

AUNT CHLOE

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When Bodies of Water Exhale

-Toni Morrison

“All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was”

buried bones unbury themselves
sublimate calcium & phosphorous
oceans shift
currents whisper betrayal
when floods drown bodies
under caked mud & dead, dried things
afterbirth a sorrow
a basin of grief
when flood conflates accident & execution
migration & exile
we call this middle passage
when flood overflows the edge of desire
the body leaks wonder
damp brow damp thighs
receded waters
a love beneath
when flood seeds soil
gardens sag heavy with harvest.
Heavy with harvest gardens sag
when flood seeds soil
a love beneath
receded waters
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Note: Previously published in *The Langston Hughes Review*, Vol. 25, No. 2, SPECIAL ISSUE: Art and Politics: Reexamining Langston Hughes and Amiri Baraka (2019)

The Substantia Nigra, or, What Ali Might Have Said (excerpt)

"float like a butterfly, sting like a bee"

Emmett gone nearly ten years now & you are reminded how the submerged body will float despite weighting & how those folk were lynched because Jack proved marked men can startle like prismatic color through the static of radio & how those asiatic people in Vietnam might find a vision of Brother Malcolm sparking liberation to be universal truth that men who dare cultivate butterfly philosophies & spread their butterfly wings bear the distinctive hum of the bruised & burning sting nestled deep in tender meat & how a bomb will tear the delicate bodies of four little black girls like a bomb tears the delicate bodies of four little yellow girls too for surely when history pendulates a steady rhythm even the greatest of great nations will sink & plunge in the shadow of the diving bee

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The Day Prince Died

"How could you leave me baby, leave me in the dark?"

--Prince

the day Prince died she devolved n2 muteness / returned 2 stubborn silence
/ sucked her thumb / curled n2 herself / lashed out @ ne1 bold enuff 2 ask
how r u? / wander-wondered / danced profusely / returned 2 a time when her
name was Desire—pronounced Desireé / when everything was erotic / when
everything was beautiful, strange & they were faggots / when she fainted b4
the 4th encore & revived by the finale / when he was ageless & she was agile
/ they risked it all / leapt w/ abandon / landed in deep plié / full 2nd / graceful
as Alvin Ailey dancers n revolution—revelation / she always landed on her
feet / let the music b her guide / 2 getting off proper / she fucked girls / she
fucked guys / liked fucking herself most / didn't believe in nasty bodies nor
sin / knew her body & what 2 do / knew the difference btween feel right &
feel wrong / found a creamy center / said i would die 4 u / said nothing
compares 2 u / said i wanna be ur lover baby / jacked them off b4 blotting
her black lipstick / she married a man / she married a woman / she was always
alone / said i don't understand y u have 2 hurt me baby / hurt me in the dark