Matter

A short one by Idris Goodwin
June 2020 Version
KIM – A black woman, young adult, educated, progressive
COLE – A white man, young adult, educated, progressive

The Asides: The actors speak to us---sometimes in the midst of a scene
They should also say the words in bold---who gets assigned what
may be determined by director and ensemble
PRESENTATION HISTORY:

#Matter has received staged readings and development with Jackalope Theatre, The Black Lives Black Words Series and Colorado College

It was fully produced by Actors Theatre of Louisville in Jan 2017 and The Bush Theatre in the UK in March 2017

It is published in Black Lives, Black Words: 32 Short Plays edited by Reginald Edmund (Oberon) and also the forthcoming Papercuts Anthology: Year 2 (Cutlass Press)
"Black lives matter. White lives matter. All lives matter."
--Democratic Presidential Candidate Martin O’Malley, 2015
Prologue

We lived next door to each other. As kids

And now---same city

We were never that close during any of it
But we knew each other

I’d see him here and there

We were aware of one another

We kept our space
Not consciously
We just ran in different spaces

But we were always aware

Social war

Another body.
Another name. Another image
Has circulated. The latest body
Name. The newest image to haunt

It’s shameful

I posted
This is no time for apathy
I liked it

COLE

The fight for equality continues on

KIM

Liked it!

COLE

And then I typed a hash tag and three words
Words I thought anyone could get behind

KIM

I didn’t quite like that

COLE

I responded with: A hash tag and three words. Nothing offensive. Words I thought anyone could get behind

KIM

I didn’t quite like it so I deleted it

COLE

She deleted my response. Totally hypocritical

KIM

My wall, my space. And yeah I edit it
It’s the one space where I can build the world I’d like to inhabit

COLE

I respond to her posts a lot. We share the same algorithm. Politically

KIM

My response was to remove it

COLE

Erasure is never okay so I responded
This is not a race issue, not really---this is about abuse of power

KIM

I responded
Are you crazy!

COLE

I responded
We’re talking about equality
The human experience
no time for stark divisions along racial lines
This is a time for us to recognize our shared humanity

KIM
I deleted it

COLE
I messaged her

KIM
He messaged me

COLE
We haven’t seen each other in a while or spoken
The last time was at a concert
She was a little mad at me
Because the mc performed a song with the n word in the chorus
And she saw me sing along
And she never said anything
But after the show
She was cold to me

KIM
He messaged me

Hey Kim
I know it’s been a while

KIM
He felt like we needed to talk
Needed to clear the air

COLE
Can we sit down for coffee sometime

COLE
Sitting down

KIM
I want to ask you what you meant
but I'm finding it hard to ask you

What I would rather do is just tell you
what I think
about what I thought you meant

COLE
I can explain what I meant

KIM
I am sure you can
But can you explain what I read
And what I took it to mean?

COLE
I just meant that we are all comprised of matter
Matter being that essential molecular element of which we are all built
Ordinary matter like trees and water
Solids and liquids

KIM
But sounds, the voice for example, was not always considered matter
Matter used to only encompass a select set of solid objects

COLE
But all along, it was all matter

KIM
What happens to matter split? Does it explode and decimate millions of bodies of color? And whose hands split that matter? What we are talking about are black lives split, shaken until they become bombs

COLE
“Their lives, those lives” ---its all ridiculous
We’re here—and we can decide the way this is going to go
This doesn’t have to---shouldn’t be
And we---us---we don’t have to ascribe

COLE
An Aside

There was that summer after senior year of high school. We were both short on credits. All our friends took off. We had to stick around. We both ended up working at the Library to make extra cash. We kinda got close that summer. We talked about books. Smoked joints on lunch break. That was the summer I got into R&B and I turned her on to some indie rock. I thought, “man what a cool chick”

There was that one night after our shift. We got those tall cans and decided to break into the school.
We heard someone---so we ducked into the only open room we could find. The Chemistry room. It was dark in there and we were super quiet….we drank more and started to get close. Maybe it was because things were coming to an end. We got close to…but we didn’t ---she stopped suddenly---said she had to go home.

We are on the same side Kim

Are we?

