

“Knock Knock”

by Daniel Beaty

As a boy, I shared a game with my father—
Played it every morning till I was three.
He would knock knock on my door,
And I'd pretend to be asleep till 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 Mama takes me on a ride past cornfields
on this never-ending highway
Till we reach a place of high rusty gates.
A confused little boy,
I enter 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's,
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, 25 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, 'cause I decided awhile back
I want to be just like you, but I'm forgetting who you are.”
And 25 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 ever lesson I failed to teach, hear these words:
‘Shave in one direction with 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.

Def Jam Poetry – Daniel Beaty
<http://youtu.be/RTZrPVqR0D8>