

Obama

Black



Long may he live

By

Jaryd

Porter

WHY I LIKE IT: *Fiction Editor **JOEY CRUSE** writes... Jaryd Porter's, "Obama Black," is like watching a saccharine Tarantino movie slammed together with Steve McQueen's sense of culture and history – as if Chekhov's gun and Jackie Brown were best friends. Our protagonist, Mindy, is many things: shy, intelligent, overweight, unfulfilled, and tired. She's tired of the banalness of her life, the harassment that she receives from her co-worker, and the struggle that she constantly faces as a large, black woman in contemporary society. She is well read, well versed in movies in and music, and well aware of the many different kinds of candy available as descriptors for those around her, and today is the day that she's decided to, "kill a bitch," There is much to praise within this story. The structure of the plot, the clever wordplay, the dialogue and how it moves these characters forward, that care with which Porter crafts the emotional content, the themes of family, how to find one's place in life, and the all too real consequences of what can happen when you drive a normally nice person to the brink. Michael Douglas anyone?*

This piece was well thought out and executed. Entertaining as well as heart wrenching and warming.

Five stars.

QUALITY QUOTABLE (for the love of language...)

“Smith and Wesson. Smith is the triggerman and Wesson bury a fool,” Mac said. I don’t think he knew what that meant, but that would make for two of us.

“I...so when I shoot her, it kills her? That’s what makes Smith and Wesson different from one of the other gun companies?” I asked, crossing my arms. I was trying to be a smarter shopper.

“Nigga, no one call ‘em ‘companies’.” Being half-white, I didn’t know what to do with that word: “nigga”. Using it didn’t come to me naturally.

. Obama Black

Yes, I bought a gun to kill my coworker, Shelby.

I squirmed my way through the doorway, trapped in a fight for my life. I was Ellen Ripley crawling through the vents with a flamethrower. I’m positive those vents in Alien smelled better than my cousin’s house. Grandma rolled in her grave when Mac moved in. I stomped on a paper bag full of burger wrappers and empty fast food cups. Piles of McDonald’s bags and empty drums of Muscle Milk filled the foray, along with dollar flipflops from Walmart. A wall of feetstink between me and the living room. I pinched my nose as the feetstink became weedstank. The walls were stained by the latter, but totally marinated in the former. Fuck if I was gonna take my shoes off and catch athlete’s herpes from the sweaty, saturated carpet. I entered the wide archway which opened up into a big living room. Mac came slinking out of his bedroom in his Popeye boxers. His doorways were all too low, so he had to duck on his way into the room. The winking cartoon sailor next to his junk made me wanna puke. I regretted grabbing IHOP with Lina Tsubachi, because this was a lot to handle on a full stomach. Neverending pancakes were too much responsibility for the average sentient humanoid.

MacIntosh Gillespie, my big cousin, came in bobbing his head, scratching his hairy navel, and humming along to “Yonkers” by Tyler the Creator. He had a single earbud in and a black beanie covered in cat hair on his shaved head.

“Cuh,” he said, his voice sounded like how Tropical Skittles taste. That was our shorthand, being cousins: “cuh” with no honorifics. He nodded at me, acting all tough with his own cousin. Mac sounded like a chipmunk, but he was built like a bouncer or private security guy—not fit, but big and intimidating. Not to me, though. I knew Mac was a teddy bear named

- after the computer he was born next to. Yeah, right there on the carpet. There was a stain that wouldn’t come out—.

“Cuh,” I said, swallowing that spit that was close to becoming the horrific reboot of the neverending pancakes from earlier. I held it together.

“Smith and Wesson. Smith is the triggerman and Wesson bury a fool,” Mac said. I don’t think he knew what that meant, but that would make for two of us.

“I...so when I shoot her, it kills her? That’s what makes Smith and Wesson different from one of the other gun companies?” I asked, crossing my arms. I was trying to be a smarter shopper.

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“Distributors?”

