



RUBY

VERIDIANO-CHING

MISS UNIVERSE

poems & writings

MISS UNIVERSE

poems and writings

ruby veridiano-ching

cover art by fahamu pecou

*For those seeking:
Here's to faith that our time will come.*



iLL-Literacy Productions | Oakland, CA 94608

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Printed in the United States of America
Print design by Adriel Luis
Cover art by Fahamu Pecou

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Miss Universe is me, you, here, there, everywhere.

Miss Universe is everything.

Welcome to my Universe.

Editor's Note

In her poem, “Dear Miss Universe”, Ruby confesses, “an oracle visited me in a dream last night/told me I must learn to let go.” Already we hear a sister listening to God’s whisper – a higher truth stemming from a higher Her. So we lean in to listen as girlfriend steers us from sisterhood to womanhood, charting a course by her stars ~ celestial & concrete, voice fluctuating from sultry smooth to sassy-Oaktown-soulful- diaries of a girl with “a polka dot suitcase” taking us down America’s back roads with her heart in our pockets, heart on her sleeve, lost, but miraculously leaning towards light.

Small jewels of beauty glint in Ruby’s writing ~ her vernacular pops & clicks when she swaggers thru Atlanta, Chi-town, and the Bay, or when she writes haikus to Jay-Z...laxes into longing with “summer in your eyes” or turns visionary when she invokes Obama as a “sunrise bleeding across a wartorn sky.” She calls 2008 a year of “cruxes and high noon.”

Look up, ladies. A ruby star has begun to bloom.

Peace,
Issilah.

Ishle Yi Park, former poet laureate of Queens, NY, and author of *The Temperature of this Water*

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Poetry:
Like Spit
Like tears
Like Bile
Like Phlegm
Like Skin
Like hands
Like laughter
Like heartbeat
Like movement
Like Life.

“When I travel around the nation giving lectures about ending racism and sexism, audiences...become agitated when I speak about the place of love in any movement of social justice. Indeed all the great movements for social justice in our society have strongly emphasized a love ethic. Yet young listeners remain reluctant to embrace the idea of love as a transformative force. To them, love is for the naïve, the weak...yet, our hope lies in the reality that so many of us continue to believe in love’s power. We believe it is important to know love. We believe it is important to search for love’s truths.”

- *“All About Love”, Bell Hooks*

For All the Wars Inside Me

Truth one.

I'm not always confident
I never know how to begin any of my poems
Wonder if I know how to use these words
Like I'm supposed to
Worry that I'm not able
Uncomfortable under pressure
Have trouble believing I'll live up to expectation
Can't even write anything for myself anymore
I've flung myself to the mercy of an audience
Attack myself as my own worst critic-
I think these days
I want to stop calling myself an artist
Just human
With faults and feelings
Like anyone
And these testaments serve as peace treaties
For all the wars
Inside me

Truth two.

I don't read the news everyday
I wish I were writing more race poems
For the revolution
I don't know all the politics or the war in Iraq
Instead
I find myself fighting a losing battle
With my embarrassingly helpless obsession with love
And yes I think too much
And if I tell you my most fragile secret

It is that
My worst fear is ending up alone
And I want to write for healing
But all I've got are these aching words
That so eagerly want to take shape of a lover's curve
Bend adjectives to form the brims of eyelids
Swell into belly
Catch fire
After friction
Tremble
Like aching muscles
Exhaling against touch
I miss making love
As much as I miss writing real poems
Like I miss being honest
Like I miss being needed
But for the record-
I believe that lovemaking
Has saved more lives than any protest demonstration
And a kiss
Has freed more of us
Than we will ever give it credit for
Love is a movement
I'm on the frontline
And I'll still keep on fighting

Truth three.

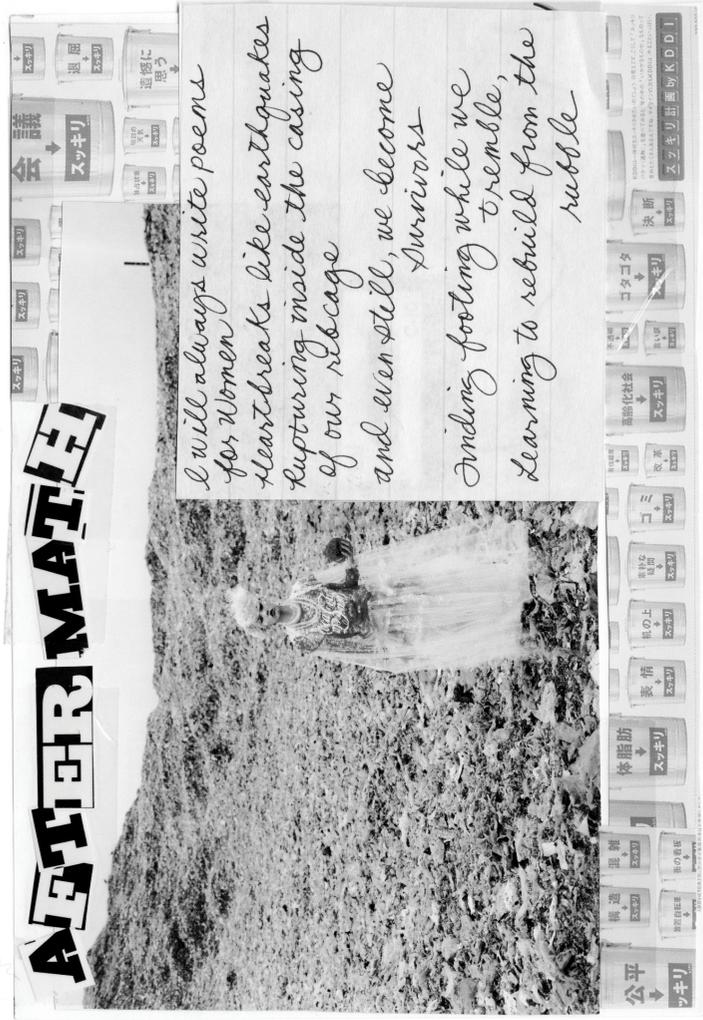
My battles start erupting
Along my sides
In this extra flesh that bulges from my waistline
My belly is where most of my insecurities gather
The place that mocks me the most
It reminds me I am disgusting
And sometimes it's hard to be inside myself

And I remember how annoyed I am at my mother
Not only for her criticisms
But for inheriting her hips
Tomorrow I wish my clothes will make me feel skinny
Too often I forget to be beautiful
Curved out like this

Truth four.

I am bare after exposure
Raw like fresh wound in saltwater
This is the most honest I have been for far too long,
My first real testament in months
I lay it down,
A peace treaty-
For all the wars inside me*

Quoted from Ishle Yi Park's poem, "City" from The Temperature of This Water



Dear Miss Universe

An oracle visited me in a dream last night
Told me I must learn to let go
Don't be scared any more
I will have everything

If we hang too tight
We risk strangling possibility
Tie it down before it grows
Choke before it takes breath

Exhale
Let faith lead you
It's all going to be okay
I promise

We become everything we say we are
So speak it all into existence
Like calm after the storm
It will come

Life is conspiring
In ways which we cannot see
Write a passage on the Universe's lining
Trust she will make way

New age theory, maybe
But I speak my spirit's language
I can't help it
It's the God in me

When I Decided I Didn't Want to Be Pretty

Ever since I was old enough to learn it, I've always wanted these things:
One, to be pretty
And two, for a boy to love me.

