be/trouble

by bridgette bianca
# table of contents

## section i: and the living be

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poem</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>at least i can say</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lesson number one</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a saturday night</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hashtag black girls are real</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the way she’s always paying for a debt she never owed</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to amiri/with love</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we are the people darker than blue</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>double jeopardy</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>habitual</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## section ii: this much i know is true

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poem</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nikki-maya/mother’s day</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the grind</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>what doesn’t kill you makes you lucky</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as the wolf picks his teeth with our bones</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>every nigga is a scar</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>an exasperated black woman said fuck it i’ll do it</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that good black don’t crack</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on your mark</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i’m trying to remember when i started apologizing for my body (aka shit people say to fat girls)</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
section iii: our fallen

to reap 62
and who will be next 63
the talk 64
now i play black mama crying over dead son 67
give us this day/death is our daily bread 68
position open until filled 71
for colored girls when rainbows don’t lead to
  nothin and fairy godmothers ain’t real 73
freedom 75
what have they done 76
disaster 80

section iv: ain’t we a dream too

i want the world to see 84
there goes the neighborhood 87
ego-trippin 92
repeating a lie don’t make it true 94
we will bring them to heel 97
you can’t spell patriot without r-i-o-t 99
reason number 72 101
a message from uppity negresses 103
was it good for you/like blood on dry ground 108
for the nice white ladies on parade 109
i call you sis because you my sista 112
some heroes wear their durags with the capes flapping 117

acknowledgements 120

6 be/trouble
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
mommyidontwantyoutogetshootedmommydontcuss
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

bridgette bianca
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ake 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