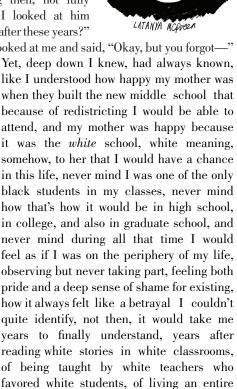
LATANYA MCOUEEN

We Were Never Free

Once, my father told me how he'd tried to plan his high school reunion. When he contacted all the white students, they refused to come, some even hanging up the phone when they heard his name, each and every one still harbored resentment over the integration of their high school, still after all these years angry for the sake of it. I was young then, not fully understanding the depths of another person's hate. I looked at him uncomprehending, and I asked "Why? Why do they care after these years?"

Without hesitation, without even a blink of a pause, he looked at me and said, "Okay, but you forgot—"

Remember we were once slaves, remember they gave us Bibles to make us believe our lot, "obey your earthly masters with respect and fear," they made us remember, "and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ," remember that was the quote they used when they whipped us, remember they jeered and smiled in photos as they stood in front of the burned remnants of our bodies, remember they took pieces of us to keep, remember any reason was enough to rope us by our necks, remember sundown towns, remember Bloody Sunday, remember "segregation today, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever," remember the acid poured in pools when they saw us swimming or the rocks thrown to make us drown, remember redlining, remember fighting against separate-but-equal only to be met with fire hoses and the police dogs sent for us, remember Katrina, remember how they spit on us sitting at lunch counters, remember the murders of our heroes-of Malcolm, of Martin, of Medgar—and so many other lives stolen, remember the Birmingham bombing, remember the Charleston shooting, remember the neighborhoods they kicked us out of, pushing us out further still, always pushing us further toward the edge of oblivion. So do you understand?



life where I was made to feel invisible

because of course I was invisible, I should

have understood I never belonged in the first

place even though my mother tried so hard to

make sure I was put in the spaces that had

long been denied to us, to her, but what my

mother never realized and what it took

me forever to understand was this simple

truth my father now was trying to tell me.

"We'll never be the same as them, no matter what we do in this life, no matter how much we try." Do you get it now?, he wanted to know. Did you finally get what I've been trying to make you see for all these long years? We were never really equal.

We

We have never been free.