

Foreword

ALEXIS PAULINE GUMBS

For a year, my partner and I lived in an apartment with a brick floor. At least three times that year, I dropped glass jars of honey on that floor and they cracked open. Precious local honey oozed out over my shiny brick floors. Like a message or a meditation. Have you ever seen the way honey works? So thick that it slows down time. So sweet that it convinces you your skin can and should touch broken glass. So golden and brown that it calls the light from all directions.

What E. Patrick Johnson offers here is a work of honey. A time travel testament, a beautiful hexagonal prism, a strategic sweetness that allows us to drink in the painful edges of life in a world that is violent to Black women and even more so to Black lesbians in the South.

In this book, E. Patrick Johnson creates an afro-surreal world for the real-life stories of Black lesbians from and in the South. A world populated by fly (and sometimes actually flying) girls, grown women, grandmas, butch daddies, and dapper self-identified dykes. As we journey with him and the archetypal Miss B., through this world we encounter a queer ecology of witness.

Johnson centers himself as a sometimes uplifted, sometimes conflicted, sometimes reluctant, and sometimes even confused listener. He therefore gives us permission to feel however we feel when we are confronted with the realities of sexual violence enacted on Black girls by the men in their communities and families; the inspiration of the contributions Black southern lesbians have made to their communities through their art and activism; and the drama, excitement, and sweetness of their evolving love lives over time.

Through this work, and through his brave honesty about how the stories affect him, refract his own story, and challenge him on his journey, Johnson models how the life experiences of Black lesbians in the South are relevant to everyone in the world. While as a Black queer woman who grew up mostly in the southern United States I appreciated the reflection I found in stories that resonated with my own life experiences and even learned a new context about the lives of people in my own communities, or whom my partner Sangodare (Julia Roxanne Wallace—who was interviewed for this book) and I met on our cross-country Mobile Homecoming tour of listening to and honoring Black LGBTQ feminist elders, the most revolutionary approach to this book is as a practice of what Audre Lorde called “the creative power of difference.” As you travel on this journey, you will be experiencing a different form of oral history. You will be led to learn from the very different lives of each of the women interviewed. And, most importantly, you will be called on to know yourself differently through the transformative truths of these heartbreaks, adventures, spiritual insights, and resilient examples.

When I think of the impact of this book on the world and our communities, I think not only of the sweetness of honey but also of its medicinal properties. Allow this work to clean you out, awaken your body’s aliveness to the air around you, inspire you to listen deeper, love bravely, and be a part of the buzz that transforms the world.