

## One Bullet Can Hold Up The World

I can't remember if my mind bent  
to the dark side. That day, that night,  
that chill-bump, hair raising, second  
a voice screamed his epitaph. Was it rain  
or snow when I heard news blurb, read  
the headline, got my worst phone call?

Bullets always cost less than the gun...  
the life. If singers sing life, Lennon died  
twice. No more Beatles, no more Walrus,  
no father making clown faces to little boy.  
Empty guitar E-string boxes cluttered up  
Lennon's old closet. Unplaced notes

wander around, hanging out on street  
corners, smoking like cigarettes.

In small light between my dreams, or on  
another avenue of my dreams of orange  
marmalade, chamomile tea, and hot stench

of strawberry incense, Lennon, Ghandi, and  
Kerouac form a jam session, exalting our poor,  
our homeless and starving masses of confusion.

Ghandi moans an ancient Tibetan chant used by  
Prince Siddhartha. Not having to fast for freedom,  
not having to push his small Indian frame to desert

dehydrated fit, not having to prove a point taken  
well. Lennon picks up on chant and strums—closes  
his eyes in deep pleasure, in a peaceful tranquility

of harmony, without a British invasion, mop-top,  
or frenzy of frantic teenage girls yelling in his ears,  
throwing his key off. Kerouac leaps far into his

mind, regurgitates life in the mist of living dribble,  
fighting between his conservative self and his free-  
spirited id, using magnanimous words with biting

syllables, hoping his karma can cloth frail naked  
minds. Three gurus. Eyes shut. In transcendental fit.

At this point of poem, I saw red—grew dodgy, felt like  
Ginsberg when he wrote *Kaddish*, or Langston traveling  
to Africa, down Congo. My mind blew up—  
a turmoiled cornucopia of spasmodic junk. My reds  
and blues mixed like the crayon art of a 2yr old. Ghandi  
and Kerouac dissolved in my mad blurb of passion—

fading like sound, distant—the record's end.  
Lennon was alone again, laid out on cold concrete,  
guitar six inches away from his body. As if  
reaching for it, blood-stained and cold, he longed  
in contorted abstraction to play just one more note.

I cried him to sleep.

Raymond had gone to the Million Man March. And it was the end-all-be-all from how he used to see the world, to how it changed how he would see the world from then on. He tried college, but dropped out after a month of classes. He later struggled through Ivy Tech. He got a gig at the University of Chicago as a phlebotomist. Although the MMM was life-changing for him, he was more enthralled with the guy who set up a drum set in the middle of downtown D.C.—just green and white five-gallon plastic drums, and a grocery cart that he used as a cymbal. Ray said, “It was amazing what this dude was doing with what he had. He had us dancing, Malik. I’m serious! We were dancing to the beats he put down. And this was how he made his living, just playing music with the essentials, discarded junk. If I could only do something as rich as that, I’d be on my way.”

Ray is probably why I think like I think; he has been such an influence on me because he has such a brilliant mind, knows so much more than I will ever know, but he always says, “Malik, I just can’t sit up in a classroom, man—letting all those so-called profs blow smoke up my butt. Nah, not me, bro.”

## **guitar hero**

jimi only wanted his try at man-  
hood, do what God blessed him with,  
inhale air like any other creature,

while strumming, plucking, cat's  
guts—did it on left hand side of proper  
things. a pain split tips of fingers.

it left most to think he's not right.  
he didn't want to be king of mountain,  
he didn't want to be a bum in a rut,

jimi just wanted to flow in energy.  
inside his body, he fought a civil war  
for color, for blood, and for status.

many couldn't transpose brown skin:  
his brownness yelling like a banshee.  
his Afro, unkempt, blew with wind,  
tangled in others' vices—low self-esteem.  
his bandana kept his mind in place,  
as promoters faked loyalty for hand jobs,  
but his twisted lips meant forever.  
jimi knew our hurts, plucked the chords.  
he could bend with kick of wah-wah,  
get lost in the thrill of freshness.

was he voodoo child of papa legba?  
did he make deal with baron carrefour  
to play his axe like a mad scientist;

to create his career bending sound;  
to isolate himself on stage; lug our load,  
have rhythm section fade—be witnesses?  
band mates experienced him too, right?  
virtuoso not feeling himself a vocalist.  
he had verbs to play and lyrics to live.  
with fire, teeth, and body electricity  
jimi was a glitch to white folks,  
not black enough for black folks—  
hooked us in with juicy sideshows.

## ~Session Nine~

I realized that all the people in my photo album made me who I was. I remember how CJ looked that last time I saw him. He was all debonair, working in the mayor's office. And Tulip (Michelle) decided she was going to be a pharmacist when she got out of high school. She worked at Walgreens, and had talked with Dr. Sanjan, the pharmacist who worked there, and who also told her about scholarships that she could get, and that even Walgreens had to offer. T-Bob wanted to become a truck driver in the Tri-state area, a straight 9-to-5, which was hard to do as a truck driver. Even though we kept in touch through phone calls, texts, emails, I wanted to see them.

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I met Bev but we broke up. She was it for me. After kicking it for six weeks, we told each other we were in love. Could it have been that I was lonely? Could it have been that I had not assimilated fully to the Cali lifestyle, still in culture shock? I don't know. I thought we were great. But she had second thoughts, started bringing up all her old boyfriends that hurt her before; before long, we were on the outs. One day she asked me, "What if I can't accept the love that you give me?" What could I even say to that? But it wasn't a question. It was how she felt.

Bev's father was a light-skinned black man and her mother white. Bev could pass for white and had problems with darker-skinned blacks like myself. She told me she only felt comfortable around the blacks in her family. I didn't say anything, but I felt that she was saying she didn't feel comfortable around me. It was strange since Cali was probably the most culturally mixed state other than New York and Illinois. When I realized how she doubted everything: love, her identity, it was beyond anything I could do. It was all on her. It made me think how we all want the love we are not willing to give.

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I learned my family and friends participated in giving me a full life. With it, I had to do what Tammy and Lamont never had the chance to do—live. I needed to love every chance I got. I mean, why not? If Sam and Tricia changed like they did, I knew that love had a place for me, with me, in me. So that's how I kicked it.