



**AND YET, I EXIST:
EXPLORATIONS IN
WOMXNIST
FUTURES**

A Womanist Working Collective Zine

After Pearl Cleage's "We Speak Your Names"

because we are liberated
because we are liberation
because we are freedom personified
because we are not limited
because we are not voiceless
because we sing
because we dance
because we are free

we are liberated
we are liberation
we are freedom personified
we are not limited
we are not voiceless
we sing
we dance
we are free

liberated
liberation

freedom personified

not limited
not voiceless

singing
dancing

free

The Flow

Introduction

“The Odyssey of Self”

I’ve Been A Womxn

What is Womxnism”

Odes to the Pillars

HOW IT FEELS TO BE FREE

The Letter

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A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually.
Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility ... and
women's strength. ... Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people,
male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health ... Loves mu-
sic. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the Spirit ... Loves struggle. Loves the
folk. Loves herself. Regardless.
Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.

Introduction

BY
JORDAN EALEY

Alice Walker, in her 1983 book *In Search Of Our Mother's Garden*, provided us with this new framework of thinking about our relationship to and with the world: womanism. Walker gifts us womanism and inspires a spiritual, theoretical, and personal language for Black women, femmes, and nonbinary folks to navigate the world. It is a love language based on thriving, living, community, and love. Womanism is an ethos of care, teaching us how to live and how to love.

When the two of us were brought together by the Womanist Working Collective (WWC), we were inspired by the incredible work that this organization has been doing since its inception. We knew that we wanted to create something that would live on beyond the time frame that we were working within and to mirror the futurity that WWC was already doing with their community and care work. This is what we seek to do here.

Black feminist scholar Tina Campt offers a prescient understanding of Black feminist futurity:

“The grammar of black feminist futurity is a performance of a future that hasn’t yet happened but must. [...] It’s a politics of prefiguration that involves living the future now--as imperative rather than subjunctive--as a striving for the future you want to see, right now, in the present.”

Futurity, for Campt, is not about waiting or patience. It is about living in the right now, about the future’s immediacy. Black women, femmes, and nonbinary folks have always thought about the the framework of futurity, about what they need to do to make that liberated future happen. Right now. In many ways, then, this zine is about performing that future. Through a series of creative works, we sought to make a way for a Black feminist and womanist world where those who are most vulnerable are free.

The Odyssey of Self⁶

BY

JAKAELA DAVIS

*“Tried to play straight, how your whole style bent?
Consequence is no coincidence
Hypocrites always want to play innocent
Always want to take it to the full out extent
Always want to make it seem like good intent
Never want to face it when it time for punishment
I know you don’t want to hear my opinion
But there come many paths and you must choose one
And if you don’t change then the rain soon come
See you might win some, but you just lost one”
-Lauryn Hill, “Lost Ones,” The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*

What Lauryn is essentially doing is inviting those to maneuver freely in a world where movement was only limited because of who they are. This movement, this unshackling of chains, this type of freedom, still applies to the descendants of those who were once shackled by physical chains. This type of invitation, summons us to break free from the mental chains of performance of respectability so that we may become our most authentic selves. Lauryn Hill’s song “Lost Ones,” which is a part of her debut solo album, *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*, is drawn from Carter G. Woodson (1933) book *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, in which the author posits that Black Americans were being maliciously conditioned by educators. Hill’s masterpiece is not free of controversy”, but it is one that calls the attention of Black people.

Activating the invitation of Lauryn Hill within my own life, I often ask the question: What does it mean for me to live my most authentic self? Within that authenticity, is there profound liberation? Could the need to survive cease to exist because of this profound liberation? I want to invite you on this journey of authenticity, a journey where liberation meets survivability and the two become one. This is a journey where the intersections of queerness and blackness collide in order to give birth to a freedom that is beyond this realm.

It is the year 1968, and there sits singer, songwriter, and activist Nina Simone pondering the question: “What is freedom?” Her response begins with a bunch of analogies of describing what freedom could be for Black people if we knew freedom beyond our own capacity. Nina Simone, responds with the most iconic answer “I’ll tell you what freedom is to me. No fear. No Fear.”

