

## ALIYAH SHABAZZ

Born and raised in Philadelphia, aliyah\_shabazz (Aliyah West) is a full-time creator and writer, who does some teaching and mothering on the side. Her writing focuses on gender, race, class, and the supernatural. When she is not writing, she teaches high school literature while raising, supporting and learning from her teenage daughter. Aliyah has always felt a connection with water as it is a focal point of her forthcoming collection of short stories. She is inspired to go deeper into the world of black resistance and how we, as a people, engage in large and small acts of resistance everyday. This is what sustains and nourishes us. I look forward to joining a larger community of writers and artists who exist to fight, love, and thrive.

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### *We out here...*

There are rivers that join us. Together. Separates us. From our pain.

We just out here surviving, moving, bathing our babies in the river. To bless them, we must get them ready for, they are prisoners of a silent war. A cold war, a spiritual war, a virtual war, an invisible one.

We just out here walking through rivers, trying to get this rent paid, or pay a mortgage, to a life where no matter where you lay your head you will be overworked and underused, under the weight of a carefully crafted message. The message reads: you can never be fully human, fully yourself. You must be magical or invisible, threatening, sassy, scary, ghetto, humble, not like those others, animalistic, well-spoken, uneducated, dangerous, professional, exciting, sexy, strong, forgiving, an example, full of hope, spiritual. All of these identities assigned to us to wilt the spirit. A wilted people who still keep at it, reimagine it, pull it from the ashes and work our magic. We do it out of necessity and make it style, every time, every. fucking. time. The waters protect us when we are expected to pander or prove, explain or change. The world is on fire and they say our own oppression doesn't exist.

We really just out here sitting by rivers, trying so hard to not acknowledge that it was

there; it was taboo, for us to touch, speak, or see it; essential to our very survival that we not look our trauma in the eyes. Knowing that it's depravity would turn us to salt, to stone, petrified by the evidence that such an evil could exist. No, we are water, we create new realities, we move intuitively.

We out here surviving, laughing, dancing, creating. Worn bodies and assaulted minds swim in the river to be restored. Brutality of black bodies, criminality on cell phone cameras. Their phones are not waterproof. Swim deeper because an image could never define us, who we are. Never tell them. Where our rivers lead.

