

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Tonya Ingram: New Poems

Tonya Ingram · Wednesday, June 4th, 2014

Cultural Weekly is proud to premiere three new poems by poet, writer and performer Tonya Ingram. Tonya is the 2011 New York Knicks Poetry Slam champion, a member and co-founder of NYU's poetry slam team, a member of the 2011 Urban Word-NYC team and the 2013 Nuyorican Grand Slam Team.

7 Commandments My Child Should Know

After Falu

1. I am a filthy heart.
2. It was the summer the loosed toothed woman
called me out of my skin
that I felt my black bubble a venomous song.
She, a chamber of snarling lip
stood before me as if to lighten an evil
only a mother could birth.
I, a pulsating cathedral,
could not find its rhythm to reverse the poison.
To bless the stain.
How I've dirtied my gown.
I am a violent bride.
3. The first time he asked me to kiss him,
I pretended to not hear.
His smile made every tooth a murder of crows.
The adolescent lips of a pale boy have no business
learning the witchcraft of dark flesh
should he want to keep his clean.
4. When I watched my mother's ex-boyfriend
hurl the dining room chair at her body,
all of the love in me retired
all of the anger reborn.
Should the eyes of a daughter
witness man peel his skin

and reveal his thirsty devil,
then surely, there must be a hell.

5. Whenever grandma complains
grandpa stopped living in his body,
I wonder if this is what happens
when love stops showing up to work.

6. I am a filthy heart.
Forgive me.
I have sinned a dark girl's lust.
I have laid bare for an audience of men
with just enough black to knit me into costume.
Do not turn from me.
Do not turn from me.

Many have mistaken my quiet for take.
And take.
And take.
Until name means empty.
Until I have burned a glorious destruction.
But I am terrified that I will be just like her.
That my mother's yearning for man breath
will consume me until my own oxygen is fatal.
Should I become this.
A sacred blasphemy.
A disciple's fantasize.
A preacher man's thorn.
A jezebel's proverb.
I will disrobe my flesh
for I have dirtied a sanctuary that is not mine.
Raid from it what you please.

7. All I want
is for my love to be the saint your sins pray to.
the temple your hands cannot praise.
the chorus of a hymnal you cannot lead.
Singing, hallelujah.
Look at what the Lord has made.

Unsolicited Advice to Skinny Girls with Bitten Nails and Awkward Glares, Part 1

After Jeanann Verlee

When your best friend's father invites you over, say no.

When the girls at school tease you for wearing payless light-ups, do not wrench your face. Smile,
then tie your laces.

When you finally learn how to Dougie and its 2011, show off to everyone you know

When you finally learn how to do the original Harlem shake and its 2011, keep it to yourself

When your mother asks you to buy her a pregnancy test, do not slam the door behind you. Do not snatch the twenty from your birthright.

When she says she is pregnant, do not sacred suck your teeth. Do not holy roll your eyes.

When the boy with the intrusive shadow calls you a “ white girl” do not cower your head. Do not question your black.

When your grandmother says you act like an old lady, take it as a compliment. Set the teapot. Knit the turtleneck. Check on the apple pie.

When the next NYU student asks to touch your hair. Laugh, then ask if you can touch theirs.

When your best friend’s father invites you over, say no.

When you catch your brother with a porno, act surprised. Laugh it off. Do not call him a sinner.

When your mother asks why you take so long in the shower, tell her you hate this cancer. This dark that wears you like a plague .

When you discover your grandmother is bipolar and schizophrenic , hug her. Then Google each illness.

When you question if you are anything like her, hug yourself. Then Google each illness.

When you cry in front of your brother because he has just learned you are not his full sister, do not slump your shoulders. Your eyes are a well the thirsty crave. Pour into him.

When your best friend’s father invites you over, say no.

Unsolicited Advice to Skinny Girls with Bitten Nails and Awkward Glares, Part 2

After Jeanann Verlee

When you visit your brother at Riker’s Island, do not blink to hold back the tears. You are Moses. He is the miracle. This is the red sea.

When your mother brings your sister home from the hospital, do not hide your hands. Do not fear you will drop her. She is a medallion in a collection plate of screws. Treasure her.

When the older woman with silver hair and loose teeth calls you a nigger, give her the finger. give her Jay-Z’s “The Blueprint”. Give her The word of God.

When the your mother’s ex-boyfriend puts his hands on your brothers, grab the chair
When your mother’s ex-boyfriend puts his hands on your sister, grab the frying pan

When your mother's ex-boyfriend puts his hands on your mother, grab the phone. Grab a knife. Grab your voice.

This is Armageddon. This is taking back what the devil has stolen. Do not fear. Do not cower. Do not question.

When your best friend's father invites you over, say no. You are resurrection. You are silence turned shotgun. And death has no place here.

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