

Lead Paint Test

Billy Woods

Not for sale, keep the devil out, knives by the window, find you where you idle

A death rattle for the ages, twenty-year cycle
Breaking mirror, shattered gazes, empty framing tending to a heart
Corner creeper, lights on hallways still felt dark
Jigsaw parquet floor, detail inlay for the preservation
The stories we know, the stories we tell
Nuclear family, nuclear fallout, still, all is well
Cracked plaster, exposed brick
The wood door swings under a stiff in the summer, pocket door rubber track
Heat expansion, same high school graduation picture on the mantle
With a smile fit for a home-going
Playing dumb, but we all knowing
Steel wool crack filler
In my past, on the back, looking up at the same ceiling
Sometime I think we share some of the same feeling
Somehow forever's a mighty long time, Inshallah, God-willing

God bless this sweet home, my beloved haunt
124 Bluestone crouched on thin haunch
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I hold my breath if I walk past on a visit
They replastered the last crooked paths of the lizards
My uncle is the ghost of Thanksgiving past
First floor, front room, Mom's was the last
To get the message
Now it's just tenants
Y'all wasn't here when the bandos was brick skeletons, moss gathered like migrational change
Miguel pigeon coop feathers kept breaking the drains
These ain't pains, these the regular aches
My mom slaved cause she said ownership was breaking the chains
Me and my father's main bond was that day we cursed out pigs at our gate
Every Black life a thriller
Even an infant if the Enfamil don't kill her
Pages turn Ezra Jack Keats to iller fates, Arthur Miller
Home was base to beatin' the chase from toes tagged in the chiller
Now walk past my own door, no welcome homes from the shivers
Forgiveness like the cold wind, old men remember

Let the children come
Let your mother hear you laugh

Half-crushed by the car, dragged herself back and caterwauled
Father put her out her misery on the kitchen floor
Mom said, "Be proud of her, she made it home"
If these walls could talk, they might not, after all, we don't
One door been locked since when, why is never said, but we know, we know
I left that house for two rooms, but it got a peephole
I ain't been back since then, but kids still see ghosts
I'm not my ancestors' dreams
They in the room wishing they could smoke and eat
Lean shadows, dust swirling in sunbeams
Shadows reach for my son in dreams
Some shadows that deep, shadowing me

Crossing that threshold again, they gon' part like the sea
Silently pointed to that room, but I swear to the Lord I never had the key
Somehow, it's in my hand now, that brass turned green
Grass dead in the yard, Philistines chop down the avocado tree
I put my ear to the door, but all I could hear was my heartbeat

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What kind of evil you got in there?
It ain't evil, just sad
Come on, step on through