

# Let Your Body Mortify However You Please

By Jessica Kinnison

## 1.

Bury Jerome with his clean cotton picking bag pinned  
like a ballgown. Backwards cap. Eyebrows perfectly arched,

rouge on his high delicate cheekbones. Be sure to drape his long train  
so it swoops in silky wrinkled folds around his legs from behind.

Bury Donnie with his framed picture of his mother in her Sunday best  
taken on the day she was laid to rest in her white casket with the golden handles.

On the other plane, there will be no jacket, heavy as a turtle suit,  
no jacket of charges telling the world you ain't worth shit.

Here on Earth, they won't even hire you at the chicken plant.  
Up on that bridge, in the sky, in heaven, in that other dimension,

there, your hands will be smooth as a baby's  
hands. Let your body mortify however you please now

because this ain't it. Colonial torture image courtesy of:  
me. The one trying to save every body.

The one who doesn't know her butt from a hole in the ground.  
The tower in the center doesn't catch Truth cutting the fence.

She's cutting for long distances on foot on the way  
to heaven. While life itself is an apparition chasing us.

## 2.

The black key in the quilt has burned a black hole  
in the Earth. Only way to freedom is through the grave.

Overflow tents/ cards in the rain/ hot ass tents/ the burning  
need for something else. Lloyd Bone drives the funeral horse.

Buttons made from animal bone. Marbles made from animal bone.  
The dead man is finished off by the sun, the birds, and the flies.

Only then did they stop. Easy rider. Stagger Lee. Human domination.  
Humiliation. Who wouldn't be more at home in other worlds.

Why not dislocate from this sorry planet. Take up the freedom not to be.  
Why not get yourself humming with death until it's redundant.

Space/ time/ space/ time/ black alter world making  
the rusted cot, rusted wall, silver toilet close to the hall.

### **3.**

Reverend Perkins said his aunt's boyfriend came to lunch every Sunday.  
"I'll be seeing you next Sunday if I be livin'," he would say.

One Sunday, his chair sat empty. Snatched up  
off the road between Jackson and Brookhaven for walking.

When he was growing up in the Delta, he decided he wanted  
more than to just exist. He started speaking to himself out loud

in the fields. Last Sunday, two people shot into the Second Line.  
Thousands of people kept going on up to the bridge.

Up there, there was no traffic and the sky, the sky  
was clear blue as a November afternoon in New Orleans.

Someone inside the group shot all around,  
killing two people. Six tubas set down in a row.

### **4.**

When I had short hair, teaching in the jail,

a student asked: "You got a girl, butch mama?"

What's your deal, what you into?" All I could do was look away because I had no idea what I was into.

I was allowed not to know. No one stripped me down and sprayed me with a hose. I was the star too precious to name.

I was allowed to be the crystal that shattered when pressed. Meanwhile, I expected the students to write and read out loud:

childhood memories, love poems, anger poems, instruction manuals for something they know how to do well.

Terra wrote about the jacket they put you in when you say the word "suicide."

"Turtle Suit: A How-To Guide."

They strip you down,

and make you cough, then cough again, just to embarrass you, she writes.

Then they put you in a green padded gown that reminds you of a turtle shell.

No undergarments allowed. Then there you are until you stop saying the word "suicide" and they let you

back into general population in red scrubs with a spork to eat with. That's as good as it gets.

Eventually, after it all, you stop saying "suicide" for real because you realize it's redundant.

5.

His voice is suddenly as high as a leaving train.

His footsteps sound like a smoking bus disappearing into song:

“I made you a living when I was free. Now you won’t even write to me.”

In the kitchen of the group home where I worked, Larry, tall and muscled,

looks as wholesome as a firefighter. He’s a man  
anyone could fall in love with in the rain. He irons his blue jeans

and wears tank tops that show off his lotioned brown shoulders.  
He has a slight Delta accent, just certain words, and knows a lot about vegetables,

when they grow and what kills them, out in the fields of Mississippi.  
The calliope of the riverboat plays “Yankee Doodle Dandy”

as we stand making coffee. The kitchen is where my memories are.  
You have to stand close together there between the big table

and the counter to get anything. Just as I’m thinking this afternoon  
is resplendent, that I might be in love with Larry, too, soon

if much more of this beauty goes on: trees rustling outside the window,  
the calliope fading out, faint burnt smell of coffee from the roaster by the Canal,

just then, Larry says, “I haven’t known anyone as kind or good as you not  
since the warden up there at Angola. Just like him,

when I ask you for something,  
I know it’ll be coming soon.”