As a Black, Non-binary Trans person, I am often asking myself what freedom looks like. My response is often one that leads to a deeper understanding of self; I knew that in my own discovery I would have to rid myself of the binaries that were often placed upon my life.

Coming out as non-binary trans and queer within my Black skin required a liberation that was beyond my own tangible needs. If one were to ask me, a Black queer and trans person what liberation is, I would say that liberation is separation and living beyond binaries, leaving no more room for suppression. Suppression was a means to survive, it was a tactic that allowed for me to live within the needs and necessities of respectability. Suppression became my worst enemy and my best friend all at once, but the more I grew into myself, the more liberation became me. I am often shocked at the person I have become, it has required me to withstand beyond binaries, normalcy.

I have come to the understanding that we live in a society where normalcy was and still is defined by the standard of whiteness. It is at this understanding that living beyond the binary becomes ontological, a way of being.

“Kaela, are you still holy?” was the question that often-ended conversations between my grandmother and I because it was tethered to the question: “Kaela, are you still gay?” Hearing these questions at the end of every conversation filled me with both rage and curiosity. I understood that there were beliefs that my grandmother had held onto for years and asking her to shift her mindset into seeing me for the first time as an authentic Jakaela would be a difficult task. However, curiosity struck and the wonderings about what does it mean to invite her to a conversation about queerness and liberation. This is an invitation that is filled with transparency, nurture, and love. As I am growing more into myself, I am learning to respond to these questions with a simple, “Yes, I am still holy and I am liberated.”

I know that in order to figure out the inner being of my true authentic self, I needed to create a home where I am safe and liberated. This was a home of movement. “I must forsake “home” (comfort zones, both personal and cultural) every day of my life to keep burgeoning into the tree of myself.” Gloria Anzaldua speaks to the way in which she must break the binary of what she has been called to be. Forsaking homes is placed around the ideology of living beyond the binary, so that one can become their most authentic selves. I am holding this understanding and looking through the lens of what it means to be Black, Queer, and Liberated.



What is Womxnism?

The word Womxnism is a foundational word, at its core Womxnism rooted in wholeness and the well-being of all humanity. According to Activist, Scholar, and Author Alice Walker, “womxnist” unites women of color, especially Black womxn with the feminist movement at the “intersection of race, class, and gender oppression.” The beauty of Womxnism is that it recognizes and advocates for all people. Womxnism is a form of feminism focused especially on the experiences, conditions, and concerns of women of color, especially Black women. Womxnism recognizes the inherent beauty and strength of Black womxnhood and seeks connections and solidarity with Black men. Womxnism identifies and criticizes sexism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, colorism within the Black community and racism within the feminist community. It further holds that Black womxn’s sense of self depends equally on both their femininity and culture. Alice Walker writes “Womxnist is to feminist as purple is to lavender” suggesting that feminism is a single-issue component of a larger ideology, that is within Womxnism one is able to grasp at the many layers that one may carry. Womxnism focuses on the holistic well-being of humanity, in other words “no one gets left behind”.

I'VE BEEN A WOMAN

By
JORDAN EALEY

CAST OF CHARACTERS

TORI: Black femme, 20s

CRYSTAL: Black femme, 20s

SETTING

Formerly known as Philadelphia, 2065

A field in a place formerly known as Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on February 16, 2065. The stage is bare except for a tent, poorly made and kind of worn. After several beats of silence, Tori enters. She is dressed in tattered clothing and carries a backpack and creeps around, cautiously taking in her surroundings. She spots the tent and walks over to it. As if on cue, Crystal emerges from the tent, startling Tori a bit.

TORI

Whoa, you good?

CRYSTAL

Yeah...yeah, I'm good. Have you been in there all day?

TORI

Sure have. Was waiting on you to come back.

(beat)

I'm glad you came back.

CRYSTAL

I always do.

TORI

...well?

Well, what?

CRYSTAL

TORI

What now? Did you find anyone? See anything?

CRYSTAL

Yeah.

TORI

And?

(silence)

Crystal? What did you see?

CRYSTAL

Nothing.

TORI

Oh my G-

CRYSTAL

No, I mean. I didn't see anything. It's gone. All of it.

