**Chocolate Smile by Marje Kilpatrick**

In my neighborhood

We stay quiet

While our sisters stand under streetlights

Letting the shine adorn their skin

They prance in silver six-inch heels

With clothes that caress their curves

Coated in chocolate

In my neighborhood

We stay quiet

While fiends crave a fix in the form of a fluid

Swimming beneath a needle

Letting it corrupt their insides

And run tracks up their arms

And within their damaged veins

In my neighborhood

We stay quiet

While our brothers stand on cracked pavement

Selling broken dreams in the form of a little blue pill

In my neighborhood

Every mouth is wired shut

Rape culture

Quiet

Education system

Quiet

Police Brutality

Quiet

Institutionalized Racism

Quiet

Type 2 Diabetes

Quiet

Shh

They won’t tell you about the little girl

Who once held the corner store at her fingertips

Whose innocence was corrupted with Coke bottles and Ho-ho cupcakes

They won’t tell you about that sweet smile

Feet on pavement

The way her pink knocker balls used to swing

Sipping on chocolate milk like remembrance of Mama’s nipples

They won’t tell you

How she sucked on Tootsie pops since she was three years old

Holding lukewarm bottles of soda

Too scared she’d lose her grip

Hot Cheeto stains on the collar of her shirt

And the side of her lips

Stuck in between her teeth

Using the tip of her tongue to savor the last of her dose

They won’t tell you

About that dimple-filled smile

With big gaps

And big dreams coated in sugar

The way she hid jawbreakers between her cheek and teeth

Turning her smile three shades of blue

The ebony of her skin against the rainbow of her smile

Chocolate like beauty

Like goddess

Like ancestry

Chocolate like Hershey’s Kisses building on the back of her neck

Chocolate like she was raised in the center of the hood

With hip-hop her late night lullabies

And staticky cable with her Saturday morning breakfast

Chocolate like ever corner near her home is adorned with a liquor store

Chocolate like she ain’t never heard of Whole Foods

Just a hole in her only food can fill

Chocolate like Mama don’t have health insurance

Like a trip to the dentist cost more than Mama’s rent

Chocolate like her teeth becoming one with her skin

This is for the girl who held the corner store at her fingertips

Whose mouth use to ring of adrenaline-induced laughter

Her sweet smile now rotting away with her innocence

Jagged teeth in her mouth has her gums aching

They won’t tell you

How her smile was corrupted by blue slushies and black licorice

Leaving brown potholes in their wake

And we still remain quiet

While they drain us of everything sweet

But the color of our skin and the sugar in our hips

In my neighborhood

Our thighs are heavy

Our asses thick

Of culture being weighed down by silence