



Helium

Rudy Francisco

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Helium is the debut poetry collection by internet phenom Rudy Francisco, whose work has defined poetry for a generation of new readers. Rudy's poems and quotes have been viewed and shared millions of times as he has traveled the country and the world performing for sell-out crowds. Helium is filled with work that is simultaneously personal and political, blending love poems, self-reflection, and biting cultural critique on class, race and gender into an unforgettable whole. Ultimately, Rudy's work rises above the chaos to offer a fresh and positive perspective of shared humanity and beauty.

Helium Details

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Author : Rudy Francisco

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From Reader Review Helium for online ebook

Jeimy says

Raw and unflinchingly honest, these poems—especially those on racism and other social issues—land like sucker punches in the stomach. Read them and open your eyes if you haven't already.

Carol. says

"Tell me a story
and let's laugh like it's the only
thing keeping us alive.

Play a song
and give the stereo
permission to use its
outside voice.

Let's sing loudly,
offbeat and out of tune..
Let the world know
we don't care how it sounds
because the only key we need
is already in the ignition."

(from *Drive*)

Poetry is indeed food for the soul. The cover of Rudy Francisco's first book of poems attracts immediate attention, but it is the poems that will slide into your thoughts and demand your attention. Divided into four sections, each roughly corresponds to a different theme. Section III was particularly good, with thoughts on race, gender and identity, deserving several reads. II is about the end of a relationship and was my least favorite. IV is perhaps about survival and hope, and I is about identity, various thoughts and falling in love, but you know how poetry is.

His style reminds me a bit of Adrienne Rich; no particular rhyme or metre, with enough unused space to let you know each word is quite chosen. There are poems in the first section that feel a little too arch, a little too self-conscious, but not often. These are probably the ones that most benefit from performance. Still, he charmed me with '*Ouch*':

"Yesterday, I injured myself
and the explanation didn't make sense.

I said, "Well, I was walking..."
and that was the end of the story.

At this age,
my body is a stranger that I
keep meeting over and over again."

Skin II was one of the poems in the section on race that I found profound in imagery and parallels, perhaps a way for the unaware to understand the burden of racial representation.

"When you are the only black man
in the whole neighborhood,

your skin is that one friend who
meets everyone before you do.

It wears a wife beater
and house shoes,

it knocks over the
neighbor's mailbox,

it cusses in front of the kids
and plays the music too loud

but you actually don't do
any of those things."

I also really loved *Accent*
and how it connected culture with food:

"My mother's accent is
the most popular brand
of salt in her country.

She gently sprinkles a little on
every word before she allows
them to pass her lips.

This is a ceremony that happens
every time she has something to say"

It turns out Francisco gained fame as a spoken word poet. Here's a performance of his interesting, insightful and painful self-poem, '*My Honest Poem*': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=...>

It's very interesting, listening to the emotion and speed of his words, as I imagine them in a much deeper, slower cadence. There appears to be more humor than I would have expected, although perhaps the audience is just aware of rawness, and the laughs are uncomfortable, or supportive; I don't know. But I think I prefer the voice in my head.

Two of the most moving poems in section III are on YouTube. '*Adrenaline Rush*' takes a hard look at white privilege and gets a very deservedly hushed reception. It's an extremely powerful, truthful poem and his performance is riveting. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jh09j...>

I loved *The Heart and the Fist* when I read it, but the performance was equally breathtaking: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8IHYA...>

One of the only modern poetry books I've been inspired to purchase. Highly recommended. Remaining on my 'currently reading' list so I can keep picking it up. Note: all poems quoted are partial, but unedited.

Mimi says

This was such a delight to read. Rudy Francisco writes straightforward, vulnerable poetry that could best be described as 'well-intentioned sucker punches'.

Francisco addresses his own struggles in this collection, at times self-deprecating, at others so unflinchingly honest it feels uncomfortable to read:

*I have an odd fascination with sandcastles and ice sculptures: things that will only last a few moments.
That's also why I fall in love with women who will never love me back.*

Especially the poems tackling social issues - racism and sexism - were heart-breaking and eye-opening.
I know that we carry guitar cases full of phobias hoping we can turn fear into our strongest instrument, I know that our hands break things just as frequent as we can fix them. And we often forget that sexism is a family heirloom that we've been passing down for generations. As men, it is important that we start asking ourselves, What will the boys learn from us?

