

Evelyn N. Alfred

Pecola's Hunger

*after The Bluest Eye*

Staring at her reflection  
at the penny candy store

Pecola imagined saffron hair  
blowing in the wind  
eyes clear and blue  
like the sky.

*My skin is black, my arms are long  
my hair is wooly, my back is strong*

Behind the window

a visage of beautiful Blackness  
echoed her young face,  
her smile organic  
her umber colored skin  
softer than a summer  
chocolate bar and for a moment,  
Pecola's hunger for blue melted.

*My skin is black, my arms are long  
my hair is wooly, my back is strong*

Until the sound of patent-leather  
shoes caught her attention.

A high-yellow dream

arrived with the winter,

egg white & fluffy like meringue –  
beautiful Blackness was forgotten.

*(Not) strong enough to take the pain  
it's been inflicted again and again*

## Sorry Jimmy

The innocents destroyed me  
with beliefs and well-meaning  
injected in my skin daily  
needles smaller than a wasp's stinger  
a thousand benign pricks before the  
inflammation next time

I could hear the condition of their minds howl  
behind composite unrestrained smiles  
their eyes pared the body that was my body

Too close to their honeyed death ballad  
I crash into rocks that weren't rocks  
but mirror shards that stank of history  
a broken body trembles, becomes *The Thing*.

**ode to period panties**

*after Francisco X. Alarcón*

period panties  
smashed  
in the corner  
of the underwear drawer

spoiled  
they sulk  
and side-eye  
the bikinis, the boyshorts

remembering  
the time before  
they were regulated  
to one week

pretty & seen  
by more than  
loose pants,  
dirty hampers

instead they wait  
fearful  
of the next  
bloody crisis

**Dear Dad**

*after Jean Valentine and her friend Reginald*

Thank you. I appreciate your visits  
each time, still in the last body.

Are you worried I won't recognize  
you stageless in your fifties?

That last letter I sent eighteen  
years ago shut you down -

light pencil lead strikes  
didn't soften my ire -

can't send this one, but will you  
receive it where you are

where are you besides resting on  
top of my ashy bookshelf?

Am I at risk if I don't believe in after,  
inheriting your cells.

I, too, am not going to make it  
forever. Shimmer until dust.