(beat)

Tori, we're alone.

TORI

Shit.

CRYSTAL

They took it all. This shit was supposed to be different but they took it all.

TORI

Oh my god. What are we going to do? The others are all gone and I can't connect to anyone.

CRYSTAL

We gotta fight this, T.

TORI

What?

CRYSTAL

We gotta fight. If we don't fight this, then all we gonna do is be stuck here. With nothing. And I'm not going down like that.

(beat)

Not like her.

TORI

But again, I ask, what the hell are we going to do? All we have is the goddamn tent. No way to contact anyone. We alone, Crys. We have nothing.

CRYSTAL

We got each other. Right? We been in this shit. We been in this together since you pulled me out the fire. Remember?

TORI

Yeah, I remember that. I ain't never gonna forget that.

CRYSTAL

Alright. So, we just gotta regroup. Black girls always know how to regroup.

TORI

Why do we always gotta pick shit up, though?

CRYSTAL

You know why, T. This shit ain't new.

TORI

Yeah, but we in 2065. It's supposed to be new. We in a brand new world. Or we was supposed to be.

CRYSTAL

What, you thought 'cause a bunch of white women was in office, shit was gonna be different? 'Cause we share a body part with them, they was supposed to care? Psh, that was never gonna happen.

TORI

Yo, why you always gotta be so negative? Look around! We already in hell. The Earth is eating us alive and our glimmers of hope are not interested in saving us. I don't need you shitting all over me right now.

CRYSTAL

I'm keepin' it real.

TORI

Well, you real annoyin.

CRYSTAL

Whatever.

Silence. The two women look around. They don't really know what to do. Tori retreats into the tent. Crystal sits down on the ground and sighs. Tori returns from the tent with a piece of paper. Crystal turns and sees that.

CRYSTAL

What's that?

TORI

You are in uncharted territory, swollen with fear, soaring in love
with a woman whose heart is stitched together with the stuff
of clouds.

CRYSTAL

(overlapping)

Oh my God-

TORI

She fills you and feels you and every other planet before her
seems insignificant.

You sometimes remember your astronaut and his spaceship
and how he still

tries to pull you into his forever. But then she smiles. And you
are planted

back into the earth. You decide to cruise beneath the sky, in a
world

you could have never imagined. And your cloudy woman, your
soft corner

in a hard world? She decides to come with you.

(beat)

You remember that?

CRYSTAL

It was after the fire.

TORI

After the fire.

CRYSTAL

You came back for me.

(beat)

You always come back for me. When I wrote that, I felt like we
had so much adventure ahead of us. President Ocasio-Cortez
had just been inaugurated. The Congress had just become
100% women. First time ever. Seemed monumental.

TORI

It was. I remember my Black ass being so excited. Women just took over.

(beat)

I didn't expect it to end up like this.

CRYSTAL

We trusted the representation.

(beat)

My mama had always told me that I shouldn't trust the representation. I feel like I was born a goddamn Black feminist and I still put my trust into some white women. What a shame.

TORI

If the white men started it, the white women finished it.

(beat)

This all could have been stopped. We all had so many plans to stop it. When that Women's Revolution Army overthrew President Ocasio-Cortez, I did not know we were gonna end up in this kind of hell.

CRYSTAL

When that fire started at the inauguration, I remember thinking to myself: "Man, this is it. You had a good run, Crystal. It's time to go." And then...you came. Doing the bravest thing I don't think I ever could have done.

TORI

(chuckles)

I'm not brave. I'm just a woman.

CRYSTAL

Nothing about you could ever be "just" anything.

TORI

We made promises to each other after that. We said whatever was coming, we was gonna face it. It's here now, Crystal. The thing that was coming? It's here. What we gonna do?

CRYSTAL

(sighs)

I don't know. Part of me just waiting. It wasn't a fire but maybe it'll be an earthquake. Or a hurricane. Never thought I would see a hurricane in DC. But we don't fucked the world up so much that anything could be possible.

TORI

Girl, please. This apocalypse shit ain't shit for us.

Suddenly, a loud siren is heard. Both of the women stand up and get on guard. Something's happening. The siren keeps going. A rumbling starts. The women begin gathering their things.

