

# Where Blooming Flowers Meet The Sky.

By Darryin B. Cunningham

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## **CHARACTERS**

Zhuli.....20s-30s, An up and coming successful poet and painter  
 Malcolm X.....30s-40s, Muslim minister and civil rights activist.  
 Nina Simone/Ms. Donna Edwards.....30s-60s, Pianist, songwriter, singer, civil rights activist  
 John Lewis.....20s-70s, Civil rights activist, House of Representatives in Georgia.

## **TIME/PLACE**

The Present  
 New York Apartment

**WHERE BLOOMING FLOWERS MEET THE SKY**

*Lights rise on Zhuli's New York apartment. She is dressed in her comfy clothes. It is directly connected to her living room area. She sits in her office room at her desk, typing away on her laptop. After a brief moment, she opens her journal and begins to read from one of the pages.*

ZHULI

“Why does it feel like I’m running behind, running in place, running from lines, running from space?/

*(She is interrupted by her phone ringing. She denies the call. The phone rings again. She stands up, debates and then finally answers. It is a facetime call. We never see Donna on stage, but we do hear her. )*

Hey Ms. Donna, how are you?

MS. DONNA

Hey, did you deny my call?

ZHULI

What? Oh no definitely not.

MS. DONNA

I’m pretty sure you did.

ZHULI

I didn’t. My...finger...slipped. I’m sorry. I’ve been busy.

MS. DONNA

I sure hope so! The big boss needs that poetry book today.

ZHULI

Today?

MS. DONNA

Yes, today! Tell me you’ve been working on it?

ZHULI

Ummm, yeah. Yes. Of course I have. It's just not coming together like I hoped it would. Everything feels stale. Like I've said all I needed to. What if I don't have anything else interesting to say? What if this is it for me?

MS. DONNA

Zhuli, how long have I known you?

*(Zhuli doesn't respond.)*

Hello?

ZHULI

Oh you actually wanted an answer? Since I was 16.

MS. DONNA

15, but close enough.

ZHULI

Oh, sorry.

MS. DONNA

My point remains the same. Ever since the first time I heard you read one of your poems out loud, I knew I needed to know you. I needed to know the soul that crafted such beautiful art, and the story behind those eyes. When I became your manager it wasn't because I wanted to make a ton of money. I didn't even know for sure what our future together would look like. I just knew you had a gift. And I believed in that gift. And I believe in you.

ZHULI

You do?

MS. DONNA

Seriously? You'll figure it out! Love ya.

*(Ms. Donna hangs up the phone. Zhuli is humming 'Sinnerman.' as she puts the phone down. She grabs the journal and begins reading again.)*

ZHULI

Where was I? Oh yeah, behind the expectation that someday I could be great. I wait.

Life has gotta be,  
More than flowers in a flower bed  
More than lions in the lion's den  
More than wet clothes drying  
More than food pan frying  
More than tiger stripes  
More than black rights  
Or starlight  
Or spotlight  
Or limelight  
Or your life  
Or my life  
Or hindsight  
Or foresight.

What if the lines don't hold?  
Or the paper don't fold?  
Or the box doesn't close?  
Where do people like me go?

Cause we/

*(Zhuli stops abruptly and sits down in disappointment.)*

No! This isn't it.

*(To herself.)*

I don't know if I can do this.

*(She takes a sip from her mug. After a moment she lays her head on the office table. She begins to snore. A blackout or some other distinction is used to show a passing of time. Malcolm X enters and stares at Zhuli for a moment. She continues to snore.)*

MALCOLM X

Ahem!

*(Zhuli pops up.)*

Good morning.

ZHULI

*(Looking confused.)*

What are you doing in my apartment?

*(Beat. She speaks again before he can answer.)*

Sir I don't know who you are or why you're in/ Malcolm... Wait, Malcolm X? Are you Malcolm X? Why are you here?

MALCOLM X

*(Genuinely confused.)*

That's a good question.

*(He looks around her apartment. He truly ponders the question for a moment.)*

I don't know. Perhaps I should ponder your question further to come to a conclusion.

ZHULI

How'd you get in here?

MALCOLM X

I don't know that either.

ZHULI

So you're THE Malcolm X?

MALCOLM X

Hold on, is there another?