“Nah. Smith and Wesson like an ol’ friend, cuh,” Mac said. I found it especially problematic that he had a “friend” singular who was both Smith and Wesson, but it didn’t matter. Smith and Wesson wasn’t my friend. Smith and Wesson, singular or power couple, were going in the river after a couple squeezes from Smith and a few wallops from Wesson. I get what he was doing with language now. That’s actually really fun.

He didn’t ask me who I was planning on shooting. He had the pride of Daedalus affixing wings to Icarus, blissfully uninformed that Icarus was gonna abuse that boon. A lotta masculine images, but I was trying to be strong. Men don’t have to do anything to be strong. Insufficient action made men weak, exemplary action made women strong—I had to act and it had to be big. It had to be successful. I didn’t wanna be like Antigone. I had to be more like Viola Davis in that

woman king movie: Woman King.

Mac gave me a gun named “.38”. He handed it over to me and I almost tipped over. Like me, it was an instant classic, short and stout, and heavy as fuck. Unlike me, the snub-nosed .38 was a movie star. Mac told me that there was a thing on it called the “safety” and that it was safe

Guns are supposed to be dangerous. Don’t give me a fucking nerf gun. I turned the safety off, seeing that Mac was already breaking a sweat over it. I dropped that massive little gun into my skirt pocket and felt the elastic pull downwards, almost taking down the establishment.

“Here comes the danger,” I said. I am the danger. Jane’s got a gun. How about that?

“How ‘bout that?” I smirked, exiting the screen door. I turned sideways and sucked it in, to squeeze through the doorway. I remembered how Grandma used to shake her head at how hard I had to fight to get into her house. Twenty years of terror and it got tighter every single time. That was why I let the door slam shut behind me. Spite. Fuck you for making me feel like an elephant in a phone booth. I didn’t know the nosy neighbor was out on her front steps until she suddenly spoke up.

“Are we talkin’ to the door now, girl?” Ms Keever asked, resting her fat ass cigar in her long, bony fingers. She sat directly in the summer sun, not a drop of sweat tarnishing her black, green, and gold dress. Jamaican flag? Flag of something, anyway. She struck me as the doomsayer soothsaying soothing secrets at the doomed Caesar. Ms Keever didn’t look where she was talking. An oracle who acted blind to bind her oratory to the classics, but was blind in mind alone. She was not blind in spirit, however. If she was, she would’ve kept her mouth shut when I walked out of my cousin’s place like a scheming hyena, just shy of rubbing my hands together and cackling. She used to be my Grandma’s best friend, but she was also the old lady who’d snitch on us to Grandma. Antique Rastas like Ms Keever expected a girl like me to curtsy for her like I was at a Tudor tea party—just as likely to end in a beheading as any conversation with her.

“Afternoon, Ms Keever,” I said in my Cherry Mash voice. My normal speaking voice was more of a Reese’s Peanut Butter Cup. I had a few of those in my pockets. My skirt has pockets because it’s the fucking future, already. The modern bad bitch doesn’t carry a purse...unless I need the extra storage space, but stipulations like that make the conversation of bad bitch-ness and modernity look like a heated controversy.

“S’noon, girl. Ya always appear a-fightin’. Sweatin’ an’ a-mutterin’,” Ms Keever stated, so observant—observant enough to see that I’m a fighter like Russel Crowe in Gladiator.

“I’m just fighting the good fight, Ms Keever,” I said, still Cherry Mash. For those who don’t know, when dinosaurs roamed the Earth, candy was also really bad. Nowadays, we have five billion flavors of Oreos and Twizzlers, but the oldies grew up sharing Cherry Mashies with Jesus H. Christ in the lunchroom. After Jesus Christ tamed the dinosaurs, he became valedictorian and prom king. Basic history as told by Mindy. I could tell Ms Keever all about the dinosaurs, but she knew. She’d been the fucking prom queen.

