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For Knobby

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FOR KNOBBY

JEMELA MWELU

i don't know how he
got his nick name, but
George was his real name
he was tall and lean
like a Jamaican vanilla bean
and just as chocolatey brown
Knobby and i went through
elementary, junior high
and high school together
after graduation most of
us went party hopping
i saw Knobby at a least
two parties i went to
a few weeks after graduation
news came that Knobby
was killed in action
i didn't even know
he had been drafted
i hadn't had anyone die
who was close to me
other than my grandma
but Knobby's death made
me numb beyond grief
several weeks after the news
it seemed the whole damn
neighborhood of young
boys had been shipped out

the numbness i felt
turned to speechlessness
now i know it was fear
fear of losing my friends
fear that we as a neighborhood
were penniless and helpless
to say no these boys can't go
they got parties to go to
they got girls to sweet talk
they don't know nothing
about no going to war
they just learned to drive
i was told the Marines gave
Knobby's parents the flag
that was draped on the casket
i wished they could have
been draped in Knobby's smile
i can still see his smile
it followed me through elementary,
junior high and it was erased
the year we graduated 1964