ZHULI

Just the one I think?

MALCOLM X

Then I feel comfortable claiming that to be myself.

ZHULI

Yeah...right.

*(She takes a closer look at him.)*

You do look like him though...why do you look like him?

*(She studies him closely now.)*

Oh my god, you look just like him. That's creepy.

MALCOLM X

*(Throwing his hands up in confusion.)*

I am him.

ZHULI

*(Kung Fu gestures.)*

Good. I didn't wanna have to go Kung Fu Panda up in here.

MALCOLM X

*(He makes a valiant attempt to understand the reference. Gives up after a moment.)*

I'm sorry what?

ZHULI

Big panda bear that does Kung Fu and beats up the bad animals.

MALCOLM X

See, I hear you sista, but I have no idea what you're saying.

ZHULI

Seriously? Jack Black?

MALCOLM X

Who? Is that his birth name?

ZHULI

I don't think so.

MALCOLM X

Is this Jack actually black?

ZHULI

No.

MALCOLM X

Then I'm not sure I understand him.

ZHULI

You don't have to. Look, I was basically saying I will fight if I have to.

MALCOLM X

I see. You're threatening?

ZHULI

Correct.

MALCOLM X

Well that's just unnecessary.

ZHULI

I thought violence was your thing?

MALCOLM X

The devil is a liar.

ZHULI

I'm sorry?

MALCOLM X

Uh, people say things that aren't true. That is used to turn my fellow brotha's and sista's against me. That don't make it true. I'm not gonna sit here and waste my breath trying to convince someone that I am, who I know I am. I don't know why I'm here. It's unclear. But what is clear is that I'm not welcome. Peace be upon you sista.

*(Malcolm attempts to exit but he can't open the door.)*

ZHULI

Do you know how doors work?

MALCOLM X

You're being funny. I can't open the door.



ZHULI

Let me help.

*(She walks over and opens the door for him. Malcolm attempts to walk through the doorway but some force stops him each time. He grows frustrated and gives up.)*

MALCOLM X

Close the door. It's clear I can't leave..

*(Malcolm concedes and sits in her office chair.)*

ZHULI

Sure, make yourself at home "Malcolm X".

MALCOLM X

I don't know what to say or do anymore.

ZHULI

*(Under her breath)*

That's a first.

*(There is very awkward silence for a few moments. Malcolm sighs every now and then as if to call for her attention.)*

I mean, I guess I could use the company/

*(Zhuli is interrupted by a chime or ringtone, this could also be heard by the audience. She takes out her phone and sees the message.)*

ZHULI

Darn...

MALCOLM X

What was that?

ZHULI

My phone. It's from Donna, my manager.

MALCOLM X

Your manager?

ZHULI

I'm an artist. Well, poet and painter. I have a big project due tonight and now I'm being told they are gonna pull funding for my grant if I don't meet my deadline today.

MALCOLM

So why haven't you finished it yet?

ZHULI

Oh, umm, I'm Zhuli. Zhuli Walker. Waiting til the last second and doubting myself is what I do.

MALCOLM X

You kept your slave master's name?

ZHULI

Maybe you are Malcolm X.

MALCOLM X

*(To himself.)*

Zhuli.

*(To her.)*

Is that name of African origin?

ZHULI

My parents were convinced it was. They said it means peace or gift. I later found out that the name could also have origins tied to China.

MALCOLM X

China?

ZHULI

Yeah, so, I'm just Zhuli. I try not to think about it too much.

MALCOLM X

Hmm. So why are you hesitating, Zhuli?

ZHULI

I wish I knew. It's not like I do it purposely. I just have so much riding on this. I can't help but worry about what people say or think. Plus in today's society, every decision we make is forever, thanks to social media and the internet. Last thing I want is to have to disable my comments on instagram.

MALCOLM X

What's instagram?

ZHULI

It's a social media app.

MALCOLM X

I don't follow.

ZHULI

Nevermind.

*(The room finds silence again. Zhuli lays on the ground and reads her journal. Malcolm dozes off in her office chair. Soon after she falls asleep on the floor. Another passing of time happens. Nina Simone, John Lewis and Malcolm lean over Zhuli's body, staring at her. After a moment, she wakes and screams.)*

ZHULI

Ahhhhh!!!!

