

THE DEFIANCE OF DANDELIONS

by Philana Imade Omorotionmwan

*Nobody likes the head of a dandelion. Maybe because they are so many,
strong, and soon.*

—Toni Morrison

CHARACTERS

THE ROOTEDNESS	the first girl in the whole entire world; also serves as the voice of TEACHER LADY
THE STRONGNESS	comes off as a bully, but she's really just a fighter because she's had to be
THE QUEERNESS	gender non-conforming
THE BRAZENNESS	appears to be very pregnant
THE THICKNESS	has had a "woman's body" for as long as she can remember
THE BOISTEROUSNESS	talks a mile a minute
THE SOFTNESS	rather than speak with a lot of words, she uses her body to communicate her feelings; also plays the GRIOT

TIME

The time before time, and the time that is happening right now.

PLACE

Eden. And a classroom in a school run by colonizers.

The First Girl In The Whole Entire World

(A dark stage. The GRIOT enters from the audience singing.)

GRIOT

The Story of the First Girl in Whole Entire World./Waaaaay, waaaaay back/in the time before time/the first black girl in the whole entire world/which is to say the first girl in the whole entire world/came to be.

(Lights rise to reveal THE ROOTEDNESS.)

Her name was

ROOTEDNESS

Evbokunru¹.

GRIOT

(Now much later/in the time after time/that would trouble some people's tongues/And so they decided to call her/Eve/But her name was)

ROOTEDNESS

Evbokunru.

GRIOT

Which means/"what the ocean has done"/For the gods had molded her from earth and ocean/They placed air in her belly/and fire in her heart/And they buried deep within her seeds of doing and being called "Coulds"/(*For "Should" did not exist yet.*)/She didn't quite know what they were/but sometimes Evbokunru felt the Coulds stir within her.

(Ideally, the actress playing ROOTEDNESS develops an individual phrase of movement for each statement. Unless it looks and feels super-corny. In which case, we'll figure something else out.)

When she saw the sun's rays/she learned she could show warmth to all beings.

(A phrase of movement.)

When she heard the birds/she learned she could raise her voice.

(A phrase of movement.)

When she felt the winds/she learned she could push against things.

(A phrase.)

She learned that she could curve and roll from the hills.

(A phrase.)

From the flowers/she saw she could bud into blossom.

(A phrase.)

From the trees/she knew she could stand firmly.

(A phrase.)

And from the turtles, she learned that she could shrink.

(A phrase.)

Evbokunru lived for many years in this way.

¹ Ev-bow-KUN-roo.

(ROOTEDNESS might begin to repeat the phrases one after the other or blend them together to form a kind of dance.)

Embracing and raising and pushing/Curving and rolling/blossoming and standing/And shrinking/But only whenever *she* felt like it/Because could was just that/a possibility/Could/For Should had not been made yet/Yes/in the time before time/Evbokunru did as she pleased/(Now I'm not saying everything was perfect/but Evbokunru's body was all her own/And she was deliberate and afraid of nothing.)

(The humming of GRIOT's call stops.)

ROOTEDNESS

*I, I am de-lih-buh-ruh-ut
and uh-fray-a-aid of nothing.²*

ALL

Nothing.

ROOTEDNESS

*I, I am de-lih-buh-ruh-ut
and uh-fray-a-aid of nothing*

ALL

Noth—

(The sound representing Should interrupts them.)

GRIOT

Now where exactly Should came from/or when or why/no one really knows/Perhaps Should came over by foot/Perhaps it came over by boat/Or perhaps.../the gods simply dropped Should on the earth/to make for a more entertaining show/But whenever and however mysteriously it came/Should arrived thinking about one thing/How to make that cha-ching

Only Should didn't want to do any work/so it needed someone else's back/on which to build its wealth

So Should wasted no time telling Evbokunru, the first girl in the whole entire world, all the things that she ought to do.

(The sound representing Should plays underneath as GRIOT speaks each command.)

Should told Evbokunru that in order for her to be taken seriously, she needed to close her arms and legs,

(The sound. A phrase of movement indicating that ROOTEDNESS complies.)

shut her mouth,

(The sound. ROOTEDNESS complies.)

cover up her bloom,

² From "New Year's Day" by Audre Lorde.

and give in
(The sound. ROOTEDNESS complies.)

