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Our Lives are Worth Celebrating

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Our Lives Are Worth Celebrating

DARIUS PHELPS AND DR. BRIAN MOONEY

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1. Warning

Hear the alarm.

Sounds like books doused in accelerant.

Like “Don’t say gay” sharpied on silver duct tape.

Like white supremacy taking to the mic
at your local school board meeting.

Hear the alarm.

Sounds like an insurrection.

Like Proud Boys huddled together
with semi-automatic rifles outside the Capitol.

Sounds like an AR-15 with an extended clip
in the hands of an incel.

Hear the alarm.

Sounds like fragile white masculinity
shattering into shards of glass

like an empty vase dropped from the sky.

Sounds like the word “groomer”

in the mouth of every so-called Christian mother
who is more afraid of a drag queen than a Nazi.

Sounds like white young men marching with tiki torches
towards the main entrance of your school.

Hear the alarm.

Sounds like a thousand dog whistles
blowing at the same time.

Sounds like the doors of a Planned Parenthood slamming shut,
leaving an empty medical building
as a symbol of our hatred toward women and their bodies.

Sounds like *Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with us*.

Sounds like another lockdown in my son’s preschool,
his little head poking out from under the table
as the sheriffs sweep the building in tactical gear.

Disclaimer: this curriculum has a warning label.
It says, *keep away from children, so they don't interrupt the design.*
It says, *see teacher as poison control /*
as emergency responder /
as a crisis caregiver.
Listen to them when they write,
"YOU don't know my sorrow, YOU don't know my PAIN."
Listen when they tell us,
This warning is not a metaphor.
Look outside. It is literally burning.

Listen to the alarm blaring.
Sounds like Mama whispering warnings in my ears.
We must protect our grace -
oppression and discrimination,
You are destined to face
it is rooted in our veins,
laced with our ancestors' pain.

Hear the alarm.
If you listen close, it is not all doom.
Sounds like a song
in the key of vulnerability.
I know it is my soul's duty to be the vessel,
this beacon of hope,
for these young men of color
for white folx who don't understand

They must get free, too,
that their humanity is tied up in this shit, too,
they need to know their souls are at stake.

2. Signal

See the signal.
Looks like a bonfire of books burning,
words becoming ashes between our fingertips.
Sentences ablaze.
Truth, alight.
This signal is a trail of smoke

from a classroom engulfed
in the silent voices of tomorrow.
This signal is an EXIT sign
glowing through the haze and smoke,
so many years spent gasping for air
with the fear that I'd choke.

This signal sounds like a call for resistance,
for fists, for any means necessary
to refuse our death softly,
but to go out blazing and unholy,
tossing the teargas back.

Hear the signal. It is a rally for truths
we shouldn't even have to affirm.
It's for my 5-year-old daughter
on my shoulders at the protest,
yelling at the top of her lungs
for a world she will inherit
that is flooded with our sins.

Hear the signal.
Sounds like levees breaking from the surge
and people abandoned shouting from rooftops.
Looks like long days and even longer nights
wading through my own sea
of doubts and insecurities,
being the token black male figure.
My evolution means nothing
to their scripted curriculums
and twisted facades.

This fire is my blessing to carry yet,
they try to make it feel like a burden.
Hear the signal ringing loud in the ears
of anyone who refuses to hear the truth
that we are stifling and suffocating our youth.
They deserve to be liberated and loved.

3. Celebration

Hear the celebration.

It sounds like dancing and defiance.

Like joy, not in spite of, but in response to
their denial of our humanity.

Hear the celebration

 Leave your home
 and join us in the streets.

 Sounds like a mosaic of voices
 stitched together by radical love
as the soundtrack of our classrooms and communities.

 Hear the music of our resistance.

 It sounds like singing.

 Like silver hymns.

 Like deep blue psalms.

Sounds like prayer over a breakbeat.

 Like a classroom cypher
 and children drumming on desks.

Hear the celebration.

It sounds like, "*Mr. Phelps, I need you,*"
as their tiny, fragile hands
pick up my pieces and make me whole.

Listen to these rhythms of rejoice.

Listen to us becoming the promise
of a world that is not yet.

 Hear the celebration.

 Hear this boom-bap turn up pedagogy.

 Listen to the body, whole in itself,
 sacred as a temple made of stories.

 Hear the sounds of the classroom
 as sanctuary, as refuge,
as a homeplace, as a beacon of freedom.

Hear this praisesong in the key of abolition,
in the building of something new & better & more beautiful.

Hear this celebration in the voices of the youth
they remind us that we are not alone in this fight—
not when we have each other to lean on, to call home.

We walk this journey towards liberation, hand in hand,
refusing to be chained and shackled by fear and hate—
the vision of our ancestors—
is a guiding light,
a beacon,
reminding us,
we are all wounded healers.
so come, testify, bear witness,
dream with us beloved.

let's face this together /
our lives / are worth / celebrating

DARIUS PHELPS is a doctoral student at Teachers College, Columbia University. He is a full-time lecturer at Medgar Evers College and Assistant Manager at Brooklyn Poets. An educator, poet, spoken word artist, and activist, Darius writes poems about grief, liberation, emancipation, and reflection through the lens of a teacher of color and experiencing Black boy joy. His poems have appeared in the *NY English Record*, *NCTE English Journal*, and many more.

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