NINA + MALCOLM X

*(The both flinch.)*

Ahhhhh!!!!

*(John Lewis laughs.)*

NINA

You sure you a poet? Chile, with that voice, you should be singing.

ZHULI

Well when I fail, maybe I'll try that next/

*(Realizing another person is in her apartment.)*

Malcolm!! Who're your friends?

MALCOLM X

Oh you know Nina Simone. The Grammy Hall Of Fame singer, songwriter, pianist, composer and activist.

And John, a politician, civil rights activist, and/

ZHULI

And you served as a House of Representative for Georgia's 5th congressional district. Nice to meet you sir.

JOHN

The pleasure is mine, Zhuli.

NINA

*(To Malcolm.)*

Hi neighbor!

ZHULI

Neighbor?

MALCOLM X

We lived next to each other for a short while.

ZHULI

Great. This is awesome.

MALCOLM X

Hold on, so you don't question whether this is the real John? I mean, you got old brotha!!

JOHN

She probably saw me on her smart TV. And that's right. I lived to be 80.

NINA + MALCOLM X

That's beautiful.

MALCOLM X

Smart TV? Are there dumb ones too?

*(Zhuli gets up and sneaks away to her mug.)*

JOHN

Only less intelligent.

ZHULI

I think if I close my eyes real tight, I'll wake up eventually.

*(She does just that. The three others stare at her in silence for a moment. She opens her eyes and they are still staring at her.)*

NINA

Hi.

ZHULI

*(Heading to her office chair to sit. She slides into it, defeated.)*

Hi. Y'all are welcome to stay, just...ummm...please keep it down. I need to finish one last poem for my poetry book. It's due in 4 hours.

NINA

Poetry book? You know I was a bit of a writer myself.

MALCOLM X

So was I.

NINA

Not like me though.

MALCOLM X

How do you mean?

NINA

Which one of us has 40 albums?

MALCOLM X

And no number one records.

NINA

They were never going to allow my records to reach number 1 because of who I was, and what I sang about. Not to mention being a woman. My songs still did what they were supposed to.

ZHULI

Easy yall. I'll take all the help I can get. What do you mean no number one records? Forty albums and not a single number one?

NINA

Not a single one.

ZHULI

Wow!

NINA

I'm surprised your mother didn't teach you about this.

ZHULI

Well she uh-hh,  
*(She takes a moment.)*

She's why I started writing.

NINA

Honey, I'm so sorry.

MALCOLM X

That must've been hard. I know a thing or two about that.

ZHULI

Is that why you were so angry and violent coming up?

MALCOLM X

I wasn't angry. And when I was violent it was because I had to be.

ZHULI

Okay, I'm sorry. I just always heard that you believed in non peaceful protest.

MALCOLM X

*(He takes a deep breath.)*

That simply isn't true. I never preached for violence. I believed the black man should have the right to defend himself. I spoke for equality and equal opportunity for our communities. He is human. Therefore, he has a right to exist in the world like everyone else.

ZHULI

Okay, respect. I hear you. Feels like we're still standing up for those same things these days.

MALCOLM X

These days? When exactly is, these days?

ZHULI

*(Feel free to change this to the current year for context.)*

2023.

MALCOLM X

I can't even imagine.

JOHN

Progress was made.

MALCOLM X

Was it?

JOHN

There is still so much work to do. But there always will be. We should never stop trying to find ways to better human beings. To be kind to each other.

MALCOLM X

I always imagined there would come a time when black people would seek more education and independence from the white man.

ZHULI

I like to think we accomplished some version of that. Seeking to be more educated and learn our history. Building each other up and restoring our communities.

NINA

That's music to my ears.

ZHULI

As much as I'd love to catch you all up on the modern world, I really need to get to work.

MALCOLM X

She was telling me earlier how she's been hesitating because she can't help but worry about others' opinions and reactions. She also mentioned social media was creating fear and discomfort for her.

ZHULI

Thanks for that overshare Malcolm. As if I wasn't stressed or embarrassed enough.

*(Zhuli walks away to her office chair to begin working. Malcolm tries to follow her but he is stopped by Nina.)*

NINA

Give her a moment.

MALCOLM X

Okay.

