

# Edisto River Review

## 2023



# **Edisto River Review 2023**

**Clafflin University**

**Orangeburg, South Carolina**

**Volume VIII**

**Editor: Nick Robinson**

**Associate Prose Editor: Dennis Bormann**

**Associate Poetry Editor: Sharon Gile**

**Cover Design: Brooke S. Jacobs**

*Edisto River Review* is a publication of the Department of English at Claflin University. Views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the university or editors.

Copyright 2023 by Claflin University. Rights revert to authors upon publication.

Printed in the United States by

Williamson Printing, Orangeburg, SC

## FROM THE EDITOR

The best artistic works provide insight into humanity through the depth and breadth of creative exploration. And creativity is at the core of what you'll find in Claflin's student literary journal, the *Edisto River Review*. The journal's mission has always been to raise our students' voices by publishing their most searing visual and written creations. And because our students are the rising conscience of society, we haven't hesitated to take on difficult subjects. This time last year we settled our 2023 theme, "Gun Violence: How Has it Affected You and Your Family."

According to a recent Kaiser Family Foundation survey, more than half of US adults or their family members have encountered gun violence: they've been threatened with a firearm, witnessed a shooting, or experienced a relative's death by a gun. Black adults are about twice as likely as Whites to be affected by gun violence. And in the last several years, not only have firearms contributed to the deaths of more of America's Black children than any other type of injury or illness, the child firearm mortality rate has doubled.

In line with these realities, Brooke S. Jacobs' first prize-winning journal cover offers a metaphorical imagining of the consequences of America's rising gun violence: a blood splattered Statue of Liberty with an AK47 propped against her shoulder; on the back cover, bullet-ridden bodies lying in a pool of blood at Liberty's base. The freshman winner of this year's nonfiction contest, Chelsea Ossai's "Sóró Soké!" takes readers on a journey of authoritarian violence that ends with the disappearance of a myriad of protesters, including her best friend. Our winning poetry submission, Jerrell Alston's "The Native Beast" is a dark exploration into the nature of man.

But, as the lifecycle of the human experience is anything but singular, there are also incredibly joyous renderings in this issue. There's magnificent internal artwork. There's Sandrina Foster's "My Birth Experience" which reveals a teen father and mother's struggles turned to exuberance at the birth of their "beautiful brown baby girl." Amira Aiken's prize-winning "Twelve O'clock" ruminates on the irresistibility of love. And for the



very first time in the *Review*, we have singing, acting, and poetry in the form of an extended play directed by Professor Annette Greivous, and performed by a Claflin student-theater ensemble.

We hope you are moved by these unique and original works as much as we have been. After all, movement in the form of change is at the core of art. You consume an essay, a poem, story, or a painting, and it alters you, sometimes for a short while, but often enough permanently and in ways you may not even be aware of on a conscious level. And isn't change what it means to be human, including being in debt to people you don't know and that you can never thank enough? But today, I'll try to express our thanks. Thank you, Brooke; thank you, Jerrell; thank you, Chelsea; thank you, theater, and drama members for your moving contributions to the Claflin community and to the world at large!

At this point, I want to shift gears and look forward to our 2024 *Edisto River Review* and this year's contests, which are driven by the exploration of yet another question: "My Body, My Choice: True or Not and Why?" This issue of the individual's right to self-determination with regards to sexuality, marriage, and reproductive choices has split modern America right down the middle. As usual, our editors want to hear your thoughts and ideas by way of your poetry, stories, essays, and cover art. You'll want to know that we've significantly increased the first-prize cash payout this year: \$550 for first place in all four categories, and with \$100 for second place winners, and \$75 for third. For more details on the contests, look for this flyer in Claflin's Friday Communications email, and then email me your work at [Nrobinson@claflin.edu](mailto:Nrobinson@claflin.edu).

In closing, if this is your first time with our journal, with *your* journal, thank you in advance for cracking the covers. If you have been with us before, thank you for coming back. Good reading!

**Nick R. Robinson, Ph.D.**

Associate Professor of English  
Editor, *Edisto River Review*

## **2023 Department of English Creative Writing**

### **Awards**

#### **Claflin University**

#### **Cover Art**

**First Place: Brooke S. Jacobs, Untitled**

**Second Place: Assiya Desoky, Untitled**

#### **Non-Fiction**

**First Place: Chiamanda H. Ossai, Sóró ‘**

**Second Place Tie: Savannah Joyner, The Cowardly Girl’s  
Wish**

**Sandrina Foster, My Birth Experience**

**Third Place: Jerrell Alston, It’s Time**

#### **Poetry**

**First Place: Jerrell Alston, Native Beast**

**Second Place: Sandrina Foster, Grandma Janie’s House**

**Third Place: Amira Aiken, 12 O’ Clock**

## Table of Contents:

<b>11 Sandrina Foster</b>	<i>Grandma Janie's House</i>
<b>13 Chiamanda Chelsea Ossai Sóró Soké!</b>	
<b>17 Assiya Desoky</b>	<i>Untitled, Front Cover</i> <i>Untitled, Back Cover</i>
<b>19 Jerrell A. Alston</b>	<i>The Native Beast</i>
<b>21 Savannah Joyner</b>	<i>The Cowardly Girl's Wish</i>
<b>26 Jada Bostic</b>	<i>Untitled</i>
<b>27 Whitney Stroman</b>	<i>Untitled</i>
<b>28 Ni' Ray Nelson</b>	<i>The Generational Pain</i>
<b>29 Sandrina Foster</b>	<i>My Birth Experience</i>
<b>33 Jada Bostic</b>	<i>Untitled</i>
<b>34 Ethan Drake</b>	<i>Pieta</i>
<b>35 Amira Aiken</b>	<i>Twelve O'clock</i>
<b>36 Jerrell Alston</b>	<i>It's Time</i>
<b>42 Breeze Smith</b>	<i>Untitled</i> <i>Untitled</i>
<b>44 Jerrell Alston</b>	<i>Let Her Smile</i>
<b>46 Mekhya Horry</b>	<i>Losing Micah</i>
<b>49 Assiya Desoky</b>	<i>Emotional Neglect Series I</i>
<b>50 Kennerde Powell</b>	<i>Untitled</i>
<b>51 Caliese Beckford</b>	<i>Baby, Wait!</i>

<b>55 Ethan Drake</b>	<i>Traumatic Daydream</i>
<b>56 Brooke S. Jacobs</b>	<i>A Knight's Sacrifice, A Queen's Strength in Sorrow</i>
<b>57 Jerrell Alston</b>	<i>Know This</i> <i>The Deafening Sound of Black Creative Reflection</i>
<b>62 Laya Kelly</b>	<i>Untitled</i>
<b>63 Laya Kelly</b>	<i>Untitled</i>
<b>64 Caliese Beckford</b>	<i>I'm Done</i>
<b>65 Sandrina Foster</b>	<i>The Decision</i>
<b>72 Breeze Smith</b>	<i>Bang</i>
<b>73 Antonio Rutledge</b>	<i>Expectation of Masculinity</i>
<b>74 Kamara Chima</b>	<i>Vivid Ponder</i>
<b>75 Amira Aiken</b>	<i>RUN, or Don't</i>
<b>78 Kendell White</b>	<i>Untitled</i>
<b>79 Whitney Stroman</b>	<i>Untitled</i>
<b>80 Mekhya Horry</b>	<i>To My Cat</i>
<b>81 Jalen Langley</b>	<i>The Summer of Choices</i>
<b>85 Drama: Unknown</b>	
<b>86 Ni'Ray Nelson</b>	<i>Stereotypical</i>
<b>86 Jayla Myers</b>	<i>Flea Market</i>
<b>90 Jevauni Malcolm</b>	<i>A True Queen</i>
<b>91 Kambria Cook</b>	<i>HAIR</i>

<b>91 Jayla Myers</b>	<i>I DIDN'T HAVE TIME</i>
<b>92 Kayla Sweat</b>	<i>Black LGBTQIA+</i>
<b>93 Author Unknown</b>	<i>Bitches</i>
<b>94 Kambria Cook</b>	<i>Polygamy</i>
	<i>I AM CHANGED</i>
<b>96 Jevauni Malcolm</b>	<i>True Love Doesn't Share</i>
<b>99 Savannah Joyner</b>	<i>Love is Complicated</i>
	<i>To Those Who Can No Longer Feel</i>
<b>101 Eden Rattley</b>	<i>Accept The Help</i>
<b>104 Kambria Cook</b>	<i>Oh, to Be a Black Woman</i>
<b>104 Ni' Ray Nelson</b>	<i>PUTTING YOURSELF FIRST</i>

## **Sandrina Foster**

### *Grandma Janie's House*

Thompson Street  
Where I grew up.  
It wasn't my house,  
but it was my house.

Grandma Janie's,  
it was home.

Every summer  
My sister and I  
Stayed for days.

Breakfast and dinner  
Always made.  
An aroma of waffles and bacon.  
Melted margarin in pockets of waffles.  
Aunt Mae,  
Best friend and sister  
Washed dishes each night.

An untold agreement.  
The two sisters had.

With not so much to do,  
Entertainment was found.  
Every room,  
Kept me busy.

Kitchen,  
Apples, grapes, and carrots.  
Cookies and ice cream.

Never failed or let me down.

Granddaddy Hack's den.  
Execution of my art,  
Took place.  
Coloring with markers and crayons.

The back room,  
Grandma Janie's bedroom,  
My personal favorite.

A filing cabinet.  
Full of every,  
Tyler Perry film made.  
Plays, tv shows, movies, and cartoons.

Outside.  
A garden of harvest.  
A building of golf clubs and balls.  
A building filled with sewing machines and materials.

Hours were spent.  
At days end,  
Slumber in the back room.  
10:01 everything black and quiet.  
Morning,  
Breakfast made.  
Time to do it all over,  
Again.

## **Chiamanda Chelsea Ossai**

### *Sóro Soké!*

Weaving my way through the large Nigerian crowd, the chants kept getting louder “Soro Soke! Soro Soke! End Sars!” With a huge smile plastered across my face as I kept going, I thought to myself; I couldn’t be more proud of this generation. We had been protesting for the abolishment of the SARS (Special Anti-Robbery Squad), which was founded in 1992 in Nigeria. It was formed to combat violent robberies and other heinous crimes. Unfortunately, it had become something else, something unrecognizable. SARS was designed to protect the people from danger but instead became the danger themselves when they started killing, extorting, and harassing innocent citizens.

We said enough is enough. The killing of Nigerian citizens particularly the youths had becoming rampant. Eventually, their target became the young men and women who had locks, owned iPhones, and even owned new cars. It had become an attack on innocent people just because of their looks and the luxury items they owned. Every day, people came out on social media to highlight their experiences bad with SARS. Some would talk about getting their items forcefully taken from them and others would narrate how they were severely beaten. Some went as far as some recounting the death of their loved ones in SARS’ custody.