TORI

Oh my God, what's going?

CRYSTAL

It's here, T! We gotta go! We can't stay here! We have to keep moving!

TORI

I---I don't know what's going to happen!

CRYSTAL

(beat)

Me-me either. But I can't believe I found you in time!

TORI

What?

CRYSTAL

I CAN'T BELIEVE I FOUND YOU IN TIME!

Tori hears her the second time and grabs her hand. Together, they run toward the audience as the lights abruptly go out.

END OF PLAY



Graphic Art by Keria B

“This apocalypse shit ain’t for us.”





Ode to the Pillars

Presented by
Jakaela Davis

Telling untold stories in the formation of poetry requires a sense of yielding and empathy. Yielding in the sense of giving up one's own judgment of what they perceive the story to be or what it should become. Empathy because these are stories that are often overlooked and it is one that requires a sense of understanding that this is not the whole story, for we only see the parts. As I try to tell the story in the form of poetry, I urge you, the reader to look beyond these words and search for the wholeness within these individuals. I urge to provide a sense of agency to each story that you hear beyond the ones you have read today.





Pauli Murray

Knowing who you are requires a sense of urgency to
leave the home that has become foreign.

People often say that “to know thyself is to love thy-
self” but what if to know thyself requires us to do
more than love but to give ourselves a chance.

A chance to know the most inner parts of your own
being.

I am both, male and female, I am distant and near.
I hold no gender, but the one of my own being transi-
tioning beyond a state of normalcy.

I hold these inner parts as stepping stones towards
a path that wasn't always meant to be, but one that I
created as a need to survive.

Stormé DeLarverie

Graphic Art by Keria Blunt

The first time I heard about Stormé was about a few months ago, if I could describe Stormé in a poem it would be this:

What is it to you? A matter of who I am or who I am not.

You are afraid of someone like me, someone who walks within their whole being, unapologetically!

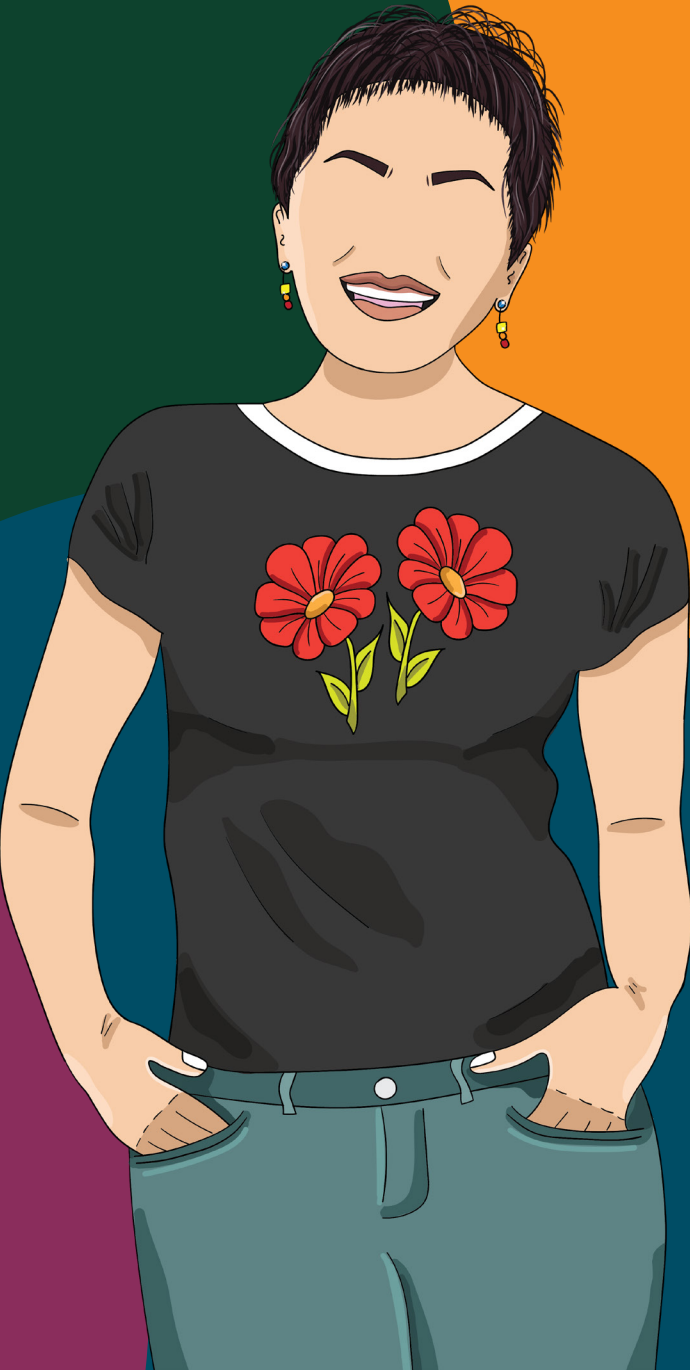
Are you simply afraid because you are me and I, am you?

