

roots and culture
winter 2000





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from the editor

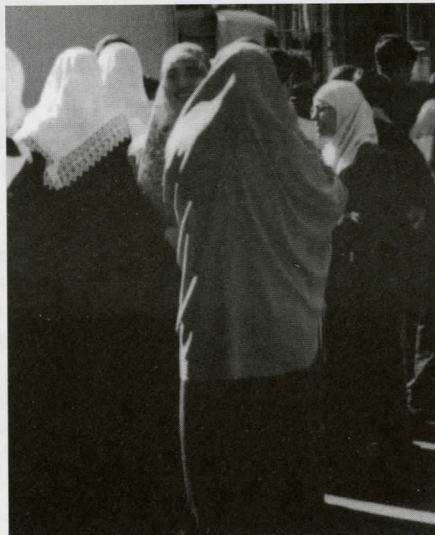
When I was young, perhaps fifteen, I thought I was a rebel poet, secretly venturing into Greenwich Village, spouting Nikki Giovanni and Amiri Baraka poems. But, of course, I was no rebel. I was simply restless and hungry to lose myself to the world. So, I drenched my life in poetry, continued my adventures in New York, bought my first Billie Holiday CD, and met a 50-year-old painter who became my high school mentor and helped me fulfill my aching desire to become an artist. He told me that as a writer I must never confuse the vibrancy and possibilities of the earth with the futility of the world. His advice rests on the idea that the earth is a grand and cosmic creation; the world is of purely human manufacture. The process of becoming an artist, he explained, like most other human occupations, involves the inevitable search for wholeness in a decidedly incomplete world. But be patient, he cautioned, for we do not spring whole like Athena from the head of Zeus. Wholeness is a lifetime endeavor.

Each artist of color in Roots and Culture magazine realizes the acute difference between the corruptly constructed world and the lambent earth. By recognizing this vast difference, they are able to illuminate the political and social injustices of the world while recognizing that there is epic in the domestic, that we each, despite the seeming smallness of our existence, live grand lives. Epic lives. Each artist in this issue places a new piece in the whole. They travel to what James Baldwin once called the "wastelands," the deepest and barest parts of ourselves, while simultaneously embracing what Arundhati Roy dubbed "the god of small things," the necessary belief that life is lived in the details. Their words and visions are so hip, as Ms. Giovanni would so righteously proclaim, even their errors are correct. And their combined talent has constructed a winter edition so tight, it should make each of us yearn to (re)discover the rebel poet within.

Chi Mgbako



©freeha rubbani



Hyderabad Evening
Sham-e-Ali al-Jamil

Balmy Deccan evening
makes it easy to weep
near parched fountains
and crumbling architecture

Where birds dive
through cracked arches
and solitude helps stitch
patches of ones life together.

Tears flow with ease as you sit
in secluded courtyard and wonder,
what was this place before the storm?
we, who are in exile.

Artist Profile: Sham-e-Ali al-Jamil is a Muslim woman of South Asian descent. A writer and a poet, she currently works as a public benefits advocate for survivors of domestic violence at the Urban Justice Center in New York City.

|||||| **WE, WHO ARE IN EXILE**

Sisters' Supplications

Freeha Rubbani

Twilight. In solitude
we rise.
Sacrificing the comfort of
slumber for this daily jihad,
we orientate ourselves East.
You stand and bow,
humility's tenacious
gravity maintaining
your downward
gaze.

I prostrate, accepting
my miniscularity.
The ground reciprocates my kiss.
Faced with Glory,
we are mere reductions.

Our geometry merges—
We are particles,
I form the horizontal to
your vertical.
We recite and
repeated your right
angle merges with mine,
bridging time and
space.

ARE AT THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE CREATOR |||

The Light of both worlds blesses
this Intimate square.
Our square fits perfectly within
this Divine triangle.

Our humble sixty
degrees are the lower bipartites
of this tripartite trinity.
We were displaced letters. Salaam.
We are now complete creation; I being
aliph to your meem,
we form a perfect arabesque.

You Umm Lu' Lu', Mother of Pearl, glorify
The Sustainer in the kinesis of
your upward sway.
I-Umm Turaab, Mother of Dust, submit
and secede, melting
into the ground.
We are at the Footstool of the Creator,
our tongues uttering encrypted
verse—a language cloaked by veils.
We pray for our twelve year-old
martyrs—young blood is spilled daily on
sanctified ground.
We are remnants
of an ancient, displaced clan,
striving for an abode where

we are neither alien nor strange.
Maintain the vigil—repeat
and recite. Let the words
drip from your mouth.
Praise what was Written.
We were created from naught,
by-products
of intermingling fluid.



©freeha rubbani



Our dialectic climaxes
in our final prostration. This is our daily
victory—the breach of finite
timespace.
You and I are Believers—
lovers and letters, merging daily
at calligraphic junctions in
the perpetuity of pilgrimage.
Ameen.

Queen Min Bi

Ishle Yi Park

Queen Min was the bomb. Smooth forehead, perfectly parted thick hair, and plum lips at fourteen enough to make any pedophile happy. So the king hand-picked her,

orphan Korean child born in Yuhju, stringless, to be a royal marionette - who would have guessed she owned a wooden heart to match any politician?

Maybe she abused her handservants. maybe she pumped into her husband backwards doggy style with an early bamboo Korean strap-on and that's why she never had children.

maybe that made Hwang so happy even after she died, throat sliced open by invading Japanese, he carved her name into a slab of man-sized marble by hand, honoring a woman who snatched his kingdom

without a glance back at history, what those scrolls dictated for female behavior.

I want to be like her, befriending pale-skinned Russians and infuriating her father-in-law

enough for him to conspire towards her death while commoners rested head to stone pillow and dreamt of her brow raising power, 16 when she married, 32 when she died,

before Japanese flags flew over our country, before Confucianism enslaved women, before Korean housewives were beaten without domestic violence laws to shield their swollen faces. Half a world away

nisei Korean children flinch at the smacking of skin on skin, memorize the language of moans and curses like bullets, these songs the only remnant of our culture, and I wish she was more than dust and legend,

more than a sold-out opera at Lincoln Center or part of a wistful poem, I want to inherit that tiger part of her, the part that got her killed, the part that inflamed my eyes and had me tracing the walls of her birthplace

with my fingers in the rain, wanting to collect and construct a woman out of this myth. So by the Chinese calendar she's a rabbit, her favorite drink was macculi, the homemade forty of Korea, her left

breast slightly heavier than her right and maybe she kissed her husband on the forehead before overtaking his kingdom, as Queen Min Bi, so loved by all they called her Mama.

Ishle Yi Park is a recipient of a fiction grant from the New York Foundation of the Arts. She has been published in New American Writing, DisOrient, The Brooklyn Review, Dark Phrases, SLAM, and the NuyorAsian Anthology. She wants to move to Korea next year. If not, Oakland.

Untitled Monologue

Miranda McLeod

Sshhhhh...ssshhhhh...hold on a sec. Look at this. Do you see all the people getting off? Look at her, and him, and her and him and him...See them? Isn't that just amazing? All the white people get off the train, here. Highland Avenue. Last stop for the white folk. After here it's only the blacks and latinos, latinos and blacks. Some whites, sure, but there's something different about them. The whites that stay on after Highland Avenue, they're not quite like the ones who get off. It's the fat, see? The fat, that's how you can tell where a person is headed, how long they stay on the Y line before they hurry off. The fat of people who stay on the train and the fat of those who get the hell off is different, it hangs different, they wear it different, it's caused by different things. Those who stay on, well, that's a greasy food fat. That's the fat of chicken and rice and slices and meat patties and gravy, whole plates of chorizo and egg, tortillas, steaks, fat of the fried, fat of the sizzling, fat of the full-bellied waddle walk, fat of the loosened belt, fat of the loud, the hearty, the feeling oh so good belch. But it's also hard fat. It's fat from the long 10 block walk up hill past broken concrete and blurred graffiti. Fat from three kids. Protective fat. Fat that says don't fuck with me, motherfucker. Fat that could perhaps slow a bullet, if thick enough. And it's not just black folk, not just latinos, latinos and blacks. No, white people have it too, if they stay on past Highland Avenue. Not too many of them, of course, but they are there, and they do have that good food thick skinned head down shoulders hunched, leave me alone, leave me alone, that's right, do not fuck with me, do not fuck with me motherfuckaaaaaaa fat. Fat that must survive in shitty conditions. No color to that fat, nope, it's the fat of the poor.....

Now, the fat that does get off at Highland Avenue, that's mostly white fat, though yes, yes there are the black folk that get off too, and they got that get-off-at-Highland-Avenue-fat. It's an aristocratic fat, that's what it is. The fat of sitting. A comfortable fat. A poochy fat, on men its like a little plump booty, little plump breasts, around the neck a bit, the fingers. On women it's the fat of no job. Part time job. Volunteer job. The fat of Gucci. Chanel. A fat that doesn't know McDonalds. Pastry fat. Latte fat. Time-out fat. That all gets off at Highland Avenue, see? And I wonder...I wonder why that is? What is it about Highland Avenue? What forces hover at this stop? What is it about the air, the light, the soot, the trash that starts at Highland Avenue? It takes fat and beats it, squeezes it, hardens it. The photons work differently on the electrons here, after Highland Avenue, energy moves different, substance changes form. Aristocratic fat can't survive after Highland Avenue. It becomes hard too soon, it can't handle the piss and the dogshit, the toothless smelling people, the broken mountainous sidewalks. Aristocratic fat melts under the heat of 24 hour bodegas. Aristocratic fat becomes poor fat after Highland Avenue. That's why most of them white people get off. Protecting their fat, see. Protecting that aristocratic fat.

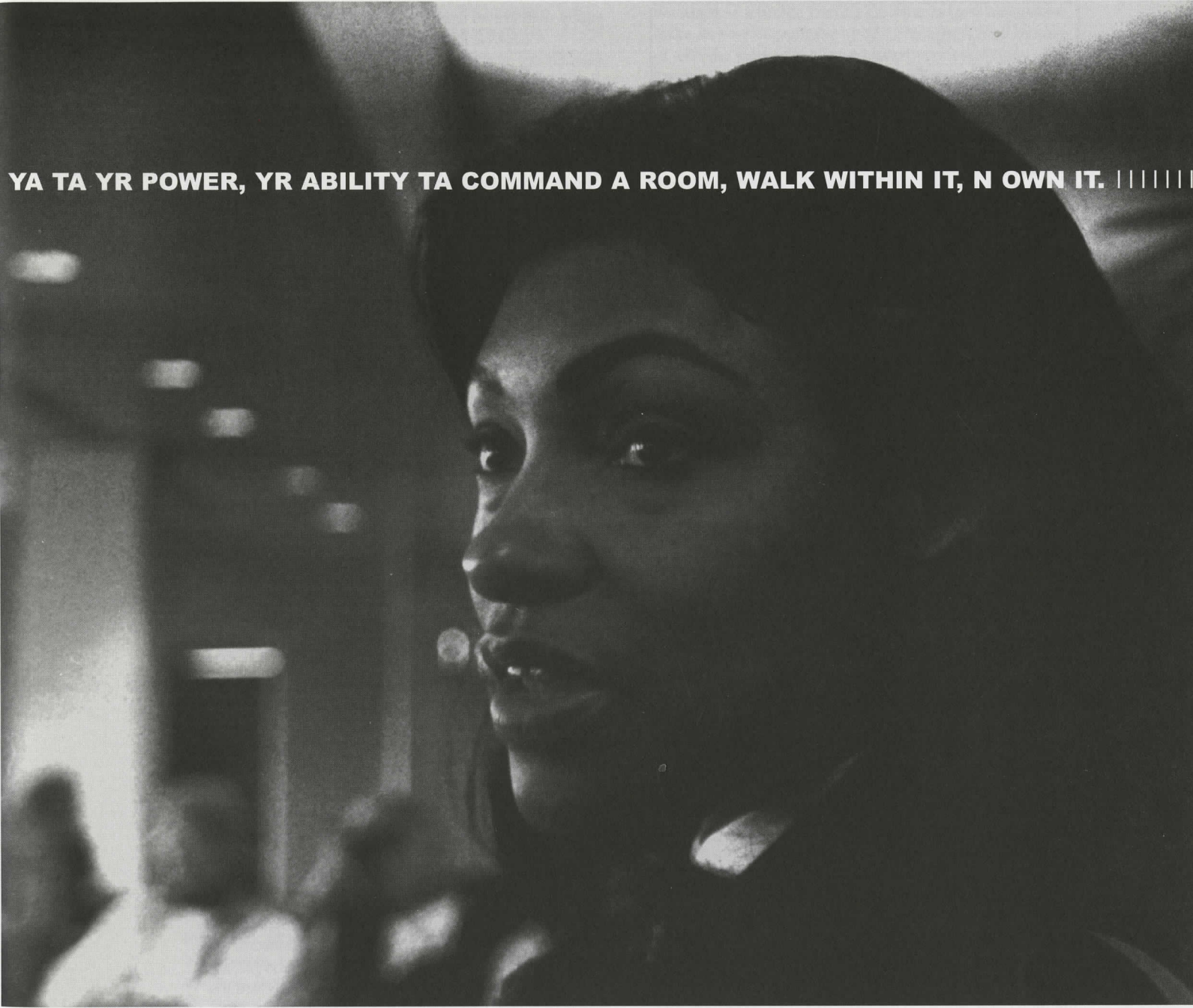
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kinky fuzzy naps
my comb is missing a tooth
now that's resistance.