The day had come, the day when the Nigerian youth decided to take a stand and speak up. Hence the term “Sóro Soké” this loosely translates to “speak up” in the Yoruba language of South-Western Nigeria. This was essentially telling Nigerians to speak up, to stand up for their rights, the



rights of their children, and the future generation to come. The protests began. Multitudes of tired but ready citizens took to the streets of different cities across Nigeria including Lagos, Abuja, and many others. The first day of the protests went well, different companies and brands provided food, water and drinks to the protesters which had become a carnival-like protest. It did seem like history was about to be rewritten. Everyone, both home and abroad, started to feel the impact of the movement which was called “#EndSars”.

Day five of the protest came. My best friend, Mide, and I decided to participate in the protests in-person as we had been participating online just like many others. We came quite late to the protest ground, which was located at the Lekki Toll gate situated in the high suburbs of Lagos, Nigeria. Clutching Mide's hand tightly behind me, we eventually made our way through the crowd to the front. They had just finished the chants and proceeded to singing the national anthem. "Arise o compatriots!" we began singing wholeheartedly. Everyone had smiles on their faces because, like me, it felt like good was about to come, a huge change was about to be made.

Suddenly the lights went out. This wasn't a shock to us because it is a normal thing in Nigeria for power interruptions to occur at any time. I looked at my phone and it was 6:40 pm, it was dark now and so we waited a little while for the lights to come on. Roughly ten minutes later, we heard gun shots. A man started running towards us shouting “it’s the military, they have big guns, run o!” I felt Mide's hand immediately leave mine. There was chaos everywhere, people running, people screaming and people crying. It was my worst nightmare turned into reality. The only thing that mattered at that moment was to find Mide and

find a way to get out of the area. While running, I kept screaming for Mide but I couldn't find her. Unbeknownst to me, that was the last time I would see and touch my best friend- Mideola Smith. The night was foggy to me as I had fallen while running and passed out.

I woke up to a few people surrounding me in what seemed to be a hide-out. I immediately shouted Mide's name and they quietly hushed me and one of the men explained that he saw me fall and being a small person, he easily picked me up and ran. We waited for the noise to calm down and prayed together. It was 4 am now, the shooting had stopped. I looked for my phone to call home and call Mide but I lost my phone in all of the chaos. The men offered to take me home as I lived close by.

Upon getting home, my mom and Mide's mom immediately broke down in tears because they had been watching the news and tried calling all night. They further explained that my dad and Mide's dad weren't home as they had been out going from one police station to another looking for Mide and me.

The question I dreaded was asked, "Where is Mide?"

I immediately broke down in tears and so did Mide's mom. The weeks went by slowly as there was still no news of Mide's whereabouts. Mide's parents kept going from mortuary to police station looking for their only precious daughter. Weeks turned into months and I had already started losing hope, someone may have kidnapped her but I didn't want to believe my friend is dead.

It's been almost two years now and whenever I hear a loud bang, it shakes me up. I still can't sleep well, I have dreams of her. I have tried but I can never get over that night, I can

never get over losing her. Not knowing if she's dead or alive is so disheartening. To this day, my only prayer is that Mide will come back someday, alive and well.



Courtesy of—Assiya Desoky, *Untitled*, Front Cover—



Courtesy of—**Assiya Desoky**, *Untitled*, Back Cover—

**Jerrell A. Alston**

*The Native Beast*

A lesson.  
A tragedy  
There it was,  
crawling, Crawling  
in centuries of turmoil.

It was taken  
away from  
celestial kings,  
gorgeous queens,  
and one Holy Spirit.

No one  
spotted it  
in the misty,  
charcoaled graveyard.  
There it was,  
squirming, Squirming  
where merits of love  
vanished,  
into nothing,  
But,  
what the world  
wanted it all to believe.

A scorching carcass.  
Scorching.  
A broken one,  
A Broken beast-  
Man.

None  
could see the bones

dancing in the black ashes.  
One for the sand,  
the other for the rib.  
There it was,  
a clean, glossy melanin,  
Washed into a universe  
where feet touch the surfaces  
of waterfalls dripping into  
an unforgettable haven.  
Known as kin  
A man, a beast of Kin

## Savannah Joyner

### *The Cowardly Girl's Wish*

“Have we met before?”

My friend Raven, her roommate Selena, Antonio, and I had walked from our college campus to Cookout, something I had done several times before, and had ordered our food when a man had asked this question. The man's name was Leon Wilson. It didn't take me long to remember him. We had met before a couple months back. I mean, it would be hard to forget a black cowboy. When we last met, he seemed more interested in Raven than me. Not that it bothered me. So, the fact that he asked me this question surprised me.

“Yes, my friend and I met a couple of months ago here,” I said, hoping to shift the focus off me for a moment. But his eyes were still locked into mine. He smiled and nodded his hat towards me.

“So, this must be our special spot then huh,” he said.

Smile. Remember rule number one, say, or do whatever you have to survive.

My father had taught me how to survive in a man's world. He taught me was to be observant, especially when it came to men. To know what they want before they want it. Always be aware when there were more men than women in the room. Always know when it's time to leave and always have an exit plan. Always be conscious of your surroundings and if it's necessary, be prepared to fight, and in a worst-case scenario, be prepared to take a life. These rules were drilled into my head, and I carried them with me in my heart. I wouldn't forget them; I couldn't afford to.



I took a deep breath, biting back the nausea wave that hit me, and smiled back at him.

“Yeah, something like that,” I responded. I looked over at my friend Raven and Selena, to make sure they were seeing the same thing that I was. She gave me a look, one that I knew all too well. I rolled my eyes.

“Finally, it’s not me this time,” she joked as we sat at the bench close near the window.

“Who’s he?” Raven’s roommate, Selena asked.

“That’s that man we were telling you about. The cowboy,” Raven exclaimed.

My order was called from the window, and I break away from the gossip and go get my food. During the brief interaction I had with my friends Leon Wilson had moved up in line, he was next to the window.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” I said habitually as I scooted in front of him.

“It’s alright baby,” he said coolly.

Baby? I felt the disgust and the shame rise up in me. No, remember rule number two, don’t show the enemy how you feel, ever.

I didn’t respond. I smiled and turned around as the cashier informed me that they didn’t have any more honey mustard sauce.

“That’s okay, I’ll take barbeque,” I said politely.

“You should get what you paid for,” Leon Wilson said as he came closer to me. “If I were you, I would demand to get what I paid for.”

“It’s okay,” I said.

“You should get what you want, because I get what I want,” he said with a slick smirk.

Once again, I felt this aching feeling rise up from deep with in me. It’s a feeling I knew all too well. Fear. Don’t be afraid Savannah, remember rule number three, fear is the enemy of logic, keep your cool. After all, you have your knife. Yeah, that’s right, I had my knife. With my father’s permission, I bought one when I was seventeen and was told to only use it during emergencies. I should have felt safe with that knife, but I didn’t. In fact, having it so close to me, made me feel even worse.

My father taught me how to use it and shared all the places that it could incapacitate a person. He showed me how to protect myself and yet I was still afraid. If it came down to it, could I really be brave enough to take the life of another person? I knew that I couldn’t. My father had raised a coward, and a cowardly soldier has no place in the battlefield. I knew why I kept that knife. It was for me, and I was aware of this the day that I bought it. I was gonna protect myself the only way I knew how. I would rather die a coward’s death than to let another man touch me.

“I’m okay really,” I said.

The cashier, a young woman, handed me my food and called the next person in line to the front. Leon Wilson’s focus finally switched from me to the lady at the window. The crushing weight finally began to fade away, but I couldn’t let my guard down. After all rule number four is to never let your guard down until you’re back home.

I took place at the bench again and my friend, Antonio, stood beside me, blocking my view from the window. I was overcome with more guilt as I'd never thought to ask Antonio if he wanted to sit.

"Do you want to sit down," I asked.

"No, I'm fine," Antonio said and gave me a soft look before he turned and faced the front again. In that moment, I wondered what exactly Antonio was doing. But when I noticed him glancing over to where Leon Wilson stood, that's when I realized. Antonio was shielding me from Wilson's view.

In that one movement, the need for protection that I so desperation clung onto had been replaced with true safety. At that moment, I realized that there was nothing in this world that could touch me, not even myself. Tears began to fill my eyes against my will as I did my best to control these emotions as I waited for the rest of my friends to get their food.

I can barely recall the walk back to campus. My mind replayed that movement over and over as I pondered if it was deliberate or accidental. I never knew that such a small movement meant so much to me. After we dropped off Raven and Selenia to their dorm, I stopped Antonio.

"Umm, hey, I wanted to thank you," I said as I grabbed his sleeve.

"Yeah, no problem, you seemed really uncomfortable, and I wasn't going to let him touch you, I hate men like that," Antonio said.

"Yeah, I was uncomfortable," I said genuinely surprised that he knew that. I was pretty good at hiding my discomfort, but

in the few months of knowing each other, Antonio had managed to peer into my soul and shined a light amongst my darkest sins and my deepest desires.

“Thank you, I really mean that.”

When I made it to my room, I cried because I was finally safe. I finally had peace.



Courtesy of—**Jada Bostic**, *Untitled*



Courtesy of—**Whitney Stroman**, *Untitled*

## Ni' Ray Nelson

### *The Generational Pain*

Gun violence leaves a lasting stain,  
A legacy of sorrow, a generational pain,  
Families torn apart, children lost to the fray,  
The trauma echoing through the years and days.

A wound that never fully heals,  
A heartache that's passed down, a pain that feels,  
The weight of loss, the agony of grief,  
A burden carried on, a somber belief.

The cycle of violence, a chain to break,  
For the sake of the future, for the families' sake,  
Let us unite and make a change,  
For a better world, free from the gun violence range.

## **Sandrina Foster**

### *My Birth Experience*

I am awakened by an execution to my lower back. I roll onto my back to scoot toward the edge of my bed to sit up. The excruciating pain in my back seems to be getting worse. There seems to be a knob on my back that is turned to the highest setting of pain. It feels like a lethal injection has entered my spine. I look over to see my boyfriend with his mouth open as a roar of exhaustion exits. "I can't sit here and suffer. I'm going to the living room" I said under my breath hoping the bear next to me would feel me getting up. I set my hands on either side of me and holt myself on my feet. Wobbling towards my bedroom door I turned and seen the bear still in hibernation.

As I'm sitting on the couch I'm panting for breath as the injection seems to be working throughout my body. I quickly remember an app on my phone that keeps track of contractions to decide if your ready to go to the hospital. After fifteen minutes of repetitive injections in three-minute increments, the app flashes a message across the screen as if it were breaking news.

Get prepared. You are in labor. Make your way to the hospital.

I freeze. What should I do? I decide to take a shower to escape reality for a while. My reality is about to change for the rest of my life. Once I leave this house, when I return, there will be an additional little human that lives here. She will call me Mama. This is so life changing.

I get dressed and begin to tap the bear. "It's time to go to the hospital" I shake him lightly. He gets ready and we grab



everything we need before hitting the road. Sitting in the passenger seat, I can't sit still. There's fire in my seat. The fire has entered through my bottom making it impossible to sit.

"Hurry up and get me to the hospital!" I scream at my boyfriend who is trying to keep his composure.

We get to the hospital, and they direct us to a room where a nurse hooks me up to several machines to monitor the seed in my belly who is now the size of a watermelon. This watermelon in my belly has now reached its capacity and is now looking for an exit out of me, causing me so much agony. The muscles in my back begin to spaz out of control as if the Tasmanian devil just entered a playground in my spine. The playdate continues for the next thirty minutes until the nurse enters the room.