*(There is silence for a moment.)*

Hey, I was wondering, how did I pass away?

JOHN

*(Hesitant)*

Well you//

*(Malcolm interrupts him.)*

MALCOLM X

Actually, don't tell me.

*(Another moment passes.)*



ZHULI

*(To herself.)*

Innocent souls robbed of black bodies.

*(They all look at her for a moment before silence takes the room again..)*

JOHN

Let's not get into the specifics of it all. But your impact lived on. Over 30,000 mourners at the public memorial. There was an overflow of people outside who couldn't fit into the church. Ossie Davis did the eulogy, called you our shining black prince.

MALCOLM X

How do you know?

JOHN

I was there. It sent waves of shock and sadness through our country. Even Dr. King spoke openly about you.

*(Utilize the clip of Martin actually saying this if possible.)*

“While we did not always see eye to eye on methods to the race problem, I always had a deep affection for Malcolm and felt that he had a great ability to put his finger on the existence and root of the problem. He was an eloquent spokesman for his point of view and no one can honestly doubt that Malcolm had a great concern for the problems that we face as a race.”

MALCOLM X

He said that?

NINA

His words exactly.

MALCOLM X

*(Walking away.)*

Excuse me for a moment.

ZHULI

Is he okay?

NINA

He will be. Now let's focus on this poetry book of yours, what's it about?

ZHULI

You're right. Ahhh! I need to get this done.

NINA

Tell me about it. It might help.

ZHULI

Oh, it's complicated and convoluted and abstract and all that. I don't th/

NINA

Enough with the fancy words, just talk to me.

*(Zhuli looks at John for help.)*

JOHN

Don't look at me, you don't mess with Nina. When she opens her mouth, you listen.

ZHULI

*(Sarcastically.)*

Great, thank you so much John.

*(He aims a thumbs up her way.)*

Um, okay. Well, my poetry book is inspired by a series of paintings I did a year ago. I was uh-hh, exploring some inner struggles, which resulted in me painting a series.

*(They wait for further explanation. There will be visual representations of each.)*

Um, the first one, called "Oppressor", is of a white man who is pushing a white woman down, while painting a picture of a black family. The second one, called "Ancestor", is of myself, as a kid, reaching out with one hand toward this massive, magical tree. The blooming flowers and leaves stretch out at me. Forming on the tree are faces. All unrecognizable except one. My mother. With the left hand, I'm reaching straight up, towards the sky. In the sky is...uh-hh.

*(Fighting her emotions.)*

In the sky is my dad. He's smiling at me as his ancestors carry him further into the sky.

The third painting, called “Master”, is of me, sitting at a desk. There is a mirror. In it is my reflection, which is a different version of me. My hands are around my neck and mouth, fear is in my eyes, and butterfly wings sprout from my back. The three paintings were sold separately and as a collection. My manager and agent thought it would be cool to explore these ideas further through poetry. So I did. Oppressor and Ancestor sections flowed out of me like river water. But master, seems to have me stumped, more than anything I’ve ever written.

*(They process in silence. Malcolm hears the conversation from afar and walks back towards the group.)*

NINA

That is a brilliant mind you have, young lady. So creative.

ZHULI

Thank you. Wait, was that sarcasm/

NINA

No, I really think you’re gifted.

ZHULI

Right. Sorry, I have a hard time accepting compliments. Hey, you were a singer right?

JOHN

Man what?

JOHN + MALCOLM X + NINA

*(They sing together.)*

WHEN YOU’RE YOUNG GIFTED AND BLACK,  
YOUR SOUL’S INTACT

ZHULI

Oh wait, I know that song!

NINA

I’m sure you do. You probably know this one too.

*(She begins to sing.)*

BIRDS FLYING HIGH, YOU KNOW HOW I FEEL.

ZHULI

*(Zhuli sings.)*

SUN IN THE SKY, YOU KNOW HOW I FEEL.  
BREEZE DRIFTIN ON BY,

NINA

YOU KNOW HOW I FEEL.

ZHULI + NINA

*(They sing together.)*

IT'S A NEW DAWN,  
IT'S A NEW DAY,  
IT'S A NEW LIFE FOR ME.

ZHULI

So how'd you do it? How'd you write all those songs? Channel all that passion into beautiful activism?