Fear gripping/ripping your whole body being rid of its own queerness.

So, you kill me, I mean you kill you so no one can see it, but what if I told you it's too late?

You are exposed, I see you, because I am you.
No longer in hiding, I see?





Gloria E. Anzaldúa

Graphic Art by Keria Blunt

Gloria E. Anzaldúa scholar of Chicana cultural theory, feminist theory, and queer theory. Their work centers the anger and isolation of occupying the margins of culture and collective identity, here are my words about Gloria:

De los otros, “of the others”. I am other, think I am beyond it.

Other as something that is seen as unusual.

Or perhaps that is you, you as the other.

Walking with normalities, refusing to your indifferences, your body becomes a binary.

That is, within your very being, you are OTHER
THAN YOURSELF.

ODE TO THE BLACK QUEER/ TRANS BODY:

PRAESENT BY
JAKAELA DAVIS

I remember very vividly the day I saw you, captivated by
your joy and laughter.

I went up to you and wanted to get to know you on a
deeper level, it was your beauty that summoned me.

The way you light up the whole room is beyond me.

You were simply beyond me.

Telling your story, I can hear the pain and brokenness, I
knew then that I wanted nothing but to hold, for you are
meant to be held.

To be healed and liberated in a way that requires the
interlockings of pleasure and self-vindication.

You, my love are the becoming.



HOW IT FEELS TO BE FREE

By
JORDAN EALEY

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MAE: Black woman, 40s, self-assured yet vulnerable

OKWUII: Nonbinary masculine-of -center person, late 20s, nearly broken, but trying to stay brave.

SETTING

Somewhere, the future.

A liminal space. Following a bright light, Okwuii appears as if summoned from nowhere. Maybe they were. Another bright light. Mae appears.

OKWUII

It's you.

MAE

Hi there, baby.

They embrace with fervor. It's a fierce and warm hug - clearly one that neither of them were expecting to receive. It's hungry. It's loving.

OKWUII

Mama, I thought I'd never see you again! I really did. I've been here, just trying to make it through the day. Sometimes, I dream of you.

They finally break apart. Okwuii studies Mae closer now.



OKWUII

(beat)

Why you look so...young?

MAE

Apparently, here, we look the way we looked when we felt our most beautiful. I imagined myself the way you saw me when you was a little girl.

OKWUII

I'm surprised I wasn't transformed into one to meet you. How did we end up here? Did you call me?

MAE

(beat)

Yes. I did. I think it might be time.

OKWUII

What? Are you sure?

MAE

I'm sure. Sarah-

OKWUII

It's Okwuii now.

MAE

(beat)

Okwuii. That's beautiful. Where did you get that from?

OKWUII

From myself. I gave it to myself.

Mae considers this for a moment. It might be a bit uncomfortable for her.

MAE

You didn't like the name I gave to you. The one my mama gave to you.

OKWUII

It's not that, Mama. It's just...being here and in this time, I've made some discoveries about myself. I thought this name fit me much better. I like the way it feels. You don't like it?

MAE

It ain't that. I just never want you to cut yourself off from us over here, you know? Names mean a lot to us, you know that.

OKWUII

I do know that. Really, I know but what did you think would happen when you sent me here? There's so much time between us. So many things are different. It's different here.