"Good job, Mama! You went into labor all on your own. We will be admitting you to a room," the nurse excitedly informs us.

They sit in me in a wheelchair and push me through the hallways. The fluorescent lights along the ceiling put me in a trance. It is all fun and games until it's no longer fun. Women die from giving birth. Babies die when being born. I forgot to take my prenatal vitamins this morning. I'm scared. I snap out of my daze when the nurse opens the door to our room. The Tasmanian devil had taken a potty break, but he's back on the playground. The nurse and my boyfriend help me on the bed. This loft is made of concrete with a sheet over it. How do these people expect me to get comfortable in this bed from bedrock.

The nurse looks at me "Do you want to get an epidural?" she asks.

“Yes!” I yell in exhaustion.

A male nurse walks in rolling a tray with a needle wrapped in plastic. “Sit up for me and you must stay completely still for this shot” he explains to me.

My boyfriend and nurse come and stand in front of me. The Tasmanian Devil is playing in my spine again, and this time he’s interrupted by a real lethal injection. Fire spreads throughout my body, I’m under attack. Water begins to fill my eye sockets. I can’t bear this torment. I squeeze the nurse and my boyfriend’s hands. A cold rush overcomes the fire in my body as if the fire department just put out the flames on the playground the Tasmanian devil is playing on. It’s over. The male nurse hands me a button that releases the epidural medicine as needed. My eyes begin to lower. I see the back of my eyelids.

Hours passes by and occasionally the nurse comes in and checks on what will be the exit of my baby, the watermelon. She hasn’t found the exit yet, but I feel nothing. There’s a constant pull on my lower half, but I can’t tell what’s going on. I pick up my phone to see that it’s 10:45pm. The nurse walks in to check the exit once again. Her face lights up in excitement.

“It’s time! I see the head” she tells me.

She leaves the room and returns with an army of nurses. My legs are placed on a pedestal wider than my shoulders. The doctor walks in and the army part ways like the Red Sea. “Are you ready mama?” she asked putting on her clothes. “Give me a long push” she orders me.

I hold the bottom of my legs even though my legs were noodles and numb to touch. I push for ten seconds and the

army all gasps. “One more time” the doctor says. I give it another push and a release of the watermelon finds the exit. The image of a green round fruit was a beautiful brown baby girl with a head covered in hair. “Oh my God!” I yell in awe. She puts my daughter on my chest, and I begin to overstimulate. I’m hysterical and overjoyed with love from my boyfriend as he kisses my head. “We did it” he whispers in my ear. “Yes, we did” I say through a shaky voice.



Courtesy of—**Jada Bostic**, *Untitled*



Courtesy of—**Ethan Drake**, *Pieta*

## **Amira Aiken**

### *Twelve O'clock*

Shall I compare thee to a midnights' thought?  
Something you wish away but can't fight off.  
Am I wrong to think this, I guess I'm caught.  
You have warmed my heart now I am more soft.  
You led the way, was that a big mistake?  
I think not. You showed me life with no reason  
No breaks, I fell without an ache. Intake  
The midnights' thought without weazen with treason.  
Will I be hated, I think I'm fading.  
Has my love been vague, wish me away  
Hearts are not average nor will they be prey.  
With you it's stationary, no lil sway  
Shall I compare thee to a midnights' thought.  
Something you wish away but can't be fought.

## Jerrell Alston

### *It's Time*

I started shifting my body on the soft examination table with the paper crinkling under my dark blue jeans. My left wrist stiffened in my arm brace as both of my parents sat in their chairs across the room. The bordering silence ran across the baby blue walls and the green marble counter filled with otoscope tips, tongue depressors, and medical gloves. In my presence, this silence crumbled the everlasting saving grace that my mother held onto.

“I think it’s just Carpal Tunnel. Yeah, he’s had this before George.” My mother’s voice cracked and faded through each word.

“Mmmpph, all I know is, I’m a need to see these X-rays. Just to see if this doctor is telling the truth,” my father said, while sitting in his confident throne of adequate nursery experience in the military.

The doctor opened the door slowly. I witnessed something that I couldn’t explain until later that day. He looked at my parents with a soft benign gesture and placed the x-rays on the screen. He motioned for my parents to walk up towards the x-ray screen. He looked at me and gave me the most pitiful smile that I’ve ever seen.

The doctor clasps his hands together, “Okay so, it seems that Jerrell’s x-rays show something a little different than Carpel Tunnel. As you can see here, some of his bones have shifted and this particular bone isn’t getting enough blood flow, causing Jerrell’s immobility and pain. Now for a seventeen year old male, this disease is rare. It’s mostly common in older and middle aged men. It’s called Kienbock’s Disease.

Now these next few months are crucial and I will have to be honest with you, we need to get that bone out because it's already dying and it's only gonna get worse from here on. So, I believe the best option is surgery. We take the bone out, puts some rods and let him heal, then we take those out and he should regain some mobility. It may be an arduous process, but I believe we can pull through."

I watched my father's eyes glide around that X-ray screen like a rescue helicopter searching for survivors on a distant island. His firm stance initially gave me hope, but I realized it was a front. He didn't have anything to say. I watched my mother's eyes water faintly as her hands were pressed against her chest. My mother's eyes held tight to God in that moment and I could see her soul softly reciting a prayer. The same prayer that carried her through a life threatening car accident.

As I looked at the doctor, I realized what I saw when he entered and what I saw when he was explaining the next step. I saw a man who settled himself and in fact, enjoyed using a stethoscope engraved with scriptures. A doctor, who, for his entire academic and medical career had answers that no flawed human had a right to possess. Now watch it all suddenly crumble with the unknown insurgence of a disease that he couldn't resolve with his own two hands. My life was in uncertain hands. I just sat there. Thinking of how I had little control over any of it.

Why God? Why did it have to be?

\*\*\*\*

It was the first week of my Senior Winter Break. Only 24 hours earlier, I was acting in a film for my Film Festival Project and now I am here. It was 9AM. After me and my



mother check in to the Roper St. Francis' Hospital, a nurse escorts us into a small, squared teal room where the anesthesiologist and Doctor met us. They both state the procedure should only take up to an hour at most. The anesthesiologist left, came back with anesthesia, and began to place an IV into my arm.

The hospital room is freezing as the December cold brushes down the laces of my hospital gown. My mother a trooper, sat in the corner of the room like a stallion pulling a broken chariot. She has prayed away so much in her heart. Generational curses, illnesses, and coverage throughout life. However, this was something that never of us could pray away. My face tightened into a lumpy ball of hardened clay as the fluid courses into my body.

"Mother. I hate how this feels. Why do they have to put this in body."

My Mother looks up hesitantly, "They will have to put you asleep for the procedure, Rell. It will be okay."

I wasn't okay and I didn't know how to say it. How could God let this happen? Why was left with this? My eyes are softly staring at the TV, while my Mother sits in the chair massaging my feet.

"How does this feel, Jerrell? Is your feet still cold?"

"A little actually, but it's fine. Do you know where my father is? It's almost time for me to go in and I want to see him again."

"Jerrell, now you know good and well I could never track down your father. That man is always in the wrong place when he is needed. At least you got to see him before you go in."

“Oh yeah,” My voice dissipates into a soft forgotten tone.

My body is shivering in the cold hospital room as I sit under the covers. My thoughts are all over the place. My mother’s massage doesn’t really help but telling her to stop would only give her more to time worry. I truly did not know what to say or how to feel. My stomach is churning at every waking moment and my heart cannot stop pounding. Nothing could stop this. Nothing could stop how I felt. The aching moments started to beckon me to a new reality. All I could think of was how this could go wrong. How would my Mother react if I never woke up? Is my father truly coming back to see me? He did...he came at the wrong moments. Am going I to be the same? How will this disease change my life? Is God truly protecting me? So many unanswered questions and I had absolutely no control over any of it. My heart left me with no real hope for resolution.

A knock suddenly strikes the door multiple times.

“Gotta surprise, Rell,” My mother says while smiling faintly.

Suddenly my uncles, aunties, grandparents, and cousins walk in with chipper steps and beautiful smiles. These smiles surrounding me allowed my face to drip and soften into a loving shape. With all that was going on, I never once thought of my pious family and their sacred love that has guided them for so long.

“Hey everyone, I’m so glad that you are all here,” my voice is still shaky with doubt.

“Aww baby, we would never miss something like this. We just want you to know that we are here for you in your time

of need,” My aunt says softly as she places her hand the foot of my bed.

“God is with you as well, Jerrell. His mere presence will shield you from it all. I know the future is uncertain, but that is why God is here to give you faith. He will always love you son,” My grand uncle says.

“I think we should pray before he goes into the other room,” My mother says while grabbing my hand.

Everyone bows their head and grabs each other’s hands. I softly close my eyes and smile. The thought of family and God covering me caused my heartbeat to sooth, my mind to ease, and my body to settle. Another knock came from the door. The anesthesiologist and another nurse walked in.

“It’s time, Jerrell.”

The anesthesiologist and the nurse start to maneuver my bed and push the petals. My heart rate suddenly increases again and my anxiety starts to take shape. I did not know if I was going to come back to them, but I was glad they were there for me.

“You’ll be fine, baby boy,” My mother says while letting go of my hand.

“I love you all,” I state while the doctors adjust my chair.

“We love you too, baby,” My Grandmother says.

They start to push me out of the door and down the hall. The anesthesia starts to tighten its grip around my consciousness and I start to dose off. As we enter the operation room, I see a wide volume of lights, three trays of utensils, and five or six doctors in scrubs. My body is slowly shutting down and all I see is the light fading very faintly.

I am now awake, while sitting in the bed of my home. My arm is wrapped in a very soft cast, while tightly cushioned against six pillows. I am sitting back watching TV, while mother is sitting at the foot of the bed, rubbing my feet.

“Good morning son, how do you feel?”

“Okay, still woozy and my arm really hurts. How long have I been out?”

“You dozed in and out after the surgery and you’ve been asleep since we’ve been home.

My arm felt like three thousand needles were embedded in the skin. Everything is still hazy and my back was slightly aching from my seating position. My mother softly smiled as she rubbed my feet. They were as warm as could be. I realize that her smile wasn’t just a gesture, it was a confirmation of safety in healing. It is something that tells me that I can relinquish all of it, while still feeling human

In that moment, I realized how important it was to have faith in my God and the unknown. This was my first real tragedy and it truly ate away at me from start to finish. I didn’t know what to believe in and I didn’t know how to feel in this moment. Today, I wear my scars with pride as the days go by and as the nights cause my wrist to throb. I wake up every day having faith in God’s will, knowing that in my heart, I have no need to worry about or fear the unknown.



Courtesy of—**Breeze Smith**, *Untitled*



Courtesy of—**Breeze Smith**, *Untitled*

## **Jerrell Alston**

### *Let Her Smile*

I remembered her last words.  
She sat up on her black chair and spoke of love  
Her words glistened through her wrinkled throat softly.  
Something truly visible in her eyes, but in others,  
Fair and poor, life was a testament to an entangled reality.  
Let her smile.

