

Her Voice

For Dr. Nina Simone

bowl of crushed
blueberries, knife
edge, cracked
calabash, heavy
truth, ancient
wine and renegade
bones, rise up
white wings of
doves, tapestry
of nerve, daughter
of well-aimed
lightning

blinded compromise,
nail-like tongue,
bitter root, burnt honey,
tornado blackness,
bent-backed women
walked up her throat,
flew straight-arrow
from her mouth,
Mississippi, Gullah
baptism, the Nile
Congo, belly of
slave ships, Harlem,
potent cocktail
of her
pitch
 black
 notes,

divined riots on piano
keys, exiled, and passion
and turbulent ritual.

she was that sound
in the racing heart
of thunder.

Session Four

i.

see the invisible women?

pecan colored
hunched over
conveyer belts

anonymous
cinnamon hands
passing items
over red laser lights

see the invisible women
after hours
behind meat scraps
or whirring sewing machines

who hears their
who hears their screams
break open the night?

ii.

I've known women
stolen by jagged
sheets of pain
pelvises smashed
skulls shattered

where are their names?
the news?
the outrage?

who speaks your name
if you are brown
and poor and woman,
if your body is felled
like a storm
ripped ginkgo tree?

iii.

but what if we mattered?

she whispered once
while we sat for hours
in a clinic
uninvestigated unsolved undiscussed unimportant

she was 24

24 years of dreaming
what if etched in her easy smile
generous eyes like onyx almonds

she was 24
she vanished like smoke
her name was never broadcast

sometimes the hands that claimed her breath
sneak into my dreams
sometimes my own throat burns
with bottomless screams

iv.

see the invisible women
everywhere?

their sweat fuels the engine of the easy life
their screams break open the night

we do matter
I whispered back

we do.

who hears?

The Jazz Musicians

(for Arthur Doyle)

who let these men
become ancient?
their hands, cracked,
sad as aimed guns
crescent moon spines
testify the constant lack
of answers and it hurts
to see them walk
moaning feet—

what is lost,
knowing that without a stage
there would be no ears?

it is the daily deaths
we orchestrate our breath
I don't laugh so loud
it's the ghosts
dancing inside me
and the men
whose faces are map
and scripture slip their arms
into my laughter
reach through the music wall—
Sister, can you hear me without sound?
Sister, can you see me when I am silent?