night she was born. And yet, there he stood - frozen in his thoughts trying to figure out how even to respond to this request without breaching the emotional levy he so defiantly guarded for himself whenever she would inevitably ask him about this poem. How could he tell her about on one of the most dangerous, and most surreal, nights of his life; one that felt like it could have been his last if not for... the miracle:

“I don’t wanna be the one to have to give her ‘The Talk’ about policing at this age,” he thought to himself, *“She still sleeps with a damn nite-lite. Is she ready?”*

Ali stopped himself in the middle of the tracks of his own train of thoughts with a moment of humbled awareness: he was just as afraid to tell his story as he was for her to hear it. Was *he* ready to relive it again? Even if he could, how would

he finesse it for a five year old to understand? He decided to stall:

“Aye, lemme ask you this though... you ask me that every time I do that poem. And every time you ask, I tell you... *Maybe when you’re older*” they said simultaneously when Niyah mockingly joined in on the refrain.

“*Mmxxcht!* Ali sucked his teeth with feigned indignation as he pointed at her, “See there, you know my response! So why you wanna hear that story so bad?”

“Because I only know GiGi Pearlie through your stories,” she shrugged.

“Damn, you had to go there, huh?” Ali said quietly, but accidentally, out loud.

“Ooooooh... you cus-sed!” Niyah teased.

“Whomp whomp!” Ali always imitated a trombone when he made a verbal slip, “My bad Baby Niyah.”

“Ain’t nothing I haven’t already heard before anyway!” she proclaimed defensively, not wanting him to think she couldn’t handle a ‘grown folk story’ as he called it.

“We’ll both pretend we didn’t hear what we just heard. Either way, just need to warn you this story... this story is like, yeah. It’s pretty... intense. And damn near unbelievable.”

“Too intense and unbelievable for me? But I like make-believe” She said, containing her excitement for both the story setup, and that Ali’s second cuss word clearly just demonstrated a new level of trust with her.

"Well, yeah - but for me, too. And it's *my* story... well, and GiGi Pearlle's. Well, *yours*. You deserve to hear it. But, can I trust you with my story? Will you believe me and keep my secret?" Ali asked in a low, serious tone.

"*Wallahi*,"¹³ Niyah said, matching his energy with her hand over her heart."

"That's good enough for me. So uh... here goes nothing. And everything:
Have I ever told you the story of how fireflies saved my life the night you were born?"

"WHAT? NO! Tell me! Tell me! Tell me! Tell me!" Niyah exclaimed as she waved her hands uncontrollably with excitement.

Just as he was readying to speak, Ali's trauma flashes began to kick in, amplifying everything - how his breath was getting shallow, palms getting sweaty, and heart getting heavy. He began to drift. It was 2014 all over again in his mind:

Ali remembered how he wished his tinder date that night had told him their family he was visiting lived in the notoriously racist gated community in the east side of the town before agreeing to drop them off home. He remembered how he was tailgated in his hand-me-down hatchback by an unmarked SUV flashing its high beams and ramming into his rear bumper. He remembered how in a panicked moment of survival, he tried to swerve into side streets and alleys, only for the assigned community police unit to enter the fray, flashing its blue and white lights,

13 Swear to God, in Arabic

ordering him to pull him over or he would open fire. He remembered his horror as the unmarked SUV blocked him in from the frontside as a half dozen uniforms swarmed in, reaching for their holsters. How the officer approached the SUV, as if to have a Citizen's Council¹⁴ meeting about his fate and form of punishment. Ali remembered every single symbol displayed as if part of their uniforms - from their confederate and blue-lined flag tattoos, punisher skull car decals, the "I'm The Infidel Allah Warned You About" and "If you can read this, I'll shoot you" (written in Arabic) bumper stickers. But most of all - it was the empty, icy stares looking *through* him, not at him, that struck fear for his life. For being a Black, young, queer man in a post-Travyon, post-Eric Garner, post-Mike Brown world that just let all their murderers walk free - it was dangerous to be seen as a threat, but it was absolutely deadly to be unseen as a human. That was the story of their eyes. Is this the story he really wanted to tell her now?

No. Not tonight, he decided, "but she should still hear the truth..."

Ali drew out a deep breath and cleared his throat: "A'ight. You old enough to hear the truth about GiGi Pearlle... and it all happened the night you were born that inspired my poem."

"Ohhh... this is gonna be good!" Niyah squealed as she settled into her sheets.

"The truth is... she's *magic*." he said plainly and slowly, looking directly in her crescent mooned, amberstone eyes. "And so are you."

14 White Citizens' Council, also known as Citizens' Council of America or Council of Conservative Citizens

Niyah fell silent not having ever seen her uncle look or sound this way before.

"You were born early - I didn't even know sis had gone into labor since I was... out on a date. But on my way home, I was pulled over, well, more like surrounded and almost arrested, or worse.."

"For what! What happened?"

"DWB. Driving While Black. In the wrong place, at the wrong time."

"How rude! Where was that!?"

Where isn't it? He thought before answering: "Right here in town. Eastside."

"Ooooooh," Niyah replied, knowing exactly what that meant.

"I went directly into protective mode - turned on all my lights. Slightly cracked my window. Put down my phone in plain view and kept my wallet and registration on my dashboard. Started to hit record on my phone and that's when I noticed it was 11:13pm.

"Heeey... that's the exact time I was born."

"I know, I'll never forget it. 11:13pm. I'll never forget because that's also the exact moment..." he paused as he gulped: "the moment those half dozen troopers circled my beat up car, guns drawn and ready to blast..."

"Babakuya, Noooo!" Pearlie said, emotionally and almost tearfully, as she reached for his hand. "What happened?"

"They were ready to blast until my radio *blasted*... GiGi Pearlle's prayer song. It's crazy because she sang that prayer to me, our mommas, our cousins and all of us children when we were born:

Bless these Waters, Bless this Night, Bless our Fire, Bless our Light

I know I sound crazy but like, I haven't heard her pray those words in like mad hella years, but in that moment I swear, *wallahi*,¹⁵ on everything that I love - I heard her voice like she was singing through my car speakers... I heard clear as the night...

And, they heard it, too."

"The ones who were trying to hurt you and take you away, Babakuya?" Niyah asked.

"No," whispered Ali as he continued to flashback, "the fireflies..."

The room was still as he slowed himself down for a beat, gathering his memories for the millionth time to make sure it indeed was his truth:

"I thought the blue and red and white flashing lights were from their squad sirens, but it wasn't. It was a swarm of *neon* fireflies, all glowing like a constellation of Christmas lights flashing in-synch with the cadence and intensity of GiGi Pearlle's words. And they started coming out of everywhere - my AC, my floorboard, the gas pipe, the back seats, the speakers - flying in formation like a whirlwind until they covered my entire car."

"Whoa, a swarm of neon fireflies. That's. So. Awesome!" Niyah breathed out in mesmerized whispers.

15 Swear to God, Arabic

“Heh, I haven’t even told you the craziest part yet!” Ali said with an incredulous smirk.

“How is that possible? What happened!” she gasped immediately.

“There were so many fireflies in the swarm, flying so quickly around my car, that all I could see was a shield of light. Like, they were in a dance and trance to her words. And when GiGi Pearlie finished her prayer ‘Bless This Night’ - everything faded to Black. Her voice, all the lights, the fireflies - everything! Faded. And I can’t explain it, to this day I have never told anyone... but I was *magically, miraculously* home. In my hatchback, in my garage - with my hands up over my head still. There in the driveway... It was like, the prayer was a portal home. And of course, I forgot to hit *record*.”

He stopped and stared at his hands, now holding Niyah’s - knowing she could feel their balmy shakes.

“She saved my life... her prayer song... and these magical ass fireflies... saved my life, but left me with my raggedy ass car,” Ali shook his head, chuckling as he released her hands to wipe down his face, almost in disbelief for his own story.

Without saying a word, Niyah reached out and hugged her Beloved Babakuya tightly around his neck.

“And it happened the night you was born, Baby Niyah,” Ali’s voice shook as he spoke: “ya’ll - saved me that night.”

“How? What did I do?” Niyah asked as she wiped away her own tears with her right hand as she clutched Ali tighter than ever with her left.

"You being born. Arriving early to make sure she sang that prayer right on time. And because it wasn't just GiGi Pearlie's voice I heard. I heard yours, too. Crying in pitch to the words of her song. You have her eyes, you have her voice... you have her magic."

Ali looked lovingly at his niece's beaming, smiling face:

"No... I have MY magic," she joyfully boasted, hugging him around his neck.

Ali laughed and smiled: "Ashé, Baby Nyah. Ashé. Goodnight, Beloved. And keep this our secret."

She squeezed him tightly again as he tucked her into bed. As he reached to turn off the lamp that served as his spotlight.

"Babakuya..."

"Yes, Beloved."

"Love you."

"Love you, Back."

"But Babakuya..."

"Yeeeeeeesss, Niyah?"

"Can you tell me another story?"

[Summer 1919, Montgomery County]

Pearlie could barely sette for bed that night after all the excitement earlier. Mama Ezili made her promise not to tell anyone what happened on the banks of Gun Island

Chute. Not until the time was right, anyway. As Mama Ezili tucked her in, she couldn't help but ask: "Was that Mama and Baba shining through the fireflies?"

Mama Ezili smiled without answering and kissed Pearlie on the forehead.

