Obsidian in Sand

By

Dimitri Woods
ACT I

Scene 1: Open Mic Night

"Lost In The Crowd" by Fantastic Negrito plays.

The stage is blank save for a small table with two chairs, a mic stand with a Vintage Mic, a board on the table and few others items as necessary. The stage darkens as a spotlight comes up on the mic stand. The music fades as a YOUNG MAN enters into the light. He goes through a ritual of cracking his knuckles, wrists, elbows, his neck, and swinging his arms wide and then closed like swimmers do before they make their starting dives. He is wearing a black hoodie with a fitted baseball cap. He finally looks up and takes in his audience.

YOUNG MAN

(A Poem)
I am a Black stone in the white sand of an empty beach. I stand alone amongst the tiny white grains; marked as a blemish, because I’ve tainted what is pure. I don’t fit in, But I don’t know how I got here. My Brothers and Sisters are few and far between—spread out amongst the millions of little white and see through shards. We’re picked up and collected, then tossed back in the ocean by passersby, who hold no regard—or if any, very little time. Mother Ocean carries us back, gently on her tiding waves, to take our place again amongst our none-too-distant pale-faced kin. My skin has many scratches along its surface; long and fat, thin and short from the everyday struggle to secure my place— from being trod further into the depths of my white sand friends, and overlooked, mishandled, and I daresay abused. But my Sisters call me Beautiful and my Brothers call me durable despite my flaws. They say I am the way Ancestor Nature and her father intended me to be. That these scars and cracks are simply proof of my (MORE) (CONTINUED)
YOUNG MAN (cont’d)
journey and my vitality.
I am proud to be this iridescent me--
for others are far too blind to see the many vivid
colors that shade my identity.

The YOUNG MAN melts out of his performance. He
comes to face the audience off, and address them.

YOUNG MAN
I speak this peace at an open mic night, as I look out
into the sea of shirts that scream "I CAN’T BREATHE"
and suddenly this fear takes hold of me, and I can’t see--
black out all the Brown faces with tears streaming down
in traces
of transparent, metallic iron and salt.
And in the blackness of time, my breath comes to a
halt,
just as my ears cease to hear, and my skin fails to
feel in that physical sense we’re all so used to.
I’m swallowed into this blank space, which no one would
seem able to follow.
Though I’ve lost all sense, somehow, there’s still scent.
I can’t actually smell it, but I can tell that it’s there.
It’s the oddest sensation.
And it’s fear.
It plagues us, and grabs hold of us, keeping us
hostage, ransoming our collective consciousness.
And WE CAN’T BREATHE:
it’s suffocating us,
forcing us, one by one, to submit to our knees,
until only one YOUNG MAN stands, holding on by a
single, feeble strand.
And the YOUNG MAN shoots out his voice like a spell of
light to drive the shadows back into the night,
but the fear remains,
hovering,
stalking its prey,
waiting for his guard to fall.

The stage lights fade during the last few lines.
The YOUNG MAN sits in a chair to catch his breath,
keeping a watchful eye on the shadows around
him...always at attention, ready to act in a
breath if needed.
Scene 2: We Play Go

A YOUNG MAN sits at a table alone. It has two chairs--his and an empty one across from him. He is wearing a black hoodie. There is a board on the table: it’s for a game, obviously--wooden with what looks to be a grid of sorts on it. He pulls out a black bag and empties its contents onto the board and table. There are little black and white stones. He separates them into two piles: black and white. He sits. And waits. After a moment, he gets up from the table and exits. He returns with a small red ceramic cup of coffee. He drinks it black. He sits back down and continues to wait. The man chooses the set of Black stone tiles. He places one on the board and waits. He sips his coffee. Out of a bag or his jacket pocket, he produces a pack of Marlboro cigarettes. He lays the pack on the table, in the space across from him. He sips his coffee again. He speaks.

YOUNG MAN

We play Go on Saturdays. It’s kinda like that thing you see in movies, where these old dudes play chess in the park on weekends. We got the idea by watching this movie from like the 90s where these real gangsta cats were always playing chess in the park on weekends. We thought that shit was like the epitome of hoodness, right there. So we started with chess. But dawg, man... that shit’s boring. Checkers ain’t much better. Then we learned about Go. That shit’s crazy, man. You gotta like, create space for yourself and protect it, but like the other dude’s tryna do the same thing. And like, when he’s tryna create his space, he’s simultaneously taking up your potential space, so you gotta like take space back from him, while he’s doing the same shit to you! It’s crazy man.