The two aren't mutually exclusive.

Unfortunately for me, I've never been able to grow out of insecurity
And if I didn't know any better,
I could almost swear I've got a case of hyper-empathy:
Sometimes, if I'm not careful, I feel too much
And hurt so easy
So when a boy decides he doesn't love me
It must be because
I wasn't pretty enough.

My little sister teases me because she catches me sneaking glimpses
Of my reflection
On things that aren't even mirrors
Like glass doors or store windows sometimes soda bottles
She accuses me of vanity or loving myself too hard
But really
I look into these mirrors with hope

That one day, my validation
Will smile back at me.

Makeup and hair spray and big earrings and nice clothes
Are not sold with confidence
But sometimes, they help a little.
And there I'll go in front of the mirror again

And as much as I say I don't care how I look,
I am careful when I pencil in my eyeliner
Because these outlines help me see the contours
Of this so-called beauty better.

But makeup, a lot like self-confidence,
Is temporary
And when I cry, my mascara runs
And eyeliner gets smeared across my knuckles
And frankly I'm frustrated that I've made myself my own punching bag
Because when a boy doesn't look at me
I jab into my esteem's battered self-worth
And I'm tired of blaming my bruised reflection
For being seemingly unable
To know love.

It's hard to keep composure when I'm wrestling
With my anxiety
Hard to stand upright when I want to sink into myself,
Desperate to dig out the pretty in me
That must be lost in the quarry of my self-esteem's
Crumbled debris.

(And yo, try hauling all this baggage in high heels.)

Honestly, I'm tired
And my feet are sore
And there are days I don't want to wear eyeliner
Or wear nice clothes
And I've decided I no longer want to be pretty
But beautiful*
And necessary*
Because beauty is permanence
And having heart

And I think I'm old enough now to learn to want new things
Like for a man to love me with my face bare
Soul open
Hyper empathy and all
Vulnerable but willing to love like I've never been hurt
I don't want to dig for pretty
I want to find self-love
And inner peace
I want someone to love the kind of beauty
They'll work hard to keep discovering

Because beautiful is timeless
And endless
And offers more than lipstick stains or guesses on how I look
At dawn.

I want love and beauty
With permanence

Today I begin-
And every morning
I will tell myself
I am beautiful
Until
I believe it.

**quoted from Eric Gamalinda, *Zero Gravity*

Young and Restless

It's 4:43 am. I can't go back to sleep. Gen called me over an hour ago; frustrated with the way her heart caves in the wrong direction. Help me, Bing, I'm sinking. I'm half awake, fumbling with blankets and damp sweatpants, trying my best to help her find sense. Truth is, I'm in the dark too.

We've been friends twelve years. Watched each other grow from gawky stances and lopsided hairdos into curves and sex appeal, into college degrees and daily wisdom gathered mostly from estimates. I know we're getting old and she's growing tired of uncertainty. Calls me at 3 am for answers, but the back of my throat still itches, scraping the bottom of somewhere desperate to dig up the words I've misplaced between the crevices of growth and transition. I don't know what to tell her except, "I feel you."

We miss the days that we didn't mind being alone. Being single used to be so liberating. These days, that same freedom is suffocating. Gen, I'm treading my legs just as hard to stay afloat, but girl, sometimes I feel like I'm drowning too. My heart is heavy with longing. Is this what being a woman means? It seems like everything hurts more knowing my emotions are maturing. This grown up shit is complicated as hell, and I've never been one to embrace patience. I spend most of my days longing for something, somebody.

I want to rescue her, but all I can do is console her with honesty, offer her my vulnerability. I want to tell her I'm doing my best to survive life's current, that I live my days reminiscing the past and anticipating the future so much I forget where I've put the present. Maybe it will help her, maybe it won't. But just maybe, she'll know she's not alone, and we'll both hold each other down to keep us both uplifted. I'm her anchor, she, my sanctuary.

Asking

I have cried countless nights

So tired of
Waiting

This kind of lonely
Has grown Fist
Bone
Nail

Scraping inside my flesh
Clenched
Gutted
Hungry

At what point must I arrive to find a love that won't neglect me

There is something broken

Or missing

Inside of me

Splintering the casing of my ribs
A soul nearing the brink of

Collapse

A heart pulsing
The sound of surrender

I have run out of words for prayer

Which ones will God choose to hear?

The Call to Bring Chivalry Back

Ladies, check this!
I have been waiting for chivalry to make a comeback
The same way we have all been waiting
For the Fugees to get back together-

Highly anticipated, right?

I mean, even Flava Flav found his way on television
And these suckas still don't have their gentleman's act together-
Now please don't get me wrong,

This is not a male bashing poem

Rather, this is my call to commence the campaign
to take back chivalry

Because I am tired of being
the hopeless romantic
This year, I vowed to be
the more hopeful romantic

And trying to believe that
There are still some decent men
Who's got more things to sing about than...
Supamannin' hos

Cause YES! There *is* something wrong with that!

And my point here is this:
Take it back to soul music
Cause we got a whole curriculum
Of love's lesson plans

To learn through old school

And I wish we could all graduate from this mis-education

Of game and ownership

Take it back to nurturing the purity of love

Because I want to believe again.

Now fellas, please do understand that

I am aware that love is a two-way street:

But these days, I'm afraid of crossing it

In fear of getting run over

Already had a few collisions

And I'm still nursing the bruises

From those injuries

So in all my bare honesty, I want to find hope in restoration

Cause despite my encounters with disaster

I still look at this love thing

Wide-eyed and awed as a child

Dream love as if it were a fairy tale

Watching my steps while waiting to be swept off my feet

I want to believe that we'll find a way back to true connection

Relearn how to speak beyond text messages

Cause I refuse to believe that our generation

Has reconfigured romance to a touchtone keypad

Let's open channels to give and receive courtesy

Cause I don't want to accept that

We've closed the doors to chivalry

After the invention of the power lock

Come on,

We are better than this

We are more open than this

Speak through innocence of honest emotion

No intention

Not even expectation

Soften up just enough to be a gentleman

Cause for real, even independent women

Need some help

Getting taken care of

Once in a little while.

I'm Not Letting Go Yet

Accuse me of being irrational or unrealistic

I'm a fighter

With a heart that's been through too much to surrender now

So warn me all you want about this battle

I've already beat you to the frontline, heart open

No armor

I'm ready.

I have all these words scrambling inside my mouth. Some of them still stuck in the lining that coats the inside of my throat, these frantic words too nervous and scared to admit they want to confess my growing attachment to you. I think some of them are intimidated, worried they won't ever create a description to accurately represent the span of this feeling, want so much to capture you in a text worthy of sharing. Instead, these words bump into each other, clumsy and awkward, gawky, not knowing whether to shape into poem, attempt song, or flood into my journal. They're trying.

Over lunch the other day, we almost gave up. I sat there, silent, fighting the defeated romantic in me, poking at my pasta until those stubborn tears found somewhere else to go. I couldn't even look at you, a part of me angry that you'd found it easy to tell me we should walk away, kept chewing until my mouth convinced my eyes to stop reacting. You're stirring your chowder, peering into me for some kind of retort or reply, and all I can do is avoid your stare, trying to silence this heart pounding in protest inside my chest as if it were yelling from a picket line. I'm not willing to let go, damn it, and I won't apologize for my non-compliance. You're the first comforting thing I've been willing to collapse my heart into, and I'm willing to make the most of the present moment, wherever it may take us.

