

# Black Womxn are Violets

*After Alice Dunbar Nelson*

wild            wistful<sup>1</sup>  
lovers        wander  
              the fields<sup>2</sup>

perfumed and deadening<sup>3</sup>  
far from    sweet  
clear perfect loneliness

god<sup>4</sup>    made  
          wild violets  
heaven mounting  
          dreams

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<sup>1</sup> in which the body once existed. in which the ashes swallowed breathing. in which something lived yearning for sound.

<sup>2</sup> expanse beckoning empty. folding itself into spell. protecting the ones forced into space, guided to rip the earth and self to ruin.

<sup>3</sup> in which there is always a palm covering the gaping blackness of a mouth.

<sup>4</sup> an origin, or ancestors, or root, or seed, or the uproot of it all.

## My Mother and I Loiter

on the front steps of  
some young professional's  
apartment in Boston.

                  She smokes  
I hold my breath  
it is hard for both of us  
to breathe.

Hers: heavy doses of meds  
Mine: small doses of meds  
meant to make seeing her  
less painful, other things  
less crushing.

                  Today it is hot  
she tries to blow her cigarette  
smoke away from me  
she doesn't know much  
about me anymore  
but she knows I've always  
hated the smoke.

                  She knows  
I've always hated how we've  
never been able to connect.

                  She used to roll  
my infant body in a stroller  
while she fumbled through  
schizophrenia.

                  I knew nothing  
but how to love her  
the way babies know  
how  
the way babies don't  
know that they  
are experiencing  
pain but that something

is breaking      and my mother

is a hurting thing but like a baby  
she doesn't know this  
                  so I sing to her  
about my job and how the family is doing  
this calms her all the time.

                  I imagine

she feels no pain if only for a moment  
and i can smile as I wonder  
if this is how it feels to be a mother  
                          to know the world  
and all its evil and to soothe anyway  
even when the consoling never comes back  
                  and you're left empty.  
I can't pretend to know about birthing  
but I know how to make up happy stories  
for a woman on a front stoop  
who can't believe her daughter  
is almost thirty.

                  Who can't believe she had a baby once  
chanting back every lullabye

                          meant to make things okay  
meant to shield  
                          everything soft  
like we are told  
                          only mothers could  
I don't know  
                          how to be a mother  
but somehow  
                          I have learned  
to keep  
every hard  
lesson tucked away  
until enough time  
has passed  
                          until the world  
has aged us both  
old enough  
to learn.

## Here We Are in Infinite Joy

*"People dance to say, I am alive and in my body.  
I am Black alive and looking back at you."*

- Elizabeth Alexander, "The Trayvon Generation," *The New Yorker*

Here is the skin  
the sun glares  
its radiant  
teeth towards

Here are the hips  
mesmerized in rhythm,  
weighted blues, holy  
strut, beautiful  
as ever

Here they are  
having cried through  
some wrecking calm or chaos

Here they are dancing, for  
how could they not?

Here's how a song  
emits the limbs  
to swing

*Are these words happy or sad?*

Does it matter?  
If the song  
is a rich croon  
in the body?

The knees arch  
weathered joints  
alive, with motion

The bass an arsenal  
for euphoric convulsing

Here they are  
Stunning celebration

How we move  
How we move

Cadent glory  
it is *never too much*  
*never too much*