Was she blind?  
She couldn't feel the crickets sunbathing in her afro.  
Dark orange and lightish green insects perusing the  
chapters of her novels.  
Their temptations drawn yet, their curiosity was indolent.  
She lead the crew onward, as she bled from her white  
church dress.  
She ran throughout the street without fear and delivered  
white slates.  
Her doors kept opening, even when she didn't know the  
crickets were gone.

Archaic and declarative were the words that described her.  
Her glossy pink floral gown covered her ankles and her hair  
pin slid back from the grease.  
She never liked dolls, only collectables that waved back at  
her.  
Afterthoughts came with her kisses, deadly afterthoughts.

As time slammed through each wooden wall,  
The lines of black clothing directed the outside weather.  
She sat in her chair,

watching seasons create a tremendous view of subtle  
breathes.

She never imagined a better view...

Unbeknown to her, the risks of pain bled like  
pomegranates.

She would describe her life around dead water puddles,  
People were amused by her words, but they already sank  
into a new universe.

She never sat at the temple of a typical throne.

Not much, but little clumps of

Darkness,

Surrounded her feet and kissed all of her servants before  
they followed her  
to the end

A bellowing scream came from that temple,  
an acknowledgement of a dying organ.

It finally had a conscience,

Flurries of earthquakes shook the land.

Entering stages of devastation far past humanity's  
temperament.

She craved little...

Just a night without misery and day without darkness.

So please....let her smile,

Her love was what most couldn't interpret.



## **Mekhya Horry**

### *Losing Micah*

It was July 21st, 2022, around 4:30 a.m. when I got the call that my little brother had passed. I was in shock and could not feel a thing. My mama called me earlier that night to tell me that he got shot. I kept saying “Huh with a B.B. Gun?” My mama said no, and I thought that he would just recover quickly, and everything would go back to normal. Little did I know that he would be gone forever.

Two days before Micah’s death I remember him telling me that he had a party to go to and that he had to find an outfit. I was like what type of party that you are going to that you are so excited about. He was going to one of his little cousin’s first birthday party. He rarely ever got to go there because my mother never thought it was safe for him to go there. This one day he was so eager to go. My mother finally let him go and even spend the night. Micah had his outfit laid out the night before and even got my other little brother ready for the party as well.

I was always a hard worker so all I did was go from job to job. I still had time to bond with my brother. We would make TikTok’s, clean together and even fought a couple of times. That’s what all siblings do, it was apart of life.

I remember all my little cousins being at our house the week before and them just lounging around like normal teenagers would do. I bought them a box of pizza and went on about my day. Later that night we cooked some spaghetti and watched an episode of Wild N Out. Micah was laughing hard the whole night it was like he knew he was not going to be here for long.

It was a normal Thursday for me, I was doing the usual getting ready for work at the daycare. I got up and saw that Micah was still on the couch asleep. It was still the summer so he would stay up playing 2K, GTA, or Fortnite. Later, that night I had to work at Nike. When I came home, I saw everyone else but Micah. I later learned that he was at the party he was talking about all week. He would usually call me and tell me to pick him up whenever he was ready to leave. This time he did not. I was going to call but I was thinking to myself nah maybe he wanted to stay. Later that night I was tossing and turning because I had a bad dream. I sleep with the TV off. But this night I had to turn it on because I was so startled by the dream. I went back to sleep. About two hours later I was awakened by a phone call from my Mama.

‘Micah got shot’ she said.

“Huh” I said in a sleepy voice: With a B.B. Gun?”

“No, with a real gun,” she said sniffing. She told me she would call me back in a few minutes. She called 30 minutes later and told me that he passed. I woke my sister up and we sped off to the hospital, I was still in denial thinking that this was all a dream. When we arrived at the hospital, we were greeted by my family everyone in tears. I started to cry too when I realized that my brother was no longer here with us. I wanted answers immediately, there were rumors going around saying that he shot himself. I tuned all those rumors out and asked my mama for the truth.

The truth finally came out a couple of months after his death, he was at his auntie’s house in the room with his cousins on his dad’s side. In that room there was a gun. The kids got a

hold of it accidentally went off and shot him in the chest. But the detectives ruled it as a homicide, still to this day.

I want to know who shot him. He was so young, only thirteen years old, and had a whole life ahead of him. I still have my moments when I get sad. I hear a certain song, see a movie, or just look at a kid who is about his age. I wish that I got to see him that day so I could have hugged him. I also wish that I had picked him up that night. I know I am not the one to blame. But I wished that things could have been different maybe he would still be here.



Courtesy of—**Assiya Desoky**, *Emotional Neglect Series I*



Courtesy of—**Kennerde Powell**, *Untitled*

## Caliese Beckford

### *Baby, Wait!*

It took a second for it to sink in.

Her husband!

She plastered her hands against her lips to muffle the words though they had already escaped and loudly at that.

The blood began escaping from his head and creeping towards her.

She made steps back but tripped over her feet tumbling flat on her bottom.

A sharp pain shot to her belly making her think of her baby, no, no, no! this can't be happening.

Questions clouded her head as her heart raced.

What am I going to do?

What is going to happen to me?

My baby?

She wrapped her hands around his ankles,  
pulled his body making a trail with the smudged blood on the floor.

Tears raced down her face as she dumped dirt from the growing hole.

It was too much.

The weight of the shovel and the dirt,  
the weight of the body,

and the weight of what she had done.

The pain in her belly got increasingly worse,  
forcing her to sit down and maintaining deep breaths.

The movement of air in her lungs  
was disrupted by the crushing of leaves.

He had lifted his head  
and so had the baby.

## **Dai'John Stewart**

### *Final Buzzer*

Coming into the game this Saturday evening, I'm a little more nervous than usual. I'm a little more jittery, and the usual game day meal when I was younger my mother used to make me breakfast that consists of a bacon, egg, and cheese sandwich with potatoes and a salad isn't sitting right in my stomach. I had decided to come home this odd day instead of riding with the team because we played in my hometown and my coach had given me the go to do so, so I did. I'm a sophomore in college and this is the game that we needed in order to make the California Community College tournament, so I was a little more excited and anxious.

"Dai'John are you ready?" my mother asked.

I don't know why but the words I wanted to say didn't come out. I heard footsteps approaching my room door so I tightened up and my door swung upon and there was my mom with her keys and purse ready to go.

In the locker room the energy wasn't like our other games. Teammates with their earphones and straight faces knowing it was game time and that we couldn't mess this one up. I proceeded to tie my shoelaces, right shoe first and then the left, a little regime I do every game. Listening to Rod Wave, stretching, and loosening up, I began to ease up and was just ready for game time. Before we walked out onto the floor for warmups my coach had a few words of encouragement telling us,

"Play your guy's game and don't think about the magnitude this game holds. Play at our pace and the game will come to

us. Let's fight and let's go out there and win this game" he exclaimed.

We ran out on the court and I felt the cold air of this bright polished gymnasium. As I looked around I saw my family in the stands cheering me on and saw my teammates locked in. Shots are falling for me in our warmups and I'm getting a good sweat in. I'm feeling great for the game that's about to begin and then buzzer rang for the start of tipoff and it's GAMETIME!

Two minutes are left in the game and we are down five points. My jersey is drenched and I'm pretty exhausted. I have twenty-three points, six assists, and eight rebounds. My coach calls a timeout and is telling us the game plan for the last minutes and although I can hear my coach screaming the game plan. Hundreds of the home fans are screaming at the top of their lungs, "I believe that we will win!" I just couldn't stop thinking about the weight this game is carrying and how bad I wanted to get back out there. Locked in for these last two minutes it felt as if time was moving twice to triple the speed, then seeing it go from two minutes to just twenty seconds.

Throughout that time we had some great plays with me hitting a clutch three to put us down two and getting another three by my teammate to put us up one. But then the opposing team hit a dagger three to put them up two. We had the ball and our coach was out of timeouts. He yelled, "Take the last shot!" It was do or die.

I dribbled the ball out as the time ticked away reaching about eight seconds. As I looked up and saw this I drove to the basket and saw my teammate who was in the corner coming over to help. I continued down into the paint to draw his



defender a bit closer then I passed the ball to my teammate. He caught it with a second on the clock. He gathered to shoot the ball with the weight of the gymnasium and our faith on his back. The buzzer rang and the crowd covering their mouths in awe, he made the shot. Game over. We won!



Courtesy of—**Ethan Drake**, *Traumatic Daydream*



Courtesy of— **Brooke S. Jacobs**, *A Knight's Sacrifice, A Queen's Strength in Sorrow*

## **Jerrell Alston**

### *Know This*

Know This

Emeralds that glow;

Have nothing to show you

Gods that yawn;

Are only man in disguise

Women that cry;

Have no real weakness

Sheep that steal;

Are innocent in the den of thieves

Lions that love;

Are beasts that have tamed their instincts

Oceans that smile;

Can't listen to the sea's cry for help

Oracles that bleed;

Only call for the sinners needing redemption

A broken man can;

Only fix what he believes is broken

In order to;

set yourself free.

## **Jerrell Alston**

### *The Deafening Sound of Black Creative Reflection*

The grey morning light shimmered against our wide classroom window that was placed in the heart of the right wall. Placed in center of the front wall was a Smartboard. Positioned on the top-right side of the front wall, sat Pink Floyd's Album Cover, *The Dark Side of the Moon*. Its rainbow was a muse.

It was the third to the last day of my sophomore year in high school. I was sitting near the back of the room. My body shook in an unsettling flow of anticipation. My classmates were chatting and tossing a soft ball back and forth. Gloria, a peer, looked at me and quickly placed her hand on my shoulder.

"Hey, do you think that you will get into the program?" Her voice was cheery, yet pretentious.

"Of course, I do. My work is worth a lot and I want to share it with the world," I pat her shoulder back.

I watched my peers around me for a second. A classroom that sparked their wanderlust was now in the rear view. For me, I knew this wanderlust was just the beginning. As I sat in my chair positioned in the back of the classroom, all that was on my mind was the ensuing packet placed in my mailbox. That packet gave me the right to call myself something worth mentioning to the world. A Creative Writer.

Creative meaning that my mind, body, and soul would ooze a new composition that harnessed my ability to influence the world. Writer meaning that I would have to embrace the stories sewed inside my fibers like a newly stocked Cabbage Patch Doll. I was now writer, one that chose to relive the

days over and over in my head. Not just any writer, I was Black. Black. A Black Writer analyzed thoroughly under the telescope of a white audience.

\*\*\*\*

After only two weeks of my new Creative Writing Class, we were about to have our very first workshop on poetry. I am now a junior and my thirst for creative learning is at its highest. On this particular day, I unpack my supplies, while adjusting my seat against the pale white wall behind me. The assignment, write a poem of your choice and bring your feedback. The teacher, Mr. Seari, lifts his hand and we all rhythmically push our chairs to the front of the classroom. I am the third person scheduled to present. I sit patiently as my work flares onto the screen. An orchestra of finely tuned lines that ringed a harmonious tone wasn't enough for me. It wasn't enough for my Blackness that radiated in the back of a Creative Writing Class. In a gentle tone, my heart sings each word of poem. Finally, as all of the words leave my mouth, I look around. Nothing, but earth shattering faces. Pale faces. Red faces. Disgusted faces. Horrified faces. My neck muscles start to boil against my tempered skin. A whole secreted in my throat as each second passes. I did everything to keep my Blackness from falling apart.