It's frightening how on-point Francisco describes issues of masculinity and sexism in our society. He does not shy away from calling out the perpetuation of toxic masculinity:

*I had no idea what class this was but I did know I was passing and isn't that what masculinity has become?
A bunch of dudes afraid of their own feelings, terrified of any emotion other than anger, yelling at the shadows on the wall, but still haven't realized that we're the ones standing in front of the light.*

Francisco also addresses how others keep searching for the next adrenaline kick, the craziest challenge, the punch of fear mixed with excitement while he is forced to fear for his life every day because of racism:
Being black is one of the most extreme sports in America. We don't need to invent new ways of risking our lives because the old ones have been working for decades.

It seems that no matter what issue he tackles, Francisco scores with raw commentary that *resonates*. This was such an insightful poetry collection, brutally honest and heart-warming at the same time. I definitely recommend checking out Rudy Francisco on YouTube if you're interested in his poetry!

I received an ARC from Netgalley in exchange for an honest review, so thank you so much

Katerina says

"I died early. I died young with breadcrumbs in my hand, so they buried me and when they buried me, they put these coins over my eyes, and I used them as bus fare to get back to Earth, just so I can look for you"

Katie McNelly says

Phenomenal collection of poetry. I can't wait to gather my thoughts into a coherent review. Just...wow.

Hirdesh says

Review soon.

Middlemist Red says

As always, in order to get out of my reading slump, I needed to read some poetry, and I was drawn to this collection because of Nour's review!

This was such a delight to read, not disappointing at all. I loved this book!

Shannon (leaninglights) says

I will read/listen to anything this man writes. Complainers and Yes were my favorite pieces of work. I HIGHLY recommend for poetry lovers and novices alike. ??

Anna Kander says

Rudy Francisco is a black spoken-word poet from San Diego. His book has about sixty poems, a mix of longer poems (about 1-3 pages) with quick 1-2 line poems. This is love poetry—sensual passages dot the text. This is also no-holds-barred protest poetry. It made me say “F**k yes.”

Yet from the first page, I was also chuckling. The book has genuine laughs, and some poems have creative points of view—for example, “the day has been asking about you.” Reading the whole thing was an experience—the poems are carefully ordered, and you can see the narrator's growth from the first poem to the last poem. Early in the book, after a couple of love poems, I made a note to myself: “These poems felt somewhat generic—about how woman makes the poet feel, not about her in any specifics...” But—hang in there, reader! The narrator figures this out about himself, too.

The narrator's growing into a different man. He figures out (in my words, not his) that he's been taught to treat women as interchangeable. “We often forget that sexism is a family heirloom that we've been passing down for generations,” he notes. For his own sake, as well as the sake of women, the narrator strives to live differently.

Some favorite poems: “To You,” “And Then After,” “Skin II,” “Liberty” (just—wow), “Rifle II,” “In the Voice of Hip-Hop,” “Strong,” and “I Bet the Trees Are Thinking.” Francisco is writing about experiences of anxiety and depression (though he uses those labels sparingly) and the specific anxieties of blackness and masculinity.

Read “My Honest Poem” to learn about Mr. Francisco's personal story. Read the poem “To You,” about how sexism gaslights women, to its phenomenal last line.

Francisco's main metaphor is water. Water kills and drowns. It's to be feared, as water or love. Helium (words? hot air from love poems? for sure, the book title) is escape, a way to break the surface of toxic

masculinity—firmly entangled with racism—and breathe. Water is old, sexist ways. (I’m still admiring the line, “I held you the way a boat holds water.”) Water might be people in general. Water causes anxiety, or it is also anxiety. Waves are water and an outdated (hair) style for black men. Yet water is also scarce and disappearing, as in California droughts worsened by climate change. It’s precious, as in a half-empty glass. Drink or you’ll die, because water is life.

And read, read, read.

Bonus quotes from HELIUM, by Rudy Francisco...

(view spoiler)

Kristy K says

4.5 Stars

My reflections on each part.

I

Rudy Francisco is a ray of light with hopeful, humorous words and a positive outlook. There's a light-hearted banter here that in no way diminishes the quality or meaning of his message.

His poems still talk of new love, of a life unfinished, and of finding his way, but there is something refreshing about the way he writes.

II

As good as he is at writing about optimism, he's even better at writing about loss. His poems *Vanish*, *Scars*, and *Museum* struck a cord with me. This section is bleak in the best way. Rudy's able to look at or experience a situation and beautifully, sometimes metaphorically, emotionalize it. From the few spoken word videos of his I've seen, I wasn't expecting this. But I loved it.

