

# 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



## 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*