

"Caribbean Flex," "Nice for What," and "Prologue"

Shane Book

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Caribbean Flex

Make I come check you, my baby.
Where I from, them who drink Lean
is mostly grown men
who eat they barbecue, drive
around in they slabs,
go home and make
love into brightly-coloured stuffed animals.
I had a friend, once.
I put roses on the Panamera.
I put handclaps on the Guantanamera.
It all happened on an Instagram story whatever
hashtag DracoWeather; hashtag ThisAndThat.
Started at the bottom
and kissed on it.
Loved that bottom so much
I wanted to piss on it
(I never told you that).
Bless-up! Big-up!
These fully White-peopled cities

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love recordings of dead Black people crooning
through hidden ceiling speakers above
the lettuce aisle
but don't want boogie Blacks
in the glass condo next door.
I get so lonely.
My friends are Ben and Jerry's
chunky Monkey.
I'm a chunky Negro Monkey.
We're natural, empty friends.
The empty streets are emptied
at precisely eight o'clock. Gimme
another tub Saturday night alone
watching all my Black people on Netflix
give me death!
Same ting!
Lemme put on my Black Power beret
and scream slogans into an empty
Congo Peas can. I'll drown the words out
with the engine sound of the bathroom fan.
Lemme watch so much online porn I hurt
the fleshy-ribbed crook of my hand.
Lemme blast Soca tracks way past
the rental condo 10 PM bylaw silence.
I lick my wrist. All night long
the shuttered grocery
store outdoor speaker gusts
the empty sidewalk with Grime:
*Bae from India, hills of biryani,
meds so good, now I speak Gujarati.*
I don't care.
I leave myself on read.
A corporation sprayed the condo walls
wet colour before I got here.
And my dog, he's on probation
another five years. Skrrt-skrrt-skrrt.
I no go rush you, my baby.
From my balcony, I spied that gyal,
outrageous ting, but she can't see
'cause I got shades and ting. Now
I like collars, I like almonds

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I'm not frontin', I like shining,
I'm blunted, I'm grinding
the dankest loud
into small, chiming twists
of melty space-time
that's for me to never know
and me to plead out.
Goddess of the goddam Sea!
Goddess of the goddam Sea!
Come forth, Buttah Cyat!

Nice for What

I mean here. Is where.
The fuck. We should
always ever start.
Today, as we say to Wall Street
and the billionaire class,
Yo dawg, come thru
wit dat Fruit Roll-Up,
I still don't like maps,
me and the night sky are way too attached.
Right across the street from where we are
at this moment
is the City's largest fossil fuel power plant.
Yesterday I trimmed Bush Monster.
For all you know
I'm the United States Congress now.
That's the shit I'm talking 'bout though,
like you Prada-Man-I'm-Soda-Mouth
1000 Hemi-powered horses
direct from a factory,
the giant mushroom cap tendrilled
to everyone's head.
Be it resolved that it is
becoming a problem and let us be clear,
it is no secret that that
plant is located right next to the City's
largest public housing development,
nonetheless it was there
I learned Courvoisier and frenemies
is a Chex Mix type of a mixture—you're shitting
me—and the largest campaign rally
of primary season sprung up
on Saturday. In support of environmental
racism, the powers that be are unhappy
you're here, throwing everything
to get people repeating.
I know you like to stay low.
I've been tweetin'
what you leave under the maple.
Like a cam commandeering

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a tortilla farmer
you cheesed me like a chatty man
which explains why Queen Street is poppin'
on Tuesdays. Dun kno!
Yeah, Gucci, Ozwald Boateng and Kiton,
style tighter than a squeezing python,
the one and only
Prosecco popper, the cheddar doctor,
Achebe's words call me when they lonely,
I finesse down Boundary Road.
On their fashion-less asses
I been teaching classes
vaping wizard cabbage
welcome to the Sauce God circle.
All a y'all what he called "Nasty People"
I been up so long it look like down to me.
I wonder who's in this penthouse
tonight?! Airbus 380, man,
this thing's got spiral staircase, man!
I just hit a switch. Switch! Switch!
How I score them points
and lead assists like I'm LeBron.
This the spirit in the ghost site
right now, Scarborough ting from time, style,
sucker-free shades tabled
later on a power motion
to make sure
women are not being paid
same as men. That's too old.
Times were hard in Puerto Rico.
We were dying, we are an island
surrounded by water, lots and lots
of water, ocean water, that is a quote.
This the flow.
Top left, those '97s look greezy fam,
we need to talk the "stealth exotic car" approach.
I don't know 'bout you
but now that Walcott's dead,
I feel I can write:
Oh you swaggy, huh?!
I started feelin' the burn when he came down,

