

# from *Sonnet's Shakespeare*

## Sonnet L'Abbé

CXI

Hot-formed lady shake she donkey. Sweet brown sugar twist she behind. What for a tune, chile, if not dancin? The Mighty Sparrow he mek yuh wine. Little gyal goddess done teef men's eye. She got a roomful dem peepin she backside. Hot heat spreadin down onto she belly. Wet heat from her form mek a boy loose tie. Female form provide the action. In public, sweetmen answer she smile. Child, public manners don't mek batie less round. Female body drive the dance hall wild. How come yuh sittin when yuh batie so poom-poom? Yuh nice amerindian friend gone come. She give Sam Baksh reason to dance. Dhaalpuri, samosa and a bottle of rum. She dance to Mighty Enchanter "Dulari-Beti." She swing to Aubrey Cummings' lead guitar. She dance to Colin Wharton; she work The Saints. She like the dum dum duddy of the Telstars. Shanto song body the spirit uh Guyana. Mek the Indian tap and white British mind. We no more under England rule of law. Down yuh colonialism! Rattle yuh behind! Like a kwe-kwe is dance hall be jumping. Partiers plenty high wine will drink. Portions of chow mein, souse and dumpling. Latrins' steam counksy, rass strong stink. King Fighter, he bounce up wit Lilian. Roaring Lion mek sly observation. Better nah marry pretty-ass one. That girl will mek fuh bitter union. Thick dunk woman devour double an pepper. She dingolay; she dance calypso an roll. If yuh not erect, best expect correction! Pity men think she under bai control. Gyal friend, bacchanal does be bouncing yuh backside. Tsk, yuh tek your eye and pass me? River Corentyne heart, your serpentine twine. Yuh is enough to cuss—remember who yuh rass be!

I'm staring at Shakespeare's poem. Blocked. Carnage because Black was not counted fairly. Torn into faithless weather because literature assured Black bodies bore no right to beauty's name, because until now is Black's traumatology streaming in successive waves. Those critics never unpack the intestinal douleur of one's own beauty slandered with a bastard shame. Informed since I could read by the monarchy's hand on the throat of English, I've put on an enunciative face, trusting the figure of speech's power to fair the ink of English thinking. The foreign anguish, language! With art's facelessness I borrowed legit face; with my sweet syntax, a beauty that they couldn't disown. Shame on who? Shame on who? I'm literally bowed over the keyboard of my computer. Sometimes you see yourself profaned. Sometimes you're profaned—nothing unusual—by the archives you're working in. Why feel disgraced in two thousand seventeen? *Le professeur francophone que j'ai rencontré* on Bumble blanks at my imaginary stresses: okay, your poems are about race, but we don't have to think in black and white over dinner, do we? Somebody doesn't. This situation suits some bodies just fine, and they will date me, if I don't bring work home. I'm churning through Shakespeare's sonnet, contemplating easier occupations. My children, who were not born into fairness, who no beauty ever lacked, who never happened at all, read this grudging creation over my shoulder. They are with me always, as I fail at ease. They don't exist, as I cleave to my poetry like a significant other who never asks anything of me, who isn't hurt by my inability to lighten up. Nothing's coming, just a gust of weather, a failure to work through a sonnet's hatred. Slavery's tongue is in my head, kissing me, saying smile, smile, beauty shouldn't look so hard.

To me, you were a freaky, fairskinned father figure of song. Uncensored lyricist, your naked verse caressed my unnubile, ten-year-old, deflowerable ecstasy. How young we were when first we heard of your eye caught by Nikki masturbating in a hotel lobby. Aphrodisical purple synth chords, electronic hymns to funk, your androgynous beauty lashed titillating, throaty sex at nuclear winters' and cold wars' threat. A little red Corvette drove me from the conformist interests of schoolbooks into the Revolution's love manifesto. I hummed verses of Purple Rain as I developed breasts. The mixed-race, liquid-gender vibe, the auteur-pompous sparkles and rings topped charts. Funky fellow, pre-autotune imp spinning turntable gold, you inspired sensuous excess. Pop rock father, sugar daddy, my innocence was lost to the sounds of Head and doves crying. I seduced a girl in the recreation room of her parents' split-level: bubblegum perfumes, pink skin, thrilling tongues—soft, wet, hot juvenilia. Madonna's crosses burned; her sinfulness commoditized was our first fetish; meanwhile your fresh mouth was horrifying rich-mommy-and-senatorial-ball-buster Tipper Gore. Parental advisories hadn't yet happened; your "filth" was labelled vulgar by purity police; kids learned to dig albums authorities branded explicit. Stealing from Little Richard, Curtis Mayfield, Marvin Gaye, Chuck Berry, Elvis, James Brown, Stevie Wonder and Bowie, at a pace hyper would call hyperactive, you dropped so many tracks your label sweated. The unprounceable symbol which became your thing (on your cheek, "SLAVE") frustrated music journalists lacking adequate font for the-artist-formerly-known-as. A soundless glyph as the artist's name was contractual insurrection. Masculined feminine, eyelined manly babe, decimating categories of groove, defy mortality! Hush our fears of life-without-Prince. Shh, fears of this opioid-strutted age. The Purple One vibrated at a mauver level. Pleasures of you were born while he was. His bedroom, a butterfly sanctuary. Man, a sexy motherfucker's dead.



The Boulevard Club must have stifled a shudder when my mom rang to inquire about memberships. Young Guyanese newcomer hadn't thought about how courts are segregated by those whose bequeathed equities proudly make them "exclusive." At Crawford and Queen, the public hard-surface courts at lowly Trinity Bellwoods didn't wear only whites; her groundstroke forehand powered straight to my dear dad's doting heart. Meanwhile, apartheid South Africa was inviting only the fairest and most PR-friendly competitors to its tournaments. A jewel of Wirraayjurraay, they'd let in. To Evonne Goolagong they promised fair treatment, though some say that she shouldn't have agreed to be an honorary white while they denied Arthur Ashe. You faced shame-drills at the corner of Compton and Atlantic, your father testing the power of shame to make you lose your cognitive edge. Like Tiger Woods, you ascended into aristocracy's recreational spheres, where country clubbers game. Rankine's already written a Serena who dares to be so bold as to call out negrophobic umps, while a rival's right to blonde privilege she'll shrewdly let pass. Mine is the Redditor-marrying Serena, living the fantasy more blondes understand. Trophy babe. Signature fashionista hanging with Wintour. Snotty, false friends must swear a thousand allegiances to you, crowned earner. Supermom-to-be, your attractiveness to the sponsorship industry is smoking hot. Companies with your face on their storytelling brand themselves mother-of-all-stamina, conqueress-while-Black. I'm driven to witness: I want to bear the way you do, trusting my Black performance will be assessed fair, that this best linesmanship will meet literary judgment in its place. I want nothing to do with art's false modesty. I want to hold court where Black won't save me. I want the physicality of my deeds, the demand of the excellence. Without a brown girl's desire to play tennis, I wouldn't be here, so manifest of what I think, my game proceeds.