Samirah Umarah Raheem

©latham thomas



BUT NONE CAN COMPARE YA TA YR POWER, YR ABILITY TA COMMAND A ROOM, WALK WITHIN IT, N OWN IT.

honey n vinegar/my first butch

Ahimsa Timoteo Bodhrán

... for Vincent Villanueva & Yoseñio V. Lewis

momma, u were the first butch i ever loved. many have come n gone since, but none can compare ta yr power, yr strength, yr ability ta command a room, walk within it, n own it. u were always at the center of my thinking, the white elephant of my consciousness. it is around u i orbited, a satellite ta yr sun.

i am the woman u never could b. look at this hair, these nails, this skin, these teeth. this is what money can buy. this is what money did buy. yr money. yr life. i attract men like honey ta yr vinegar. i am the one stung by bees, not u. but it is not their mark i bear, but yrs.

i remember the nights i spent at yr feet, clippers in hand, emery board, bottle of jergens, rubbing the life back into yr toes, the fallen arches, the horny heels. it has always been this way with me: me at the feet of women, catching the crumbs that fall ta the floor, lifting them up ta my mouth, giving thanks n praise, while other boychildren ran about me; the girls, they too had their way. hairs unbraided, drifted down, side ta side motion, swaying, me, listening for clues.

from down below i could c yr legs, varicose-veined, ridges n craters, rivers bulging their banks, traversing yr terrain, thin-legged spiders crawling up towards yr crotch. is that where their nest lies, between yr legs? where their nest lies, where the rest, yr nest, lies. where i come from is like that. the wart on yr finger, rubbing yr rings, the golden wedding band, rubbed raw. rings, rings, ringlets, how i hated yr hair, the smell of chemicals, the beauty shops we went ta; how i hated yr hairdressers, permanents that never lasted being yr only ever-variable constant. how i wanted more than anything for u ta b beautiful: femme. small. soft. quiet. but, no, u remained big n butch, butch n hard, as hard as yr heels n as ugly, as loud as anything n as ferocious. u were the one i always ran from, the one i always ran ta, the one whose love n approval i needed most, n sometimes got.

u r not the kind found in card stores, no high-priced hallmarks hold yr image, no sitcom icons bear yr name. once i feared losing u, lost in a place without time or recorded history. now i fear neither death nor assimilation.

momma, i now know all that i ever needed ta know: i know that when u die, i will become u.

You

You are just enough,
no skin or muscle wasted.
The thought of you
makes me get out of my chair.

Hallie Montoya Tansey

Love Haikus

Anthony Morales

Sunlight low smoke hangs
shadow paints sky on morning
side walls eyes sparkle

with new energy
smiles are flowers of laughter
raindrops tears down cheeks

into deep patient
puddle palms sweat ripples ripe
moon breeze caresses coast

You move me like air
on roofs stars close touch heaven
with soft kisses on lips

If clouds were playgrounds
we'd monkeyflip with thunder
lightning jungle gyms

Fall down on cotton
no blacks blue rainbow's horizon
we survive on love

Excerpt from *The Village*

Katori Hall

Chapter 1:
"The Bri-Bri Wars"

"Leave my brother alone!" Her sharp voice almost blasted the dog's heart out of his chest. She twisted her hip to the right, then rocked it to the left, all the while moving her caramel neck like a snake. Just like the way she saw Big Mama do it when she caught an attitude with anybody. Bri-Bri's swinging hips and neck made her whole body rock to an invisible syncopated beat that only Queen Bri-Bri could hear. Her dance took a whole two seconds but the dog continued to slink closer. Tyrin, her 2 and _ year old brother (or 30 month-old brother whichever baby conversion chart you prefer).

More diaphanous foam fell from the puppy's mouth as it trotted from the garbage dump behind the apartments. Baring his teeth, the puppy inched closer and closer, bringing the smell of week-old banana peels mixed in with greasy, ghetto Chinese food into the purview of Bri-Bri's nose. He stanky! The residents had made the back street behind the Village Apartments a virtual makeshift dump. The project mamas beat the hell out of their children if they were ever found poking through the

HER MOTHER HAD CHOSEN TO VEER OFF THE CHOSEN PATH

junk on Levee Road. Of course, not out of sheer wickedness did they smack their brown bottoms, but more out of fear that their kids would contract typhus or tetanus from the hypodermic needle crop growing in the cracks of Levee Road. Next to the Franklin sewage pumping station No. 34, the dump added to the notorious aroma that hung over the Village—and only the Village—like a constant mist. It was like God had quarantined the Villagers, forever making them lull in the stench of their lives, especially at seven o'clock every night, when the town of Sugar Ditch had to process its raw sewage.

But to the Village kids, Levee Road was a modern-day Israel—flowing, not with milk and honey, but with shards of glass and burned out Pontiac Cameros of drug dealer's past. There was an old tin abandoned building bursting with tossed couches, cars, and crack vials. A playground for the project kids of the Village, but all at the risk of the nice ass whipping with an extension cord.

And here, some rabid dog from Israel wanted to eat her brother. Tyrin, absolutely oblivious to the light pad of the puppy's paws pounding across the pit-filled road, continued to bend forward in hopes of correcting his balance. A brown load made his pink Pull-Ups sag, exposing a hint of his cocoa bottom. With one hand grasping the load and the other rubbing the furry ponytails dotted across his head, he poked his lip out in contemplation. He leaned forward more, ham hock legs moving in wobbly steps toward his big sister. With her stiff, greased ponytails slicing through the air, Bri-Bri pelted the shedding

puppy with gravel from the pit in the road.

"LEAVE HIM ALONE!" Bri-Bri's usually light voice taking on a demonic tone. She threw like a girl, winding back for power, but ending in an ineffective flick of her wrist at her side that was usually saved for flirting on the playground.

The puppy still did not listen. Perhaps it was deaf.

Bri-Bri picked up more rocks, screeched with eyes closed, and whipped her head back as her hand funneled more rocks the dog's way. Wind whooshed through her front gaps topped by pink and ebony gums, and she ran closer to Tyrin. The puppy, a bit defter in his defense movements, dodged the bullets spewing from Bri-Bri's hand. However, Tyrin's hair was filled with the shrapnel. The puppy maneuvered away from the battle, and all that rang throughout the Village were the cries of Tyrin and the curses of Bri-Bri.

Suddenly, a pack of boys in starched Ralph Lauren t-shirts and creased jeans burst forth from the damnation of Levee Road. Riding in tandem on bikes, the young boys' speech resembled a highly ecstatic sermon with every other word punctuated by "Mothafucka" or "niggah, please!", instead of "Hallelujah" or "Lord, Jesus!" Leading the pack was an 8-year-old juvenile delinquent Martin, a.k.a. Mr. Ears. Project legend had it that Martin had already smoked marijuana, shot a gun, and had done "it" with Skanky Shanika, making him first in many things, except for reading. Sitting on the handle bow of

his crony's bike, he barked commands as his unit crossed Bri-Bri.

"Whatcha ya, lookin at gurl?" Mr. Ears yelled, turning his head back to continue Bri-Bri's ice-princess stare.

His henchman Lil' Melvin struggled to keep the bike balanced as he pushed his obese legs up and down. His legs plowed into his chest with every rotation making the beads of sweat roll down his double-chin. The metal seat creaked incessantly beneath the mammoth Lil' Melvin.

"Obviously nothin," Bri-Bri mumbled deciding to stop staring. She rolled her eyes and continued to gaze at her brother. Knowing he riding on his lil' sistah's bike...

"I heard that!" said Martin as he swiveled his saucer-like ears, and pumped his shoulders upward as though he was actually going to jump down from the comfort of the handle bow to come beat Bri-Bri's butt.

"Yeah, Brianna Ashley Morgan!" spat out Lil' Melvin. The whole gang buckled over in laughter at Bri-Bri's obviously un-ghettoized name. Her mother had chosen to veer off the chosen path and give Brianna a name that had crossed the Atlantic Ocean long before the American Revolution. Instead of the phonetically spelled, innovative names, such as Shuaquana or Karizma (Charisma), Cheroqui (Cheerokee) or Daymeean (Damian) found in the Dictionary for Ghetto Names Baby Book, Brianna Ashley Morgan's name had obtained the reproducibility factor of a "Jessica" or "Karen."

Unlike Melvin, Brianna did not have the infamous 'Lil' implanted forever at the beginning of her name. Children who had received the notorious L-I-L had often outgrown it by the age of nineteen. However, many 30 year olds were still being called Lil' Larry or Lil' Ronny. "I ain't gonna be lil' forever..."

Brianna held on to her innate ghettoness through her nickname, simply a duplicated syllable that rolled off the tongue of her little brother easier than Brianna Ashley Morgan.

"Shut yo fat ass up!" Brianna challenged the group placing her scarred hands on her early developing hips.

"Turn around," Martin shouted.

Lil' Melvin slowly wheeled the bike around. Brianna stood at one end of the parking lot half wanting them to come her way.

"Let's get her!" Martin whispered.

Lil' Melvin squeezed his legs together to put his little sister's bike into motion. Slowly and surely, it picked up momentum as the bike sped along the parking lot breaking gravel and glass in its wake. Martin projected from the bike like a gargoyle hood ornament. The air sliced past his ears making it hard for him to hear the "Stop, Lil' Melvin ain't got brakes!" coming from the crew.

Lil' Melvin tried to stand up so that he could efficiently pump his legs and make the bike go faster. Instead, Lil' Melvin suddenly fell back down and hit his

...AND GIVE BRIANA A NAME THAT HAD CROSSED THE ATLANTIC LONG BEFORE THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION.

scrotum sack on the constantly creaking metal seat. Choking on his spit, Lil' Melvin crunched down in pain, perhaps the only crunch he had ever done in his life. Lil' Melvin's head lunged forward knocking Martin from his perch. Arms spread like wings, Martin flew into Bri-Bri knocking her ten feet into another yard.