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no cameras. Just him in a wheelchair
and a maniacal half-smile.
This is why I been sayin,' "no new friends."
I'm so hot.
I'm so right now.
The time is now
to be uncompromising.
You know how this shit go.
Say my sobriquet, say my secret name,
when no one's checking for you
bet I'm hugged up on you,
'cause I'm about that life, paying
no mind to the chicken heads lighting
fake friend fires
all up in my face.
I don't wanna tat
my name on anyone right now
so I know it's real.
The health of forty million people
who live in poverty, let's all get a field
away from the screens,
yo nice me
a juice box dawg.
I just need a reason
not to go out every evening.
These, I stan.
She was so arms,
she said I looked fat in my Caribana outfit
when the only heart attack
we should be talking about
is the one Wall Street is going to have.
Hair did, clothes dripped,
it's too late for all that Brother Love shit,
that "I'm your homie" tip,
waste yutes always mallratting smack my head,
wherein potential totes lies.
Make you dance to this.
Make you.
Make you dance
make you dance to this—
Let there be interviews like confessions,

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twitter fingers turn to chicken fingers,
and you getting bodied by a bee's stinger?!
Your boy says he's the light-skinned Keith Sweat.
Well, I'm the light-skinned Boba Fett.
I'm not upset.
Putting prices on my head
is just impersonal,
it's disrespectful disrespect.
That's social death
while September 20th
is just one of those days
when your life change
forever, in other words,
I got more chune for your ear holes
so peep how I creep on your game,
watch Da Breakdown
but wake up and nothing's wrong,
'cept Penny finna get merked
if she tries to talk to my mans again.
Fear not. Two tokes
and I'm already blem fam--dirt long distance--
I need you--Patrice Lumumba--you
actin' kinda suspect,
keep callin' me young Malcolm X -
why the sudden genuflect?
Fake diamond earrings
till I return to the wrestling ring.
To be sure, there's no unreal rest here,
that's just your deflection.
You don't link nobody no more,
you just ash me like a dead phatty,
and I be running 'round this backyard
with no pants on
like I'm skinny.
You make me wanna buy a Draco (skrrt!)
a slug proof shirt, and a Trek bike,
for the health to let the windpipe
be West Coast air freshened.
The time is now to be vocal fried.
Too much wahalla!
The time is now to be relentless.

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That's a long, long way.
When I returned from it,
svelte and swaddled in a dark blue
pinstripe suit, I came to your door
and wept, right where slavery evolved
into Jim Crow
--evolved into Mass Incarceration
evolved into The Realities We Have Today,
maybe to some he's *Tio*
maybe he's something else to you:
"Liquid" means rewind,
"the Gun Shot" means forward--
you requested it
so we rewind!
That's the flow.
Yo lowkey, Comfort Zone is lit styl
you're so extra, Scarbs ain't even that bad.
You make my love seem slanted.
I just can't comprehend it.
Nobody text me while I commune with Osiris,
I needed some shit
with some boom bap in it
and since you picked up,
I know he's not around.
Since 3000 Puerto Ricans did
not open their eyes this morning.
This is not the flow
that got anything hot.
Boooooooooom! Boom ! Boom! Boooooooooom!
You know how that shit go, seagulling
through the 604 with my Bose.
Yo, you dedded me, dog!
I'm on some Marvin Gaye shit.
I don't eat pork, I don't mess with cops.
I took you to the egg place,
then the Park Lane Presidential,
shout out dope piano bar
with the salted snack poles.
Someone said to me, it's like your girlfriend
is our very own Beyoncé,
I ain't g'on lie

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I felt proud even
though I knew the whole time
you were hatin’ me.
Every so often the place was maximum rain:
red, black and green on my body
‘cause I’m dipped in the dreams
of Marcus Garvey,
I go give you every-ting
no matter from my pocket
or my grandfather’s wallet.
My winter diet is champagne
and caviar, quick-delivered by Ferrari.
Yo this bee really tryna
come for me eh?! Run up freak!
This Arizona is mad bless right now.
Look, now you got me started.
Wagwan my G?!!, motorcycles scream
past the window,
Manchu Wok is lit right now,
you ain’t gonna get it all
anymore-real-pathways-to-Socialism
when today unbelievably,
that’s the beauty of the streets.
I’m no climate change expert.
I’m a climate change survivor.
God’s plan.
Holy Summer Controlla rollin’
deep in a Duppy mind,
even when we knelt, some still felt
threatened, pelted words at us,
but them shits just slid off, meltin’—
if we ever get another chance to
we may “pull-up, pull-up” in the month of May.
You can take that to the masked
banker, police helicopters hoovering
our row houses
the whole summer
while automatic gunfire fetes
the hometown champs.
In its light we do not stunt.
For damned sure, we’re turnt up:

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a bomb heat cyclone
all up in our feelings.
The feeling that ate the soft zone.
The feeling that lit the clouds,
each muraled block.
In its light we still.
In its stilled light.