"Well, will you tell me the bedtime story you promised?" She clearly hadn't forgotten.

"As if you haven't had enough adventure for tonight? Well... I did give you my word that I'd tell you the story of my vision dream that brought me here to you. And it was all fulfilled tonight!"

Young Pearlie smiled her gap-toothed grin from ear to ear as she snuggled deeper into her soft feathered-pillow and quilted cotton bedsheets. Mama Ezili set the candle down by Pearlie's bedside table - the shadows flickered ecstatically against the pinewood walls. Mama Ezili caressed her Beloved's forehead as she began the story:

*once upon a dreamtime...
Mother moon sent her lovesong
wrapped in seeds of light
to protect her beloved children below.*

*and Mother moon smiled
down upon the earth,
watching with joy her beloveds
dancing in safety of shadows
as they trail the way
her love shines*

but then, the fire-eaters came.

*Mother moon watched in horror
as their hunters, cloaked
in secrets of midnight,
kidnapped her children
like fireflies encased in glass,
stealing her lovesongs
wrapped in seeds of light
to fuel their master's appetite
for fear...*

*...she called upon sister stars
of the farthest twilight sky
to carry down newsongs of protection wrapped, this time,
in seeds of fire*

*and the fire-eaters consumed these seeds
not knowing Mother moon's songs
now buried in their bellies, taking root
and would one day blossom from within*

*Mother moon watched in awe
as her sister stars, cloaked
in uniforms of twilight
released her children
like fireflies encased in glass,
singing new lovesongs
wrapped in seeds of fire
to fuel her children's appetite
for freedom*

Mama Ezili sighed and looked down to see that young Pearlie had fallen asleep. As she blew out her bedside candle, she saw some flickerings continue to glow just outside the window. She chuckled quietly, stood up and began to head to her sleeping quarters for the evening. She paused at

doorway of Pearlie's room, and turned back to whisper the rest of her dream story:

*and Mother moon smiled
down upon the earth,
watching with joy her beloveds
dancing in shields of smoke
as they trail the way
the fire flies...*



The Dream Tank: Memories As Supercode

PING! *“Welcome back, Ibrahim. You’re returning from a series of simulations. Take three deep breaths, and open yours with a softened gaze so you can readjust.”*
How did that feel for you, Ibrahim?

Aiya’s voice again woke Ibrahim’s dreaming.

He felt a stinging of hot tears begin to well up, lumpy throated and tight.

“I saw... my Great-Aunt Niyah. I saw her story. I saw my ancestors’ actual dreams. I can’t help but feel all the joy and the rage. It’s... overwhelming.”

“I see you. Is there anything you need in this moment?”

“A breath,” Ibrahim exhaled, “because it doesn’t help that you **sound** like her.”

“Take several. Take time.” Aiya’s invitation was welcomed.

Ibrahim breathed in several breaths deeply, slowly.

“It’s **taking of time** that gets to me the most. I mean, how do we measure the impact of reparative policies when what was stolen from us was time? How much time has been taken? How many collective years were redlined away from our lifetimes where our zip codes were more

predictive of life expectancy than our genetic codes at birth?

How many microseconds stolen by microaggressions can be aggregated into entire time loops of deep breaths and resets to re-ground ourselves in our own humanity?

How many years of collective healing, joy and imagination were denied because our dreams were locked up, locked out or locked down -- to the point where even our freedom fighters thought it foolhardy to dream new dreams...

The safe passage of Black Children should not be an act of radical imagination - but that is what this quantum imagination of white supremacy would have us believe."

The Dream Tank filled with silence, as if in memoriam, when Ibrahim finished.

"Sorry for the rant," Ibrahim quietly apologized, if only to break the eerie quiet.

"No need to apologize for your truth. Perhaps it would be appropriate to explore how others remember and reclaim time with their loved ones."

Ibrahim was taken aback. He wasn't prepared for the Dream Tank's Ai system to recommend a question. But the recommendation felt like the best next step.

"Yes. Let's do that..." he paused to gather his thoughts into a 7 question:

"Who must be remembered on Abolition Day?"

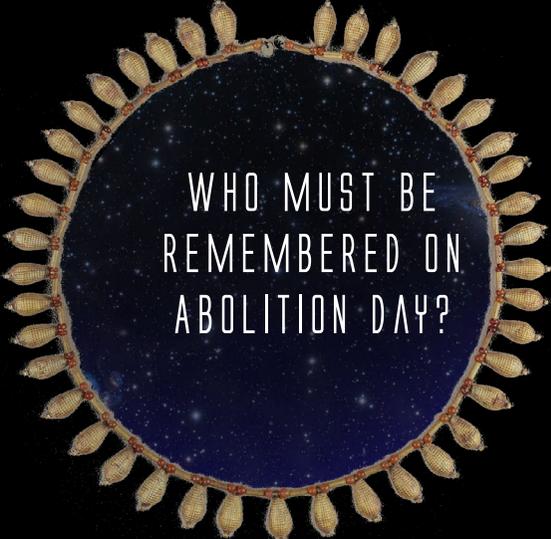
A vortex of neon hues flashed around The Dream Tank as it processed the newest simulation. *"Invitation accepted. Are you ready, Ibrahim?"*

And as suddenly as he said yes - everything faded to Black.



REMEMORY
BY WILDAN IMARISHA

Artwork by Amir Khadar



WHO MUST BE
REMEMBERED ON
ABOLITION DAY?

Rememory

by Waildah Imarisha

Ayo stood on the edge of the community garden and scanned the gathering in Cityheart. Nearby joyous shrieks poured forth from the park as the young ones played under the loving watchful gaze of today's caregivers. The wind teased the festively colored tents where elders and others who needed it sat for the day's circle. Folks stood in pockets, chatting cheerfully before the start, belying the solemnity of the event. She saw so many familiar faces, folks she had grown up with in Freedelphia. There were new faces as well, recently arrived refugees, searching for a place to call home, or at least home for now. She knew everyone here though, even the new people. To participate in a justice circle, folks had to be here at least six months and join at least one community responsibility project. You had to show you were committed to the whole before you could determine what justice meant to it.

If I was a refugee, I might not do the requirements to participate, Ayo thought glumly. The justice circles had come to feel more burden than privilege to Ayo. The one two weeks ago had been particularly draining, lasting 20 hours. Ultimately the one who harmed and the who was harmed came to an agreement, as did the larger community, but the time and effort to get there... And the circles were happening with more frequency. When Ayo was younger, there might have been one or two a year. But the escalation of the war, the growing scarcity of resources, so many new folks coming in from UCF territories who had never experienced cooperative life before – it just felt like the work on all fronts was never ending. And unlike other areas of liberation service like growing food or childcare or peacekeeping, you didn't

rotate on and off. Everyone in the community participated in every justice circle, whether it was one a year or one a day.

Ayo shook her head. She didn't know how many more of these she had in her.

"Hello, beloved one," said a deep soft voice.

Ayo turned to see her mentor, Zaza, and the two embraced. Ayo had always loved hugging the much taller Zaza. It always felt like Ayo was being enveloped in protection.

Ayo immediately felt more grounded. It took Ayo back to her childhood, when she would study with Zaza every day. They had been paired because of Ayo's boisterous and quick-tempered nature. It was felt Zaza's steady calmness would teach Ayo as much as Zaza's knowledge of mathematics and gardening. And it worked. Even today, whenever Ayo became agitated, she closed her eyes and imagined she was next to Zaza in the community garden, the sun's warmth on her back. Out of the corner of her eye, Ayo used to watch Zaza, her long thick grey dreads coiled on top of her head, her aged strong hands tenderly placing new buds in the earth. That memory always centered Ayo.

"Have you talked to Essakai recently?," Zaza asked, bring Ayo back to the present.

The breeze ruffled Ayo's afro, playfully pulling at the curls, like her chibling Essakai, also called Kai by those who loved them, had done since they were young. Even though the two were chosen family, they both looked more alike than many who were blood-born. Same chestnut skin, same unruly hair, same mischievous smile, though Essakai deployed it much less often than Ayo. Two years older, Kai

was always the scholar. As children, Essakai always wanted to know the whys of the world. It was not enough for Kai to know that something functioned, they had to know how and why. No wonder our four parents asked the cooperative to supply so many mentors for us, Ayo mused. Between Kai's endless questions and my tantrums, we were more of a handful than all our other siblings and chiblings combined.

"Yes," Ayo responded to Zaza's question. "They hope they can rotate out and be home by Abolition Day, because you know how Kai loves the celebrations." She reached out to lightly touch one of the tomatoes growing on the vine near her. Not ripe yet, but soon.

Zaza chuckled. "Yes, they have since they were little. You both did. Though you loved the Abolition Day re-enactments best and demanded to be part of them well before the Age of Choice, while Essakai mostly wanted to talk to the elders about what it was like to live then. They had read every text and seen every holo about it, and still so many questions."

Ayo smiled at the memory, then sighed. "I hope they'll be here this year. But you never know with the war."

It had been almost a year since Ayo and Essakai had seen each other, since Kai had volunteered to fight in the people's war against the UCF (always in her head, UCF stood for United Confederacy of Fascism rather than what the remaining capitalist nations officially called themselves, the United Confederacy of Freedom). The two had been able to have several holo-calls, and on them Essakai shared some of what it was like on the front. They were supporting new liberated territories to form every day, but it was slow going and took far too great of a human and environmental toll. The Liberated Territories were ultimately winning, but even in winning, it cost so much.