Moments later, Bri-Bri found herself toppled in Mr. Grave's freshly cut grass. The shrapnel of grass bits became embedded into her brown ponytails. The Bergamont grease acting as Elmer's glue made her hair more colorful than the collage she had created in Mrs. Mavis class. Her mouth formed a silent O. She did not move. In fact, no words came out of her pink-lipped abyss for at least 15 seconds. Later, the screams came fusing into the satellite dishes at the sides of Martin's head. To cover up the heightened amplitude, Martin chose to turn up the notch on his own laugh—or snort, rather—so Mr. Ears/Swine/Beelzebub/Martin roared with laughter.

She mumbled in the inaudible voice of a freshly snag-a-tooth child, "Shut up, muthafucka!" Running over to him, her fist made meaty contact with his ear.

The two wrestled in the grass with fists flying and smacks resonating amongst the burgeoning crowd. The crowd moved into the street as Bri-Bri and Martin rolled into the glass and gravel wrestling mat of the parking lot.

"Get out the skreet," the project kids screeched

in unison as a brown peeling Cadillac surged forward to make its way through the circus. The horn blared mixing in with the jeers of the crowd, creating a cacophony. Seeing Bri-Bri being pummeled by Martin, Shaunna yanked the key out of the ignition and peeled herself from the cracked leather seats.

"What in the Hell is going on!" Shaunna heaved open the car door. Seeing her baby, Tyrin, just standing on the side of the road, she ran and scooped him up in her slender arms jingling with nickel bangles.

The crowd parted like the Red Sea, exposing the remnants of our heroine Bri-Bri. Posed stiffly, she lifted her ragged head to look up at Mama. Her hair, now unconfined by butterfly barrettes or dollar store rubber bands, flew freely in the wind. Her face was tear-streaked but void of wetness. Crouching down in the sediment, she grasped her bloody knee closer to her flat chest. Her smooth skin inflamed with pain pulsed with embarrassment, for she knew the consequence of her actions. Silence came...silence. Her project mama slapped her across the face.

"I told you to watch out for Tyrin while I was gone! Didn't I? DIDN'T I?" Shaunna Ashley Morgan asked.

On top of that Brianna was beginning to break out into the hives, and her eye swiftly puffed and folded in on itself.

Corcovado

Akil Baker

Twilight dances on the swelling sea as an old guitarist sinks into song. Every evening this lonely skeleton sits, with lanky legs crossed, swathed in frayed linen shrouds and serenades the ocean. Tonight, his dead eye stares into its cloudy white blanket and evokes the moments when it was awake in a flutter of colors that approximate a feminine face. Muscles twitch deep within his temples. Billowing wind tousles the fringe above his frigid calves and sings through the hole exposing his pale shoulder. It is as if his feeble fingers find the cat-gut strings without his guidance. He savors their sorrowful song along with the whispering sea like a blind man's meal. Images from his surviving eye blur into iridescent circles of light, as a salty tear hovers, then slides down his face between clenched lips. When he opens his mouth, it makes the sound of a kiss.

Water

Jahi (Marcus Anthony Hunter)

Starting in a place where reflections splashed around in puddles
where yellows, greens, and reds meet in the form of adolescent gollashes

Can I cry for you?
Melt for you?

Slide down your canal-like back providing safe passage
between sorrow and distress, through the sea of soft brown

See if only pain could melt like snowcaps on mountains...

Sometimes I cry so that hydrogen can mesh with my sadness and create something as serene as
water

See the salt of my tears carries death like that sea, but I am alive...

Too much at once...I breathe

I breathe cause breathe traps air birthing light on hollow dim shadows pulsating across
charts like flat-lines
beep...beep beep

but I am not dead
my pain moves across me like water
drip drop drip drop

Monotone impossibilities, like acid making water bleed

I watch cause sight reflects the brilliancy of itself---a sort of reflexive conceit

I watched folks float on words born in calligraphy
children forsaken for graffiti's aesthetic promises

watched... the divine damned
and bathroom stalls become bedroom walls
becoming kitchen floors

shifting open and close doors

Creating this void of air removing all molecules in efforts to remain absent

Wind breezing air birthing light in this void

Breathe confronting rhythm conforming into melodies---fiddled across a vacant sky

Like a drunkard-depressed cause he can't find his liquid's pulse

I must breathe

I breathe cause breath traps air birthing light on hollow dim shadows pulsating across
charts like flat-lines

beep...beep beep

but I am not dead

my pain begins to harden like icy-water
drip drop drip drop

Monotone impossibilities like acid making acid bleed

dripping liquid memories that boil over from the sky
in my eye

down my cheeks

through my veins

till they reach my feet

My pain sliding down a river of acidic dreams---an unconscious suicide

So I journey back to the beginning,

The place where questions are answers

Do you bleed?

I bleed clear, my mother once told me

She said pain, like God, is too real to have color

it's smooth like chocolate

and spreads like water

slave skin

The scars on his back
spread over his chest where they
become beauty marks.

La Marr Jurelle Bruce

Decline, set, mimic
the sun! Bathe in the blithe-blue
darkness, 'tis all done.

Carlos Javier Vazquez

Untitled

Andrew Maerke

I.

Sighs—a closing book—

One by one pages stuck

Against each other, eyes, mouth, chest

Pull in upon their binding.

The wife says something to her husband.

He does not respond.

It is later and they are

Making love. Everything is oblivion.

Duende. They might as well be in

The tropics, have you ever seen people so absurd.

I would make a river of your head

And dive into it—feel the banks

Scratch against my knees—no, my lips,

I would cup your river in my hands.

There is my reflection rippling

In the surface of a subway car,

And behind me—savages.

Actually, the savages might push me in

And then I would fall into your cold. Turbulence.

II.

Pyramids: monoliths squeezed out

By hydraulic pressure—Saqqara and Zozer

They might as well have grown

Like mountains or milk cartons

Crushed between the earth's palms—

Shh—this is a waterfall

Or an exhalation,

There is such a difference

Between power and oblivion.

III.

In the sexual arena you have become

A gladiator or a tiger,

You are mercenary as the clouds.

IV.

We are giraffe.

We are african mammals

Licking salt of cave walls.

We are lovers flung from a pail

Upon the bed, pressing as poems

Into paper do, ink sinking

Into paper sinking grain by grain.

We are elegant and oblivious as

Giraffe.

V.

Last night's wine

Has been knocked across the sky.

All sound sucked back

In morning's dry mouth.

I go down with it

Skin brown, against white
From my bed,
From my pillow,
The seasons turn
have turned and left
It was the summer
Was the spring, no the cherry
Blossom festival
her hair spread petals.

Three Poems

Andrew Maerke

I.

Your breasts are hanging

pears or gourds

Full of the rice liquor

That ancient poets

Always carry.

I throw my neck back

And drink deeply.

Your body is

a weathered gourd

for the rice liquor

That ancient poets

Clutch in cold sleep.

I throw my neck back

And drink deeply—empty.

After sleep I rise

the smell of liquor rises

from my skin.

II.

I am hanging

From your lips'

delicate pout

caught and listless

like a lynched man.

I have strung myself

Up there to catch

An air thick without

time or motion.

III.

With my kisses,

Or my fingertips,

I am walking

The slow rise

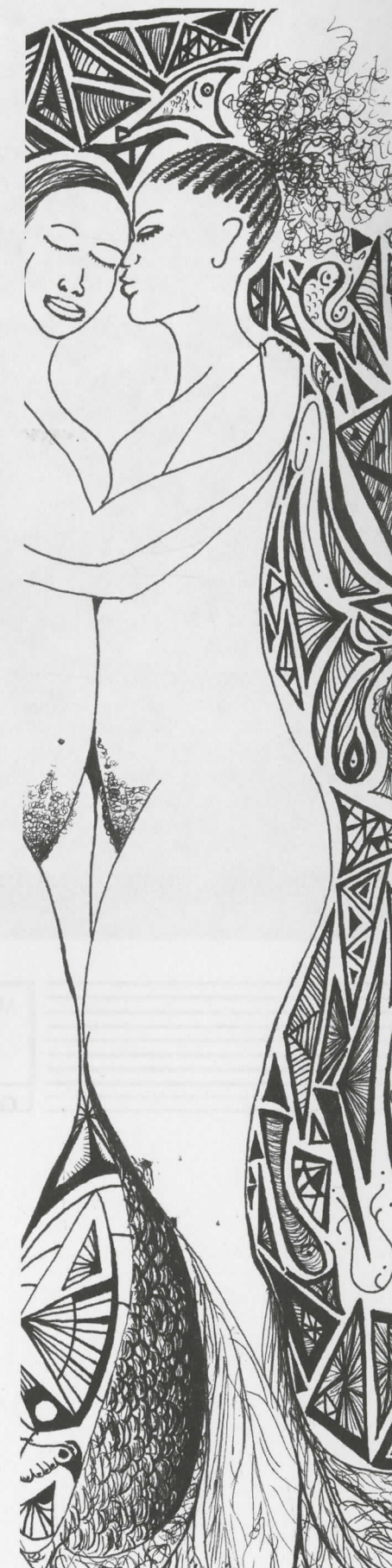
Of your breasts' barrows

To be interned

In a cool dark hollow—

among memory lost,

A procession of kings



©hawkes



©latham thomas

Absorb the morning weather's feel, as it forces us to reassess.

Carlos Javier Vazquez

Clason Point Haikus

Anthony Morales

1
girls play double dutch
dancing over spilled blunt guts
moms screams once it's dark

2
sitting on the benches
sunlight seeps thru midnight trees
deez quickly move in

3
you can run fast now
no Social Security
once outside the bars

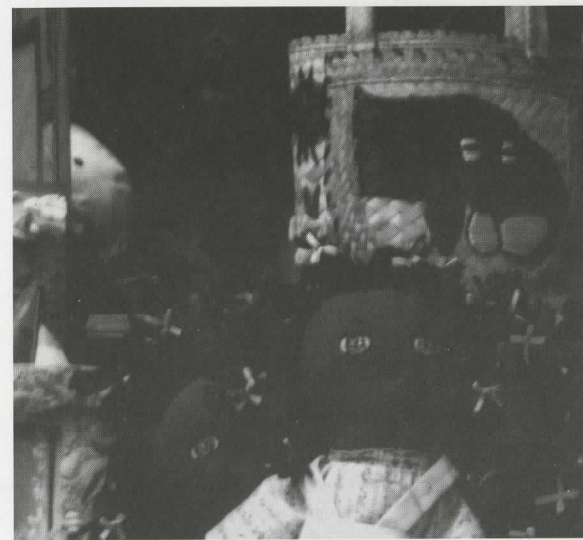
4
old timer plays chess
I'll bust your ass take your bitch
leave you without queen

5
Dreams are stars in cloudy
New York sky Once in a blue
moon you'll see one fly

6
do not bite hangnails
or toenails keep new clippings
like butts in ashtray

7
leaves hang low wind blows
broken glass lays quiet steam
rises from beer grave

8
alley kittens crawl
in trash can Mother has fish
bone hanging from lips



Psalm 10:17

Ishle Yi Park

All I have done is write you love poems / omitting the bent forks and bruised jaw / lines that scarred our relationship

All I have done is write you love poems / I felt you needed them / like pillows / like my breast in sleep / like your dead mother

All I have done is write you love poems / and even in my poems / I become your defense attorney / ready to slash cut down burn disqualify any accusations /even if they are true/ becuz too many people want to attack you / and I'm not about to join their tirade / against young beautiful criminals/ who in another world could have been poets / or men

but this isn't about them / this is about me and you and strange / things we've shared like ghetto UTZ red hot potato chips / Victoria Secret underwear chocolate / dime bags from Cornelia and / too many funeral communion chips

its about court appearances at 9:30 in the morning / waiting in the piss stained hallway at BCF / 8 hours for your release/ its about bundles and your goddamn block and friends / like Nicky who lock his girl up / in Howard Housing to stop her from going to Bushwick Outreach /

its about money hell / yeah I won't front /the dramas of economically deprived love / like your constant deals with the devil and other misunderstood / criminals on the corner of Hart and Wilson / and how I hate paying for every \$3.00 discount / movie and McDonald's value meal on our cheap ass dates / making me think Applebee's / is high class

and its really about doors / locked doors we stood behind at a time when we barely / reached the knob, stretching to turn it with wet / palms while some man beat our mothers and we stood / on the other side / tousling the hair of our brothers.

so I can't get over what happened last Thursday / I can't get over how we have become / them and more...

purple stains on my arm, my thigh / small universes of pain recorded on skin I fell into those universes, escaped from / bathroom lights and dingy tiles, fell into a calm / seeing myself 5, 15, 21 / I'm a small girl. All my life I've been / fighting, but no one, not even you, love / will kill me

but I guess I'm riffin again / like you say and I lost / my point somewhere between loving you and loving / the world that hates you but baby / all I have done is write you love poems / when maybe all you ever needed was a psalm / and maybe some day you will understand that this is one / that starts with you and ends with myself / like a love song come / undone.

ras
Locks are dreamcatchers:
visions that would fly out him~
tangled there instead

La Marr Jurelle Bruce



Part One: Streetlight

La Marr Jurelle Bruce

This city is a glorious doom.

