

## **To be a MAN (Mark Abreu)**

### **PART ONE**

To be a man you've gotta make other men scared of you

Is what he told me.

To be a man you've gotta know how to take a hit

Is why he punched me.

To be a man you've gotta be disciplined

Is why he yelled at me.

To be a man you can't act small

Is why he never tucked me in.

To be a man you can't cry

Is why he told me to stop acting like a girl

To be man you've gotta be in charge

Is why he hit my mother.

To be man you've gotta be dominant

Is why I'm afraid of him.

### **PART TWO**

To be a man you've got to express yourself

Is why he took me to therapy

To be a man you can act small

Is why he embraced me

To be a man you've gotta respect women

Is why he is there for his wife.

To be a man you've gotta protect what makes life worth living

Is why he took us in.

To be a man you've gotta love

Is why he tucked me in at night

To be a man you've gotta be understanding

Is why he let me explain my actions

To be a man??

What does it really mean??

## A Letter to My Father (Essence Johnson)

I do have a dad  
I remember the car rides to your house on weekends  
And the windows rolled down  
As sweet sticky summer air intoxicates me  
Our music's beat blasting through brooklyn streets  
People watch us weirdly  
I know why they're staring  
*Daddy why do you have your music so loud*  
And you'd always say the same thing back  
*Its cause Im from Brooklyn baby*

So when they ask me at school  
*Where are you from?*  
I tell em' I'm from Brooklyn  
Cause that's where my daddy's from  
And I'd listen as he called everyone on the block son  
At block parties and gatherings in my Aunts backyard  
Screamin' *Where Brooklyn at, Where Brooklyn at'*  
We were the heart of Brooklyn

And when you left I was never the same  
My cotton pink pillows stayed tear stained  
But now I can't cry  
I don't know how to anymore  
Soon the memories fade  
Your voice, your face, your place in my life

They say when your lost you could always find your way back home  
But what if home isn't home anymore  
That special place of love is a puzzle I just don't belong in anymore  
But Brooklyn was never my home  
You were

## **Shrimp Taco Bites (Toluwanimi Onanuga)**

*after "When the Burning Begins"*

I wouldn't say making taco bites is easy  
But it's something you can learn  
Raw shrimp, skin it and rip off the tail  
Preheat the oven 350 degrees

Be sure to wash it like your older sister told you.  
You know the one that used her own time and money  
to help you make this thing. Always remember that.

Mix in chili powder and salt into a bowl  
Wait for your older sister to finish grating the lime  
and remember to relish these moments  
Because she won't be here much longer

Mix the lime zest with the mixture  
Mix that mixture in the shrimp.  
Let your sister stick the tray in the oven  
Be sure to hold on to these good times  
It's crucial

While the shrimp is baking, mix minced chili peppers  
The chili peppers that actually weren't minced so you had to cut it up with a fork. Mix those  
peppers  
With sour cream. Make sure it doesn't look  
Too red or too white  
Assemble everything together and sprinkle with cilantro

Enjoy the food you've made with your sister.  
Think about how soon, she'll go back off to college  
And who knows when she'll be back and while I can live through it  
It sucks. Then realize why holding onto to those memories you made were most important part  
of this recipe.

If you don't, the food will only be rated  
a seven out of 10  
from the own people that made it.

## A Shot in the Dark (AJ Walker)

A dark night with no stars in the sky.  
A black boy walking down the street,  
blending in with the background,  
his hood obscuring his face.  
A mother sitting nervously by the door,  
waiting for her little boy to come home- he  
never will.  
And finally, a white police officer riding  
around  
with his finger on the trigger.

Watch the cop car closely as it slowly  
creeps up next to the boy on the sidewalk.  
Then focus your attention on the boy's  
nervous face  
that moistens with tiny beads of sweat, or  
the way his body shakes as if he already  
knows how this will end, or  
the way the cop climbs out of the vehicle  
and towers over the boy.

Now listen to the dialogue:  
the way the cop projects his hateful words  
with an air of confidence- like a predator  
closing  
in on its prey-  
as he interrogates the boy;  
the way the boy struggles to find his voice,  
and the way it's barely audible  
over the sound of his beating heart  
as he tells the cop where he came from.  
Not that any of the dialogue matters,  
cause the boy's voice is silenced,  
and the cop's side of the story is all we have.

Watch as the boy reaches in his pocket for  
his I.D.  
his hands trembling.  
And the instant the boy isn't looking,  
the cop reaches for his holster  
and pulls out his gun.

Try not to look away  
as the bullets penetrate the boy's skull.  
*BANG*: all color drains from the boy's face  
and a small gasp escapes his lips  
*THUD*: his knees give way  
and he falls to the ground.  
*POW*: he lies mouth open,  
surrounded in his own blood.

Take notice in how the cop smoothly  
holsters his weapon  
and drives away in his car.  
Take notice in how nobody comes for the  
boy  
until his body is found in the morning.  
Take notice in how the news labels him a  
thug,  
even though they don't know the truth  
regarding his last breaths.  
Take notice in how the cop plays the victim,  
and earns the sympathy of the jury.  
Take notice in how people rally for weeks,  
destroying towns  
and screaming for justice.  
And finally, notice how all memory of him  
fades  
until he's just another statistic,  
just another dead, black, boy  
in a world who didn't care if he was dead or  
alive.