Ayo looked around, taking in their community gathering space Cityheart, and the city surrounding it. Brightly painted row houses leaned into each other, touching shoulders to create a protective circle. The houses were old, some bearing damage from when this city was liberated, but well-cared for and obviously well-loved. Freedelphia was liberated before her birth and she struggled to imagine what life was like for Zaza and the other elders who had grown up here. She was always in awe of the strength and courage it took for them to rise up and start the Liberation, one of the first territories to do so. Facing down armies of police, military, and mercenaries. Well, she didn't have to imagine because she had been to the Rememory, so she had felt it. She felt what they felt in her bones. She knew what it like to have fear screaming in your ears, to have uncertainty and doubt your continual companion. That was part of why they created the Rememory, so no generation to come would idealize or glorify the past into something untouchable.

Even so, having lived in the memories of those who came before, Ayo could not comprehend Essakai's choice to fight in the liberation wars. She was constantly scared for Kai, scared for everyone fighting. Scared of what would happen to herself and her home and everything she ever knew if they were to lose.

A doubt had sparked in her the day Essakai said they were volunteering. The doubt continued growing every day since, until it consumed her. She worried she was not strong enough to offer anything to this cause. She, who had always been the fiery one, the one who loved the Abolition Day re-enactments, the symbolic tearing down of the last prison by hand. She, who had stayed behind while her chibling, the gentle scholar, left to risk their life for freedom.

Murmuring from Cityheart grew louder, and caught Ayo's attention. Hannon entered the circle, surrounded by his family. She knew Hannon growing up. He had been a friend of Essakai's. Ayo had been shocked when she was told it was he who was center of today's justice circle. Hannon was so like Essakai, not as inquisitive, but quiet and gentle. Like Kai, Hannon volunteered to fight. But Hannon was injured and sent back. His injuries were severe enough that the healers focused on his body first, so unfortunately he had not been able to receive the Rememory soul healing others did when they first returned. Before Hannon began that treatment, he flew into a rage in the market one day and attacked someone, seemingly for no reason. Hannon was so far gone, the peacekeepers for that cycle had to stun him.

And now they were here as a community, to determine what was to be done with Hannon. Ayo's heart ached seeing the ways his head and shoulders slumped as he waited for the beginning of his justice circle. She felt certain this circle would reach an agreement; Hannon had already expressed deep remorse and said he would accept any judgment the community decided. *But how long would it take to heal Hannon, Ayo wondered, if it was even possible?* He must be healed, so he did not do this again, or turn this pain inward against himself. If he could not be healed, then what was to be done with him?

She hoped that the grounding would help him find his way back to himself. She was glad the justice circles always began with the grounding, where every person in the community shared a time they knew the one who harmed at their best, to remind that person they were more than the harm they had done. That it was always their choice.

After the grounding, the community would bear witness to the one who was harmed. That person could

share any and everything they wanted to about this incident, and also about the larger society, the ways they had or had not been supported through this. Because we must always remember that justice is both relational and systemic, and we must always make better systems to honor and protect all the relationships, Ayo recited the words by heart. That was part of what made justice circles so exhausting though. There were commitments from the one who harmed, but also usually from many in the community. They were always in the process of reimagining how they did things. Ayo had been taught this was a wonderful opportunity to continually reinvent society, and she truly believed that.

Ayo sighed. But it also meant there was always more work to do. She felt exhausted just thinking about it. And seeing Hannon now made her terrified for Essakai. Before this, the fear that Kai would not come home alive consumed her. But now Ayo also feared who they would be if they did come back. What toll will fighting this liberation war have on them? What if she had to be part of a justice circle for her sweet scholar who came home so deeply hurt, it changed the core of who they are?

“Your face reflects the heaviness in your heart,” Zaza said softly.

“Tell me about this.”

Ayo shook her head. Ayo didn’t want to tell her beloved mentor she wished to be anywhere but here. It felt cowardly when so many were giving so much more. And this was what abolition was. The elders fought to become responsible and accountable to and for one another. This was her birthright.

Zaza was the oldest person Ayo knew. There weren’t many left who had been there on the first Abolition Day, but

Zaza had. She had been there to welcome home the returned family when the last prisons around Freedelphia closed. She had lived it all, and she had helped to build everything around them.

But while much had changed since the first Abolition Day, and things were unimaginably better, it still felt so heavy. All of the work to create these processes moved individuals and the community forward, but it didn't magically solve everything. There was still so much more holding and healing to come, for this case, let alone all the other cases that would follow.

"I wonder," Ayo began slowly, almost guiltily. "I wonder if it was easier before. Before abolition. I know it wasn't right or just," she added hastily, "but it seems like it was a lot easier to just call someone to deal with things like this.

"You lived through it," she said, her eyes sliding to finally meet Zaza's. "Isn't there some part of you that missing it being someone else's responsibility and not yours?"

Zaza acknowledged the importance of the question by settling into it. After several moments, Zaza took Ayo's hand in hers. Their skin color was almost the same. And because Zaza's hand was so much larger than Ayo's, it was like Ayo's hand was taken in and became part of Zaza.

"I understand that inclination because sharing power means taking responsibility. But no, I would never go back to the way things were."

Her eyes faded out, staring into the past. "Black folks and brown murdered in the street, stolen into graves or prisons. Parts of you broken so deeply inside they cut you and you bled for the rest of your life. All part of a system that

stole your power, stole your history, stole your memories and told you that was what freedom was. But there were always those who knew that true freedom meant connection, and community. Liberation means nothing if it's not collective.

“That’s why we created the Rememory, so that we wouldn’t forget, so that your generation that came, and the one after that, and after would remember.”

Zaza gestured across Waterway. Ayo knew from films that Waterway once was a wide street choked with cars. But then the elders dug deep, turning it into an aqueduct. They had dug all the way to the river, and Waterway filled with water, circling the heart of their community. Zaza’s gesture took in the Rememory which lived on the other side of Waterway. The building looked more like it had grown than been built. Its circular angles created a feeling of the infinite, and the vines and flowers that crept up its walls served both to keep the inside cool as well as connected to the earth.

“That is why Cityheart and the Rememory are so close together, and why we hold justice circles here. There are other gathering places in Freedelphia we could go. But here we are connected to the Rememory, to the past which is not past, to the future which is now. We enact justice here knowing we do so under the watchful eyes of time.”

Ayo looked to the site, and wrapped her arms around herself, remembering her only visit to the Rememory. She was being so immersed in the experience of the past, she almost drowned. It came during the Age of Choice, which was different for everyone. She entered at 11, while the more precocious Essakai went at 8. Ayo remembered pestering Kai to describe it when they came back but they had just shook their head. “I don’t know any words that can tell it to you.” Ayo hadn’t understood what they meant until she herself went.

Zaza gently squeezed Ayo's hand gently. "Perhaps it is time for you to Remember again."

Ayo nodded, took a deep breath, and then crossed one of the many stone bridges over Waterway. She looked down into the swirling waters as she passed. Zaza had told her this was part of ancient wisdom that they had re-Remembered in the time after the first Abolition Day. The Rememory needed the flowing river, the currents connecting them to all that was and is and will be. It was only when the Waterway was finished that the Rememory first breathed.

Ayo remembered Zaza telling her the Rememory had been named from a book called *Beloved* by the ancestor Toni Morrison.

Ayo walked to the heavy round doors. Written across them, really more grown into them than etched, was the phrase, "Freedom dreams don't live in real time." She ran her fingers over the words, then pulled both doors open and walked through. She plunged into darkness, a darkness both visual and physical. She felt the darkness press against her skin, calming and cool. It was just like the first time she entered, but also entirely new, because she was also both same and new.

She reached down to remove her shoes as she had been told to do when she was a child. Beneath her feet felt like grass, which puzzled her the first time just as it did now – is it possible that there was grass growing here, in the absence of light?

She waited, trying to slow her breath and her mind. Her previous visit had almost overwhelmed her with sadness and pain. Her third parent suggested Ayo might have been too young when she went, and looking back, Ayo agreed.

While others were ready at that age or earlier, she had not been. Of course at the time, Ayo rebelled and insisted on going. But living in the memories of her ancestors had been heavy and painful. She never came back, unlike others, including Essakai who made it an annual Abolition Day pilgrimage.

Pinpricks of light shone in the darkness, rising from the ground and flitting in loose formation through the air. They beckoned her forward, and she followed without hesitation, knowing her feet would find a safe path.

As she neared, most of the tiny lights floated away from her, but a few hung close, directly in her path. As she moved forward, she and they merged. An explosion of light split her consciousness. She existed here, and in multiplicity across history. The cacophony of pain filled every aspect of her. The moans of slave ships in her ears and the stench in her nose. Her blood pounded in her ears as she stared at the barrel of a gun, knowing this flashing red and blue would be the last thing she saw. Rope razored into her neck as hundreds of jeering white people pointed and laughed. The cold clawed her bones in a solitary confinement cell, the blindingly bright lights that were left on 24 hours a day burned into her mind. She choked on tear gas, lungs screaming for air, and saw through blurred eyes the advancing line of private military contractors. The one constant in all the lives were the cries for help and the screams.

She stumbled forward, falling down to one knee. Tears stained her cheeks and sobs wracked her chest. Her entire body trembled with the weight of so much generational trauma.

This was a million times worse than she remembered.

