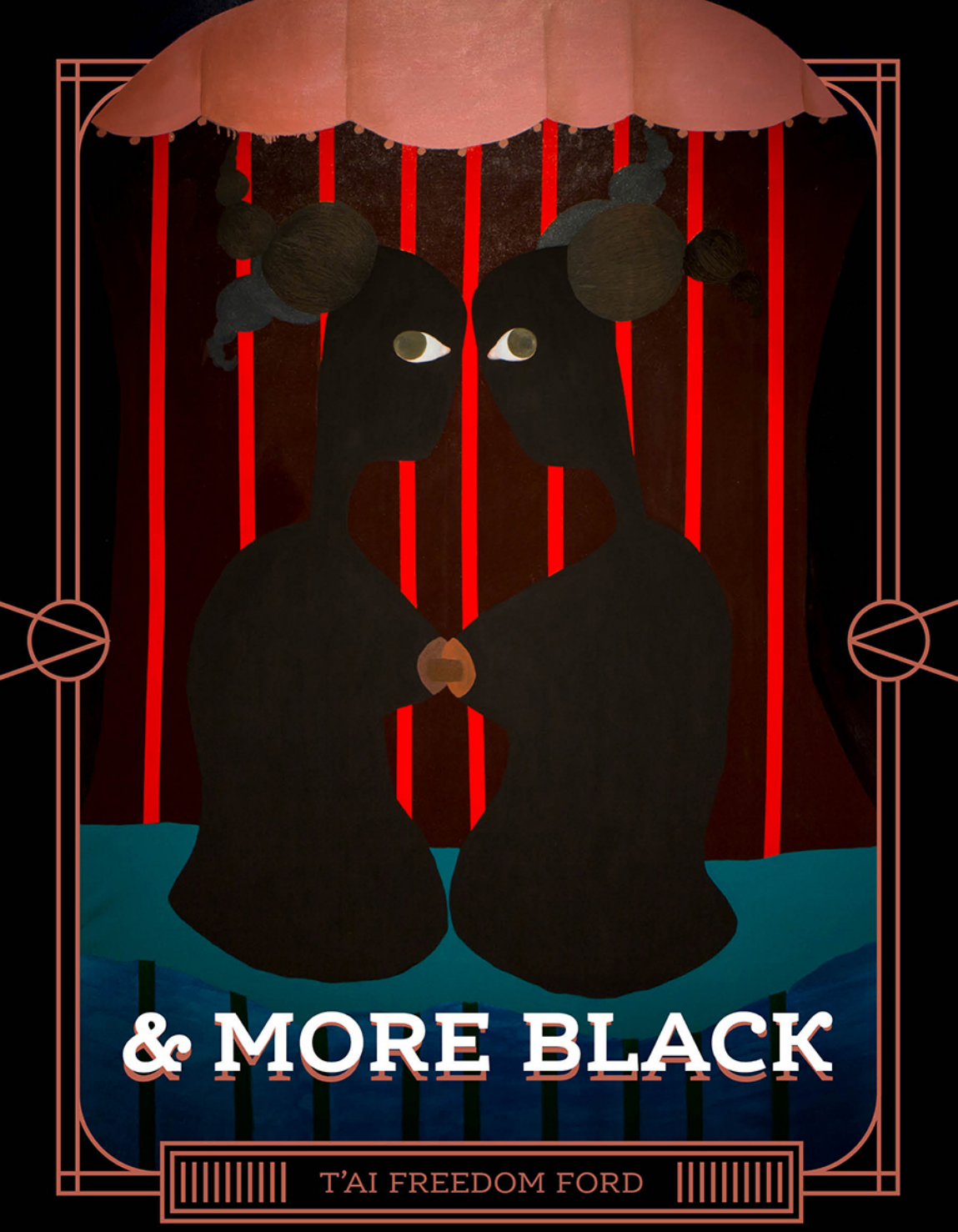

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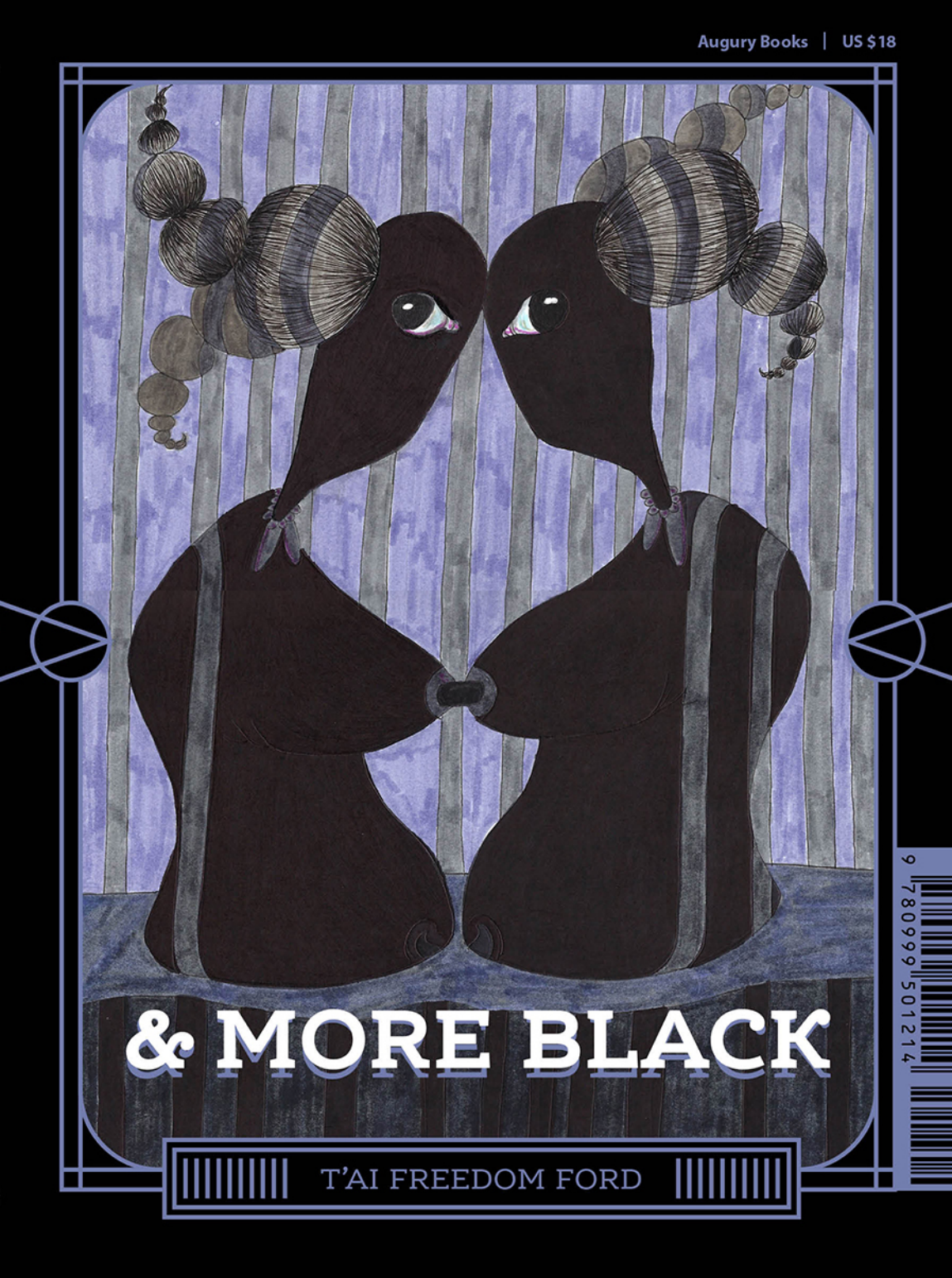

Praise for *& more black*

& more black is full of "dance floor long division," Hello Kitty lunchboxes, double-dutch, and "dyke dowry." It remixes the visions and vernaculars of Wangechi Mutu, Amiri Baraka, Erykah Badu, Glenn Ligon, and countless others. It finds the music in Graceland quicksand and "Kanye's alter ego." "we be makeshift / bodies got too many mouths" t'ai freedom ford writes in these propulsive, poly-vocal, poly-verbal gems. This is a book holding spectacular spells, songs, and instructions for freedom. —Terrance Hayes

& more black

t'ai freedom ford

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First Edition

When you removed the gag that was keeping
these black mouths shut, what were you hoping for?
That they would sing your praises?

—John-Paul Sartre, *Black Orpheus*

from here i saw what happened and i cried

after Carrie Mae Weems

the blood is red the blues is red the blues
is blood the red is dirt the dirt is brown

the brown is red the dirt is blood the blood
is blues the blues is brown the brown is skin

the skin is blood the blood is kin the kin
is red the red is blood the blood is new

the new is skin the skin is news the news
is brown the brown is noose the noose is red

the red is blues the blues is dirt the dirt
is skin the skin is blues the blues is kin

the kin is brown the brown is blood the blood
is news the news is black the black is new

the new is red the red is noose the noose
is black is blues is brown is red is blood—

