



how to get over

POETRY BY

t'ai freedom ford

The reader journeys through these poems, circa 1787 to 2013, and emerges realizing that everything is connected—the ways we live, lie, love, and die—the ways we all get over.

how to get over is part instruction manual, part prayer, part testimony. It attempts to solve the reader's problems (by telling them how to get over), while simultaneously creating them—troubling the waters with witness and blues. ford's poems witness via a series of "past life portraits" that navigate personal space as well as the imagined persona. These portraits conjure the blues via the imagined lives of the inanimate (a whip, a machete), the historic (a Negro burial ground, Harriet Tubman, The Red Summer), the iconic (Pecola Breedlove, Richard Pryor, Rodney King). At the same time, these portraits focus on the past lives of the author and grapple with themes including sexuality, sexual abuse, and substance abuse.

ADVANCE PRAISE

"From the moment the poet declares that there's a 'plantation in them lungs,' and sets the stage for a starkly 'muscled music,' you may as well let loose your rigid misconceptions about what poetry can do and steel yourself as it becomes the way your body moves from one exclamation to the other. Each of these lean and urgent poems, bulging with insistent energy and image, is a hallmark of t'ai freedom ford's fierce inventiveness and refusal to settle for anything that lives its only life on the page. The fact that you aren't ready for this work is exactly why you need it in your life."

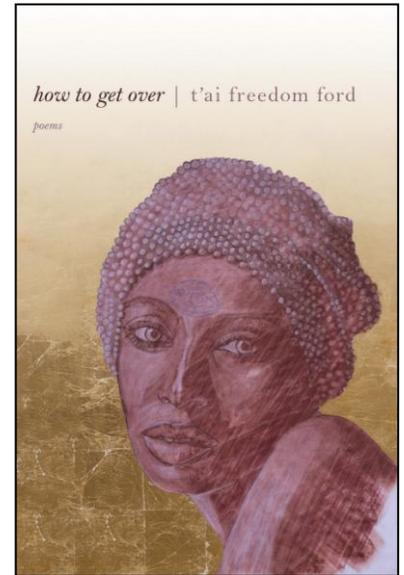
—Patricia Smith, author of the National Book Award finalist *Blood Dazzler*

"t'ai freedom ford has written a Live/Lie/Love/Die survival guide for survivors of drug wars and hip hop fantasies; a gender-blurred bildungsroman built with the bone of poetry; a battalion of rhyme brilliantly etched across loss and discovery; a celebration of brown-skinned love and a boomboxed declaration of living filled with all the grit and spit it takes to make love last. This book has come just in time for all us who've been under the gun, under false pretense, under arrest, under the influence, and burying our hearts underground. Here we have a Harriet Tubman of a tome with a mission to deliver us from ourselves and unto ourselves, to teach us simply and profoundly *how to get over*."

—Tyehimba Jess, author of *leadbelly*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

t'ai freedom ford is a New York City high school English teacher, Cave Canem Fellow and Pushcart Prize nominee. In 2014, she was the winner of *The Feminist Wire*'s inaugural poetry contest judged by Evie Shocklee. She is a 2015 Center for Fiction Fellow and a 2015–16 Emerge-Surface-Be Fellow sponsored by The Poetry Project. t'ai lives in Brooklyn, but hangs out digitally at: shesaidword.com.



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FROM HOW TO GET OVER

how to get over
for colored girls

drain your skin of its color
till it tints toward beige

bury your rage in the back yard
along with your weave leave it

for the scarecrows
when the hair grows shake the naps

on ya head long and loose
till they dangle 'longside your neck

as familiar as a noose use paper bags
to torture anything browner

than you bitter their sweet with bruise
get used to pretty

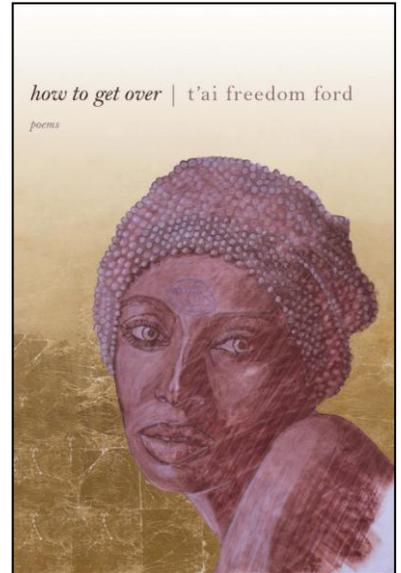
pretty pretty pretty shitty your 'tude
with its golden veneer

sneer at the dark ones
they embarrass you with smeared faces

remind everyone you are mixed race—
marry a white boy named Ethan

please him with the fat ass
inherited from the nigger you never knew

forget the funk of failure and its wailing past:
pass pass—



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