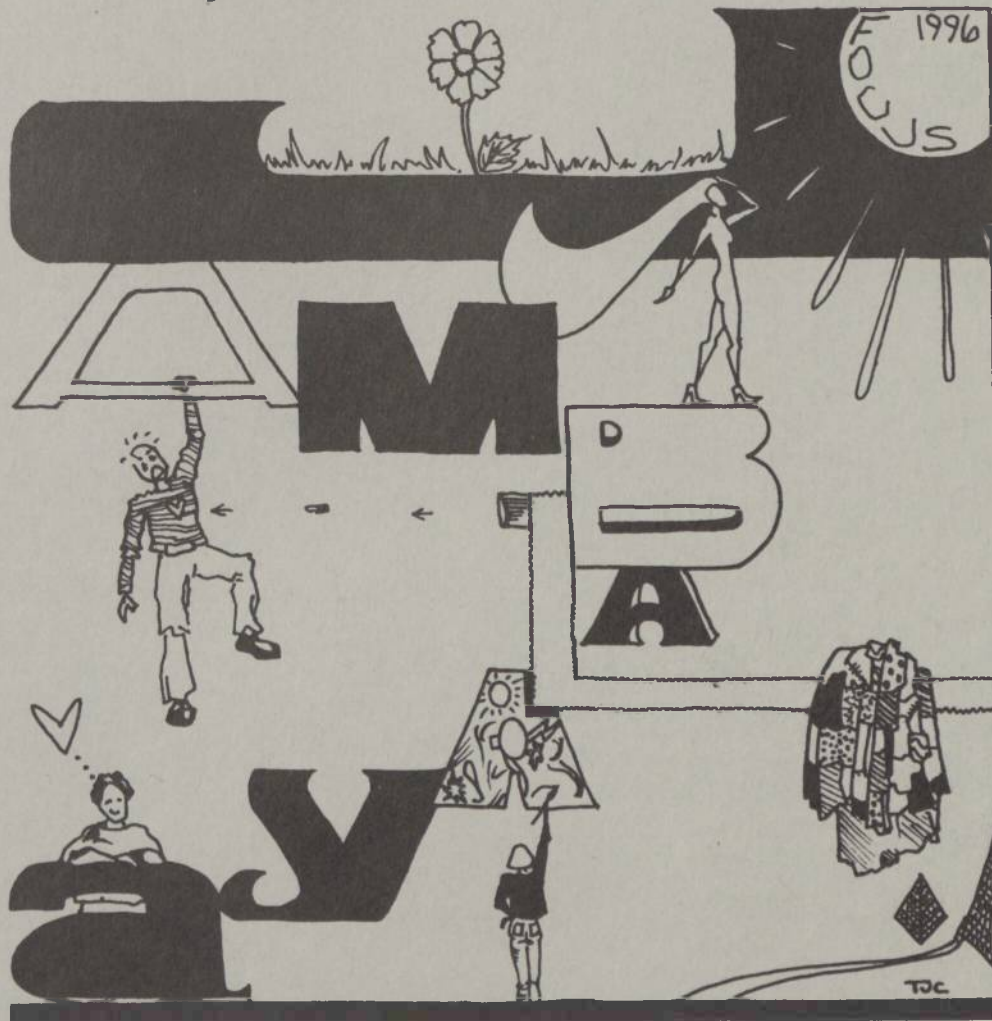


# Focus 1996



Jambalaya

FOCUS

1996

The Spelman College  
Literary Magazine

# Dedication

Focus 1996 is dedicated  
in memory of our Sister **Kelly Ann Brown**

and

to **June Jordan**

That the light of your spirit  
and the gift of your words will continue  
always  
to brighten and enrich our lives.



# Acknowledgments

We thank

**Dr. Akiba Harper, Dr. Anne B. Warner, and Mr. Ray Grant**

for teaching us by not revealing how difficult  
and rewarding  
this was going to be,

**Dr. Johnetta B. Cole**

whose unwavering commitment, once again, has  
empowered us to build from our own creativity,

and

**The AUC Community**

for fostering an environment of creative scholarship.



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## trippin' in the dark

While TRIPPin' iN the DaRk, StUMbliN' ovEr GrANd-  
\_\_\_mother's old reCipiEs I fiNally fOund oUt How to  
maKeJamBaYa: a pinCh Of thiS a Dash of ThaT, \_\_\_  
\_\_\_wITh An asSortment of hErBs aNd SpiCes, And  
Most ImPoRTantLy, LOVE. togEtheR, Our InGRed-  
ients FoRm dElecTAbLE uNity: It'S Time, TaKinG \_\_\_  
\_\_\_CaRe of The temple, BlowING bubbLes, ChURch,  
WhaT aBOuT IOVe, I Puff LiVe, ShoWer SanCTuary,  
Alone, adDress To an unDerClasS-woMan DeceiVed,  
\_woManly thOughTs, a CorNer-Stone iN the FoUnda-  
Tion Of sisTERHoOd, the TruTh hiGh PlaCes, boDy\_  
\_\_\_FAT, rEgRet, wHeN a BLaCk mAN LovEs a woMan,  
siLhOuEtTE, sHaRed sLeEp, uNtit-Led, UnAttainAbLe,  
thE sOIAriUm, oN SuN-bRonZeD FeeT, oDe to a \_\_\_  
\_\_\_DruMMer, aSeEd of Pro-MisE, wHeN the Bough  
BReaKs, mAkin LovE To mUsiC, eTc. SigNifYin' oN  
TrYing tiMes, wE FiND the trUth BehiNd the LyE \_\_\_  
\_\_\_CraCKed oPen By OuR wEarY hAnds thAT flnd  
ReST iN the Quiet Storm, nOw is the Time to \_\_\_  
FocUs oN the beAuTy wiThIn US. YuM. bOn ApetiT!



**It's Time***Cari Coleman*

My eyes open slowly as rusty hinges  
as I lay for a moment,  
contemplating the design of my comforter.  
The unabashed blaring will begin soon  
and I know now, my ears won't be ready.  
The mind begins to calculate;  
errands plus classes add meetings  
divided by the variable time.  
I have a couple minutes.  
Ah-- that time of day  
must be a glimpse of heaven  
-or maybe hell  
wrapped in security blankets  
soon ripped off by beeping  
and the variable time.  
Contemplations and calculations  
must form into reality-  
but only 18 hours until I can re-enter  
the luscious forgetfulness of the bed.  
The blaring beeps begin,  
forcing their jagged fingernails  
to move repeatedly and painfully across my ear,  
until I slap it away.  
I turn to my side  
as "born-again virgin" eyes  
make out the rude red digits  
that belong to the variable time.

**Taking Care of the Temple***Rukiya Bonner*

I ran around the track,  
did the bleachers two times,  
Drank a gallon of bottled water,  
Got a cramp in my behind.  
Walked it off, no longer sore  
thirty sit-ups on my bedroom floor.  
Put Zhane in my CD player,  
selected number five  
put vitamin E in my scalp and hair  
then brushed it 50 times.  
Got in the shower, my muscles relaxed,  
Freesia shower gel  
On my legs, arms, and back.  
The scent was refreshing  
Stepped out of my tub  
Dried my feet off on fuzzy bathroom rug.  
Cocoa butter, from ankles to chin  
Turned the volume down, it's on song number ten.  
Silky pajamas, fuschia and rose  
Put corn removers and cushions on both pinky toes.  
Number 12, that's my song  
Pulled the covers back,  
Turned the TV on.  
CD was over, turned the ringer off  
Programmed "Sleep" for 30 minutes  
Foam egg-shell cushion was soft.  
To my God, a prayer was said  
On my satin pillow, I then rested my head.



**Blowing Bubbles**  
*Na'Taki Osborne*

liquid spheres  
falling in  
soft, spangled  
rainbows,  
laughing  
catapulting  
into nothingness  
before my cool  
watchful eyes  
to rest on blades  
of verdant grass.



## Church ?

Imani Romney-Rosa

I rolled over in my bed, stretching my arms above my head. Coming out of the stretch I placed by watch before my eyes, and opened them just enough to see that it was 8:21 on Sunday morning. Having seen the time I was now fully awake. I threw the black and white striped sheets and the black comforter over by head to protect and shield by eyes from the Northern, and Southern light, which was flooding into my room.

I squinted my eyes, straining to hear any sounds coming from the other side of the house - the TV, my parents deliberating in whispers in bed, the sounds of the bathroom water running. There was silence only a partial relief.

Under the covers I turned on my watch light, to check the time again. 8:26. One hour and thirty-four minutes until ten. I quickly reminded myself that it took thirty-five minutes to get to Springfield in Amherst, but the deep part of me knew we'd never leave on time anyway. Yet, and still I managed to convince some part of myself that we were not going.

I closed my eyes trying to force myself back to sleep. I was awake, completely awake. I had to fall asleep if I ever stood a chance in this battle, which I never did anyway. Choosing to go was for white people, people whose parents didn't care enough, people who weren't truly dedicated. Choosing to go was certainly not something "any of my kids" would get to do.

I guess I had fallen asleep, since I woke up to the sound of my Dad's slipper's dragging across the carpet. *Zzzp, zzzp, zzzp, zzzp.*

"Maya. Maya honey. It's time to wake up..." Dad said presumably kneeling over my eight year-old sister's makeshift bed in the next room.

"For what?" Maya rumbled, still partially sleep.

I exhaled and waited for his answer. Dread swept over me. My stomach started dancing, playing with my nerves.

Dad finally said, "Church."

The agitation in my stomach grew stronger. Sleep, I kept ordering myself. If they have to wake you up, maybe they'll say you're too tired to go. Not. This is the time when I most dread the sound of my name. I can feel the growing presence of my Mom, or my Dad, as they enter the room, and try to gauge at what level to call my name. I check the sides of

the comforter, to make sure it is securely covering every part of my body, as if a blanket over my head would make my name impossible to hear, thus perpetuating the myth that I have been asleep all along.

"IMANI?!"

Uugh. They found me out.

"Imani? Time to start breaking out of the shell. Unfortunately I was nineteen years old, and I couldn't still ask, 'for what?'"

Seconds later, my Mom followed knowing that I would actually have to be touched, maybe even shaken, to be "awakened." She peeled the covers down, just far enough to see my face, grinning, widely, knowingly.

"Good morning Mom," I said groggily, annoyed by her cheeriness, and knowingness.

"What time did *you* get home last night?"

I debated, as I had the night before, about whether I would say "late," or actually give a time. I decided on just saying "late."

"Late."

"Like AM?"

"Yes." That was exactly when I had come home, about 3:10 a.m. or so.

She sat down on the bed, as I dragged my covers away from my body, to see her.

"Are you going to church?" She asked this smiling broadly.

I flashed a smile back, grinning from ear to ear. Did she actually mean I had a choice, the luxury of a CHOICE? Was I white? Did she not care anymore? Did she actually mean I had a choice?

