

little sister: A Black Speculative Solo-Performance (excerpt)

Misty De Berry | Northwestern University

Introduction

little sister is at once a solo-performance and a transgenerational diasporic memoir. It tells the story of a nomadic child spirit named little she who shape-shifts through the memories of one black/queer woman across several incarnations of being. Spanning the Antebellum South to present moment Chicago, it explores structural forms of violence that become embodied and re-produced, particularly within the black family unit and other interpersonal relationships. As performative writing, it invites the reader to encounter and accompany the text as a psycho-spiritual potential to interrupt, intervene, and reconcile the stories we tell ourselves with the stories that are mapped onto us.

This is my little sister.
she be corn rolled— white linen dress.
she make happy happy with
patent leather\
click-click
on the inside part.
click-click on the out.

We be
Gullah/
from the long time ago\with momma sweet-
and daddy-bird.
She be sparkle sparkle
and rain\
shine she bright wet—
freckle freckle of time—
arm. cheek. third. eye\
foot.

This be my little sister— we
Creole—
from the long time ago/we circle
neck to neck
on the inside part—
while mamma be on the out\
flat foot at the soil cause we

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crossed oooooovaa the
water—

 azugar
in the midst.

She belly be
she center— it knows
sees/
hears

all kinds of things.

People see she\first thing they do\
touch she—

 pick she up—
wanna watch she see
they-selves from above.

Learn she walk reeal late
'cause everyone steady touching on she—
picking she up/like she be
good luck charm like she be
sage in she throat.

She mamma say—
soon as she come to her belly
she knew she\gave she name
right then—
say—she be the one
 \set we free.

Grew she up figuring since everybody
steady talking 'bout *she be the one*
set we free.

 Figure only right to pass herself out
along\watch others pull
forth
she sweet.beat.

she body be/
 they host.

All the
big girls

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in the
school/yard
say—
she think she cute
Say
she don't come from nothing though—
so it don't much matter
how cute she is or ain't.

Mamma
don't like
little she fighting
so
pay they no mind.
 And anyway
it be
she sixth birthday\
 pink and
white icing-
blue swirls
making like happy
roses\with
yellow on the inside part and
sprinkles-
red juice\purple satin\
 ribbon—

fire hydrant
open
up
on federal street. So\
 after mamma hold
she hand
while she cut the cake—
gonna go get she/self
wet
from the chest down—maybe she
hair too—
 'pending on how good daddy make
mamma feel.

She other daddy be

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she reeal daddy—
she warm daddy\<\
she be
 his little girl—daddy.

he say
he
hear she time she go
silent—
say hear she heart go
love—love love\love
love.

Say—
quiet be
the time when god speak—
and say god the same-
love—love
 love/love
love.

She feeling so goood
from hearing voice
come to she\
she wanna
 sit.down
and
hug on she/self all night\
close she eyes
see indigo blue
red\<\
 /wet
she self
sticky
tween she legs—

Run
she to her mamma's washing sink—
had been told to
stop\touching she-self till make she-self sticky/

What she suppose to do when sticky
happen all by itself—? close

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she eyes—
pray see indigo no more—

close she eyes.
Now
see
 silver- wind.

Wind say *breath(e)*\\
breath—
Wet she\\self sticky again.
 wind say—
you and i be we now
you and i be
we.

Shape shift/Testify.
I see myself in the wavering
stream
and i
touch
what an\\odd dance
bring me in
loose me up\\shift
down
down down—settle. release here.
Can't tell
how long
I've been 'round these smiling skin and bones.
I touch
i feel my skin\\growing scales.

Oh
heaven upon me, make
light.
 Bless me, oh companion thy beloved-
forever friend.
Touch my heart and still my soul
bless me\
tis nigh—be with me
holy-mother-blessed-daughter-/lover
seat of my forever(d) spirit-twinned

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soul.

She memory—breath in trees.
shape-shift—
 She be 1833—
she mita
offer a prayer
for she spirit-heart\she
Creole heart—
she African
she
Latin—
She Boriqua
heart—
she sweet-sweet
she
blues-blues
she
bom-bom deet-deet\
 she pena heart\
she come from below sea level—heart.
Fly she
home
From the west/heart.

She be
slave girl—
400 years forward\\800 years
back.

In fields so green—
turn
they blue and moist.
Rice. rubber—cane.
She make
steady
from behind\the eyes.
Story say
some old/
man took she.
stole she into her mama's womb.
And feet so

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flat
cause
they crossed oooooooooovaaa the water\
where she
and she
sleep neck and
neck//

No one hardly
tell their names apart.

Call one fire.
call the other\wind.

At the earth's floor
she and she
rub
pelvis atop another.
In fields so green turn the blue\
worn limbs part under linen white dress/
finger crawl
of
wet skin\Push into moist opening-
pelvis at the earth—she and she
push pelvis
weave breath
make
a passage
chest to chest—
this way/
know they names—by heart.

Shape shift
she be
here now
(right here)
flat screen\blinking cursor
arrow
page
hollow light.
Finger scroll of silver-white.
she be right-now—
gone.

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Shape/shift.

At the end of last winter
she threw her hands in the sky—
say *she don't*
know where she going
but she seen where she been\
wanna spilt the difference.

Say she root release
see. know. hear. reach\
breath
anchor....breathe

Part she scalp down the center—almond oil
for she flight//
next
places two chords
at the waist\
one for this world
one-
for the other—
a reminder that knowing she-self
means saying yes
to what she knows.

This be my little sister.
She be corn rolled—white linen dress.
she make happy happy with
patent leather\click-click
on the inside part. click-click
on the out!

We be
Gullah/
from the long time ago\
with momma sweet—
and daddy—bird.

She be sparkle sparkle
and rain\
shine she bright wet—

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freckle freckle of time—
arm cheek third. eye\foot.

This be
my little sister.
When she was
little she—
she and she sleep
neck
and neck—
no one hardly tell their names apart.

They pinky-swear a bridge
heart to heart—
meet
when the waking eye turn
sleep.

Say she/
we be the
two that got
away— call me
'you'
and call you
'blessed be.'

Later after she slips away-
she will imagine herself
a new self—
May she leave
this space in peace—
May
she leave
with her
heart in.tact\\
May she accept the full
range
of her knowing—and in that
knowing see you—
see me and call to arms
brass trumpet at the lips—and incantation
of yes

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and yes, and yes, and yes, and yes, and yes\\and yes.

Misty De Berry is a PhD candidate and performance artist in the Department of Performance Studies at Northwestern University. Her research interests include performance philosophy, phenomenology, affect theory, and women of color feminisms. Her current research explores contemporary social art practices in the context of U.S. carceral regimens. Recently, her original solo-play *Milkweed* was published in *solo/black/woman: Scripts, Interviews, Essays*, edited by E. Patrick Johnson and Ramón Rivera-Servera, which received Honorable Mention for the Errol Hill Book Award from the American Society of Theatre Research.