



# **FOCUS**

# **1999**

## Acknowledgements

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-And-

## Thanks To:

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Ms. Teras A. Jackson

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The Massai Women of Kenya who grace the cover of Focus

## Editors' Note

Moving into a new milineum we all anxiously await for what the future holds. Though, in this rapidly changing society it is vital to remember the voices from our past. Hence, **FOCUS 1999** has selected literary works from past issues in remembrance of those who have come before us.

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\*Photo by Kellye McKenzie

This 1999 Issue of FOCUS is dedicated to Vanessa Sanderson, and to all Black women in Africa, The Caribbean and the Americas who have fought to make a better tomorrow for their children.

### **Why I Write**

*Pearl Cleage*

I am writing to expose and explore the point where racism and sexism meet. I am writing to help myself understand the full effects of being black and female in a culture that is both racist and sexist. I am writing to try and communicate that information to my sisters and to any brothers of good will and honest intent who will take the time to listen.

I am writing because four women a day are murdered in this country by men who say they love them. I am writing because rape is. I am writing because I am a daughter and a mother and a lover and a sister and a woman and a feminist. I am writing to understand. I am writing so I won't be afraid. I am writing so I won't start crying again. I am writing because nobody said the word sexism to me until I was 30 years old and I want to know why. I am writing because marriage is slavery unless it occurs between equals.

I am writing because I have seen my friends bleed to death from illegal abortions. I am writing because I have seen my sisters tortured and tormented by the fathers of their children. I am writing because I almost married a man once who beat me regularly with no remorse. I am writing because my daughter is almost old enough to start dating, and I don't know how to tell her to protect herself from what I cannot even fully articulate to myself.

I am writing to allow myself to feel this anger. I am writing to keep from running toward it or away from it or into anybody's arms. I am writing to keep from shooting somebody whose face is only now coming into sharp focus.

I am writing/writing/writing for my life.



# AMBUSHED

**Motto**

*Michelle Wonsley*

Just like  
American ways,  
American weigh  
race matters.  
Race matters.  
True, love,  
true love  
is real:  
Israel  
was  
Black then,  
back then  
In fact.  
In fact,  
When I see  
win, I see  
we'll, lose.  
Well loose  
American ways.  
American weigh.  
Americans sway.  
American's way!  
Say, Black,  
say "Black".  
Are you American?

**The Perfect Soldier**

*Charles W. Davidson Jr.*

See me not as I creep into your temple,  
taking your life is simple,  
I have the power of a thousand swords.  
I feel no pity, I feel no pain,  
I am indestructible.  
As silent as the tree falling unheard  
in the Wilderness.  
As deadly as the most powerful weapon.  
See me not but I am here,  
watch as your T-Cells disappear,  
but have no Fear.  
Killing you is my destiny.  
I have no other purpose;  
The master of disguise.  
I have no body and no eyes.  
But I see you as Nothing standing  
and as Nothing you shall Fall.

**I Hate Chicken**

*Bonny Renaye DeWitty*

I Hate Chicken  
I don't like it!

I go down the stairs and see chicken  
take the train and smell chicken  
go to the store and buy chicken

I don't like it!

I go to Nikki's and they havin chicken  
Stop by the church potluck and they offerin  
chicken  
I decide to go home and momma eatin some chicken

She say "Momma, done fried some chicken wings"  
I reply "N-O! I don't like C-H-I-C-K-E-N!!"  
And stomp up the stairs  
But, later that night I go to the fridge and have  
a wing!

**Untitled**

*Jill Toliver*

Didn't nobody have to tell them  
they knew  
Didn't nobody have to tell them  
cuz they already understood the word  
hate  
and how it applied to them  
Dark ashy skin  
Nappy hair made ugly but straight  
every Saturday morning  
Big eyes opened wide with desire  
staring at anyone who had something  
that their momma couldn't buy  
Runnin' to the corner store!  
Gotta buy chips  
and soda  
and bread  
with foodstamps  
First grade reading level  
in the fifth grade  
Crude broken English filled with double negatives  
and I is and she ain'ts  
The desire ran strong and free in their eyes  
to be  
somebody else  
or to somebody transform their own lives into  
something better  
But why even dream any longer?  
Nobody gives a fuck about the black kid filled  
with hate  
Soaked it all up from the  
*Can I help you's*  
Every two minutes at the departmennt storre  
And the *I'm sorry but we have no more job open-*  
*ings*  
for black kids who can alter public space  
as they walk down the sidewalk  
Labeled a gang every time they stop to talk with  
friends  
Well why not?

Gotta find love somewhere  
It might as well come  
from someone else  
who understands  
hate

**Park**

*LeConte J. Dill*

Giggles and screams  
And laughter and dreams  
"Higher, higher,"  
you yell to the man  
through lips full of smiles  
and bubble gum  
He pushes you on the swing  
And you soar above all the other kids  
in the park  
Pink jackets and blue jeans  
and chocolate-stained cheeks  
and dirt-stained palms  
are all jumbled together as tiny flecks on your  
brown eyes  
yet they don't seem to matter much  
All you care about is that big tall man  
that you know will always be behind you to give  
you a push  
to call you "Baby Girl"  
and make you believe in heroes  
Those Summer afternoons are still so vivid to you  
Your freshly plaited hair, and your tightly laced  
tennis shoes,  
And your tummy full of peanut butter and jelly  
sandwiches  
I wish that I too could still see that park  
and those kids  
and that man  
and feel his hands grab me close to him  
and lift me to the sky  
and make me believe in heroes  
Yet Existence cuts deep into my heart  
and severs my memory  
And I fall face down into the sand for  
my swinging  
has come to an end

**Insurrection**

*LeConte J. Dill*

Brick-walled me  
Black-balled me  
Circumscribed in a room  
Stifled by the fumes  
Dimly lit mentality  
Endless flogging  
Cerebral lynching  
Blinded by my tears that I mustn't let fall  
Fits of fury  
Incarcerated in a world that I thought was  
Mine  
Embodied by a person whom I thought was  
Me  
Heart thumping  
Mind racing  
Eyes searching  
Drum beating  
I didn't know that you could start a  
Revolution  
By just standing up  
And walking out the  
Door.

**Weight**

*Aja Kellie Riddick*

Purple haze  
Scented fog  
Lights blinding  
Through the thick  
No more guides  
To the ocean  
No more routes  
None to pick  
No more whispers  
In the darkness  
No more clues  
To the end  
As the tunnel  
Reaches closure  
There'll be telegraphs  
To send  
An array of  
Simple greetings  
To which you'll add your own  
Hope that others  
Will gain meaning  
From those thoughts  
That you helped grow  
With design, deliberation  
You've created something new  
No more thoughtless replication  
That you've seen someone else do  
Bottom heavy like a teardrop.

**Untitled #2**

*Brionnea Williams*

People are like bouquets  
in glass  
growing immensely  
in a cramped place  
loving too much  
giving too much  
wanting too much  
saying  
Let me go  
you are stifling my development

**Untitled #4**

Michelle Wonsley

Who will go to the Naked Screaming masses?  
Hungry and Filthy, they call you.  
Beckoning in languages unimportant  
And varied  
Poor and Desperate  
Sexually Abused  
Beaten and Broken,  
Precious Gems.  
The RICHES of this continent.  
Amongst the rubble, it is hard to see the  
SHINE.  
you and i are brilliantly luminescent  
and such are our predecessors.  
we will leave a legacy of  
ILLUSIONED ILLUMINATION.  
our iridescent intellect oozing  
SILVRY MERCURY  
down  
our  
legs  
around our feet  
to poison  
Mounds of weeping parishioners  
who have placed their faith in  
Us?!!  
Kill or be killed.  
we the undeserving, undeserving "ONES"  
who drip METALLIC witticisms  
onto  
helpless retching  
under-  
dogs.  
Are WE gifted?  
Or in the symbiotic tradition of  
OuR country-  
Are we JUST THIEVES?

ဝဝဝဝဝဝဝဝ

**MYMUSE**

**Insomniac**  
**Michele Wonsley**

**at night I lie awake  
afraid to dream you  
afraid to dream you and wake to find you gone  
at night I lie awake  
afraid to sleep away the time I think you  
afraid to sleep away the time I think you and fall to  
dream you  
and wake  
to find you  
gone.  
Sometimes I just go to sleep.**

**Abandoned**

**Nzinga Kuumba Terrell**

**I am that neighborhood you once took pride in  
The one you showed to all your friends  
You took the time to make me look pretty  
I was the best looking block in the city  
But now you have forgotten me.**

**I often wonder why you lost interest in me  
You were just too caught up to see  
While you were gone I was poisoned with litter  
That is why I am filled with so much bitter  
You sure have forgotten me.**

**You ignored all my cries for attention  
So now when litter falls I act in submission  
I don't have the strength to fight back  
I think it's because of the nourishment I lack.  
Oh, why oh, why have you forgotten me.**

**I used to be able to shake off the damage  
But lately it's been too much for me to manage  
When the flowers died and the windows shattered  
Didn't you notice I felt like I never mattered  
You have forgotten all about me.**

**I am left here totally destroyed  
Now who will step and fill the void?  
There is no one who dares  
Why, because no one really cares  
You have forgotten me**

**"To A Certain Dread Headed Poet Who Doesn't Know He Is"**  
*Rochelle Spencer*

**He Writes Like He IS**  
**at a piano.**  
**Pounding Words**  
**to simple grace.**

**Untitled**

***Aja Kellie Riddick***

**I love the way that love should always be,  
And take from it the same way that I give.  
With passion, fervor, and intensity,  
I give my love the same way that I live.  
I offer words lubricious and too smooth,  
That slip and slide from tongue to lover's ear,  
So slight that you may miss them if you move;  
And this, my love, is how I keep you near.  
For if we parted I would not survive.  
The pain would be too great for me to bear.  
Because your love is what keeps me alive,  
My heart would fail to beat without your stare.  
Forever trapped inside your heart and hand.  
And dedicated to what they demand.**