No. What she meant was, I am giving you the choice to say yes. Pretty slim picking if you ask me. Still grinning, I ask, "So you mean I have a choice?"

Her smile faded. "You're on the prayer list." She said that as if that explained it all.

She knew I didn't want to go. She knew about that little part of me who had stayed out late last night just to be able to cop out, too tired to go. She knew I would kill to say, no, I wasn't going. She knew I couldn't tolerate her response if I did say no. She knew it all, this game we had been playing in different ways for some years now.

She got up from the bed. I still hadn't answered. I was thinking about my true options. What were they? Well, at any rate, I knew I didn't want to go, despite the fact that I was totally awake now.



I wondered at what it was that made me not want to go so badly. Ironically when I was in school, in Atlanta, I went to church every Sunday, without fail, rain or shine, sleepy or awake, feeling like it or not. What was different about our irregular family treks from Amherst to Springfield? I knew the sermons didn't touch me, but they didn't at school either. Was it "the devil" tryin' to keep my soul down? No. I doubted it. Was it laziness? Some. Probably.

I think it is a way of thinking about my spirituality that doesn't fit into that mold anymore. I sit in church, literally, crossing out the events as they pass, devotions, prayer, invocation...till we got to the end. I wanted to think about my spirituality on a daily basis, trying to be a good person, independent of going to church every Sunday. I was to be a good person, outside of the confines of the church, the organized religion. I convinced myself, saying, tons of really good people don't go to church. Maybe it was that I dreaded going with my family. No, that wasn't really it. Maybe it was because we had to go such a ways. Maybe.

At any rate. I didn't go, and am not feeling too terribly about it, not too. I felt the need to tell the story of this struggle. Every Sunday for years and years, this same pattern. Now changing. Now broken.



**What About Love***Kamaria George*

What about love

What is love?

I found out love was not

desiring a man's fingers to fondle my flesh

laying open my legs as unwanted seed and death enter my body

Waking to a bed of lies

caressed by sheets that hide a covenant broken before its time.

Love is the birth that was impregnated with words and Spirit

a cross that became a bloodstained altar.

When I found Jesus Christ

love was revealed

intimacy with God.

oil and water: the jellyfish float as pictured on p.93 of my  
swimming textbook

my entire being  
suspended  
just above the meniscus  
yet settling into i  
fleet deeper  
*as his eyes*  
*looking through me*  
*as his touch*  
*probing through me*  
surging onward  
pressing forward  
time becomes an insignificant  
centrifuge  
--my face breaks the surface--molecules unjoin  
liberating oxygens  
and carbons and Hs  
clamoring for the stability  
i have disrupted  
as i fleet deeper  
submerged now  
heaviness transformed  
to less  
now and the  
hydrogen bonds  
of the atoms  
stroke  
my head as they glide over and  
past  
sending me into  
bliss

*Alyssa Y. Alston*



I puff live  
Like a nigga  
    gettin' so high  
and when I retreat  
I begin to repeat  
    and replay  
the images of the past  
because they last  
    so long in my mind  
Time  
does not heal all wounds  
Like they say  
you're headed in a  
downward spiral of doom  
But I continue  
on this venue  
that I be trippin' off of  
don't be slippin' in love  
cause I been there  
everywhere  
I turn I see your face  
As my tears leave a trace  
And in my mind I cannot  
erase  
What has happened in my life  
The strife that kills me  
Like a knife  
The wounds I feel  
and I see  
could not erase  
how I continuously be  
but if you cover me  
Like a tree

My mind is clogged  
with smoke that  
I cannot dismiss  
As I miss  
the lips that I once kissed  
Yet I still wander through  
the darkness  
So spark this  
so that I may see  
my lover drawing nearer to thee  
nearer to me...  
nearer to me...  
nearer to me...  
nearer to thee  
I draw myself  
As my high  
sits on a shelf  
Will it fall  
and lead to a wall  
as it takes me with it  
Yet I still stand tall  
so all others will cease  
    die  
and decrease  
No longer will they appear  
in your mind they sit  
    in the rear  
Because I have taken  
over  
Like an army  
in another country  
no more  
will I stand aside

I will find shelter  
in the midst of the storm  
I am born  
again and again  
hoping this time I will win  
because this time I will win  
because it all makes sense  
this damn high  
got me in a dense  
fog

I will be your guide  
As He will be my God  
and I will rest in peace...

*Kimberly Perkins*



**Shower Sanctuary***Cari Coleman*

Ten hours out there  
strong, independent Black Woman  
--with attitude.  
Ten long hours.

But when I pull that curtain  
to the stage of life,  
I enter my domain.  
I am the lead character  
-and why shouldn't I be?  
against the stark white porcelain  
my brown body shines in beautiful contrast.  
The drops that feed life  
now burst on contact with my  
hot, yearning outer layer,  
the remnants being soaked into  
the inner being that thirsts for nourishment.  
"Cares of the day" evidenced by  
beads-sheets of sweat, dirt,  
tears  
now swirl at my feet.  
my essence radiates as long, enveloping fingers  
caress my curves and wipe away my fatigue

This is the finale,  
the happy ending that never really comes  
for me as the curtain opens once again,  
I become a supporting cast of many  
and I am forced into a costume  
that doesn't quite fit.

**alone**

thechaosdripsfromthewallslikesweatandthenoisepermeatesmyskin  
inthemiddleofforeveristand  
asthecrowdbeatsagainsttheglasswallsofmysoulseekingallofmyperson  
tosabotagetheseecurityihavefoundinsolitude  
therearenodoorswithwhichicanletyouallin  
andthelayersofhurtmistrustandshameareshatterproof

*Darlene Anita Scott*



**the truth behind the lye**



**Address to Underclasswomen  
From an Upper-Class Sister...**  
*Cari Coleman*

I'm not ignorant,  
I've been here a while now,  
I know the rules;  
no white after Labor day  
and until Easter.  
Shoes must have at least a 2 inch heel  
-unless they're Timberlands  
then one inch heels will suffice.  
Hair must be neatly done  
-and done every week,  
every other week at the very least, but that's it.  
No matter how cold it is,  
short skirts are always acceptable.  
Jackets must be made of some type of animal skin  
-or at least name brand  
Tommy Hilfiger  
or DKNY  
must be proudly displayed on one's person,  
At All Times.  
MARTA is acceptable only when going to  
or coming from Lenox,  
Cars made before 1990 and used by students  
are looked upon as transportation,  
*not cars.*  
Actual possibilities in dating are from one place.  
Do not acknowledge anyone who is not  
in your group,  
do not smile at others while on campus  
and *especially off campus*  
Remember, we are sisters  
*-in name only.*  
And above all, do your best,  
strive for the best,  
for you are the best  
*and they aren't*  
Welcome to the experience.



**Deceived***Na'Taki Osborne*

They've drowned my sister  
in a sea of whiteness,  
overpowered her with an evil current  
and  
washed her up  
on the wrong shore.  
They've baptized her in a pool of self-hatred  
"cleansed" her  
of her roots  
and flooded her brain  
with their lies.  
They've white-washed her  
mind  
and shaded her  
eyes  
so that  
even she  
can't recognize  
her own  
beauty.

**WOMANLY THOUGHTS?***Tristan Alexander*

My hair just won't do right today  
 hair strands won't lay, just going every which way, even as dry as hay,  
 Fuck it, it's okay I'll just make a hair appointment today  
 Droopy eyes look so tired and baggy; Must get more Beauty sleep because  
 a man I must keep  
 I show nough don't want to weep  
 Let's get some concealer, a little powder for the shine, eyebrows looking  
 wild I need by tweezers now, damn, I forgot to shave my legs, under arms  
 looking a little scary too  
 I need some eyeliner and eye shadow please, gotta get the lipstick and  
 pucker up, don't leave lipstick on the cup  
 Almost forgot my lipliner. Look at my nails I've got to get them done  
 Need a shower of perfume  
 to smell like a cool gentle breeze as I walk through the room  
 This doesn't look right. It will look better in the sunlight. You know this is  
 fittin a little tight. I guess I should have did my leg lifts last night.  
 Getting ready, I gotta go, I'm late, let's go, get away from the mirror; glass  
 reflection of perfection, flawless without defect.  
 I think he's looking at me, look at me as I walk by, eyes are all on me  
 I didn't know why? I look so fly  
 They see all my flair and I wish they wouldn't stare. That girl she doesn't  
 like my appearance, She's threatened and jealous that's all  
 Don't hate me because I'm beautiful!  
 Too much confidence, Stuck-Up Bitch, Fake Fuck, Ugly Slut, with her flat  
 butt, can't miss her fat gut, she looks like an ugly mutt  
Thinking every guy is looking, They all want to get with me, I'm not looking  
 over there. I refuse!  
 I'm not looking at him, no eye contact, I'm not looking. I'm keeping my  
 head up high and straight, pointed toward the sky, Why?  
 Because I'm too fly



Look at me I know you like what you see  
passing by walking quickly and slow while he's trying to kick his little  
rhyme and flow  
My Shoes are starting to hurt I think I've got another corn on my toe.  
Wait a minute no you didn't just call me a hoe!  
I hope my hair looks right, stop! Check the mirror, Be vain, appreciate  
attractiveness  
The best qualities in every woman are her looks  
Expose, Show the body, give 'em some leg, shoulders, butt, flat stomach,  
and breast to show your cleavage; Just show some skin for the men. Gotta  
see that figure the shape of an our glass, lots of class or  
maybe a big phat ass  
The way you move and walk  
The flow of your stride, hips go side, to side, to side, Gotta look good for  
the image and perception, the stereotype.  
Nothing but exploitation of the woman  
Are we at a fuckin market shopping for a good cheap piece of meat?  
Sophisticated Bitch, Magnificent Bitch, Glamorous Bitch, Spectacular  
Bitch, Voluptuous Bitch.  
You know you can work it, Go Girl, You Go, Do your thang, strut your  
stuff, show 'em what you got, YOU got it  
The look, you know, the look because you've got the look  
You know his look, the look he wants you to look like, it's what he likes,  
it's what he wants.  
The Man's eye controls us all.

*Tristan Alexander*

**A Cornerstone in the Foundation of True Sisterhood****Part One: Repentance***Kamaria George*

I wounded your soul  
with honey coated words dipped in hatred  
left by the jagged knife of jealousy  
that ripped the flesh of our friendship  
spilling life upon the earth  
you never knew that I had killed you in my heart  
and then one night my reflection began to suffocate my sleep  
I awakened one night  
my soul had become a carcass  
I had to tell you who I really was...

Somehow as if your Spirit had completely transfigured  
you forgave me  
and a calming mist breathed life into a sea of ashes.