I know. It hasn't been that long. And I've been known to be too eager with these feelings, but it's the way your hair coils like black olives in spiral, the summer in your eyes, and the way my skin ripples under your fingertips when you touch me that cripples my ability to walk away from you. I want to clutch your hand to prove I've caught what I've been reaching for. With you, I am alive with feeling, and I refuse to give up possibility.

Damn it, you make me write disgustingly cupcaky journal entries. And when you come over at night, I hardly sleep at all and wake with new knots in my back when you are next to me. Most times when we wake, my neck is hot and damp from the breath you exhale into me while you sleep, but I don't care. I would rather have this than not, and no, I don't know where we're going, but I'm willing to try the distance, so hold my hand, walk with me, I'm not letting go yet.

“Come on baby light my fire
Everything you drop is so tired
Music is supposed to inspire
So how come we ain't getting no higher”
- *Lauryn Hill*



Penguins Suck
Ruby Veridiano-Ching
Permanent marker on printer paper, 2008.

Why I Write Race Poems Example # 19

FUCK PENGUINS.

In the past three years, there have been more blockbuster movies starring penguins Than Asian-Americans.

And apparently penguins speak better English than Asian Americans. Even though Asian Americans have been around longer than *Penguin Americans*.

And to the makers of *Happy Feet*-

I am not fooled by cute penguins who sing gospel, tap dance, and talk in fake Latino accents.

Your cartoons are caricatures and you have found yet another way to pollute our children.

To my fellow Asian Americans: please do not accept any roles that require a penguin suit.

Thank you.

For Virginia

I want to write for me
For everybody
Who asks themselves why they are going through this
Because sometimes I decide
I cannot be strong enough for myself
But just maybe
There is someone who needs me
So I am trying

I do not know when it will be okay
But I know we must be here
For something
If we place our hands to chest
We will feel proof that there is love
And that we are alive
We are still standing.

So this is for Virginia:
For the day
The news bled across my computer screen
Headlines that belonged to a horror movie
Words like 'massacre'
It was like watching a Tarantino film
Re-enacted on a campus in shock

In my head I heard a collision
Gunshots sirens ambulance
Static and panic crackling on police radios
Hard boots and black armor thudding against concrete
That day
I wondered if fear tasted like metal

There was a different headline by the hour
Media was quick
Internet even faster
By 7 PM Wikipedia articles had placed Texas as third
Columbine as second
Virginia as first

The nation held their breath until authorities
Identified the shooter
The next day they released his picture
Pause, my hand to chest

He was Asian

With a face that from a distance
Could look like one of my family members
His name attached to an introduction
Labeled "South Korean"
Not American
But South Korean

The day before I heard he was Chinese
Today South Korean
Anything but American
(even though he was raised here)
I remember September 11th
Would anyone who shared his resemblance
Be labeled as the enemy

Because
His face could resemble
One of my family members from a distance
Apologies from South Korea
He was still American
But the country that raised him will not claim him

My heart breaks for Virginia
For candlelight vigils
For torn flowers
For sharp questions that can't be rounded by answers
For aftermath
My heart breaks not because I am Filipina
Or Asian

But because I am human

This voice is for the silence that cannot talk back
For the emptiness that could
House collapse
For every face that could be mistaken
My heart breaks for Virginia

I do not know when it will be okay
But I know we must be here
For something
If we place our hands to chest
We will feel proof that there is love
And that we are alive
We are still standing.

I want to attempt to summon beauty into existence
For us

I want to salvage these words
Lost in between sobs
Answers
We might have accidentally swallowed

Dress Code

He said he would buy
Himself a suit
A slick, black one
Dark like the occasion he'd wear it to

Hella fools be dyin' out here, son

He said with a forced laugh-
The sound as swollen,
Dark, and full
Like the belly of a gun

Said he'd rather be prepared
Than sorry
Walking the night
With metal buckled into his belt

A warrior braving the city
The way he knew how
Won't take shit from no one
Without a fight

That night I clasped both hands tight
Asking God
Please Lord, don't give him any reason
Or occasion

To dress accordingly

Oh, Obama

Iowa made you a shining glint of hope
A change we want so badly to believe in
2008 is a leap
Year of cruxes and high noon
You are the man of the hour, have you come to prove
Our time has finally come

Because for some of us
You are daybreak
Sunrise bleeding across a war torn sky
You are tomorrow in a country of expired yesterdays
In Iowa your words detonated a spark inside us
You thundered a voice that erupted
An urgency for change

Oh Obama,
Have you become our Moses
Can you part the waters that drowned New Orleans
Resurface a city neglected,
Because for some you are the hope
Lapping at the sides
Of those just paddling to keep afloat

Will your voice bring our soldiers home
Will it silence the bombs in Iraq
You might just be the first face to color in
The white of this country's legacy
Will you prove America is ready to accept
Its first black president
Will you prove we can all outrun this race

Oh, Obama

I know you can't promise freedom
Because although you are a good man
You are just a man
Flawed and imperfect just like the rest of us
But if you are daybreak and 2008 is high noon
We might just be ready

To finally, wake up



Why I Write Race Poems Example #114

FUCK TABLOIDS.

Look, I'm not really into conspiracy theories,
But I've got a little one of my own:
I think that the Bush Administration was primarily responsible
For instigating the break up of *Brad Pitt and Jennifer Aniston*.

I have reason to believe they instructed the CIA to form an alliance
With the Hollywood industry
To scheme the making of the movie, Mr. and Mrs. Smith,
Then touched base with the Pentagon
To arrange for one of history's biggest Hollywood hookups-
They dubbed it

Operation: Brangelina.

In my theory, Bush's brilliant decoy strategy
Plaster every image of pop culture's juiciest romance controversy
On the front page of every magazine cover
Market it as the most URGENT headlining news story
Divert the masses from real newscasts
To keep them from noticing all the bullshit

Replace political awareness with public amnesia

It's brilliant, a choreographed conspiracy to induce voluntary ignorance
95% of my peers
Know more about *Brad and Angelina*, the "Crank That" dance,
And the most recent updates on *Britney Spears' current antics*
(And I won't front, that percentage even includes myself)

But we tend to know much more about all this
Than we do world affairs.

I'm telling you, Bush has something to do with it!
Curate our memory conveniently so we won't remember

Forget the
Tsunami
New Orleans

No, the news will cover Jennifer Aniston's recovery phase instead.

Native Tongue

I like to speak my native tongue
Even when my Tagalog fluency
Misfits like a lisp
Interrupting my English eloquence.
It is my way of pressing my lips against borders

In order to kiss both sides of home.

I suppose it has always been in my nature
To make love to language
So I still speak with sun kissed words
Homeland history
Carved into the corners of my mouth

Makibaka
Kalakasan
Pinagmamahal

But some things fall between the gaps of translation
Misplacing things
Like understanding
Like connection
Like return

My heart is lost in transit
Between Manila and San Francisco airport gates
This is why I always feel the need to keep moving:
I'm never quite settled in on each side of home.