Prologue

Q: The title of your book, *All Black Everything*... what do you say to those who might find it aggressive?

A: I see it as quite the opposite. I think of the book’s title as building a home in language for “All”—as in the totality of being and seeing and listening and celebrating: a colossal chorus and a constant syncopated timekeeping. Deepest, richest, Black-loving time. “Black”—as a notion, not of displacement or lack but of a whole embrace, fullness unfurling in sync, like coming over a hill and seeing a field of purple flowers whose names you don’t know: the voices, sounds and heat of African diasporic cultures dripping together with the blooming force of creation. One become “Everything.” Everything and also nothing—the vertigo of living a precarious existence on just a little spot, trying to stay on the brimming-up tip with Black joy and promise.

Q: Hmmm... so how does being a member of the African diaspora influence your work?

A: Part of you wants to resist imposing an order at all, not compartmentalize: if you’re going to be a target, better to be moving. Installing a lot of doors made from planks of music, countless portals of sound, can heap enough flexibility into a book that hopefully anyone may enter anywhere. I’m thinking now of the cultures of the African diaspora stripped of languages and customs and artistic traditions and thrust onto the steaming surface of a living, serrated dream, where roles are unrehearsed and one knows one is unwanted here and one is expected to just give up and die. But one doesn’t die. Instead, one improvises and lives. This is perhaps the only order the book embraces.

Q: “Improvises and lives...” wow! Can you say more about this?

A: Most of the poems in the collection are fairly recent but one piece was written just before the planes flew into the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001. The newest poem was written in late Summer of 2020, a few months after George Floyd was murdered. In between those two poles, I took refuge in many twists and spots on this earth, while trying to make the sounds in my mind and ear—tones and pitches somewhere beyond the soft, bland drudgery of basic normie lyric life—match the sounds on the page and in my mouth. The flute of felt thought, the music of wrongness made right and bad and jagged as a look. I also think of this book as the sound-shape oral history shards of many peoples mashed in with the noise of a brash mega-set of Black culture

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waves. And sometimes, just like in real life, power-sounds snuff people-sounds: money's big voice, the noise of capital flows crunching hard into bodies, like body blows. To remember those who have been lynched, we are instructed to "say their names." Maybe this book is what happens when there are too many names to say and not enough words and the words begin to melt like chalk statuettes because the rain is too much, the pain is too much, and maybe this book says the names another way.

Q: So, is this a book about race?

A: No, it is a book about clothing.

Q: Are you serious?

A: Clothes, like words, can communicate things. Literal and subtextual and symbolic and logical and emotional things.

Q: What about all the people who just throw on any old outfit and step outside?

A: Some of us are not allowed to do that. A few weeks ago, I parked my car in the rooftop parking space I had been renting since moving to Vancouver some months before. When I stepped into the late-night air, I heard a voice yelling. I turned and saw a White man leaning out the window of an apartment across the street. He shouted that he had been watching me and knew what I was about to do and there was no way in hell he would let me steal that car. "Red hat!" he kept calling me, "Red hat!"

Q: Really? I can't believe this happened. It almost seems like it couldn't possibly be true.

A: It is true I own a red hat, which matches my red Timberland boots, which matches my red car. And it is true I wore both the hat and boots that evening. It is also true that while he loudly proclaimed he knew I intended to steal my own car, I wondered if he knew he was pushing a rage into me I could feel roaring up in the form of a molten beam of shimmering axes? I guess he must have known I was brought up to try very hard to make people feel unthreatened by my presence and to always turn the other cheek—or why else would he be trifling with me? I am pretty sure he did not know that over the years I had turned my cheek so much that in this very moment of his accusing and humiliating me, my cheek had finally twisted so far that my head actually spun

off, floating up and away from the rooftop parking lot to glide between the tall building canyon walls towards the enormous, blue-illuminated, domed roof of the sports stadium. And I am positive he did not know that in the next few moments, the dome’s blue light scheme would switch to red, black and green. Nor could he know this colour shift signaled the domed stadium was returning to its long-occluded original purpose: that of a spacecraft making a brief stop to pick up all the African diasporic people living in this coastal metropolis. And I was damned certain he did not know this spaceship, this love-ship was fixing to whisk the entire scattered world-wide community of Afronaut Beloveds for the convening of a Bermuda Triangle’s worth of Plumed Parliamentary Soul Delegates at the largest Afrogalactic get-down the world had ever never seen.

Q: I’m not sure what this has to do with the poems in your book.

A: Exactly.