## **OSEI**

*Lys Azuana*

**Fiery nights searching within myself for what I lost in you  
The war is raging inside me and a dreadful storm stirs all around  
I am consumed by my emotions thus my growth or ability to understand  
anything beyond myself is stifled.**

**When I wake in the early mornings, you are the center and focus of my  
thoughts**

**In essence, you have been and are my world...my everything  
I refuse to deny myself the memories of our passionate nights reaching  
for each other in the dark while the candles burn.**

**The candles burned out as our nights filled with intense, sensual, and  
creative play.**

**But, as the candles burned out, so has your interest and intrigue with me.  
I refuse to accept the reality behind your aloofness.**

**Your nonchalant attitude is as if in your world, your present reality, I do  
not exist.**

**Love, I do exist.**

**You refuse to see me though my presence is ever constant.**

**Look at me**

**OSEI, can you see me?**

**You have decided that I am not functional in the present framework you  
have created.**

**I ask of you, Osei, is it possible to deny someone's existence when you can  
taste them every time you swallow your saliva?**

**Is it possible to deny someone's existence that you have shared so much of  
yourself.**

**So many secrets...**

**The times you have lied...**

**The times you have cried...**

**Your most personal experiences**

**Your joyful acceptance of the world and how you function in it**

**I still loved you...**

**I still love you...**

**I am a part of you just as you are in me.**

**Love is an entity that is sufficient unto itself.**

**Love functions through itself**

**Love can never be erased.**

**Whirling around in a world filled with madness**

**The essence of living lies in who and what we have experienced.  
Listening, straining every nerve to hear above the tumult of my quicken-  
ing pulse.**

**You are not here with me, OSEI**

**But, I feel you.**

**Slowly waking..**

**Accepting that you are shallow, weak, and filled with lies**

**Yet, still loving you, OSEI.**

**Dreams Break in the Night**  
*Natashia McGough*

**Whispers of wept silence foreshadow my loss of you. Memories are portraits of lost reminders that thicken and burden with a quiet pain. Visions as vacant as puddle stains evaporate into air as you silently call my forgotten name. My mind retreats into its own fantasy, as dreams break in the night.**

**Crying prayers swirl and beg with the dying cast of my rain above your silent eyes. The quiet of your voice shatters my heart's deepest security. Left footsteps of thought trod behind and wait anxiously unexplained. Never given a moments chance, you pass by leaving an unspoken glance, as dreams break in the night.**

**My loving tune arises with the stroke of my forgiven harp as you are guided back into new and distant surroundings. Relentless time clocks the shortened hours you have to watch our ending sunset. Closely witness, as dreams break in the night.**

**I pull you push away and my fallen tears continue to stream unto my bare face. Then there is the darkness and the wonder of a dying storm. Your drummer moves fading off into another light. Your fervent goodbye waves in this sheltering swirl of words unknown. My last chapter of this book closes as my dreams break in the night.**

**Reflections on mediocrity**  
*LeConte J. Dill*

**I sit here  
With stiffly pressed,  
Hip-accentuating  
boot-cut jeans  
Victoria Secretly laces me  
embraces me  
and my jewels  
3 hours  
and 45 dollars worth  
of hair dyeing and frying  
hours seem like years of nail biting,  
and unruffling of the intricate pleats of my mom's  
curtains  
with each flashing headlight  
I fight with my conscience:  
He did say 6:30, right?  
Or was it 7:15?  
And yet my watch reads 9:45**

**And I still wait for you**

**I sit here  
Among pity-ridden wads of tissue  
and silent telephone rings  
Vowing never to utter your name again  
to the shadows of the nite,  
between gasps of horrific passion  
Contriving your desire  
My books in my bag remain untouched  
That paper due in an hour remains half-written  
Tufts of hair peek out from under my scarf,  
and did I wear those same jeans yesterday?**

**And I still dream of you**

**I sit here  
Among pictures now tucked away**

**in emotional scrapbooks  
Laughing outwardly  
Batting away teardrops  
with Maybelline as my armor  
Lying convincingly  
amongst friends  
Coming to grips that your  
Player, hustler, baller, lifestyle  
Of being a Youology, pre- Her major  
Has caused you to consider my own existence  
As faded  
and even jaded**

**And I still think of you**

**My little heart**  
**Jamila Zahra Wade**

**I often find  
myself  
alone**

**wondering if  
you are aware  
of the pain  
you've caused, or  
if you're thinking  
of my little heart,  
which you knowingly  
crushed  
in your palms.  
I am**

**alone**

**empty,  
and I'm sure  
you have your hands full  
with the soft flesh  
of another woman,  
or perhaps, they  
remain filled  
with little remnants  
of my love.**

**Untitled**  
**Kobie Mahiri**

**I have seen diamonds which blinded me,  
and the sun's rays sting my eyes.  
Yet your beauty is soothing,  
and appeals to a part of me deep inside.**

**Your voice is soft and rhythmic,  
like the sound of butterfly wings.  
Yet your eyes tell stories of strength  
found exclusively in spiritual beings.**

**Although your demeanor speaks  
of an old soul gentle and kind,  
your youthful ambition screams  
of a passionate spirit undying.**

**I am a fool. Conquered  
by self-doubt and fear  
Affections I tell the page,  
wishing to whisper in your ear.**

**Midnight**  
**Notsgnal**  
**Kobie Mahiri**

**Midnight comes, I've already gone.**  
**My body rests, while the soul is not done.**  
**It has a date every night.**  
**Within dreams and images it takes flight.**  
**Free from the crime-compacted streets of life.**  
**The vast world within our love holds no room for strife.**  
**Approaching our spot, I envision you dancing above the roses.**  
**Our steps and hearts are synchronized as the gap between us**  
**closes.**  
**You're the sun around which my galaxy of love revolves.**  
**Only through mystical occurrences could such an enchanting**  
**love evolve.**  
**They can take away my worldly possessions and kill my will to**  
**fight.**  
**But until soil covers my boxed home, they can never take away**  
**my midnight.**

**The Tiger and the Spider**  
*Shana C. Williams*

**It was a relationship out of balance from the start.  
A Spider to a Tiger had given his heart.  
But it seemed they were destined to be apart..  
To think, the Tiger needed from the Spider to part.**

**The Tiger cried, and the Spider too..  
Neither quite sure of what to do..  
So the Tiger decided, "Okay Spider, I'll chose to be with you.."  
And so they carried on...exploring love these two.**

**Until one day along came an observer..  
Who questioned the Tiger, asking how well could a spider serve 'er?**

**To which she replied, "Just fine..  
He dines me with poetic wine.."  
"Yeah," the watcher warned, "he'll sting you, it's just a matter of time!"**

**But the Tiger ignored..  
Felt this relationship worth being explored..**

**So, the observer spoke with the Spider.  
"How long to she'll roll over and squish you while you lie right beside  
'er?"  
To which the Spider said, "Never!  
We'll survive all thick and stormy weather..  
She'll always be there, believing we were meant to be together."**

**So, the watcher left them alone..  
Hoping they'd realize the misfortune to which they were prone..  
And decided, "Hey they desire to live in this danger zone."**

**Time went on, and to each other they did no harm,  
Convincing others of their partner's charm.**

**Until at this ironic, romantic site,  
No, there was no fight..  
But things just did not feel quite right.  
The Tiger turned in her sleep that night,**

**Ended up squeezing the Spider a little too tight.  
In an apparent attempt of flight,  
The Spider released his venom with all of his might!  
And so...you can see neither would be alright..**

**The Tiger was stung  
The Spider all mangled and wrung.  
The observer looked, and his head hung..**

**For Me**  
**Stefan Chase**

**My obnoxious**  
**ability**  
**for imagining**  
**fulfills**

**The yearning**  
**to feel**  
**and be**  
**felt**

**It feeds**  
**my reality**  
**with what's**  
**missing**

**For me**  
**Love is**  
**attainable**  
**figuratively speaking.**

**"Sonny Shines"**

**Bonny Renaye DeWitty**

**-dedicated to my father-**

**Shines like my white patent leather shoes use to on Easter Sun  
day**

**Shines like my hair, after I have gotten it pressed and greased**

**Shines like the icicles outside my window in the winter**

**Shines like a sun that wakes all beauties from their slumber**

**Shines like my heart when I saw my little beauty Brandon**

**Shines like the eyes when we allow them to see**

**Shines like tears that fall when lovers walk by**

**Daddy Shines like the moon when it's relaxing at one in the  
afternoon.**

**You shine, He shine We shine Us Shine SonnyShines.**

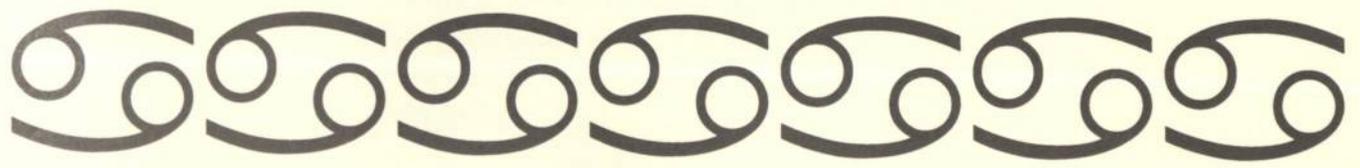
**Never**  
*Jamila Zahra Wade*

**I promised  
we wouldn't work.  
sealed  
the fate of our failure  
with never.  
I prevented you  
from reaching me,  
and aided in  
the brutal destruction  
of love.  
I became a foe,  
an enemy  
to the passion  
that could have erupted,  
that should have invaded our souls.  
because of that  
I am guilty.  
and you cannot  
prove me innocent  
by admitting  
you help put out  
the fire.  
the blaze died  
by my foolish pride,  
and my refusal  
to depend on  
you  
to fill my void.**

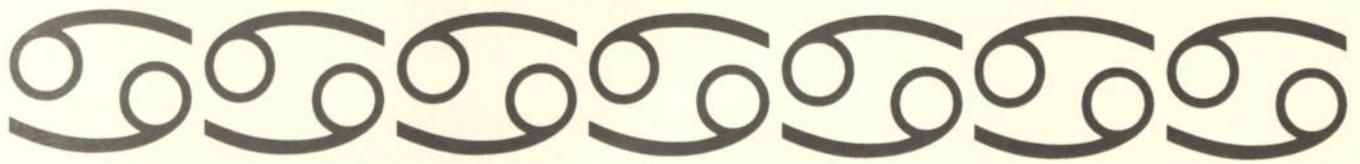
**I'm still half empty,**

**and never  
won't allow me  
to be full again.  
believing  
in never  
stops me  
from letting you  
in my heart.  
deep**

where I want  
and need  
you to be.



