

Rhythm by Joshunda Sanders

Sunup to sundown, a hundred shades of Black girl beauty. Caramel & pecan-colored, rays springing from our lips, mouths full as golden balloons, sweet as Jolly Ranchers. Sugar bubble gum breath, tongues grape purple, hair deep brown or bright pink or braided royal blue, slicked with shea butter & coconut oil, edges smooth & dry elbows oiled like our thirsty shins.

We stay ready – we don't need to get ready. We spring after winter, a breeze of competition. Eyes prying youth open to look inside at our becoming, hips spreading womanhood wide east & west.

Bass flying through rattling windows, energy lodged in earth thrumming, shoulders curved in, protecting our hearts & the fly chains at our necks from the chill as our bodies learn to be the sounds of the city.

Our souls sway to drums that never stop pulsing. Our feet never stop moving. If we can't move, we don't exist. We are some bodies, so: we rock, we roll, we slay with Janet Jackson levels of control.

Spring, a short bridge to summer, means time to show these people we mean business.

We pound out hood morse code on cafeteria tables, rocking steady, swaying up against the wall with our loves, legs scissored, hair turning back from the humidity we make as we become songs.

We grown in every moment we steal, singing to our own soundtrack. Tamika & Amecca & Ayana & Monique make another party with us, names like songs, like prayers rising from the Atlantic floor so we would always be music.

A drumbeat, a declaration, a love song. A step, a cheer, a chant with our mouths, the beat vibrating from hands on flesh. We make celebration between the long hours of what else is there? Passing notes or sending texts or watching the timelines & scrolling & scrolling. Sweat reminds us we are alive & we are here & we are planted.

We want to move our body south & north & rise up in freedom. We are Six of Wands tarot cards blooming victory. We are radiant Empresses of earth, stepping & dancing, winding hips all in the street.

These Air Maxes were made to stomp to the rhythm.

It is ours & it is from Africa, to Brazil, to DR, to Trinidad, to Grenada, to Harlem & The Bronx & Queens & Brooklyn.

When it's time to step & clap, step step clap, we get it popping. A force all its own: launching.

We own these streets when the rhythm come down. We came to rock. Rhythm is our national anthem, our prayer; is our religion, is the hope & the dream of the rebel. We not just dancing to the music you hear, but the music you can't, the lyrics in our blood, the thrum of the soil, our ancestors dancing, singing, swaying with us, quaking the earth.

We predators, bitch, not prey. Give us back our smiles from your staring, your leering. Snatch back our proud chests, titties aloft, from your grubby ass hands. We say our rhymes together & cast a circle big as the city, wide as the river we shake down to our core, we lift up like we praising Oya & Eggun & Oshun.

Our rhythm is praise for the sky. Teeth shining white in the sun. We give you our bodies, our daily bread, just to dance. When we step & snap & slap our skin to the beat, our ancestors are keeping time, echoing in traffic. Pumping our chests, arching our backs, we get low low low

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so we can burst up & out like uncapped hydrants, flow out into these streets until the water seeps in, seeps down & we out.