

April 2018

Ephesians Six

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Recommended Citation

Gantt, Raven (2018) "Ephesians Six," *The Anthology*: Vol. 2018 , Article 51.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.winthrop.edu/anthology/vol2018/iss1/51>

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ephesians six by raven

The children congregated on the porch of the modest, blue home as they always did on Sunday evenings. Their growling stomachs created a choir orchestrated by the smells wafting from the kitchen. Collard greens, okra, yams, red rice, chicken. Magical women convened over pots and conjured up a feast. Older folks sat in the living room drinking and dancing, having wiped off their makeup and masks they'd put on earlier for Jesus.

From the speakers, Sam Cooke crooned so loudly that the boys,

who deemed themselves men, were standing on the corner of the street – alert but nodding their hooded heads to the smooth melody.

“keep those records playin’ cause I’m having such a good time dancin’ with my baaaby...”

The sun was fading away and dragging along the heat. Gathered outside, ordered not to leave the porch, the children grew restless, especially the oldest among them who had earned the moniker, Slick. Leaning against the railing, he reverently watched the boys.

huddled on the street.

Slick sat next to his youngest cousin perched on the steps and whispered, “Jay, I’ll give you five dollars right now if you go an’ bring a bottle of beer out the fridge.”

His sister answered instead, “No Jay, if he wants one so bad he’ll get it himself. Besides,” Nina said, directing her attention to Slick, “you don’t even have five dollars.”

Someone sauntered from the corner, hands deep in his pockets. His steps were exaggerated and he was unintentionally walking to the beat of the stereo. Slick knew who it was, could detect him from miles away.

He cleared his throat, manipulating the bass in his voice and shouted the name, Omar.

Nina snapped her neck toward him, “Don’t call him over here.”

“Shut up, Nina, and mind your business,” Slick said.

Gaining notoriety as the best trafficker in the state, his reputation proceeded him. Guns, money, drugs, women. Whatever paid was packaged. Often he would be seen offering large bills to the youngest children, a persuasive measure. Young men adored him, swiftly shifting their demeanor when he passed them by and the sagest cursed him, called on God from bruised knees that their kin would not fall prey.

Omar reached the porch. He slapped palms with Slick but stared at Nina, a wink and grinned. The streetlight caught a flash of fine gold against his amber-hued skin, glossy with sweat. Slick stood to meet him at eye level and to block his view of the girl. Nina, feeling uneasy with the interest he showed, thought of walking away but knew better than to leave Slick outside to make his own decisions.

“When you gonna come hang wit’ us Slick?” Omar asked.

“He can’t...” Nina began and Slick raised his voice to compete with hers, “I can’t leave tonight.”

Omar squinted. “You’ll find a way. Sooner or later.”

A voice cut through the air, southern drawled and thick. Every head swiveled towards the entrance. Slick’s father stood at the door, leaning against the frame, giving the impression that he was trying to cram as much of himself as he could outside. His words slurred as he called out. “Junior, come inside.” A belch emerged from the pit of his belly and the kids rang out with sound ranging from amusement to disgust, the man smirked, “The rest of ya’ll too, come on an’ eat.”

A stampede of kids rushed past the burly man, sticking out candy stained tongues as they passed. As Slick tried to squirm in behind Nina, his father reached out and gripped him by his t-shirt, creating a cluster of fist, crimson cloth and glittering gold chain. He stood firm, an immovable force, as if he was sober all along. Slick would have thought so if he hadn’t caught the aroma of whiskey on his breath and he knew from experience how heavy it could make his hand. He pulled him in close but didn’t bother to lower his voice.

“The first step you make down that street is the last one you’ll ever take. Understood?”

“Yes, sir.”

The fist unclenched and smoothed out the fabric it once seized. “Good.” His father looked over his head and met dark eyes. “Walk away from my house, Omar.” The command was laced with a threat. Not bothering to look back, Slick watched from the doorway as he strolled back into the living room and wrapped an arm around his wife. Relaxing into her husband’s frame, a smile crept across her face, the prelude to a giggle and the scene made Slick smile too. He stepped over the threshold, but not before casting a glance over his shoulders and catching Omar’s eye. Sooner or later.