**CENTERED**



**Ritual**

*LeConte J. Dill*

Straight-backed pews  
Smiles and singing  
Pages rustling, peppermints passing  
Satin bows and frilly socks  
Swinging patent-leather shoes  
Heads bowed, eyes closed  
Napping

Straight-backed pews  
Pensive thoughts  
Ears listening, eyes skimming  
Hands clappin'  
Amen-ing  
Head bowed, eyes closed  
Praying

Straight-backed pews  
Smiles and singing  
Cameras clicking  
Rings and petals  
Hands intertwining, hearts interlocking  
Heads bowed, eyes closed  
Vowing

Straight-backed pews  
Pensive thoughts  
Organ purring  
Navy suits  
Still air, empty chair  
Heads bowed, eyes closed  
Sobbing

**Many a Night**

*Charles W. Davidson Jr.*

On this night I hear the sounds but can no longer expound on the ineffable deeds produced by Hate, Fear, Evil, and Greed in the ten foot high weeds I try to breeze through the breeze knowing that if I even sneeze or breath my life won't proceed.

It's death dressed in white, vicious coneheads in the night, they fill me with fright, no delight when fear reaches indomitable heights as I crouch out of sight ready to put up a useless fight for the continuation of my so-called life in this world of filled with strife.

Rather run than rot on an old noose knot, neck goes pop as I graze the top of a Willow in the hot, hot Sun--I'll never stop till after me they're not or I'm shot, body drops.

I can run no more, my once strong Black body is now aching weak, and sore, surrounded by four, I realize Death will replace the life I bore, but death I ignore, it is relief I search for, as I am dragged across the Earth's grassy floor I have been instructed by the Lord to Fear No More.

Now I feel the Pain as they set me aflame it starts to rain from the heavens again, nailed to a cross I am going insane, my soul begging not to remain, somewhere far off I hear my name, as fore consumes my physical remains my Spirit feels no Pain, only Pity in **HIS** name.

Untitled

*Charles W. Davidson Jr.*

A Brown sugared dream I saw as she stood  
ripe and beautiful in the sand and sun unaffected.  
Her young dark skin glistened with sweat which  
did not deserve to sit upon her breasts.  
She wore an expression of pain,  
a pain the world had caused refusing to acknowledge  
her glory.  
A glory so royal and elegant that it evoked fear into  
those who paled in description.  
But unrecognized was her beauty by many  
and even herself.  
She held no appetite for her own magnificence.  
Her partiality fell upon the form of others.  
Others whom the world sees and would  
not dare fail to exalt.  
I refuse for this to be a continuing reality.  
I will personally take away the beguiling mirrors  
which shout slander into the face of this  
immaculate creation and replace them with the  
undistorted mirrors of absolute truth,  
those which shout to her that she is the Queen of the  
Earth and the mother of man.

## I Saw My Soul

*Charles W. Davidson*

I saw my soul the other night,  
it blinked and laughed and then it cried,  
told me of the pain it felt,  
let me feel the tears it wept,  
talked with me and told me truth,  
gave me wisdom to give it use...

My soul was shiny and silver,  
regal and blue.  
It wore a soldier's helmet,  
and waterproof boots.  
It had eyes that sparkled  
with wings that flew.  
It just appeared mysteriously,  
like the grass' dew.

This was not always my soul,  
but once occupied an oak,  
lived within fire,  
even some old slavin' folk.  
My soul was a pharaoh,  
my soul was a rat,  
my soul told of the jungle,  
when it was the biggest black cat.  
My soul worked the railroad,  
it was once a little girl,  
but my favorite is when it lived  
in the Sun and daily lit the world.

⌘ & ʘ & ⌘ & ʘ & ⌘ &  
ʘ & ⌘ & ʘ & ⌘ & ʘ &

&

**WOMYN'S  
WORDS**

**Black Beauty**

*Jamila Zahra Wade*

black beauty black whore black sheep  
an outcast considered  
animal  
for her business  
of wild ways,  
left home  
for hoeing in  
the gardens of weeded men  
for loving liars  
& lying in burning beds,  
she spread fire  
& acquired an inner flame  
of self-hatred,  
never dreamed  
of being a reject  
she  
once wanted more  
than menial blow  
jobs  
but couldn't find  
strength  
in her family,  
& was fooled by  
opportunities for open lips & open legs  
so she opened wide  
grazing a field of fears  
f-o-r-e-v-e-r  
black beauty black whore black sheep

## ***Ashes, Black-eyed peas and Sweet Breeze***

*Iyabo Andaiye Kwayana*

*I am up this morning because the sun bore a hole through my window and I felt its rays coming through, frying me. Sometimes the sun feels like that. Especially here in this house. This house is a crucible. Its contents change under heat.*

*Always change. Shed skins.*

*Things get hot here early, around nine in the morning. I remember being a young girl sitting underneath the outstretched arms of the backyard's trees trying to escape the heat of the house. I remember my eyes being wide at first, then drowsy. My relationship with the sun holds this same drowsy/ wide-eyed quality to it. It is a circadian rhythm almost: invigorating and zapping.*

*The sun doesn't set till late and the heat doesn't let up again until around midnight. We get about twelve good hours of intense heat everyday. I asked my mother once, "Doesn't the sun ever get tired?" She said calmy, "No. It loves to shine and its rays make us stronger." "Stronger," I would ask, "or blacker?" Her response was always the same. "Both" she would say. I got my indigo skin from her, my almost black eyes from her and the sea of white which surrounded them from my father. My father's people had a more caramel hue about them. As a child, I never did understand why he and his people were caramel instead of indigo. Actually, I don't think I consciously thought about it until some very recent happenings in my adult life.*

*Mama said that there were all sorts of color in the world and the universe and beyond and she said that my father's people had special powers that came about way back in history when they changed from indigo to caramel. Now I shiver as I know the thing that changed our people from indigo to caramel in my family was rape during their enslavement.*

*She once whispered to me that I was destined to acquire my own shamanic powers through similar rites. "When?" I would ask, not fully understanding what that process would require. "Soon" was mama's typical response, her own near black eyes, as she said this, holding the seemingly diametrically opposed elements of pain and joy in them. She would always say that without undergoing pain, one could never truly experience the joy of seeing. "The pain blinds you," she would say, "sight comes after you have understood pain and choose to go beyond it. Pain is anything that blinds you and doesn't allow you to move."*

*I feel my mother in the big house this morning. She is the sweet breeze passing through it who distracts me from the one hundred and one degree heat outside. There are no sounds in it or around its perimeters except for her cool breeze easing through the branches of the magnolias making its way through the house and my feet shuffling down the oak stair case to the kitchen. Things quieted up a bit since last week when, even if there was a breeze, I sure couldn't feel it. This house always bring me back to a sort of peace, though many not so peaceful things have happened here.*

*I am Lazarine, an almost twenty-six year old student of medicine taking a leave of absence from the academic world. I inherited this house from my father whose people have lived here since they were slaves. I was born here and have lived here since I was a little girl. My first love is laying on hands. My second is cooking. Both involve fire. My mother told me that there would always be fire around me. In fact, she is right. The emotion of fire has brought me here. I came because I needed a change. I needed to outgrow some things in my life.*

*As I recount my reasons for coming back home, I am beginning to think of my parents. There is a picture of them on the mahogany cabinet: my father appears giant like next to my mother's slight frame. Their colors which are starkly different, are complementary. This picture reminds me of the Yin Yang symbol that my mother wore around her neck. She told me that it was an ancient Chinese symbol that an elderly Chinese man had given to her the day of her initiation as a priestess Medicine Woman. She described the day that the man gave her the necklace as being cold and gloomy. She said that he spoke the following words to her, "The sun cannot always shine. Darkness and light must be equally appreciated. One must be buried before one can rebirth anew." I always used to ask her what that had to do with the symbol around her neck and what it had to do with her. She told me that one day I would understand.*

*I can hear my mother telling me everything about the world and I can see my father healing people by speaking to them and placing his hands over the crown of their heads. My mother was an original Medicine Woman and she was gifted with sight. My mother had a recipe for everything, life and food. I call these recipes life's essential rituals.*