NINA

Well those songs I didn't write. Even though some might say I further popularized them. I never wrote from anger. I wrote and sang from intelligence. From what I knew. I sang from a place of letting white America know who they are. And what they have done to our people around the world. That's not anger. Anger has its place. Anger has fire. And fire moves things. But I sing from intelligence, because I know who they are.

*(Beat.)*

I think that's why Martin, Dr. King and I got along so well. Martin was always on stage. Even when he wasn't. His dedication was amazing. He never forgot for a second that he was on Earth to lead his people. Our people. When he wasn't on stage, he was still on stage. Much like me.

ZHULI

I didn't know you knew him.

NINA

We were close. Marched on Selma and Washington together. Ain't that right John?

ZHULI

That's right., you were close with him too?

JOHN

He became a brother to me. I was the youngest person to speak at the march on Washington. 17 years old. It was the honor of my life.

ZHULI

Do you still remember any parts of your speech?

JOHN

Of course, I remember pieces.

*(Preps himself, tries to remember. Delivers to the audience.)*

“One man, one vote is the African cry. It is ours and must be ours. Where is the political party that will make it unnecessary to march?” And umm, I remember parts like/

NINA

“We cannot be patient. We don’t want our freedom gradually. We want it now!”

MALCOLM X

“We will march with the spirit of love and dignity.”

JOHN + MALCOLM

“We shall splinter the segregated south into a thousand pieces, and put them together in the image of God and democracy.”

MALCOLM X

Such wise, profound words for such a young man.

ZHULI

Wow. Hearing you speak, you sound so much like MLK.

JOHN

He was my brother in arms and my mentor. When I was in High School I wrote to him and told him I needed help. Two weeks later he sent me a roundtrip bus ticket and invited me to meet him.

*(Chimes/Ringtone sound scares Zhuli. She checks her phone.)*

JOHN

Everything okay?

ZHULI

Yes...it's just, yall were so brave and creative. I can't even finish a poetry book about myself.

JOHN

You can. And you will.

ZHULI

I only have a few hours left. I can't lose this grant.

JOHN

What happens if you do?

ZHULI

I lose the art show and the grant money. Then I can't pay my bills.

JOHN

So let's get it done.

ZHULI

I've already gotten so much rejection and threats from people for my painting series. I was just trying to tell my story and people didn't even accept that. Said my story was too brutal, too woke, too on the nose. I was just trying to be myself. Share my heart.

JOHN

No one can ruin you. There will be people who celebrate you, and people who tolerate you. But we will never be accepted by everyone.

*(He takes a moment. This could be delivered directly to the audience.)*

I met Rosa Parks in 1957. Martin in 1955. They inspired me to find a way, to get in the way. That good, necessary trouble. When I was in college, we, black and white students alike, would sit in our peaceful protest, and they would put cigarettes out in our hair, pour hot water or hot chocolate down our backs. Or even spit on us. But we were orderly and peaceful. They even put us in jail. We were charged with disorderly conduct. Disturbing the peace. For sitting in, for going on the freedom ride, for marching for the right to vote.

*(Back to Zhuli.)*

But somehow, some force, or maybe God almighty himself, kept me here. So I could continue to find a way to get in that good trouble.

ZHULI

Yeah, but that was then. You guys have no idea what it's like to grow up now. The social media era, where we all are forced to grow up with the whole world watching. And judging. Shoving their opinions in your face. And some days I can take it. Other days, I wanna find the darkest corner of the room and hide. But I can't. Because it's not just about me. Earlier I said my mother was the reason I started writing. Well, my little brother is the reason I continued. And why I won't stop creating art. I have to be his mother and sister. Do yall have any idea how hard that is? How complicated it is to explain to him what our life is now, where mama is or just...

*(Zhuli becomes very emotional. She kneels down before she speaks again.)*

I want to make something my brother can come back to and always cherish. And I wanna fight for our right to have a voice. I never want him to think he lives in a world where he can't be free to dream. To be whatever his mind can think of. But I wasn't built for marches and it's not really safe for him.

*(She takes a moment.)*

Most days, I just wanna make it 24 hours without feeling like we have to conquer the world. And right now I'm feeling every bit of the Earth's weight. I just...I'm stressed. I just wanna get through the day.