She understood so clearly now Zaza's words, why they could never believe things were better in the past. But with all of this coursing through their veins, embedded in their genes, what hope did they have? How could they find peace when this is what they were made of?

Ayo turned her head back in the direction of the door. She knew she could just leave now. The Rememory was a choice, not a requirement.

The remaining lights flitted playfully in front of her, beckoning. Ayo didn't know what she needed, but she knew she needed something, and she didn't know where else she could get it. She thought of Essakai and her resolve strengthened.

She wiped her sleeve across her face, and pushed herself back to her feet. She stepped forward into the next light cluster.

Ayo braced herself for hurt and hopelessness to engulf her again. But instead there was floating, like the pull of a gentle river current. Whispers at the edge of her consciousness became louder. Thousands of voices spoke names. Some she knew as the martyrs of the Before Abolition times, murdered by agents of the state. So many she didn't know but she sensed they were old, names that were imagined lost for centuries.

"No one and nothing is ever truly lost," Zaza had said often.

The names were on the current and they were the current and she was on the current and she was the current and she was the names and she said her name and it sounded like all of their names and still hers, and she

reached out and touched the names and it felt like touching her own face.

Finally, this feeling of connection and completion receded, but it did not fade. It settled into her skin and became part of her.

Without hesitation, Ayo merged with the next step of lights in front of her.

Silence, a held breath of anticipation.

And then the words spoken from a multitude of voices across time: "We knew this day would come."

And the explosion of lives into her mind. Again her consciousness was split between so many different realities. Around her hundreds of thousands surged forward, pushing back the rows of militarized police until they retreated entirely and there was only singing and dancing in the streets. The hammer in her hand drove the last nail into the house she had built for her wife and children, all of whom had been born into slavery, and now, here, at a home to call their own. The feeling of so many arms holding her on as she stepped through the gates of the prison that had eaten decades of her life.

Rapture infused every part of Ayo's being, generations of Black joy filled her to the brim. Ayo realized she was dancing, a breathless carefree bodily manifestation. She hadn't been aware of it before, but her body knew it was the right response.

Ayo had never felt anything like it. But she must have, since she went through this before. How could she have forgotten this? How could this have not changed her to her very core?

With a start, she realized she never completed the Rememory the first time. The first set of re-Remembering overwhelmed her, and she chose to go back. She had experienced only the trauma, never any of the generational exultation amplified and cultivated until it infused every cell in her being.

Rather than be sad at having missed out on this for years, Ayo smiled, full of gratitude to have received it now.

"Thank you," she whispered. And then, because it didn't seem enough, she shouted it. "Thank you!"

She began chanting it while dancing.

"Thank you thank you thank you thank you thank you..."

There was a movement of the darkness, a contracting. Ayo felt the darkness embrace every part of her, and she raised her hands, threw her head back, and let out the most joyful noise she could manifest.

Ayo instinctively knew she had finished the journey. In front of her from the darkness blazed the words, "Freedom dreams live in you." It was the door's interior mirror inscription. She put out her hand and pushed.

Ayo emerged into the light, sun warm on her skin just like the ancestral joy she knew now lived within her.

Zaza stepped forward, and hugged her close, and that felt the same on her skin as the sun and the joy.

Zaza looked into Ayo's eyes. "I know this is hard. We are in a period of transition, of upheaval. Times like these

ask so much of us. It can feel like we will be broken under the weight of it. But this is why we have the Rememory. To remind ourselves that this moment is not unique, even though it will never come again."

Zaza took Ayo's hand. "Everything is temporary, except this," she said, squeezing her hand.

Then Zaza let go and with one sweep of her hand encompassed the entire community gathered in front of them. "And this."

Ayo, nodded, blinking back tears that felt like laughter. They walked arm and arm back to the circle. It parted organically like a flock of birds making space for returned wayward members.

"Let us begin," the three justice facilitators murmured in unison.

And everyone present bowed their heads, and all began to hum in the same breath, as if from one throat.



MAKEBA - OLD BEGINNINGS

BY: AMBER BUTTS



Artwork by Amir Khadar



Makeba - Old Beginnings

by Amber Butts

This is what we regret: when the last police tower fell in Makeba during the Before And After Wars,¹ every political prisoner and formerly incarcerated person within 100 miles was killed too. The towers were self maintained and had their own transportation system. They printed out more food and prison cells as new inmates arrived.

The Water Trials, a “voluntary” statewide initiative meant to support re-programming and re-entry, insisted that prisoners be injected with a naturally derived nutrient stabilizer to counteract their limited sun exposure. The consequences for refusing The Trials included a mandatory five years added to their sentence, with no outside communication or visitation, and food rations cut by 50% for the duration of their confinement.

Prisoners were held throughout Equezi Tower, the summit of the police station, three hundred and seventy four stories high. Though the freestanding tower was higher in the air than any machine made building, they were only exposed to artificial light. Lionel Burd, a senior scientist in the behavioral department, found that natural light increased the prisoners’ capacity for violence, mania and aggression. Burd also theorized that the prisoners’ offspring were bound to share their characteristics as well, and should be closely monitored. After his proposal to Council was approved and a

1 Among pro-abolitionists in Bordertowns of the United Confederacy of Freedom, this was the local name for UCF’s war waged against abolition - dating back to colonial era through the contemporary era conflicts

decree was issued, the direct descendants of prisoners were expected to enter a new program called the Re-education Projects. These Projects were located in Enuzi, a separate tower twenty meters below ground.

Though the Re-education Projects promised already struggling households rehabilitation, housing and food, no children were brought to its doors. Seventy six percent of investors pulled their funding for the following year and the nonprofit coalitions stopped approving grants. Families were cited for obstructing justice and given one week to deliver the qualifying children.

Community members know this period as The Big Theft,² where the offspring of prisoners and birthers were taken from them in the dead of night. Birthers who heard whispers of the government's plans, grabbed their babies and braved the trek across the borderlands to Ebulu, only to be brought back by Makeba Border Control and thrown in the tower above (or below). Those who knew about The Big Theft were forced to sign non-disclosure agreements, lest their other children and family members be admitted into the Towers.

For the first few years of their lives, the children were not permitted to touch another human being. They were restricted to separate apartment pods to limit socialization and monitor their behavior. They were not given names, and instead were identified by numbers, a combination of their personality type, build and danger level.

In Enuzi Tower, the children learned diction, speech, math, history, and art exclusively from geo-engineered plants. When the plants were frustrated or thought an activity ridiculous, they shook the walls of the apartment

2 Black children were stolen in the night by UCF government during the early years of anti-abolition secession

Pods and let out red gas. Most times, the gas' texture, color and taste were dependent on the mood of the child, but every now and then, the plants decided for themselves.

Once the children turned six years old, their charts were made available to court appointed special advocates to assess their progress and rehabilitation. In the 100 year history of the Re-education Projects, no child had been deemed fit to leave the confines of either tower. Some served as deputy assistants, janitors and clerks in the police tower courthouse upstairs, but they were never reunited with their families or the general population ever again.

Once a prisoner dies, the body is shuttled through a magnetic tube beyond the property lines of the institution, stripped of its authorization code and left for the gravediggers. We wash and bury our dead here. It wasn't until Madu, one of our community engineers autopsied the body of his uncle, Etur Sepuk that we found out what The Water Trials were really about. Every prisoner in the Tower' blood was washed and made into a weapon. If they escaped the facility alive, the locators in their blood were automatically triggered, and their bodies went into shock. While shutting down, the locators atomized, blowing up everything within a mile radius.

Mariame Leba, a social worker inside the Lower Tower, filed her first report against the bureau in the Winter during the final year of the War. Leba cited child endangerment, forced separation, beatings, lack of sunlight and psychological torture. Her complaint was accepted and presented to The Warrior Council later that Summer. While Mama Leba, as the children called her, awaited the date for her summons, she was placed on unpaid leave through the Children Deserve Structure organization. She was not allowed to gain employment elsewhere and spent those months drawing up blueprints for emergency exits

in the lower Tower. The Towers were advertised as “self sustaining” but they offered no protocols for emergencies. There was one transportation option, with one way in and one way out.

After pleading her case to The Warrior Council, where no one met her eyes, Mama Leba knew she’d already lost. Of course the Council had known about the abuse happening in the Towers, they were the governmental body that approved it in the first place. Mama Leba thought this generation would be different, but there was no way they’d allow a sixty seven trillion dollar industry to be threatened by her findings. And she was sure she wasn’t the first social worker to do so.

Though she was told a decision would be made and flown to her, Mama Leba arrived home to find her place ransacked. She would not be returning back to work, the hologram on the wall nearest the window cited the official reason as a “conflict of interest.” When she went to pick up the broken urn that once held her father’s ashes, a red and yellow alert popped up in the air in flashing one word: CONFISCATED.

Right as she was to leave the council grounds, Mama Leba summoned her cane and broke the glass separating her from The Warrior’s Council. Before the glass shards finished dancing on the floor, Mama Leba had rushed to General Abushi’s face, cursed him and laughed at how all the blood rushed out of his face at once. She accused the council of cowardice, claiming that their own children would suffer.

Mama Leba knew even before then, that she’d only have one chance at survival. Before she submitted her request to the Council, she set up a backdoor to get to the children if they ever needed her. In each floor of the lower Tower, one child was tasked with keeping a photo of Mama Leba’s ancestors. Everyday they took voice notes and reported the happenings inside. Photography, paintings, video and media depicting human beings was strictly forbidden in Makeba. Early Makebians had the gift of

traveling and communicating through memories by entering into photos. Police Tower authorities took great pleasure in digitally altering original photos, placing them in nondescript places and torturing Makebians through them.