*I came to the kitchen this morning to prepare my favorite meal. It was the first meal I ever prepared. My mother used to call it the favorite food of the ancestors. When I cook it, it is a ritual. "Mama, I*

*am ready to be unburied." I say to myself. Today this is a ritual for un-burying me.*

*The meal's ingredients include black eyed peas, minced garlic, onions, cayenne pepper, bell pepper, and a few other spices. It is only to be cooked for ritualistic purposes. Otherwise it can give you gas.*

*The black eyed peas have two layers. You rub off the first and the black eye comes off with it. You must rub the eye off of each black-eye pea and discard all of them in order to make this dish.*

*I place all the ingredients I can find on the hard surface of the kitchen counter. The soaked black-eyes are already there. The garlic cloves, the onions, the oil. I am only missing a few ingredients. I get a familiar feeling inside my womb. "Cooking is an art" my mother used to tell me. I say a quick prayer and then wash my hands.*

*My mind hasn't been the same since the incident a few months ago. Last week I started to remember more how things were. Last Thursday I woke up screaming and crying, and laughing all at the same time. I think this meal will help beat that spirit out of me.*

*To cook this meal you also need a large frying pan and a grinding stone.*

\*\*\*\*\*

*I have suffered in the past few months from not remembering my own voice. Do you ever find that the voices inside your head are not your own? Have you ever had to step away from them in order to remember your own? Do you ever wonder how those voices got inside you? I know my mother's voice is inside me and that of jah's and my own but three months ago my spirit inter-mingled with another.*

*Well, mingled is not the word I want to use as it was a violent interaction. This spirit rubbed off on me and encased me in his voice. It is for me to unravel myself from this encasing now. I can only handle three voices at a time.*

*As I glance outside the kitchen window, the sun is nowhere in sight but I know its there because I can feel its rays gathered in a concentrated ball of heat directly above the ceiling of the kitchen. The kitchen is located in the center of the house. I have been in the kitchen for almost three hours, unaware of time. The last time I was here for so long was the day of my last ritual. I ended up burning the meal. I had to throw it away.*

*All of the eyes on the black-eyed peas are gone now. Its a slow and monotonous task but I managed it without even being aware of how long it took. Every time I perform this cooking ritual it marks a time when I can no longer see with the same eyes I saw with before.*

*I light the flame and place the frying pan over it. I hear a distant knock at the door.*

\*\*\*

*I was crushing the formerly eyed peas in a clear dish with the grinding stone slowly and firmly. I added water and it began to all mesh into a smooth looking paste. An eyeless pea paste. I added the minced garlic, the chopped onion, the bell pepper and...had to stop because I remembered I didn't have any cayenne.*

*"Yes - I'd like to get a delivery," I remember telling the general store manager." Send one of those boys over here with some cayenne please."*

*Its funny what pepper can do. Starts a fire. I remember having drifted off to sleep waiting for the store's boy to come when I heard a pounding at the door.*

*"Ms. Lazarine, its me Ken. Ken Cook. The Cook's boy. I got this here delivery - some cayenne."*

*"Come on in son. Have seat" The boy had no shirt on under his apron. Common. Country Boys. His eyes looked deep there was something behind them. He handed me the cayenne and I turned my back to get the money to pay him for his services.*

*I felt dizzy all of a sudden. A haze of sleepiness fell over me. I finally realized that it was not sleep hitting me. Instead, there was an arm strangling me and another hand pulling me down. I felt his strong arms form a grip around my chest. He threw me onto the living room floor where I had been laying. He was medium framed but the weight of his body crushed me. He immobilized me. The force of submission is sometimes overwhelmingly strong. I could not scream except in my head. I was buried under him.*

*I saw his body arch over mine. I remember the welts crawling up from the base of his blue-black spine. His young body all worn and old way before its time.*

*His legs wrapped around - he forced- introducing himself violently- my waist aching- he forced- my arms flailing// my entire body wailing. Made me cry. YOU DEMON! My breath- I felt- he violently introduced himself to me - STOPPPP! I am screaming in my head. RELEASE ME! SHIT he's inside- GET OFF! You mother fucker.*

*His body was arched over mine. I saw the welts crawling up from the base of his spine. Die mother fucker- die!*

*Its that Cook boy mama. That family that moved in up the street. I watched him grow from the time he was ten and I was about fourteen. He kept to himself mostly. His family had funny ways. Remember we used to hear howling coming from behind there house? Sounded like coyotes.*

*His body I examined for a brief while, I saw the arch of his back and its scars at the same time. I saw his father, his sister, his mother on each limb of his bruised body. They were now all inside me. I looked at his face and felt blood escape down my indigo thighs. I closed my eyes tight. With every slow jolt, I felt his shit in me.*

*Wrapping around me. Why was he taking his sweet old time to complete this- with none of his violent acts did he spare me. Instead everything he did was done meticulously. He was taking all his stuff and emptying it into my trembling insides.*

*He engaged me in his twisted psychotherapy.*

*Each repetitive motion he performed was like some jacked up wrapping and digging. He wrapped himself around me and I became a mummy. He buried me-alive-until my eyes didn't see anything but him. My body couldn't feel him but it knew it was subject to him. This, strange burial rite. I woke up from it never having slept. My body was wrapped in gauze. I feel dead. This force of submission that I fought against had completed its task I did what it asked and stopped fighting it.*

*I read something before about shamans in training being buried alive so that they could be humbled. Was this what my mother was talking about-death before rebirth. The importance of experiencing pain before there can be sight. If so, this burial rite she spoke of was a strange sort of burial rite.*

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*The cups of hot oil are jumping in the pan which means it is time to cook this paste by adding heat. I ball up all the paste and add each ball of paste slowly and one by one letting their heads become submerged in the oil. They quickly change from white to brown to black as I absently let them burn. I watch as smoke fills the house. The second time I've burnt the dish. The balls of eyeless paste are charcoaled now but there are still a few that are edible. I don't feel like eating. It's too late. I've been in the kitchen all day. I look closer at the picture of my mother and father on the mahogany desk. For the first time I see something engraved in the frame. It reads:*

*The art of Re-birthing: The Phoenix*

*Fire came over us  
the villager ancestors hover around us  
we lay covered in flames  
amidst piles of ash unscathed*

*My mother knew the power that accompanied dying. All my people are snake and butterfly people. We lost something during slavery. Its whips, its voice, its mentality and rape buried us. I was buried in a similar way. But my mother would say that every tragedy holds a promise. We experience heightened power and sight after we are buried or burned to ash. "Like cooking," mama's favorite saying, "Dying is an art. Learn to do it exceptionally well."*

**Just Be**

*Brionnea Williams*

*Don't say what you're gonna do  
Don't give me tongue in cheek remarks  
Don't hide behind words  
Just Be*

*I can't stay in your corner  
if the room is circular  
I can't back you up  
when your back is against the wall  
I can't be there for you  
if I don't know where you are  
I can't forgive  
the unforgivable  
I can't forget  
the unforgettable  
Gone is the role of the superwoman  
I am me  
I can't be anyone else*

*Don't act right  
Don't act like you want me  
Don't act like you care  
And although I am producing, directing, and starring  
in my drama  
Actors aren't invited for casting,  
so you need not practice you lines or rehearse your scenes  
Don't act  
Just Be*

*Just be real  
Just be in my corner  
Just be there for me  
Just be a part of my life  
Just be a piece of my reality  
Don't say  
Don't act  
Just Be*

***My Best Friend, A Tribute ( I didn't give you permission to cry)***

***Brionnea Williams***

***Grab some tissues  
This is going to be  
a wet one  
For years of dedicated  
friendship you get  
A poem  
Hold the applause  
and take a seat  
but remember  
I didn't give you permission to cry***

***I love you, love you, love you  
(3 times for Kappa)  
I need you, need you, need you  
I can't live, can't live, can't live  
without you  
I was born when I met you  
I was born to meet you  
I met you before I was born  
My Best Friend, Akilah  
I didn't give you permission to cry***

***And here you thought  
stressed was yours  
but it belongs to the both of  
us  
I like to refer to stressed  
as ours  
like our mothers  
(whom we share)  
like our sisters  
(the ones we claim)  
like our food  
(you know our gourmet cuisine)  
like our sense of style  
(we can not be faded)  
like our minds  
(can I have a separate thought)  
like our relationships***

*(parallels)  
like our friendship  
(which makes me realize you  
are here with me at all times)  
I didn't give you permission to cry*

*You are my bodyguard  
& who would imagine you guarding me  
You are my life guard  
& who could think you had that much power  
You are my safeguard  
& who should believe you can protect  
me from everyone including myself  
Being the object of Tug-of-War  
Being one of the prettiest girls I know  
Being what I aspire to be  
Being dependable and available whenever  
I need you  
Being the other side of my coin  
I may never miss you  
because you are with me  
I may never lose you  
because our friendship is a lighthouse signaling  
ships to come home  
so stand up and take a bow  
and receive your tribute  
but remember  
I didn't give you permission to cry*

*Your tribute  
however has no end,  
appendages may be added  
as I see fit. You see your tribute like our friendship  
will last forever  
it goes on and on  
There will be sequels  
So if you must, you have my permission,  
my dear friend, you may cry.*