*(Zhuli tries to fight back tears. Nina comes over to console her. She begins to sing "I wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free." But slower.)*

I WISH I KNEW HOW

IT WOULD FEEL TO BE FREE

I WISH I COULD BREAK

ALL THE CHAINS HOLDIN' ME

I WISH I COULD SAY

ALL THE THINGS THAT I SHOULD SAY

SAY'EM LOUD, SAY'EM CLEAR  
 FOR THE WHOLE ROUND WORLD TO HEAR  
 I WISH I COULD SHARE  
 ALL THE LOVE THAT'S IN MY HEART  
 REMOVE ALL THE BARS  
 THAT KEEP US APART  
 I WISH YOU COULD KNOW  
 WHAT IT MEANS TO BE ME  
 THEN YOU'D SEE AND AGREE  
 THAT EVERY MAN SHOULD BE FREE

*(As John steps up to speak, Nina begins to hum softly, holding on to Zhuli. It could be the same tune or a different one. There is something motherly about it..)*

JOHN

You're right. We will never know what it's like to be a kid or young adult today. But I've been hurt before. I was so sure the entire world was against me, but I never gave up and never gave in. I kept my faith. We must march, with hope, faith and love. On this little planet we call Earth, we must learn to live together. Get into good trouble. Martin Luther King Senior used to say, "Make it plain, make it clear, make it real." And his son could make those words sing and dance off the page. You can too. You've been given a gift, and gifts are meant to be shared. Even if you only inspire one person, you've made a difference in the world. And that's worth it.. You won't be able to control the internet and that's okay. Focus on how you respond, that is what you can control. Show the world your art. Show your brother the world. You are fierce Zhuli. But you're also kind. Just remember it is important and possible to be both.

ZHULI

I/

*(Before she can finish her sentence, John Lewis fades away.)*

He's gone.



NINA

I guess his job was done.

ZHULI

I guess so?

NINA

Can I ask you something?

ZHULI

Sure.

NINA

What's driving you?

ZHULI

I'm sorry?

NINA

You said you wanted to *share your heart*. To make something your brother could cherish. Why?

ZHULI

Actions will always speak louder than words. So I guess...I guess I wanted to show EJ what courage looks like. What catching a dream looks like.

NINA

Catching?

ZHULI

Something my dad used to say when I was young. My brother and I are 12 years apart, so I passed it on to him. It's okay to chase a dream. But he wanted to make sure we understood what it looked like to catch one. "Happens more often than you think." He'd always say that.

NINA

Have you caught any dreams lately?

ZHULI

Unfortunately, art is the only way I know how.

NINA

Fortunately, it's the gift you've been given. We are all meant for something.

*(They share a smile.)*

ZHULI

Thanks Ms. Simone.

NINA

You can call me Nina. We are friends now.

ZHULI

Yes ma'am.

*(Silence takes the room again.)*

NINA

You know...I didn't come from money. My mama would say, "I don't know what we are gonna eat tonight, but I'll pray and it'll come." Sure enough she prayed and it came. She kept the faith. So I did too. So when I was 12, I had my first professional recital at a musical library. They sat my parents all the way in the back. I'm sure you can guess why. But they could hardly see me. I stood up and I said, "If my parents don't sit in the front, I don't play." It was one of my bravest and defining moments

ZHULI

So what happened?

NINA

What you think?

*(They share a laugh.)*

Don't worry about those who try to get in the way, or keep you down. Maybe you weren't built to march like John. Or speak like Malcolm. Or preach like Martin.

*(Jokingly.)*

You definitely weren't built to sing like me.

*(They laugh.)*

That's okay. Doesn't mean you can't fight. Doesn't mean you shouldn't. I wasn't built to get behind a podium. Instead, I got behind a piano. I let the heart and the cries of our people flow through my voice. Singing is what made sense. It's how I learned to fight. To educate. You've got so many talents. Use them. Get creative. There is more than one way to fight the good fight. Just because you and I weren't meant to give speeches doesn't mean we weren't meant for greatness.

ZHULI

Greatness? I don't know about that.

NINA

Oh I do. We've all got greatness inside us.

ZHULI

What if I don't know how to use my art to make a difference?

NINA

Zhuli, you've already started doing it.