**High Places**  
*Nia Tuckson*

How hard it is to walk  
upon these platforms  
down the paths that  
we choose  
while maneuvering  
over, around, between the cracks  
and wrinkles  
of fractured cement carpets  
unceremoniously laid before us  
to pound upon  
day in / out;  
causing us  
to surmount  
ourselves to unstable,  
unattainable heights,  
straining upward like  
so many hungry plants  
voraciously awaiting recognition  
in the highlight  
of the  
sun.  
(but instead getting burned)

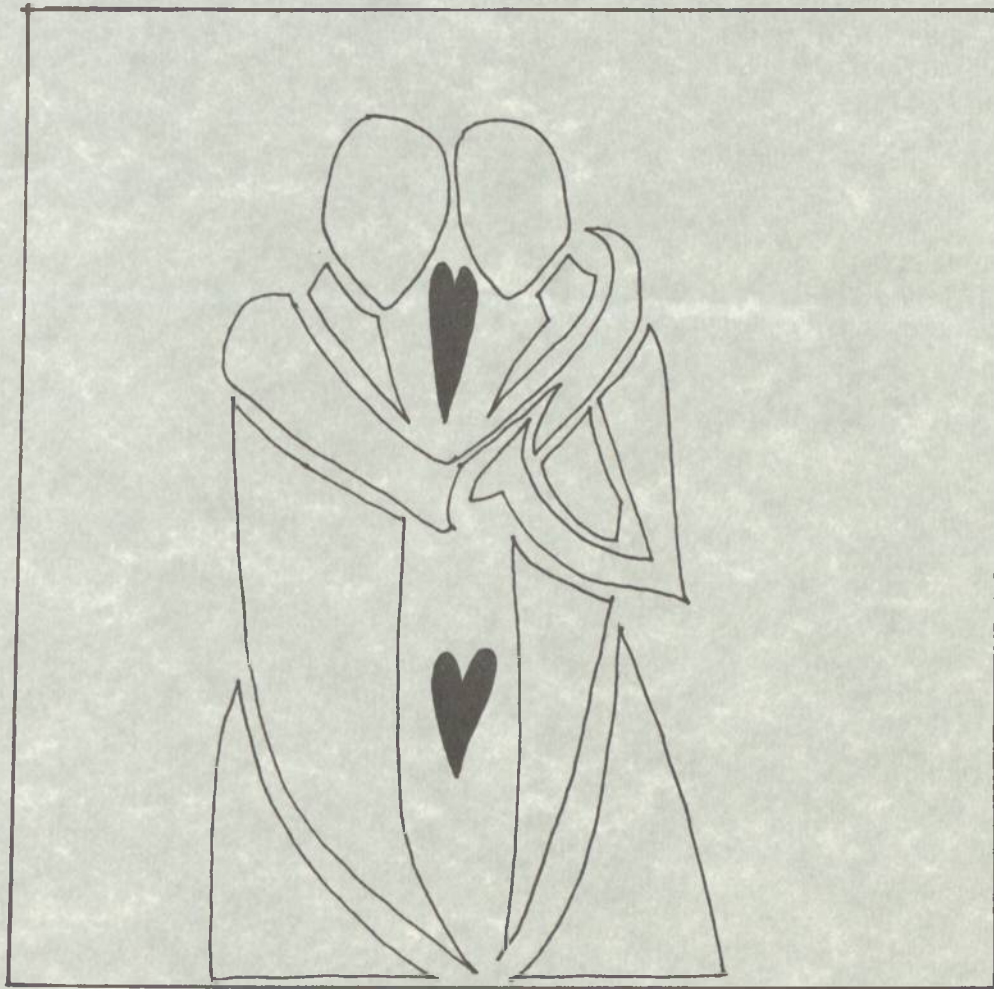
Pity if we should wobble  
and  
fall  
flat  
from these spiked,  
four inch  
pedestals  
upon which we attempt to  
balance  
our  
whole  
entire  
selves.

**Body FAT**  
*Tristan Alexander*

The feeling of heaviness  
 Bloated and Sluggish  
 Full, Busting Loose, I can't fit, feeling like I might explode  
 Full, wide, huge, large, gigantic, Plump, Obese, Fill the wound; Consume until Doomed  
 I know I'm fat  
 Can't look in the mirror, its too disgusting, Images of fat, Reflections of me, visual discomfort  
 What have I done to myself and my body  
 Look at me, You can't miss me, everyone can see me, All of me  
 Don't try to look the other way and ignore me or stare like you normally do, just sneering and gigg  
 Flabs and Dimples, circles of rolls, juicy fat, squishing and rubbing together, overlapping  
 Don't you see the ripples flowing back and forth  
 Chunks and Lumps all around, each Pound  
 I hate my body and I hate myself  
 Food is my only true friend, Fat Fake Smile because I feel great, I've never been better  
 No one understands, they can't relate, the tell me I look alright but I know the truth  
 I know what I look like, I see it every morning, noon, and night. Fat, Fat, Fat, Fat all over me  
 I can only wish it away  
 I would sacrifice anything and everything to be skinny, Just for more bones and muscle  
 Look at my huge thighs, my large round ass, the rolls of fat around my waist, the flaps of fat on my  
 I wish I was her, I want her body, Please take mine you can have it, take 1/2 of me  
 Why do I look like this? So grotesque, I'm abnormal and unnatural  
 Hey fat girl, just lose the weight, Stop eating, stop stuffing your face, get off your ass  
 It's not that difficult, you're just lazy  
 The fat girl blues  
 Look at all those calories and all that fat, cholesterol in every bite I take  
 cellulite on the thighs, fat cheeks, double chins, big fat gut, protruding, bulging  
 Get a knife, slice that fat away, Get some fuckin scissors and cut this shit off, staple it, tie it in kn  
 Fatso, Bulky Greasy Lard Ball, You Pig; You Cow, You look like a fuckin farm animal  
 Fat Girl you don't belong anywhere  
 You can't fit into the picture, close your fat mouth  
 Don't say cheese!



**a calm place in the quiet storm**



**Shared Sleep***Shaka Brown*

With you I can trust myself to dream  
To allow my mind to explore the infinite realm of my fears  
And desires.  
You will protect me while I lose myself  
Within myself  
While my soul flies  
My body is grounded in you  
For you are all I need to survive in this world  
And without you I could exist only in my mind.



**Stolen Moments**  
Tristan Alexander

*I remember the time  
 In my mind, it wasn't that long ago  
 When I was devoured by your love  
 It consumed me, subdued me, and overwhelmed me  
 I was submerged, marinated and engulfed in it and warmly simmered in your love  
 I was bubbling and began to foam and fizz all over  
 I dipped and dabbed in it with you now and then  
 We plunged and immersed with each other and scooped into each other  
 Every blue moon because I couldn't see you as soon as I would have liked to  
 Every so often when you came around  
 We would spend some time  
 You say I love you, I miss you, I need you, I want to be with you  
 Can I kiss you?  
 The soft kiss the wet delicious, luscious, delectable sensuous, pleasurable, tender perfect kiss  
 Touch me where you know I like it; finger tips on my hips, hands that squeeze and caress, arms  
 that surround me gently around and through my erogenous zone  
 Only you remember everything, you are the only one, you are the one that remembers  
 My body, what stimulates and pulsates, what excites and delights, and satisfies  
 Our sexual erotic organs exchange juices  
 as they meet and part  
 And Love is in our Heart  
 It's real and true, genuine, sincere, actual, authentic, pure completeness  
 That won't allow us to stay apart  
 Your smell all over me, your skin, your chest, your arms and shoulders, your legs and toes, your  
 back and your behind, your neck, ears, and face  
 Where I look into your eyes, beautiful, captivating, tantalizing, mystique, brown, strong eyes  
 Then you fade away because you can't stay  
 I still see your shadow, the ashes of smoke drifts out on a cloud, like a breeze in the air, like a  
 splash that ripples in the water. Indenting and imprinting me  
 Flooded with thoughts and memories; drowning, the mind wonders and dreams of you and your  
 warm affection  
 There is sorrow in my heavy hollow heart beating slowly, feeling the pain and the longing  
 the need for you  
 I remember  
 Until we meet again, it's never soon enough. When we are together  
 I can't forget, it will never escape, our love is a prisoner, captured, seized and trapped  
 inside, not allowed to surface, forced not to permeate our obstacle, not able to see our invisible  
 wall that blocks, hinders, and stagnates  
 our sentence has lasted so long, it's been such a long time, that I can't even remember the crime*

**Eroticism***Kenji Jasper*

Slithering through sweaty sheets like a python, U&I both know nobody needs to fake it, just take it to the Nirvana again, pure blends of tongues, teeth bodies and sleek euphoria of Coletrane's greatest hits on shuffle,

Bodies and souls up in the mix mixing spiritual essence illuminated by the presence of tongues caressing breasts, hands caressing chests, nibbling on necks, mutual mic checks in the midst of flying specks of L-O-V-E floating on a cloud of jasmine incense lit by the flames of our desire.

Position depends on disposition, moods depend on the music and the olfactorally perceived jambalaya of Cologne, oil and body lotion,

Guzzling down to 40 ounces of love potion #9 to quench the thirst of the weekly HAJJ through plastic souls and study sessions that constantly saute in our minds,

Committing crimes against the soul each and every time we sit in the corners of our cribs and wish, swish the fluid of desire within our jaws and spit it into the sidewalk of booked schedules and severed means of transportation.

We need it. We feed it, just a few moments on the sundial., please?

Eroticism, a few 60-minute highs transcribed from the words our lips can't say, the phrases we can't ponder, focus to the smeared lines we walk trying to avoid insanity.

It starts with a burning feeling, quenched by labios sobre sitios en la cara, los brazos, las piernas and the spots that you trace with your tongue down the inner thigh, penetration relation of veneration most high.

You gotta try it, never buy it, let it hold you in its grip, extract the stress within your flesh that's about seven days old, elevate our spirit to a place where the pleasures lie untold.



## REGRET

*Ebony Ellis*

The look of disgust and confusion as well as annoyance on his face made her cry even harder.

"But John, I need you! You can't go! You can't-- not right now!"

"What the hell do you need me for? You're going to have a damned baby! Since when do women need men for things like that?"

"You don't understand--"

"You're damned right I don't understand--"

"I need your support right now and I'm lonely," she whimpered.

"If you want support you can go to your mother's! I'm going and that's that! In September I'll be gone, baby or no baby."

She began to cry even harder now. Her bloated body was racked with sobs.

"Oh for God's sake," he said nastily, reaching into his pocket for a handkerchief and throwing it at her, "Wipe your nose."

He watched his wife fumble around on the floor for the handkerchief. She picked it up eventually and blew her nose. Her crying did not cease.

Her tears had no mollifying effect on him whatsoever. If anything it hardened his resolve to leave. In a few months, he would be on the boat sailing far away, without a second thought. Baby or no baby.

He was not a cruel man. At least, not on the surface. There was that cruel streak in him lurking just beneath the charm and affability and when anyone who dared to touch it or fathom it inevitably got burned. He used it as a weapon, as a means of escape, as a way not to have anyone need him, as a way not to feel.

He was a man who valued his independence strongly. Even as a young child, he could not be burdened by other people's needs and desires. He had asserted himself against her mother at a very young age. He cut himself off from her smothering affection and never missed it. He knew from experience that he could never allow himself to get involved with anyone or anything that stifled his freedom and need for exploration and travel.