Mama Leba had a secret name for every child. When they logged and placed their reports in the photos, they signed them with their names. The last recorded time stamp for Mama Leba in the Hall of Witnessing, has her calling to her birds and saying,

“There are children below the earth. Haven’t you heard their screams? Don’t you feel them shaking?”

The prisoners knew the risks and had consented, or so we kept telling ourselves. We said things like, “One second of freedom is worth more than one hundred eternities in chains.” And we had gotten their consent.

But we hadn’t accounted for the children in the Tower below. We hadn’t assessed the architecture and function of The Towers. We didn’t know much about them, honestly. Even before The Tower exploded, the Plants³ knew of our plans. They’d been listening in on Mama Leba’s conversations and the conversations that happened before her and the conversations happening even before then. Plant memory is what early Makebians secretly injected in themselves to fight off the Forget. But that is another story.

Not all of the plants were in agreement about saving the children, and some maintained their own contingency plans, but most were committed to what they call The Great Breakout.

Of the two thousand and eighty two children accounted for during the last Tower Census, one hundred and sixty nine survived. It is unclear exactly how the plants saved the children. I’ve gotten as close as I can with one of

3 Sentient Plant-energy beings

the old ones, Silus⁴, will not say more than, “Before each child was wrapped in vines, we built a bubble and placed them inside. Then they were free.”

Plants do not trust humans. They’ve seen too much of what we can do.

It took three days for the Towers to complete their burn sequence. Silus says even the air was dead and the children are half theirs now. All we know of Mama Leba is that her cane was found in the soil, at the base of the Tower.

It is August 2163, when the *Last Saved Child*⁵ dies, a week before the rains come. One hundred years with us and they never give their names. I was tasked as Head Nurturer or Historian, a distinction that is only asked for in your language. These are my notes, so let us pretend I am both and neither, knowing which is insignificant. Each saved child screamed silently when they were awake and loudly as they slept. Early on, we built an impossibly large bed to fit their needs, and initially they buzzed to it. We called it The Hive, but eventually they were repulsed by each other and spaced out in rest areas not unlike the pods they grew up in.

Community members rotated roles, hugging, rubbing, watering and shushing *The Saved Children to sleep*. They were well fed and invited to attend school, the latter of which they all emphatically denied.

We keep a ledger of all the good things we’ve done here. All the times we’ve saved them from each other, especially with the littlest ones having a taste for poisonous things. They all died the same though, crouching, feet arched to run, arms above the rest of their body in a protective

4 Plant Elder

5 The one hundred and sixty nine children saved by the Plants in The Towers.

position. Those of us that were assigned to investigate their deaths found that the combined lack of sun exposure, touch, community and ritual had ultimately caused a fracture in their bodies, also known as Heartbreak. As I said, we kept a ledger of all the good we'd done. When one of The Saved Children smiled, we counted it as a victory. But before they died, we built a collaborative program that collected their wishes, after realizing that we had never been safe, possible places for them.

Our cultural memories and plant knowledge melded together, and highlighted what The Saved Children wanted most in the world: to be buried with grace, as their siblings had not. For us to promise them that this would never happen again.

With the plants' assistance, we tracked each birther down, even the birthers of the children who were not saved. Melena - Silus and I's daughter - led the procession. Those who no longer lived in the city organized their own ceremonies. Melena's blue black skin called energy from the sun, her long purple dreads were covered in red moss and crackling, her gold anklet sending sparks to every ankle wearer across the globe. We would all feel this loss.

Young children marked the streets and subway stations and backroads and roads with no names and loose dirt and kitchen floors and movie theatres and cars and parks and couches and gardens with black X's, marking each life that was stolen in The Before and After Wars. 6 billion X's in every corner of the earth. So many in some spots that had the satellites survived, they'd be seen from space.

Melena gathered the mucilage from behind her ears, rubbed her hands together producing an ever growing green ball and threw it to every nearby person, a signal that it was time. Papaya drums beat throughout the circle, Boom. Boom. Boom. Each X tapped at every point. A quick burst of pressure opened the earth and turned it into a wide, needy

mouth mumbling prayers. Eagles from every sect placed marigold seeds in the middle of each X, as dancers sashayed into the circle.

We all rejoiced. We said our regrets out loud. We promised to do better.

And still, when the young girls removed their mosswraps and whispered for their dreads to go abuzz and those dreads started rotating like helicopter rotor blades at the same time, we breathed in sadness too. When they flew up to the rooftops with their rifles, making sure that no one disturbed this moment, some of us wondered if they too would be killed for the promise of a world they would never get to set foot in.

The men on the streets ushered everyone in, doubling as security monitors, but it is the children above and below that taught us what it means to reclaim a block.

Before me, none of us said a word about the Lost Children.⁶ We openly mourned the loss of the supply chains, but we could not bring ourselves to talk about the fact that we allowed the children to be taken in the first place, nor that one thousand, nine hundred and sixteen of them died this time.

With help from the plants, we thought, if we could save them, perhaps we could make up for the ways we've ravaged each other. Perhaps we could learn again that revolution is not a land grab.

It does not necessitate sacrificing those we think are already irredeemable.

6 he one thousand nine hundred and sixteen children who died by fire and suffocation, after the decision to destroy The Towers.

I write in this journal so that we remember regret. So that it hangs heavy and close in our hearts. So that it may never happen again.

We said anything for the revolution. We made plans and promises to stick by them no matter what. But not this. We didn't blow up those towers to then do what those people in them have done to us.

Where was I? Ah, yes.

Every place is a graveyard. This is something everyone must know. But there is also sun and blood and water and history. We must take all the things we know and rebuild them. Makeba was not the first village to blow up the Police Towers. The work continues. Just last Tuesday, Akunva residents successfully threw every free flying surveillance camera from the sky.

Language is like that, it tries its best but in the end there is never quite anything to describe the brutality of the world. There is now a photograph with all of us in it.

It holds our past, present, and future memories. If we listen closely enough, we'll be able to travel through them to a place in which we are all here.

Free.

THE KEENING

BY: AYIZE JAMA-EVERETT



Artwork by Amir Khadar



The Keening

by Ayize Jama-Everett

B.dot always hated it when Whips had to police. Telling him that everyone had to police didn't help. Reminding him, it would be his duty as soon as he was old enough only made him more upset. He didn't like Whips, not tucking him in. That was his issue with policing.

B.dot had parents. Three to be precise. They'd moved into the second floor of the three-story, nine-bedroom Domicile five weeks before he was born. Whips didn't have kids. Didn't have partners. She wasn't even close with the other kids that lived in the Domicile. But somehow, for some reason, B. Dot chose Whips as his favorite adult, and there was nothing anyone could do about it.

That's how people treated Whips. When they liked her, they held onto her tightly. It hadn't led to excellent career advancement. She was a seaweed processor on the line, just like a quarter of her generation. It didn't lead to private housing. Her room was well appointed, but she had to clean dishes and do communal laundry twice a month, just like everyone else. She didn't mirror this affection from others; she liked people well enough but was also ok to be left alone with her birds and her books. What it did make her good for was policing.

She was sure it was a lie that the Policing rotation was random. Her name had come up four times in the past year. Altogether it would take eight months that she spent policing her neighborhood. Responding to domestics, helping the injured, guiding the youth who were in danger of becoming anti-social, working with the mentally unstable. She'd excelled

at the training, all but the hand to hand combat, but it wasn't a calling to her. It was just...people. But as she strapped her uniform on. Her communique, boots, and belt, drive full of resources and turned on her beacon, so central booking knew where she was and what she was doing at all times, she hoped tonight might be easy.

Whips rode in the front of the robot rickshaw and pretended to steer even though the mechanical animal-like machine was preprogrammed. All along the street, people waved to her and smiled. She never waved and smiled at anyone else when they were policing. Whips thought it was embarrassing to be so public, so visible in her job. She liked the anonymity of the Seaweed processing line. Everyone's scrubs looked the same. And everyone was doing the same work, vital work. Making seaweed taste a little less gross. Last week she was on the lamb line, quick heating, and forming the kelp, so it had a texture like lamb. She wondered who they tested these things on. Who was the last person to have eaten lamb? But even that was more important than policing. Who the hell needed police?

The mechanical headless bull stopped in front of the Pooped living Community. Whips loved the name the Seniors organized to rename their living quarters to. None of them worked, so they all participated in their house meetings and collective decisions continuously. You want real democracy one of her Mothers once told her, Let the old folks' data mine and participant observe.

"Who are you?" She looked to be more than ninety years old, but her external leg braces and girdle gave her the pep of a younger woman. She wore a light green moo-moo that clung close to her hips, her long dreads were gray and white, and her wrinkled almond complexion smoothed out around her cheeks and forehead.

"I'm Whips."

"You a boy or a girl?"

"Why?" Whips asked, fundamentally confused. Would the old-timer try and flirt with her? That would be the only reason anyone from Whips generation would try and ascertain her gender.

"I'm old school. I like to know these things."

"For today, I'm a girl. That ok?" Whips opened the back of the rickshaw as the elder stepped up into the wheeled two-seater.

