

# ALYNG CHLOE

## A Journal of Artful Candor

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nijla mu'min

We  
big face brown girls.

I never fought  
but watched as extensions were yanked from scalp  
faces greased for knuckles to slide  
by the library entrance where it all go down

we were friends in elementary  
chasing sugar tongues, dyed with red pop  
and laughter was easy, in between-  
now, our bodies, bend for aim and target

you stole 20 dollars from me  
and I backed out the fight, fearing something  
be broken  
me  
a nose,  
a heart-  
shaped puncture we both held

we just big face brown girls in the mirror  
spraying sheen and rubbing grease into our curls  
and kinks that then get tied back at night

We scared, we can't show it  
we cry, no one knows but our pillows wet  
and we in places we don't want to be  
touched behind desks by boy hands,  
didn't want it, but didn't know how to say it

*no*

we so much softness,  
we fought, fall into the grass

we see each other the next day  
hope for some sun on the wound  
and be  
big face brown girls

~nijla mu'min

I want to have a real conversation with a real person. I want to stay up listening to Marvin Gaye under a round moon, laughing in between echoes of silence. I want to run into the darkness of joy. I want to run into mysteries that keep us wound up in each other's eyes. I want to live. I want to dance under yellow stars I cannot see. I want to forget time because I am waiting for the words to come. The words, the light, the flowers in between my fingers. The fog in my hair. I want to have a real thing. A real, deep, fun thing. A watery sea-deep type of thing that I can't count and can't subtract or add anything to. A thing. A thing that overflows the tub and leaves a flood of presence. A thing without screens, or pictures. Just soft rumors on my pillow, branches to swing into the next song, humming life that brings chills and magenta and clementine and raspberry into the smell of our laughter. I want to have a real conversation.

-Nijla Mu'min

I asked you. *Will you go to prom with me?*

my mom found my dress in San Francisco. Last dream on the rack. We pulled it off so fast. Flew down the street with an iridescent lavender miracle in the back seat.

I was smiling in a north oakland house. Cameras still had film. Brown fingers cranked them up and I was a black princess wondering if I was the only one.

You were asking how I wanted to pose. How I wanted to be held. I just wanted to be yours. Everyone was so gentle, remembering how love once found them. The air was gentle.

We rode in the back seat with cologne and perfume on our necks. A potion. Stevie was at the wheel. I don't remember the fog.

I was holding in my stomach so it wouldn't poke out. I was loving the way we looked in the glass.

Remember Nelly playing, and black girl's eyes rolling. Remember the taste of apple cider and plastic flutes on our fingers. Denny's afterward and the distance made by the table between us. I didn't know how to touch.

That night i had the stars under my fingers. I saw the whole bay in your eyes. I see your eyes now and I don't feel anything.

You are bigger than the memory and I am living in a world, apart.

What if we could all go out into the world like it's prom. Like it's new and fresh and real. Like time stops just for a night to be beautiful. To be held.

-Nijla Mu'min

The women of apartment 1B

clean the house when men come over  
they push boxes into corners  
and sweep their sad underneath the bed

The women of 1B

call men, "boys" and blame  
it all on their signs  
if he cheated, it's because he's a Gemini  
and they can't commit  
Scorpios are vengeful  
will get you back in the end

The women of 1b

blow dry their Afros into mushrooms of worry  
seduce their own reflections in full-length mirrors  
blow cannabis into cold air condition  
and slather their bodies in thick Shea butter

they smoke newports  
but prefer hand-rolled cigarettes  
they eat organic mayonnaise  
and kiss the man-boys goodbye  
in the morning