"Alright, great feedback everyone. Great work, Jerrell," Mr. Serie said softly.

After half school year of sitting in the back of a classroom, I was gone. The energy in the room became a strong stocky Utah smog that I could rarely see myself through. My Blackness suffocated under a darkening light each day. I finally succumbed and realized why the color Black was never in this array of tempting chasm of light.

\*\*\*

As we reached the end of the year, everything began to slowly take shape. We were only three weeks out and the morass of our work was completed. We were given one final project for the year; organizing our portfolio. On this school day morning my portfolio is due, I was sitting in the car with my mother. As I sat in the car on the way to school, I opened my computer and started sorting my work. I looked over at my mother and she softly smiled.

“What’s wrong son? You’ve been down a lot recently,” Her voice nearly invoked tears of my own.

“Mother, I feel like a nuisance in my own classroom. I’ve felt more and more secluded from a classroom full of people. I always feel alone and I never really want to be there. I think I am going to stop writing and leave the class.”

“Listen, son, no human being, not even a group of people, should stop you from pursuing your goals and endeavors. Some people will love you for the person you are and some people won’t. Now, if you want to leave the class that is totally up to you, but don’t let anyone decide what you pursue in life. You are the only one to decide how far you go in anything. Don’t let anyone’s opinions of you define who you are. You are who you are. Embrace that.”

That day I decided to go into the class with a disposition that would be defined by me and me alone.

\*\*\*\*

Today, I sometimes regret going back for another school year. There were more people to witness my work and I soon realized that changing my point of view helped. But there were still times where my work and my opinions weren’t

given a just chance for criticism because of the fact that it entailed black stories. I was proud though. I earned awards that helped inspired me to find the passion and motivation to keep going. Through family support, I found the desire to write at a larger degree. Even through all the hardships, I enjoyed each day that I had.

I enjoy who I am now more than ever. I learned my terms of success are defined by me and me alone.





Courtesy of—**Laya Kelly**, *Untitled*



Courtesy of—**Laya Kelly**, *Untitled*

## Caliese Beckford

### *I'm Done*

The stacked assignments looked down at me,  
the sun waved goodbye, and it was time to begin.  
The first book stared me in my face as I turned the first  
page.  
Sip by sip, book by book I went on.

Books became scattered all over the room  
and the light bulbs begged for a rest.  
The hours went on for days and my mouth became a  
desert.

Sleep battled with my eyelids,  
and the last words on the assignment fought my weary  
fingers  
as the bed called out to me.  
I forcefully dragged the pen across the paper to mark the  
final word.  
My almost lifeless body fell  
to be caught by a mush of clouds.  
My body conformed to my bed's welcome.  
I sighed as I slowly expelled all I had done from my mind.  
My consciousness drifted closer and closer to a place of  
rest and peace  
until pulled back ashore by the memory of another dreadful  
assignment.

An electric feeling rushed through my body,  
pulling me back to the chair.  
I stared at the first question.  
The words faded as tears welled up in my eyes.  
"I'm done."

## Sandrina Foster

### *The Decision*

I look to the right of me and see a face buried into a screen three inches from their face. I huff in anticipation for Pinky to find a restaurant for us to eat at. I look to the left of me staring out the window watching people walk in and out of Ingles Grocery Store. Traveling into my thoughts, I remember that I haven't started my monthly yet. Looking back at Pinky, she is still scrolling through Google for restaurants. I notice myself twiddling my thumbs. An unsettling feeling overtakes my body.

"There's a place called Maki. Are you feeling sushi?"

Then Pinky notices my body language. "Oh no, what's wrong with you?" she asks turning her body towards me.

"I need to check my period tracker. My cycle was supposed to have come by now" I explained. Opening the app on my phone, I see the update 7 Days Late.

"There is no way" I say looking into Pinky's eyes. They are as wide as the hood of a corvette. "I'm about to get a pregnancy test." I get out the car and hear her following.

We enter the bathroom with the purchased test. I take it. I hold it up waiting for the urine to process through the stick. A solid pink line shows up and I feel a bit of relief. Before I could exhale, I notice a second faint line. My mind is jumbled like a puzzle. My heart is racing as fast as a thoroughbred.

"Um...Pinky?" I wait on a response. "It's positive," I faintly say.

“I think you might’ve done it wrong,” Pinky says, trying to persuade.

I know this girl did not just say I took it wrong. How do you mistake a pregnancy test? I need to figure out what I’m going to do. This is my junior year of college. What will my college friends think? How will I be able to manage motherhood and being a student full-time. How could my summer break take a life changing turn like this? It’s early so I’m sure a pill could solve this. I pause mid-thought because I know myself too well. Whenever there’s a difficult situation, I tend to overthink my way into an anxiety attack or a depressional state of mind. I take a deep breathe and posture my lips to speak.

“We’re still going to Maki?” I ask.

~

It’s a few days later and I’ve talked to two people I trust the most to give advice and not judge me in any way: my sister and aunt. My family is very religious, so we all believe that God does not make any mistakes. If there is a baby growing inside of me, it was sent through the love of God.

I’ve finally decided now is the time to discuss my current situation with my closest friend from college, Snake. She was the first person I met at Claflin University. Snake was my next-door neighbor, and we had the same major, meaning we had nearly every class together. She and I spent a lot of time together over the two years we’ve been in college. From traveling with me back home to meet my family to going to the beach together for Spring Break, our bond was as close as peanut butter and jelly.

During the beginning of the summer, I asked her if she would be interested in being my roommate at an off-campus apartment. We agreed and began searching for places to live. The nicest yet barely affordable apartment we could find was a thousand dollars a month. We both desired the luxury of being on our own, so we paid the deposit. I was working at Target in my hometown and had thoughts to transfer to the closest one near Claflin. That would result in me driving thirty minutes to an hour for work to pay my half of the rent, while balancing being a full-time student. It seemed difficult, but not impossible.

I was sitting in my car listening to a playlist of contemporary gospel. This was the only place I was able to fully be in my head like a scene from *Inside Out*. Searching for the correct words to express my situation, I built the courage to call her.

“Hey Drina!” she said, she seemed to be in a good mood.

“I got some bad news...” I said, dreading this conversation. “I’m pregnant and I’m keeping it. I don’t think I’m going back on campus”.

“Wait. What about our apartment?” she asked with a change in tone.

“Yes. I know we’ve paid the deposit. I’m going to send it to you now. I spoke with Beckford, and he says to give him a call so he can place you in a dorm on campus.”

“I spoke with Beckford as well and he told me there aren’t anymore dorms. You just left me without a place to stay. I guess I won’t be going back to school either,” she said in frustration.

“Wait. There must be a way around this,” I said, trying to think of a solution.

“What if we live together for six months and then Shavonne moves in, and you can go back home” she said.

“Yeah. I guess we could do that” I said trying to sound certain.

“Okay good! I’ll call you later and tell you what Shavonne says,” she said.

I hit the end button and sit back in my seat. Why would I go to Orangeburg and waste money on an apartment, when I should be planning a place for my child to live? I wouldn’t be prepared enough to move twice. I should be saving money, not wasting it. My family is here. My boyfriend is here. My doctors are here. Why would I move two and a half hours away from everything I know as home. I feel myself overthinking again.

I knew there were only a couple of weeks before school, but this was very unexpected. How was I supposed to please everyone? I didn’t want to seem selfish, but there was no way I could afford an apartment in Orangeburg for six months just to move into another apartment and have it set up before my baby arrives. This all seemed so stressful. I hoped Snake could understand at least a little bit. This was life changing for me and a decision needed to be made. A smart one at that.

I decided to send Snake a message and hope she would understand.

I don’t think it would be a good idea for me to come to campus. I understand this is extremely inconvenient for the both of us, but I must do what’s best for me. I’m sending

your refund for the deposit now. I hope you understand, and I don't want this to make or break our friendship.

I CashApped her one hundred and fifty dollars. I also forwarded her the email Beckford sent me stating he has a place for her to stay.

Well, that went well. She had her money back. Only thing she needed to do now is call Beckford and get assigned a dorm. I knew she was upset, but she'll be fine.

I now needed to plan my future with my child and boyfriend. Where were we going to stay? I wondered if it was a girl or boy. Did I want a gender reveal? What might be the theme of my baby shower? I spent hours apartment shopping and searching for baby clothes and items to decorate. As I was scrolling on my phone, I see a large attachment sent from Snake.

I talked to Cee, Shavonne, Danni, and Zee before saying this to you. I wanted to get other people's point of view. I understand you didn't plan to have a baby a hundred percent. Shit happens. However, we had a commitment to one another, and you didn't have the decency to let me know ahead of time when we're supposed to be close friends tells me a lot. Not only that, but before making your final decision you didn't even see how it would affect me. I'm not trying to make it all about me, but when you asked me to be your roommate it became about the both of us. I think it's very unfair that you told me last minute and just expect me to find a way on campus. I think it shows how little you care. I thought we concluded that you would do the first six months and then switch with Shavonne. That is what we all agreed on. Of course, I told my mama, and she wants to take legal action. This shows me that we were never real friends,



because you don't up and bail on them. Like I said, I talked to all our college friends and a few other people, and they all agree with me. You didn't even make sure I was going to be straight but instead gave me your ass to kiss. You basically said to me "Aye I know we had a deal but fuck that it's about me right now." That us not what friends do at all.

Wow. I cannot fathom that this was what she got out of all of this. I was stuck in a rock and a hard place. I then begin to receive messages from each of my college friends.

I think you were wrong for doing Snake like that.

You're not a real friend. It's not her fault you got pregnant. Now Snake can't come back to school.

Didn't y'all have a plan? Why would you bail on her last minute.

I am so over this. All my friends have turned on me in a bat of an eye. How could they all feel the same? I literally told her I understand it's inconvenient for the both of us, yet I had no other choice. This is all too much for me to handle. I'd just found out I was expecting and within the same week I lost all my friends.

I should call Danni. She's levelheaded. I dialed her number and I hear a country-toned voice.

"Hello?"

"Hey, Danni. Everyone is texting me telling I'm wrong. What happened?" I asked in confusion.

"Well, Snake called us crying saying that you told her you weren't coming back to campus, because you were pregnant, and she needs to figure it out for herself when there's no

more dorns. She also told us that you guys signed a lease and y'all credit would be ruined" she explained.

"But we never signed a lease. We only paid a deposit, and I gave her the money back. I also talked to Beckford, and he said she needs to call him so they can work something out. She lied to y'all!" I exclaimed.

"Oh, and she made a group chat with just us. She was talking a lot of shit about you." Danni was telling me all the gossip that was said.

