

“Our Black Synthesis of Time” by Jeffrey Caliedo

I.

Above the earthy soil of our ancestors  
There is a whisper,  
A slight breeze that begins anew.  
It quietly dances across my skin, each breath a different tale.

II.

My grandmother sits alone in a field of nothingness  
The white cotton beneath her wrinkled skin crushes underneath her weight.  
As she slowly rises to her feet,  
Grandma turns to me with veracity veering through her voice.

Her wooden sandals walk over and ask if I know how she got her scars.  
She reminds me of the bruised splotches of red and blue that once painted her body  
She makes me bare witness to the history etched into her skin,  
The forever carved into her memory.

III.

Chronos watches from above with a slight grin.  
From amethyst clouds, this God of time watches  
Our final breaths and first words dance together.  
He notices that the home is weathered but the love is not.

IV.

When my mother was younger there was a giant magnolia tree  
That stretched towards the heavens.  
On very quiet days, the branches would  
Sway gently and the tree would sing.

It is said that my great grandmother was the first to plant this tree.  
Years ago, a single seed was laid with no idea of the family heirloom that it would become.  
My mother used to hurriedly climb to the top of the tree,  
And proudly watch the world below her shrink into yesterday.

Until one day my grandmother came running out,  
Yelling and insisting that my mother get down from the tree.  
Such a shout could come only from someone  
Who knows the necessity of roots; who knows what too much faith in the world will get you.

V.

How privileged are we not to use our bodies as tools.  
In the past, the wear and tear of the human temple meant that we were simply effective.  
I watched as they treated every single bone beneath our skin as if it were a piece of brittle glass.  
How they worked us for hours, paid us for minutes, and disrespected us for nothing.

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VI.

I stare at my mother in a dark car alone.  
I do not say a word, and as worry consumes her  
She explains that she refuses to allow my life to become another moment in history,  
A deadly sacrifice just to spark an already silenced conversation.

VII.

Chronos stopped smiling a long time ago  
Even mischievous gods of time have a limit for destruction.  
How long can amber skin and onyx bodies be tossed aside like sediments?  
How many hidden figures and shaded stories does it take until we can see the sun?

VIII.

The sun is already here.  
When morning creeps past the horizon,  
Nothing is able to stop the light.  
Its warm, infrared rays will come and cradle those that search for it.

Our century of time is searching for it.  
It is sugar in our wounds and sticky tears in the air,  
The smell of blood and the feeling of love becoming inseparable.  
Our century of time is Mississippi summers and winter solstices,  
The generational stories, singing fathers, and sun kissed cheeks  
more memorable than the pain.

IX.

I won't write another poem about suffering.  
This time, the sound of rain hitting concrete is nothing more than rain hitting concrete.  
Today, these droplets are not a metaphor for black bodies hitting the ground,  
Or a tool used to disguise the tears.

Instead, this God sent gift is washing past pain away and enjoying the now.  
In second grade, my cousins and I would dance in the rain without a care in the world.  
We'd jump in puddles formed from potholes and  
Our parents watched as boundless laughter fills our lungs.

X.

This is Our Black Synthesis of Time:  
Boundless laughter and climbing to the top of trees.  
It is okay to acknowledge the pouring rain and frightening heights  
as long as we share these moments of history, together.