Black boys die
on blackboard streets—
They become chalk outlines,
and are erased.

emanuel

Yes, Sir, I am calling in sick
because my people are
dying on their knees
with their hands in the air,
praying to a god
who prefers white skin;

and the last time
we went to church,
we found our pastor’s blood
in the communion wine
but unlike God
he did not turn into bread;

and the last time
we dipped our hands in holy water,
an officer shoved us in
and choked us under
until the water turned black;

and the last time
we tried to breathe,
an arm clamped around our neck
and forced us to the ground
so we could hear our lungs explode
in our collapsing chest;

and the last time
we tried to stand up straight,
our spine snapped in two,
and when we tried to run,
our back ate four bullets,
our heart ate one,
and when we asked to be buried
in that same little town,
a pale-skinned terrorist
carried out the will of God;
and maybe, maybe I could
make it to work,
but I’m afraid to leave my house
because corpses hang from every tree:
corpse from a hundred years ago,
corpse from a hundred years from now,
corpse from this morning,
stripped of their names,
swinging in a stale white wind;

and you expect me to act normal,
to smile wide
and assure you that my people
are just exaggerating
about our own bullet wounds,
but even Uncle Tom
died at his master’s feet;

so, Sir, I am incredibly sorry
to inconvenience you,
but my people are dead
and my heart is sick,
and I’ll need a lifetime
just to cut down these trees.
for carefree black girls

Here’s to the carefree black girls who make mistakes. To the girls who drown their depression with one too many shots and throw up at their ex’s feet, the girls who champion natural hair but tug at their 4c roots, wishing it were long, straight,
good.
Here’s to the girls who might like girls and who tell other girls that ‘It gets better!’— Meanwhile they’re healing the bruises of their mothers’ ‘God can change you!’

Here’s to the girls who have stopped going to church but not stopped looking for God: to the girls who lie awake panicking that they’re going to hell.

Here’s to the girls who can’t bring themselves to watch Sandra Bland, who’ve stopped reblogging Black Lives Matter because they’ve gone numb. Here’s to the girls who clench their fists when white people walk by and the girls who secretly wonder if black girls deserve it.

Here’s to the girls whose mothers have given them containers of sticky yellow skin bleach. Here’s to the girls who use it ‘only to clear acne scars’ but who relish in the fact that their new skin glows in the darkness.
Here’s to the girls whose acne scars
form angry red constellations,
the girls who sleep in makeup
and the girls too afraid
to wear short sleeves;
no one told you
that those scars can reach the elbow.

Here’s to the girls who wish
they were boys
but never want to be men,
and the girls who squeeze their legs together
whenever a man walks by.
Here’s to girls who flinch in the mirror.

Here’s to the girls who are so damn tired.
Here’s to the girls who are so damn manic.

Here’s to the girls who are so damn fat
and so damn skinny
on the same day.

Here’s to the girls who can’t go on
but go on,
who preach forgiveness but can’t forgive themselves.

Here’s to the carefree black girls
whose freedom comes at a price.
Here’s to the carefree black girls
who never feel carefree.
she breathes on my chest

I don't do feelings
her skin smells like cocoa butter
and I'm too selfish
shining like black gold from her bright eyes
to stay faithful.
to her round thighs;
I find excuses
any girl can provide sex
at the bottoms of bottles
and I don't believe in making love
and don't realize what I've done
but holding her in my arms feels like
until her voice cracks
God on the seventh day
as she sobs,
admiring his creation:
choking on my name.
It is good.
book of acts

We speak in tongues
between your legs,
sipping communion wine
between desperate gasps,
crying to a god we pray
isn’t watching
us desecrate his altar.
—Oh, God—
You tear my hair,
I suck your skin,
and your holy water rolls down
my chin.
To everyone who loves me:

You do not.
You are infatuated with the version of yourself
that you see in me,
because you do not realize
that I’ve been carefully trained
to be a mirror, mimicking the rise of your
voice, the wave of your hands,
the way your eyes light up and your smile quirks.

And because humans are vain,
you are already searching for yourself
inside of everything you see,
and are delighted to find
that I am the closest thing;
so when you beg me to stay, it is not
as a husband drawn to his wife,
but as Narcissus to a mirror,
and are no more in love with me
than you are with the glass on your wall.
boyhood

I am a broken brown boy
bound together with Ace bandages:
I am the confusion of my lopsided face
in the mirror
as I tug one eye closed: Why are my eyes so
crooked? Why is my jaw so round?
My chest is flat in my favorite picture.
I fold my arms across my stomach
and turn my cheek,
so no one can tell the difference
between me and my

father says I am his first daughter,
but I know I am his second son.
So my only inheritance is his thick lips
and anger outbreaks, and as I write this
my right hand types slower,
three knuckles splintered apart and scabbing
from where I buried them in the wall.

My story does not end in testosterone.
My story does not end in phalloplasty.
My story does not end with my fingers
stitching golden half-moons across my chest.
No:
My story chugs on in sports bras and muscle shirts,
and in Jersey dresses and curly weaves,
because if I could just be pretty enough,
yes, if I just looked like all of the girls
I wanted to sleep with,
instead of like their boyfriends...

The last time I slept with a girl,
she called me Father,
but I know she never felt satisfied. 
My muscles did not look like her father’s muscles. 
I spent my bank account on clothes for her, 
jewelry for her, red wine for her, 
and, for me, a hookah pen 
that filled my mouth with glass and ink. 
As she pulled glass out of my gums, 
she said I didn’t need to write anymore.

They say artists speak the truth, 
but I don’t have any: I can’t write the bible_ 
on masculinity or the manifesto of femininity_ 
or offer any pointed Platonian platitudes _for merging the two; 
and although Plato pondered whether a female body 
could contain a male soul_ 
my tongue can’t fathom that sticky word. 

Soul.

I am the awkward masculinity 
festering at the bottom of a wine glass. 
One day a man will scrape me out, 
tie me into a white dress 
and call me the beautiful mother of his children. 
And when the Ace bandages fall like ribbons 
to my blistered feet, 
I’ll run a hand over my crooked ribs 
and cringe. 
And I’ll say to myself 
when I say to my girlfriends: 
Don’t you look so beautiful, baby girl? 
Don’t you just look so beautiful?
young/black/zie

// for all the young, nameless, homeless
black, queer
victims of hate crimes

When nothing fits
except a baseball bat to a nonconforming backbone,
who will phone the parents
of the motherless
to claim the question-marked shaped body?