He goes back to staring at the board, waiting. He takes another sip of his coffee. He sets the cup down. He looks off to his left. He’s wearing a watch. It’s analog. He examines it. A moment. He takes another sip.

YOUNG MAN

Real relevant shit.

A moment. He takes off his hoodie.
Scene 3: What’s It Gonna Be

En Vogue’s "Don’t Let Go" plays as a YOUNG MAN dances to the chorus. He is in loose fabric pants that allow for great movement, and a muscle shirt. His dance is wild, but oddly beautiful. It doesn’t feel complete. He barely recognizes that anyone is there; his only goal is release. As the chorus fades, he takes his time to melt out of his trance—breathing hard. He goes toward the table and presses pause on his iPod/Phone. He takes a long draw from his water bottle that has been lying in wait in his little black bag. Finally he speaks.

YOUNG MAN

Throwbacks, man. She and I would jam out to old 90s records and just... be. We’d forget about everything else and just breathe each other in, keeping time with the beats of our heart, we’d be so in sync. We never had to say nothin’ when we were alone together, cause all we’d need to do was listen to the language of each other’s dance. Trust. That’s what made it all work. She could throw herself into the air and never worry about comin’ back down, ’cause she knew I’d be there to catch her. But really, I just loved holding her in my arms. Tell the truth? She supported me more than I felt I did her. She could perform the most spectacular lifts without a single flinch, and I’d be floating on relevé in arabesque like there couldn’t be anything less. And she’d do it all en pointe with so much ease in her neck. And life together was a seamless dance—man and woman, but without any stereotypical macho convention of gender; just two people loving each other, creating together, for each other. I lifted her and she me, and we’d just simply... be.

The YOUNG MAN finishes his stretch (maybe it’s a hurdler’s stretch? Sitting? Standing?) He takes another pull from his water bottle. He presses play on his iPhone/iPod and John Legend & The Roots’ "Hard Times" blares through the speakers. He puts on his black hoodie and a fitted baseball cap.

Scene 4: Numb

The YOUNG MAN returns to his spotlight mic stand with the Vintage microphone. Once again, he performs his pre-show ritual: cracking knuckles, his neck, elbows, wrists, stretching his arms and swinging them in and out of hugging himself like swimmers do before they dive in. He lifts his head

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and once more takes in his audience. When he is ready, he speaks.

YOUNG MAN

(Another Poem)
I’m trying not to go numb.
Because numbness is a by-product of mis-perceived consent, which would suggest that your killing of me is or was permitted.
You know, it’s hard because statistics I heard show that in 2015, a year of quote-un-quote progress, every 28 hours, a black man, woman or child is brutally shot and killed--by a cop, vigilante, fanatic, white supremacist, or any idiot with a gun and something to prove.
#BlackLivesMatter,
but with each waking day, our newsfeeds saturate with the fact that this police state don’t quite think that way.
It’s a myth:
something irrelevant--a dream half spent, or perhaps deferred.
Which would you prefer?
I can’t remain silent, because I’m valid, as much as some would try to tell me otherwise, either directly, or with the all-inclusive phrase, "not just yours, but ALL LIVES".
But Mr. Hughes, I know what happens to a dream deferred.
It doesn’t dry up like a raisin in the sun, nor does it fester like a sore and run.
It won’t stink like rotten meat.
And it damn sure ain’t nothing sugary or sweet.
Yeah, it’ll sag like a heavy load.
But most disturbingly: it will implode.

The YOUNG MAN fades into the darkness away from his mic stand, to once again, take a seat at the table.

Scene 5: No Place

The YOUNG MAN sits studying the Go set. He sits back in his chair. He reaches for his red coffee cup, and takes a sip. He sets the cup back down.

