

***Black girls have to learn***  
Shelley Osafo Grant

How to dress, how to speak, how to be  
How to use their voice,  
without their words reshaping  
into daggers.

While others revel in song, in the sway of dance,  
Black girls assume the role of teachers,  
with no room  
for their own rhythm.  
No leisure to explore their essence, to uncover their truth.

Black girls have to choose,  
who's validation do I crave today?  
We've become addicted, to a drug there'll never be enough of —  
I'd pay any amount to any dealer who makes an offer.

Black girls have to hide,  
conceal their emotions like a bandaid covering a cut,  
Covering a cut that cuts beyond the bone.  
Tread cautiously to escape the snares laid  
by life's hand.

We need to remind Black girls  
    You're allowed to cry,  
    To be angry,  
    To just exist,  
    To celebrate your existence  
You deserve that, Black girl.

For you are both somebody's ancestor  
and their wildest dream.  
A vision of things unseen  
and yet to be.

## ***Three Stories to Change the World***

Dean Charpentier

### **ONE**

i still dream of the day my father  
disappeared ghostlike into the cornfield with  
my neighbor and a pair of shotguns

they were to rid the farm of hungry deer and  
later as i played in the sand under the swingset  
i heard the shots from the distant tree line

that night in the dark my father cried into  
a weathered bottle of stinging whiskey  
to forget the beastly blue bruise on his shoulder

or maybe it was to blot out the  
image of the wounded doe in the underbrush  
her sides heaving and her

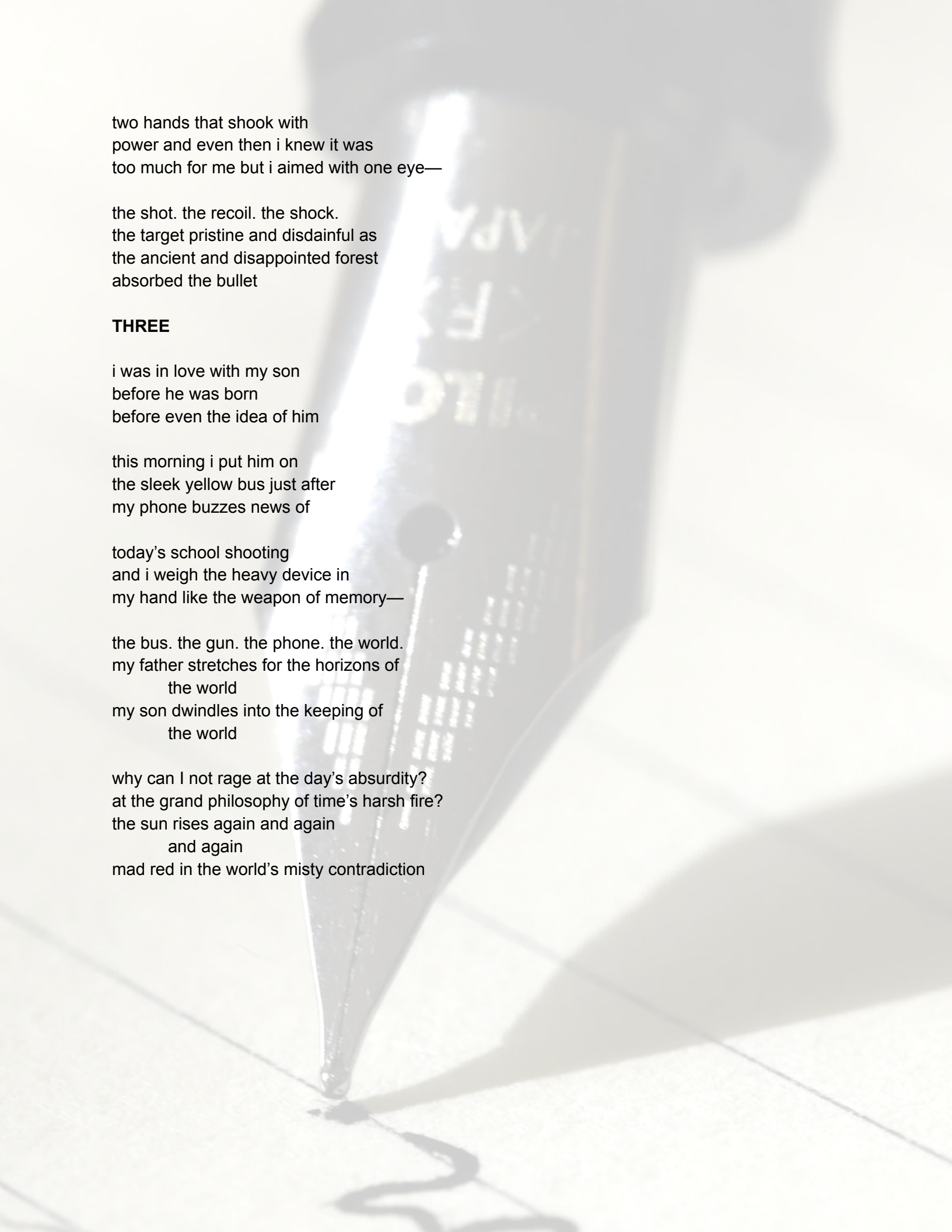
fiery blood-splatter across leaves  
pooling like his bruise in the brickish dirt and  
when his wound healed in the world  
he would leave us

### **TWO**

i've shot a gun once in my life  
in the fresh green morning of  
my friend's backyard

i was just nine or ten but i  
can still feel the grip of  
the pistol in my clumsy young palm

metallic and balanced and  
too heavy for my boy's arms and  
he showed me how to hold it



two hands that shook with  
power and even then i knew it was  
too much for me but i aimed with one eye—

the shot. the recoil. the shock.  
the target pristine and disdainful as  
the ancient and disappointed forest  
absorbed the bullet

### **THREE**

i was in love with my son  
before he was born  
before even the idea of him

this morning i put him on  
the sleek yellow bus just after  
my phone buzzes news of

today's school shooting  
and i weigh the heavy device in  
my hand like the weapon of memory—

the bus. the gun. the phone. the world.  
my father stretches for the horizons of  
the world  
my son dwindles into the keeping of  
the world

why can I not rage at the day's absurdity?  
at the grand philosophy of time's harsh fire?  
the sun rises again and again  
and again  
mad red in the world's misty contradiction

## **Colors of Unity**

Daniel Min

In the tapestry of life, a rich array,  
Of hues and shades in constant sway,  
Each color unique, in its own way,  
Yet together, they form each and every day.

As I journeyed far from home's embrace,  
To a different continent, a different space,  
I found myself in a diverse place,  
Where everyone held a story to trace.

In South Korea, my home's embrace,  
A place that shares the same race,  
But in America, a newfound grace,  
A tapestry of cultures, a vibrant chase.

From every corner of the globe they came,  
Each bringing gifts, a different flame,  
And in their diversity, no two the same,  
Yet together, they build a common frame.

In classrooms filled with voices rich and bold,  
I learned the power of different stories told,  
Of different paths and dreams untold,  
And in their diversity, my own heart swelled.

For in the tapestry of humanity's song,  
Every voice, no matter how long,  
Could be heard all year long,  
By creating a harmony, forever strong.

So let us celebrate the colors we see,  
For in our diversity, lies the key,  
When unity thrives, we all agree,  
To a world united, where all are free.