Because of this great need, he never got too attached to anyone. Besides, his quickly aroused boredom never allowed that to happen anyway. He was capable of great fondness but not real attachment. This tendency stemmed from his longing for sustained mental stimulation. He would allow friendships and love affairs to last only as long as the stimulation he got from the people lasted. Once that stimulation was no longer generated--or at least no longer could provoke a response from him, he was gone. The person who failed to learn this about him and thus, got burned by it all the time was his wife.

He regretted marrying her now. He misjudged her and had purposefully ignored many of the warning signs. He chose not to notice several things about her--her needfulness, her emotionalism, he

sensitivity, her insatiable desire for closeness, her dark broodings, her seriousness, her jealousy. All of these traits had been wrapped up in a package of cool magnetism, of high intellect, of independence, of great beauty, of a restrained passion. Her enigmatic personality and unpredictableness--the fact that he could not quite figure her out--pulled at him like a magnet. Her attractiveness made him toss all caution to the wind and in a blindly romantic display asked her to marry him.

When all of her deeply hidden qualities became so pronounced that he could no longer ignore them, he had done his best to pretend that he did not notice, that he did not see them, that none of them intimidated him. But year after year, month after month, day by day, even by the hour, he began to feel suffocated, closed in on. He tried to break away little by little but his wife's grip had tightened and choked him. Her jealousy and possessiveness increased--no, manifested itself--and it threatened him beyond belief.

He had misjudged her and now he regretted it.

She had been involved with the theater long before their marriage, so he expressed no surprise when she came downstairs the next morning acting as if nothing had happened. She spoke a cool graceful good morning and proceeded to eat her breakfast as usual. After they both had eaten, she cleared up the table and did the dishes without another word.

He was somewhat baffled by this behavior--knowing that she was one to hold a grudge. He dismissed it as some form of manipulation, some scheme of hers to get him to do what she wanted. However, at dinner that same night, he noticed that she made no effort to respond to anything he said. His discourse on the federal government's problems was only met with a sigh instead of the usual heated debate. His opinions about the newest best-seller were ignored. His suggestions of going to dinner next week went unanswered. She shrugged indifferently when he began to tell her about work. He dismissed--a little uneasily--her behavior as a clever, though unsuccessful, ploy to make him feel guilty about his decision. He concluded that she would return to her normal self after a few days.

As a few more days passed, however, he began to fear that maybe she was not trying to manipulate him. Her cold silence at meals was something that he could no longer write off as anger. Her withdrawal was something he could no longer ignore.

He asked her about it and she told him with ice in her voice that he could do whatever he wished because she no longer cared and did not need him--for anything. "Do what ever you want; I don't give a damn. Go wherever you goddamn please." He laughed aloud in an attempt to make her believe that he did not take her seriously. Her cold hard glare wiped the smile off his face. She was definitely serious.

She demonstrated her not caring very well. She spent most of her time upstairs in what would be the baby's room crocheting and knitting and sewing things for the baby to wear. If he was not in that room, she was in the den listening to mournful blues records or playing her own music on their piano. Sometimes she was on the phone in their bedroom talking to people he did not know. Wherever she happened to be, he was never with her. It got to the point where they did not even eat meals together anymore or sleep in the same room. "I'm too big to lie down now," she said when she first started sleeping in the living room chair.

At first, he relished his new found freedom. She no longer questioned him as to what time he would be back from this party or that dinner. She did not even raise her eyebrows when he began



spending the night at the houses of friends. He did not think that she suspected his numerous sexual affairs with other women. He knew that she no longer balked at his frequent business trips. She began taking a few friends to Lamaze class with her rather than begging him to show some interest in the upcoming birth of their first child.

But slowly, as days melted into weeks became a month and a half, he realized that he felt as if he were missing something. The number of "safe" women to share a bed with decreased more rapidly than he thought possible. His friends tired of him and began to drop subtle things; when these failed, they began to not invite him over so much. Other social invitations dried up--many of his associates began to leave the country for their annual summer vacations. His round of "mandatory attendance" business conventions also came to a grinding halt--the season for them had passed, not to be started up again until the next year.

Because of these circumstances he found himself at home quite often and quite often he found that he was not in the company of his wife.

Toward the end of August, he received a telephone call at his office. A man named Harold--who claimed to be a close friend of his wife--said that she had gone into labor and was at the hospital downtown. Harold told him that he and his wife were coaching her in the Lamaze breathing and that he did not have to come to the hospital. There was a polite "goodbye" before the click and the dial tone.

He worked the whole day and drove to the hospital in rush hour traffic. When he got to the hospital and inquired about his wife, the nurse working the front desk asked him to wait. She picked up the phone and spoke to someone in hushed tones. A few minutes later, a thin gaunt man came up and introduced himself as his wife's obstetrician. They exchanged a few niceties before he asked of his wife's condition.

"The labor is going very smoothly. It should be over in an hour, maybe two."

"I want to see her."

An odd look passed over the doctor's face before he said, "I have to ask your wife's permission."

He was incredulous. "Permission? Why?"

"Your wife asked us very specifically for her two friends to come into the delivery room with her. She said nothing about you."

"I'm the baby's father! I'm her husband!"

"I still have to ask, Sir."

In shock, he watched the doctor walk away. The doctor emerged from the room ten minutes later shaking his head. "She doesn't want you to come in, sir. Sorry."

He felt anger rise up in him. She has some nerve, he thought. She's been whining about how I took no interest in the baby now she won't even let me see her. Or, at least, she had been whining about my lack of attention. Ever since their argument she had not mentioned one word about the baby and his lack of interest in it.

A little more than an hour later, the doctor emerged from the delivery room telling him that he was the father of a nine pound baby boy. He was allowed to go see his wife in the recovery room.

She had been very cool and disinterested, choosing to pour all of her attention into the red faced baby lying in the crook of her arm. She spoke less than twenty words to him the entire time. She did not even say goodbye when he turned to leave.

The days after the birth were marked by calls to his office congratulating his good fortune. He did not know what to say; his wife had become so possessive of the baby that he felt almost as if the baby was not his. He had no say in what the baby would be called; his wife had already chosen a name without his consultation. She did not allow him to pick the baby up. After she was released from the hospital, people that he had never seen before—but who were all friends of his wife's—came over with gifts and congratulations. They never had anything to say to him. She did not return to their bed, choosing to sleep downstairs closer to the nursery where she could "hear the baby crying at night."

September, the month of his scheduled departure, came, taking some of August's heat with it. It was hot on his day of departure, some two weeks after the baby's birth. He was hot and uncomfortable in his suit but his wife was cool in her sundress and sandals, not sweating at all. She pulled the blanket down over the baby's head to prevent him from getting sunburn. All of her attention was focused on the baby; she had not spoken a word to her husband since before breakfast when he had asked a question.

He knew that she had not spoken to him before because she was still upset about his decision to go. However, he did not understand why she did not express regret that he would not stay home with her. He had half-expected her to look at him with tears in her eyes and ask him one more time not to go. She had done that the first few times he had gone away—in the first years of their marriage. Now her face was rubbing against the baby's face completely oblivious to his presence.

"You don't have to kiss him so much," he said resentfully. "he does not need that much attention, you know." She rolled her eyes at him but she did not stop kissing the baby. She began to talk to him instead.

The ship pulled into doc fifteen minutes late. Before boarding, he turned to his wife expecting tears, a soft "I'll miss you" or an "I love you," requests for frequent phone calls and/or postcards. Just like before...

Instead his wife turned her concentration away from the baby for a few minutes and eyes him almost coldly. "I guess I'll be seeing you," she said evenly.

"I'll write everyday and I'll call," he said half-expectantly.

She sighed. "Alright."

"I love you," he said not quite knowing why.

She said nothing. He felt as if he had been punched. She always said "I love you" first and waited until he said it back. This had never happened before. He made a move to embrace her and at that precise moment, the baby hiccupped. His wife's attention was drawn right back to the baby.

When he boarded ship, he felt odd, not quite like himself. He was experiencing feelings of disappointment and loss. He also felt the beginnings of regret.



**Unattainable***Deonne*

he always told me he loved me  
 my presence my being  
 just as i am  
 and i smiled  
 knowing neither of us in love,  
 but appreciative of the soul, sol, sole.

and i loved him  
 once.  
 with an uncertainty forever lingering  
 always knew i wasn't what he wanted  
 not truly

knew he was searching,  
 lost me and found a new  
 but not the true  
 object of his desire  
 on his internal quest,  
 i foresaw the struggle  
 and the outcome.  
 his invisible life  
 was clear to my vision.  
 though not yet discernable to his own eyes.

i understand the confusion  
 in searching for your own identity  
 i have endured the pain  
 as well as the realizations:  
 refreshing and reaffirming.  
 find comfort in your private battles.  
 find comfort in your brother's embrace.  
 find comfort in my knowledge.  
 and seek your own.

i always accept the expect.  
 including, unattainable.  
 out of reach to all women

my once-lover-now-friend  
 (well, not exactly friendship)  
 forever searching,  
 open your closet door  
 free yourself from your confined room;  
 that thoughtful spot  
 will only leave you standing with open wounds.  
 i'd rather wear the scars.

## When A Black Man Loves a Woman

Edwardo Jackson

"Bitch."

"Ho."

"Slut."

"Trick."

The pauses were for emphasis. When she had gathered enough composure, she continued. "Those are the names my last four boyfriends have called me after I had dumped them. It wasn't enough that these were pitiful excuses for men, but they had the nerve to revenge their wounded male pride upon me. And this isn't any real life version of 'Waiting to Exhale.' Those brothas were so trifling, they didn't even give me a chance to inhale."

With that, the studio audience erupted into female ovation. He turned the volume down slightly on the monitor, staring helplessly at the woman on camera. She was bitter, the pain clearly etched in the expression on her brown skin face. Hiding behind no make-up, save a bronze colored lipstick which revealed her full lips radiantly, Jasmine Dukes stared straight past the camera which focused on her defiant, self-righteous face. He was mesmerized. Underneath her veneer of reticent disgust and controlled rage, lay a vulnerability he could relate to. He felt it had been a long time since that vulnerability had been tapped-- or had been tapped in the right way. Instantly, he fell for her.

The talk show's theme music saturated the set and the hostess bounded down an aisle to the front of the studio. The camera closed in on her face as she said, "Next we're going to hear from a woman who has given up completely on black men, and now exclusively dates white men! More to come on today's show, 'Why Black Women Cannot Date Black Men.'"

He really hated this particular talk show host, A former TV sitcom darling, she was so washed up in acting she had to put on sensationalist trash like her freak show-talk show, which only helped to emasculate the black man some more. Aside from her antics, the man was about to use her commercial trash for private gain.

He dialed a number from memory, a phone number in a New York City area code. "Yes, Marn How're you doing? It's Marcus, I'm in our station's production room, calling from Chicago. Rememb when you said if I ever needed something to go ahead and give you a call? Well, I was watching the taping of yesterday's show, and I need a favor."