Buildings and moonlight join hands and leap down from on high, and onto the backs of blameless men who linger on sidewalks. With the everlasting ache pressing into their shoulder blades, it is a miracle that such men remain above the ground; it is a wonder that they are not absorbed by the earth.

Five of these darker brothers are now huddled beneath a streetlight at the edge of Harlem. They have carried, yes, they have even embraced the curse that this city promises. It is a part of their divine inheritance: soft, brown skin; swirling, zig-zagging, impenetrable hair; backs strong enough to uphold tenements, moons, and should need arise, the burden of heaven.

This city is composed of jagged angles. The shifting lines of housing-project hallways and their airy elevator shafts, of sidewalks cracked, hateful monkeybars, and windows shut-tight—these lines intersect, and the angles created are sharp and gorgeous as dazzling knives. Tonight these knives are aimed at the very same streetlight under which these young men, these darker brothers, stand.

They are positioned so precariously still, and

gathered so close: they must be prophets engaged in prayer, or, perhaps, war. The streetlight throws a circular force field, a halo, and who can blame men for seeking solace herein? You see, the moon hurls an antiseptic blaze at men, and burns off sins only when it has tired of revealing them for all to see (maybe that is the key to redemption: maybe sins, not people, must be burned after publicly revealed). But street light comes down a slow rain. Like baptism. Tides sighing sin ashore.

One night the burdened five may try to blot out the heavy moon. Snatch threads, balls, shards of its light from their shoulders, as if they were baby spiders, and fling them back to wherefore they came. These men may fling the buildings—brick, metal, glass, mortar—off their shoulders and into oblivion, but not so far as to reach that point beyond oblivion—not so far enough to offend the Lord (have mercy). Make no mistake: it is not the burden of heaven, not the weight of God they carry. It is the weight of a bulbous, gelatin-like substance somewhere in the lower part of the space between heaven and earth, somewhere in earth's atmosphere.

Reginald will be the first to hurl his chunk of moonrock. His overzealous body—his thin but tremendously imposing frame of deep-not-dark-brown that houses huge eyes, and a chaos of hair—will be the first to charge in battle. Reginald would like to become a martyr:

he would crucify his own self if he had an extra arm to drive the final stake into his cross. But instead, he will have to seek a war or some persecution to entice death. Reginald will die violently, righteously: he will be remembered for having ascended to Heaven in the instant before his death. When they speak of him hereafter, they will either whisper or shout his name, if they dare speak it at all.

Solomon, Sol, will be the second to launch the weight away from him. He has the most gorgeous scar, a rainbow thrown from his temple to his cheek, hardly missing his eye. His coffee-with-three-sugars skin showcases the wound converted to beauty mark. Witnesses to his scar ache to know the rain that fell against his face and preceded it. He is in constant motion: when he is not pacing, he holds his movement down, holds it still, and trembles from inside.

Rashaan will be next to follow suit. His is a hard, cruel face. Head tilted downward, eyes lifted upward, the sinister edge of his lip gnarled in loneliness or some other ache. He is always preparing to pounce. Rashaan wears his anger like a festive mask across his face. And who could blame him? He is guarding his soul. Contained in a medium-sized body, an oily brown that glows. If he were larger, or his brown blazed, he might inspire a fear too intense.

Then Marc will hurl it. Marc's locks are dream-catchers. It would all fly out of his head, caught by a breeze and lost to the sky, if it did not get tangled up in

||||||| THIS CITY IS COMPOSED OF JAGGED ANGLES. |||||||

that glorious mass. These are ropes that lasso his dreams and nooses to hang those that must be expelled to forgetfulness. Marc's smile can defy, or, perhaps, deny all the sorrow on earth. Often longed for and always reserved, it compels his lovers toward goodness. He deals joy in smiles. He stands at that precarious leap toward manhood, smiling rather than straining, all the way.

Leroy keeps a pile of sermons and love songs neatly folded in his back pocket. He dreams poetry and scrambles to scribble words on the tablet beside his bed each morning. He sees, not poetic visions, but the actual words scribbled on paper while in his sleep. He must memorize words in dreams and then have the conviction to wake and write them down. How can he put it all down? Leroy will probably be the last to challenge that weight. Not because of cowardice, but because he might take a moment to appreciate its texture in his hand. But not tonight. The work to be done is much more exhausting.

* * *

This tiny tribe of young men—preacher, rainbow, guardian, smiler, poet—are not the only beings who carry this weight (they do carry it most publicly, though; young men are always the first sent off to war). Neither are they the only beings in the street tonight.

Drawn from their homes by the sheer sensation of summer heat blown on winter air—a strange phenome

non of this city's fall—proud project folks are outside crowding the streets. This is not some desolate ghetto composed of empty streets. This is not the rare and overemphasized ghetto that is petrified into silence and stillness. It brims with too much life, movement, emotion, forces, shifts, grief, ecstasy: too much to be contained in a suburb. It is a ghetto only because folks who live here proudly pronounce the word. Though they are burdened, these folks need never be subject to loneliness. They survive because the weight is distributed among many.

Children are dancing and falling through the project playground, within arms-length of their smiling, guarding, mothers who chant these same children's names. A ravaged gate poses as if it can keep out the crackheads who are content to rage against wakefulness. Junior high school kids march by, laughing at jokes they would not dare have their mothers, those same playground guardians, hear. Older men have a thicker, gorgeous laughter as they exchange their own private jokes; but this laughter seems always based in a solemnity in guarding those mothers. These thugs who guard, not women or children, but corners, dare passersby to slow down. People on Sunday-evening errands rush by: but not too quickly, in reverence for sabbath, and for the autumn heat.

The streetlight that guards our six young heroes stands before an 'abandoned' but thoroughly populated building. This building is across a narrow boulevard that separates them from the Baldwin Housing Project. The

eleven-building structure would be shaped like the letter U to one looking from above. It looks like a brick and glass colossus reaching arms out to embrace from, to someone looking at the structure face forward from a distance. Its hollow center faces the boys. A metal, glass, concrete, playground is at the center of the U's hollow. A basketball court lies adjacent to the playground. The corner beside them holds a bodega.

Rainbow scarred Solomon watches a pigeon land on the arch of the streetlight's forward-leaning neck. The bird contemplates gravity, looks up, then launches again.

"I heard on the news yesterday that all the pigeons and all the rats in New York are mutants. The garbage they eat is mutating them. I'm telling you: one day you them muthafuckas gonna evolve, gonna merge into one species. You gonna be walking down the street, or waiting on a subway platform, or sitting on the roof, and you gonna see some pigeons with fangs or some rats with wings"

"That'd be some shit" Marc, the dreadlocked dreamcatcher, sighs. He is distracted, and only halfway responding to the thought of some evolution.

"Yeah. But on this same news episode—it was New York One—I saw a story on drug use. That shit ecstasy. They interviewed this white kid who said that if you go out in the rain while you lifted on that shit, you feel every rain drop mad intense-like. It feels like a trillion tiny fingers massaging you, and you feel every single

one."

"Word, Sol? For real? Rainwater coming down like a trillion little fingers. Your whole body is like a dick with like a fifth of a trillion hands jerking you off. Sounds dope. Should put that on my list of things to do." Marc smiles.

Leroy, righteous poet, interrupts: "Keep away from that type of mess. Weed is enough for me. It's a plant, an herb in an unaltered form that grows from the earth. God created weed. Ecstasy? That's some little white pill produced in a lab. Artificial shit. Leave that shit to little white kids." He gives his words like command.

Solomon: "Weed helps with your creativity and shit, right?"

Leroy: "Nah...Not really. It only opens my mind to what was already there. Loosens my brain up and lets thoughts flow more smoothly. But yo, I haven't created anything worthwhile in a long time. It's a struggle...To be young gifted and black..." he laughs. "Before I die, I'm gonna create something dope. I'm telling you. Then I can die young. Be like 'peace' to the world. Ride a breeze right up to heaven. I'm gonna be intense and creative and something I make is gonna be more than me. Too much to bear. Then I'm gonna have to die. It'll take my place." He smiles.

Rashaan, brooding mask-wearer, asks with impatience: "What are you talking about?"

"You know I'm not serious. But a lot of artists

THE SECRET IS THEY SCARED TO BE ALIVE.

die young. Leave a big impression though. Take my favorite singers. Singers are artists, right? Aight: Otis Redding died in a plane crash. Marvin Gaye's father killed him. Sam Cooke was killed by some woman with a pistol, and died naked in a motel room. Donny Hathaway committed suicide: threw himself out a window. All died young. And unnatural deaths. But then again, what type of death is natural? But the point is they sang so loud, I can still hear those voices echo now."

Solomon says, "Shit. I knew about Marvin Gaye. I didn't know about those other cats. That's some shit though. But wait, don't you like that blind cat too—Stevie Wonder? He's alive."

Leroy proclaims, "Stevie Wonder is the dopest of all. He's blind though. He's blind so he ain't have to die. He was born blind and has always had something to suffer through. It was always too much to bear. So in a way it was never too much to bear. But you know what I mean. He's blind so he ain't have to die. That man is dope though. I swear he knows what the sky looks like. What it feels like. How do you tell someone—who never saw a color—what it looks like? You can't. Nobody told him, but I swear he knows."

"Donny Hathaway killed himself?" Marc asks.

"That's some punk shit. God bless the dead, but that's some punk shit. I can't respect a cat killin' himself." Rashaan has anger in his voice.

Marc responds, "But how you gonna respect these niggas who do shit and know they gonna die

because of it? It's the same thing. Some people can't make themselves die. So they do shit, to make someone else kill them. They don't have the strength to make themselves die. That's a soldier who can take his own muthafuckin life."

Leroy declares: "No doubt. That's how I feel. Rashaan—you impressed by these niggas out here, all bold like they not scared to die. The secret is they scared to be alive. They want to die. If I want to die, I'm gonna do it myself. And yo, my suicide note would be dope. A work of art. Get that shit published. That'd be wild!"

"That means you'd be doing that shit for attention?"

"No: white girls with bulimia do that shit for attention. If I want attention, I'll paint a building purple. I'll start a new revolution. If I took my life it'd be because I did everything there was to do. Theoretically." Leroy says.

"Revolution? What do you know about that...?" Reggie's voice booms, stomps, into the conversation.

"Tell me this: Are you a preacher or a revolutionary, nigga. Choose your struggle." Leroy twists his face in mock contempt.

"He a preacher and you a poet. We all know that. Y'all are stupid." Marc interrupts.