Still trying to find footing amidst a shifting current
Of a Diaspora's journey
I've got an immigrant's identity rooted in a soil of struggle

Nurtured with American privilege

Still I carry tender havens cradling Philippine glory
In the alcove of my veins
So when she bleeds
My memory of her breaks open in blisters
She, an abrasive reality scathing into spirit
I know I must have inherited from her
Disordered,
Confused,
But altogether I know we are resilient

Much like her, I'm a survivor

Our struggle still continues but our existence remains fertile
People Power 1 2 and 3
Oust Marcos
Oust Erap
Oust GMA

Revolution fills and swells through Manila streets
From Pasay to Quezon City
The EDSA Highway
Is a passing channeling the birth of three generations rising in rebellion

The EDSA Highway-
it is an artery deep in the heart
Of the Philippine quest for freedom

A landmark for the insurgency of urgency-
A sea of brown spiked
With barbed wire and rosary beads
I feel her like anxiety pounding against my ribcage

Her uprising sets into me

Like a red sun from a cracked sky
Corruption stays hot and Philippine politics remain a fractured ideal
She is broken
Still, I refer to her as home just as much as she lives in me

I am an offspring of her legacy so I will live it
My native tongue
An heir of her living legend so I will speak it
her imprint stamped across my lips
Mabuhay ang Pilipinas
Long live our spirit.



Over the past two years, I've been using Bing Pun as my screen name. Everyone usually asks, "Why Bing Pun?" Well, to put it quite simply, my nickname since childhood is Bing. And I really like puns. Alright, so 'like' is kind of understatement. I've grown kind of, sort of obsessed with them. Okay, fine. I am on a full-blown pun obsession. I mean, the screen name itself is a pun off of Big Pun.

But geeze, can you blame me? I can't help it, I swear! They are so pun. And punny! (You see, now they've begun). But honestly, I have no control over them sometimes. They've become an automatic reflex, I just can't resist. Denying them will only take the pun out of things.

Alright, alright fine. Hello, my name is Bing Pun and I'm a Pun-aholic.

Being the only girl and non-emcee within my crew iLL-Literacy, I often get *pun-ished* for these puns. My fellow iLL-Literates have attempted interventions, confronted me about my unrelenting corniness, and have even coached me on my delivery. But I do not care. I like my puns, and I'm sticking to them. I've bravely declared, in a very Mary J. Blige kind of way, "This is who I am. You can love it or hate it." I am now happy to say that these days, after declarations such as these, that the iLL boys are much easier to *o-blige*.

Now I do have to tell you, that I never know when these puns are coming. They just sort of do. They're like my X-men mutant powers. They are uncontainable. Slightly unruly, even. They escape without permission, and the reactions? Well, I guess you could say they do vary, per mission.

Exhibit A.

There was the time at the Youth Speaks office when Rafael was at his desk thinking of careers where people must hate their jobs, and my pun struck again:

Rafa: Damn, I would hate to be a telemarketer. Or a meter maid. Those people must go crazy at their jobs.

Ruby: I don't think it's that bad.

Rafa: Or what about toll bridge people? I bet someone's already jumped off that bridge.

Ruby: Yikes. Oh well, I guess you could say their job really took a *toll* on them, eh?

(insert drum roll here)

Exhibit B.

My friends and I were talking about Jay-Z again. It's no secret how much Hova comes into conversation, I mean, we drop references in homage to the man almost as much as he raps about slinging yay. But whatever.

It's a weeknight at Naka's, and Drizzle and I were in her living room waiting for her cable to get fixed. After getting off the phone with the cable man with no sufficient progress, Naka sighs and offers, "Well, in other news, Jay-Z is rumored to have gotten a woman in Trinidad pregnant." To this, I automatically reply: "Ahh. Well, I guess he's gonna be a Trini-DAD."

(insert Naka and Drizzle's laughs and groans here)

Exhibit C.

In case this whole poetry thing doesn't work out, I do have a back-up plan to grasp a hold on fame: a few weeks ago, I was discovered as... a hand model. How's that for an opportunity being *handed* over? I mean, you gotta *hand* it to me, right. I mean, that could offer me some kind of break one day, nawmshayn??? If anything, that little back-up plan just might come in *handy* one day! (Alright, I think I freaked all the hand puns out of this sucker already. Let's move on.)

Exhibit D.

During our theater run at Intersection for the Arts in San Francisco, I showed up to rehearsals in evidently too much teal. Some of my cast

members opted for orange ensembles, to which I commented, "Orange ya'll wearing a bit too much of the same color?" Justin smirks and slyly replies, "Well what about you, Rubes?! You got hella teal on. Whats up with all this teal, huh??" Refusing to be subjected to being 'hella moded', I defiantly reply, "Yo, man, you can't TEAL me nuthin!!!"

This of course was met with a lot of head shaking, laughter, and a shrug that affirms that this is Ruby- we're gonna love her anyway.

You see, the point is, my good people, is to show you how much I really love and appreciate puns. I don't think this book would be complete in your process of getting to know me if it didn't at all mention this very significant portion of my life.

So Hello, my name is Bing Pun. Love it or hate it. (I don't think you can resist doing the former though.) It is very nice to meet you.

Black and Yellow

When I was younger I used to think of pale pink petals, red plastic hearts,
And whatever color this year's
Valentine cards would be when I thought about love.
Nine-year-old innocence defined the simplicity of love as the shade of pink afterglow
Left from a blush

The color of my pen ink when I thought about my new crush
Love was as simple as happily ever afters-
Once upon a time,
Do you remember?
Love. It used to be so damned simple.

Simple and instant like getting knee scrapes during recess
And peeling dried glue from palms
Simple like red, pink, and white
Simple like red and yellow made orange
And red and blue made violet
And yellow and blue made green

But when I was eighteen
I found out that apparently and unfortunately
Black and Yellow-
They don't mix to form love.

Black and yellow:
They were all the wrong colors
To paint this crazy idea of love
One color was too dark
One color was too light
There was no way these two could ever blend together right

It would just paint a distorted picture
Of what it would look like if love went blind
It's a mismatched mess like a painter trying to paint
With both hands tied behind

Now call me idealistic or utopian or even preposterous
But I grew up thinking that love was unconditional.
Now all of a sudden,
The same people that taught me about love
Was teaching me that love was simply
Unequal.

But isn't love supposed to be all-encompassing?
I mean I knew it wasn't perfect,
But isn't love supposed to overcome everything?

I grew up thinking that love was the strongest universal faith
Then I grow older and I discover
That love is a politic corrupted by race

Black and yellow stirred in a pot of love produces a bitter taste
And the world won't hesitate
To spit your idea of love right back in your face
Regurgitate your twisted idea of love and choke on it

Girl, please, who are you fooling?

Filipino girls don't belong with a black man
Go home and fall in love with one of your brown brothers
Girl, you know you aren't even fly enough to kick it with a brotha

Now see, I didn't even know what to say that though, you know?

I was only looking to love
But love comes with centuries of oppressive histories attached
I thought love was a fairy tale, not a condemning book
Stressing the fact

That according to pages in history,
Yellow girls aren't allowed to fall in love
With a man who was black

Your struggles are too different
And you'll never understand
If you can't feel his pain
How could you ever even begin to mend the cuts on his hand?

You were birthed from different motherlands
And from where you began
The sun never shone the same way
So how can you expect to shine the light
When your ancestors never accepted his darkness anyway?