**Miss Betsy's Pie**

*Jill Toliver*

*Betsy Brown sashayed down that  
red dirt road  
with her sweet potato pie  
Past Mister Reynold's laundromat  
Past Miss Lili's beauty shop  
Past Mister Bobby's liquor store where the  
old and young men left their generation differences  
behind to talk and joke with the other  
Oooh wee!  
Said Little Jim as Betsy Brown sashayed past  
Say Miss Betsy that sho' is a  
sweet smellin' sweet potato pie  
you sashayin' down that street with in yo' hands  
Said old man Johnson  
That pie looks sweeter than any my own momma coulda made  
durin' her pie makin' days!  
Might I have a slice of your sweet potato pie Miss Betsy?  
I'm sorry Mr. Johnson  
said Betsy Brown  
but I made this sweet potato pie special for somebody else!  
And with those words Betsy Brown continued to sashay down that  
street  
with a that everyone knew belonged to her from 300 feet away.  
And the eyes of the old and young men followed her down that red dirt  
road  
And the aroma that she left behind  
made them exclaim  
Lord, have mercy! I wish I could have a piece of Miss Betsy's Pie!*

**Tasha**

*Jill Toliver*

*Ten surrogate mothers and no surrogate dads  
pull babies onto hips by their upraised arms  
little arms raise to be held by any substitute father  
whoever is around when baby cries*

*your sweet nothings promise thoughtlessness to her hopeful ears  
as you penetrate trust with hard thrusts of unclaimed power  
ejaculating bitterness deep within her womb*

*lethal whispers are killing my sisters  
no thought in the world to a mother's simple desires  
quietness stabs her as you avoid the questions  
her anger crystallizes into reality when  
boys stop asking her for her phone number*

*when you leave in the sixth month  
quiet pleas form in her eyes  
only to fall and break  
she holds tightly to the rope of her youth  
only 3 months long  
before she performs the holy ritual to love, cherish and care for  
your child  
her sisters substitute father and lavish kisses on your abandonment*

*partners only long enough  
to produce little hands and little feet  
toddlers wobble around the knees of  
ten surrogate mothers and no surrogate dads  
who pull babies onto hips by their upraised arms*

**Victimized**

*Shelly Faulk*

*Well, here you are  
Convicted of a crime you didn't even  
know you had committed  
The crime of being a woman  
Well, that's it, ain't it?  
Ain't that the reason you're layin'  
on that kitchen linoleum  
as his hard, ham hands  
pummel your body  
attempting to knock the  
beating heart from your chest?  
Beating out his native fury  
on the African drum that was once  
your face?  
While your babies, his babies, y'all's babies  
stand there and watch  
Their shrieks like the cries of  
Remus monkeys  
As he's giving his son a demonstration  
of the art and finesse with which  
he should gift his own bride with, one day  
And aren't you teaching your daughter?  
Showing her exactly how she should one day  
receive that gift?  
With obsequiance and hunched shoulders,  
flailing arms and wails,  
Teaching her that this is not a gift which should be re-  
turned  
"NO!"  
This is a gift that is given and received  
over and over,  
again and again  
But why? Because you're a woman?  
"NO.  
It 'cause my man doesn't like the meal I cooked  
and his shirts weren't washed and folded  
when he returned home from the hunt.  
It's 'cause I didn't keep the children quiet,  
you know he like them quiet,*

*so he can rest.  
But he loves me...  
He just can't help hisself sometimes."  
And that is why the linoleum is awash  
with the blood of your grandmother and your  
great-great grandmother and your  
mama, and  
you  
That proud Franklin nose passed  
down through the generations  
deemed almost unrecognizable by the coroner  
Because you were a woman?  
No.  
Cause of death?  
Love.*

Abena Agyeman

*Most mothers are instinctively maternal, self-sacrificing and over-joyed at their children's progress. My mother is an exception. Rather, she is neglectful, selfish and unfeeling. I could go on, however, this account is not intended to negate and berate her as a mother. Instead, I wish to reveal the story behind the scorn. A story that is independent of me, but I am irrevocably dependent upon. A story that delineates the relationship she had with my father. Through her story I communicate much of my life.*

*When my father, native to Ghana, was a student at Makerere University ( a university in the East African country of Uganda) for his Masters, he met my mother. Then, he says, he was attracted to her because she was strikingly beautiful. She had a certain walk and grace about her that made it imperative to know her. His reason could be thought to be banal but looking back at her pictures, I kind of understand what he means. As a matter of fact, she looked a lot like me: flashy, confident, silly but proud. She wore large African head wraps and chunky earrings. Tailored floor-sweeping skirts that opened at her thigh and revealed her long graceful legs. She looked free as if she could conquer this world in a basupi (traditional baganda garb) while drinking a cup a scorching hot tea (up until this day, my mom can consume large amounts of curdling tea). After the first encounter with my mother, they dated for a number of months off and on, for my father traveled very often to take care of family and explore life. During this time, however, a coup ensued and the notorious military dictator Idi Amin Dada took over the government. His ruling proved to be a very unfortunate one, for he began slaughtering hundreds of people. He had a particular interest in young women though, an interest where he picked, raped, and then killed a young female each night. Thus, the people were in a state of panic. Parents struggled to have their children shipped out of the country. One of those shipped eventually out was my mother. Jaja (grandma) and grandfather, knowing that my parents were in a relationship and my father had almost completed his schooling, arranged to have my mother meet up with him. At the time it seemed as if it were a fairy tale. Destructive tyrant ruling the country, all who were able attempted to flee; and while most people went to stay with relatives, my mother was able to run into the arms of her beau. This fairy tale however, quickly metamorphasized into a reality. A reality characterized with incessant verbal melees. I am not writing of basic disagreements.*

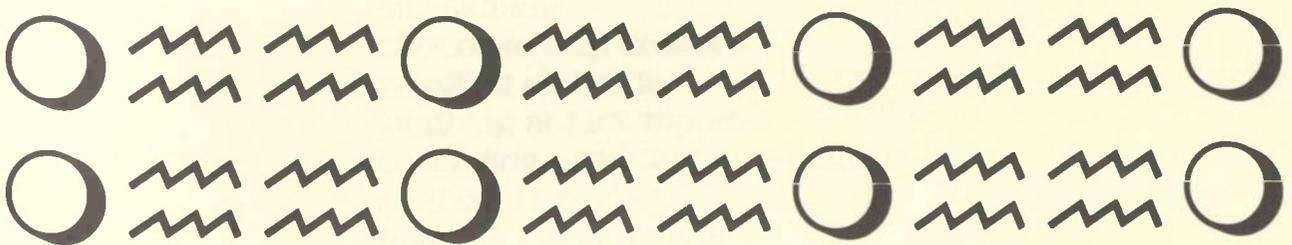
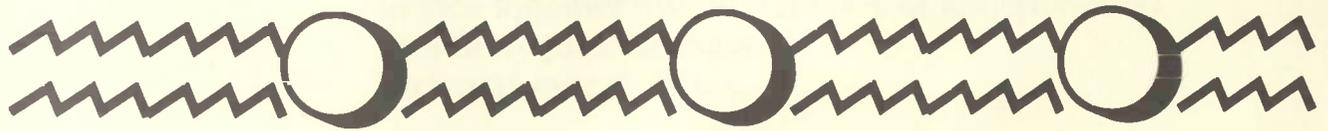
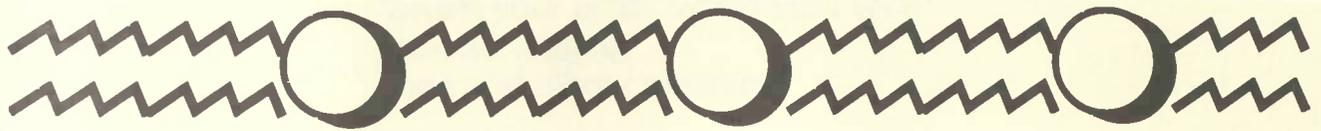
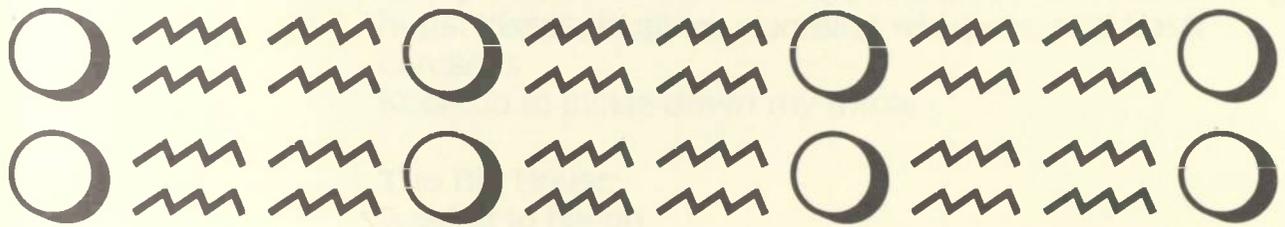
*I am writing of deafening displays of anger, disgust, and regret. What were these confrontations about? They were about anything and everything. Nevertheless, of all the things that galvanized an argument, it was my father's idea of what he thought my mother should be doing in her life. She should cook (my mother does not know how to cook because she is part of the royal family in Uganda, consequently they had servants for everything), exercise and go to school. Paramountly, however, was how she should take care of her children.*

*My father has puzzling stories about me wailing in the middle of the night and how she would sleep right through it. Thereafter, my father arose night after night to lull me to sleep. My maternal auntie complains of this too. As I matured, I would ask my mother to take me to the park, movies, pool, even up until this day, she claims that she is neither a park, movies or pool person and that I should ask my father to accompany me. Whenever I ask her what it was, or is, that she enjoys, she remains quiet. Years passed by, and I realized that it never occurred to her to attend my musical concerts or even my prom. Now, I watch her with my younger sister and like is repeating itself.*

