

*New Year, Same Old Sickness*  
(a poetic-style monologue,  
read as a narrative)

**CHARACTER:** A feisty 65-year-old woman of color.

**NOTE:** Though this is written in poetic form, it **should not** be read as such. Read it as a narrative, structured by comas or the lack of, and spacing.

Comas within sentences allow for short pauses; comas at the **end** of lines are meant to be a “catch your breath and keep going” to maintain the flow. No punctuation at the end of a line means keep going, breathe only if you need to. A period is a definitive stop.

Spacing refers to in-between the lines. A collection of lines has a focus that may still flow into the next collection. Typically, though, a space implies a new starting point in time where well construed silences are placed; spaces greater than the pattern set are meant to stretch the silence. If you don’t see “double space”, it means the lines separated by pages are all part of the same collection.

Sixty-five years old.

That's me.

Born March 5 1956 in Cleveland Ohio.

The youngest of six children.

Three boys, two girls and me.

I lived in the same house until I was seventeen,  
prompted to leave by a brother's improprieties.

(double space)

My father was a bricklayer by trade,

a door-to-door salesman by moonlight.

He peddled more than kitchen spices and syrup for sweet candy drinks.

He sold lovely words and empty promises.

He sold my mother a nickel-and-dime ring.

Sold her freedom to six young kids,

then liberated himself by moving out and moving on to wife number three.

(double space)

My mother,

unable to forgive him,

spoke words that were evil and full of spit.

She was determined to keep us from the same fate.

She preached the importance of college, career, and numero uno,

forsaking men, marriage and children—

though not in that order.

(double space)

Before Billie Jean King made it official,

I witnessed the war between the sexes

watching the battles between oldest brother and younger sisters.

Their blood, the same as the other,

was as different as whiskey to wine.

Strong and hard to swallow,

my brother was an acquired taste,

not easily acquired.

(double space)

My oldest sister,

assigned to being my governess,

taught me how to lay low not bring attention to myself or to cause a disturbance.

Much to my surprise,

her lessons proved to be beneficial.

(double space)

Looking back on my life,

I can see her due diligence came from love and concern.

Given all the madness surrounding us,

that being the sixties,

she knew better than I that as a black, as a woman,

laying low was sometimes the best choice to make.

In contrast to my brother,

who encouraged me to always fight back.  
I took to heart what both taught me,  
learning most importantly,  
when to choose one over the other.

(double space)

Living through the sixties was my introduction to the complexities of life.  
Consider.

Bussing is being talked about.  
Bill Cosby is the first black face I see on TV,  
followed by Diahann Carol.  
Notwithstanding their popularity,  
no singular black face stood out more to me  
than the countless Negro faces I saw on the news.

(double space)

I studied their faces intensely.  
Sad reflections of each other sobbing.  
Their tears dropping into puddles of sorrow.  
Nothing short of utter disbelief.  
April 4, 1968.  
Martin Luther King is assassinated.  
Shot. Killed. Eradicated.  
Riots flare up across the country,  
setting ablaze neighborhoods,  
indiscriminate of whose homes and businesses went down,  
going up in flames.

(double space)

Enraged faces of color everywhere,  
hindering firemen and provoking the police.  
Neither one can do their job,  
forcing a choice to be made.  
Put out fires, hose the mobs or simply stop caring.  
How do you make that decision  
to protect firemen, protect property or to just say, fuck it?  
The choice was made higher up.  
Call in the National Guard.  
Jeeps with mounted machine guns patrolled neighborhoods under curfew.

(double space)

Had hope died with King at 7:05 pm?  
It was a tactical error as I saw it.  
Where there is no hope,  
there is no reason to worry about life.  
No future worth living.  
King was the opiate that calmed the savages.  
His sudden departure led to withdrawal.  
So burn baby burn!  
There ain't no reason now,

not to burn the whole damn city down.

(double space)

Yep, those were the days.

Not the good old days for everyone,

but they were the days.

Full of restless energy,

seeking purpose and action to turn an injured nation into a haven for all.

They were the days of fear turned to courage.

Discord transformed into harmonious voices.

Calamity, being peacefully muscled into steadfast resolutions.

