

Knock Knock

by Daniel Beatty

As a boy I shared a game with my father,
played it every morning 'til I was 3.
He would knock knock on my door,
and I'd pretend to be asleep
'til he got right next to the bed,
Then I would get up and jump into his arms.
"Good morning, Papa."
And my papa he would tell me that he loved me.
We shared a game.
Knock Knock

Until that day when the knock never came
and my momma takes me on a ride past corn fields
on this never ending highway 'til we reach a place of high rusty gates.
A confused little boy,
I entered the building carried in my mama's arms.
Knock Knock

We reach a room of windows and brown faces
behind one of the windows sits my father.
I jump out of my mama's arms
and run joyously towards my papa
Only to be confronted by this window.
I knock knock trying to break through the glass,
trying to get to my father.
I knock knock as my mama pulls me away
before my papa even says a word.

And for years he has never said a word.
And so twenty-five years later, I write these words
for the little boy in me who still awaits his papa's knock.

Papa, come home 'cause I miss you.
I miss you waking me up in the morning and telling me you love me.
Papa, come home, 'cause there's things I don't know
and I thought maybe you could teach me:
How to shave
How to dribble a ball
How to talk to a lady
How to walk like a man.

Papa, come home because I decided a while back
I wanted to be just like you.
But I'm forgetting who you are.

And twenty-five years later a little boy cries
And so I write these words and try to heal
and try to father myself
and I dream up a father who says the words my father did not.

Dear Son,

I'm sorry I never came home:
For every lesson I failed to teach, hear these words:
Shave in one direction in strong deliberate strokes to avoid irritation
Dribble the page with the brilliance of your ballpoint pen
Walk like a god and your goddess will come to you.
No longer will I be there to knock on your door,
So you must learn to knock for yourself
Knock knock down doors of racism and poverty that I could not
Knock knock on doors of opportunity for the lost brilliance of the black men who crowd
these cells
Knock knock with diligence for the sake of your children.
Knock knock for me for as long as you are free,
these prison gates cannot contain my spirit.
The best of me still lives in you.
Knock knock with the knowledge that you are my son, but you are not my choices
Yes, we are our fathers' sons and daughters
But we are not their choices.
For despite their absences we are still here.
Still alive, still breathing
With the power to change this world,
One little boy and girl at a time.
Knock knock
Who's there?
We are.