*I get so tired of niggas. Look, I am not a materialistic person. Unlike some of these other sistas running around here, a brotha doesn't need to work on Wall Street with a Jag in the driveway and a Beemer at work to keep me happy. Chances are if he isn't gay, he's probably white. But I would prefer if you stepped to me with a little more class. None of this "what yo' name is" mess. I am so much better than that.*

At last the show had drifted from everyone's memory. All last week, men had been calling out to her, hawking at her with, "Weren't you on that show, shawty?" The few without gold in their mouth, who had some conversation to offer, were upset with the fact that she had given brothas in



Atlanta a bad name. That struck her as funny. That was like saying two comes before one, or Z before Y.

For that same reason, all these fools had suddenly become defensive. Like "Waiting to Exhale" had outed them or something. Where men intimidated by a strong black woman? Why couldn't they believe that a college-educated, career-oriented, childless, determined, Afrocentric, successful flack woman existed? Could they possibly be so insecure about their own shortcomings that they immediately perceived her as a threat?

*All I want is a decent black men. Check that-- I want more out of life than that. No man will or caneverdefine who I am. A strong Jasmine Duces will be here before, during, and after any man of mine will be. I refuse to compromise any bit of myself for a man. What I want to understand is why can't men deal with a strong, black woman?*

It was not like she had been dating pimps, drug dealers, or gang members. Harvey was now in med school. Harold was a grad student at George Washington. Ahmed was a senior Corporate Finance major at Morehouse and Mason an aide to a Congressman. She could not believe that such "educated" black men as these could be so overwhelmed or jealous of her strength that they would degenerate to calling her a "bitch," "ho," "slut," and "trick." With men like that, no wonder she had been celibate for the past seven months.

Her phone rang. This broke Jasmine's trained meditation as she soaked in the tub. Hot baths on cold winter nights helped keep her body warm the way she used to remember it kept warm. Baths were more relaxing than men; at least she could think in peace, without worrying about what lie they were formulating to get out of bed and go home. "Hello."

Her voice had a sultry, scratchy tone to it, as if God had taken a sander to her larynx. A woman with edges, rough edges. He could tell she was relaxed from the warmth of her voice, so he hoped to take advantage of it. "Hello," he said in his lowest, sexiest voice. "Am I speaking to Jasmine Dukes?"

"Yes you are," she responded warily. "Who's calling?"

"I'm afraid you don't know me, Ms. Dukes. My name is Marcus Tolliver. I'm a production coordinator for WKKV TV in Chicago, Illinois."

"Okay, Mr. Marcus Tolliver. What are you doing calling me? And how did you get this number?"

"I do have to apologize for my methods. I watched a taping of the show you were on last week, a day before it aired, and I just felt that I had to contact you." Although he sounded smooth, he was honest. That was the best policy, right? "So I pulled a few strings."

"You had to contact me," she repeated, sarcasm dripping off each syllable. "Aren't there enough females up in Chicago with big chests and firm legs?"

Her bluntness knocked him back. Before Marcus had even been able to get to the sales pitch, she was saying, "I don't want any." He had spent over a week trying to get up the courage to cold call her and she was going to end the conversation so abruptly? "I don't think you understand me."

"No, Mr. Marcus Tolliver, I understand you perfectly well," She spat, sitting up straight in her tub. "You're one of those token black executives at some big TV station in a major market who's used to getting his ego stroked by all these desperate women who throw themselves upon you because of the size of your car, your bank account, or your head, however you want to interpret that. You see me



up on that stupid show, denouncing black men, and you perceive me as a challenge. You will instantly claim that, no, you're different, that you're college educated, have a steady job with good income, and will 'treat me the way I deserve to be treated.' You'll put on a decent act for about three weeks, and then when you have tried to seduce me, screw me, and play me for my money, only to get nowhere, then you'll either dog me with any number of females up there in Chicago who are stupid enough to get played out like that or drop off of the face of the earth, as mysteriously as you had appeared." With a conquering air, she added, "Tell me I'm wrong, brotha."

Marcus suppressed all instincts to tell her she "was wrong." That was exactly what she wanted to hear and he was certain she had even more ammunition for that remark than for his previous one. How could he possibly tell her that he had fallen for her over a TV screen, at first sight? How could he possibly tell her that women had dogged him, too, every bit as bad as the men in her life had dogged her? How could he tell this mistreated, scarred woman that it had been boys, not men, who had mishandled her? How could he tell her that he would, could love her down in every way, to cherish her mind, body, and soul?

So he didn't. "Sista, you have issues. You have some serious issues that you need resolved. Having an attitude like that is not going to help them one bit."

Jasmine's lazy, floating eyes popped wide open. "Excuse me, brotha, but you called me. I thought you were a 'production coordinator' not a Psychic Friend," she vollied back, icy voice in stark contrast to the steam of her bathroom.

"No, listen here, sista. I was going to come on this phone and tell you how much I was struck by your story, how much I could sympathize with your pain, and how much I could relate to your disgust with men, because we feel the same things too with our females. But you copped an attitude before I could even get that chance."

"Brotha, you know absolutely nothing about the struggles we black women have to go through to even find an intelligent, sober, clean, employed, attractive, straight black man these days! They are the exception, not the rule! You remember those names my exs had called me? That filth was spoken from the mouths of "educated," employed, intelligent black men! If that is the best y'all have to offer, especially with one in four of you in jail, the I'll take my chances with my "attitude," thank you very much."

Leaning back in his chair, Marcus ran his hand over his caramel colored clean shaven head. "that's exactly what I'm talking about. You have all become so judgmental these days. Before we can even open our mouth up, y'all have already formed some kind of conclusion about us. If I dress too casual, I'm on welfare. If I dress too well, I'm a dealer, or worse yet, a Tom. Don't let me look too attractive because now I'm probably gay. Jasmine, I understand your frustration, because good black men are hard to find. But now we've come to you and you won't even give us a chance."

Wiping away a bead of sweat from her forehead, Jasmine considered that statement. Was he legit? The brotha sounded as if he knew what he were talking about, as if he had studied the problem and come up with a solution. But how "good" a man could he be, if her were calling up a woman he didn't know, a time zone away? Something had to be wrong with him to be going to extraordinary measures to "contact" a woman, a female not even in his same state. Yet he intrigued her. Whatever drove men to pursue women Jasmine no longer knew; she had long given up on finding a decent black man. However, this one had more than conversation and audacity. "I'm listening."



In a gentler tone, Marcus continued. "Like I said before, sista, you've got issues. But they aren't too big for us to work them out."

"Us?" blurted Jasmine.

Softly: "Yes. Us." He paused gingerly, to collect the right thoughts to say. "Jasmine, when I watched that videotape, I saw more than an attractive female. I saw more than a woman denouncing black men. I saw a woman who had been hurt, a human being who had been hurt. I know women thing that men don't hurt, but we do. I hurt, too. I've been hurt several times, by several women, and I can relate. Women don't have the exclusive rights to rejection, Jasmine. But, in spite of all this, I still believe in love."

His pause allowed his thoughts to sink deeper into her psyche. Although she was familiar with the tactic, Jasmine was vaguely aware that it was working. "I'm listening."

"Jasmine, when I saw you, I could see past your facade of self-righteous defense. I could see past your mask of cold indifference. These weren't men who had hurt you-- they were boys. You have to believe me when I say that true men who believe in romance still exist," he added tenderly. "Do you believe in romance, Jasmine?"

Weakly, she responded with, "I'm listening."

"Romance, Jasmine. When it all boils down to it, I could see us taking that walk in the park. I could see us struggling together in a fitness class maintaining our athletic cuts. I could see us reading each other Countee Cullen and Claude McKay; feeding each other ice cream from inside a steamy shop on a wet and rainy afternoon; arguing over current events and political leaders; playing chess by candlelight, feeding each other cheesecake between moves. I am not a poet, but I see such poetry between us, Jasmine. Although we don't know each other, I feel a symmetry in our lives which is incredible. I know you had believed in romance once, Jasmine Dukes. Let me help you believe in it again."

Marcus fell silent. Comfortably, Jasmine shifted around in her bath water. She held the phone away from her face with her mahogany hand. Her body was sweating now, but it was not from the bath. This man had just touched her soul. This man whom she had never met, had never seen, had never even known before ten minutes ago, had touched her soul. Despite all of the intelligent, educated, wrong black men she had dated, never before had one just taken a back door directly to her soul. These were more than lines from a player, these were heartfelt images from a man driven by passion. Was he right in his assessment of her quick decisiveness about the worthlessness of black men? Was he right in his opinion about her views of romance? Could she, if she wanted to, discover romance again? Was this man even worth that risk? Was this black man, this sweet, intelligent, educated, sincere black man worth that chance?

Wryly, Jasmine allowed a slight smile, breathing softly into the phone. "I'm listening."

**makin' love to music***Darlene A. Scott*

it moves my body and soul between the legs of this race called life  
where i pause to behold the speed of the pulsing liquid rhythm  
which flows freely into me so that all i can do is mo-o-ove and  
release all that is welled up inside me onto the 8'11.5 mattress  
where my thoughts lay.

i submit to this ecstasy without any question about tomorrow  
basking in the knowledge that the pulsation beckons me with an  
aphrodisiac melody every night.

ten to two is my time to unleash my passion and allow the sweet  
seduction to take place yielding to neither phone ring nor knocking  
guests.

it echoes in my ears inspiring climatic energy to spill from me  
here.



**Untitled***Shaka Brown*

I can't stop loving you because you ask  
It's gone past you  
It's gone past me  
And though you had everything to do with it  
You are now as removed from it as I am  
As the acorn births the oak  
You gave the seed that grew inside me so quickly  
I thought it would tear me apart.

Instead it's holding me together.

I can't return the seed.  
But please accept the fruit that hangs from my branches  
Forever growing.  
Forever ripe.  
Forever yours.



**Silhouette**  
*Imani Romney-Rosa*

I remember quite clearly, lying in the bed, with his face between my legs. His mouth was open, and his tongue sticking out. His hands were braced high up on both of my buttocks, and his shoulders pressed against the backs of my thighs. Besides his chocolate brown face looking down at me, in all of my glory, I could feel his presence surrounding me, enveloping me. His love took hold on my soul, and twisted it and pulled it in, to intertwine with his. My whole being was with him and in him. His eyes spoke for him. They told me what he felt, what he longed to say, and what I longed to hear. It wasn't I love you. It wasn't I want you. It was a little, I need you, but it really was, you belong *with* me, *near* me, and *in* me. When his fingertips held my hips, when the side of his face brushed against my inner thigh, when his tongue slithered between my lips, I felt his need and he felt mine. This would not be a simple, or a fast or an easy night. This night would be a slow, hard, enduring night. It would be my night with him. It would be a night sculpted

for me. The images from this night would be a slow, hard, enduring night. It would be my night with him. It would be a night sculpted for me. The images from this night would plague me. They would comfort me. They would silence me. The images from this night would make me crumble with desire. His clear brown skin, his deep dark eyes, his wrenching soul, and his powerful presence overwhelmed me, excited me, and never, ever left my mind.