YOUNG MAN
It’s easy to get overwhelmed when you’re playing black. I don’t know why I keep thinking that I’ll find a way to win. Guess you can say I’m resilient. Or at least persistent. He’s a lot better than me at this game.
That’s part of the fun, though--tryna figure out a way to get ahead. I place one tile here, and before I know (MORE)

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YOUNG MAN (cont’d)

it four of his appear and then mine is gone. That’s how it usually goes. You get put on defense real quick playin’ black. Like, I’m always tryna band all mine together to just create a huge space, and keep him from surroundin’ mine. But some kinda way I always end up with these small lil’ pockets of like three or four until they’re surrounded by like six white tiles or somethin’ like that. And then all I can do is be happy that at least they ain’t been disappeared, you know?

The YOUNG MAN goes back to studying the Go board. Throughout the last speech, he’s set the board up as he’s described: a pocket of a few black tiles surrounded by a wealth of white tiles.

YOUNG MAN

You never seem to know how it happens, either. You try to go on offense and like attack their space, but you got troubles at home! So it’s a matter of "Do I protect my own, or do I head over there to try and put them on defense?" It never really makes sense. Why you gotta choose? It’d be cool if you could change the rules. But I guess it ain’t so much about changin’ them, but learnin’ how to work around ‘em, huh? Like, I can’t just sit here knowingly playin’ a side that has been proven to be disadvantageous for me and act like that’s jus’ how the game goes, you know? Like, I’m sure people win playin black somewhere. I just ain’t figured it out yet. But I’m workin’ on it. Meanwhile this fool playin white just gon’ keep beatin’ my ass, I guess.

(beat)

Where is he? Damn.

The YOUNG MAN hovers over the Go board again, studying the pieces. He is earnestly trying to figure out some sort of strategy. He stands up to stretch--tight for all of the waiting.

Scene 6: Strange Fruit

A YOUNG MAN takes off the black hoodie he is wearing. He stands there in a black tank and loose sweats. At the table next to him is an iPhone/Pod. He picks it up and scrolls, then taps. The song "Strange Fruit" plays. As it does, he begins to dance. Each move he attempts seems to be stopped by some sort of invisible force. A turn jolts to a stop at 90°. A tilt starts, but the leg stops horizontal to the floor before the YOUNG MAN snaps back into place. He stares at his limbs in confusion. The song fades as he comes to stillness, but continues playing as he speaks (maybe it’s the instrumental?).

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YOUNG MAN
I remember when I got the news. I stood there. Just still. I had been trying to start the choreo for this song. And I just stood there as it played. I kept trying to start, but my body wouldn’t move. Or when I did move, I’d start to cough. Not like you’re getting over a cold kinda cough. I’d be hacking. And it’d grow to this violent choking, like on bile, or black tar, or something nasty like that. We don’t smoke. That shit’ll...

He stops himself before he can go further. He returns to the table and takes his water bottle out of the bag he left there, and takes a long drink.

YOUNG MAN
We didn’t know what exactly the piece would look like; we never do...did. But we knew it had to be to this song. There’s this eerie beauty to it, but it’s also horrifying. You get all these disjointed, distorted images, and our bodies just seem...seemed to know what to do in the moment, building off each other--responding to one another.

(beat.)
Where is she, now? I can’t create if she’s not here. She’s more than just... She’s... She was... If there’s no her, then there’s no us, there’s no art, no dance, no language, no... meaning. I could only really dance for her. It’s not worth it, otherwise.

(beat.)

The YOUNG MAN attempts the dance once more. This time we see something begin, unimpeded by the invisible wall. Maybe the beginning or the majority of a phrase. It has taken much effort. His breathing is heavy.
I think I need a smoke... Take the edge off...

The YOUNG MAN puts his hoodie back on. He sits in the chair at the table. He picks up the pack of Marlboros, and taps it against his palm.

Scene 7: Smoke

A YOUNG MAN sits at a table with two chairs, wearing a red fitted cap. He sits in the chair with the pack of Marlboros in front of him, and the white Go tiles. He looks off to his right. He checks his watch. He places a white tile on the board. He waits. He checks his watch again. He takes up the pack of cigarettes, tapping the pack against his palm as smokers are wont to do. He

(CONTINUED)
knocks loose a fag, begins to pull it out further, then stops. He contemplates his decision for a moment. He looks at the empty chair. He gives a small smile--his eyes don’t.