Shrinking was the only act that Should approved.
(The sound. ROOTEDNESS complies.)

Still/whenever/Evbokunru felt the wind/or heard a bird/or smelled a flower/all the
 Coulds/began to stir inside her.
(ROOTEDNESS begins to perform a phrase of movement, but the sound of Should plays. ROOTEDNESS struggles to complete the movement but cannot. She attempts another move, but the sound plays again. The same thing happens a third time.)

But Should was very, very powerful. So Evbokunru soon learned to be silent an still, but
 when saw the hills and the trees and the rays of sun, her Coulds stirred and stirred until
 they simply burst forth.
(BOISTEROUSNESS, BRAZENNESS, STRONGNESS, QUEERNESS, THICKNESS and SOFTNESS appear.)

Each carried a different glow of the sun in her skin. Some were big and some were small.
 Some were in between, and they were called
(When she calls them, ROOTEDNESS gives each girl a phrase of movement that she receives and performs when she repeats her name.)

ROOTEDNESS

Amia³

BRAZENNESS

Amia

ROOTEDNESS

Jamaya

BOISTEROUSNESS

Jamaya

ROOTEDNESS

Aaliyah

QUEERNESS

Lee

ROOTEDNESS

Lee?

QUEERNESS

Lee

(A moment.)

ROOTEDNESS

Lee.

Shay

STRONGNESS

Shay

³ Pronounced Uh-me-uh.

ROOTEDNESS

Malaika

THICKNESS

Malaika

ROOTEDNESS

And Jade

SOFTNESS/GRIOT

Jade

It turned out Should wasn't as powerful as it had seemed. Amia, Jamaya, Shay, Lee, Malaika, and Jade could only be controlled when they were in one body. So with every sun, they could scatter far and wide.

(They spread out from Evbokunru like the petals of a dandelion. Ideally, the lights shift to sunrise.)

They embraced and raised and pushed. Curved and rolled and blossomed and stood. But they would always return when Evbokunru called them back to her at moonlight.

(Lights shift to sunset.)

ROOTEDNESS

*I, I am de-lih-buh-ruh-ut
and uh-fray-a-aid of nothing.*

ALL

Nothing.

(The girls return to Evbokunru one by one.)

ROOTEDNESS

Amia

BRAZENNESS

Amia

ROOTEDNESS

Jamaya

BOISTEROUSNESS

Jamaya

ROOTEDNESS

Aaliyah

QUEERNESS

Lee

ROOTEDNESS

Lee.

Shay

STRONGNESS

Shay

ROOTEDNESS

Malaika

THICKNESS

Malaika

ROOTEDNESS

And Jade

SOFTNESS/GRIOT

Jade

GRIOT

(Now I'm not saying everything was perfect, / but we had each other / and that was powerful.)

(The Sound representing Should.)

Of course, Should wasn't one to accept failure easily, so he set out to find new ways to get Amia, Jamaya, Shay, Lee, Malaika, and Jade under his control. He had to make sure that they [and their daughters' daughters' daughters' daughters] did what they should. [If he was ever to be profitable.] Should tried shackles

(The sound of chains. THICKNESS stops moving.)

and whips

The sound of a whip cracking. BRAZENNESS stops moving.)

and fires

The sound of fire burning. BOISTEROUSNESS stops moving.)

and gavels

The sound of a gavel banging. QUEERNESS stops moving.)

and

The sound of a siren. STRONGNESS stops moving.)

ROOTEDNESS

*I, I am de-lih-buh-ruh-ut
and uh-fray-a-aid of nothing.*

ALL

Nothing.

ROOTEDNESS

*I, I am de-lih-buh-ruh-ut
and uh-fray-a-aid of nothing.*

ALL

Nothing.

(The girls start moving again. [The sequence of sounds repeats faster. They pay it less mind. It repeats a third time even faster. They pay it no mind at all.]

GRIOT

[Selling, beating, burning, jailing/nothing Should did made [the daughters' daughters' daughter's daughters of] / Amia, Jamaya, Shay, Lee, Malaika, and Jade permanently do

as it wished. And whenever one girl did what Should said, / ten more sprouted up who didn't.