(beat)

I thought you would have wanted me to be safe. Find a life here.

MAE

I do. I do. Sarah-I mean, Okwuui, I do. Guess I ain't realize that meant you might have to give up a little part of where you come from.

OKWUII

I haven't given it all up, though.

They stand in silence for a moment.

OKWUII

So you must have called me for a reason?

MAE

Yes, right. Got off track for a minute.

(beat)

I need you to come back.

OKWUII

What? Why?

MAE

You gotta use some of your magic. It's Jonah. He hurt.

OKWUII

How hurt? What happened?

MAE

We was tryin to run. Everything was okay 'fo some catchers was able to track us down. Didn't even assume we had papers or nothing. Last thing I saw before I was able to go was him gettin' tackled by the catchers. That's how I end up here. I was wishin' for you, wishin' you was here and that's how I got here.

OKWUII

(beat)

When do I have to come back?

MAE

What you mean? *Now*.

OKWUII

But my life, I-

MAE

This Jonah's life. Remember him? He the one helped you leave the first time.

(beat)

You can't turn your back on us now.

OKWUII

But what about my safety? I can't just go back to what I was doing. I'm not the same person I was when you sent me here.

MAE

What you mean?

OKWUII

I mean...mama, look at me. Like really. Look at me.

(beat)

Do I look the same to you?

MAE

Yes. I mean, your clothes are different and stuff, but you look like my daughter. My sweet baby girl.

OKWUII

I'm not your baby girl or your daughter, Mama. I'm...I'm not that anymore. You're asking me to go back to a time when I can't be who I fully am. How do I do that?

MAE

Not sure I get what you sayin'.

OKWUII

Mama, I'm...I'm different. I have a partner. Not a man. A woman. And I don't...I don't think of myself as a woman.

MAE

That's...I don't know what to say to that.

Okwuii moves closer and takes Mae's hands.

OKWUII

Say you love me and that you don't get it, but you respect it.

Mae slowly takes her hands away from Okwuii's. She moves further away and contemplates. Okwuii, visibly hurt, takes this as a rejection, as Mae has clearly made her choice.

OKWUII

Mama?

MAE

I don't know if I get what you sayin'. I'm just bein' honest. But baby, I always knew you was different. That you was special. Why you think I sent you away? I knew I ain't want this for you. I want a future where you free. Even if I can't be.

OKWUII

Mama, come with me. Be free with me. You been fightin' for so long, you should be free with us. This new world...it's beautiful. We can choose our own paths, we don't have to follow anybody else's.

MAE

But we gotta get Jonah, right? We gotta save him.

OKWUII

I know.

(beat)