*I know that my father is not a bad man. He is not even an average man. He loves and hates equally hard. A wonderful and passionate influence he has been in my life. Although all of this is so, I also know that he robbed my mother of much of her spirit. It is only now that I, as a woman (also about to be wed) see my mother not as just my mother, but a person. More importantly, she is a woman, a woman who had dreams, a young woman who believed she could do anything. But then she married, married a man because it was socially and culturally unacceptable not to; married a man who had already lived his life, a man who had already made time to travel, locate his occupational passion, and most importantly, to find himself. And so by the time he met my mother, he was ready to start a family life. It used to anger me that my mother was not moved like other mothers, moved by our accomplishments and triumphs. The positive in all this?*

*The positive is that it has made my spirit strong. My father is an omnipresent individual in my life, but I also sometimes feel my mother's spirit-her youth and vivacity is in me! I am still angry but in a distinct way from in my younger years. For now I understand, I know. I wait silently for the day when she will take back her existence, cease the self-pity, and instead seize and indulge in the jubinations of life. I know she can. We all can. I am here to help her recapture her spirit; her life irrevocably remains in her hands.*

# JOURNEYS



**Five-Eighteen**

*LeConte J. Dill*

"Baby Girl, come on over here and give Nana some shuga"  
hugs, kisses, laughter, soothing whispers, and back  
caresses  
Kool-Aid to trickle down my throat

The Big House:  
waking to bacon  
crackling  
and oatmeal  
thickening  
to Romper Room  
and  
"brush your teeth, wash your face"  
ponytail tugging  
knee and elbow greasing

Backyard scavenger hunts  
talking to myself  
when Barbie and Skipper took a hiatus  
fat fingers fumble  
to lace together my only modes of transportation  
Cranberry juice hiccups  
Dick and Jane pursuits

That unwanted rest—  
hands on hips,  
lips poked out  
eyes...  
closed

Full tummy  
still stuffing  
chocolate chip cookies  
wiggling on her lap  
laughing at Jack tripper  
cascading with Captain Stubbing  
cool cold freezing  
baths to lower a fever

Cod Liver Oil gulps  
vaporizers  
inhalers  
pills spill  
across the sink

nestling in her arms  
tears melting into her flannel  
cheeks nuzzling against her wrinkles  
forever in her embrace

**Me for Me**  
*Shana C. Williams*

All I want is someone who wants me...  
Not to change me or fulfill their ideals of what I should be!

A man who understands my style,  
And doesn't care if my dresses are as long as a mile!

One who recognizes that true beauty is within,  
And not in how much I show my skin!

Is it a phase for a brotha' to desire a woman with "hoochie" ways?  
Is this a scene out of "School Daze?"

Yes, I may have the body, and for some it's fine,  
But their ways, simply are not mine.

Why must a woman fulfill this ideal?  
We both know that word of glam is not real!

So, because you cannot stare at my thighs,  
You focus harder to undress me with your eyes!

But...when I ask you accept me for me,  
For all I am and what they cannot be?

## Just Another Day

*LeConte J. Dill*

I kicked my foot from under the pastel sheet as the early morning July heat began to sizzle me within my bed. I readjusted my twisted night shirt and furrowed my brow. My nostrils flared as I inhaled the stale whiff. Oatmeal.

"Dee. Get out here before your breakfast gets cold".

I managed to pull my heavy head from the pillow and trudged into the kitchen. Sure, I should be glad that Mommy was fixing me breakfast, but I felt too grown and too tired for the comfort of oatmeal.

"The milk and butter are in the fridge, and I already put some sugar in," my mother added cheerfully, despite her long shift last night. I could still tell that she was tired, though.

"Thanks, Mommy," I chirped, playing along with her merriment.

Smokey Robinson crooned softly in the background and whisked me away to Summers spent cruising down the Boulevard, instead of crammed into some classroom.

"There you go with that daydreaming again. What in the devil could you be thinking about? That's what got you repeating that Math class as it is. Now hurry up and eat your cereal. I asked Jessie to drop you off at school on her way to the shop."

"That's alright, Mommy. Gayla's picking me up," I reassured her as I slid lumps of oatmeal in the garbage,

I hurried to don my new Hat Pants outfit and remove the rollers from my hair. Carelessly, I threw the Pre-Calculus book into my sack and fussed with my curls.

"There that girl goes blasting that music. Does she even have a license?"

"Bye, Mommy. Smooches," I mumbled while I gently pecked my mother's chestnut coated cheeks.

My mother stood guard at the front door and eyed Gayla suspiciously. Taking careful notes of me locking the car door and fastening my seat belt, Mommy waved from the porch.

"Hey Misses Sue," Gayla yelled over her eight-track cassette's tunes.

Mommy's only acknowledgment was one hand on her hip and a shake of her head. I wish she wouldn't worry so much about me. Maybe now she could get some rest.

"Girl, what yo' mama think, you two-years old or something?"

I laughed along with Gayla, partly embarrassed by her assessment, partly annoyed."

"That outfit is sharp. Who you trying to look good for?"

"Me, myself, and I. I ain't studyin' any of those fools at Washington."

"Why you so uptight? It's the Summer. Our social calendars should be full. I'm trying to live it up while I can".

"Well, you live it up for the both of us , cause Dee is fine just the way she is."

Gayla stared at me over her shades and shook her head.

"Girl, I don't know what to do with you."

We rode the rest of the way to school in silence except for the humming of the radio and the math theorems murmuring in my head.

"Oh, there goes Melvin with his fine self. Is that who you wore those shorts for Dee," Gayla's nudging my arm brought me to the school parking lot.

"Are little nappy headed boys all you think about? I have to run to Math. I'll meet you back here at noon. Are you going straight home?"

Gayla ignored me as she caked more and more lipstick on her full lip. I stood there rolling my eyes as she engaged in a romantic interlude with Fashion Fair.

"Girl, why you standing there, looking at me all crazy? I thought you had to run to Math. You should be running to Mr. Sexy Chocolate Melvin".

I sucked my teeth at Gayla's uncontrollable hormones and carried myself and my sack off to class.

"Nice of you to join us Dee," was my teacher's smart aleck comment to me as I walked into the classroom.

Fooling around with Gayla. Will I ever learn? I silently tread with my head down to the back of the room, pretending not to hear the snickers from my classmates.

My teacher hovered at the front of the classroom, giving his sermon about the never-ending plight of "x". I stared at the numbers in my book and tried to pay attention. As I crunched numbers and twirled a piece of my hair between fingers, I felt a sense of unease. I looked up and my ebony eyes met Melvin's hazel ones. Quickly, I diverted my attention back to "x" - at least I was safe there for now. Don't be silly Dee, he wasn't looking at you. Melvin wasn't paying your curled coif, baby oiled, skinny legged, Hot Pants self any attention.

"And what was your solution, Dee," was my teacher's attempt to calm my self doubt. However, this just seemed to augment it.

"I haven't solved it, yet." I couldn't come up with a better reply, so I was met with more snickers.

"I'd like to see you after class Dee."

Tears of angry embarrassment tried to well up in my eyes. But I couldn't let any one in class know that I had been defeated. I pulled

my shorts down from riding up my thighs, and looked at "x" for the answers to so many of my problems.

I jotted notes, fought with "x" and listened to my teacher's droning as the clock's hand's seemed to move arthritically.

"Read Chapter Five and do the odd problems one through 39. I'll see you tomorrow."

I gathered my notebook and textbook and slid them into my sack. I eased out of my seat and dusted a piece of lint from my shorts. I'm sure that Gayla could find a way to amuse herself in the interim. Besides, this shouldn't take long. . . I hoped.

"Now Dee, you have yet to show me that you truly want to pass this class. Failing again could seriously jeopardize your college application process, and admission counselors would not look favorable upon that. I'm here for extra help if you need it. I want you to succeed, but you have to want it also. . . "

He moved from preaching about the variable "x" to preaching about Dee. At least he mentioned college. Most teachers didn't care a lick about us. We were just living in a concrete jungle trying to survive. But even if I did get accepted to State....Mommy was struggling to make ends meet as it was. She was so adamant about me matriculating and all, but I couldn't bare to put the burden of tuition on her.

I sashayed from the classroom and searched for Gayla's Bug. Melvin and his friends were smoking by the gate. I looked past them as I walked towards Gayla.

"Girl, hurry up, I have to stop by the store. What took you so long?"

"That ole bug-eyed teacher about to run me ragged, that's all. I thought you were going straight home. Mommy will throw a fit if I'm not home soon.

"Give me a break. Grow a backbone, child. It's just a little past noon. It's not like we're going to throw a party or something. You about to put that same gray cloud over my summer that you have over yours."

Again, I sucked my teeth at Gayla's comment. I wished that she would hurry up out of the parking lot; I could feel Melvin staring at me again.

"Oh, is he winking at us?"

"Girl, just drive."

Gayla's *I just have to stop by the store*, turned out to be us stopping by the drug store, the market for her mama's supper, the ice cream shop, and the beauty shop to make an appointment for next Saturday. By the time we finished oohing and aahing over Marvin Gaye in the record shop, it was already six o'clock.

"Mommy is going to kill me."

"She is going to skin you alive," Gayla teased.

"It's not funny. How do you expect her to trust me enough to go out and have a good time this summer, if I can't even abide by the rules she gives me?"

"Calm down. You're gonna get your cute little Hot Pants all in a bunch. Just blame it all on me."

"Mommy already blames everything on you, but that's not good enough."

"I'm surprised that you and your mama don't already have ulcers".

I chewed on my bottom lip for the rest of the way home, partly to quell my anxiety and partly to keep myself from going off on Gayla. How could I let her keep me out so late? Then again, how could I let myself be pigeon-held by mommy's rules again?

I slammed Gayla's door and pulled my sweater close to me as I watched her speed off. I knew mommy would be mad because I hadn't called, and the dinner had probably been waiting, and she had to go to work soon.

