

TIM SEIBLES

At 59

Roving from Nike to New Balance,
Prince to Puma, I pick up a pair
of size 13s, some shorts and blue sweats,
still feeling the sneakered beast scuff
his muzzle against my skull.

Two tall, hard-shouldered young brothaz
fondle Air Jordans, talkin a little shit:
If I getchu down on the block
wit deez muhfuckas'll be callin you Betty.

“A drowning man,” Mooji wrote, “is not
interested in air” and as the constellation
that pardoned my life goes dark, I recognize
this snag in my chest, this cut breath, this

lonely, late mid-life knowing: the inescapable
all around me, desperation all around—my own

stumbly efforts at love, my own
trying to say *say something*,
while the duck-speaking dickheads
salute their zombie platoons.

Always big, bad Death posting me up,
backing me down, the ball's trick bounce
racking my heart: I know he's smooth
with either hand, but still mean
to snuff his shot.

In my college days,
when my parents were well
and the bulk of worry sat elsewhere,
I strolled around with *my boys* and mostly,
we wanted the same things:

to play sports, “make big bucks,” and have
the fine babes find the come-hither in our faces.

What I miss is that damn sure *hellyeah!*
we carried like crisp cash. JC, his wit,
that manic laugh, Eric's slick grin,
and Doc, so thin only his head
cast shadow: that loud halo
of hair. "Don't touch the 'fro," he'd say.

I miss my boys and the *Ohio Players*
funkin' us up against the Earth's black hips—

. . . *you a bad, bad missez*
with those skin-tight britches
runnin' folks into ditches, yeah . . .

We couldn't help ourselves.

O Sex, song book of the Better Angels, how I craved
and savored your generous pages—chapter
and verse and verse: kissing for hours, daylight lost
to the liquid velvet of the tongue, the body:
delicious synagogue, cello hungry to be bowed.

These days I'm a *Sir* a gray beard to be addressed with deference,
someone whose wisdom might even be vaguely revered.
I don't believe the longing ever ends. I can't believe
I'll ever understand what I need to understand,

but in college I told Doc, "Prob'ly by the time
I'm forty things won't get to me as much."

As I look at my life, I'm afraid and earlier today,
in the mirror, I saw my mother's face
shocked at how old I am. *My goodness! How old*
are you?

And when I tell her, she's sure
I'm lying—and to be honest, I just
don't know if I'm the age I am. Each year,
part of a conversation I almost had
with someone I meant to call.

You think maybe all you do adds up
to a definable sum: the eulogy,
a campfire that lets survivors
warm their chilly hands, but really
nobody knows
what turned inside you or why
evolution has guaranteed that
none of us stick around. Recently,

a friend shrugged, "Might as well be positive,"
and I want to bear the *affirming flame*,

to believe in people because I'm a person.

I think about Kennedy's brain
blown all over his wife's pink dress,

and Malcolm X, dying
with a new idea guiding his voice—

but whoever mentions Yuri Kochiyama
holding his head in her lap? I believe
in the last word she saw lighting his lips.

Across the street, beneath a sky-blue sky, trees
black-barked and bare. I'm in a café now, surrounded
by clattery laughs and scrambled chatter, a mad jazz
that would scatter birds. Awhile back,

one of my boys died. I heard about it long after—
the funeral, somewhere in Georgia—so in my mind's eye,
Dewey's still alive: *doin' the bump*, party-whistle
beaming in his mouth, "Jungle Boogie" *rockin' the house*.

I used to think my lucky days made me
different somehow—"some angel
payin' my way"—like my mom said,
but this poem
could just as easily be Dewey, almost
remembering me at the same party,

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under the same groove: my fantastic history
filed down to a few finger-pops and some *Kool*

& *The Gang*. It's hard to breathe
without the delusion that magnified my life.

I sat across from him in class. We both
wrote poetry. Does everyone secretly

believe they're indispensable? I stall
inside this self amazed by my face

which is brown and not remarkable.