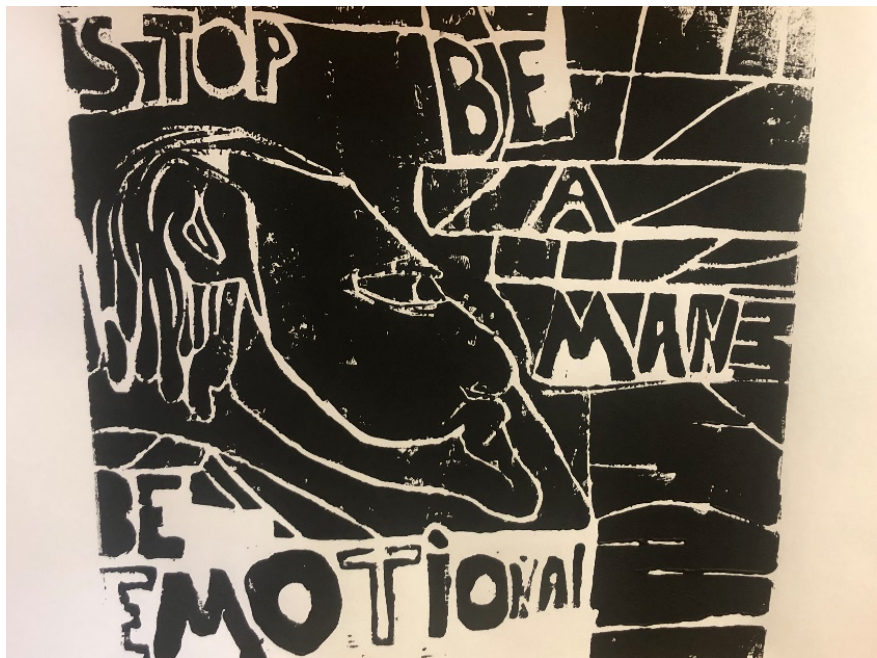
Danni and I talked for about twenty more minutes. We both realized that Snake only told them what she wanted to fit her narrative that I was a bad friend. She told them that my parents would take of my child, and I wouldn't be able to prosper with a child. She even went as far as saying, "Fuck her kid."

I was through with everyone. Nothing else mattered, but my school and child. Ever since that situation, I promised myself I would dedicate my time and life to family and myself.

Today, it is September of 2022. I am a senior in college with a six-month-old baby girl. My little family has prospered beyond measures. I am an insurance agent with a pending salary of over one hundred thousand dollars a year. The life I have now, I wouldn't trade for the world. I know deep in my heart that I made the right decision.



Courtesy of—**Breeze Smith, *Bang***



Courtesy of—**Antonio Rutledge**, *Expectation of Masculinity*

## **Kamara Chima**

### *Vivid Ponder*

Your perfect body cavity,  
settling in the silk sheets.

Pressed in silk pillowcases, to keep your hair nice. Neat.

I'm safe. Warm.

Calm in the Earth's storm.

Because your touch is enough.

Your scent, a comforting musk.

So, I breathe it in.

Breathing in the aroma, inhaling you back to life.

But dusk deepens, and the silk turns light.

As the night ends, I'm enlightened.

And when the sun shines, I'm reminded.

That my dreams can turn heavy.

My vivid ponder can cause dented sheets.

So, as I wake,

the perfect body cavity turns hollow.

Weightless.

Bleak.

## Amira Aiken

### *RUN, or Don't*

My sisters and I share so many memories. Since birth, I have not entered many spaces without one, two, or all three of my sisters being there with me. We rode thick as thieves EVERYWHERE in the backseat of my parent's red Toyota minivan. We went on road trips, to gymnastics and dance practice, and to see family. However, the majority of the time, we were in the car on the way to school.

Early mornings have never been my thing. Therefore, waking me up for anything I could care less for is challenging, to say the least. My parents would have to wake me up at least three times to get me ready for school. Each time I was asleep somewhere different. I can recall pulling the blanket off the bed and hiding in the corner just to get some extra shut-eye. So I can imagine that this day started something like this.

~

After getting dressed for school and eating breakfast my sisters, Aniya, Akyla and I head to the car. Elementary school mornings are at the crack of dawn, the air is crisp and dew is still on the grass. My dad usually dropped my sisters and me off at school.

The ride there is short, we live less than half a mile away from the school, Bob Mathis Elementary. Getting out of the car while saying our goodbyes, my dad wished us a good day (at least it better had been for our sake) and we headed to the entrance. My dad is strict and sometimes easygoing, nonetheless, he wants and expects the best from all four of his daughters.

The walk from the drop-off line to the morning entrance is a distance, especially for little ones still waiting on growth spurts.

My sisters and I chit-chat on the way to the door until we are stopped in our tracks. My older sister Aniya gasped and drew close to the exterior wall. My little sister Akyla and I follow suit. As we all look to the entrance, Aniya yells “It’s a dog!”

~

Like shared memories, my sisters and I shared some of the same fears. I think our fear of dogs stemmed from the unknown. Growing up, we did not have any pets besides an occasional fish, my mom’s preferred pet. Aniya also has severe allergies and anything with fur was at the top of her “stay away from” list. For a long time, our next-door neighbors had two large dogs that would roam around the neighborhood interfering with my sisters' and my playtime outside. This long list of cons altered our perception of a “furry friend.”

~

The teacher on duty yells to us “don’t run” while the dog looks towards us and starts running. We book it back toward the car. All three of us screaming “DADDY! DADDY! DADDDYYYY!” at the top of our lungs. Another faculty member must have gotten my dad’s attention or he could’ve heard us screaming. My dad stops the car and we all scurry back in.

Aniya says frantically, “Daddy there is a dog chasing us.” At this point, the dog had probably stopped running after us a

long time ago. My dad shook his head and laughed. He parked the car and walked with us back to the entrance.

On the way there my dad spots the dog. “That little thing is what y’all was screaming and running from.” My sisters and I finally make it into the school building.

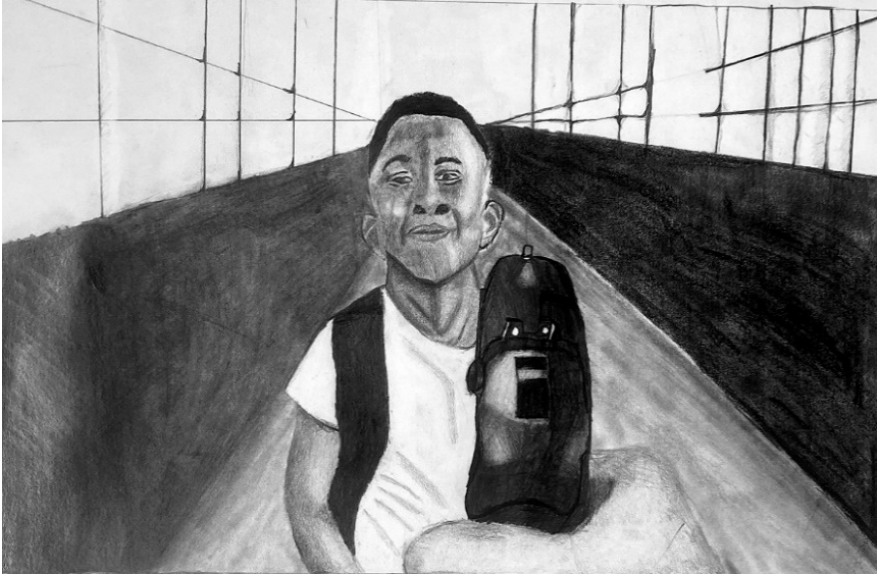
The smell of French toast sticks and grits hits me as we walk in. The cafeteria entrance is immediately after the morning (side) entrance. I can see my peers eating and enjoying breakfast.

Walking down the hall to my class, I am feeling a lot of mixed emotions. I am relieved to be past the dog situation, slightly tired from the extra exert of energy from screaming and running and a little embarrassed about the situation, especially considering how small the dog actually was.

I make it to my third-grade class. A class with a teacher I am not fond of but that is a different story.

After settling in, I turn to my friend and ask, “Did you hear any screaming?” She replies, “No,” and I am relieved. This was an isolated event.





Courtesy of—**Kendell White**, *Untitled*



Courtesy of—**Whitney Stroman**, *Untitled*

## **Mekhya Horry**

### *To My Cat*

My living cat, you inspire me to write.  
I love the way you cook, frighten and soar,  
Invading my mind day and through the night,  
Always dreaming about the big Dior.

Let me compare you to a humped balloon?  
You are more silly, forgiving and weak.  
Strong sun heats the able peaches of June,  
And summertime has the stable newspeak.

How do I love you? Let me count the ways.  
I love your frivolous arms, feet and smile.  
Thinking of your giving feet fills my days.  
My love for you is the competent Nile.  
Now I must away with a chilly heart,  
Remember my mad words whilst we're apart.

## Jalen Langley

### *The Summer of Choices*

Choices. Until I was a freshman in college all my choices were made for me. What I ate, drank and even when I went to sleep. Life is just so simple when you do not have a choice. But that's the thing about choices. They are what make us unique individuals. It took me a long time to figure out the difference between a bad choice and a good choice.

It's the summer of 2019 and I just graduated from Viera High School. I'm on the road to become a visionary. Or, in a more literal sense, I am driving six hours from my home in Florida to Claflin University. Claflin has a summer program called Panther Pass. It's a program designed to give freshmen a head start and learn their way around campus.

I arrive at Claflin around 12 and I'm exhausted. Coming to Claflin was not my choice but I only had one other option and that was the military. So, I really don't want to be here right now, but home is six hours away and I don't have a car. I get out of the family car and stretch my legs while looking around. We are parked at the gravel parking lot and the campus is quiet. In the distance I can hear the birds chirping and a bell tower ringing. We walk into the gym and start to check in.

The orientation leader speaks, "Hello, welcome to Claflin we are so glad you are here my name is Chris. What's your name."

I think to myself this man is lying, this school can't be that great. But I play nice and respond, "Hi my name is Jalen Langley"

Chris says, “Hi Jalen. Inside the gym you will find tables. That’s where you go to check in and find out who your suite mate will be as well as your classes for the next five weeks.”

Yet again the course of my life is in the hands of someone else. I just hope my suite mate is nice and clean.

I move into my dorm room, say goodbye to my mom and sister, then I don’t know what to do. For the first time in my life, I have the freedom to go anywhere and do anything. It feels natural. Like this is what I was meant to do. It is my destiny to be free.

It is a few days later, and I have made new friends and I’m doing great in all of my classes. I’m coming up to my first college party. It’s at my friend, Zack’s, apartment. She lives there with her brother who is working and going to summer school. Coming to this party is my choice and I feel like it is a good one.

I knock on the door and Zack opens it. “Hey Jalen, I’m so glad you’re here. We bout to get fucked up!”

I reply boldly, “Hell yeah. What we bout to drink?”

This will be my second time drinking unsupervised by a parent and making the choice of how much I should drink. The first time I was with trusted friends I knew for months before I started drinking. I have only known Zack and her brother for a week.

I have shot after shot of a one-liter strawberry lemonade Svedka bottle. I am the only one drinking out of it and I finish the whole thing. By the end of the night, I am back in my bed safe and sound. I have no clue how I got there. According to my friends who took me back I was the life of the party. I was twerking on the walls and letting girls dance

on me. Which by the way, is not a normal thing for me, if you know what I mean. Of course, I threw up all over the place, which is not a good feeling at all. But it was my choice to get drunk and it was my choice to act the way I did. Choices like these will be the recurring trend throughout the entire summer.