“It don’t take a pound off da bones,” Ms Keever chuckled. Her voice hit me completely Mike and Ikes with that familiarity, but infuriatingly limited flavor-wise. Mike and Ikes made me want Skittles and Skittles made me want Mike and Ikes.

“No, Ms Keever.”

I was wheezing. Most people don't run outta breath just standing up, but I never claimed to be most people. I leaned against the flimsy metal railing which followed those three cement steps down towards the sidewalk. I'd parked my black GT Ford Fusion on the dead grass next to the small collection of mini fridges my cousin so thoughtfully deposited in the middle of the lawn. Fridge-henge. White people had Stonehenge, but my cousin was taking it back...one burned out mini fridge carcass at a time.

I went to space with Major Tom when Ground Control was buzzing in that there was something wrong. She stared at me the way she did when I was a round little girl with big glasses and sticky fingers. She knew when I was up to no good. I decided to laugh. Who the fuck decides to laugh?! Why is it hard to act natural? It's not hard to be natural, but as soon as you think about acting that way, you realize you've never seen yourself act natural before.

“Hahaha!” I screamed. I bit my lip. Silence. I laughed my breath away, pulling in a loud, shaky breath through my nostrils. It wouldn't take an oracle to see a suspicious bitch, there.

“Mindy...if ya up to something that'll make mama cry, bes' stop an' think awhile. Wise woman commit not what bring hurt on wise women.”

Thanks, Yoda.

I hugged the railing and descended the steps. I pulled at the elastic waistband of my skirt, afraid that the two ton gun was dragging it lower.

“Ya always were one smart girl, Mindy. Stay smart,” Ms Keever said.

They say the early bird gets the worm, but this early bird was gonna shoot a bitch.

Lina and Lena were working. At a whopping 4'8", Big Lena stood on her toes to look over the counter. The floor was lower on the employee side so kids wouldn't be intimidated by our height. That's what Lina's parents said, anyway. It meant that Big Lena needed a stool to stand on.

“Hey, it's Books!” Big Lena shouted, petite and skinny with a Starburst voice—only the pink lemonade ones—bouncing up and down like she was on a trampoline. Her caramel hair fluttered around, always messy and strong-smelling. Too much product to get those waves and not enough effort keeping them from getting tangled and knotted. “Books” was the nickname the Tsubachis gave me when I started at Candy's. The shop should've been called “Candies”, but the Tsubachis weren't interested in checking for typos before having the sign made.

“Hi, Mindy,” Lina said, her voice full of bass. Snickers as fuck. She was a baritone and sang backup in a local indie punk band called Diss Orient. She also played bass, but she wasn't exactly advertising her musical talent.

“Just me and Asian Fusion holding it down, girl! Fuck it up, nigga!” little white Big Lena shouted. Yeah, she used that word.... Lina exhaled so loudly through her nostrils that I envisioned a cartoon bull charging a playful matador. Big Lena and Big Lena only called Lina “Asian Fusion”—Korean mother and Japanese father.

Big Lena wandered out into the back alley for a smoke. I had sat at an empty table near the front counter, overfilling an uncomfortable chair.

“What’re you reading?” Lina asked, while chewing on gummy sharks.

“A book about a disgruntled employee dreading her shift.” She squinted and curled back her upper lip. I held up *Como Agua Para Chocolate*.

“Is that so?”

“It’s so,” I answered. I dug my hand into the pocket of my skirt, and felt the gun packed with Reese’s Peanut Butter Cup candy wrappers. Were these the contents of a wise woman’s pockets? Angela Davis never had to shoot anyone to fight the good fight. In my mind, Angela Davis had the wisdom of cow-eyed Hera without the insipid pettiness. This errand was how you get acquainted with cops sporting mean mustaches and meaner handcuffs.

“So...feel like talking about Shelby, now?” What a fucking leap. She was talking about the incident from last week like she hadn’t had all morning to talk to me about it.

“Shelby’s the scum of the earth,” I answered, slamming my book shut.

“You have things in common with her,” Lina said, biting her lip when she was done.