III

I would call this the social issues section but that seems to trivialize how inspired and real these pieces are. Topics range from racism to masculinity and more. Rudy makes his experiences relatable, his thoughts coherent, and his verses flow in this section.

IV

A few last thoughts, a quick look at family, and a wrap up of a great collection of poetry.

Gabby says

"My hobbies include: editing my life story, hiding behind metaphors, and trying to convince my shadow that I'm someone worth following."

Wow, this was beautiful, the poems are so lyrical and have an emotional punch. This collection of poems discusses many social issues like sexism, racism, mental health, religion, etc. I especially love the poems about "being black in America" were very eye opening. Like this one here:

"Being black is one of the most extreme sports in America. We don't need to invent new ways of risking our lives because the old ones have been working for decades."

I also love the poems about water and how scarce it is becoming, and wondering whether or not future generations will know water the same way we do. I also loved the romantic poems and the poems about his Mother. I especially liked this poem:

"However, she makes everything feel like midnight. The streets are empty and her car is the only one on the road."

I only knocked off a star because of some cliché-writing or cheesy poems that felt like they didn't belong in this collection, things like this: *"Cupid is irresponsible and I'm tired of him using me for target practice."*

But other than that, I really loved it. This is a gorgeous collection of poems that is very beautifully written and thought provoking.

The Serendipity Aegis ~ ?Misericordia? ?????? ✨❤️ says

Q:

**I hope there is something
beautiful on the horizon
that's just as impatient as I am.
Something so eager,
it wants to meet me halfway.
A moment that is diligently
staring at its watch, trembling with
nervousness, frustrated,
and bursting at the seams,
wondering what's taking me
so long to arrive. (c)**

Somehow, this resonated with me.

Q: Do you know the human body is approximately sixty percent water? **When I walk into a room full of people, all I see is an ocean. (?)**

Q:

Page

It just sits there, with a mouth
full of entitlement, staring at you
and wondering why it is still
not a masterpiece. (c)

Q:

Let the world know
we don't care how it sounds
because the only key we need
is already in the ignition. (c)

Q:

My hobbies include: editing my life story,

hiding behind metaphors,
and trying to convince my shadow (c)

Q:

In 1983, illusionist David Copperfield
made the Statue of Liberty disappear.
He placed a curtain in front of the monument
and when he pulled it down the 3,000-foot
statue was no longer there.

I think about how this magic trick
has become too familiar. Liberty
just vanishing without any explanations. (c)

Q:

"Welcome to the family. Wow.
You sure know how to make an entrance." (c)

Q:

Remember,
every year
two million people die of dehydration.
So it doesn't matter if
the glass is half full or half empty.
There's water in the cup.
Drink it and stop complaining.

...

When your shoulders are heavy
stand up straight and call it exercise.

**Life is a gym membership
with a really complicated cancellation policy. (c)**

Q:

That night, I walked in my sleep, I slept in my walk, I walked backwards until I saw you for the first time...
(c)

Q:

I whispered your name in the wind, hoping somehow, maybe some way, my voice would reach you, but it
didn't, and I died. (c)

Q:

I have this envelope. ... I think most of them are still alive. (c)

Q:

I whispered you stardust. (c)

Aliaa says

One of my new year resolutions was to read more poetry well it is the only thing I actually did. I read a lot of poetry books this year and while I am not a critique I can say that this book was one of the best poetry books that I've read so far, if it wasn't THE best.

I found it very relatable and the parts that wasn't I nevertheless enjoyed. I'm glad I decided to read it.

Fiona says

Finally, finally - here's a poetry book that really lived up to the hype.

Evocative and beautiful, this is a short collection but it packs a punch and covers a wide range of topics - there's a lot of love, from inception to infatuation to heartbreak, but the author isn't shy of straying into more political topics.

Every word felt authentic and heartfelt. I'll be very interested to see what comes next.

Samantha (AK) says

Hello there! It's me, Chronically-Late-to-the-Party. This is what I get for not keeping up with the poetry circuit, I suppose. *Helium* popped up in my GR updates feed with a cover that made me look twice, and an endorsement in the review that had me kicking up a trail of dust in my fast-track to the library. It's just as good as promised.

Rudy Francisco's work is clear and incisive. He wields his words like razor blades, cutting away to the core of all those moments in our lives that catch the light and say "Here I am. This is true. Notice me."

This is poetry that's meant to be read out loud. Take your time. Savor it. It's kind of like a breath-mint for society's ills. Or maybe just a well-deserved slap. Depends on the poem.

Alright, I'll stop torturing you with bad similes. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to go buy a copy of this for myself.
