

1st Place Poetry 2017 Summer Contest

I found such surprise in this heart-searing poem. There is unexpected force in the poem's unconventional structure, how each line snaps in sharp breaths and staccato bursts of joy and ache in equal measure. The poet imbues each moment with needfully tender observations and a natural rhythm that carries the reader along in its song of grief and wonder. By exploring how much of this living we wear as a mask of yearning for the dead, this is a vivid and touching eulogy for the lost ones. What keeps me returning is the fire of imagination on the page, how it constructs for the lost brother an afterlife of his own dreaming, a place of freedom, a place for the loved ones to dance again; at last, at last.

Safiya Sinclair

egungun

Aurielle Lucier

if there is such a place/ where the dead walk/ & there is no/ mourning/ i am sure you are/ there/
brother/ i am sure you are eating/ pork rind & dancing / windmills round/ the niggas we/ read
about in/ grandmothers good book/ wildthing / i bet they call you/ i bet you cant hear/ them/
over the tender/ sound of a drum calling you/ even there/ where the time dont stop/
i am sure you/ run late to everything/ i am sure nobody minds/ when you flash them/ that sun
swallowed mouth/ that unhinged glow/ brother/ i bet you/ if there is such a thing as God/ he
who rules/ the truest religion jeans / who calls the water/ into/ puddle/ into/ flood/ into /
the very tears which carve my face / i am sure/ you have renamed him/ *my nigga*/ have called to
him/ *aye, OG*/ down a long hallway/ full/ your voice
a lark/ more mischief than praise/ i am sure he answers with a smile/ each time/ i imagine your
shoulder wet/ in the twilight of/ this third space/ this not hell, not earth/ this heaven
by another name/ his head resting gently/ his body the tremble/ of a wailing/ now subsided
& you brother/ you a crooner/ & been one always/ you sing him your favorite/
songs in the key of life/ you let him unfasten his whole self/ before he go back/ to being our god &
the magic of it is/ you aint no angel/ you aint / you just you/ out there/
being light/ once/ when you knew you were dying/ you told me to/ rest my head on your chest
& listen/ it is silly/ to call the heart a drum/ considering/ but damn/ if it wasn't music/ brother/
what was it?