Leroy continues, "What's your deal, Reggie? You ain't have nothing to say before. You hear a key word in your dictionary and you're ready to pounce."

"I'm not tryina play you. I was only listening to

pieces of your conversation. I always got something to say, huh? I apologize. Just heard the word 'revolutionary'. Just asked a question. You took it more as a statement. My bad. Your bad." Reggie can hardly hold in his smile.

"Whatever. You always got to be the smart-ass, don't you? It's a way of life for you, huh?" Leroy's smile betrays the seriousness of his voice.

Reggie is ready to embark on one of his out-loud contemplations: "But yo, something feels strange tonight. What time is it? Eight thirty? Why are all these people out? It's Sunday. People need to be eating Sunday dinner now. We usually some of the only folks out here by this time. And the muthafuckin air tastes weird tonight. Thick. Like I'm going through it instead of it coming through me. And why is it so hot-cold tonight? It's like hot air being blown on cold wind. I'm in a cold sweat. Not because I'm sick, but because of the weather."

"I know what you mean. The weather be battling itself sometimes. He's wild. But when I feel hot and cold at once, even if I know better, I just call it warm. I'm tired of questioning everything. You know?" Leroy says genuinely.

"Hm...See that? Some people in shorts and some people in leather jackets tonight. And why is the sky tinted orange—you see that or I am going crazy—tonight. I'm telling you kid: it's intuition. Something's about to go down. I know you feel it too cause you generally do Leroy. Just like me. Y'all need to stop talking

about bullshit and pay attention. I'm tryina figure out what to do."

Leroy makes a sound of synthesized sigh and laughter: "You always have a plan, negro. A plan. Something you're anticipating. Something that's about to happen according to you. If I ain't feel something strange tonight too I'd just say fuck you and go right home or meet up with Veronica to mess around. But I know what you mean. And you know I know that hot-cold don't have to mean warm. Sometimes it mean hot-cold, and it just can't be explained. With me it's not like seeing or telling the future. I just feel something coming on, the way birds know about rain. Like there's a chemical inside me that knows shit. But it's just a chemical and can't tell me what." Leroy pauses: "But you can tell me, right? What is it you're waiting for?"

* * *

When Memphis appears, people begin to panic. The chaos that Reggie felt plotting to take the night, finally has the audacity to do so. The chaos that Reggie noticed in the air, the weather, the color of the sky—those immense forces that people tend to ignore—fully shows itself when Memphis comes to herald it in. When Memphis appears, these people, diverse as they are, join in collective panic. When Memphis comes stumbling down the street before the Baldwin Projects, no man will be able to control, nor explain his frenzy. But who is this

HE WOULD FOLLOW THE SOUNDS OF WORDS.

Memphis?

Memphis—not from Tennessee—was a simple man. He was a beggar-grammarian, a sidewalk poet, a subway preacherman who desperately adored words. Longed for the sounds of words flying off tongues, and yes, more desperately, the meanings of words enlightening men. To witness Memphis speak, the sheer sounds strung together—even before the place where sounds become words, and long before the place where words are given meanings—was humbling. Even to the most pompous of passersbys. He often traveled downtown. There, upon hearing his voice, carefree—careless—white children of the Upper East Side could feel a graze of the crushing hand that weighed so heavily upon their peers a mile upward, uptown.

He so loved conversation that he sought it wherever he could find it. Occasionally, he would find it in himself. Yes, converse with himself. Memphis would ask a question and provide his own response. He would tell a joke and release the sound of his own laughter. He would ask a riddle, give himself a clue, come up with the answer, and then congratulate himself. Memphis would debate with the ardor and passion all the rhetoric could supply—and he was his own gracious opponent. This he would all do out loud. This was, occasionally, enough for him. He ignored the looks and comments he would often receive, though he adored words too much to not know the simple meaning of the word schizophrenic.

He would often travel the subways in an intense

but unplotable search for conversation. In fact, he took to the sort of wandering that was usually reserved for crackheads, beggars, lunatics—and a passerby would not dare tell the difference. Memphis did not chasten himself to the wandering in a straight line, at a sustained speed, in a seemingly constant direction, to which darker brothers were accustomed. He would follow the sounds of words. He might speak to someone on the street or on the subway without warning. White women had a tendency to initially ignore him and then abruptly quickly, for their lives, flee. Black women tended to have more conviction and might give a stare, would even address him, but would still stubbornly walk away.

He had a thick beard, abundant and wild, but well kempt. A controlled, confined chaos. Premature gray flecked the hair by his temples against his cherry wood complexion. A deep-not-dark brown tinted red. He would not part from a long black trenchcoat on the most humid of days. It always looked new but was stuffed with some curious and as yet unseen items Memphis felt obliged to carry. Because he wore his coat everyday people assumed that he wore the same clothes, everyday, underneath. His teeth were dull yellow, but perfectly aligned. More importantly, he flashed a smile that unarmed even the most careful walkers on dark streets. He was by no means dirty—something just looked dusty about him. As if all he required was a dry rag wiped over him. No water, soap, definitely no rubbing alcohol. But this was his smell: rubbing alcohol. Rubbing alcohol: and peppermint. One

HE WOULD FOLLOW THE SOUNDS OF WORDS.

might be misled to believe that he bathed only in alcohol and dined only in peppermint, they so dominated his odor. He smelt nothing of funk or semen or piss or liquor. And he was not from Tennessee.

* * *

Memphis is not from Tennessee, and he is not running. No: he is freewheeling forward through the air. Stumbling, tripping through space, limbs flailing, and it is a wonder he does not fall. The darker brothers have never witnessed a man run like this: faster, yes, but not so hap-hazardly, not so desperately, not so wildly. It was as if Memphis had lost control of his body but could still propel himself forward in space. It is as if hell got legs and is rushing up behind him—such was the frenzy of his two block trip from the subway station by the barbershop and for a two-block distance.

The people who witness Memphis collectively go as insane as a man with an itch in the fold of his brain. Though he is one man, all are drawn to him at once. Misses Rita snatches her three toddler children with one sweeping arm movement, and hugs them against the ground. Alfonsito has dropped his bottle and is screaming ravenously at his mother who, for just a second too long, denies his call. Rashaan's brother Muhammed lunges forward and pulls out his nine millimeter—maintaining the stance of a soldier instead of that of a criminal. Somehow he believes that his gun will protect him from the motion

of this stumbling man. A teenaged boy named Dee, and his girl Dee-Dee lock the doors of his 98 Honda Accord and he wraps his arms around her like a present. Older, dignified men like Mr. Clarke, cannot hide the distress from their faces. Crackheads scramble into zig-zagging, circular paths, yes, like roaches whose hideout was discovered and flashed with light. Some people drop to their knees, then on to their stomachs in the middle of the sidewalk. It is as if they are praying, and only then are they dropping for cover. All at the sight of a stumbling man. The tiny tribe watches from across the street, determined to be profoundly still. A gaudily overdressed older woman, either bag lady, or a church lady come from a long days service, continues to walk. She is somehow unphased. Maybe she is an angel. The others are phased as the moon.

Then he just stops. Memphis just stops. He stops at the edge of the curb of the second block of his flight. He seems to be positioned at the edge of a cliff, beholding an abysmal three-inch fall of the space between curb and street. There is something so terrible behind him that he runs like falling, and something so terrible before him that he stops like death. Suspended between the two, he stands feverishly in his spot of ground.

He stands straight, spreads his arms out and then begins to tremble as if his soul is struggling to get out of his body. He looks like an image of an old Black Jesus, positioned there on the street: all beard and pain and invisible crucifix. Memphis performs another sort of ritual on

BUT HOW CAN HE TELL THEM A COLOR THEY'VE YET TO SEE?

the sidewalk, a ritual that brought witnesses to frenzy... then he falls, curls on his side in fetal position, and goes to sleep right on the street.

* * *

These darker brothers are gathered on a project rooftop. They feel divine when they breathe weed-clouds that merge with sky. Gathered to recount the fulfillment of prophesy five days before: the death of a prophet. Body sprawled out on the street where he laid down and seemed to go to sleep.

"That muthafucka was insane. Goddamn I never saw anything like that. I seen Rochelle's baby born right from between her legs. Seen Mr. Clarke and them be baptized. Seen when Tyrone beat his father unconscious and shit. I was right there when Martin stabbed that crackhead in the neck. I'm telling you, I never panicked like this though..." Rashaan exclaims through his shell-shock.

"I'm telling you: Memphis wasn't crazy. No one was chasing him either. No one was after him. Not a person, at least. The way he stopped, he couldn't have been too scared of someone after him. Then what he did after he stopped. When he opened that coat and threw all those things on the ground." Marc is disturbed.

"What the fuck did they find?" Rashaan pleads. Reginald boomed: "They found a nickel painted gold, a Bible, a kaleidoscope, a magazine from 1982, a journal, a

cut out of a black angel, some binoculars, a subway map, and some weed..."

Solomon joined in: "Everyone was wildin. It was all I could do to keep back. You saw when I tried to run up? It's a good thing Reginald snatched me up and held me in a chokehold to keep me back. I'm telling you: It was like Memphis was throwing money out—the way people scrambled to get these things. I'm telling you: it didn't make no sense. People were hypnotized. Like starved dogs or sharks tryina get their hands on those things. People started fighting. Miss Rita and that Puerto Rican woman each left their kids aside and wrestled, hair-in-fists, over that little kaleidoscope. Crackheads were scratching each other for that subway map that got tore up anyway. Mr. Clarke punched Mr. Wilson, knocked him clear out, to get his hands on that Bible. Did y'all see how many of them dealers were chasing after that paper angle, like little girls chasing dandelions. Damn."

"He hurled all those strange things all over the street, then went right to sleep. Made himself die. Lord. I've never seen anything like that. Everyone went insane." Leroy is in awe.

"There was something else, though. A tenth thing he threw out onto the street. I can't believe none of y'all saw it. I couldn't tell what it was, but I could see its color: a strange color purple. I'm calling it purple because it's the closest word to describe what I saw. It wasn't really purple though. It was a color I had never seen before that point. When he threw it, it flew right to

the edge of the curve. Someone snatched it up though. Before I could see what it was. I'm telling you: since then, that color has tinted my dreams. It's been there when I close my eyes. Shit, I see it when my eyes are open wide. I'm telling you. I know I sound bugged: but whatever that shit is, it's valuable, it's precious, it's worth something. I—we need to find it... That's... why I brought y'all here..."

Reginald pauses and seems to watch a pigeon take flight from this roof to another, swoops down suddenly to retrieve something that must be precious. Then the bird rise up—the light blazes its skin so it looked like phoenix—and perches its mutated-self on the leaning-forward neck of the streetlight. This pigeon is longer and narrower than most he's seen. Something purple (or was it purple?) is caught in its left claw. Almost as if it had noticed Reggie's stare from the rooftop, the bird flees from sight and into an alleyway. Lord. Have Mercy. If he can't show them the color, he has to find some way to emblazon it into their eyelids so they can help him search for it. But how can he tell them a color they've yet to see?



Seeing Ourselves
Sham-e-Ali Al-Jamil

No matter,
that I was told to
devalue
her,
Resilient with
kaleidoscopic
beauty
flourishing
even without
nourishment.