ZHULI

I have?

NINA

Maybe you just needed someone else to tell you to keep going. We all need that sometimes.

*(Nina begins to fade away. Zhuli chases after her and grabs her hand.)*

I have to go. I've overstayed my welcome.

ZHULI

What? You haven't! I think I need you here.

NINA

You don't need me, child. You have all the tools you need.

*(Nina begins to sing Here Comes The Sun.)*

HERE COMES THE SUN, LITTLE DARLIN'  
HERE COMES THE SUN, I SAY

IT'S ALRIGHT  
 IT'S ALRIGHT  
 HERE COMES THE SUN, LITTLE DARLIN'  
 HERE COMES THE SUN, I SAY  
 IT'S ALRIGHT  
 IT'S ALRIGHT  
 LITTLE DARLIN'

*(Nina takes a second. She smiles. She takes Zhuli's hands.)*

I see so much of myself in you. You've got this.

ZHULI

Can I hug you?

NIINA

Of course!

*(They hug. The moment is warm and beautiful. Afterwards Nina begins to walk away into the same void as John. Malcolm approaches Zhuli)*

Oh, and you've already inspired one person.

ZHULI

I have?

NINA

Yeah, me.

*(Nina exits.)*

MALCOLM X

And then there were two.

ZHULI

Yup.

MALCOLM X

Sista, I know you have some concern about me.

ZHULI

I don't. I mean, not really.

MALCOLM X

I get it. I can tell you're not the biggest fan. But we are more alike than you think.

ZHULI

What do you mean?

MALCOLM X

I lost my parents when I was young too. I imagine it troubled you like it did me. Young sista you have so much life ahead of you. It's clear to me, you're incredibly gifted.. I got into some trouble when I was young, and it wasn't always good trouble. As I'm sure you did too. But we can't let that stop us, there is a dream embedded in the soul of every Black American. Our fight, our cries, our feet, leaving footprints in the soil. I know what people think of me. The truth is, they weren't used to hearing that black and brown people have every right to defend themselves against the hate of white America. When you're stripped of every other option, and your people are tired, what do you expect to happen? They wanted to paint me as controversial because I fought for black liberation.

ZHULI

Black freedom!

MALCOLM X

*(Excited)*

Exactly. Black freedom! Black business, black cities, black structures and wealth. There wasn't one correct path. And you know what Martin and John went through. It's not like Martin's peaceful way of protesting was fool proof. Every angle we played had flaws. I'm sure if we knew for certain, exactly which road to take, we would've all been marching together.

*(Beat)*

That would've been nice. You know, I only met Martin in person one time. In 1964, March 26th, during the senate debates for what would eventually become the Civil Rights Act. I said a lot of things that I think scared white people, but by comparison I'm not sure why I should care or be seen as a villain. I don't want to get away from my point.

ZHULI

And that is?

MALCOLM X

You aren't always gonna know which route is the correct journey to take. But if you don't choose, your feet are stuck in solid ground. Your mind is sharp and your tongue is silver.

ZHULI

Silver?

MALCOLM X

Think of it as being clever. Don't be afraid to be opposed. Those people on social media we're never for you anyway. Your art is an instruction of your soul. I see that now. You must use it, to speak your truth. You've got wings in the last painting right?

ZHULI

Yes.

MALCOLM

And it's titled, "Master". I gathered it must be referring to you, being the master. Only you can unseal your own lips right?

ZHULI

How did you know that?

MALCOLM X

I listened with intent to understand. And you painted it beautifully with your words. Half your work is already done. If the only thing silencing you, is you. Then I think you know exactly what your solution should be.

ZHULI

You're right Malcolm. But I'm scared. I want to inspire the youth and I want to impress the critics too. It's not easy.

MALCOLM X

All the more reason to do it. And don't worry about being "woke". Being awake is a good thing. It means you're alive.. Attentive. It's necessary to dream, but we can't turn dreams into reality

while we are sleeping. You will inspire the youth and you will impress the critics, because you're true to yourself and doing it your way. And the good things will come. It won't hit everyone, but it'll hit who it's meant to.

ZHULI

"It won't hit everyone, but it'll hit who it's meant to." Wow. You spitting bars right now Malcolm.

MALCOLM X

Bars?

