

12:27

Ninety-eight years
twelve months
twenty-seven days
into the twentieth century,
I gave Mother Earth an ode
to my existence in the form of cries
as I emerged from an airtight atmosphere.

When birthing me,
my mother couldn't have predicted that
as our plot thickened time would deliver us a
sadness.
Or that someone would rob me from cradle with
intentions,
Like, rock-a-bye baby in the name
of child protective services--
family has changed immensely since then.

It looks nothing like me, oh
but it carries the kind of love you cannot purchase,
the kind of love you must find in yourself,
a love without strings, apologies, or conditions
-merely the expectation that I will open my arms
to its embrace one day.

This is an ode to that love.
For every year it replenishes my roots,
as I outgrow what has me grounded.
That love thrives with me through the cries,
so that I wilt, I rise, I bloom
and celebrate during the
twelfth month on the
twenty-seventh day of every year
in the twenty-first century.

I Am

I am patient and ambitious.
I wonder if this means I will get what I deserve.
I hear life works in mysterious ways but
I see a few people who understand the game, so
I want to know what they know.
I am patient and ambitious.
I pretend like I enjoy the path we're on but
I feel like going where there isn't one and leaving a trail.
I touch the heart through art because
I worry that it's a dying form of expression.
I cry when my feelings and thoughts become entangled, but
I am patient and ambitious.
I understand that I have to pace myself.
I say that I'm incapable of dreaming small because
I dream bigger.
I try to go for the gold instead of settling for the silver.
I hope you don't plan on doubting me because
I am patient and ambitious.

STARLENIE VONDORA

when the girls in my neighborhood
come over to play with me,
they grab the dolls that look the most like them.
i wonder why.
why is it that when we're approached by what's foreign to us
we flock towards what is familiar?
what will we learn from that?
when you are faced with change and
decide not to look in its direction,
what will you learn from that?
if everything you ever know
is exactly the way you want it to be,
what will you learn from that?

- playdate pensamientos

THINGS I NEVER SAID

tell me i can't do it
just so that i can,
with white teeth taunting you.
to smile when you're being tested is
to know that you've already passed.
tell me i won't,
and i will bloom before you.

- wild child

foster brother.
 the first time i attempt to play basketball with you, i barely make it onto the court. you push me away and say that i am too small to play ball, that my arms don't offer me enough support, so i wait awhile. the next time i try, you say the chance of me getting hurt isn't worth the fit that ma would have if she found out. so you point to the bench and say to warm it up. which i don't hesitate to do. sitting on the sidelines and taking in the skyline is good enough for me. it's better than sitting on the couch inside and taking in the television. so i settle into the nearest seat and bask in the evening glow. i focus on the rhythm of nature's creatures humming in sync: the birds, the bees, and the boys barbequing next door. the harmony keeps me distracted for awhile. but just when i grow tired of watching you be a ball hog, something in your spirit shifts. you ask me if my arms have gotten strong enough and usher for me to take a place on the asphalt. before i know it, i am floating in front of the basketball rim, in your arms, with the ball in my hands. you say to take as many shots as i want. so i do this over and over again. when you put me down, i am still amazed at how different the skyline appears when you're closer to the ground. in this moment, i decide that i'm ready to be taller and stronger. i announce that i can't wait to grow old and do all that you're capable of doing. that's when you take the ball from me in exchange for wise words. you say, *be careful not to get so caught up in what will happen next that you can't appreciate what is happening now.*

- hoop lessons

the girls across the street wore pastel pink shoes
 so i asked for pastel pink shoes
 my foster mother asked if i had pastel pink money,
 the girls across the street rode their bikes around the block,
 they played under the stars
 even after the street lights came on,
 they got what they wanted
 when they wanted
 what they had
 and when i wanted the world to work like that
 my foster mother asked if i would listen,
 she said
*when you start wanting everything
 remember that nothing is as it seems
 and sometimes
 something won't be what you need,
 it'll be someone
 because everybody would take somebody over
 anything.*

- the girls across the street

STARLENIE VONDORA

you turn a blind eye
cause if it ain't me it's you
thanks for looking out

- haiku for big sister

THINGS I NEVER SAID

loneliness looks like
the moon without any stars to shine next to it.
loneliness tastes like
food without any seasoning to accompany it.
loneliness sounds like
a single wave rushing towards the shore.
loneliness feels like
the body without the self onboard.