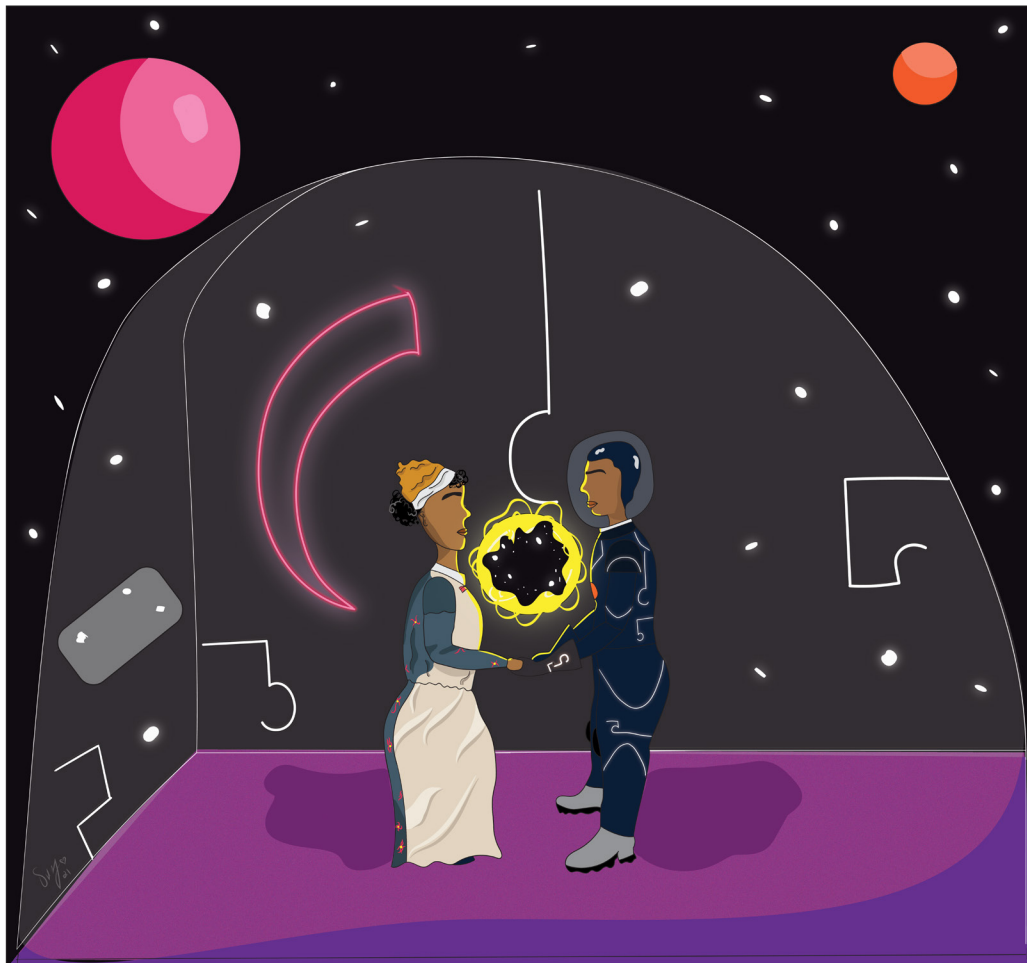
We do this..and you come with me? Okay?

MAE

(beat)

Okay.

Blackout.



Graphic Art by Keria Blunt

“Mama, I thought I’d never see you again! I really did. I’ve been here, just trying to make it through the day. Sometimes, I dream of you.”

Dear Black Womxn,

They laugh to conceal their crying,
They shuffle through their dreams
They stepped 'n fetched a country
And wrote the blues in screams.
I understand their meaning,
It could an did derive
From living on the edge of death
They kept my race alive
By wearing the mask! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! [1]

“Ahh, I see that’s that survival apparatus!” In 1988, Dr. Maya Angelou wrote an adaptation of Paul Lawrence Dunbar’s poem “We Wear the Mask.” A combination of Dunbar’s poem and her poem, “For Old Black Men,” the poem is titled, “The Mask.” In an interview, she stated, “The mask was the two-facedness that Black people had to have in this country to survive. To grin and bear it, and then to bear the unbearable, that this is who they were.” The poem is based off a story that Dr. Angelou witnessed while riding a bus in New York. She noticed a Black woman who was working as a maid, laughing, (excerpted from the documentary “still I rise”) Whenever the bus stopped abruptly, she laughed. When it stopped slowly, she laughed. Later, Dr. Angelou explained, “Black Americans, for centuries, were obliged to laugh when they weren’t tickled and to scratch when they didn’t itch.”

There is something about the way we Black, queer bodies walk through this broken un-healed, un-loved world. We choose to walk in a way in which a veil could never cover. We no longer wear the mask, because it simply does not fit us.

We are simply healers walking this earth and with every stride, with every embedded footprint, healing is released. We no longer wear the mask because it is our bodies that are no longer invisible. We are visible beings asking the world around us, “Do you know who you are, Black child, do you?”

Do you know what it means to be liberated, as a means of living freely in the skin you call home? Do you know the understanding of what it means to be who you are called to be? See, the world has prepared you to be something that you are not. The world calls you strong and independent because our ancestors were forced into this role, but if this is who you are then just be.

“Two things everybody’s got tuh do fuh theyselves. They got tuh go tuh God, and they got tuh find out about livin’ fuh theyselves.” Janie, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston

Ashè
Black Womxn

[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_HLol9InMlc Dr. Maya Angelou explains and recites the poem “The Masks”

Thank You Alice Walker



Graphic Art by Keria Blunt