Now see, this love thing
It's not so simple anymore, now is it?

And mom and dad:
Ever since I was younger I've always respected and held in honor
Every word that you've said
But I'll never forget that look on your face when I didn't bring home a
Filipino man
But brought a black man home instead

All these years mama kept my prided light skin away from the sun
And now she's afraid her grandchildren's going to have dark skin

Couldn't even go out and tell my aunts and uncles
I was all grown up, and now I had a boyfriend
And don't even think about going out there and causing heart attacks
By telling your grandparents

So for two years, I was forced to suppress the love I had for him
Forced to suppress one of my life's greatest accomplishments:
I finally won someone's heart over
And no one even congratulated me on it.

It didn't even matter that we made each other happy
Didn't matter that the only real thing I knew then
Was the love he had for me.

And just so you know-
I nurtured him with all the love I could possibly give
I made sure my man was taken care of
And I was prepared to care for him for as long as I lived

But my all was never enough
Cause this world kept insisting that the road
Between yellow and black
Was paved a little too rough

But can we just stop with the classifications for just one minute
And just believe that love is love?

I'm only human
I can't exactly choose who I fall in love with
Sometimes cupid's arrows fall unexpectedly
And the spell is too strong for me to fight it

I'm just a woman looking to give my love
To a man deserving of it
And if that man is a different color than me,
Then what kind of woman would that make me
If I turned my back against him?

I wish love was simple again.
Wish I could believe in the simplicity and honesty of love all over again

The next time I fall in love world,
Will you be willing to accept it?

Worry Hard

Cooks dinner meals without meat when she knows I'm coming home
She didn't raise a pescetarian or an artist
But allows me to do what I will
Sometimes still asks if I'll ever get a full time job

I tell her, Ma, stop worrying
I inherited her face, hips, her mild case of OCD- we are both neurotic
Worry ourselves sick, turn every nothing into something
Known to drive our men (and each other) crazy
What can I say, Filipina women love hard

Tells me to stop worrying about men who don't know how to love yet

"They'll just make you miserable", she mutters so my father will
overhear
After 25 years of marriage she's exasperated at his inability to be
romantic
He doesn't put enough care into silver weddings or roses
She results to washing dishes purposely too loud to drown out his
excuses

Don't worry Ma, he'll come around

We're talking more these days, learned how to hug her when I moved
out
Could never live together we're too much alike
We used to fight in cataclysm,
Like disaster ending with broken dishes and sharp arguments
Littering our feet in silent wreckage

Always told me worrying would give me wrinkles, so stop

Look who's talking, I tell her
She used to accuse me of telling people I didn't look like her
I wonder if she understands that she is the most beautiful woman I
know
I only got so lucky to have inherited her face, hips, the way she loves

And sometimes I worry because we women learn how to love so hard



The Original Miss Universe. My Mom, 1982.

Story of Overcoming

Part One

My mother always carried my uncle's warnings
Like a solid word tucked within the nape of her backbone
This is why she walked so rigidly
Careful, like tightrope
Straight so nothing could puncture
The satchels of reasons she bundled her family's breaths in
Survival. It was the immigrant's reason.

In 1993, American streets were littered with eggshells
And we were instructed
To tread through them carefully, step soft
Because our first year in strange soil
Called for necessary modesty and indifference
And we didn't need to attract threat
From foreign menace we wouldn't how to defend ourselves from.

My uncle instructed my mother to weld her guards
Strong like iron
Unflinching as outspoken interjections
Resilient especially to dark skinned soldiers
Who waged war on streets
Like pirates rioting violent conquest
On suburban sidewalks

For a while I was taught to stay away from them
Blaring propaganda on television screens
Only served to confirm their warnings
But what did we know?
We were new to all these colors
And the Spaniards who cultured us to wash the browns out of our skins

Bent our definition of beauty
To reflect light and deter dark

So I watched my mother take vigilant steps
Through grocery stores
Shielded us with hushes, careful not to spark embers
Of fiery tongues that blazed boisterous opinion or complaint
That was falsely generalized to only come from
Those with dark skin
As if white people didn't sputter their own blistering diction
That singed my yellow skin just the same

My uncle warned, be weary of them
And I ask why
And he replies with a recollection of events
Gathered from last Wednesday's ten o' clock news-
Auto theft on the corner of Mack and Stockton
Suspect description: 6 foot 3, 21-year old Black male.

Part Two

Bad People Know No Color There Are Simply Just Bad People.

I wish they heard me.
But my argument was a fly swatted in midair,
Small, pathetic, and dispensed
Because the next week my cousin came home
With bare feet, cloaked in a bloody mess
Busted lip split by unforgiving welts, a swell of bruises he endured
In defense of his new Jordan kicks
That was kicked right off him
By the two black kids down the street

I won't lie I hated those two kids
I wished their faces could be bashed in
Like the permanent dents they left
On every family member's scarred psyche
But despite their seemingly permanent fear for dark skin
I still believed
Bad people know no color there are simply just bad people.

But those scars stung especially during days
When my father used to work late nights at the corner store 7-11
Imagining he was bait dangling easy
In front of midnight predators
Who chucked dimes at his counter top
Disrespect hitting like silver bullets

Mama used to be afraid
And I used to worry too
Sending papa out with no armor
Just a faded green clerk's vest and quick wit
That I could only hope would be quick enough to escape his lips
Before it crumbled through the cracks
Of his broken English

My father, still clumsy-worded then
Sometimes, he stumbled through language hurdles in the middle of a
joke
Through late nights
Encountering demands exhaled from alcohol-tinged breaths
He learned to associate fear
And intolerance
From the blackness he only saw it come from.

But Pa, please hear me: Bad people know no color,
There are simply just bad people.

Part Three

During my senior year in high school
I fell in love with a man whose skin
Was the exact shade of my parent's fear
So even after a year of breaking open
I still buried his memoirs amidst heaps of piled clothing in my closet
As if he was some kind of dark secret.

My love for him was some a covert operation
Sneaking through back doors
Meeting on distant street corners
But when my mother found her way to my heart's undercover hiding
place
She unearthed a painful chaos
That caused daily riots, word-slinging crossfire
On the home front

Our strange union of black and yellow love coalition
Was a battle
Leaving me tired, breathless, and internally maimed
But time and life lessons allowed my mother and I
To nurse these wounds together
Bandage emotional lesions with acceptance
And shy welcome for a love she tried to understand

Immigrant mother, first generation daughter
Separated by first and third world ideology
I know sometimes she wishes life were as simple
As the lullabies she used to sing me

But mother, your blessing is my inner peace music
And I ring freedom songs
When I see your rigidity melting,

Uncle's warnings softening from the nape of your backbone
Your back may be forgiving enough now
To dance through this poem with me

And I will always remember
Martin Luther King day
You watched a fallen leader catch his people
In the arms of his rightful defiance
And you told my little brother,
Anak, if there was no him, there would be no us.

And I danced then, Mama
Soared in the airs of resolution
That I unmistakably heard from your voice
Dance with me, for there is nothing like this song
Dance with me,
For this day, I know,
We
Have
Overcome.