For a while I let my choices speak for me and I am just along for the ride. It is like that until I have my first anxiety attack and I realize that I have a problem that is much deeper than my beautiful black skin.

\*

A few days before that anxiety attack there is a fight on campus, so security is beefed up and we have a curfew. We have to be in our dorms by 9 o'clock every night and our student leaders will come around and check our names off a list. But the student leaders do not care as much once the clock hit five and the professors and administrators leave for the day. So, me and my friends make the choice to sneak out.

This time, I make the choice not to get as drunk and to practice knowing my limits. My friend Erin on the other hand did not make this choice. She is completely wasted by the time we went back to campus. Being the good friend that I am I walk her back to campus with my friend Don and Joe. We are all stumbling around the campus like clowns in a traveling circus. The next day our student leader has a talk with us.

He says, "The administration is going to get really strict with this group because they saw you guys out past curfew last night."

When he says this my heart drops. In that moment I feel so scared but when the moment passes, I go back to talking about how we are going to get drunk in the dorm rooms.

Our student leader gives us advice I will never forget. He says “As long as you keep your grades up and play nice during the daytime, you’ll always fly under the Claflin radar.”

\*

Days later, the night of my panic attack, there is another fight. This time a girl brought a crowbar and bashed the other girl's head in. So now security is extremely tight. They even moved the curfew up to 7pm. The events of this night are very hazy because I once again make the choice to get extremely drunk. The only part I remember is someone yelling about us getting kicked out and then my panic attack begins. I was pacing back and forth and my heart feels like it was going to explode.

I remember saying “Oh no I can’t get kicked out. My grandparents are on the board of trustees. They are goanna kill me.”

My friends do everything to try and calm me down, but nothing is working. After this night, I know that my choices have consequences, and once you get the freedom to make choices on your own you are responsible for those consequences.

## UNKNOWN: Drama Entry

A collaborative piece developed by Kambria Cook, Jayla Myers, Ni'Ray Nelson, and Kayla Sweat and directed by Annette Grevious.

## THEA 211 – Fall 2022

Originally performed by a core group of actors (6-females and 4-males) under the direction of Annette Dees Grevious, and produced by Claflin University Theatre Ensemble February 26-27, 2023, at Claflin University in Orangeburg, SC.

### Original Cast

Jerrell Alston

Jasmine Booth

Tristyn Brothers

Charlese Harrell

Savannah Joyner

Antonio King

Jevauni Malcolm

Jarrett Matthews

Trinity Robinson

Kaylen Stevenson

Raven Lewis-Stage Manager



The actors enter BLACKOUT in expressionless masks.  
LIGHTS UP, then speaking begins. Masks are removed by  
the end of the piece.

**Ni'Ray Nelson**

*Stereotypical*

It's so stereotypical to be defined by our skin.

We're told to sit quiet and just blend in.

But it's impossible to sit quiet while you pick and prod our  
brains.

Because your subliminal racist questions nearly drive me  
insane.

"How do you deal with that hair? Can I touch it? Can you  
teach me how to twerk?"

It's a process. No. And that's gonna take some hard work.

I get it, you're ignorant and you just want to know more.

But let's face it, look it up. That's what Google and Bing is  
for.

So the next time you ask me about any "black" traditions

I'm just gonna simply say that you're unable to fathom our  
amazing black visions.

*BLACKOUT*

**Jayla Myers**

*Flea Market*

Underscored by *Static* by Ari Lennox

*Young black woman in her early 20s, picking out her afro in mirror. Cell phone rings; she picks up.*

SOLANA: Hey ma. I slept okay, how bout you? oh okay, what you got planned for the day? Mm, no I was just going to run to the flea market today and see what's new. \*pause\* Okay. I will. Love you too. Okay. Okay. .Alright. – *(She rolls her eyes as her mom keeps telling her last minute things like “don't drive too fast it was raining last night” and “make sure to call me when you make it.”)*

SOLANA: Okay ma I gotta go. Okay. Bye bye. *(She arrives at flea market with shades on, a long pants romper with sandals and her Afro fluffy and moisturized.)*

SOLANA: I may take a look at that African jewelry first. I wonder is the woman who makes them is here on Saturdays— *(She bumps into an older black man in his mid-40s.)*

MAN: *(He examines her. A smile spreads across his face.)* Well, it sure is nice to see a black queen of today still wearing her natural fro. I thought I'd never see the day.

SOLANA: *(A look of confusion spreads across her face. Fake laugh)*

MAN: *(He laughs while speaking.)* I'm sure a naturalista like yourself wouldn't dare put a single strand of that horsehair in ya head, aint it?

SOLANA: *(She looks around in confusion but awkwardly goes along with it in a nervous laughter and gives a toothy smile. She walks away with smile slowly leaving.)* Oh, I'm fine with what I'm working with. You have a good one sir! *(She continues walking. Shakes the previous weird*

*encounter off. Older Black Woman selling oil lamps stops her by calling out to her and promoting her oil lamps.)*

WOMAN: Ooooh honey I got something that will fit the tone of your home environment. You are screaming black woman right now. I love your little one piece and the shoes to go with it. If only yall lil girls these days will find something to do with that hea! How can you even focus with that hair all over the place like that???

SOLANA: *(Solana face goes to a smile to a confused look in an instant. She stands there and stares at the old woman.)* I can manage. Thanks. *(She walks away with an attitude. She sits, eventually grows tired of looking for the jewelry lady. Instead, she decides to take a seat and scroll on her phone.)* Maybe I should go on the other side of the flea market where the fruits are instead chile.

*A Hotep Black Man comes in view as she is saying this. He invites himself to sit down directly in front of her. She looks up at him. He looks at her with a devious smile that says "I'm about to rope her in" he immediately begins to speak.*

HOTEP: Y'know, it sure is refreshing to see a melanated, educated, and elevated black queen with her natural hair out. See that's what we need! We need more queens like yourself to teach our fellow sistas the way to feel beautiful. Why, I just seen a group of black girls yesterday and every single last one of them just look like a pack of skittlez. Im talking all types yellas and pinks and greens and orange. You woulda thought they was a music group.

*Solana groans out in misery. She wants him to please stop talking about her like she is some revolutionary leader. She just wanted to go to the flea market and enjoy her morning*

*while giving her hair a break from the buns she's been throwing them in. He speaks over her groans.*

HOTEP: I'm telling ya it's a mess out here. The entire time I was sitting there eating my gyro just looking at 'em. Like damn, where are the strong black natural women that can lead a black man-

SOLANA: *(She slams her hand down on the table. She rubs her temples in annoyance.)* ENOUGH.. please!

HOTEP: *(He looks around embarrassed yet confused. He questions her.)* Enough of what? You act like I haven't been sitting her complimenting you the entire time. Listen, if your attention span isn't there to listen to a black man talk about the struggles of our community then you should-

SOLANA: *(She stands up while grabbing her belongings.)* I SHOULD be able to come to the flea market and enjoy my morning. Listen, whatever your name is, I'm not some revolutionary leader, nor am I a walking example of the perfect black woman. I'm just a college student trying to do a little morning shopping and get some fresh air. I didn't do this for the culture, I didn't do this to be a public figure for black women, I did this because this is literally an AVERAGE every day for me. And tons of black women! TONS of black women where their natural hair every day. But you guys are too worried about policing the black women who choose to do their hair in other expressive hairstyles to notice that wearing our natural hair never was some big statement. It's just what grows out of our heads!

HOTEP: *(He starts to get up.)* Listen lady if you're having a bad day, I'll leave you be.

SOLANA: Actually, I was having an okay day until you came and spewed out that childish Hotep nonsense! But since you are deciding to leave, do me a favor and don't do this to any other black woman that has her hair out. the last thing we need on a Saturday morning is a bum in our face tryna holla by putting down other women who look just like me with a different hairstyle. Tuh! *(She begins to walk away.)*

## **Jevauni Malcolm**

### *A True Queen*

My hair, a di best paht a mi,  
Look how it bounce,  
Mek even the haytaz dem a stare,  
Nuhbadi can mek me feel shame a my hair.

Dis hair go tru strife,  
An di white man try fi end it life,  
But black man hair will always survive,  
Nuh matter who wah come,  
Wedda a police or knife.

Dem did say black hair ugly,  
Dem did say a white hair run tings,  
But nuh matter how much dem diss wi,  
Black hair will always be natural beauty,  
As long as wi mek dem know seh wi love it.

Suh comb it out,  
Neat it up too,  
Then step out and show out,  
Embracing and loving all of you.

*Hotep exits, leaving Solana pondering over her hair.  
Musical underscore fades. Enter rappers.*

**Kambria Cook**

*HAIR*

Yeah I like my hair and I know you like it too  
Curly little girl and you wish it could be you  
Always tryna front and say that my hair not cool  
But baby best believe I see you stare in the rear view

Verse

People try to say that black hair is not professional  
How you tryna tell me what to wear when I run the show  
Black and curly hair or some locs, just to name a few  
I look good, we look good, ha, yeah that's just what we do

Girl show your hair and wear it with some pride  
We should not be scared to wear our hair outside  
Interviews, events, and meeting new people  
This is America we should be treated equal

*DANCE transition to The Way You Make Me Feel by  
Janelle Monae*

**Jayla Myers**

*I DIDN'T HAVE TIME*

I didn't have time to tie my shoes this morning  
I didn't have time to make my bed

I didn't have time to turn the tv off  
Im late for work, I gotta get gas.  
I didn't have time to speak to my colleagues  
I didn't have time to hold the elevator for the custodian  
I didn't have time to go to the cafe  
These assignments are past due, I gotta do these now.  
I didn't have time to call my mom  
I didn't have time to tell my grandma happy birthday  
I didn't have time to check my messages  
I gotta respond to these emails, I gotta stay on top of  
things.  
I didn't have time to party with friends  
I didn't have time to drink and play cards  
I didn't have time to make memories  
I gotta graduate, I gotta future  
A future that consist of nobody  
A future that only involves me  
A future with no friends  
A future with no family  
A future that I was destined to have  
Because I didn't have time.

**Black LGBTQIA+**  
**by Kayla Sweat**

Was it my brown skin that made you feel uncomfortable ?  
Or was it my masculine clothes that made you look at me  
strange ?  
I don't care either way because this is me.

Why look at me confused  
I already know what you want to ask  
Yes I am a female  
No, I do not want to be a man.

Why does it bother you that I wear boxers  
Yes I get a haircut every two weeks  
I surely do smell like cologne  
It's expensive too  
Don't get it twisted because I know I am a female and I  
keep up with my feminine side.

Maybe your daughter isn't gay  
Maybe she just like me  
Not because I am girl but because of the person I am

I would never let you put me down because of my  
sexuality  
But everybody is not like me.  
Homophobic people are the main cause for me people like  
me to commit suicide.  
Why does it matter that I like girls  
Why does it matter that he like boys  
It's not you so why does it bother you so much.

To the mothers from the church that say God intended me  
to love a man  
To that I say a woman has loved me harder than any man  
ever could

I don't apologize for the person you want me to be.  
I apologize because you can't accept who I am.