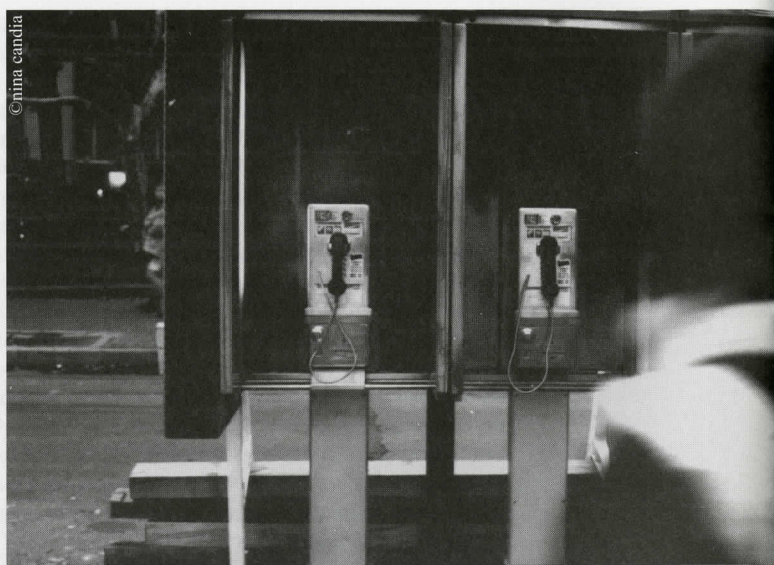
Told to
embrace

apologies for oppression
or pull the frayed edges
of fabric we have woven
holding our tale
in our words.

How do I see you through the
tangled caricature?
Us?
sharing story
over dinner as we
carefully weave
soul strands together
or the serenity of your smile,
as you wish me peace
on the subway platform.

Observe the midday
colors of fall, as they storm
and stress our thoughts through time.

Carlos Javier Vazquez



In the final analysis

Anthony Morales

Puerto Rico's paralysis
Caused that plane trip two suitcases
Full of guayaberas and congas

My last name is Morales
More or less of the chicken soup
Doesn't matter when you want none

Phone home at telefonica
When Verizon's not on the horizon
Infinite rights fly musical kites
Cutting cloud Dutch Master

Sky's falling like chicken little said
Alley cats and stray dogs pouring
Rain Rain Rain go away
Rain Rain Rain go away

So i can come out and play another day
Puddle puzzle pieces
Muzzle dollar & dream lotto mottos

Broken windows closed doors
Process is triangle rest lah spot to cornerstore

Buy nickel bags of weed
Throw the seeds in the ashtray
Hope one day they'll grow like
Weeds in vacant lots blowing to & fro

Depends on if the sun's shining
Clouds got silver linings
Story books happy endings
Ghettos got tomorrows
Looking like yesterday's
Five o'clock shadow

Silhouette sidewalks of New York
Talk bochinche and smell of seasoned
Pork shoulder/Chips get colder
As temperature congeals/reveals
Truth inside platano peels

Don't slip
Or is that superstition ??

40's blunts and hearts cause us reminiscin'
traditions of tragedies cause
apathy galaxies
and mothership's headed
towards the black hole

Soul outta control like runaway rollercoasters
Toaster burning bagels
Unable to turn table
Flippin' through cable to find

Spiritual inner peace
Feast at TV dinners of fools
Think it this game we know the rules?

I learned in kindergarten
Color outside the lines for
A more pretty picture

In Life's coloring book
We are characters
With empty thought bubbles
Thick like cotton clouds
Seperate each thread unique
Cobwebs of soliloquyoys

Meditate on memory stashed on shelf
Dusty self/reflection in transit train/express

Many stumble on escalators of success

(excerpt from)

miscageNation: a body in seven parts

(previously published in MIZNA)

Ahimsa Timoteo Bodhrán

i.

I come from the edge of things/
stand in doorways/ know
not/ which room/
to enter.

I am the poor child; I had neither books nor food nor clothes. *I am the rich child, knowing full well my beauty, my place, feeling always at home; I ate only the best of meals.* I dove under tables for crumbs that fell off others' plates; I lick the bowl when no one else is looking, so hungry, so hungry am I. *I turn away food, spoiled, finicky, particular, knowing more will be coming, simply knowing.* I dangle my feet from the lip of a cup, paper and plastic, quartz and crystal, wine and whisky. *Sit under trees, by cool blue streams, imagine skyscrapers and tenement buildings, sirens and cop cars, spray from a fire hydrant, children in the street playing, stepping, doing double dutch.* Sit on concrete, in sunlight and shadows, search through the wreckage for blades of grass, find them between cracks, by cigarette butts and beer cans, place them between two hands, cup them, and whistle. Listen.



ii.

He grows up in a house of butches, is always the little girl, the one who's always a bit "too different," the one who "thinks too much," who asks "too many damn questions." Most often though, he is silent, plays by himself, knows none of the other children on the block. He is always on the other side of the door, listening in. He does not speak. He is spoken to. And for. He is the one the others do not notice is missing. Once, he went up to the front door, groceries in hand, while the others went in through the garage. They forget he is outside. The cold milk presses against him, its perspiration making a wet spot on the inside of his jeans. They find him an hour later outside, sitting on the steps. It is dark. His arms are wrapped and knotted in the plastic bags he was carrying, bitten by bugs, mosquitos and gnats, they are weltd. Perhaps they were thirsty and went to the fridge looking for something to drink. Perhaps it was a commercial on TV that freed them from the couch. Perhaps it is then that they remembered. They find him cold and wet, sticky in a hot humid New York night, crying onto his mother's milk. He did not even bother, did not even think, to knock.

iii.

I am in sixth grade. Each of us is assigned a country. I am given Libya, a country the U.S. is bombing at the time. I

iii.

I am in sixth grade. Each of us is assigned a country. I am given home, to the library, to do research, come back with recipes and maps, a story I have written of a child surviving the bombings. I am a North African Jew writing about the destruction of my homeland. I am eleven years old. I go home. My father is watching TV. He supports the bombings, tells me he wants Qadafi and "all the other terrorists" dead. I eat dinner.

vii.

We go home through the mother, through the mother's body. This is what I'm thinking. But how when she is the white one, when it is your father who is colored and his before him. When they are your connection to color, to darkness, these men you bear little in common with, mostly your maleness, and some days not even that. Generation after generation of brown men marrying white(r) women. We go home through the mother. But it is through the father we come back.

The Palestinian Christian lover I held onto for dear life, hoping his experiences would color my own, not getting how my experiences were just as Arab as his, not getting how I was objectifying him, privileging his life lived back in the Middle East over my own, not getting how because he was monoracial and a non-Jew I saw him as more

Arab, not getting how I was more connected with our contemporary U.S. community than he was. How I was, in many ways, his connection to the queer Arab/Middle Eastern community. How my tongue, Spanish / Spanglish / Latino mixed with German, Hebrew, and Arabic, was just as legitimate as his. How I was not the only one holding on for dear life. How often we cling to each other for survival, as lovers, as queers of color, as Middle Eastern people targeted in and by white America.

Each time we touch, we make Hajj, we make Hajj. There was a time when we made love under the rains. There was a time, in the deserts, beneath the cool shade of a tree, at night underneath its stars by the oasis. There was a time. There was. Let it be again.

Where once I searched for color by association, now I look in the mirror to satisfy my own questions of authenticity and evidence, (be)longing. I have, and I am still, becoming what and who I have always desired—my own. Once I looked for color by association, wanted their passion to burn brightly and bloodily into my skin. It did not seep in, their darkness, but something is definitely pouring out. I bled through the pores.

We go home though the lover's body. This is what I'm thinking.

breaking

Samirah Umarah Raheem

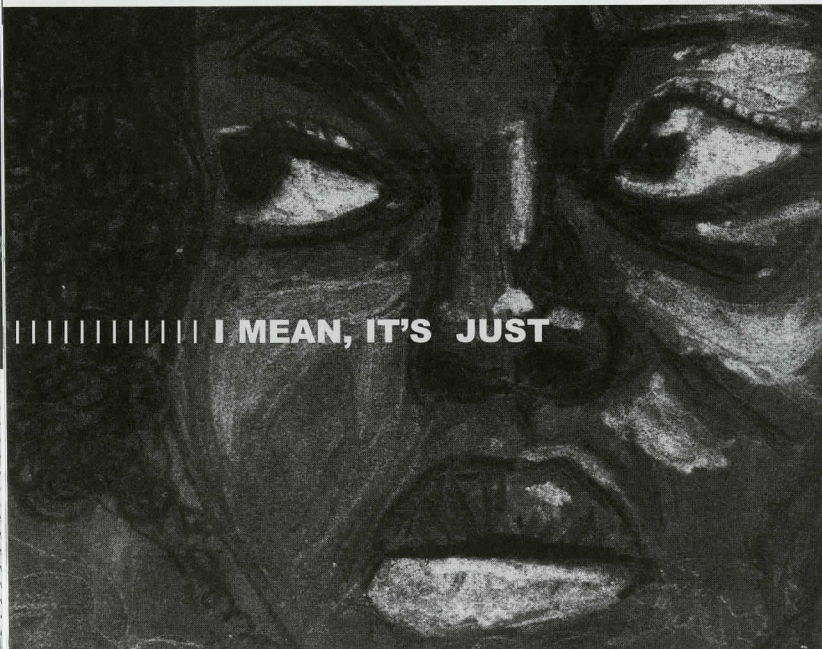
breaking

days
beats
backs

backs breaking under the gravity of the situation
knowing you are graveyard bound/ hand/ and foot
your tenacity is offensive.

some may stomp
off beat

proclaiming that they want a piece of this life
but knees would buckle
lungs would collapse



||||||| I MEAN, IT'S JUST

breaking

there is no salve for these sore and tender souls
no clouds to keep truth from blinding/ bleeding/ breaking hearts
so we hide our faces from the sun
in shame

some may try
but never could they decipher
the wind's whisper
warnings
sorrow sighs

see some break dance steps
down
sweat out perms and presses
back to the naturally chaotic order
of these things

we maintain:

these rhythms
this flesh
carrying color and sacred beats

sounds/sighs/cries
blood
carrying curses and prayers
because all get answered

break
defy
testify
we still here, ain't we?

break-down:
I am incapable of bending
brittle



SKIN,

RIGHT?

©d'lonra ellis

I split into two almost evenly
one part observes the other skeptically
too much fear to heal this schism
I can't breathe
my thoughts collide
I move/ shake/ shimmy
trying to shed my skin
this skin!

if only I could be free of the weight
crushing my bones
if only I could lick my lips after speaking
to savor the sweetness of words brought forth
with certainty

break loose
break free

but as it stands
I break
each piece of mine
diminishing my peace of mind
I am off and odd
needing to realign
needing to release myself from imminent ruination
by way of ruminations on conditions
beyond my control
this skin.
break/ defy/ testify
I'm still here ain't I?

but it's bigger than I
break a dance step down
sweat
because we still here
bring it back to a natural
chaotic order
I must maintain
these rhythms
this flesh
colorful and sacred
full
it is bigger than I
this skin

this blood
curses more curses and prayers

I MUST MAINTAIN / THESE RHYTHMS / THIS FLESH |||||

all get answered
we need more room
so everything will have a place
otherwise we will break from the pressure
of trying to fit in.

