

“Count Day” by Brittany Rogers

Valentine’s Day in Detroit Public Schools  
fell on count day this year-  
Which means all 187 of my students  
have to be present in each class, all day  
to convince the State that we need  
book money and pencil money  
and new teacher money.

Rest assured. My students could care less  
about a count day. They care  
that Valentine's day is cancelled,  
their pink carnations and puppy love put aside.  
Black kids deserve joy unspeakable  
and yet here we are. Them in their uniforms  
marching in the building single file;  
Security wand-checked their bodies  
searched the gifts they clutched  
like a bloom of daisies  
The usual.

On Valentine’s day in Florida,  
a white man shot up a school  
murdered fourteen students,two teachers,  
one coach- but we know that by now.

My eyes are glued to my phone between taking attendance  
anxiety a colony of fire ants as I watch the news.  
The irony is the lesson that day was on graveyard love,  
So we read Toni Morrison, talked 90’s R&B  
and Black love as a burial site.

Already, newscasters are lauding us as heroes  
saying, what an honor it is to die in the line of duty.  
The irony is people stay wanting Black women to  
keep everyone alive at our own expense.  
I want nothing more than to pull my own kids  
from their schools- take them home and cuddle until the  
world forgets what they want of me- but I am teaching.

I am always teaching. I don’t leave my house without  
a stack of papers I can grade, just in case.  
I talk to my husband about my students

like every conversation will build a room for them  
in our home. I am an exhausted my mama used to  
warn me about when I demanded she get some rest and I know this  
is not what it should mean to be married to a teacher.

We don't even do a valentines date that night.  
The next day, we have an active shooter drill.  
I remember the teacher from Florida died  
following the drill to the letter, and am almost a shrieking tower.

When they ask why we have to practice how not to get killed  
when we are a Detroit factory stuffed with Black  
and Brown bodies- when our bus stops and gas stations  
and blocks are more likely to be shot up  
than our school I tell them my mama taught me  
that bullets aint got no name  
I learned early to get down  
and away from anything that might shatter.  
I tell them to follow whatever protocol they mama taught them  
for New Years or Fourth of July or the first real hot day  
in a Detroit summer. I tell them Valentine's Day  
is officially added to the list.

I turn the lights off. Bolt the door.  
Stand guard over the kids stacked like a  
game of Jenga waiting to topple in the corner.  
Wonder what it means that I am teaching here, still  
too in love with a graveyard to leave.