YOUNG MAN

(A Ghost)

YOUNG MAN

I’d always play white when we played. Black starts, but it don’t have much direction. Or, well, Black might have an idea where they wanna go--what space they wanna make theirs, but see, white gets to roll up here and decide like "Well, I’mma make my space over here," or "Naw, I think I’m gon’ take your shit right there" and BAM! Invasion. See, if you get four of your tiles to surround one of their tiles, like so--

He demonstrates, placing more tiles around the single Black tile.

YOUNG MAN

--Then you get to disappear their tile. And now you’ve successfully claimed the other guy’s space. So I guess you could say the goal ain’t just to make your space and defend it; it’s to have the overwhelming majority at the cost of the other guy. Civility be damned.

He sticks the fag back in his mouth and reclines back in his chair, eyes stayed on the board. He checks his watch again. He looks off to his right.

YOUNG MAN

Looks like he won’t have no problems beatin’ me anymore.

(beat)

He shouldn’t have to keep waitin’.

Scene 8: Sing

"Confrontation" by Damian "Junior Gong" Marley plays. It fades as the YOUNG MAN ends his ritual.

The YOUNG MAN reappears at his mic stand. He performs his pre-show ritual, once more.

YOUNG MAN

(Another Poem)

I just wanna sing,
but I can’t keep from crying,
and you wonder why.
I’ve got Brothas and Sistas
dying by the wayside,

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
YOUNG MAN (cont’d)
forfeiting their lives
in the way of enforcement’s eyes.
Ideas in our heads
after contemplating our dead.
Notions of a more perfect nation:
America, the Land of the Free and Home of the Brave?
Except freedom is a privilege as we’ve found, not a
guaranteed right,
just as much as is the ability to feel safe.
When the body sworn to protect and serve
would rather harass and humiliate,
use excessive force, and demonstrate cowardice.
How hypocritical.
But who takes blame?
Or is it equal parts shame?
My dear Brothas and Sistas,
we need an insurrection to keep us from falling in this
direction,
in which only waits destruction.
So here’s my instruction:
muster up your gumption—expand it wide as the Hudson,
and let us sing!
Sing for our Black Men and Women, our Sisters and
Brothers, Sons and Daughters.
Sing for their safety.
Sing for their Freedom.
Sing and Stand.
Stand for your right to be treated with dignity and
respect.
Stand so those who have stood for years can, not sit,
but rest their weary bones in the strength and support
that your strong legs provide.
Stand knowing that you’re not lying down on your backs
with the realization that that is how you’ll end buried
in the ground.
Stand knowing that you stood for life;
not just yours, but ours.
Sing again for the future.
Sing for progress, and the continuation of a dream.
Sing for hope that ’This Too Shall Pass’ and that
’trouble don’t last always’.
Sing that others can hear you, and our mighty voices
may raise up in harmony, awakening the dead and tired
that they too may stand again and walk.
I implore you.
I beg of you.
I fucking command you.
To hear the words of our collective souls,
un-articulated in simple poetry, policies and ads.
Listen to your hearts and the hearts of the mothers and
fathers who’ve outlived their children.
Let not your fear cripple you, nor the expectation of
(MORE)
YOUNG MAN (cont’d)
pain, resistance, or difficulty paralyze you. 
No road worth traveling, nor cause worth fighting for 
ever was without, or will be. 
I desperately want to sing because I’m happy, free and 
safe. But the storm is raging, and the sound of my voice alone cannot pierce the waves the lightning strikes create in their wake. 
So sing their names 
And don’t forget to say her’s 

The YOUNG MAN starts to rip away at his hoodie. 
Maybe we’re noticing for the first time, but it is covered in gaff or duct tape stripes. With each name he rips off a new stripe. 
Tamir Rice 
John Crawford 
Trayvon Martin 
Mike Brown 
Erik Garner 
Oscar Grant 
Aiyanna Stanley-Jones 
Rekiya Boyd 
Sandra Bland 
Freddie Gray 

So sing their names 
And don’t forget to say her’s 

He is no longer ripping off tape. He stands there reciting the following names. An impossibly slow fade to black, and music fades up (Alicia Keys’ “As I Am (intro)” Maybe something else. Definitely a hard hitting instrumental). 
Walter Scott Emmett Till Medgar EvarsMary TurnerDontre Hamilton Ezell Ford Dante Parker Tanisha Anderson Eric Harris Tarika WilsonLaquan McDonald 

So sing their names 
And don’t forget to say her’s 

Lights.