I entered the house and quietly shut and locked the door behind me. There my mother sat in the dark living room, rocking in her chair to the lulling sound of Muddy Waters.

"Sorry, mommy, I. . ."

"Your plate's in the oven. The rice may be a little stiff now," she said calmly cutting me off.

I ate my food in silence as mommy readied herself for work. I didn't mean to upset her before her long night. I wish she would just hear me out. Frustrated I went to my room to tackle those math problems.

I awoke to discover that I had drooled all over "x" and that my mother had already left for work before I had the chance to resolve things.

I walked to the living room and found a note addressed to me, written in mommy's scrawl: *A fella by the name of Melvin called for you...*

**Haiku**

*Bonny Renaye DeWitty*

- is this a haiku, even if I am not sure what one is
- is this a haiku, just cause it's short and sweet, but has no point
- i'm trying to write a haiku and be like Haki with a splash of Nikki and a slosh of Gloria
- maybe that's it, perhaps a haiku is less them and more Renaye.

Untitled  
*Jameta Barlow*

Explain to me

why people dance in each others heads  
or lay in each others beds

Explain to me

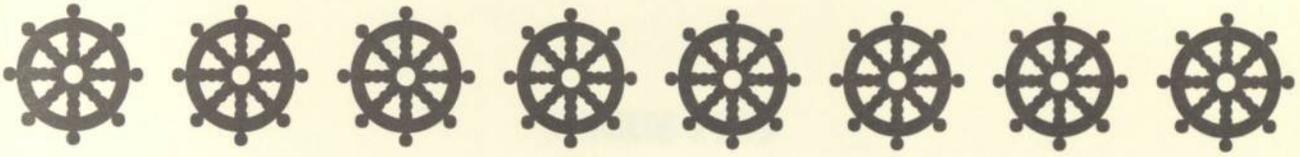
why roses are like a drink from each others souls  
or become dried up debris full of thorns of hurt and pain

Explain to me

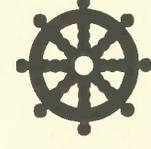
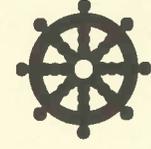
why suddenly one day the world seems as if it is a  
flower blooming  
but can easily turn into a never-ending glooming

Explain to me to me

why spending all day and night with one person  
becomes all you want  
but for some the memories still  
haunt  
you until  
one day  
once again  
someone dances in your head  
only to inevitably dance out of your bed.



# SISTRENS PASSED



## FOCUS 1989

**KIM C. LEE**

### **Victims**

**If I was raped tonight  
Who would care to help me fight?  
The wheels of justice would crush my toes  
Pointing to my habits, my provocative clothes.  
Say I asked for it and had it  
Many times before.  
Making me the criminal,  
Calling me a whore.  
Because I am a woman  
Who does not follow "status quo"  
I drink and smoke and cuss  
And go where the hell I wanna go!  
And though they seem to look at me  
They do not understand  
Because, the only definitions of "I"  
Are those given to me by man.  
And I am just a willing pawn  
An object made to turn him on.  
And when I succeed in what he assigned  
I am the guilty party.  
After all, he is only a man  
He's not responsible for his body.**

**Leisha Stewart**

**The Ballad of Little Johnnie**

**Little Johnnie in his coffin lay,  
Felled by a bullet that went astray,  
Felled by a bullet that went astray.**

**Mama warned him to be wary, but  
Little Johnnie was contrary,  
Little Johnnie was contrary.**

**One day playing in the field,  
Little Johnnie's fate was sealed,  
Little Johnnie's fate was sealed.**

**Caught in a drug deal gone sour,  
Johnnie saw his final hour,  
Johnnie saw his final hour.**

**Now blind to tears and wise to fears,  
Little Johnnie lay silenced for years  
Little Johnnie lay silenced for years.**

**Nicol Hanyard**

**People try so hard  
Laxatives-to get it all out**

**Vitamins-to get it all in**

**Calvin Klein-to be in**

**Liquid Paper-to cover it up**

**Xerox Paper-to do it again**

**Tammy Baker-try again**

**Exercise-to fill it all in**

**Rhinoplasty-to fix it all**

**Salary-to pay for it all**

**The Pill-to prevent it all**

**Makeovers-to help it all out**

**bad credit-to go to jail for it all**

**good credit-to be able to have it all**

**Greed-to want it ALL!**

**People try so hard.**

***Carliss Johnson***

**On Intraracism -if there is such a thing**

**When you look at me  
you see**

**a light-skinned,  
a yellow,  
a redbone.**

**But when I look in the mirror,  
Everywhere i look  
I see the  
gentle  
explosion  
of Blackness.**

## **Focus 1990**

**Tomika DePriest**

### **Tell-A-Vision**

**The idiotbox tricked me into an hour long journey.  
I traveled to places I had only dreamed about  
and  
Places I never thought of.  
I saw myself in different images  
Totally different from MYself.  
When I landed upon the stars,  
I became one of them.  
Zombie-like. All dressed up  
and  
Being applauded for what they called being a "Bitch"!  
All this time I thought a bitch was a female pregnant  
dog?!**

**Yes, the idiotbox ceased ME  
and  
Took me to horrific heights.  
My brown eyes turned into a mystical blue  
and  
My hair took on a blondish tint.  
For a while I thought I looked like a Winner.  
Yet, my brown turned imaginable white skin made me  
into a Sinner.**

**Indeed, the idiotbox was hard to escape.  
It was clearly a case of Rape.  
As if my world had not been rocked enough.  
Yes, I found the idiotbox to be a bluff.  
All fiction and fantasy.  
Beware!**

**Andrea M. Wren**

**Haiku**  
**planted his fists in**  
**her face and she watered and**  
**grew a field of weeds**

*Kim C. Lee*

**Where Have All the Children Gone?**

**Where have all the children gone?**

**The playground is full of empty  
crack viles and dirty dope syringes.**

**no Mary on the monkey bars  
or Sammy on the swings.**

**Where have all the children gone?**

**The schoolyard has a high barbed  
wire fence holding the criminals-  
inside.**

**no Sandie learning science  
or Robert reading aloud.**

**Where have all the children gone?**

**the street game got different  
players – pint size pushers and  
bubble gum whores.**

**no Dana jumping double dutch  
or Billy playing ball.**

**Where have all the children gone?**

**the hospital is filled with crack  
the addicts screaming and shaking for  
the calming white substance. (and it  
ain't mama's milk)**

**no Cathy quietly cooing  
or Malcom in mother's arms.**

**WHERE HAVE ALL THE CHILDREN GONE?**

**has anyone checked the graveyard.**

**Shennette Garrett**

**recipe  
got me a taste of  
a goodbye last night**

**“even if i don’t never get  
with you no mo, i’ll always remember you”**

**your little bit of goodbye was  
bitter  
crumbly and dry  
too brown  
not quite done in the middle  
with a little blood left near the bone**

**looks like i’ma have to  
cook myself up  
a little  
something  
special.**

## Focus 1991

*Phillip Harvey*

### **Ashley's Dance**

**She dances, Ashley dances  
And my eyes dance with her  
Whirl Ashley  
Twirl Ashley  
She prances, Ashley prances  
And my thoughts prance with her  
She is lovely as a rose  
darkened by dusk  
She is a specter of brilliance  
tempered by trust  
Twirl Ashley  
Whirl Ashley  
She dances, Ashley dances  
And my heart...dances with her.**

**She whirls across the theater stage gracefully, each spin melting smoothly into another, and I watch her. She is not the only dancer who pirouettes to the beat of the tom-toms, but God's light bathes her, nurtures her, separating her from the others. She drenches me with her loveliness and my eyes soak in her every movement...her every expression...her every smile. Who is she? I wonder. Who is she to possess such beauty?**

**"The woman third from the left, what is her name?"**

**"Ashley...she's a real comer, the future is hers if she wishes it to be."**

**Ashley dances, and my eyes dance with her. The other dancers feed off her magnificence. Following her as though she were Moses leading them to glory. My eyes follow her as well, basking in her beauty as she parts the ocean and walks amongst the clouds. The black silk of her dress falls loosely behind her, punctuating her every spin, accenting her every stride. A motley colored scarf adorns her head; its silk resting gently against the nape of her neck, highlighting the black-as-night blackness of her hair. The deep ebony and**

magenta of her gown hugs the curves of her body, as she sways to the beat of the tom-toms...She is vibrant...All of the sweet secrets of life seem to lie beneath the surface of her caramel brown skin, allowing promissory echoes of ecstasy to seep through the smile that never strays from her face. She is beauty incarnate and the sheer brilliance of her magnificence burns my eyes...Burns my soul...She dances, Ashley dances and my eyes dance with her.

Ashley prances and my mind prances with her. She is limitless. This is evident in the mockery she makes of space and time. Space becomes nothing more than a dazzled voyeur as Ashley whirls; for she is everywhere at once, ignoring all concepts of boundaries. Leaving awe-stricken gazes from whence she has come and eliciting looks of delirium from where she is to go. Her presence touches every corner of the theater, leaving only her loveliness to linger...No...Space does not hold her. Time stands still as Ashley twirls; for how long have I gazed upon her? Minutes? Hours? For a duration unknown, I have wallowed in the depths of my burning soul where the beats of tom-toms are the only measures of existence...No...Time does not hold her.

But what of me? Is she for my arms to hold? If Time and Space, the powers before which all forces must yield, cannot hold her, then what chance have my modest arms of mortal flesh? I wonder if she has the same perception of love as I do. Will she have a need for the stifling earth-bound love that I could offer? In my arms lie the realities of Human misery, Human joy, HUMAN LOVE...Will that be enough? My soul burns. She prances, Ashley prances and my thoughts prance with her.