(double space)

Those were the days of the sixties and seventies,

when government turned spy on its own,

degrading discrediting mocking innocent harmless citizens,

exposing them to the inferno of hate.

Making them easy prey to scorn to hang to oppress.

(double space)

When the injustice actions of j. edger hoover,

were justified in the name of “God and Country”.

(double space)

Those were the days when nooses dangled in the wind, waiting.

When massive mobs, sweltering in anger,

cursed and spat and hosed and legislated their resistance to change.

(double space)

Those were the days when “others”,

refusing to continue in silence,

took to the streets rejecting their place in the status qua.

(double space)

The days when frightened simple folks became brave soldiers,

combating monsters,

disguised as men of honor heroes protectors patriotists,

who at night took their true form

as blood-thirsty creatures hiding behind their cloth of hatred.

(double space)

Those were the days.

When determination was the backbone of hope.

Shackles, the inspiration for freedom.

And the spiritual voices of loved ones taken, sirens demanding justice.

(double space)

Those were the days that freedom fighters had hoped never to fight again.

Had hoped the evil wall of the belligerent would fall to expose a new world,

where the sun would be respect and the moon kindness.

A dream for us all someday.

Someday, we continue to dream.

(double space)

Those were the days.

And I have seen them all.  
Through the eyes of Rosa Parks and Shirley Chisholm and Barbara Smith.  
The passing of time has worn its mark on me,  
leaving false impressions of weariness and remorse.

(double space)

My life.  
Made hard by being black.  
Harder by being female.  
Hardest being a woman who loves women.  
Near impossible being all three.  
But I remain standing, through it all.  
Through the racism the misogyny the homophobia.  
I remain standing  
with no other purpose than to piss off those trying to knock me down.

(double space)

And I shall remain standing,  
as the pompous behavior of forefathers resurface in their descendants.  
Galvanized by an ogre posing as a man of great deeds.  
As the chosen one, handpicked by God Almighty.  
Revered by reincarnated thugs seeking a past that should have died long ago.  
Bullies, who no longer hide,  
but march in daylight,  
armed and prepared to eliminate Me.

(double space)

Perhaps You.

(double space)

Perhaps...

(double space)

all of Us.

(double space)

In the face of mounting terror,  
the me who has withstood anger hatred attacks scorn abuse ridicule.  
Who has been belittled vilified unappreciated my body contaminated with lies.  
Who has suffered admonishment disparagement punishment damnation.  
Who has endured the denial of respect that I am due.  
In the face of all this shit, I will endeavor to remain standing.

(double space)

Sixty-five,  
still breathing,  
and now, counting steps.  
Infinite steps,  
heard before the bullets bulldoze through the bone that keeps a man upright.  
That causes the body to lurch to a sudden stop the knees to buckle the arms to drop  
the head to flop forward colliding with earth.  
The bullet is loud,  
but the scream,

the moaning of a mother,  
now one son less,  
is loudest of them all.

(double space)

Tears free-fall onto a casket soon to be lowered into the ground,  
witnessed by family and friends who take one step after another by her side,  
trying to provide comfort and give her strength.

(double space)

His life is no longer proof of her labor.  
And her memories of him, will never be enough.

(double space)

Steps.

Fast slow arms in the air,  
it doesn't seem to matter.

Fear is a growing virus that kills.

Created by guns in the hands of someone "afraid for their life".

Too many painful steps delivering a mistaken identity to another grave site  
of another one, now forever gone.

Of a brother son friend husband someone who was loved.

But this doesn't matter.

(double space)

Running or standing still.

Hands where they can be seen.

Doesn't matter.

Hate is a lingering disease that destroys without care.

It's a pandemic without boundaries,

killing not the host but who the host despises.

Creating steps that never seem to stop walking,  
towards the stronghold of death.

(double space)

Sixty-five and alive.

Surviving another year of the same old sickness.

The me who has *not been defeated*,

is determined to stay standing,

not wavering by any one defeat *I know I will suffer*.

(double space)

And you must ensure the same as you are targeted for extinction.

(double space)

Determined to survive the affliction that aims to kill us all.

(double space)

You need to be sixty-five.

And still alive.

THE END