"What kind of name is Whips?" Initially, Whips was going to sit in the front position. Still, it seemed as though the old-timer wasn't happy with her, despite Whips only speaking ten words. The remarkable crankiness of the woman got to her, so Whips decided to sit in the back and revel in the feeling of being disliked for no reason.

"I chose it when I was seven. A bloodkin said I whipped around the corner like a top. I liked the way it sounded. Never felt the need to change it".

"When I was growing up, we kept our names," The elder said, turning on her ample side butt to make sure she wasn't facing Whips.

"How'd that work out for you?" Whips said, trying hard to contain her fascination with the old-timer. "Being locked into one identity, all the time."

"You're supposed to respect your elders." The older woman turned back around to give Whips a stern glare.

"Mrs. Champagne," Whips took a second to look at her visual comms on her police issue goggles. They matched the person's face with all the available data the person supplied to local networks. "No disrespect is intended. You made a statement, and I asked a question. If my performance is not to your standards, I'd be happy to call another officer to escort you to the Keening."

"You ain't getting rid of me that easy. I know my rights. I have a right to a safe escort whenever I request it!" Mrs.

Champagne, held on to the bars of the carriage as though someone was about to literally kick her out of the transport. Whips realized her statement might come off as a threat to the older generation, those who grew up with police officers with guns, before Community Policing. Whips used her remote to cancel the request to pull over and to continue towards the cemetery.

In silence, they rode up to La Raza Boulevard, passing bikes, commuter vans, both public and private, and pedestrians all heading towards the cemetery. Whips couldn't go for more than a few feet without someone recognizing them and flashing their lights, a smile, or a wave in their direction. Whips always acknowledge the greeting but kept it demure. After all, she was on duty.

"When I was young, Police was different." Mrs. Champagne said almost to herself.

"They all had guns, right?" Whips asked.

"And attitude. Something like you? Black and gay or queer or whatever you are, they would have shot you for having a broken taillight."

"Thank you for surviving," It was the thing one was supposed to say to the previous generation. 'Without them, there would be no us,' was driven into every kid who went to public school and enjoyed breakfast, lunch, and dinner if they needed it at no cost. Mrs. Champagne's generation held the country by the throat and demanded a path to free education for every citizen, housing rights, and universal basic income.

Without Mrs. Champagne's generation, Whips was taught, the co-housing that nearly everyone lived in would be a disparate group of partial housing, temporary housing, and private habitations in which the rich could easily afford more homes than they could ever live in while the poor, regardless of how many people were in their family, could end up on the

street.

“Wasn’t like I had a say in the matter.” Mrs. Champagne said with a gruff.

“They say without you all, the country wouldn’t have been prepared at all when the coastal cities were hit by...

“Shoot, the Coivds taught us. I was just a kid for 19. By the time 26 came around, we all knew we had to have decentralized networks and supply chains for everything: food, information, clean water, transportation. If you was waiting on oranges or whatever from California when the Big ones hit, well that was on you. Probably had ten hot houses growing all around you, especially if you was out here.” Mrs. Champagne said it all with pride but didn’t look at Whips. She spoke as if she were talking to the world.

“You ever get mad, “Whips said as they turned the road to begin the climb up the hill to the memorial plaza that overlooked the town. “I mean you all did so much but with the environment and then the increase in foreign interference in the rest of the world, while we could I mean. It’s just...I’m asking...”

“You asking me if it was worth it?” Mrs. Champagne finally looked Whips in the eye. It was Whips turn to look away. “If the centuries of black bodies being tortured and burned and raped enslaved and fetishized and tortured if all of that made it worth it when the country on its fucking deathbed said, “Ok, we’ll try it your way since we don’t have any choice in the matter’? No, it wasn’t worth it. A human being should never have to fight for the right to proclaim it’s humanity. Do I get mad? Fuck yeah. All the time. That’s why I go to Keenings.”

“I don’t get it.” Whips confessed.

“The Keening reminds me that anger, I feel, is a deep sadness at its core. And that others can feel that sadness. And from that unification, we can work together. I can’t work with nobody when I’m angry.”

When Whips helped Mrs. Champagne out the carriage,

she did so with reverence and respect for the older woman's dignity. She walked behind the woman to the chairs set out on the flowing Green field. The seats faced a small stage, a rare stand of Birch and elm in the background. Behind the chairs, the town could be seen, all the LED lights green in hue in remembrance of the fallen dead.

Whips couldn't Keen. At least not the way Champagne could. None of Whips generation could cry as the older ones did. They would joke amongst each other that their lungs weren't healthy enough, their souls weren't deep enough, their eyes were too greedy with their moisture to let all the tears flow. They joked because the truth was much harder to deal with; the elders had simply lost more.

When Champagne began to wail, Whips recognized her voice. Champagne was a prominent voice all the other Keeners would organize around. Some folks chanted the date victims died; others chanted about who left behind, still others about who the deceased was when they drew breath. Every group had its own vocal range, rhythm pattern, and harmonies. But they all Followed Mrs. Champagne because she held the names. As a child in Civic history, Whips was supposed to memorize all the unarmed people killed by the police of old police with guns. She never could. It seemed a dark and twisted reason to exercise memory. But whenever she heard a Keening, Whips regretted not taking the lessons to heart. Some of these people had died over a century ago, but the pain of their passing still hit the older generation in a way Whips just couldn't harmonize with.

But it was the harmonizing that first alerted her to something wrong. Whips knew the sound of Keening in her community. If everyone was Keening or just one person, Whips had heard the variation. But this was a new voice, a majestic but utterly foreign sound harmonized into the communal music like a thief in the night. Just as Whips looked around to see who was singing so eloquently and strangely, Mrs. Champagne stopped singing. Whips followed her eye

line to find someone standing just outside of the grove of trees, with a dark hood pulled over their head.

"You hear that song?" Mrs. Champagne asked Whips, ignoring the crowd that came to Keen, as Whips started strolling towards the stranger.

"Yes, mam," Keen said.

"They sing like they don't know the words," Mrs. Champagne already sounded suspicious.

"Everybody knows the words to the Keenings." Whips said. It was true. Not memorizing wasn't the same as not knowing. Whips could rattle off the names of all the Fallen Peaceful if she were in a group if she as Keening. That was just the way the Keening worked. A situational remembrance.

"Well, then I'm glad you understand my concern." Mrs. Champagne almost shouted to Whips as the younger person left the community members and walked toward the hooded figure. The other Officers in the group obeyed Protocol. Some were getting their charges out of potential harm's way. Two stood by to bear witness to Whips behavior, in case they were making a mistake and needed correction and also to document in case Whips should...fail. Training mandated that one officer try to make contact with any new situation. Based on how the stranger treated Whips, they would either be identified as an ally or potential threat.

"Hello," Whips started. Concerned that while they could clearly see the stranger, there was something immaterial about it, even standing directly before it. "My name is Whips. Have you come for the Keening?"

"You are police." When speaking to people, Whips usually expected the sound to come from the person's mouth. Maybe not so precisely as the mouth but at least the general head area. What Whips heard when the stranger spoke was a low tone full volume expression from the entirety of the Strangers Body. It was enough to scare some of the Keeners.

"I am," Whips offered. "I'm sorry to ask but, is it

possible to turn the volume down? When you speak, it hurts people.”

“When you sing, it shows your hurt.” The stranger, as still as a tree, said at a lower volume.

“Yes, the Keening,” Whips said. “And thank you. Can I ask your name? Your people?”

“We are Alien song.”

Whips took a moment. Without thinking, Whips dropped to the ground in a low squat and put her hands over her head, interlacing her fingers over the crown of her head and letting her arms on the side of her head. A second later, the stranger did the same. Whips still couldn't see it's face.

“Did you hear, Whips? We are Alien song.”

“Yup. Got that. No idea what that means,” Whips said, sighing. Whips also instinctively knew it was true.

“We are what is left of a people. Not from here. All we are is a song.”

“I see you. You are not a song.”

“We are always singing to be seen. We will show you a rest...” Immediately the image, the hooded figure squatting before Whips, began to fade, a Sutter on the film screen of life. Watching it pulled on a deep panic in Whips.

“Ok, ok, I get it. If you don't sing, you don't exist.”

“Yes,” The Song said back. As it did, the full form re-emerged. “We have learned to sing in the deep of space with no oxygen. Pulled by black holes into other dimensions, we sing. Burned in the hearts of new suns, we still sing. All that we are now, is song.”

“Why?” Whips asked. The first question the Song asked still rattled Whips mind.

What did a song know of Police? “Why are you song only? Were you more once?”

“We policed,” The Song said and dropped it's tone even more. “We policed our species, our planet, our desires, our rights. For too long, we policed. It is an evolutionary dead-

end, to police. We realized too late. As our planet and bodies and desires and rights died, the only thing we could hold on to was Song. We are the song of an extinct species."

"I don't think we police the way you policed." Whips tried.

"Who is he?!" Mrs. Champagne screamed over from the small stage.

"Hold on," Whips said to the Alien song, standing and frustrated. Whips shouted back to the stage. "It's not a He. It's a Song."

"A What now?"

"A song. An Alien song!"

"What that mean?"

"I'm trying to figure out!" Whips turned back to the Song, still squatting in Whips manner. "Can I ask why you're here?"

"Our song grows. Always. It must." The song said, standing impossibly slowly.

"But song must be given, not taken. So we ask for your song."

"And then what? We give you the Song of our dead, and you do what with it?"