**Listen to Me***Darlene Anita Scott*

you shout at me from afar (and sometimes near) like i'm the one who  
stole your self-righteous dignity and if i did it was only because  
you let me

while you are all caught up in those aquarian risings the struggle  
still continues and the smokescreen behind which you hide isn't  
making our strategy (that took over two hundred years to map out)  
any clearer

i looked for you but you had dodged their bullets and yet took  
refuge in Snow White and although you say she's just a friend i  
can't pretend that i didn't see the branded "t" for token across  
your chest when we were making midnight sing

yes you are still my masculine bronze Adonis those Greek litters  
stealing the Yoruba, Ibo, Gullah strength that makes you forever  
mine but the weight of this iron burden that you call love is  
weighing me down

don't you know that i cannot cherish those four-letter lovewords  
and the overzealous pet names only make me cringe

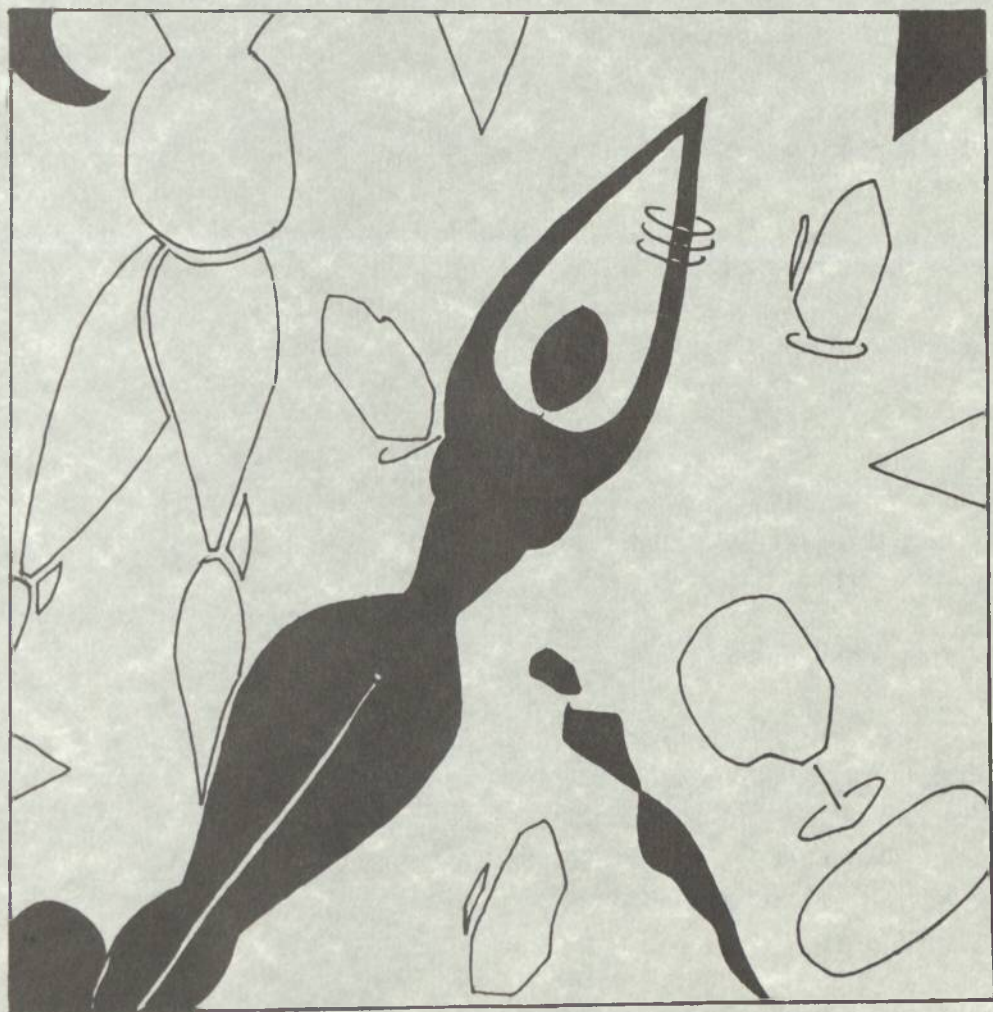
i am a woman all by myself and never your bitch either way  
when you touch me you pierce my flesh because you try to dig too  
deep

we have to work on that sneer that you call a smile and those Uzi  
eyes that punctured Mama's inflated hope and then maybe we can talk  
about love--about loving you back to me

i don't know how it feels to be kicked in my manhood but i cannot  
and will not accept the blame

anyway you lied because i saw you reduced my suffering to a joke  
and the dream to a warped vision and i could choose to hate you for  
that but i would rather listen to what, who tricked you from within  
my reach and carried you away on this horse sometimes a white horse  
i heard around the way (and i mean that literally and figuratively)  
because the struggle cannot continue without you and i need you to  
stop shouting for a minute and stop shutting me out with your  
bottle of false hope and your box of impossible dreams each one  
individually wrapped in brown paper  
and listen to me.

from weary hands





**ON SUN-BRONZED FEET SHE WALKS***Chiquita Lockley*

on sun-bronzed feet  
she walks  
tire and weary  
from carrying the weight of the world on her back  
centuries of carrying hope inside  
only to see it slip away-  
DIE  
decades of waking in the early morning  
only to go to sleep tired  
slaving for the master- her husband  
never a "thank you" uttered

years of soiling her clothes  
wiping away the tears of the world- her child  
just before he splits her lips when she refuses  
to give him money for crack  
she gets no respect  
months of knitting the quilt  
-the quilt of life  
shaping the fabric of what fate has dealt her  
shaping it into continents for world peace  
                    dolls to remember her daughters and sistas  
                    trains to remember her sons and brothas  
putting her family together the best way she can

how much longer  
how much longer must she pace the panels of the sun  
scorching her feet with each step she takes  
weeks

daze

ours

minutes

seconds

when will we learn to capitalize on our strengths rather than our  
weaknesses

when will we wake up from this daze and turn the nightmares into  
dreams

when will we realize to this country is ours because of our  
mother's blood

when will our men acknowledge that BLACK WOMEN are the foundation  
of the universe

when will brothas learn to put us first, not second in their  
lives

when will we wake up and find the cure to heal the ills of society

when will we wake up and aid our sistas-

the BLACK WOMAN

who walks on sun-bronzed feet

when will we wake up



**ODE TO A DRUMMER***Chiquita Lockley*

boom boom ching BOOM ching boom ching BOOM  
boom boom ching BOOM ching boom ching BOOM  
rhythms  
african rhythms  
sounds of the congo to boston to new orleans and back  
a collection of emotions outwardly expressed  
in the boom bang Bop of the brass  
**CYMBALS**  
symbols of our rich royal culture  
our african retentions emerging after centuries  
music  
jazz  
all that jazz  
art blakey  
max roach  
legends  
drummers  
symbols of african heritage  
soul  
brothers  
sisters  
symbols of africa  
BOOM padadada  
BOOM padadada  
**CHING**  
cymbals of the music of our motherland  
boompaching dada  
boompaching dada  
cymbals of the intertwining of cultures  
jazz

hiphop  
reggae  
calypso  
rap  
jazz  
all that jazz?  
rhythms flowing and twisting and twining and touching  
and being touched  
just like the Nile  
Miles  
count basie, louis armstrong, sarah vaughn  
dizzy gillespie  
ma rainey  
skidadeebop papa  
skidadeebop baby  
trumpets bass vocals brass  
in need of rhythm  
keeper of the beat  
soul man  
soul woman  
ching ching ching boompadada ching ching boom  
all that jazz / ode to a drummer



**A Seed of Promise**  
Written for the Occasion of the Camille Olivia Hanks Cosby Academic Center  
Dedication Ceremonies

by

*Cari Coleman (I), Spelman '96*  
*Candice Jenkins (III), Spelman '96*  
*Michelle McCullers (II), Spelman '97*  
*Nia Tuckson (IV), Spelman '97*

I.

I am your feet,  
once aching and calloused,  
aching and calloused from jagged stones  
covered in the poisons that choke society.  
Once aching and calloused, now caressed and healing  
with soothing unity-lotion and fragranced with myrrh and knowledge.

I am your knees,  
bending, giving honor,  
honor to past, present, and future  
brothers and sisters.  
Brothers and sisters building, strengthening,  
making our presence, creating us.  
Knees bending down to lift  
brothers and sisters to honor.

I am your shoulders,  
refusing to buckle, ceasing to slump  
to the anger-laden globe that rests there.  
Shoulders now luxuriant  
with soft understanding,  
absorbing frustration flowing from souls.

I am your eyes,  
reflecting a face,  
a face beaming with renewal, revelations, and rejuvenation  
in the bath of love-joy cleansing tears,  
eyes searching for that which is not prominent,  
yearning for a wisdom that is pertinent,  
pertinent to the destruction of tears filled

with remorse and despair.

I am your voice,  
 a voice once alone,  
 bouncing back and forth from stars too far away to grasp,  
 a voice now joined with harmonious strings  
 of knowledge, encouragement, understanding,  
 bouncing from walls that now shield young minds  
 from the poisons of mis-knowledge and dis-encouragement  
 and a roof that houses stars,  
 stars that hear the harmony and shine,  
 brighter.

I am love, strength, joy, accomplishment personified,  
 I stretch from beginning to the infinite,  
 I am your sister.

Will my voice be silenced?  
 Who will hear me, who will be my harmony?  
 How will I gain shape?

II.

## AND SO THE SISTER SCHOLAR SPEAKS

will my voice fall silent?  
 will by books close and crack and yellow?  
 will the drum talker and the griots,  
 the granmas plaiting hair  
 and the robed in antiquity scholars,  
 lose their knowledge in my mind?  
 will the dust fall thick and suffocating  
 over the stone etched with,  
 "study to know thyself

thyself  
 thyself  
 thyself."

will harriet's voice, bell's voice,  
 phillis' voice, zora's voice, rosa's voice  
 fade into the whispers of decay?  
 will the documents of old



entrapments and risings  
disintegrate and fodder oppressive vines?  
I can not sink like some stolen treasure.  
I will not sink.  
for fighting we have risen,  
and empowered we will remain.

if I have to serve and think  
at once,  
study and move  
at once,  
never allowing the feathered  
and winged bodies  
of testimony, of history,  
of endless persistence  
to elude my grasp,  
then I will!

if I have to slay the weeds of mental oppression,  
snatching my will with urgency,  
then I will!

I will plant my feet  
in this Georgia red clay,  
bare to the elements,  
upholding our volumes  
of resistance--  
written, scribbled,  
whispered and spoken  
and screamed.

I will search out the stories  
in the stones,  
on the page,  
in the wind.