(Movement that reflects this sprouting.)

But just as Should was about to call it quits, / Should thought of one last thing. / Perhaps... it would do the trick.

(The sound of a school bell tone.

Two girls freeze.

The sound of a school bell tone.

Another two.

The sound of a school bell tone.

The last two.

The sound of a school bell tone.

All march offstage in step.

The light begins to dim.

ROOTEDNESS goes left after them.)

THE ROOTEDNESS

*I, I am de-lih-buh-ruh-ut
and uh-fray-a-aid of nothing.*

(Silence. She goes right.)

*I, I am de-lih-buh-ruh-ut
and uh-fray-a-aid of...?*

(Silence. She goes center.)

*I, I am de-lih-buh-ruh-ut
and...?*

(Silence.)

GRIOT

Without Amia, Jamaya, Shay, / Lee, Malaika, and Jade to respond to her call, / Evbokunru soon forgot that the gods had made her / so that she to could do anything at all.

THE ROOTEDNESS

(as she exits through the audience)

I, I am...

I, I aaaaa...

I, Iiii ...

(One last time, ROOTEDNESS opens her mouth.

The sound representing Should comes out.)

Entry Routine

*(A classroom.
A school bell tone rings.
As a unit, the girls march onstage.
They stop down center and raise their arms out to the side.
They march center, stop, and shake an invisible hand.
They march upstage to their assigned seats.
They place their hands on their hearts.)*

ALL

Country country country country.
Love thee love thee love thee love thee.

(They sit.)

....

Verbal Skills Lesson or Rules Indoctrination

TEACHER LADY

(unseen)

Slant please.

(As a unit, the girls cross their legs at the knee, fold their hands in their laps, and smile without showing their teeth while staring blankly.)

Now track me.

(As a unit, their heads follow the unseen teacher lady her heels click from one side of the room to the other. Then,)

TEACHER LADY

Now after me.

I will not speak too loudly or too little or too much.

BOISTEROUSNESS

I will not speak too loudly or too little or too much.

TEACHER LADY

I will not argue with or question anyone or anything.

STRONGNESS

I will not argue with or question anyone or anything.

TEACHER LADY

I will not let too much of my too big body be too free.

THICKNESS

I will not let too much of my too big body be too free.

TEACHER LADY

I will not get out of the place I have been assigned.

QUEERNESS

I will not get out of the place I have been assigned.

TEACHER LADY

I will not give birth to a meadow of dandelions.

BRAZENNESS

I will not give birth to a meadow of dandelions.

(A moment. The pace is a little faster this time.)

TEACHER LADY

Again.

I will not speak too loudly or too little or too much.

BOISTEROUSNESS

I will not speak too loudly or too little or too much.

TEACHER LADY

I will not argue with or question anyone or anything.

STRONGNESS and BOISTEROUSNESS

I will not argue with or question anyone or anything.

TEACHER LADY

I will not let too much of my too big body be too free.

THICKNESS, STRONGNESS, and BOISTEROUSNESS

I will not let too much of my too big body be too free.

TEACHER LADY

I will not get out of the place I have been assigned.

ALL (except BRAZENNESS)

I will not get out of the place I have been assigned.

TEACHER LADY

I will not give birth to a meadow of dandelions.

ALL

I will not give birth to a meadow of dandelions.

(A moment. The pace is faster still this time.)

TEACHER LADY

Last time.

I will not speak too loudly or too little or too much.

ALL (SOFTNESS nods along)

I will not speak too loudly or too little or too much.

TEACHER LADY

I will not argue with or question anyone or anything.

ALL

I will not argue with or question anyone or anything.

TEACHER LADY

I will not let too much of my too big body be too free.

ALL

I will not let too much of my too big body be too free.

TEACHER LADY

I will not get out of the place I have been assigned.

ALL

I will not get out of the place I have been assigned.

TEACHER LADY

I will not give birth to a meadow of dandelions.

ALL

I will not give birth to a meadow of dandelions.

(A moment.)

TEACHER LADY

I will not give birth to a meadow of dandelions.