“Mmm,” I said. It was a solid “mmm”, not just a hum or a groan. “Mmm” is an acknowledgement that you thought you were doing or saying something intelligent or interesting, but you were wrong. So shut up.

“Are you intimidated by strong women, Lina?” I asked. I put on my Wild Cherry Twizzler voice. Lina opened her mouth, but no sound came out. The Wild Cherry Twizzler voice is like the Cherry Mash voice, but less “How may I help you, sir” and more “Ohmigod, I love what you’re saying right now.”

“Was that a good Shelby impression?” I asked.

“No. You sound like Emma Roberts in anything she’s ever been in,” Lina told me. I had no idea who Emma Roberts was. No offense if your name is Emma Roberts, but names like that are why IMDB exists. We don’t know who you are.

It felt like the gun was becoming exponentially heavier with every passing minute. I might as well have brought a brick in my pocket. Shelby entered in her pink shorts and cropped pink turtleneck. This was how the Queen of England dressed her corgis, but Shelby was deliberate. She strutted in on an invisible runway, and didn’t look up from her phone. She approached the counter and acknowledged Lina with a noise:

“Mmm-hmm,” Shelby said, whipping her straightened hair in one direction and letting it fall back across her shoulders. It wasn’t a weave. Shelby probably spent a lot of time straightening her hair and slathering product in it. It was a matter of appearances, not actual hair-health.

“Morning, Screentime,” Lina said. It was 4 PM, but Lina always said “morning”.

“Yeah, hi,” Shelby said, glancing up from her phone long enough to grant Lina a moment of eye contact.

“What up, Screentime?!” Big Lena shouted. She walked around the counter and got a few inches taller, following that weird step-up that the Tsubachis put in. Because we’re such scary people. I think this sarcastically, but I harbored a gun in my pocket. I had a loaded gun. What the fuck was I thinking?! I was big, but I was no Biggie nor funny enough to be Big Pun and I was fat but no Fat Joe. I wasn’t about to wack anyone with my “snub trey-eight”.

Shelby waved, absorbed by her phone. I was subjected to her discriminant rage Thursday through Sunday. She usually started with a fat joke at my expense, but she was quiet today. There was a chance she knew she’d gone too far last Sunday.

Wise woman commit not what bring hurt on wise women.

There wasn’t much ceremony to it, but Big Lena clocked out and Lina soon followed her. Shelby avoided me, staying at the other end of the counter. I looked, making sure she kept her distance. The five o’clock kids came in for sweets before dinner and hovered, while upper middle class parents let their kids drag them in through the door to buy big bags of candy before dinner. The families that came at seven were the after-dinner crowd. They also bought too much candy, but they didn’t stay to eat it. I didn’t have anyone to talk to until the firemen walked over from the station. They always headed our way around eight.

A few bags of popcorn and some light conversation. They talked with me and Shelby separately, like they knew better than to try to hold a conversation with both of us at the same time. I talked philosophy and small talk, while she went on about personal drama. Pretty, petty Shelby: all pink with her straight hair and her pink lipstick and her pink crop top and her straight teeth and she was skinny—not skinny like Big Lena who wore under one hundred pounds soaking wet—she was thicc and skinny. I wanted to punch Shelby in the teeth and she hadn’t said a word to me yet.

Ray Liotta—not the actor—stopped by my side of the counter with his half pound of jelly beans. His head was shaved and he was skinny for a firefighter, but he was probably the only kind man on the planet. Men aren’t nice. The firefighters are friendly, but not nice. Nice people don’t look you up and down when they see you, like they gotta download and buffer the full image of you, because you just too damn big. Oversized PDF. Unknown file type. Ray made eye contact and smiled and told me about his evening at the humane society and how he was thinking about adopting another puppy—he already had three. He wasn’t bragging. He was just making conversation. I choked on my tongue when he made conversation about me:

“I like your shirt,” he said. This was a funny trick. Funny! Every afternoon he saw me, he would talk about himself and his dogs and let me talk about myself and my cat who lived on top of my bookshelves, but he’d sneak in one observation or comment about me. I imagined my face turning rosy, my eyes all big and glossy, so I started blinking and holding my breath. I was purple by the time I responded.