Yes! We want the same thing

After another man is laying in the street
Your immediate impulse is to correct me---to talk semantics with me
To say *Well, actually Kim...*
I don’t know what side that is

An Aside

In particle physics, antimatter is material composed of antiparticles; which have the same mass as particles of ordinary matter but have an opposite charge

I don’t think anyone is less or more
Or special

When we say BlackLivesMatter
Do you think that’s us saying we’re special?
“*Look at us?! We’re getting shot---“*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COLE</th>
<th>KIM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No but its sort of making your suffering worse than others</td>
<td>Uhm…what did you just</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wait--- that’s not what I mean</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>It’s saying your suffering is---</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I mean—what about in Africa ---all the boko haram stuff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Or women all over the world being assaulted</td>
<td>Okay but we’re….</td>
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<tr>
<td>Or Gays and Lesbians</td>
<td>Cole…Cole…</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanics being deported, shot at border crossings</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Or hell, even poor white folks who live in black communities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Who’re bullied because of the crimes of others</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>And and and</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I’m all for civil rights but looting? Property damage and just rage?</td>
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<tr>
<td>It doesn’t work---</td>
<td>You don’t…</td>
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<tr>
<td>I mean—it’s not strategic</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>All lives Kim</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>That’s all I am saying---lets pull the act from the context of race</td>
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<tr>
<td>We have to break this down to the root</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Human wickedness</td>
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</table>

KIM
And sometimes humans kill humans because of their race

(a breath)

COLE
Wouldn’t it be great if---
I just wish we could move on. Be ourselves---be individuals---- our own perfect stars- ---just be our own perfect stars---

When we were kids---when we’d have a block party all the kids would be out---getting our faces painted like spider man—bike races---we were just---kids in the neighborhood. When did we start---

KIM
I was the only black kid at that block party

COLE
I didn’t see it like that

KIM

You didn’t see I was black?

COLE

I didn’t treat you different

KIM

But not everybody was like you

COLE

An Aside

She wasn’t always like this

KIM

An Aside

I was silent. I used to be silent.

________

COLE

She used to be real easy going. A cool chick.

________

KIM

I used to hold my breath. Breathe shallow. Up here in my chest.

_______________________________

COLE

We grew up the same way

KIM

But the way we are perceived is different

COLE

But that doesn’t mean those perceptions are true

KIM

The water and the tree are in the same forest but not the same

Different mass
Different volume
Different uses

Are you willing to decrease your mass?
Just say it
Black Lives Matter

COLE
Do white lives not matter?

KIM
Nobody is saying what doesn’t matter

COLE
But its ---exclusionary

KIM
Its contextual---in this climate---it relates to the splitting of black atoms with no consequence

An Aside
I really want to leave. I feel sick.
I want to hug Kim. And tell her I’m sorry
but also ---if I’m being honest
tell her to get over it.
life is hard and there is no measuring stick for suffering.
She can change this---just by being her self---not this angry black woman

KIM
An Aside
I really want to let Cole off the hook. Drop this whole thing. Tell him it’s all good. But I have
swallowed myself so many times to make white folks feel less uncomfortable.

COLE
I just want to fix it.

KIM
Cole wants to know how we fix it. Wants me to tell him but I just woke up this way. I don’t
know how to dig into the hearts, rewire the circuitry? Who does? All I am trying to do is keep it
together.

COLE
I want to tell her I am sorry.
KIM
I don’t need apologies. I just want it to stop.
_______________________

COLE
To say it---is to admit---that ---my life---in someone’s eyes---people living, people dead has mattered more than other folks’

And I don’t think it does---but someone at some point has believed that---and maybe my life has been better because of that—
________________________

KIM
That night in the Chemistry room---when we got close---Cole and I all those years ago---I was into it----I liked him---until he put his hands in my hair.

I thought about all those kids in school always asking to touch it. Can I touch it.
And how they’d react when they did. And he had his hands in my hair and I wondered how he thought it felt. Weird? Funny? Good? Then I thought about if he’d been with any black girls before and it was too much so I told him I had to go home. So I did. I left and that was the closest we ever got.

Kim exits

COLE
Week or two later I sent Kim a message. I thanked her for the conversation. I told her we should be in touch more often. That I wanted to keep talking. Not just about this. But our lives in general. …nothing.

That was that I thought

But one morning I went on my timeline . I saw her picture and her name being shared by everyone.

They called it…..a failure to comply…..failure to be silent ….so she was made silent.....forever

She lives on now—as a hashtag

But I still hear her voice hanging in the particles.

Does a spirit…. have mass? It must. I can feel the weight.

END OF PLAY