people in glass towers should not imagine us

after Wangechi Mutu

i spy dark things dancing in my periphery

i cross the street but it is only the trees

poplocking in the wind—my knees are dark things

they click like triggers when i walk i fail

to notice sudden flinching—my body's

post traumatic—i hail from dark things unknown

& cosmic or, less romantic: niggerish

& bionic like bullets arcing in the night

sky aching for other dark things to slow

their trajectory—i fear these dark things

will be the death of me reeking of Wednesday's

blood & bourbon & bathroom reckoning

i pull dark things from the center of me

& flush before considering their resemblance

cravings

if the chocolate is good it will melt
like a good lover darkens herself into
your sheets & disappears in a puddle
of moans—you will understand the science
of her invisible body but not
the fiction of her pulling you toward
some bloody orbit you do not crave—
this monthly reminder you are woman
in spite of wingtips & bowties you rock
estrogen is a catty bitch scratching
at your womb—an eyeless hag seeking sperm
& purpose beyond where eggs go to die
your body craving synchronicity
copycats your lover's fertility—
                its false alarm

riding death in my sleep

after Wangechi Mutu

except i am awake or so i think

my crotch—nothing more than a saddle
for her to climb atop & giddyup
black beauty thoroughbred: watch me gallop
find my stride in a field of daffodils
wet pussy honeysuckle i am all
muscle & rhythm—a sped-up heartbeat
verging collapse like a clapboard house
with too much wind but we can't stop won't stop
abdominal ache & grind slick bound by sweat
& other wetness even her moans drip
with something sticky—a sap of sorts spit?
shit: eyes closed we witness this murderous ride

i think: *goddamn this woman could kill me*

you are a remarkable woman (now hurry up & die)

after Kara Walker

together they gathered the weapons
& placed them into baskets like fruits

their calloused fingers nimble & careful
the weapons otherwise questionable—

a hot comb brick a covered pot of grits
a spade clumped with soil a soup ladle

a few choice shards from a broken teacup
a horseshoe a small cast iron skillet

that smelled of cornmeal & burnt butter
the men predictably had already

removed real munitions from the big house
leaving nigger wenches to fend for themselves—

hardly defenseless after all they had
no panties & pounds of black pussy

badass

after he died, me & Gil Scott had dinner
some dingy diner Uptown where cabbies
came for coffee between shifts—he ate soft
boiled eggs cause it was easier to get down
since smack had snatched his front teeth & his mouth
was a graveyard of decaying brown stumps
other than that he looked good considering

he asked me bout my writing told him all my poems
had bullets in them he changed the subject
told me bout a yoga class he & Amiri took
where they had to balance banned books on they heads
& how the books were heavy & made him angry
& when he laughed the hooks in his head made him ugly
& how they promised him new teeth after a year of good
behavior

in America even the black sheep are white

my mouth is a museum of moving
images ignorance is this nigger & his twitter
scrimmages motherfucker i'm bionic
check the tonic in my lineage her spine
an abacus of dreams my fingers count
the cartilage between disenfranchised
& privileged we be the in between
squishy & niggerish indigenous
with heathenish tendencies sacrilege
black power packages bridge kunta
kinte to white christmases what sort of
gift is this i make gibberish of English
nasty as black licorice we don't tapdance
no more all we do is this: (middle finger
emoji)

everybody wanna be a nigga but nobody wants to be a nigger

the kids say the kid *act Black* but he white
not *white* white but white *black* like city snow
he sag know swag like white boys know how to rap
he wear the mask know trap music hits
shmoney in shit he say *nigga* get a pass
he rock Jays & Nudies so cuties notice
he down he get ass in class he clown still pass
but niggas suss second period: *thwack*
his white face flush red as fried baloney
he grins stupidly throws up his fists false
bravado voice all vibrato means: this nigga shook
his dukes up looking like the great white hope
a poor man's piñata they bust him open
hoping for gummy bears & jellybeans

untitled

after Glenn Ligon & Zora Neale Hurston

my tongue two-faced tongue-tied tired and—i
dunno what it be sayin half time— feel
like shit in my mouth unfamiliar— most
these folks don't expect it cuz— colored
sound like blue notes not dictionaries— when
i speak sometimes words look like flowers— i
gotta nother voice sound like Sally— am
silly to be bullied all proper— thrown
into green gardens mouthful of thorns— against
ebonics lurking behind dull teeth— a
weapon awaiting redemption song— sharp
as Sunday morning a blackness turned— white
these wild words of mine sing in the— background