ALL

I will not give birth to a meadow of dandelions.

(A moment.)

TEACHER LADY

I will not give birth to a meadow of dandelions.

ALL

I will not give birth to a meadow of dandelions.

...

Strongness, The

STRONGNESS

People kept on telling me that I should be

ALL

But I'm not

STRONGNESS

Ashamed of myself
for always being ready to swing.
But I'm just doing what my mama taught me
when I was itty bitty.
When my mama played with me,
her favorite thing to do
was to ball her hands up and smile at me.

*(She balls her hand up into a fist, while smiling as if she's playing
with a baby three times.)*

After a few times, I'd do it too.
And seeing me copy made her smile so wide.

(balling her hands up into fist three times)

As I got older, she'd still ball up her fists.

(She balls her fists up into a fighting stance three times.)

But she wasn't smiling.
And I'd copy.

(She repeats.)

Then she would tell me to never let nobody
get away with disrespectin me
[by callin me outta my name
or havin my name in their mouth when they shoulda kept it out.]
She said that sometimes fists
are the only language people understand
and that the day would come
when I would learn if I had the words in me or not.
[And she hoped I did.
Otherwise, she warned,
she'd beat fight into me.]
Cause I couldn't go through life
letting people get away with
anything that denied that I am somebody.
And denying my somebodiness, mama said,
was something most folks were guaranteed to do.
So I guess I was always ready to swing.
I just didn't think it'd be on Amia.
Amia and me had been friends since
we were itty bitty.

Like we'd known each other since
just after

*(balling her hands up as if playing with a baby; everyone else does
as well)*

and before

*(balling her hands up into a fighting stance; everyone else does as
well)*

since what woulda been the sandbox
if they hadn't taken recess away.

Since her wearing my shit
so my mama could wash hers
cause Amia's mama wouldn't.

(A beat.)

Since we made up our own language
It-duh-gah. (Hey)

BRAZENNESS

Gah-duh-it. (Hey, back)

STRONGNESS

Vay a roh-say. (Got a secret.)

BRAZENNESS

Ig-uh-ih. (Tell me.)

Ig-uh-ih! (Tell me!)

The first week of ninth grade
I hear that some girl
had been goin around sayin
that Amia stinked—
stunk? stinked?— Whatever
when I heard that,

I went and told Amia thinkin
we were gonna handle this girl together.

Because Amia had been disrespected.

And she felt more me than I did sometimes.

But just as soon as I got the words out,

Vay a loh-pay (Have a problem.)

Guy-duh gee-go linging kew-sty. (Girl's going around saying you stink.)

That means "Amia. Girl's going around saying you stink.

So what are we gonna—"

But Amia swings on me.

*(pounding the fist of one hand into the palm of the other with each
number; everyone else does as well)*

And she hits one-two-three-four-five-six-seven on me.

A fist of my hair grabbed tight in her left.

And I'm just leaned over

yelling,

A-guh-ih! A-guh-ih! A-guh-ih!

"Amia! It's me! It's me!"

Cause she must not know,
cause she keeps steady
one-two-three-four-five-six-seven-ing on me.
until I'm bleeding
and that's when I know.
I know my mama's gonna know what happened.
And if I don't fight back,
she's gonna whoop me [all over again].
cause you "Don't never let nobody
get away with disrespectin you
by callin you outta your name
or havin your name in their mouth when they shoulda kept it out."
So I ball up my fists.
And I one-two-three-four-five-six-seven on Amia
(balling her hand up into a fist; everyone else does as well)
I one two three four five six seven on her.
I keep one-two-three-four-five-six-seven-ing on her.
And now I know.
I have fight in me.
And I speak it well.
And if I have to speak it to Amia,
who I've known since
what woulda been the sandbox
if they hadn't taken recess away,
since we made up our own language
It-duh-gah, (Hey)
Vay a roh-say. (Got a secret.)
Vay a roh-say.

STRONGNESS
Guy-duh-gee? (How are you?)

BRAZENNESS
Ig-uh-i. (Good.)

If I have to use fight on her,
I have to use fight on everybody.
To let them know,
when fists become the only language,
that I am somebody.