“Memories don’t live like people do/
Baby don’t forget me I’m a travelin’ man/
Move through places, space, and time/
Gotta lotta things I got to do/
God willing I’m coming back to you”

-Mos Def, “Travelin’ Man”



Calling Plans

sometimes I wanna reach so high
 pick stars like they were fruits in the sky
 and I wonder if this dream's about to go ripe
 but I wonder if this deal's gon' do me right
 cause when I'm on the road
 all I do is think about home
 have to time ~~for~~ my life
 from ~~poor~~ cities I do not own
 but hours are late in the East
 and early ~~late~~ in the West
 my year's stackin' like the minutes
 on that Sprint PCS
 best believe I'm followin'
 my callin'
 but the lines are gettin' crossed
 call waitin' ain't an option
 so my heart be gettin' tossed
 on the other side
 of the line
 just waitin' for an answer
 I'm ~~not~~ looking for my operator
 to connect me there faster
 but even when I keep it mobile
 I wonder if a landline would be better
 maybe if I just stayed still
 life would be more simple
 but this is the plan that I chase
 so I gotta keep on
 can't hang up on the game
 so I pick up the call
 and that's how it goes / trust love won't
 so I go on and on and on... ^{let me go}

Haiku Calls to Jay-Z

1.

Thank you Jay-Z. I
Watch *Fade to Black* hella much.
I live on stage too.

Wish I were a rap
Star. I'll still throw up the Roc.
Will you sign poets?

Don't know rap much but
I study your swagger points.
Can't knock the hustle.

Missy's Rooftop

(34th Street and 10th Avenue, July 2007)

On Manhattan rooftops
Crescent moons cut slivers into nights
I mistake planes for stars
Imagine they fly westward
Towards home-

I miss Oakland.

From this part of the city
I can claim the West Side
Twist my fingers into W's
Will talk like "hella" lived inside my mouth

But since New York is home, for now
Sometimes "mad" will pay a visit
On my lip's
Newfound swag

From up here I know this city is beautiful
Breathe it in
The same way I do Oakland's skyline
Driving home on 580

Today the ride on the E train wasn't so bad

I'm not so lost anymore
Earlier I talked to Jen of love
Like a survivor,

Whole even with scars

On Manhattan rooftops
I wonder if God could hear me better
I make wishes on stars
Of conquering this city

If stars were planes, maybe my heart will fly home

Haikus for Chi-City

(October 2007)

Ok Kanye, I
get it. Your windy city
Blows my breath away

I like when I land
In the Chi to stay longer
Than a layover

In this city of
Mango sisters and poets
Food, liquor, Lupe

Do all your men look
Like Common cause hot damn, son
He snaps for certain

Bay folks get hyphy
Chicago cats stay jukin
Life is one party

You make me dance house,
Maybe that's why I feel home
Thank you, Chi-City

Atlantis, Georgia

(March 2008)

I think I've landed in Atlantis, Georgia
Space age wonderland of the south
A planet they call Dirrttty
Where they breed music immaculate

ATL-iens sing easy like two dope boys in a cadillac

Cause ain't nobody dope as we
We just so fresh so clean
Supernaturally boss
In all its country grammar glory

Land of sweet tea and peach trees
Of melodies coated in honey
Song dribbling down these lips like syrup
These notes sure are tasty

Extraordinary extraterrestrials executing excellence
Bay-TLien just soaking it all in
Excited as fuck
To somehow be

Included

Aftertaste: I Miss Paris.

(December 2005)

I miss the city like a long distance lover.
Left a sliver of my heart's purity
Near the riverbanks of the Seine
So these days, Paris overflows in and out of me
Like a river overcompensating the current for freedom.

I have never felt so at peace as I did then
Desperately attempting to hang on to past memory
Living in pictures
Looking back on still life records
That captured my breakthrough

Today I chase the light I found
Shadows have an odd way of catching up
But I am certain I can outrun ghosts of past lifetime
Protected by amulet through prayer,
My lips emblazoned by the clarity of voice that found God

So every night I kiss the moon
To love me through a brighter tomorrow
Grant me a limitless sky of infinite possibility
Allow me a timeless sense of learning the means
Through a peaceful be-ing

I reach with fingers outstretched
To touch the guiding hand of the Universe,
The same comfort that showed me the way through
A graceful path in the sky

In Paris I felt like I was flying
Now I am stumbling to keep learned lessons

From walking away
God, I pray for strength to solidify
Blossoms I planted into my spiritual Earth

I believe I am strong enough to carry spirit
Bright enough to shine with light
I know that I can center peace again
Please guide me to savor sweet day
Even through the bittersweet aftertaste
Of a dream-filled night



Outside Musee D'Orsay. Paris, 2005. Photo by Nicolas Cary

Home.

November 29, 2007

The Park Blvd. exit lets me know I'm not far away from home. Driving down 580, every single time, I look over to the left of my window, breathe in, and am sure that I must live in the most beautiful place in the world. I am madly in love with Oakland.

In the corner of my room, right outside the closet door, sits my polka dot suitcase, unzipped, still littered with random articles of clothing brought in from the last journey, ready to zip up and pack again for the next one. I imagine my suitcase awake and alert, resting in between tour dates, ready to heave all my life inside it when it's time to go again. Lucky me, I'm allowed an entire December at home, a whole month to lay on my own furniture, cook meals in my own kitchen, sleep and wake in my own bed. My room looks the most lived in than it has been since I left before summer- tidy, but scattered remnants that prove I had been spending life inside it: a stale cup of tea on the edge of the table, a glass of water half empty, pajamas sprawled across my ottoman, crumpled bed sheets. God, it feels good to be home.

What an odd life I live. Pack, go, move. Always in transit, finding temporary home in cities that I adopt. There are mornings I think I hear the subway trains exhale against metal before it leaves. I think of the 7 train rolling past Five Points in Queens. I think of rollerblading on the side of Lake Michigan, admiring Chicago on wheels, watching Stevie from nosebleed seats high up on Philadelphia arenas. I can compare cities now, and know how my heart reacts when it arrives there. Like how I bet I can love Atlanta almost as much as I love Oakland. Or how Philly's subways look just like New York's. Or how brick walls remind me of Brooklyn.

Southwest Airlines, China Town Bus Lines, Subway, MAARTA, the L, Jet Blue, BART, Yellow Cabs. Always go. The past two years have

trained me to forget what its like to stay in one place, how leaving makes running away convenient, how you can distract a lonely heart by shuffling it into transit. How time zones can trick you into thinking you're in a different universe.

I figure that being lonely because of all the leaving is a better excuse than being lonely in my comfort zone. It sounds better, doesn't it? A little more glamorous and adventurous, no?

It's become so easy to run away from myself. Or at least offer myself new distractions.

But my suitcase isn't going anywhere for an entire month, and neither am I. I have an entire month to love being home, to deal with myself, to rationalize myself to not fall in love, to practice discipline, to fill this heart with all the Oakland I can hold.

No, I won't be lonely.

And no matter what happens, I can't let this heart break again. Welcome home.

“Just wait. It’ll come.
Like the rain fallin’ from the heaven, it’ll come.
Just don’t never give up on love.”

-From “Homegirls and Handgrenades”, Sonia Sanchez



Flyer design by Mai-Lei Pecorari. Painting by Fahamu Pecou.