dear Ebonics

you be a clever bitch how you say *book*
& mean: *get the fuck outta here* how
you say *bad* but mean: *Pam Grier* how you roll
your eyes at Webster one minute be twerking
in his sheets the next how you say *cracker*
ofay *honkey* & mean: *mean motherfucker*
how you bend— break— make shit up— mispronounce—
how it be cool as hooch in a house of countless drops
how your daddy *the dozens* your mama
jive how you conjugate & signify
simultaneous with your machete
& alla your heart & when whitewash tries
to render your black spectacular irrelevant
your heartbeat whisper: *i be i be i be*

about the author

t'ai freedom ford is a New York City high school English teacher and Cave Canem Fellow. Her poetry, fiction, and essays have appeared in the *African American Review*, *Apogee*, *Bomb Magazine*, *Calyx*, *Drunken Boat*, *Electric Literature*, *Gulf Coast*, *Kweli*, *Obsidian*, *Poetry*, *Tin House*, and others. Her work has also been featured in several anthologies including *The BreakBeat Poets: New American Poetry in the Age of Hip-Hop* and *Nepantla: An Anthology Dedicated to Queer Poets of Color*. Her first collection, *how to get over*, won the 2015 To the Lighthouse Poetry Prize, published by Red Hen Press. In 2018, she won a Face Out Emerging Writers Award from the Community of Literary Magazines & Presses. t'ai lives and loves in Brooklyn, where she is an editor at *No, Dear Magazine*.

About the Author

& more black by **t'ai freedom ford** is a collection of what ford calls "Black-ass sonnets," which take their cues from Wanda Coleman's "American sonnets." For ford, the word "American" conjures the spirit of her ancestors. The poems are rebellious, outspoken, and take no shit. They investigate Black art, Black bodies, Black sexuality, and Black language, unapologetically and with a capital B.

The Rebirth or HeyGirlHey

after Alexandria Smith

what they don't tell you is the white picket
fence is splintered & weathered & tethered
to a mortgage—a death sentence of normal
your limbs taunt lawnmowers & anything
with teeth you peel back pastel wallpaper
feed pasty strips to the flames whispering
in your closet—& so you die come back
with too many mismatched legs & arms
all wanting to strangle you as you run
but see how smart you be? how you buried
your throat in them bushes of blackgirl hair—
how the clueless limbs wave: *heygirlhey*
what they won't tell you is the white picket
fence was once brown & dull just like your skin

i sell the shadow to sustain the substance

after Glenn Ligon & Sojourner Truth

as black woman i am untitled—nameless
my heart a faint glow of neon wire
buzzing toward some shameless demise
i stand against walls looking nonchalant
flashbulbs mistake me for celebrity
or bored whore same difference—as black woman
i am installation art as negress
my heart a black plastic bag ghosting streets
what parts of we ain't for sale as woman?
black skin shiny as gold teeth worthless swag
is this body possible? or do i
merely exist as melancholy gesture—
self-portrait as shrug eye roll blank stare
sacrificing shadow the body remains

root of all Eves

after Wangechi Mutu

her name mean *pornstar* in ebonics: fucks
flickering electric in whiteboy head
she made of paper; she tear easily
crumple in his palm like a mistake oops
origami pussy: now she a swan
he ruffle her feathers with his magic
wand blonde weave down to her ass crack apple
bottom of the barrel black blasphemous
she pre-Jesus—tongue embroidered with lies
little lacy things like doilies in shit
hell yeah he hit that then fucked up them pies
while she unfolded herself smoothing her
wrinkled eyes her prized thighs her right nipple
her other self buried brown sprouting roots

#notorious

who we be? you already know— must be
groovy & rhythmic quixotic erotic
exotic ethnic must be east indian
with all the red dots on our foreheads must be
picnic pick a nigger loop a noose round her neck

must be disrespectful neck swivel & eye roll
pick & roll basketball our namesake
pump fake & fast break must be breakfast brown
thief suddenly ground beef see how bullets
scramble legs must be dangerous jail cells

cannot contain us tame us us anger shameless
thus anger hangs us we be beautiful & blameless
hollywood shuffle *nigger entertain us* must be
tragic traffic target you don't know us
till triggers name us murder us we famous—

Darkness very dark darkness is sectional.

—Gertrude Stein

& more black

t'ai freedom ford

Augury Books • New York

Praise for *& more black*

I'm so excited for t'ai freedom ford's silky, tough, clear-eyed, and irreverent new collection. These poems suffer none of the ongoing American foolishness. They snap so hard you might—as I did—jump up and run out of the room laughing at their brilliant, slicing wit. They are composed with soul and funk and lightning-fast intelligence. This poet will reward your reading over and over with her impressive power and relentlessly exuberant music. Read them aloud. *& more black* is truth moving at the speed of sound. —Patrick Rosal