- loneliness

First Grade

In my first grade class, there's a boy who I've had eyes on since kindergarten. I want to believe that one day he will notice me. But eventually I decide to leave it to choice instead of chance. In a letter addressed to him, I shamelessly express how fond I am of his features. The better part of me knows how imperative it is that one can put herself out there. The suffering caused by silencing oneself ends immediately by speaking one's truth. This, I learned from the romantic dramas big sister doesn't think I pay attention to. Before the scene where the man and the woman reunite, before the passionate kissing, the part where sister says to close my eyes, there's a scene in the film where the man and the woman go their separate ways. They stop letting their paths cross because they get scared of what might happen. It takes a few scenes, but eventually one of them realizes that the universe does nothing on accident. One of them learns that the people we gravitate to enter our lives for reasons and some for seasons. They all come bearing gifts. But to receive them, one has to be bold. One has to say some things she's never said. This, I learn from the happily ever afters - which don't begin until the silencing of oneself ends. In the first grade, I decide to be that kind of bold. I pass the letter around the classroom but it never makes it to him. Teacher pulls me outside appalled by the confession she snatched from one of the student's hands. With disapproval in her tone and concern in her eyes, she makes it clear that my behavior is unacceptable. But it isn't the scolding that disturbs me. At first mention of informing my foster mother, I begin to sob uncontrollably. Teacher, I plead, you have to promise she won't find out. Although teacher's eyes say another thing, I believe the words leaving her mouth.

sister.
i have never needed you more than i did when i discovered *the truth*. that thing you and everyone else were told to keep from me. well it erupted from ma's mouth and lingered in the air long enough for me to overhear it. i ran downstairs to be sure i heard what i thought i did. that is when the truth hit me. first in the face which caused my eyes to swell up. then in the heart which immediately took my breath away. sister. i still don't know how i found you. how the words *she's not really our mom* climbed out of my mouth. but when i told you the news, i expected you to say that it doesn't matter-not that *she* doesn't. you began with stories about our birth parents as if ma was to be disregarded. as if my finding out meant that i should forget about her presence in our lives. sister. i don't mean to burst your bubble but biological blood means nothing unless you want it to. our birth parents would be here with us if they wanted to. you say that ma doesn't matter, because you mind the space she has in my heart. you say *she's not really our mom* although she's been mine from the start. sister. people become your family not overnight, and not by sharing the same genes as you. family simply grows with you through the things you go through. as far as i'm concerned, our birth parents couldn't attest to the evolution of me or the evolution of you.

- finding out

STARLENIE VONDORA

on my eighth birthday
they say today is my day
i get to have my cake
long as the ten of us eat it too-
the night is smooth
until it's time for celebration
unbeknownst to me
there's a fight in the kitchen
yet i am attacked
i am the one with a knife piercing my lap
but we don't go to the hospital
as if this wound can be healed with paper and glue
as if this wound would speak volumes to the truth
this wound is perfect proof that i am not safe here
something the ten of us knew

- the knife incident

THINGS I NEVER SAID

the teacher turns toward the class
with a new task at hand.
armed with the biographies
of legends and prodigies.
he says which one do you want to be like
as if i know what it means to idolize.
my face flattens,
i choose the book by a girl
with a similar complexion
but the teacher sees my mind racing
he says who do you want to be when you grow up
to which i reply, *myself*
i want to see my story reflected in a book
rather than read that of someone else

- idol

To be a Poet

Stop trying to be a poet and just listen
push your ego-infused pen aside
stop trying to make everything rhyme
and take your busted beat on
nobody said you had to prove something.

Don't tell me it's hard
surviving on \$10 dollars worth of groceries is hard
hearing your mother scream at the dark every night is hard
watching him throw everything away is hard
-pain is hard.

Don't tell me it's too hard
as if I'm asking you to throw your world away for me
as if I am asking you to display your scars for me.
I only asked you to write a poem
to take me deep inside of your head,
there your thoughts are precious
they are pure and rich like freshly churned ice cream.

Part your mint chapstick covered lips and speak to me
No need to talk about the weather while summer engulfs us
or the loose leaves crunching beneath your feet
-they don't capture my attention the way you do.

Let me inside of your head.
Let your soul show me the you that has become so concealed
The you with so much angst pumping throughout your veins
that your body might as well be under attack
You with such piercing, mesmerizing eyes that
I still see them even when mine are closed.

the hardest thing about writing
used to be picking the pencil up
after you just pinned me down,
after my surroundings shattered,
when all i wanted was to *carry on*-
to fish for the shards in my puncture wounds
and carry on
to patch up any evidence of suffering
and carry on.
that was the *forget what i can't face*,
conceal what i can't change,
eventually it will go away approach.
the tactic that worked until
they asked about the holes in my skin
how it began to look lived in,
until moments like those commenced
conversations i couldn't resent
because i needed to say something.
the hardest thing about writing
used to be gathering myself, my words,
and the courage to reveal the mechanisms of my mind.
the curtain has been called and
now the challenge is walking into the light.

- the challenges of writing