I will voice and give voice  
to the scholar and scribe  
taleteller, watcher, thinker

and embracer.

who will join me?  
where will we stand /

III.

inside of this:  
a gift  
gleaming bright as chilled spring mornings,  
standing regal on its bed of grass and clay--

how to gift-wrap brick and glass,  
cherry wood,  
steel beams as straight as saplings  
stretching into sun?

this gift is boxed in hope,  
sheathed in generosity,  
adorned with ribbons of radiance and love.  
this gift, offered as tenderly as a whispered wish,  
accepted with jubilation,  
with smiles wide as dreamscapes and open arms--

it is here that we will stand.  
it is here  
inside this gift  
that we will house our bright belief  
here  
in this monument of glass and light  
we will speak  
here within this precious gift  
we will sing

IV.

With hands that shaped rocks  
our mothers built houses  
now worn down to pebbles  
and left cold from



the wind of neglect  
the absence of our Selves  
whispering unspoken words  
in our collective memory.

Where we stand let us conjure up new houses  
made of praise  
with windows  
big and wide

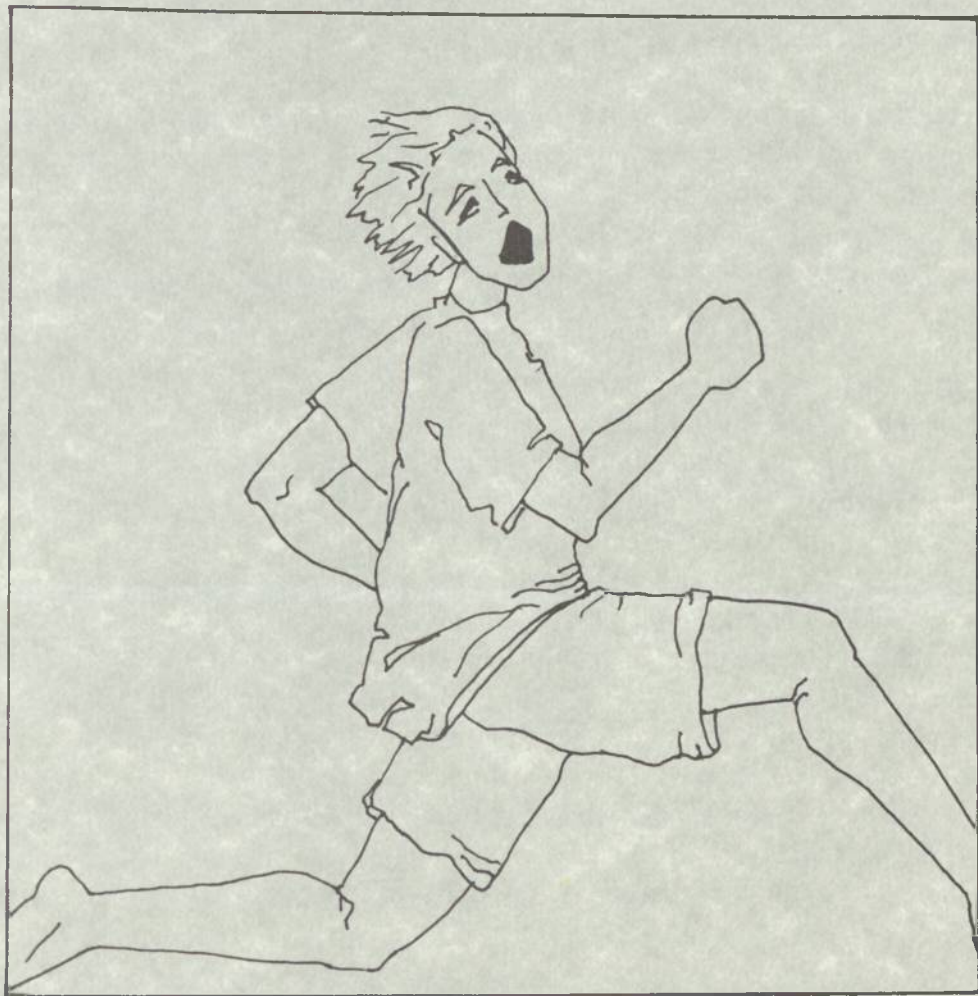
picture windows we press our faces against,  
eyes soaking in the light  
and paint  
sweet-breathed exaltations across the pane  
reflections of our mother's children

inside: from manuals  
with words for bricks  
laid by sunweathered hands  
we daughters  
will learn to remodel:  
home improvement  
for the souls of  
sisters  
seeking shelter  
from the silence.

V.

In their benevolence  
a black woman named Cosby  
and a black man named Cosby  
have planted with this edifice  
a seed of promise.

**signifyin' in tryin' times**





**"when the bough breaks"**

dedicated to Hajj Womack

*Millery Pollene'*

burning the midnight oil so that this \$70,000 piece of paper  
causes your moms to say for the first time

"baby i'm so proud of you."

and also it certifies us for independent thought  
and scholarly pontification

as we massage our chins and cross our well-lotioned legs,  
inadvertently knocking over the cappuccino onto the flame  
we thought would lead us out of the ghetto.

however,

that blinding light helped us get over stereotypical fences,  
strategically laugh at professorial jokes  
which grew out of the exhausted soil of the academy,  
and provided us with the knowledge that knights are deadly  
from the sides of the chessboard in this game of

"we wear the mask."

only to find out that we're missing a pawn  
and that acceptance wasn't riding shotgun in our 750il,  
license plate BlakPhD,

that spiritual peace was incarcerated in the Louvre  
with the soul of Sarah Bartman

and that Dunbar forgot to tell us that some masks  
were plastered with a sticky,

mildew substance called "cultural amnesia."

but on the real--

these choices and realities are like the morning  
when you heard that your man got shot  
by some brothas  
who you wish were niggas

but they were only boys who caught up in the camel clutch of a  
glib, hegemonic system that lies us on a couch made with the deceit  
of Ethan Allen

and the 10 cent an hour labor of a mother of 6 in Vietnam.  
while unsuspectingly we listen to the serene sounds of ocean waves  
crashing and remember the day we walked across the stage,  
magna cum laude graduate,  
knowledge of self was our 007  
which was purchased legally at a 5% discount  
from Bill Rights corner store.

but those pigs started to twitch nervously in the mud,  
they started to feel the unflinching grasp of  
Black clarity and consciousness,  
so they tried to devour our souls in the  
county chaos jails and prisons,  
leaving the free to embark on a HAJJ for enlightenment to those  
seemingly unanswerable questions of change and growth in a world of

YOU'RE NOTHING BUT A NIGGER!



**As Miles Stirs A Bitches Brew***October More*

Afro picks and afro puffs,  
Polyester bell bottoms and butterfly collars.  
The word around town was peace, asalaamu alaikum, power to the people, what's hap'nin  
blood?  
Blood, blood that runs through my veins, through my body, through my soul, through my  
people.  
My people, who under the pastel skies were conceived along the Nile, born in the Congo,  
and raised on the Mississippi.  
We became,  
A faceless mixture in a murky land,  
Our only strength was lifted hands,  
Fruits of labor taken away,  
Identity stolen and led astray.  
But up from nothing a bud did spring,  
A lotus flower,  
A queen,  
A king.  
God's mighty voice spoke and the earth shook,  
The mountains moved and the seas parted.  
God said, "Claim your womanhood,"  
And there came Sojourner.  
God said, "Open your eyes,"  
And Malcolm woke up.  
God said, "Be still,"  
And Rosa sat down.  
And the word around town was peace, asalaamu alaikum, power to the people, what's  
hap'nin blood?

Blood of my soul, blood of my people.  
We were broken, but broken together,  
Busted, but busted together,  
Struggling, but struggling together.  
"I got your back," was our way of life,  
Transcending all riffs, dissolving all strife.  
And under the same pastel skies that blanketed our conception along the Nile,  
We wove our dreams into the polyester fibers that carried us down long roads with  
    Martin, and transformed us into powerful communities of strong, Black, felines.  
Panthers, eager for peace but ready for war,  
Bypassing the surface, going straight to the core.  
And God spoke, the mountains moved and the seas parted.  
And under the same pastel skies that blanketed our conception, a notion was conceived.  
A notion that life was divided up between the takers and the taken so you better take as  
    much as you can before you get took and instead of building on the works of our  
    fathers and mothers we started stepping on the toes of our sisters and brothers.  
Back stab, brown nose, that's the way the story goes.  
Would somebody pleeeasetell me what's going on because it's makin' me wanna holler.

I sit in my sanctuary as Miles runs The Voodoo down and I think,  
Remember when we all grooved together in a chocolate city,  
Getting the Spirit in the Dark.



She is....

She is the dark of night.

The timeless wonder that has overpowered all.

The cornerstone of an unbreakable bond.

She is the book that has educated idle minds.

She is the protector of One Million bleeding hearts.

She is the dark of night.

She is every Black Woman.

Ariel Brown

**Message in a Bottle**  
**(brought to you by your local brewing company)**  
*Nia Tuckson*

Why are we the only ones in this  
country who hear voices?

Faceless, and without soul,  
they stand firm, holding daily vigils,  
(except on Sundays)  
preaching out dribble  
which can be heard on almost  
every corner of our neighborhoods.

These voices are so loud, that even the kids  
can't escape the noise, no matter how fast they  
run away.

They trip over their  
empty, shattered promises strewn throughout the  
streets as they play.

They tell us to fear each other.  
And their message,  
fractured, fragile, and senseless as it is,  
we pick up, and use as a weapon against one another.

Their tongues are sharper than glass.  
They cut our own and make us mute.  
We soon become addicts,  
hanging on to every drop of poison flowing from their mouths.  
Their essence has distilled our brains  
to the point where we have become their ministry,  
giving the voices an all-too familiar face.

They have possessed us  
as we gather on their precious corners  
worshipping their establishments  
as if they were temples,  
congregating on their steps and reveling in the spirits,  
(while all they desire is to dine on our cash in silver plates)  
and preaching their twisted words in strange, slurred tongues:  
loud, and obnoxiously clear:  
broadcasting for the whole community to hear,  
day and night. (Sundays, too.)

We have become a tragically misdirected army,  
drafted,  
poured into the same package as  
Joan -of-Arc:  
hearing voices which tell us  
to go out and fight wars with:  
(the poison poured into our ears must  
(prevent us from hearing things right)  
ourselves.



If you look into my eyes. . .

You may drown in a pool of chocolate, creamy rich swirling mocha alpine white caramel brown ebony flowing honey colored pool of chocolate. Taste the sweetness of my skin.

If you look into my eyes. . .

Can you see the royal purple adorned by golden bangles, scarlet blood pumping through my veins as I dance dance before my God, Praises to the god of sun, Praises to the god of water, Praises to the god of fertility, dance, dance beat drums? Feel the pounding of my heart.

If you look. If you dare look.

Look into my eyes. . .