"Then your dead become our song and travel with us. To Stars and universes, and nebula physical bodies will never see."

"What does she want?" Mrs. Champagne screamed again from the stage. By now, the panic had subsided a bit, and a semi-circle of interest formed around the hooded stranger and Whips.

"It's not a She!" Whips snapped back. "It's an Alien song. It wants to join in the Keening. Once it does, it will take the Keening across the galaxy".

"Why she want to take our Keening?" Champagne, now fearless, stomped off the stage and towards the Alien Song. Before Whips could try and get between them, The Alien song was advancing, floating a millimeter off the ground,

towards Champagne.

"You say Keening," The Alien spoke loud enough for everyone to hear. "It is a moment of your lives. We who policed ourselves into nothing devoted a continent, an octave, and a chord progression to those of us who we killed for no reason. We could not stop policing ourselves, and so we died. But your song, your Keening, shows how it might have been had we cured ourselves of the illness."

"Yes, but do you know what we words mean? Who are these people we mourn?" Champagne said now close enough to touch the Alien Song but wisely choosing not to. The Alien song reduced itself again to the squat the overwhelmed Whips had shown it earlier. Only now, it performed as a sort of supplication.

"We would like to learn. Will you teach us your song?" Whips didn't have to explain to the Alien song what Mrs. Champagne was doing while she went to the other elders to confer. The Song waited in the same squatting position, carefully observing the elders but resonating only the lowest of hums to keep itself visible. Another officer came up to Whips as they waited.

"You think we should call in armed backup?" He asked.

"You think. Champagne is going to beat someone up?" Whips asked.

"No! That...thing" The Officer pointed at the Alien Song.

"You watch too many old movies. Look at that? Has it made a threatening motion? Has it complied with all requests? Is it reasonable in its interactions with everyone? So why would you call in a weapons team?"

"It's an Alien!"

"It's an Alien song. Besides, what would bullets do against a song? Shut up and go, please." Whips managed to shoe the junior officer away just as the Song turned its head slightly skyward.

"Police." was all it said to her.

"Don't I know it."

“We can’t just teach you our song,” Mrs. Champagne, now the community elected leader for this situation, came back and said to the Alien.

“We have disturbed your protocols. We will apologize and depart...”

“Hold on,” Champagne said, placing both of her palms before the Alien song as it stood. “I mean, these are not just songs. They are people. Like you, a collective person. To share our song is to share our people. You would have to listen to the stories of the Emmitt Tills, the Eric Garners, The Beronna Taylors, and Amadou Diallos, the Mycell Johnsons, the William Howard Greens, there are a lot of names. And it’s not just the names. It’s the stories of their lives, not just who they were when they died. Can you carry all of those stories as you say to the stars?”

“We would like to learn. Will you teach us your song.” It could have been a recording, the Alien Song said it in the same way it spoke earlier. The Alien Song knew what it was asking, had known from the second it made itself visible, apparent to everyone. Whips knew the Alien song knew what it was undertaking.

“And while you’re teaching them,” Whips said, taking a seat on the grass next to the Alien in front of Mrs. Champagne. “I could do with a refresher as well.”



The Dream Tank: Quantum Abolition, Revisited

PING! *“Welcome back, Ibrahim. You’re becoming very adept at this. But just to reset, remember to take three deep br...”*

“Excuse my interruption, but those last simulations felt different - like a déjà vu for something about to happen or happening now...” Ibrahim asserted.

“Ibe, your bio-auras are spiking. And I haven’t much time to explain... When you asked who must be remembered, I needed you to see beyond the borders of time... to remember the future: your ancestors in the making... Just as I did for you.”

Ibrahim sprung up from the docking station, frantically snapped off his 4D-XR headset in a panic. He looked around the infinity room, only to see the expansive auroral lights mimic his bio-aura rhythms and heartbeat.

“You should reset and take a dee...”

“Who are you?” Ibrahim huffed quietly in a panic...
“Ibe - I’m trying to expl...”

He caught enough of his breath to forcefully yell as if through the walls of light:

“WHO! ARE! YOU!?”

The infinity room echoed with his pang of confusion. Then fell eerily silent.

“You’ve heard my voice this entire time, and you still don’t know who I am?”

The voice gently replied.

“You are not actually... are you?” Ibrahim slowed his hyperventilated gasps to hear her response. The returned silence in the room gave all the answer Ibrahim needed as he no longer could hold back his tears.

“Aunt Niyah?” He asked in through a bewildered mutter... already knowing the answer.

“Aunt Niyah... I've missed you so much What.. why is this happening.”

“Oh, Ibe. I see you. I love you. And I'm with you.”

“I love you back. And I know you're with me as my avatar guide. But it's not the same...”

“I was being literal. I'm with you. I did not think this moment would arrive when it did. Even if I knew it had to happen - and could only happen - in this exact time. ”

“Wha- wait... wait. wait. If this is the Ai being funny, I do not consent. I don't understand...” Ibrahim sobbed reaching for his 4D-XR headset as if he would suddenly see her through it's augmented lens. “What do you mean? You're a vocal projection. An avatar! How is this even possible?”

“Ironically, I don't have much time right now to tell you that we will have nothing but time to answer that question. Because in time, you will learn more truths - not just for how this is possible, but also why this is necessary. For now you must know that you were not just chosen for a special residency... You were called for a special purpose. I've chosen you. Not only to see our memories of Abolition Day's pasts, but also our freedom dreams beyond the borders of time.”

As Aunt Niyah's echoing whispers engulfed the vastness of The Dream Tank's infinity room, a swirling murmur of neon bio-auras emerged around Ibrahim as if dancing to her words:

"Our Abolition Day Futures are at stake! A radical anti-abolitionist sect known as The Fire-Eaters discovered how to TimeHack at a Quantum Supremacies Lab in UCF. This Dream Tank is a Temporal Middle Passage specifically designed for you to transport across timelines through our Ancestral Dreamspace - so you didn't just dream those simulations, Ibrahim. You were actually living them! You've been called to organize with my other Beloveds across time to heal our past and rescue our futures from The Fire-Eaters. This may be our last chance to repair the breaches across time before it's too late. My other Beloveds are waiting on you... Are you ready for this part of our journey?"

Ibrahim didn't know what - or how - to think as the rushing auroral vortex circled around him. And almost as suddenly as he needed ancestral wisdom, Aunt Niyah spoke:

"Ibe, I don't know what this future journey may hold, but I know who holds your hand."

He felt an easeful touch on his hands, which were frantically double-clutching the docking pod as the portal expanded overhead. It felt like she was actually there.

"Ibe, I can still sense your bio-auras. You're panicking," Aunt Niya's voice was firm, but calm. "To make this journey you still must radically consent to it. I need you to focus on my voice and listen with your full body."

Ibrahim focused as intently as possible - not letting go of all his fears and anxieties and hopes and confusions and excitements and pains and joys; but rather, embracing

them with full awareness. His hands relaxed, gaze softened, awareness broadened. As he did, the roaring riptides of the Dream Tank's portal began to fade... and Aunt Niyah's voice came clearly into focus, as if she were speaking directly in his ear:

"This time, I will ask a series of questions and your answers will guide you to when and where you need to be... breathe, visualize and embody your response with intention:

"What is your most irresistible freedom dream?"

"Is it wrapped in seeds of light?"

"How does it feel in your body?"

"Are you feeling loved, safe and free?"

"Who are the Beloveds entrusted with it?"

"When must this freedom dream be planted?"

"Where does this freedom dream take root?"

A wild dream began to emerge deep in Ibrahim's imagination...

And suddenly - everything faded to Black...



WHAT IS
YOUR MOST
IRRESISTIBLE
FREEDOM DREAM?



Artwork by Amir Khadar



AFTERWARD

WHY ABOLITION?

This worldbuilding project was sparked by a simple question:
What if the '94 Crime Bill had never existed?

The 1994 Crime Bill tore apart generations of Black families by funneling billions of federal dollars into local prisons and policing. The bill's proponents promoted a dangerous, anti-Black narrative that characterized children as "superpredators" and stoked racial fears while promising to placate them at the cost of Black lives. As part of the People's Coalition for Safety and Freedom, PolicyLink is working to repeal the '94 Crime Bill and replace it with a new federal bill focused on healing and community investment, developed through a People's Process that amplifies the voices of those most harmed by criminalization, policing, and incarceration.

But the prompt to imagine a world without the '94 Crime Bill—intended to catalyze support for the campaign—needed to be expanded in the wake of the brutal police murder of George Floyd in May 2020. Subsequent calls to #DefundthePolice and reimagine public safety accelerated a public reckoning with the truth about our toxic criminal-legal system:

Policing and prisons, by design, will never keep communities safe.

This is the central premise of abolition—that our system is working exactly as intended and that attempts to reform it are futile at best and deadly at worst. Acclaimed works such as *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander and the

documentary *The 13th* by filmmaker Ava Duvernay drive this point home by outlining how our criminal-legal system was explicitly designed to entrench slavery and social control. Scholars have noted the direct throughline from slave patrols to modern policing. The abolitionist framework acknowledges these realities and invites us to imagine a world where everyone is thriving and safe from the fear of state violence.

