

Why Our Knees Kiss

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They say it's rickets, bone malformation, some genetic accident. They don't know the real reason some of our knees kiss, and our thighs rub close. It isn't a defect. Those rumors came out of envy.

Way back, when the ground was fertile, and the sugar cane was sweet, the Speight women, those on my mother's side, thrived. They descended from the Baartmans and were the wisest and most beautiful in all of the South. They were the first adapters. The way a child masters a familiar song by ear is the same way the Speights took to languages. They held a library on their tongues. The most notorious thinker of them all was Lula.

Lula was a griot. That meant she carried the history of thousands of years in the grooves of her teeth. While out harvesting crops, she would whisper stories to the other workers of how the sun and moon loved so hard that they began to share each other's light. Back on the plantation, the children would gather to listen to the symphony of stories strum from her mouth. Though it wasn't always safe. The same way the Speights came together to devour their food, other hungry beasts waited for an opening to devour too.

Alligators lived on the edge of the plantation. They gained an appetite for bait babies and couldn't shake the craving. They would hide in the high grass and wait for the children to wander too far from their parents. Then, they would wrestle them under and swallow them whole. But the Speight women were smarter than the gators. They grew their hips and butts round as the perfect way to keep the children high. They would allow the children to scale their bottoms and hold onto their

backs. This way, when the meadow grass got unyielding, they could see the gators coming and avoid being eaten.

This angered the gators. They much preferred the taste of melanin over turtles or deer. They plotted and schemed for a way to lure the children back to the swampy ground. Lula worried for the children's safety; she had grown fond of every fire-lit cherub face who filled themselves with story. She knew one day they would pass them on, make stories of their own. So, one day, while Lula was hunting, she overheard the gators coming up with a plan. They were going to strike in the evening; when Lula sat all the children down to listen to the last story of the night, they would creep into the village. They would strike at Lula's most interesting part. While all the children were leaning in, completely entranced by Lula, they would let their guards down. Then, the gators would feast. The gators thought this was a solid plan, though they didn't count on Lula's wit.

Lula gathered the women and told them what she had heard out in the highest grass. They knew the gators had to be stopped and began brainstorming a plan of their own. One woman suggested singing all the gators to sleep in Nama since the clicks served as their own luring drumbeat. Another said to build a wall too high for the gators to climb but then remembered the dangers of walls. Lula combed the archives of her mouth and said she had a crazy idea. Back when the waters stood still, the Speight women watched the stagnant ocean begin to stink. They spoke to the moon and told her that the land would perish if the water didn't begin to move. So, in an effort to help, the Speight woman lent their bodies to the sea's aid. They stood on the coastline and rocked their hips like an ebb and flow. The water hesitated. Then they realized if they pressed their knees together, the friction of their hips set off its own trance. Before they knew it, the waves were rising and falling to the motion of their hips. This hypnotism was the perfect way to stop the gators.

The women all agreed that if their hips could protect their children and teach the waves how to come and go, they must be powerful enough to confuse the gators. Lula brought each woman a piece of twine to tie around her knees. Then they lined the perimeter as the sun began to set.

Lula gathered the children like always and began to tell them a story. The gators approached. They made it past the first line of shanties, but as they broke into the center, the rhythmic sway took over. The women completely shielded the children. Their magnetic orbit, lulling and powerful. The gators, on sight, began to rock without even realizing it. Before long, they were dizzy and confused and forgot why they were there in the first place. The nausea set in next, sending every gator scurrying back beneath the crest out of queasiness and confusion.

The women rejoiced. And every time the persistent gators would try to get too close, the women would tie their knees and move like the waves. Before long, they no longer needed the rope. As most things adapt, so did the women. Their round hips and large bottoms swayed over kissing knees to keep all of them safe and sound. But there was always another threat lurking. Some came through the Colonies' hills. Some sailed through the sea, convinced to capture the power of the trance.

But you, my dear, still hold it. In the space where your knees kiss and your thighs spark fire. The way to tame this world. And nothing about your body, about your joy, is an accident.