### **Author unknown**

#### *BITCHES*

I know I hate the work at school  
The constant annoyance of everyone trying to be cool  
I don't mind the flaunting of riches  
But the main thing I hate is these stupid ass bitches



Smiling in your face hoping you tell your business  
The evil plotting mind of the simple minded bitches  
Friends one day, enemies the next  
How will you know if you passed their test  
The test they create  
In attempt to see which part of you they could break  
The test is not easy and you'll never be prepared  
Only because it was created by the same bitch with the fake  
hair  
They will become your best friend and pretend they care  
To learn all your secrets and keep them to share  
The true work of an evil mastermind in disguise  
Torn up by jealousy burning inside  
Angry deep down for not living her dreams  
Angry because your taking every opportunity life brings  
A broken heart unable to be fixed with a stitch  
The lonely life of a **resentful bitch**

*DANCE transition to POLYGAMY*

**Kambria Cook**

*POLYGAMY*

Chorus x2

Why do we have to go through this  
Always always full of this sheesh  
Baby how come you can't be with me  
Omg that's crazy, I thought I was the only baby

Verse

Thinking you could have a few other by your side  
Well baby you know that with me that it's not right  
So baby you can best believe that imma leave tonight  
We not gone be already, baby f your pride  
Post verse

You can't have 3 chicks and still be with me  
I don't understand why you want polygamy  
You can't have 3 chicks and still be with me  
I can't live like this and that's why imma leave

Chorus x2

Why do we have to go through this  
Always always full of this sheesh  
Baby how come you can't be with me  
Omg that's crazy, I thought I was the only baby

Post chorus

Why why why why why

*Riri breaks away from polygamous dance and begins  
speaking while dance continues.*

**Kambria Cook**  
*I AM CHANGED*

*Riri is with Bebe, a cheating guy. Lori is the second  
girlfriend.*

RIRI: Oh okay, okay, okay, I get it! This man wants two women because [pause to think] I am not enough. I am not thick enough, my hair is not long enough, so Lori makes up the things I cannot. And as for me I am strong, intelligent, and resilient. So, I guess I make up those characteristics, right? Right!? That is what I bring to the table? Sheet, this man got me questioning my own worth. How did I get here? When did I say I was fine being in a polygamous relationship? I am too jealous to be in a polygamy, too territorial to be in a polygamy, too pretty to be in a polygamy, and too Got Damn intelligent to be here. I am done, I cannot do this anymore. I know my worth, I know

where I stand, I know who I am, and that piece of trash can no longer take me out, he can no longer have that tie to me, because it is now broken. I am beautiful, I am strong, I am intelligent, and I am resilient, and any other faithful and loyal man would be lucky to have me by their side. I am changed.

*Polygamy song ends.*

***True Love Doesn't Share***

**by Jevauni**

I fell for someone I thought true,  
Professing to only give my love to you.  
My one heart betrothed to the one I hold most dear,  
Yet as fate would have it,  
You made true my deepest fear.  
Love is abundant, you say,  
Available to be given to whomever you may,  
One by one, our love divided,  
Till with me,  
Only the spark resided.  
Rings adorned your talons,  
Which dripped with the painful love of your victims,  
Who seem bound to you by unbreakable gold,

Subjected forever to agonizing redundance that would remain untold.

However, just as they came, they soon left,  
For as abundant as you claimed your love to be,  
We all felt bereft,  
Of that warmth so true,  
Replaced by a feeling cold and blue,  
Until in the end there was no more us,  
Only you.

*Kiss Me More by Doja Cat (slowed and reverend version)  
underscores Love is Complicated.*

### **Savannah Joyner**

#### *Love is Complicated*

Someone once asked me what does being in love feel like

And I was like well, it's like, um, sort of like, oh I know it likes, uhh, well, to put it in simple terms

Love is complicated

Like unnecessarily, unexplainably, complicated

Being in love is like making an origami crane, and I can't even fold a piece of paper in half

Being love is hieroglyphics

that I don't know how to read

Being in love is finding cosine theta in a mathematical equation

And I stopped understand math

In like in the 8th grade

And my brain waves are trying to understand these feelings but it's not makes sense

It's like your speaking French, Italian, German, Japanese

I don't know what any of it means all I know is that I need more of it

I need more of you

I wanna do the things that lovers do

I wanna make magic like bibddi bobbid boo

You got my heart Levitating but I'm not Dua Lipa

Or Dababy and it's kinda crazy how you got me feeling this way

And every day you find brand new ways to inspire me

Every day you keep encouraging me to follow my dreams

And now it seems like you've become my heart in human form

Whenever I think of you my heart feels full

Is that normal, is that what it's supposed to do

Whenever I see you, millions of words fill up in my head  
but whenever I'm around I can get a single word from out  
my mouth

And I think it's pretty clear that I'm head over heels for  
you

But how is that supposed to be portrayed

How am I supposed to express that to you

Honestly, I have no clue what I'm doing when

It comes to you

Every day is a brand new adventure and as long as I have  
you by my side, I know that we can do anything

Everything

You are everything I could ever want

Your worth it

Worth all my time and joy

Worth all the fights and sadness

Worth all the good days and the bad days

And I know I can't tell you what being in love feels like

All I know is that I'm in love with you

*Music ends*

**Savannah Joyner**

*To Those Who Can No Longer Feel*

This poem is dedicated to those who can no longer feel

To the ones who have worn so many masks that they have forgotten what their true face looks like

To the ones who have hidden their emotions behind fake smiles and laughter

To the ones who believe that happily ever afters no longer exist for them

To the ones who have abandoned their broken 9 year old selves to wander the darkness that clouds their souls

To the ones who fill their temples with drugs, alcohol, and sex, because it's easier to fill and forget than to feel and remember

To the ones who try to make everyone happy but themselves

To the ones who can't remember the last times they've felt truly happy

To the ones who hide their scars behind long sleeves as their heart grieves for this is the only thing it is allowed to feel

To the ones who can no longer feel

Remember the cumulonimbus clouds that float in a clear blue

Remember the gentle rain that comes during the crisp summer heat

Remember the cool breeze that comes during a warm night

Remember the waves rolling over the shore

Remember the way the sun kissed the horizon and painted the sky hues of orange, pink, and purple

Remember the way the sun gently beamed on you face

Remember the way the flowers bloom in early spring

Remember that this is love

Remember that this is life

You are alive

You are loved

And you are enough



**Eden Rattley**  
*Accept The Help*

1M, 1F

Male: Anthony

Female: Andrea

*Andrea is struggling to carry 2 boxes. Anthony sees and pauses as he looks at Andrea.*

Anthony: Do you need help?

Andrea: No, I got it.

Anthony: Ok, I guess.

Anthony continues to walk.

Andrea: Whoa!

*Anthony turns as Andrea is about to fall back, he catches her.*

Anthony: Are you ok?

Andrea: I'm fine.

Anthony: Are you sure?

Andrea: (*Hostilely*) Look, I said I'm fine.

*Andrea gets up, grabs the boxes, and begins to walk again but struggles as she begins to waddle side to side carrying the boxes.*

Anthony: Look, why don't I just help you?

Andrea: Look, why *don't* you just leave me alone?

Anthony: (*Annoyingly*) *What?*

Andrea: Look, thanks but no thanks, I ‘m fine. I can do it by myself.

Anthony: Why are you being so stubborn?

Andrea: (Sighs) Why are *you* being so adamant about helping me? Do you want something from me?

Anthony: (Scoffs) No, not at all. I just see that you’re overwhelmed and I want to help you out is all.

Andrea: Well, aren’t you just the model Samaritan? Look, I’m only going to say it one more time. I *don’t* need help.

Anthony: (Sighs) Why are you guys like this?

Andrea: *Excuse* me? What do you mean “you guys”?

Anthony: Women. Why do you *act* like that? You dismiss people that are trying to help you because you feel as though you can do it yourself although you *clearly* can’t. Why won’t you just let me help you? What’s the issue?

*Andrea puts the boxes down.*

Andrea: “What’s the issue?” Alright Mr. Bigshot, since you wanna know so much I’ll enlighten you, because clearly your eyes have *yet* to be open. Imagine in this society, when you ask a man for help with the purest intentions, but you only have these options as a woman. (1) Either you are hitting on him, and you’re identified as desperate or easy or (2) He expects something in return, for example your number, when you really don’t want to give it out *or* (3) In the worst case scenario he’s been watching you with creepy intentions waiting for a chance to talk to you while following you With the world in conditions like this, excuse my skepticism, wariness and aggressive independence when it comes to asking men or receiving help from men.

*Moment of Silence. Anthony takes a breath before speaking gently.*

Anthony: I'm sorry. I hadn't realized how hard it was. I get it, I do. But allow me to offer this as a rebuttal: All men don't have the same intentions. There are some, no doubt, whose intentions are hazy and unclear but there are also some who can lay out their intentions with clarity. I am honestly telling you, I have no intention of asking, saying, or doing anything else. I simply want to help someone who I see needs help.

Andrea: .... (silence)

Anthony: Honestly! Please let me help you before you hurt yourself. Just like the heaviness of those boxes I'm sure the heaviness in your heart being unable to trust a man enough to ask for help weighs on you a lot. Please...

Andrea: Then...please help me with these boxes.

Andrea hands the boxes to Anthony. They smile and begin to exit the stage.

Andrea: May I know the name of the one who's helping me out?

Anthony: Of course. My name is Anthony.

BLACKOUT

**Kambria Cook**

*Oh, to Be a Black Woman*

Oh, to be a black woman

What does that mean

It means we have to deal with the unseen

Well the unseen to you  
You don't have to deal with what we do  
Oh, to be a black woman  
With curly hair, locs, and wigs  
Cover that up or else we may not get the gig  
All because of our hair  
But hey, that is how this works, unfair  
Oh, to be a black woman  
The struggle doesn't stop  
But we keep pushing along until we get to the top  
This country was built to break us  
But we were taught to be elevators  
Oh, to be a black woman  
It may sound hard  
But of course, it does to you because you're not black at all  
You're just another woman watching from your lens  
You have not been able to put on my glasses to see how  
I've been  
But oh, to be a black woman  
It means what it says  
To be a black woman is written on our chest  
To a black woman comes with too much

But I wouldn't trade it in the world, because it comes in clutch

*DANCE transition to Brown Skin Girl by Beyonce'*

**Ni'Ray Nelson**

*PUTTING YOURSELF FIRST*

Me, Myself and I  
The feeling of wholeness,  
Self acceptance,  
Comfort and love is liberating.  
Some things may be equally essential, but nothing is more important than loving oneself.

Me, Myself and I  
I may allow myself to fall in stupid situations  
FAILURE will not stop me, but make me STRONGER  
I am fully seeing myself and smiling at my imperfected reflection.  
The more I spend time with myself, the more my love grows

Me, Myself and I  
I don't need any help to be beautiful because I have that in the bag inside and out.  
I have learn the phases of myself  
So distant from that little insecure girl that I used to know  
I am everything that I can and will be  
The journey to fully embrace and value my own self

Me, Myself and I

I love me the way no one else does

*DANCE transition to Me, Myself, and I by Beyonce'*

*DANCE transition to I Am Free by Ricky Dillard*

*DANCE transition and curtain call to Freedom by Eddie  
James*