ZHULI

*(Under her breath.)*

I don't even know how to explain that to you.

Umm, like you're preaching? Speaking facts?

MALCOLM X

Ahh, I get you sista. Not sure if I should thank you for that?

ZHULI

No need. But I should thank you.

MALCOLM X

You're welcome. Zhuli we all get scared. You'll learn that courage isn't the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. Most dreams that don't scare us aren't worth chasing.

*(She runs to Malcolm and hugs him tightly. He's shocked at first. But soon after he smiles and hugs her back.)*

Try to remember at least some of this when you wake up. Al Salam Alaykom.

ZHULI

Huh?

*(Malcolm claps his hands twice. Zhuli passes out. Malcolm fades away. Another passing of time happens. Zhuli wakes up and looks around.)*

Wa 'alaykumu s-salām. Wait, what just happened?

*(Her phone rings. She gets up off the ground and answers it. It's Ms. Donna on Facetime.)*

ZHULI

Hey Ms. Donna, how are you?

MS. DONNA

I'm lovely. What's wrong?

ZHULI

What do you mean? Nothing.

MS. DONNA

You only call me that, when you want something or something's wrong. You didn't finish the poem did you? Zhuli you've had months.

ZHULI

What? No, I did. Actually just uhhh, just finishing the last touches right now.

MS. DONNA

Perfect. Let's hear it.

ZHULI

Right now?

MS. DONNA

Oh come on Zhuli. I thought it'd be fun if you performed it live for me. Hearing your words out loud is part of the magic.

ZHULI

Oh. Great. I'm just gonna grab it from my office.

*(Zhuli goes to get her journal and heads back to Donna. She fiddles with it for a bit.)*

MS. DONNA

*(Eagerly.)*

Okay. Let's hear it.



## ZHULI

Great. Yeah. Here we go.

*(This should be Rhythmic, poetic and musical. The paintings, if available should be shown as she speaks.)*

The Master  
 Of my own mind  
 Running, so I don't get behind  
 Tryna remember my hands are fierce  
 Even though my heart is kind.  
 I was scared.  
 Peeking through the blinds  
 To no surprise, this what I find,  
 That history repeats itself, and  
 victors tell it, you surprised?  
 The hand of fate covers your eyes,  
 As an attempt to keep you blind.  
 It's time we shine a light,  
 On our history, it's bright,  
 Enough to light the darkest pathways,  
 How else can we fight?  
 With my mother on the right,  
 I stretch my arm to its height.  
 The blooming branches reaching back,  
 I see her face, and it's a sight.  
 With my father on the left,  
 I reach my hand into the depths,  
 Of the sky, where the ancestors spread their wings and fly.  
 As my daddy floats away,  
 I see a smile upon his face.  
 He always said I was star,  
 One day I'll be right where you are.  
 Now it's Zhuli versus Zhuli.  
 In the mirror, I can see.  
 My eyes are finally filled with fear,  
 And my hands silence me.  
 But now wings sprout from my back,  
 There is beauty in being black.

I feel the magic in the air.  
 Just like the magic in my hair.  
 Malcolm told me not to fear.  
 Nina told me that I'm here,  
 "There's more than one way to fight."  
 Now I feel she might be right.  
 John taught me to be fierce,  
 But to let my kindness pierce,  
 Through hearts and minds.  
 I think you'll find, I give all I got.

*(She takes a second. She delivers the next few lines slower. Almost conversational.)*

Well right now, the iron is hot.  
 So I guess, this is me, giving it a shot.  
 Nobody said it would be easy.  
 I didn't know it would be tough.  
 But one thing I had to remember,  
 One voice, your voice, is enough.

*(Donna is silent for a moment, searching for the right words.)*

What do you think?

MS. DONNA

Um, I think he's gonna love it.

ZHULI

Really? Wait, he?

MS. DONNA

Your brother. EJ. That's who it's for right?

ZHULI

Well, it's for me too.

MS. DONNA

Wow.

*(Beat.)*

I don't know how you come up with these powerful ideas.

*(Malcolm, John and Nina enter. They each touch one of Zhuli's shoulders.)*

ZHULI

*(She notices and smiles at them.)*

Well, I was lucky enough to have some help.

*END OF PLAY.*