

Like flowers in the sky

after Danez Smith, "alternate names for black boys"

I resisted the pull in days following
to sit at this keyboard or bring a pen to poem

with the grief of racism's dealing
of premature death again: could another phrase carry

antidote, another turn of stanza offer song
in the siren whose list grows every 28 hours in test

of our senses? I witness Laini remembering
remembering her father's poem about self defense after

the killing of Sean Bell. my gut knows
we still ain't seen no poem stop a .38

whether in Oakland LA Pasadena NYC the Bronx Brooklyn
Portland Denver Cleveland Dearborn Heights New Orleans Atlanta

Pensacola Sanford or Ferguson. still ain't seen no metaphor stop the terror
of tanks shelling Gaza or patrolling protestors here with tear gas. in the continuing

*

senselessness could a shield of poems
blossom to protect Danez's phoenixes who forget

to un-ash, respect the living brilliance
of each firework at dawn, relieve

a mother's need for clutched breath
prolong her expectancy

for joy? and then I read Dream's words
and saw the picture of St. Louis poet Elizabeth Vega

staying with the screams of a black boy
his clenched fists veins visibly coursing with anger from his neck to arms

I AM A MAN *but he was Tod Clifton and cops are everywhere*
This is 2014 and Andre 3000 stay asking Janelle stay repeating

across cultures, darker people suffer most. why?

This is a cold war...you better know what you fighting for

*

Looking out the window, I notice more butterflies visiting the purple-flowered buddleia bush than I did last year. I imagine each wingflap a return to Eesha's small and bold, tender and free, a gesture in the backyard ceasefire towards black boys and kids of all genders being able to become black women and men and sissies and fathers and uncles and aunties and mamas, black femme brujas and bulldaggers, moonpit-freed black unicorns! alive and uninhibited from learning and living into their unpredictable, uncontrollable black brilliance. In my dreamscape Canfield Green is a forest punctuated by fields of flowers, a bed of Missouri primrose and red buckeye here, bed of wild ginger and sqwaw-weed there. Blood on the asphalt, tanks of contempt a persisting memory under the beating of this August sun. The church's gospel music stay singing with Mike making his way to grandma's and every first son of soil learns to know what it is to make afterschool dance routines undisturbed, witnessed and held in the spaciousness of a caregivers' unmediated joy.

*

And I remember the water always remembers.
There are no words, and here

what words done found and left me:
They say in the Maldives

plankton visible to the human
eye react with oxygen in the sea

to carry a remarkable glow of blue
light brighter than the Milky Way.

They say we can usually only see this
from afar, like when ships stir the sea bed

but that when waves break and jostle
this spectacular bioluminescence in the dark of night

shows itself, flashing with the dance of billions
of organismic cells reacting chemically

underwater. I imagine the molecules of Mike's brilliant,
shadow-hued coral finding shelter and medicine

here along these shores, his flashes of light
remembered and celebrated every time

waves break, and in sea's breaths
between. I imagine the oceans

having recovered from our spills
and plastics, such that they reflect

the starlight of each black boy
whose life has been stolen from us

unweighted by oil, such that
each missing bone on ocean's floor

finds release, no longer prayers who learned to bite & sprint,
now coal meeting spark & wind. If I should be so lucky to be

with these lapping shores, look up and see each freshly-born star
and molecule of warm interstellar dust

what once passed for kindling
whom all of us now can see: red-green

dust clouds blooming like flowers in the sky

*-Vanessa Huang
August 17 2014*