

little black boy

Category: Poems

written by Jimmy Moss | November 14, 2008

Jimmy Moss

little black boy

✘ sit down.

fold your hands into your lap
and put your lap into order
now cry me a little song.
sing me a little note about me
caring about what you care about,
then dream me a little dream.
and when your tears turn into
oases and exposed rivers

✘ stand up

and pour me a little cup
fill it with every broken promise
and the unfulfilled moments of
belated birthdays and first days
of the school year when your
clothes were unkempt...then
tell me a little secret
about how—you wish your father
bothered enough to be a father
or fathered another version of you,
so that you could have a friend

✘ and then

write me a little poem.
make me a little rhyme about
the places you lived and the schools
you've attended
the teachers you've impressed
and the classmates
you've offended...by simply
being a ✘ little black boy
who could read and speak well
and vividly express himself,
find clean shirts amongst the dirty ones
and dress himself

✘ long enough

✘ to cover up his little pain
and then bring me a little more
of whatever it is that you have
bundled up in your little hand,
stashed away from piercing eyes,
tucked inside of your little lap
that you peek at every moment

you are given a little slack
a little chance and little hope
a little grade for your little work
just...put it in my hand...
and trust me,
little black boy
i promise to give it back—in order.

About the poet:

Jimmy Moss is a third-year medical student at Florida State University College of Medicine. “I got interested in writing as a way of trying to communicate many of the ineffable aspects of my life. I enjoy writing about various issues (love, poverty, nature, social interactions, etc.) and am always challenging myself to push my creativity to new levels of expansion and understanding.”

About the poem:

“This poem is about me, my upbringing, and how awkward I used to feel for wanting (desiring) something more than the options my environment was daily presenting to me. Growing up in poverty wasn’t all that hard, because everyone around me was poor. The more difficult tasks were trying to overcome the negative connotations associated with ‘being from the ‘hood,’ acquiring academic enhancement from sub-par school systems, and looking past all of the negativity I received from others for attempting to establish a better existence for myself. I cared about progress, and was ridiculed for it.

“In the poem I mention ‘finding clean shirts amongst the dirty ones,’ which symbolizes the innocence of how I viewed things—because to me that was more of a skill than getting good grades. I had to learn (mostly on my own) that simply surviving wasn’t the only thing life was about. I had to visualize myself in a better situation—one where I was exceeding expectations and expanding on numerous levels. However, since I had no blueprint to follow, I had to trust that life was going to take care of my little portion of hope. I had to have faith that if I at least attempted to do the right things, something or someone (e.g., the narrator of the poem) would meet me halfway, thereby confirming that my dreams, thoughts, hard work, embarrassments, trying times, sacrifices and tears were not in vain.

“So often, I think that individuals who rise above statistical and societal stereotypes are not given enough social support, so they are forced to trust that life itself will not let them down. So far, doing just that has worked out well for me.”

Poetry editors:

Judy Schaefer and Johanna Shapiro