Do you hear the rocking of the boat, back and forth, waters gushing, waters flowing, waters flowing from the eyes of my children, waters cleaning the welts on their backs from whips That sting slash gash burn Freedom freedom, I am a man, I must be free. Smell the stench of my captivity.

If you look. If you dare look.

Look into my eyes. . .

Eyes are the windows to the soul. I am the soul of black folks. Can you stand the poisonous taste of my pain, acrid poignant foul odor to the nose like bile that is a million years of torture, back-breaking soul-killing hope-destroying shame-inducing torture. Do my screams ring in your ears?

If you look. Do you dare look?

Look into my eyes. . .

In one is the land of my captors, rolling hills of horror, horror, horror rolling over me, the other is my homeland promise of my God.

Look deeper deeper deeper deeper.

Oceans overflowing mixing spilling into creamy rich swirling mocha alpine white caramel brown ebony flowing honey colored pools of chocolate.

If you dare look into my eyes you may have to cry. . .

*-Rashell Smith*

*Apocalypse-Kenji Jasper*

"The end is near" is the epitaph written on the tombstone of a generation X'd out by continuous self missions,  
 Drinking contaminated water, eating contaminated meals, and drowning in the contaminated ideals freely flowing in the advent of the world order that's new soundtracked by "All Blues" on repeat,  
 Children trading in their childhoods for a chance at making it to one score and one even though the score is always infinity to zero when taking on El Diablo without Divine Intervention is your daily occupation and our nation is just a series of cities under siege from the plague of Man's horrible impersonation of GOD and anarchy disguising itself in the form of truth justice and the American way,  
 Because there are no Supermen, No Super Friends, No Power Twins, just the drive to make a little difference on the Black Hole of indifference that tries to eat away at your essence every time you open your eyes to the four walls of false security we call a home,  
 Nice green lawn, nice clean new car, nice white sheets, ghetto pain is gone when you bury your soul in the ground beneath the suburbs and hope that you can reinvent yourself in self-wealth and forget the brothers and sisters in the projects who gave you the strength to be strong,  
 It's the 90's and forgetting is fabulous,  
 Intercourse is an intersection with cellular degeneration if you don't wear the right equipment,  
 No power to the people dashikis and afros but broken bros mad blunts and 40 O's,  
 mental derelicts wandering place to place in search of knowledge in numbers, personality cult and more conspiracy theories than there are shady niggas in "THE HOUSE."  
 Big Brother has his finger on the button,  
 Newt the Grinch has his finger on the trigger,  
 The world's regrets are boiling out of their cauldron,  
 And though we started it all they'll always call us niggas,  
 for my life's length I've been caught up in the mix of instant gratification, ghetto strife and pickup sticks, picking up the pieces of our spirits on the floor of mainstreamed commercialism,  
 Pawning our third eye for free cable television so that we can turn into the lip service of "When the Revolution Comes" 20 years too late,  
 Another brood lost in the luxuries of living it up in Lexi, Moet and the NAACP Image Awards,  
 Waiting for Dr. King's resurrection,  
 They'll be waiting forever,  
 Drinkin' Hennessey to forget our enemies and playin' like we're G's when we go to a University,  
 Paradoxically injecting Clorox into our drinking water in hopes that mass might give us the house when he dies or when he fries at the hands of the next nigga who shoots up all the White people on NYC subwa trains.  
 The Apocalypse is coming and you won't catch me running, 'cause we can't stop GOD,  
 the veneration of degeneration so that honest souls might cleanse themselves one more time.  
 No bombs, no bangs, engineered diseases and gang violence will let us pick each other off one at a time.  
 3.5 billion people standing in line to be served their cerebral cyanide at McDonalds so they won't have to watch a million years of bad karma reciprocate.



### *Bar stool rap in the madhouse*

*(Ode to you with wire hangers chiming in your ears, who fight memories of ex-serpents)*

*Ariel Brown*

*Blowing nebulous smoke and insincere profanations,  
wicked dreams of forbidden pleasure gyrate in our twin minds.*

*We tell each other half truths,  
probing for traces of ourselves in wanton, itching eyes of intrigue, horror, and deception...  
You love men. I do too.*

*You were raped. I felt the invasion of an unwanted prick in heat just the same.  
You told me how that white boy tricked you--told you that you were no different.*

*Bedeveled by his serpentine love, you believed his testosteroneous lies.  
Still he ambushed your space and left you to expire immersed in his scathing, sickly seed.  
I fucked a white boy too. But, he wasn't the flaming prick.*

*He was an interesting sort--a fool who saw the world as a fresh rainbow brushed with friendly colors  
instead of a fading black and white boob-tube like the rest of us. He, too, tried to feed me some line  
about being different. But, I knew better. Still, I played along in the rainbow way, made a little zebra  
whoopee, and went my own way affected slightly, but always knowing that I was not like him.*

*The licentious prick was no less an interesting sort--only more so a simpleton. He was a well-hung,  
green-eyed baby machine/dope-fiend/ whore. All of the things I despise and envy. Fifteen years my  
senior, five kids, every time he bowled, he scored. He was a busy man. But somehow he found the time to  
ruin my life. His testosteroneous lies copulated a cool-headed grin from me anytime he hurled one in my  
ear, between my legs, in my mouth, any place he discharged them. When empty, he pushed me away to  
die in his seething, creamy pool. Someday, I'll thank him for finding the time.*

*(Whew!) The spirits are flying h i g h now--your eyes are becoming more murky, more stunned and  
intrigued in my drifting, dazed-glazed view.*

*In my daydream bed, I caress your every groove, touching you where I like (like I love) to touch myself--  
feeling what I already know so well. You like it. I want you to touch me, and you do. I like it more.*

*Still (for the night) our kindred desire goes unnoticed, unaffirmed in fear of self-revelation and rejection.*

*We fear the satisfaction of our curious hunger and yearning bodies. We fear the union of our lips--we  
embrace--stroke me--taste you--ravish us. We fear ourselves.*

*How much for the drinks? 11 dollars even? That's cool--the madhouse won't be too fucked up tonight.*

## The Solarium

Leon Kirkland Pelzer

As works of art the minds of their creators do reflect, so do these works of madness name the madmen as their cause. Who draft blueprints, the schematics. Model perverts, nuts and addicts. And guise the seeds of havoc in economy and laws. The creator gives us all creation's power. We are what we create inside our minds and with our hands. And those who go astray and *know* are drugged and locked away in sterile places where they cannot sniff the madmen's maddening plans.

They oughta' let loose the loons. Free the freaks and weirdos and reckless wretches that know they're lost, know it's an intricate plot but can't keep their mouths hushed. Can't find pen and paper or settle and subscribe fanatically to the daily god, mask madness in faith or make their insanity a pretty song. And so they become crazy in it, lost in it, wandering aimlessly in the creations of their own minds. And you'll hear them say it often: It's an intricate plot! And it is. It runs all the way from the heavens to the guy that hands you the Big Mac with Special Sauce when you expressly asked for no sauce. No sauce! How many times do you have to say it? It's an intricate plot that includes infinite intricate sub-plots. And if you let them detach you from humanity, if you let them make you feel an island in a sea of taxes, phone calls and faxes, social security numbers, earthquakes, floods, famines, killers, corporations, whores, parking tickets and wars and Big Macs with Special Sauce, you'll come to feel that they must be out to get you. You already know it's an intricate plot. It is. But if you lose yourself in it, can't write it down for later, sing songs in secret codes for other secret psychos, you'll surely take flight from a window. Or they'll drag you off kicking and biting, fighting their white webs. And after they drag you off, it's hard to get past the bars.

I've got it all: fun, sun, drugs. But they took away the Pac-Man machine because Ray Harvey attacked an orderly with the joy stick. He just broke it right off the machine and started in on the guy. He was yelling, "You're fuckin' with my transmissions!" Cut him pretty good across the neck but didn't kill him.



Ray's what they call a 'live one.' The rest just swallow their pills calmly and sit and rock and drool and try to comprehend television. Or they play extended, intense games of chess with only half the pieces. Neither side has a king. They play anyway. Why not? The antithesis! That's what Ray says when he's excited about the madness. He's excited more often than not and particularly when they give him his pills and check inside his mouth, under his tongue. They call his name and he steps up next in line. Same routine every day: "What? What, do you want to feed me this poison? Fuckin' poison me? Don't you know you can't poison me? I been fuckin' / with this shit for years. Motherfuckers used to ask me was I

fucked up...Nah, nah, I'm just one step ahead of these fuckers tryin' to poison me. Feed me this shit. Put it in my food. Put it in my apples, put it in my cheese. Fuckin' Big Mac sauce. Big Mac sauce..." Then he takes his pills.

Every day Ray sits in his chair by the window in the corner and looks down on the streets below. During the day they're busy with taxi cabs, busses, madmen in rags, drag, digging in trash, madmen in suits hailing the cabs. Each with his own thing, his thing that could put him over. Ray is the messenger to madmen. See, by projecting his voice just so, just right on the window pane, he uses the entire building, its beams, its wires as a conductor, a transmitter. He broadcasts on a frequency for minds on the brink, minds just one shitty day from the madhouse. He dates each broadcast and gives the precise time. Then for hours: "Sit down you're rockin', sit down sit down, sit down you're rockin' the boat! And the Devil will drag you under by the sharp lapel of your checkered coat..." He sings to soothe to admonish.

"I should've sat down," he says. "Just take the slop life throws your way. Fuckin' paupers' pabulum, the Pope, the President, pretenders. Fuck 'em. Keep your mouths shut. See, it's all an intricate plot that runs from the heavens to the guy that hands you the Big Mac with the sauce when you wanted nothing to with the sauce. And you snap! Keep your big traps shut till it's late at night. Drink it away. Become a fanatic of some sort if you must. Or they'll put you away with a bunch of other lost, crazy bastards, sit you down in a circle with the veggies and make you take their advice. How can a man give me directions in my own illusion? Tell me that. How can he get inside my head to know the way? So they'll drug you. Ah, they thought of that too! Standardize the

illusion then you're all lost. Stay out of the madhouse, the *asylum*, or you'll probably find it funny. Not funny to me, I'm in the madhouse. No, you're in the madhouse. No, I'm in the madhouse..." Then that laughter. And he's broadcasting to minds. They can't stop him. Can't stop me.

Suppose a man does not know inside from out, is convinced that the madhouse is both that encircled by walls and all that lies beyond them? Then that man, in his own illusion, is free again to go about searching for God.. What if a wall were not so sure about inside and out, didn't function in its own illusion? Could it function in anyone else's illusion? Just a single surprisingly spontaneous act of will and I'll suck these useless cinder block and brick bland blue abutments and this sea of sea-green linoleum into a void. Forget I ever existed and vanish into nothing. The antithesis! I'll never have to hear another Ray Harvey soliloquy. Madness day in and day out. Whispers in the corner about this intricate plot. The lunatic honking of horns and revving of engines outside. It's the little things that drive you crazy. Day in and day out. If I could only vanish into silence.

It's all an intricate plot with intricate little sub-plots all designed to make you snap.