

I. HAIKU

women's studies? but
what good is that degree? give
me time and you'll see

II. SPOKEN WORD

In my group of friends I was always the “the smart one”.
I'm completely at peace with that now, though this wasn't always the case.
I hated my long arms, short hair, glasses, and I could have sworn I was the darkest of my race.
Then there was the eczema, so my skin was always itchy.
And my underdeveloped body was just another reason for the pretty people to tease me.
The gap between my teeth was too big and I never got braces.
This may make no sense to you, but all of my insecurities are the foundation of my educational identity.

Allow me to make sense of the situation.
While at the same time defining my purpose in higher education.

My long arms came in handy whenever I needed to do some soul searching. Long awkward limbs became a means of breaking the surface while reaching for my purpose.
My short hair grew long.
I cut it.
It grew more.
And I chopped it off again.
Why? Because apparently short hair makes me look more like a feminist, makes me look fierce, and feel like I can change the world.
Maybe a little outrageous, but it's a huge leap from my beginnings as a self-conscious little girl.
No hard feelings, cause now I'm simply self-aware.
And my glasses.
Yeah their purpose was to correct my vision, but they also gave me insight.
To everything wrong in the world of women, but most importantly what I could do to make it right.
My dark skin.
On the runways it became somewhat of a trend.
To me it was a way to stand out during the day and at night, blend in.
The same dark skin that was covered in eczema scars.
Scars I used to hate.
How selfish of me.
Those scars weren't mine, but representations of the women who came before me.
Those scars belonged to Audre, Alice, and Zora.
To Angela, Gwendolyn, Ms. Shange.
To Toni, Maya, and everyone else that paved the way.
I became okay
With my underdeveloped body.
Because with it came a developing mind.

Hips, breasts and thighs, don't compare to the highs
I get when thinking of all I'm going to do with this degree.
I'm going to take it grad school with me.
I'm going to learn as much as I can about women, you see?
And finish the work of the ones before me.
I'm going to take one for the team, and dive headfirst into this social work thing.
Open a shelter for victims of domestic and sexual violence.
Teach them preventative measures, coping mechanisms, offer them counseling services.
Someone has to teach them that as women they don't deserve this.
The gap between my teeth just means there's more room in my mouth
So these words don't get stuck on their way out
When I'm speaking them into existence.
I spoke them.
Did you hear it?
I spoke them.
Did you hear it?
Women.
What my purpose is.

III. ESSAY

I was born in the perfect position to become a statistic. I'm a black female, so that's already two strikes against me. Add to the equation an alcoholic mother who also has a gambling habit. THAT's where all the child support money went. Let's not forget the twenty-something year old cousin who used his free time to molest me. The first few years of my life were marked by instability. Thank goodness for my father, because it was he who saved me.

My father is no scholar, nor is he a business man. But he is the greatest teacher I've ever had. He taught me that looking like everyone else wasn't going to make me happy. It was going to make me average. He introduced me to my mind and nurtured my intelligence and creativity. So much so that he, and everyone else, developed higher and higher expectations of me. For the longest time I was convinced that I wanted to be an OB-GYN. I thought it was the only way for me to manifest my love for the wellbeing of women. CHM 2045 taught me otherwise.

Once I got to college I realized that being a doctor was not my calling. I'm meant to do social work, the work that no one wants to do because they're so caught up on getting a paycheck as opposed to making a difference. It was refreshing to realize this, but I was horrified to tell my family. I felt like I was letting go of their dreams by having some of my own. I felt like I owed it to them to get a white coat. That white coat was not going to belong to only me, but my entire family. As the first person in my family to go to college I felt responsible for reaching outrageous heights in order to compensate for everything my family did not accomplish. But I've come to terms with this. I've become okay with letting down a few family members in exchange for uplifting an entire race of women.

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