## **Sizzle (Alberto Zamora)**

*For Patricia Smith's "When the Burning Begins"*

Peel the skin off the Green banana

    Cut off each piece

Thin or Thick

    Oil in a pan, that's the magic

Each piece is dipped

    SPLASH!

"Now you wait until you see the color change," my mom says

    Sizzles are what I start to hear

Bubbles rise from the oil

    "How long does it take?" I ask

"Just one more second," says my mom

    Out of nowhere I notice the colors change

Pale peach to yellow

    My mom scoops the pieces on a plate to dry and takes out a "tostonera"

"This is to smash the pieces," she tells me

    Smash like the Hulk until you see Flat Stanley

"Now take the pieces and put them again into the oil," she adds

    SPLASH!

And soon enough the yellow tint gets brighter and a crisp attaches to the pieces

    My mom takes them back out when they look golden and places them on a plate to dry

Each piece is served with a touch of salt

    "And that is how you make Tostones," she tells me

## **Imagine (Luis Lopez)**

Poetry, a window to the soul  
Open it and the gush of possibilities are endless  
Poetry can be anything  
Lost in your mouth  
Flavours scorching the tongue  
Invoking curiosity

Its sweet crisp words are moldable and craftable,  
Build a pair of wings  
And fly away, leaving issues behind  
Enjoying a savory world of your own poetic crimes

Speak of who you are  
Dig inside yourself and see the veins of emotion  
And the blood of passion  
Speak with your heart not your mouth  
And you'll find the way

Express yourself in words  
They will understand  
Sometimes it is hard and you feel no one is there  
Spill your emotions in the words  
They will be your friends  
They will be your allies

It gives you an escape  
It provides relief  
Soothing and thoughtful  
A breath of fresh air poetry is  
Giving you a break from the smog life is

Poetry is a key to the gate of your mind  
It is up to you to find what lies inside

**SIBLINGS ~ (Lisa Lushtak)**

Who is this?  
A shrieking blue-eyed monkey had bursted through the door  
Tearing a hole  
in my two year-old paradise

I never would of thought  
I could get along with HIM.  
Sharing? Caring? I had never heard of it before  
Clenched fists  
Slammed doors  
Squeals Putin can hear from Russia  
Oh, "Lisa did this"  
and oh, "Lisa did that"

Playing ping-pong on our dining table,  
Lip syncing to random songs making "music videos"  
OR  
Making our famous doughy strings topped with  
burnt, sweet and sour, red goop

So, I guess I can call my tennis champion, nerdy glasses wearing brother a friend.

## **March On! (Jada Rivera)**

I want to march with an immigrant  
A brown-skinned immigrant with a thick accent  
That has crossed over the border with his family  
And watched his father and mother get deported  
Watched with a sadness in his eyes  
Like the one he had the very same day they moved away from his country

I want to march with a woman  
A black woman, who gets paid \$30 less  
Than that white man, who just joined two years ago  
When she has been working so hard to provide for her family  
And get a significant raise  
For the last 7 years

I want to march with a teenager  
Who has been in and out of hospitals almost every month  
Been on and off on meds for almost their whole life  
Who has been hurt and abused  
Yet is still standing beside me today, alive and strong

I want to march with a Latino  
Who has gone to school and been called  
“Beaner” or “Illegal” or been told to “get out of America”  
Who has studied hard, passes their test, graduated,  
And became a very famous activist  
Speaking out for everyone who’s gone through

I want to march with people who have faced hard trials  
Who have struggled long and hard  
March with people who have survived  
Survived abuse, drugs, and depression  
I want to march with the everyday people I see  
People just like you and me

## **My Song (Isabel Pacin)**

I play not only on pianos  
But on booming voices racing across cotton fields,  
On silenced screams those voices overpower,  
On tears so beautiful you could mistake them for diamonds,  
On all of god's secret melodies,  
On all the Stars in the night sky that gave me enough light to brighten my soul,  
On my mother secretly singing sweet songs into the blackness of her caress,  
On walls of poverty and injustice,  
On voices stolen by those who are much too quick to speak,  
On all my lost hope,  
On a country that forgets how deceiving appearances can be,  
Because they can only see me as the mask they put on me,  
On all the disgusting things they call me,  
On the speckles of stardust shining in the black night,  
On clear warm tears, cold tears and cold black bodies  
On all my wasted words,  
On all my unheard cries for mercy and empathy,  
On all the richness in my skin,  
On all the hopes and dream that will never be.

## **Roots (Miles Davis)**

I am a tree  
who loves its roots.  
Where I come from.  
Where I grow.

Water me,  
I'll provide you air.  
Breathe in my  
sweet redwood pine scent.

Stop by  
sniff a broken branch.  
Though I'm alive,  
I am dying.

Love me  
I'll let you  
through my  
rough bark.

Or else,  
you might  
just  
cut me down.