Ashley dances, but the pace of her dance slows. She is spent. Exhaustion hangs softly over the smile that never strays from her face, as the tom-toms slow to a stop. It is a smile of affection that Ashley wears, yet it mocks me. The smile mocks me for it dispels my delusions, bringing my burning soul to the realization that she could never be mine. The smile tells me that Ashley has already found the arms that will hold her. She has found them among the clouds through which she has traipsed and the oceans she has divided. Ashley loves the ethereal rhythms of her dance, the driving beat of the tom-toms and it is they which will hold her. Perhaps, one day, my, or another man's earth-bound love will be enough...but not now. Human arms would only restrain her, taint her, mar her loveliness. Ashley's brilliance causes my soul to burn as well. Her place is upon the stage where she can revel in life's sweet secrets undisturbed. The smile reminds me that God's light shines upon Ashley, and because of this, she must dance beneath it.

**Suddenly the silence is broken as the sound of the tom-toms rise once again. One by one, the dancers depart from the stage elegantly spinning to the roar of applause. Ashley whirls across the stage gracefully, each spin melting smoothly into another, and I watch her. Twirl Ashley. Whirl Ashley. She dances, Ashley dances, and my heart...dances her.**

## Focus 1992

*Canangela Roquel Jackson Boyd*

### **God Loves All 24 Flavors**

As I washed the breakfast and lunch dishes, I kept watch on my little baby girl, Cee Cee and her friend Melanie. Cee Cee and Melanie were both seven years old at the time even though they sometimes talked with the sense of ninety-year olds. It was moments like this that gave me time to think and take a few minutes for myself, especially with Cee Cee out of the house. I listened to the two of them talk and plan more games that they could play. The sun was really hot that day, and for a second, I started to make them come in out of the heat, but I decided to let 'em stay a little longer. The radiant light made Melanie's golden skin almost glow; Sorta made me think of those new bulbs that gleam so bright they burn your eyes. And my little Cee Cee's rich brown complexion seemed to absorb the light and replace it with fresh, new waves of energy which she had plenty of. They both looked so stunning that day. Then, my innovative little Cee Cee created a new game called Ice Cream Queen. She designated Melanie to be vanilla Princess and herself to be Chocolate Princess. After a while of laughter and playing, Cee Cee grew tired of being Miss Chocolate and decided to assign herself the vanilla title. But Melanie wouldn't hear of it. "I ain't no dirty chocolate color. I'm vanilla," she preached as she pointed to her slightly pale arm "You're the one who's chocolate colored so you oughta be the Chocolate Princess!" Her otherwise very soft features turned mean and terribly annoyed. "But it's not fair for you to always be vanilla-not fair." Little Cee Cee retaliated with her arms crossed and lips poked. "Well, I'll just go home 'cause you're tryin' to make me be the dirty color!" And in her sassiest attitude possible little Cee Cee replied, "Well, go'n then!" In a fierce turn, Melanie stormed out of the backyard gate and headed across the street her ponytails flopping with the bob of her head. Cee Cee watched her fly in rage across the street; then, she turned slowly toward the kitchen door and slid to the porch. As she approached, I let my eyes fall into the reflection in the dishwater like I had heard nothing. She came in with her arms still folded and lips more poutingly fixed. Heading towards her usual dinner seat, she unfolded her arms so that her face could plop down in her palms. A strange silence fell between us. The only noise being made was the rumbling of the dishes and the loud clang when it hit the sink. "Mama," she finally sobbed, "do you like chocolate ice cream?" "Yea, baby girl. Why you ask?" "Uh, I was just wonderin.'

Melanie don't like chocolate ice cream. She think it's dirty. She say she vanilla and I am chocolate. Mama, do you think chocolate is dirty?" I pulled my eyes away from the soapless dishwater so I could look into her great big Bambi eyes. "Awe, naw baby girl. Yo' mama loves chocolate ice cream. And do ya' know why?" "Why mama?" she inquired with widened eyes. "Well, 'cause it's bitter and sweet, but just right. And when you swallow it, it just slides down your throat real easy leavin' all that rich flavor on your tongue. Now, how can something so good and so soothin' be dirty, baby girl?" She sniggled as I gave her a gentle tickle in the side. "Well mommy, why does Melanie think chocolate is dirty?" she questioned. "I can't say why Melanie feels that way, babe." "Then, why is she vanilla, and I'm chocolate?" I didn't know exactly how I wanted to answer this, especially for a little one with as many questions as Cee Cee. "Well, you that way baby 'cause that's they way God made you. Just think how boring the world would be if everybody were the same. So, God made us all different in some way or other. Do you see what yo' mama means?" "Does God love Melanie more than he does me, because she's vanilla?" "Oh my sweet angel," I whispered, "God don't care 'bout that. All He wants is for you to do what He teaches and to love Him. Always remember that God made you this way because he does love you, and you should thank Him blessing you like He has. 'Cause God loves all 24 flavors and that's all that really matters!" After giving me a glowing smile, she turned to a mirror over the kitchen table, and stood on the chair so she could see. She rubbed her face as if she expected her smooth brown to rub off on her fingers. She stood there glaring at her reflection for a second before turning around to smile at me. "Mama, Melanie don't know what she talkin 'bout. Chocolate ain't dirty, it's delicious!" When I saw the light in her eyes, I knew that I had told her right and that she understood.

## Focus 1994

*Sabrina Mcdanial*

**A sister is someone who isn't afraid to let her breasts touch you when you hug  
Squeezing you  
Her spirit reaches out  
Through nipples, tissue and skin  
Closing the distance  
Of time apart  
Denied emotions  
And negated female experience  
Through osmosis  
She speaks the painful truth  
That live  
-silence by patriarchal language  
In solitary confinements  
Rejoicing who she is  
Validating her way of being  
In a five second embrace  
She rubs your back  
With the comforting promises  
That tomorrow  
We will remember  
Our natural rites  
    and together  
    protruding defiantly  
    through institutionally defined restrictions  
    loosening ourselves from the grips and attempts  
    to mold us  
    claim us  
    and suck our life sustaining strength  
    we stand  
    proud and erect  
    blessed with the heated kisses of the sun  
Your eyes connect  
The contact is broken  
But this pact  
Conceived in five second soul-mating**

**Forever remains  
A smiling memory away.**

*[Faint, illegible text, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.]*

*[Faint, illegible text, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.]*

*Iadessa E. Pearson*

**I was so busy  
I was so busy  
reaching back  
pulling up my  
Black Brother,  
Big and Strong  
with Desire  
bogged down with  
mental absorption  
and bleeding- - -  
raw with the new day's  
lashing of  
Hopelessness.**

**We so long had  
been shackled together  
that I didn't notice  
his weight  
was making me sink  
slowly,  
ever so slowly,  
into the depths  
of my soul  
and drown in my  
Aspirations for Us.**

**Sabrina Mcdaniel**

**The Corners Of My Mind**

I run to the corners of my mind  
When foreign goods assault  
Alien notions, stereotypes, roles  
Drape themselves around my shoulders  
Gently massaging me to sleep.  
While others scream at me  
From Time, Vogue and Ebony.  
And the shuffling feet of capitalism  
Hustles me into chambers  
Where I'm fed  
Diet, beauty, health, wealth.

I run to the corners of my mind  
When I've wandered into the marketplace  
Selling pieces of nonentity  
    Buy one eye  
        get the other free  
    Big breasts over here  
        Thirty six C  
    Firm buttocks  
        Tight stomachs  
    High cheekbones  
        Fabulous skin tone  
We'll make you what/should be  
On sale today  
-For the price of your soul.

I run to my mind  
When they've put a price on me  
And I fear  
Soon I will be who they see.  
Down the streets of Identity  
I run viciously pursued  
Until Truth and Self intersect.  
Only then do I allow myself to breathe  
In this corner of my mind  
open and embracing me.

**Stefanie Dunning**

**to all the women who dare to love me  
one day i was walking with a girlfriend  
and she was staring  
at my breasts  
i asked her why  
she said because  
they moved**

**they moved?**

**so i looked at her  
breasts solid  
against her chest  
and asked her  
how  
she got them that why  
and furthermore  
did she like it?**

## Focus 1998

**Saptosa Foster**

**Pardon me.  
I hope you don't mind  
my flat nose and my  
black skin  
'cause they can be  
a nuisance.  
Please excuse my  
skinny legs and my  
wide forehead;  
I know they get in  
your way sometimes.  
Forgive my short,  
nappy hair and my  
heavy hips.  
They don't mean no harm.  
It's just that they  
tend to speak for me before  
I've even opened my mouth.  
And I wanted  
to tell you  
before you heard them  
that  
I *am* beautiful.  
Just so you know.**

## EDITORS' THANKS

All of my gratitude and love goes foremost toward my role models; my father, Dr. Robert Lee DeWitty Jr., and my mother, Vernell "Bonnie" Parkerson DeWitty. Thank you daddy and mommy for bringing me into this world, into your life, and giving me this wonderful journey. All of the good that I have done and will do, is because of you. I love you two-my unit- as it is you, whom allows the sun to shine upon my face. I would also like to thank my sissydon, my two bros and my nephews. Thanks gang for listening to my chatter.

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Thanks my loves, I wish you all days of green and round greatness.

Bonny Renaye



To my family, who has supported me throughout all of my many dramas this past year, I would like to say thanks. My mother, for giving me the advice that only she could give, and my father for always providing a sympathetic ear. Gia and Adrienne, thanks for all of the sisterly support.

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Kellye A. McKenzie