“It’s...it—it’s Lina’s band,” I said. I made it about Lina. I figured he was really into Lina, because he basically fed that one to me. Yeah, he wanted to talk about Lina’s band. Diss Orient. Asians, all of them, except for the skinny white guitarist who only spoke in Japanese that he learned from watching 90s anime: Otaku Paul. If he wanted to talk about Lina so bad, he should’ve come in earlier when Lina was actually working. Maybe I’d tell her that a cute firefighter guy was asking about her.

“Diss Orient, huh? You a fan?” he asked. His cadence was 3 Musketeers—soft, kind, and genuine. He ate a jelly bean and quickly scowled down at the bag. He must’ve gotten the cinnamon flavor. It was his least favorite.

“I’m going to the bathroom,” Shelby said, addressing me for the first time that day. She picked that moment to say something. Shelby was a Whopper. That thin coat of bullshit, weak

chocolate with that airy, nothing-burger interior that makes you wanna wash it down with a 7up. She realized that the other firefighters were on their way out and back across the street, but also that she was in a room with me and Ray Liotta.

“Okay...I forgot she was here,” Ray whispered as Shelby quickly and loudly exited, stomping in those heels so loudly that I thought and hoped she might twist her ankle.

“Wouldn’t it be awful if someone just shot her?” I asked, watching Ray stand up a little taller. He was still leaning on the counter, but his back went stiff. He half-smiled and his eyes darted left and right before he let out a reluctant,

“Yeahh...that would be awful.”

“You didn’t laugh,” I pointed out.

“It’s not funny,” he replied.

“What if it was a joke?”

“If it was a joke, it was kinda funny, but you gotta work on that delivery,” he said, his posture loosening up a bit. He still was wearing that weird Ray Liotta half-smile. His smile got a little wider. He reached over and set one of the cinnamon jelly beans on the glass counter, letting it spin and rattle in front of me. Ray had a sad look in his eyes.

“Don’t joke about killing people. At least not with me. I knew a lotta people who got shipped out overseas and came back with a lot less light in their eyes. Not everyone comes back the way they got shipped out. Guy I know, a marine, came back and worked at Applebees for three weeks before he shot his manager to death—six bullets, too. One woulda done it, but he went for six. The cops didn’t tase him or beat him, either. They knew he was ex-military and he didn’t fight ‘em. He said that manager called him ‘n-word’ every day for three weeks. This guy shot up militants holding AKs for a lot less. Not one of ‘em called him that word, though,” Ray Liotta told me, looking off towards the door as the other firefighters dawdled outside.

“Want me to tell Lina that you’re interested in her band?” I asked, seeing that he was ready to leave. I chased him off. Fuck.

“Why would you do that? You’re the one who got me into them...” he started acting like he was doing or saying something wrong. He kicked his feet and looked at them like they were misbehaving. I couldn’t see his feet past the display, but I heard his boots scuff the floor and saw where his eyes were looking. His eyes didn’t find mine when he looked up. He stared at a Peanut Butter Cup in the display. Towards the top. Romeo sees Juliet; a Montague does not see a Capulet. Tybalt is in the bathroom swiping right on white guys with guns in their profile pics. I’m floating. I’m floating into the stratosphere where I make eye contact with a SpaceX rocket and Jeff Bezos showering Captain Kirk with champagne.

“Can I take a Reese’s Peanut Butter Cup?” he asked.

“We have better peanut butter cups,” I answered.

“I know what I like, Mindy.”

