

Birthright  
&  
Guidebook to Growth

**MAURICE J. NORMAN**

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Poetry

*Guidebook to Growth*

Open your eyes, newborn.  
Bless your brown skin.  
Stop your screaming and crying.  
Be wise when you breathe.

Air is rationed now  
stocked on shelves  
for a penny and some pride.  
There aren't many mouthfuls left.

Hold dear your smile.  
Don't barter it away to every waving stranger.  
Some you'll call Father.  
He'll call you by a nickname.  
You'll answer with a white-picket grin.

He'll be your first lesson: distance.  
You'll learn why tag is a dying sport,  
and your alphabet, too.  
You'll stitch syllables into a new Father.  
You'll call him poem.  
Bless his brown skin  
dark enough to hide the seams.

*Birthright*

I come from a lineage of broken homes and survival tactics.

Men

who fed their families with crop

tilled from seed to sickle.

Calloused fingers, women who understand marriage don't survive

the wear and tear of this daily toil.

When he ain't come home to tuck his kids in bed.

Let his kisses wander neighborhoods over.

Children born of infidelity.

Starving.

A symphony of aching bellies.

I have anonymous branches on my family tree.

Each one nourished by an emptied womb.

Cattle sliced open into the kitchen sink.

Women with blood stained hands.

My ancestry. I do not shame

broken

english wrapped in southern twang.

Still rose these cities from soil to skyline

generations to come.

Remember the names of those who laid the brick.

The fatigue of building a nation.

We've been hurtin'.

Ain't nothing wrong with letting it show.

I switch dialects with ease the way my mother taught me.

I excuse my father's absence.

I let my hungry belly sing.