

# **be/trouble**

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*section i: and the living be*



## at least i can say

i have never wanted to kill myself  
but i have  
always been keenly aware  
that i  
could die any day  
i have  
always been sure something  
was trying  
to kill me  
the  
scenarios vary  
in almost  
all of them  
i am afraid  
in some of  
them  
i am  
fighting  
in all of  
them  
i lose  
but i never  
give up  
so maybe i  
win  
after all

this is a  
strange conversation

to have  
with strangers  
but i've  
always thought eulogies  
were for  
the people who never knew you well

they say  
malcolm  
knew his journey was ending  
martin knew  
he wasn't long for this world  
no i don't  
think myself a martyr  
i am merely  
a black woman  
which means  
the same thing  
where i  
come from  
that  
translation is not my fault  
it just is

and if it's  
not death  
then what  
is it

## lesson number one

says  
step outside of your experience  
and again  
someone  
shakes head  
but me  
shakes  
but me  
shakes  
but me  
shakes  
but me

says again  
firmly  
this time  
gently  
this time  
emphasizes each word  
mimes with hands  
step outside of your experience

lifts leg  
a sad excuse for a fly girl  
kick steps into another spot  
for the visually inclined  
watch my body  
watch my mouth  
form this concept  
step out of your experience

this is you  
takes out frying pan  
this is your brain on selfish  
bashes you over the head  
this is you  
opens jet magazine july 24 1964  
this is your heart on compassion  
flips to picture on page eight  
this is you  
pulls up a social media app  
this is your world splintering  
plays audio of a 4 year old  
mommydontwantyouetogetshooteedmommydontcuss

## a saturday night

what do you do when you see lights in the rearview mirror  
what do you do when the siren loops around your throat  
what do you do when you are on the street in a group of 4  
or more

what do you do when you are alone  
what do you do when you know you don't have anything in  
your pockets that can hurt the officer

keep your eyes on the road and find a safe spot to pull over  
turn that noise on your radio down before the officer  
approaches your window  
didn't they teach you in high school that 4 or more of you is  
a gang  
don't you know you shouldn't be out here alone  
don't you know that your skin is weaponized in the womb

speak only when spoken to  
don't matter that you wasn't doin nothin  
don't matter that they be doin this all the time  
don't matter that we don't be botherin nobody  
don't drop the g's from your ings  
don't ask any questions  
ask permission to reach into your purse for your wallet  
you should just clinch your license between your teeth  
and smile while you are doing it  
not too hard  
black joy is suspicious

keep your hands above your waist  
keep your hands on the hood of the car

keep your fingers locked behind your head  
take your foot off the gas pedal  
keep your feet more than shoulder's width apart  
keep your eyes on the ground  
do not stare defiantly into the officer's eyes  
do not call out in pain when his knee is on your neck  
go limp like a rag doll when they grab you  
do not bristle when the officer cups your vagina

if you ever find yourself being black on a saturday night  
don't

# hashtag black girls are real

there's a lot of talk  
about magical black girls  
who float on clouds of vaporized melanin  
whose skin is a never ending sepia rainbow  
where are the girls  
who feel invincible when their eyebrows are fleeky  
and their edges are laid  
girls in nameplate gold necklaces and earrings  
copper wire wound around their braids  
with burnt tips  
where are the girls who pop their gum  
and smack their tongues  
and kiss their teeth  
to punctuate  
to add emphasis  
where are the girls  
who never get to be girls at all  
they are females  
with the tone of bitch  
they are das my bitch  
with the tone of homie  
they are she the homie though  
with the tone of lover  
do we still love her

girls with praying hands behind their ears  
and rosaries on their ankles  
girls with script on the small of their backs  
or did we decide they weren't magic too

do they have to have flowers in their hair  
fake freckles splashed across their nose and cheeks  
can they have a constellation  
of hyper-pigmentation  
on their foreheads  
what about the girls  
in straight backs and fades  
the girls in fresh j's  
and timbs  
girls who sound less like tinkling glass  
and more like the kind of bass  
in trunks  
that makes earrings shake  
bamboo of course  
at least two pair  
do they have to listen to alternative music  
and dance like they have fairy wings  
can they buck and twerk  
get hype when they hear the opening strings  
of a cash money record  
or the horns calling for spottieottiedopaliscious angels  
lips pursed in concentration  
tongues out  
daring you to get like them

girls with mile long lashes  
that sweep you off your high horse  
girls rocking the kind of colorful cornrows and braids  
that you will call ratchet until they storm the runways  
that you will call ghetto until they are dubbed unicorns  
when on somebody else's head  
girls who flash their grills when they stuntin  
and pose so you know their nails is done

and snatch the air when they speak  
are those girls just as magical

are they too loud for you  
when they greet each other  
are they doing too much for you  
when they get  
a little recognition  
when they ask for  
a little more money  
when they demand  
a little more respect  
do they get to shine too  
or are they too bright for you

i would say make room for them  
but it don't matter because these black girls are bustin through  
so make way for them  
roll out a carpet of crown royal bags  
make sure there are lemon pepper wings on the menu  
and hennessey in their cups  
and watch them work  
their magic

# the way she's always paying for a debt she never owed

i have been thinking a lot about black girls  
black girls who just want to go home  
who don't want to go home  
who can't  
black girls with no homes to go back to  
black girls who make a home wherever they rest their heads  
black girls who don't rest

i have been thinking a lot about  
black girls in floral crown filters on missing flyers  
using geotag filters without alerting their captors  
tucking and rolling out of their own trunks  
raising their daughters while locked away in basements  
black girls in polaroids in the grim sleeper's garage

i have been thinking a lot about  
black girls in freakum dresses and fuck me pumps  
working western avenue and century boulevard  
black girls who use what they got to get what they want  
who have to hold their piss while they dance for tips

i have been thinking a lot about  
black girls shifting ribs with waist trainers to survive  
black girls floating disembodied atop phat asses to survive  
wanting so badly to be instagram baddies  
wanting so badly for sugar daddies  
wanting so badly for daddies  
black girls who stiffen when their daddies hug them

i have been thinking a lot about  
black girls scarred  
everywhere  
but their faces  
so they can stay pretty  
black girls scarred  
everywhere  
especially their faces  
so they can stay ugly  
black girls who want good hair  
who think their hair is an impediment  
who think their skin is an impediment

i have been thinking a lot about  
black girls who don't get to be beautiful  
who don't get to be carefree  
who don't get to be magic  
i have been thinking a lot about  
black girls who don't get to be girls