Black Alchemist

By Akilah Toney

*Black man, hold onto imagination,*

*For they cannot take the freedom of thought and desire.*

The sweet yam sun crawls through
metal barred windows,
clouds freckled with bits of cinnamon
slide and dance by.

He says sun rays prolly taste like
the Kool-Aid Mama used to make.

He stares at his baby girl on the concrete wall,
she just grew her first tooth,
took her first wobbling steps,
now graduating high school,
all in one wrinkled photograph.

Breakfast is served through the hatch.

He likes to think Mama made it,
with her Sunday Marvin Gaye playing in the back,
hot buttery grits on the plate with spicy sausage on the side,
drowning it all down with Daddy’s hot decaf coffee.

He ponders at sunrise when
his lucidity remains unshaken,
yet to be milked, pimped, and sucked.
at 5:30 PM in the Holy Name of Jesus Parish Chapel, followed by dinner, Sr. Helen’s talk, and conversation next door in the Holy Name of Jesus Parish Hall, 6220 LaSalle Place.

On Thursday morning, September 14, death row exoneree Shareef Cousin will speak of his experience being condemned to death and later exonerated at two Religious Studies classes.

Also on Thursday, September 14, from 12:30 to 1:30, the Loyola Law School will host a panel discussion featuring death row exoneree Shareef Cousin and attorneys working on death penalty cases in Louisiana. This event will take place in Room 111 at the Law School (526 Pine St). RSVP here.

Thank you to the co-sponsors of these events: Loyola Center for Ethics and Economic Justice, Canizaro Center for Catholic Studies, Catholic Mobilizing Network, Gillis Long Poverty Law Center, National Lawyers Guild, Department of Criminology and Justice, Sociology Department, and the Promise of Justice Initiative.

Poet’s Note: Black Alchemist is swirling with Surrealist and Afrofuturist imagery to convey the necessity of one’s imagination while being incarcerated. Time and the human senses are explored throughout this piece to transport the reader into a world-bending reality where they can become a part of the piece’s microcosm of freshly sweet images. After hearing stories from family members and studying the lives of incarcerated Activists, I found the common theme of creativity and imagination being used as a tool to conjure hope. For many Black people creativity is inseparable from healing. From sitting with family, opening history books, to being in arts organizing spaces, creativity is imperative to liberation.

Biography: Akielah Toney is a published writer and poet, dancer, actress, photographer, and 4th year Psychology student at Loyola University New Orleans. Toney has been featured in 826 NOLA publications, Medium’s Heated, Nola.com, Vogue.com, the New York Times, and the I Am New Orleans Poetry Anthology. To keep up with Akielah Toney’s latest works, follow her on Instagram @akilabecreatin

Monthly articles reflect the opinions of the authors and not necessarily those of Loyola University New Orleans. Please send feedback to jsri@loyno.edu.