I need more room for me
inside this skin
all anyone ever sees is
this skin
and it hurts
so many men and women
broken behind this
skin
and now we play mute
within this skin!
I mean, it's just skin right?

but what of the bones wills and egos
that have been broken beneath this skin
as bodies folded beneath stinging lashes
some claim to want a piece of this life
but they would only break!
there aren't enough dance steps in the world
to ease this pressure

so the wind continues to cry
for this weight suddenly solid enough
to break the limbs of trees roped to break necks

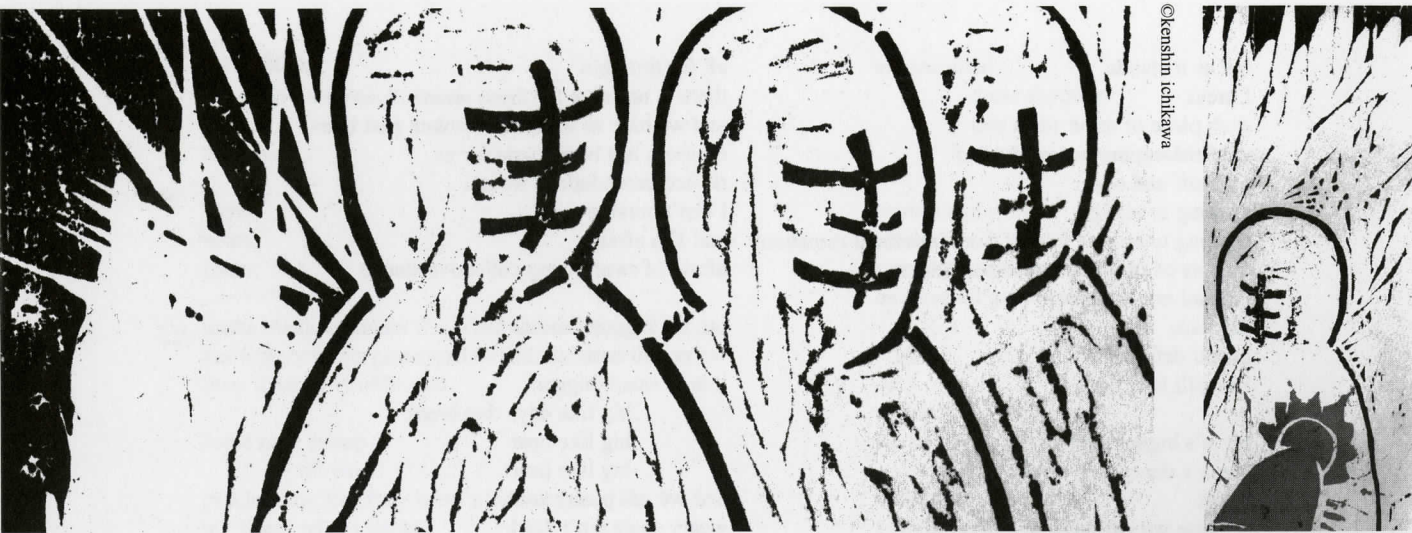
all for this skin
there is no salve for these souls
and we hide in shame for broken past lives
no room has been made for us
no accommodations for me
I can't breathe
and I'm afraid
afraid of swallowing collective shame

but it's bigger than me
we're still here
it is so much bigger
big like days that break
big like beat
big like heart
and we got plenty soul
weary souls ain't dead
we can shake out the misery
and lift the weight
we can break down these walls
remove the lead shackles that sprain ankles and wrists
we can look up at the sun
and shame him
for seeing all and doing nothing
in defense of this skin that he created
we can

breathe
dance
break

defy
testify
we can laugh and cry
and signify
to say that we are living in this skin
we can learn to stretch and grow in this skin
so that no one breaks down
ever again
no broken promises
no broken dreams
this skin can be beautiful
sacred
and full
we can shift and sashay
throw this great weight around
to intimidate those who would dare
to keep us boxed in

accommodations will be made
and we will shut out shame
turn down the lights
and give thanks
because
we are still here.



Pa Ndua

John Vang

The process of sewing pa ndau, "flower cloth," is metaphorical of the historian's craft – the telling of the story of a people. Before acquiring a written language of their own, the Hmong people depicted events of the past through this stitch-work of intricate designs and lavish colors. Since the craft of sewing pa ndau has traditionally been reserved for Hmong women, my grandmother never considered passing down this skill to me. However, I participated vicariously in the production of these flower cloths by watching my mother and grandmother sit for long periods of time stitching strings of thread onto large canvases of cloth. Once, my grandmother produced a work of pa ndau, which told the story of peb hmoob, "We Hmong," before the war. Framed within a border of geometric shapes, and colorful zigzags, were figures of Hmong people and their livestock, working in fields of opium poppies along a mountainside of greenery. This was a depiction of pre-war Laos, when the Hmong lived in relative peace in the northern highlands before the outbreak of, first, the war against Japanese imperialism, and later, the war against communist expansionism. Running along the bottom of my grandmother's pa ndau was a wave of blue representing the Mekong River—the other half of the story, omitted from what was intended to be a pleasant work of art. Indeed, the pleasant depictions on her flower cloth obscured the actual images of their own escape. Among them were trivial objects, left along the roadside to lighten the load during the silent trek out of Laos such as pots and silver jewelry. Among the more horrific were decaying corpses of small children and elderly people left behind. For my grandmother and many Hmong people escaping war-torn Laos, the Mekong River stood as the final barrier to refuge in bordering Thailand; it held the fate of thousands of Hmong people seeking to flee the on-coming regime's program of retribution for their participation with the United States and its "Secret War" in Laos.

My parents hardly mention the story of their flight from Laos twenty-five years ago. Although it is clear to me now that their experiences have shaped my own, I resisted my parents' aim of actually transforming their experiences into my own through constant sermons relating to their hardship. The fundamental lessons of life (how to relate with relatives, the importance of studying, and even whom to marry!) they impressed upon me always traced back to the difficult life they experienced in Laos and led to the conclusion that their spoiled children would never truly know what it meant to have a hard life. However, growing up in public housing, situated in a decaying area of Milwaukee, was hardly spoiling. Having to endure the stigma of being bussed from the inner city of Milwaukee to the remote suburb of Franklin to receive decent schooling was hardship. Perhaps the story of the escape was their attempt at bridging the distance between their increasingly Americanized children and the culture that my parents knew. Having endured a more raw experience of absorption into American society, they have always attempted to uphold their conceptions of the mores and traditions under the weight of assimilation and in the face of discrimination. Although I was once ashamed of my parents' story, I remind myself of how their efforts have lifted me above what my decaying physical environment and economic circumstances deemed I was capable of. Their experiences inform the understanding I possess about my identity as a Hmong American, straddling the line between two diametrically opposed cultures. At the same time, accepting this identity has placed me in a position of responding to the charge from sociologists that being Hmong places me on the "The other side of the Asian American success story," exempt from the otherwise inane "model minority" status. In the end, my own process of maturation has made me unable and unwilling to ignore the cultural and material conditions of the past and present, which my parents have made a reality for me. The importance of understanding and moving beyond the straps of the past to achieve progress has become apparent to me. I have also become attuned to the need to hold the actors and events on both sides responsible for, through war, unsettling the lives of a people, and covering the trails left behind.

Fluids

Gisela Telis

And what if the world crashed in
with white hospital sheets
or IV's
or just simply the drifting apart
flesh from flesh
in fear?

The light
draw those covers up around itself, don't it?
To keep the blue away from me, from you,
I think.
I don't know if I can watch this.
So what was that you said about not loving you again?
Maybe I'll remember
when I picture you sitting in
sterile
glaring, blaring light,
the only light under this closing sky.
Yeah, I picture you
and play out the collectable set of sobs and cries
inside my head, inside your eyes.
Could I love you if you told me, "Sorry, baby –
no touch left in this flesh for us. And
careful with the fluids!"

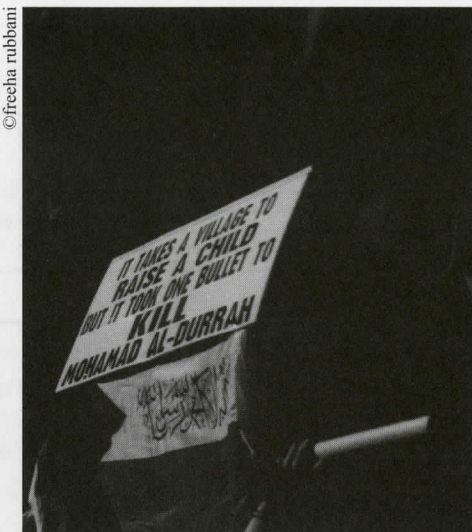
Do you know
I would let you use my flesh
I would let you drink of me?

And I would tear that blanket from the sky
to leave the bitch
cold and
scared and
shaking
just like me.
Where did my cover go?
Why are clinics
and death real to me?
And why do I have to sit and wait too –
explain away the blame in this game of let's worry and then not
and then worry again
– angry that I can feel?

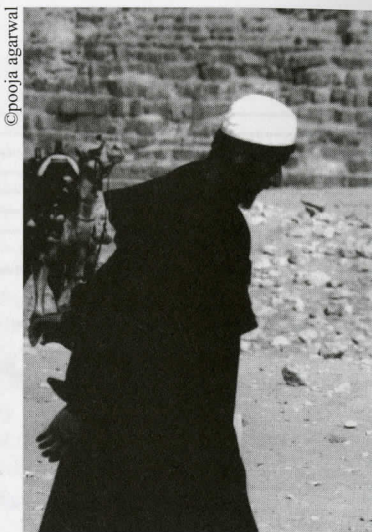
Three o'clock is soon;
I wait somewhere else
with the sound of telephone rings
or screams
crushing flat.
And I tremble for you.

Hayan Charara was born in Detroit, Michigan, in 1972. He first attended college at age thirteen, completed his bachelor's degree at Wayne State University and earned a master's degree from the John W. Draper Program in Humanities and Social Thought at New York University. His poems have appeared in Chelsea, The Connecticut Review, The Cream City Review, Hanging Loose, Hayden's Ferry Review, The Kenyon Review, The Literary Review, Mudfish, Press, American Poetry: The Next Generation and numerous other journals and anthologies. His first poetry collection, The Alchemist's Diary, is forthcoming from Hanging Loose Press—and he has received a Van Lier Literary Fellowship from the Bronx Arts Council. He edits the annual literary anthology, Graffiti Rag, and teaches literature and writing.

©frecha rubbani



©pooja agarwal



Hamza Aweiwi, a Shoe Salesman in Hebron Hayan Charara

The taps have not been running
since July seventeen,
his wedding day.
Now it's twenty-nine days
without clean water.

He has tanks on the roof.
Some days he manages to shave,
or his wife prepares the tea kettle.
But he knows the price of water.
It's holy, hard to come by.

Outside his shop, fat and bald,
an electrician with seven children
admits he does not wash his clothes.
A young girl, a yellow ribbon
in her hair, is laughing.
She knows grown men
should not smell that way.

He yanks a nail from a shoe
that needs to be resoled.
He knows he doesn't need to fix them
to walk far enough where people live differently.
There, boys are washing cars,
housewives water lawns.

He seems troubled, hesitant,
looking for something in the distance.
But a cluster of trees
blocks the view.
He still daydreams
about taking long showers,
or even two a day.
But it's almost noon,
the temperature unbearable.
And the shoes are piling up.

La Marr Jurelle Bruce

constellation

Leroy keeps stars in his pockets to weigh him down closer to the ground.

nypd blues (or the youngest homicide my father can remember)

Ahimsa Timoteo Bodhrán

newborn baby girl

one n a half minutes old

raped by her father blood

all over the walls hair-flesh pieces of

meat chunk-like everywhere

he there at the scene of the crime

wondering not why he is beyond why but rather how

u have the chalk but where do u draw

the line

slumber kings are steady the rousing fires are stoked new crossed arms tend no flames

Robert Taylor



©kenshin ichikawa

Untitled

Miranda McLeod

8-15

She has been here for at least four days. I found her. Here, way up high, above the layer of citysmog. It is a precipice, poetic with its weeds and blades of glass, wrinkled, damp condoms and cigarette butts. Her car is parked on the edge, headlights staring out over the steep drop. It is a solemn car, stoic, like some metal Native American elder wrapped in blue.

She has sat in the dented Camry during most of the past ninety-six, flat, baked, desert sun, bone-dried hours, staring out over her car's Indian gaze and deep into the desert valley. Occasionally she reaches behind her faded gray seat and pulled out a bag of Doritos, a crumpled water bottle, mini powdered doughnuts that come in six packs.

Boxes of Marlboros, long since plucked, dot the floor and seats like a fatal case of the chickenpox. All four windows are down.