“He must be intimidated by me,” Shelby said. I was wiping down some counters, closing the store. I wasn’t a fast worker, but I was methodical. Shelby was slow and about as useful as a paperweight. Paperweights: (nouns) something busted or without a purpose that is heavier than a piece of paper. A common misconception is that paperweights are heavy, but they just have to be heavier than paper. No, hold on. Watch this:

Paperweight: (verbin’) when you think you’re dropping a bomb on someone, but you’re on some high-school-drama-featherweight-type-shit. Example: Shelby was paperweighting me by suggesting that the only reason Ray Liotta prefers to talk to me is because Shelby intimidates him.

My dictionary contains words like: paperweight, Cherry Mash, Key Lime Twizzler, Reese’s Peanut Butter Cup, faux-thicc, Emma Roberts, cuh, and snub trey-eight.

“Black men are intimidated by black women,” Shelby added. Ray Liotta was Black-Italian. Mixed like me, but she only saw black and white. He looked darker than me and had hazel eyes which looked brown enough to her. He had freckled shoulders, but she chose not to see them. She made black men, and Ray Liotta, a symbol rather than individuals.

“Okay,” I said.

“Ha. The girl reading a book about Mexicans sounds like she’s ready to lecture me,” Shelby said, doing this gross fake laugh. The sound when you think it’s a Milk Dud, but it’s a dud in general. It’s a fucking Whopper.

“I said, ‘okay’. Why do you think I’m gonna lecture you?”

“It’s probably just your face. Or the fact that you’re a grown woman reading some book about magic. It looks bad to see people of color reading about magic and superstition...especially in Mexican. That’s why no one takes you seriously. That and the fact you belong on My 600 Pound Life,” Shelby told me, opening up for her lecture. Junior Mint? No. Still a Whopper. She was saying these things without even looking at me. I fell into her trap. I needed to sit. My legs were tired, but I set down my rag that I was shining the counter with and just turned my head and glared at her. I pressed rewind.

“If Ray Liotta is intimidated by black women, why does he talk to me?”

“You think you’re black? You think frizzy hair makes you black? You have no idea how to be a modern black woman,” Shelby told me, ready to proceed with her lecture. I was ready for the discussion section.

“I was unaware that there was a manual,” I replied, fully speaking through my teeth. I spit a little bit. My front teeth were big like a fucking beaver. Showing my teeth was a formula

for launching some saliva. She put on the face that wanted five knuckles and a backhand to wash it down with. The face that ordered a .38 special.

“You look like a Mexican or like an Arab,” she added, “Arabs are all skinny and hungry-looking, though. You look like a pretend Mexican.”

There was a self-destructive chip she got installed in her brain. Her hair was perfectly curtaining the surgical scars. This mega-chip was uploading psychic idiocy into her brain and attaching chemical stupid to every synapse and nerve ending, because it was like she fucking knew there was a gun in my pocket and an angry, pancake-drunk, ganja-fueled version of myself thought today was the day.

Rewind to my previous shift with Shelby. This was a week ago.

A white girl named Stephanie or Clarity or Charity visited Shelby and I knew better than to stick around and make myself a punching bag. I went to the bathroom and played Tetris on my phone, but I couldn't ignore what I was hearing:

“What happened to the fat girl?” Shelby's friend said “fat” like that “eff” was two syllables long. I wouldn't have been able to pick her out in a crowd, though. Lucky her.

“Mindy?”

“Her name's Mindy? Omigod...that can't be her real name. Isn't she black?” This girl's voice was Candy Corn. Nostalgic and familiar until you down a handful of them and realize your mouth is full of straight sugar. Mindy was a baffling name for a person of color to have to the Candy Corn girl. I didn't want anyone to call me Melinda until I was in a retirement home.

“That girl is as black as Obama.”

“I'm blacker than Obama. He's an Arab. He even faked his birth certificate,” Candy Corn said, her voice trailing off into a sound that was like a feral shih tzu chewing on a ceramic plate. I

flushed the toilet, washed my hands, wandered out there as the bell above the door sang and signaled the departure of Candy Corn. It was just Shelby on her phone when I came out there. She didn't look at me.