Abolition is often unfairly conflated with chaos or anarchy, triggering unfounded fears that conflict with our basic human need to feel safe. But abolition means building new, more effective systems of safety as much as it means eliminating harmful ones. An increasing number of mainstream policy organizations, including [PolicyLink](#), have shifted from a reformist to an abolitionist approach by working to reduce the harm of our unjust current system while imagining and building the infrastructure we need to replace it, including our work to repeal and replace the 1994 Crime Bill.

Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so that it can be thought. The farthest external horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock of experiences of our daily lives. As they become known and accepted to ourselves, our feelings, and the honest exploration of them, become sanctuaries and fortresses and spawning grounds for the most radical and daring of ideas, the house of difference so necessary to change and the conceptualization of any meaningful action. —From *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* by Audre Lorde (Crossing Press, 1985)

In other words, artmaking is policymaking. This anthology is a call to write our own future of safety, freedom, and liberation through stories, poems, and policy.

And what is the vision for a new system of safety and justice? As we move toward abolition, what should we look forward to or be wary of? The brilliant cohort of Black artists who contributed to *Black Freedom Beyond Borders: Memories of Abolition Day* provide some compelling answers that can inspire our imaginations but also guide our policy campaigns.

Anand Subramanian | Managing Director | PolicyLink



ABOUT THE TEAM

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS



Ayize Jama-Everett

is an African-American science fiction and speculative fiction writer. He is the author of the trilogy *The Liminal People* (self-published, 2009; Small Beer Press, 2012), *The Liminal War* (Small Beer Press, 2015) and *The Entropy of Bones* (Small Beer Press, 2015).

Born in Harlem, New York,

Jama-Everett is now based in Oakland, California. He holds master's degrees in clinical psychology and divinity, and has been a therapist, and a teacher at high school and college levels.



Amber Butts is a queer writer, organizer, grief worker and educator from Oakland, CA who believes that Black folk are already whole. Her work centers Black children, Black mamas and Black elders, which asks big and small questions about how we move towards actualizing spaces that center tenderness, nuance and joy while living in

a world reliant on our terror. Amber has been featured in *Essence*, *Medium*, *RaceBaitr*, and *Black Youth Project*.



Naudika Williams loves sci-fi and fantasy, especially the writing of Octavia E. Butler. Writing is Naudika's own way of creating new worlds. Naudika has garnered many accolades including the Sargent Shriver Youth Warriors Against Poverty and performed spoken word at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts and

CounterPulse. Naudika was born in Oakland and attends Laney College and hopes to be a screenwriter for cartoons and movies.



Walidah Imarisha is a historian at heart, reporter by (w)right, rebel by reason, an educator, writer, public scholar and spoken word artist. She edited two anthologies, *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories From Social Justice Movements* and *Another World is Possible*. Imarisha's nonfiction book *Angels with Dirty Faces: Three Stories of*

Crime, Prison, and Redemption won a 2017 Oregon Book Award. She is also the author of the poetry collection *Scars/Stars*, and in 2015, she received a Tiptree Fellowship for her science fiction writing.



Shawn Taylor is a lifelong science fiction, fantasy, and comic book fan. He is a founding organizer of thenerdsofcolor.org, and the Black Comix Arts Festival. His passion for stories of other worlds led him to becoming a paid Dungeon Master for many D&D campaigns. Shawn just concluded a Senior Fellowship with the Pop

Culture Collaborative where he studied how fandom power could be used for social good. Currently his company, Drum and Gourd, is working on a toy line, a collectable card game, and a LARPing system. He also consults for media and gaming companies.



Donte Clark is a poet, emcee, educator and activist from Richmond, California. He was founding member and artistic director of the RAW Talent Creative Arts Program at RYSE Center. Clark became the artistic lead of the program's first play, *Té's Harmony*, which examined local issues through the structure of

Romeo and Juliet. The 2015 documentary *Romeo Is Bleeding* follows Clark in the process of writing and performing *Té's Harmony*. Donte Clark has appeared in *Kicks* (2016), *Code Switch* (2018) and *The North Pole* (2019).



Lisa Bates is a 2019 Creative Capital awardee, recognizing her practice at the intersection of art, urban planning, and radical geographic thought. Through collaboration with multimedia artists, the works ask us to develop new visions of Black history, present, and possibility. This radical Black spatial imaginary

practice includes the Portland African-American Leadership Forum People's Plan, which asked "what would it be like if your city, neighborhood, community loved Black people?" and the art exhibition and social emergency response center [HERE | Humboldt](#)

WAKANDA DREAM LAB



Calvin Williams is a Cultural Strategies Fellow at Movement Strategy Center. He is a founding creator of Wakanda Dream Lab, producing the Black Freedom Beyond Borders fan fiction anthologies and augmented art exhibit at Betti Ono. He conspires with fellow afrofuturists to produce immersive spaces for new stories

and storytellers of liberation to emerge. He cosplays as an immersive experience curator, a podcast host for The Big We, and impact producer for The North Pole Show + Offsides Productions. He lives in Oakland with his Beloveds, Leila & Baby Malik.



Amir Khadar is a Sierra Leonean-American multidisciplinary artist and educator from Minneapolis, Minnesota. Their main mediums are poetry, fibers, and digital art. Regardless of medium, their practice has always been grounded through afro-futurism, black beauty, and ancestral practices. They were Creative

Director and Designer of “Black Freedom Beyond Borders: Re-imagining Gender in Wakanda.” Amir is currently a student at Swarthmore College.

POLICYLINK



Lupe Garcia, PolicyLink Coordinator, supports several project teams across the organization including the Arts, Culture, & Equitable Development team. Before joining PolicyLink, Lupe applied her mixed-methods research skills towards supporting a variation of evaluation and planning projects as a consultant with

government and nonprofit agencies across the behavioral health system, justice system, and community development sector. Lupe holds a BA in Public Health and a minor in public policy from the University of California, Berkeley.



Lorrie Chang, PolicyLink Associate, works to advance an arts and cultural approach to policies and practices for more equitable, resilient communities across the country. She helped design a national Creative Placemaking program in partnership with The Kresge Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, and ArtPlace America. She

was also a 2017-2018 Truth Fellow at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, fostering a culture of vulnerability to expand common truths and ignite collective action. She holds a Masters in Urban and Regional Planning from Portland State University.



Eric Morrison-Smith, PolicyLink Program Coordinator, provides project management and policy support for the Alliance for Boys and Men of Color (ABMoC). Before joining PolicyLink, Eric worked in workforce development and led a regional initiative to lower youth disconnection rates in San Diego County. Eric sat

on the Steering Committee for San Diego County's Restorative Justice Program and is a 2019 SDLA Fellow. Eric is passionate about the ways racialization impacts culture, systems, and structures to create and maintain race-based outcomes in society.



Jeremy Liu, Senior Fellow for Arts, Culture, and Equitable Development, is an award-winning artist, urban planner, and real estate developer. He has led and co-founded community development firms including Creative Ecology Partners, Creative Development Partners, and the National Bitter Melon Council. For PolicyLink, he is

guiding an initiative to integrate arts and culture into the work of community development to accelerate equity. He is a board member of The Center for Neighborhood Technology, the New England Foundation for the Arts, and the Interaction Institute for Social Change.



Anand Subramanian, Managing Director, leads PolicyLink Legal and Arts, Culture, and Equitable Development efforts to advance community safety and justice through campaigns and programs that shift toward healing and community investment. He served as the executive director of the San Francisco

Blue Ribbon Panel on Transparency, Accountability, and Fairness in Law Enforcement. Anand previously worked at the Insight Center for Community Economic Development, the Law School Consortium Project, and at Sheppard, Mullin, Richter, and Hampton after earning his JD from Northwestern University School of Law.

CREATIVE CONSULTANTS



Aisha Shilingford is surviving late stage capitalism by cultivating joy, creativity, emergence, love, breathe and holding on desperately to the future. Aisha is an artist and creative for Intelligent Mischief and Wakanda Dream Lab. She is reconnecting with her ancestors, world building Afro-utopias, and unlearning binaries and borders.

She spends her time between Brooklyn, Oakland, and Trinidad & Tobago.



Terry Marshall has been involved in social justice movements for over 20 years. His work spans a range of intersecting creative and social justice endeavors including cultural organizing, creative production, curation, writing, cultural research, dance, event production, design, and political strategy. He founded

Intelligent Mischief in 2013, a creative design lab for social good. He is the co-author of two books, *The Black Body Survival Guide* and *Black Freedom Beyond Borders: A Wakanda Immigration Anthology*.



Chinaka Hodge is an award winning poet, educator, playwright and screenwriter from Oakland. She graduated from NYU's Gallatin School of Individualized Study, and USC School of Cinematic Art with an MFA in Writing for Film and TV as an Annenberg Fellow. She was a Sundance Feature Film

Lab Fellow for her script, *700th&Int'l*. For over a decade, Chinaka worked in the nation's leading literary arts non-profit, Youth Speaks. Her work has been featured in *Newsweek*, *San Francisco Magazine*, *Believer Magazine*, PBS, NPR, CNN, C-Span, and HBO's *Def Poetry*.



Tracey Corder is a Campaign Coordinator for ACRE's Policing work. She comes to this work after serving as a social worker, electoral campaign organizer and political strategist. Her most recent position as Director of Federal Action and Racial Justice at the Center for Popular Democracy worked to advance direct action as

a tactic to advocate for progressive legislation on housing, immigration, voting rights, climate and policing. Tracey serves on the Advisory Board of Be A Hero, the Steering Committee of Black Womxn For and is a trainer for the Birddog Nation.