33 Degrees

It is those nights
 When the pulse inside us thuds in sync with the 808
 Limbs flailing to scoop the rhythm
 Caught in the wind behind us

Our bodies in full surrender
 Spell bound to the synthesizer
 Dazed in reverie,
 Aligned to the 33rd Degree

We're at your command, DJ

So move
 Like we're turning the world on its axis
 By our feet

Move
 Like we're shaking
 The fear out of our skin

Move
 Because freedom
 Is in the breaks

Catch it when your tongue
 Licks the air
 The mist from our bodies
 Rising like smoke sparked by the beat

Contact high, so breathe with me
 We go delirious in dance,
 Our skins damp with sweet humidity

Because nights like this, sweat is sexy

So dance like the funk lived inside your hips
Pop like fireworks detonated at your heels
Our teeth and wrists
Glowing in the dark

There's a movement
In this movement
So move
Like you meant it

We're at your command, Dj

Magic flares like fireworks
When West Oakland creates its own sky
A new horizon stretched inside warehouse lofts
The walls exhaling sound

My people, radiant
At the crux of the 33rd degree
Finding the sun inside us
While we dance to the dawn

At Night

Our relationship is like that single sliver of light
Peeking through my window panels
When we attempt to sleep next to each other at night.
Sometimes, it interrupts my darkness
But often, it is too faint
To shed any illumination of sense.

See, I know mostly
You are bad for me.
You handle my friendship the way the wind must handle your hair
Flailing, whipping, unkempt
Often, I lay broken amidst the debris of crushed empathy
That you leave behind.
I know all of this.

But when you lay breaking into dawn with me
I can't help but hold hopes for your rebirth
And I forgive your mistakes
The way new days forgive its yesterdays
Offering you kisses
To seal you into my present
Imagining moonlight trapped between our bed sheets
Because baby, I just want you to glow with me.

But often, you leave me stranded
Before your light catches up to ignite my warmth
Abandoning me in nights running eternal
And still, I voluntarily go blind to the visibilities of your cruelty
Because foolishly
Your friendship meant that much to me.

Or maybe its because I know

That beneath your callous neglect you know how to be gentle
Soft touches of fingertips grazing across forearms
At night, you allow discrete sweetness
To escape from the blockades of your bravado
And I am convinced that you can be kind
Just like this.

But your affection
Is just like water
It fills and drains me just at the same time
Can't cup it in my palms before it drips through my fingers
Ironic, you are some kind of fluid but not in the way I wished you
were.

Sometimes I wonder why I call you my friend
But these types of connections don't come around too often
And somehow I believe that your spirit
Reflects a manifestation of my own
So even though I've accepted that you don't care for me now

Just maybe
Instead of that single sliver of light,
You'll learn to be my sun
In the next lifetime.

Only the Happy Things

Yesterday I went the entire day
Telling myself I was okay
Proud that I was grown enough to agree goodbye
Strong enough to walk away
You aren't ready for me
I tried to convince myself
I was mature enough to accept that

The night before you held me for the last time
I missed you before you let go
My arms in silent protest
Fighting to keep you
Maturity doesn't make goodbyes any easier
And I won't ever be too old for this not to hurt

Yesterday I felt the memory of your lips
On me all day
Could still taste your kiss inside my mouth
This morning I remembered I wouldn't wake
Next to you again
And my crying won't bring you back to me

But I write too many distraught love poems
So I promised to only remember the happy things
Like the time I lived in your sweater for a week
The night you slept with your scarf on because it smelled like me
Brushing our teeth together in my bathroom sink
Delayed goodbyes on the front porch
The first time I realized I was comfortable
Calling you 'baby' out loud

You made me laugh

Had me writing haikus in tribute to your eyes
Loved mornings next to you
My temples pressed onto your collarbone
Would sleep facing the window
So the sun wouldn't wake you
See, I cared like that

Sometimes my hands will still clench
Remembering how it feels
When you'd fill the space between my fingers
But these fists will soon ease into open
I'll finally learn to let go
I think I'm grown enough now

(Spi)Rituals.

February 2007

Today during writing class, we practiced (spi)rituals. Genny Lim taught us to garner energy from our chi, pull energy from the heavens and take it in through our breath. Meditation. Inhale, exhale. For the past month and a half, something inside me has somehow been misaligned, so attempting to think straight has me stumbling with memory, with thought, with words, and even prayer. I'm losing balance.

Tina B. says it's okay to be broken. Maybe she's right. In the process of trying to collect myself, I recognize these pieces are meant to be spread out. Apart, yes, but all the while collective. Flight upwards. Thrust into the wind, heaven bound. These pieces may be unwhole, but they are mine. There are many of me, but perhaps it only means there is much of me to spread seed. At 23, there is much more growing to do. These pieces are spread throughout because I am meant to span immensely and reach vast.

However broken, I want to know I will mold peace with these pieces. Anxiety shoves and pushes in the space where I imagine my heart and lung meet, compressing breath and putting strain on my hard earned ability to love myself. I hope someday I will reach a time when loving and breathing will become one and the same. There are days I forget to do both. But I know I am growing, I know I am reaching, I know I am closer. Love comes when you are good to self. Output positive to emit goodness back, the Universe reflects our actions and echoes our calling.

As Genny says, I am a creative process. In the quest to create, I am trying on all these pieces, every trial, every challenge, every triumph, every discovery, every journey, every breath, to find *one*. Our process will tilt our stability, but our growth will lead us to leverage balance. Thrust trust into the Universe, she will guide it to manifest. Everyday, I try to remember. Thrust trust, manifest. Breathe. Exhale. Pull pure breath into the chi, chakras align, choose balance.

Asthmatic

Somewhere, in a cavity situated approximately between heart and lung
Is a pocket
Where air must forget to pass through
This happens sometimes

Especially during moments when life unfolds too fast
That it crumples in some places
Wedging itself
Probably in the spaces between days

And it is here
Where breath gets caught
In a cavity approximately between heart and lung,

Where loving and breathing
Are one and the same

But somehow neither has anywhere to go.

Life can be so inconvenient sometimes
Moves in a pace
That won't wait for you to catch up
Force growth into your schedule

Initiate battles without
permission
Shove
emotion without proper
introduction

And you're left
Handicapped to thoughts that won't shut up,

Anxiety that won't sleep right,
And a heart that keeps punking your head into submission

Life happens,
And it won't wait.

There are mornings like this one when
I meditate with one eye half open
Attempt to straddle peace and reality,
Make both meet simultaneously

Massage faith into my palms when I press
them together
Cleansing takes more than smoke whispering out of
sage leaves

But light one for me,
It helps me breathe easier
Love freer

Loving and breathing-

Soon,
both
will
be
one
and
the
same.

For the Fallen

This is for those who fear they have fallen.
Who, like me, hike on unsteady knees
Reach out to touch with bruised palms
Because holding prayers sometimes feel too heavy
On hands that already carry burden-

Baby,
I see you.

I know sometimes it feels so clumsy to be so earthbound.

At times my back aches on hollows where I'm sure
There were meant to be wings
So I find it habitual to always want to fly.