“It's rude to stare, Books,” Shelby said.

“You know...no. You don't know,” I told her, trying to find the energy for her, but I decided that I didn't have it.

“You look like you're gonna cry. Real black women don't cry. You can go back there and be a little halfie girl in the bathroom, but don't come out here and cry. It makes us look weak.”

It was on Shelby's Instagram story. She filmed me crying and snotting after she called me “weak”. The problem was that she convinced me that she was right. It brought back that moment where I wished I could shoot her dead like Clint Eastwood did to Gene Hackman at the end of The Unforgiven. I had a few fistfuls of gummy bears in my pocket, then. A week later, I had a snub Trey-Eight.

Russel Crowe's character in Gladiator would've cut her up, Milton would've cast her out of heaven, the Tudors would've taken her head, Jesus would've forgiven her (his daddy wouldn't've), Maya Angelou would've educated her, Angela Davis would've overcome her, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie would've told Shelby that it was she who didn't know what a black woman is.

I walked into the back alley and out to the dumpster, leaving Shelby with a smug grin on her face. It was a quiet night. There was a cool, whistling breeze against the dilapidated fence.

Wise woman, commit not what bring hurt wise women.

As I understand it, anyway. Ms Kever was addressing me as "wise woman". It was an appeal, not a declaration. Amazing what a comma can do.

When I finally got that gun out of my skirt pocket, it felt like a cinderblock and was hot like I'd been cupping it in my palms all day. It was clammy, even if I wasn't. The black paper from the Reese's fluttered into the air like black doves in a Jon Woo film. I chucked it into the open dumpster, expecting a triumphant thud. A final resting place for the intent to kill that which wanted to define me. I didn't need to kill the gatekeeper. There was nothing on the other side of the fence.

My train of thought was derailed by a pants-shitting ka-boom. The gun fired when it landed against the vacant interior and discharged one shot. The empty dumpster turned an already earsplitting hellscream into a legion of wailing banshees. My heart didn't beat for a minute. The wind didn't breathe for a minute. I didn't blink for a minute. After a minute, the back door was flung open.

"Oh my god! What was that?!" Shelby screamed. She blasted me with the light from her phone, already recording video. She had her knees knocking and was crouched low in her pink heels. I don't know why people immediately start recording when they're scared. This isn't Paranormal Activity. If you get got, there won't be any "found footage".

"I had to get something outta my system," I said.

"Mindy! That sounded like a gun went off! Will you get in here?!" Shelby yelled, ushering me inside. She was shrinking and getting smaller and skinnier. The mythical monster that was Shelby was defeated by every moment that I chose not to oppose her.

I followed her inside, and sat down on a bench by the front door to catch my breath. Shelby sat next to me and shivered, reduced to tears. She leaned on my shoulder and cried.

"I'm sorry," I told her. I was apologizing for trying to shoot her dead, but she didn't know that.

"Me, too," she said, her voice as boring and honest as a milk chocolate Hershey's.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *My submission, "Obama Black", was inspired by the prevalence of lateral violence across minorities. Every moment I've been told how to appear or act to seem more authentically black, every comment about what "black people like" from my peers, every admission from someone else of mixed race about being jealous of how dark my skin is; this piece is a response to how comfortable others are in telling people of mixed race how to pass as one identity or another. The consequence is how that social violence externalizes. The issue isn't just about the pressure to perform as a person of mixed race, but how that pressure can shape one's actions and perceptions. Also, I'd like to thank Jason Allen for all of his feedback and support in workshopping this story. Thank you for reading.*

AUTHOR BIO: My name is Jaryd T. Porter and I'm a graduate student at Wichita State University studying Creative Writing with an emphasis on Fiction. Firstly, thank you for reading. I haven't been published, but I do write frequently. I also enjoy films, graphic novels, art history, world history, cooking, mythology, and playing with my dog--most of which comes out in my writing. I hope you enjoy and thank you again for reading!