She is thinking.

I have no way of knowing what about.

I, too, have been here for four days. I'm above her, up the crumbly slope that rises up off to the right of the car. I'm positioned well, nestled behind rocks and a straggling cactus so I can see down to her, but she, I'm sure, cannot see me.

But she knows I'm here.

HER GAZE WAS BOLD, SHE COMMANDED THAT I LOOK AT HER

Yesterday, she emerged from the dark blue car and walked off to the edge of the cliff. I watched her unbutton her jeans, pull down her white underwear, and squat. As she peed, she stared up my hill to the place she knew I must be. Her gaze was bold, she commanded that I look at her: she swung her dark hair in the sun. She finished peeing but remained squatting, and then slowly, as she rose, she extended her middle finger high up into the air. There may have been tears in her eyes. I saw them glint like glass. But it was a hot, smoggy day, brown and bright, choking, and everything sparkled dully. She pulled her pants up and returned to the car. She hasn't come out since.

Today is hot, hotter than yesterday, at least 105. I sit and stare at my sketches of her; her face I have long since memorized: thin brownness, hair that falls down confidently, straight and dark, wide deer eyes with violently pointed lashes, mascara clumped. Her mouth is deep brown, full, and she always has makeup on. Even on, especially on, the edge of a dry desert cliff up in the uninhabited part of the Hollywood Hills. She looks like a sulking Egyptian princess. She looks like an old soul trapped.

She looks like she is thinking.

I have drawn her sleeping. I climb down my slope at night and creep to her window. I look at her and memorize every shadow and line. I can see her face when I close my eyes. I can move her face when I draw her. I have drawn her sleeping. I have drawn her awake, I have

drawn her peeing and crying and I've drawn her many, many times staring. I draw to reach into her mind. As if by going over and over the thin curve of her cheek I can slide my pencil below her brown flesh and into the pink-gray of her mind and know why she and her Camry are staring so sullenly, so vigilantly over the hazy hotness of Hollywood:

Tonight I will slip down the mountain softly and watch her sleep. She sprawls when she sleeps, even in the back seat of a cramped and stained car. Her limbs and hair and lips snake over the upholstery and slide up and down. Twice, I have woken her from her nightmares by pressing my hand against her hot forehead, by blowing cool air on her face. She stilled, once opened her eyes, but if she saw me at all, it was as a thin gray dream-man, too weird for reality, too gentle for Los Angeles.

8-16

The sun is setting. It is a neon sunset, its colors are the oranges and pinks and purples of Sunset Strip's flashing GIRLS GIRLS GIRLS signs. I watch her watch the glowing sky. She is smoking a cigarette, it lights her face up like the sunset. She turns, now, to look at my cactus, my rock, and I can see her mouth moving. She is cursing me, muttering in her lost Egyptian dialect, her ominous Native American tongue. I envision a new sketch: she, clothed in gold and bird feathers, arms aloft, raining fire and brimstone down upon me, upon the precipice, the car, herself, the Hollywood Hills and the red

roofs of the distant California-style mansions.

She turns the keys that are dangling in the ignition, and slowly, creakily, the car rolls backwards, breaking five-day-old spiders webs and unsettling fallen leaves. I watch the car drift back and back. I watch her one hand remain in her lap, the other hang out the window, letting the cigarette hang limp. The car rolls until it reaches the pot-holed dirt road that leads to the paved main road that leads back down to Hollywood, and stops.

And begins to roll forward.

Her car moves back to the edge of the cliff, and just before the front wheels can slip down the crumbly drop and over cacti and brush and bottles and broken signs and through the ragged boundaries of the city, they turn. I watch her slowly circle the turn-off until the faded sun sizzles behind the edge of the world and lets up the rich, dark cloud of night. She makes a few loops in the blackness and stops.

8-17

Tonight, I went down to watch her sleep. I slid down my slope, walked around the back of her car and approached the driver's side window. She was there, seat reclined far back, hair strewn out all over her bare arms and neck, all over the front of her shirt, eyes wide open, staring at me.

There was a long stillness, she didn't scream, she didn't move. I began to wonder if maybe she was asleep, if she had stared for so long now that she could

sleep with her eyes open and glued to nothing.

But then she spoke. "Who are you?"

"Who are you?"

A pause. I had never seen her eyes that close, and open, before. They were brown, brown like her skin and hair and the dried brush all over the hills. Brown and sad like her mouth, like her shoulders. "Why are you here?"

Another pause. She looked at my face, my clothes, my hair. I felt her weighing me with her eyes. I could not tell what she saw.

"Simon," I said.

"Danielle," she said.

She reached over to the passenger's seat and plucked through one after another red and white box of cigarettes, shaking them to see if they were empty. All of them were. She reached under the seat and pulled out a long carton of Marlboros. It was half finished. The cellophane on the pack she took out shone in the moonlight, and we both stared at it, unable to look at each other.

Danielle offered me a cigarette. I took it. We smoked in silence and stared out over the precipice, over the Camry's gaze, over the dark hills and the pricks of light dotting them.

"Are you from Hollywood?" I asked after I flicked the butt off towards the distant houses.

"Not anymore," she said, staring straight ahead.

"Are you going to Hollywood?" I asked.

She turned her head towards me then, ran her eyes over my thinness, my grayness, my long night shadow. Her eyes were like glass. Maybe because she was crying, maybe it was the night. "Not anymore," she said.

8-18

I woke up this morning because she was leaning on her horn. A long, insistent, mechanical honk, three short taps, another long honk. I stood up and rubbed the dust from my eyes and saw her below me, climbing up the dry slope. I started down towards her.

She stopped when she reached me. Her head tilted back, her arm lifted to shade her eyes from the sun, she fumbled with the ends of her long hair. She had changed from her jeans and T-shirt uniform of the past five days. She was wearing a low cut tank top and high cut shorts. Her face was brighter, her make-up applied thicker. She was all brown limb and cosmetics.

"So...ummm...Simon..." she giggled lightly, "Hi."

"Hi," I said.

"Uhhh...so...how did you sleep?"

"Fine," I said.

"Oh...cool." Her fingers were frantically tangling the bits of her hair together. She leaned on one hip, stuck the other out to the side, and gently swayed back and forth. "I...ummm...I think I'm gonna get going."

"Ok."

"Ummm...but I...ummm...like, I wanted to ask you if...ummm..."

I watched her pull her cigarettes from her pocket and light one. Her hands were shaking just slightly.

"Uhh...so do you think that you might...ummm...want to come with me?" She smiled then, beautifully in the sunlight with her long dark hair all around her and her nervous sucking on the cigarette and the thrust out hip.

I began to shake my head. She started talking really fast then, insistently, squinting up at my face. "I have money more than enough to get us out of here and the car's mine it's not stolen or anything and I don't really have a plan we could go anywhere you want to and I mean it's not like good for a girl to travel alone but it'd be so much better to travel with you and besides we could save money you know and share a hotel room," she lowered her lashes and her lips curved dangerously, "cause I think you're cute."

There was silence then. Her face began to fall as I didn't say anything. It melted from sexual to angry to embarrassed to completely alone. She let her gaze drop to my shoes, where it rested for a long while. And then she jerked her head up and threw herself forward, pressing her lips onto mine and her tongue past them and her hands hysterically into my crotch.

Her assault became a clinging hug, she pulled at me and pressed herself to me. Her body was shaking violently. She eventually went limp. I stood there, her arms around my shoulders, her form slumped against mine, her dark hair warm against my neck.

"I think," I said, "that you need to let go."

"You're right," she whispered against my skin.

I held her for a long time before she pulled away from me, ran quickly down the hill, and into her car. I thought she would shout something to me, maybe, but she just turned the keys in the ignition and rolled down the road, out of sight.

Untitled

Anthony Morales

With a ripe moon
making silver streaks in the clouds
I come out of my cocoon
like a butterfly of the night

Invisible wings that sparkle in right light
I move with the motion of all things
Leaves swing slow
like I sing

Songs of sparrows
in shadows
steady silenced by arrows
shot by the beast
who push dime bags
of death
and nickels of peace

What is the corner?
The crossroads of dueling destinies
trying to see the next aurora
It's Primetime

& fiends are crawl in'
inside their own skin
anticipatin elevation
above the clouds
where the wild things
were & became tame

askin god questions about his job
like why do you make me rob
why does my skin soak tears
like a sponge

does the pain come from
the dandelions I wished on
or three leaf clovers I crushed
because they weren't four

Beast rolls up
the spot's hotter than
the earth's core

Lava flowing like blood
in the gutter
Viejos eating guava & avocado
Slap the conga

Boom bop hollow
Beast leaders follow
The sound & smell of culture
In the air

Keeping us NYPD blue
Play a solo
Bolero
Moment of silence
delivered violently

Each record of my fingerprints
wrapped around cell bars
I once believed in
Stars
& stripes

Til I saw it patterned across my life
which one was right
for my dreams

Mis manos
command a US land
of hermanos eating
Platano trees
freely

while they hand
cuff cold cough
pass me off

leave me in the cold
W/out a buck

slash my tires
say I'm stuck
then ask where's my fire

In the middle
of a garbage can
where I stand
rubbing my hands
wishing to be a star

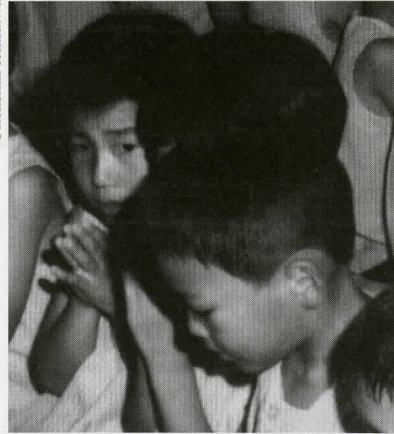
in the thick sky
far from
all this madness

the sadness gets poured
out like fortys
& spilled like blunt guts

it turns to dust
along yellow curbs
with
Newport lipstick
cigarette butts

©leah aden

©kenshin ichikawa



3 Asian Boys

Ishle Yi Park

On Wednesday afternoon the platform is quiet and heavy with people, and if the 7's late enough the sky moves from a long green to purple that backlights warehouses and silhouettes poles. The platform murmurs with the arrival of a breaking train, turning the corner and eating tracks with soundless vibrating desire. By the time it comes you have heard a stranger hum an unfamiliar song, thought about your lover's hips, watched fluorescent lights make awnings over a wide stretch of unlittered street and smelled a young couple's kiss. Although it is late and you are in transition, some part of you will want to cushion yourself into this blanket of peopled silence, heavy with the weight of cardboard bags, orange plastic bags and construction boots moving into alcoves as shelter from the wind.

Inside, three Asian boys flip through Nintendo magazines. Although they are smiling, they make you want to cry; the shape of their heads, their spoon curved frames and elegant hands remind you of Hyun-Woo. The happy loud way they speak Chinese is heartbreaking. More, the halted stilted silence when the group of white boys appear, slamming open end doors and shifting audibly in nylon Adidas running pants, snipping conversation to a crudely cut cord. They will block the middle passageway and drape onto poles, look down at the boys, say nothing and laugh. Something will percolate in the air. Your boys will look at their Nikes and maybe their hands; they will look anywhere except at each other. You will feel a strange shame, a rage rise inside and you will want to leave the train before you witness more. You will want to weep for the boys and their Nintendo secrets, hope they step off the next stop without a bookbag or an Adidased leg interrupting their exit, without a pair of rolled eyes or snickers. You hope those white boys will allow them one small justice, and you hope they will not forget the captive island of their language.

abrasive teaching
all colored voices silenced
rainbows end the storm.

Mark Kamimura





A series of horizontal lines for writing, starting with a few thicker lines and transitioning into many thin, closely spaced lines.