Now I can't teach you to spout wings
But I'll guard your Earth to hold you down
So you can stay uplifted
Because all we've got is each other

And all we got is a slab of hope that we've got to meld into iron
For anchor
For resilience
For hope coated thick
On bare skin as if it were armor

Apply faith generously son,
It is enough to protect you
Rub it into your heels
It'll help you walk steadier

Gangsta lean

If you need to
Hope you're not too gangsta to hold my hand
When your arms feel feeble

See, I keep a soft spot for you, sis

Because this world is hard
And sometimes falling in love
Feels like landing headfirst on concrete
And those bruises leave landmarks for longing

Bleeds through dreams with tainted blotches
Until it's smudged hazy

See, I know it all too well
How our hearts gets so hungry it starts to eat us up inside
We're just trying to hustle
Past the hunger
Be plump with promise,
Thick with trust
Aspire for it all to be okay

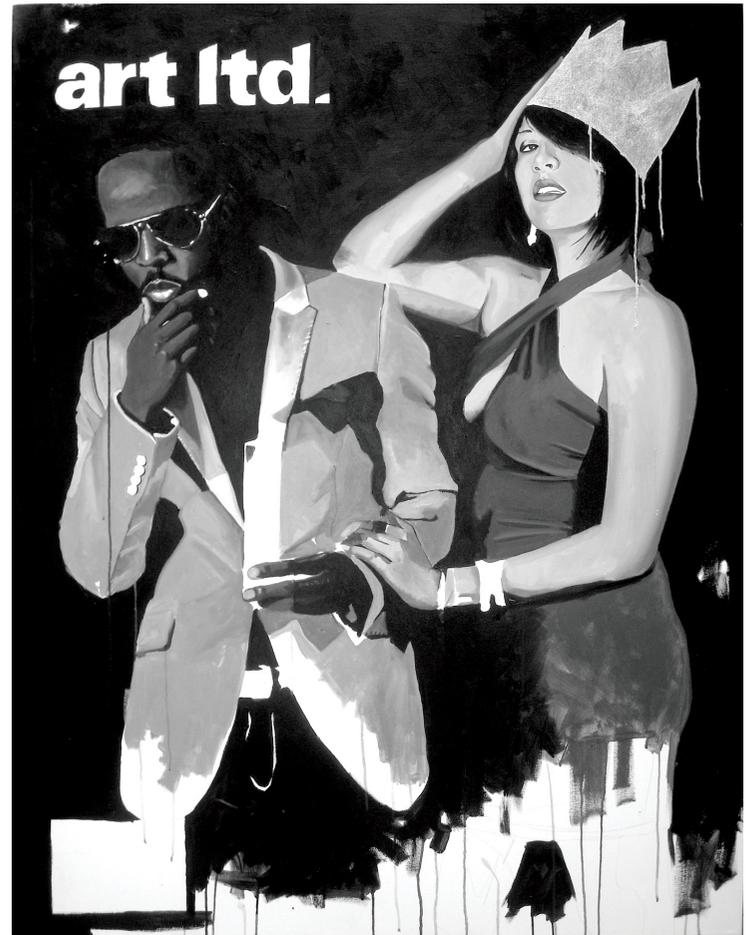
Cause too many of us know how to hurt
Without knowing how to heal right

And really, a lot of this poem is for me.

Who can't seem to learn how to be happy
But be willing to offer my deficiency to fill those who only feel half full

Cause this is all that I got
And my arms is all I got to offer
I know It's cliché as hell
But I can be here to catch you

So if you're falling,
Don't trip
Love,
I swear,
I got you.



create like a god, command like a king, work like a slave.
Fahamu Pecou
Acrylic on canvas, 2008.

Acknowledgements

Prayers and praise to God and the Universe for bringing me here, for allowing me to access their truths, for their presence in me that continues to guide my journey. Thank you thank you.

Thank you Mama and Papa for your love, sacrifice, & hard work you've done to bring us here. To my lil' sis Alyssa for being someone I can look up to, my big little brother Bowaks who I literally have to look up to- I love you. To both the Veridiano and Ching families- I'm representing both names with pride and love immense, doing what I can to do your legacy justice. I love you Ammah & Conga!

To iLL-Literacy: for giving my passions life, for cross country road trips, Miami penthouses, late night walks following the Eiffel, and countless shots of Henn- oh yeah, and poetry too.

To the Hi-Lifes: it is an honor to make music with you!

Special thanks to Adriel, for knowing the exact playlists to play, and for lending your design genius to make this book happen. Couldn't have done it without you. All my love to Paloma Belara, my sis, counselor, publicist- your unyielding support means the world (or the universe) to me. Thank you Phatty, for letting me live in your apt, cooking veggie meat, and being my big bro.

Love and bless to Ishle, for your part in my artistic development and this book process- you are an inspiration! Thank you for lending your ears, eyes, & heart to this project.

Thank you Fahamu Pecou, for letting me be a part of your art and unfuckwidable flyness- u are truly the shit!

Thank you to every single member of my Youthspeaks family, for

giving me a space to nurture and fall in love with this art over and over again. You inspire me.

Love to my sis Glenda for being my fashion angel/stylist, to my sis Mai-Lei for lessons on boss and making M'kai, my BFF Geneboobs for 14 years of sisterhood, May Salem for teaching me the value of independence, Michelle & Dunes for being pretty cousins and listening to me complain, Tezeta for being my road dawg, Jen Armas for teaching me how to align with Miss Universe, Jocie, Chinaka and Katri for writing books that feed me, Erica Eng for my dope ass EPK, Pam P. for studying to be my lawyer, Jonah for Gchat therapy, Abram Jackson for prom dates, Khalil for being such a star.

To my Bay Area family: there is nowhere, I repeat, *nowhere* else more beautiful than here, and it is because of you. To my fam in all corners of the globe, thank you for laughing, loving, dancing, singing with me. I love each one of you- if I didn't mention your name, trust that you are honored in my heart.

Special thanks to WGI! in Brooklyn, Cornerstone Promotions, ODC Dance Theatre, 826 Valencia, Intersection for the Arts, Kularts, Balboa High, and Maganda Magazine. Shout out to the Attik Crew, Blue Scholars, Mango Tribe, the Spoken Word Summit fam, Kiwi, Dandiggity, Kelly Tsai, Jeff Chang, Proletariat Bronze, bruddah Colin, 8th Wonder, Hella University, Kiser NY.

To Gangsta Pinay sistas and women across the world- You are so beautiful. I am honored to be a part of your reflection.

To all the artists, dreamers, seekers, lovers, romantics, and you who picked up this book: know that *you* are magic. You can speak it all into existence- have faith in the light inside you.

Shine with me now.

About Ruby Veridiano-Ching



Photo courtesy of G Gallerie

Ruby Veridiano-Ching is a poet, arts educator, VJ/television host, performing artist, and sole female member of acclaimed spoken word collective iLL-Literacy.

Ruby has performed and facilitated writing workshops in venues throughout the United States and Europe, and in 2007, was featured in the nationally-televised Re: Vision campaign, as well as on Common and MTV's "Minute Campaign" February 2008.

She has worked with esteemed arts organizations such as Youthspeaks Bay Area, 826 Valencia, ODC Dance Theatre, and We Got Issues! of Brooklyn, NYC. Her performance work has been showcased in numerous festivals, including Hip-Hop Theater Festival Bay Area, the National Asian American Theatre Festival of NYC, and the Grounded? Festival by Intersection for the Arts in SF.

Ruby holds the experience as a VJ/television host for music channel MYX, as well as an assistant at Jive Records in NYC. She graduated with a B.A. in Sociology of World Development and Communications from UC Davis, and also completed studies at the Università per Stranieri in Siena, Italy.

Born in Manila, raised in Sacramento, and currently residing in Oakland, California, she continues live love through her art and community.