

# ONYX

BLACK  
MAGAZINE  
OF  
VISUAL  
&  
LITERARY  
ARTS



Tradition & Vision



*Untitled*

*Black and White Photo*

*Olukemi Abayomi*

---

*Zero-Zero*

## *Letter From The Editor*

Were someone to ask you to name something that embodies and celebrates cooperation, dedication, talent, diligence and is a collaboration of vision and tradition, a few things would probably come to mind. Were someone to pose such a question to me, a definite answer would be Onyx, the magazine.

This issue of Onyx could not have been possible without the cooperation and dedication of those individuals who recognize the importance of having an Onyx, a Black Magazine celebrating the Visual and Literary art forms. After soliciting and selecting pieces, requesting monetary support (and we'd like to thank those organizations and individuals) and sitting through lengthy board meetings, we on the E-Board realized that "Tradition & Vision" is one of the staples of the "Black Experience."

Thus, we decided to honor two of the many individuals who have been vital in making Onyx what it is today, Tiphannie Y. G. Gundel and Natasha Marin. The works of these two women grace the center pages of this issue of Onyx because of their invaluable dedication to both "Tradition & Vision."

Though the "Tribute" replaced the "Literary Editor's Award", we still gave the "Visual Art Editor's Award." The photo by Olukemi Abayomi (cover) is this year's choice. These selected pieces are merely a microcosm of the multifaceted display of exemplary pieces of art and literature in this issue of Onyx. Enjoy.

Sincerely,

Alwin A.D. Jones  
Editor-in-Chief

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# ONYX

## *Black Literary and Visual Arts Magazine*

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\*A Tribute to Vision and Tradition

\*\*Art Editor Choice Award



## The Purple Sphere

INTERNAL external ETERNAL  
I am the GLOWING SPHERE  
DESTROYing FEAR  
WHETHER FAR OR NEAR  
WHETHER HERE OR A LIGHT-YEAR

I HOLD THE GLOBE AS PURPLE  
AND GOLD HOLY ROBES  
WITH SUPER GIANT STARS  
PIERCED IN MY EARLOBES  
I am the INTERGALACTIC  
EVERLIVING  
EXPANDING TO ALL  
KOLLAPSING THE WALL  
DESTROYING PROGRAMMING ONCE  
STANDING DEMANDING  
IMPOSING AND SUCH  
TAUGHT TO US TO ONLY TURN  
US TO DUST  
TAUGHT TO DOUBT THE WILL  
UNTIL THERE'S NO ONE TO  
TRUST  
TAUGHT TO KILL THE SKILL UN-  
TIL THERE'S NOTHING TO DIS-  
CUSS

BABYLON TRICKs like gimmicks  
They'll embrace eastern no self religions  
once the classes switch  
From money and crime to  
Computer contact lenses floating in front of  
your left eye

...I HEARD THEM SAY KNOWLEDGE  
OF SELF DOESN'T EXIST  
AND all we do is EXIST within a matrix  
OF ILLUSIONARY FANTASIES  
DESIRES AND FALLACIES  
I'VE READ MANY THEORIES AND  
CONTEMPLATED MORE  
AND I ONLY KNOW NOW THAT  
THERE ARE WARS,  
AND MORE RUMORS OF WARS.

But know, that I AM UNSURE  
ABOUT PUTTING MY FAITH IN

ANY kind of hucMAN  
CARVED OUT OF STONE OR  
PAINTED BY HAND  
These VIRTUAL IDOLS  
will SOON be PRO-  
GRAMMED in  
virtual reality  
where you walk with HOLO-  
GRAMS.

Holding hands with barcodes  
and retina rigid marks  
Received from your eyes scans.  
...UNTIL BABYLON FALLS AND  
BECOMES ANOTHER WASTELAND

I AM SURE THERE is A PLAN  
AND IT APPLIES TO  
This living entity  
THE LIVING CIRCLE SWIRL DOT  
DOT  
All so Known As INFINITY  
All so known as self aware living be-  
ings.

All so known as THE self aware DREAM  
All so known as THE SEEN AND  
FOREVER UNSEEN  
All so known as the THOUGHT AND  
7 LIGHT BEAMS  
All so known as THE KO-KREATOR  
POURING AND DRINKING  
THE WATER OF LIFE  
FLOWING TO EARTHLINGS

We're ENLIGHTENED AND BLESS-  
ING INSTEAD OF  
VULGAR AND KURSING  
Finding the lost who came to me  
searching

SO THROUGH many lives I AM  
DRIPPIng THROUGH AND  
SLIPPING TO  
THE mind-body I write with  
THOUGHTS AND IMAGES THAT  
DISAPPEAR  
Your inner voice is found here

When we merge in mind U-N-I verse  
TAKE FLIGHT  
UPON THIS HORIZON of WORDs  
rhythm and time

I am in tune with you do you feel the BOND

Because I EXISTED BEFORE DAWN  
BEFORE THE SUNSET SWELLED  
AND WAS GONE  
BEFORE ANYONE WAS BORN  
I ALONE TOOK FORM  
FORMLESS AND SHAPELESS  
HAVING MANY FACES AND STILL I  
AM FACELESS

NONE CAN ERASE THIS  
UNERASEABLE ETERNALIST  
IMMEASUREABLE INFINITE  
UNKNOWN AND mysterious  
PURE THOUGHT TO THE VISIONARY  
THINKING THIS IS THE REALEST  
TO THE GENIUS MY NAME IS INFINITE  
THOUGHT PROCESS

TO THE MIND MY NAME IS THE  
RHYME THAT...LAUNCHES  
TIME AND SPACE LIKE nature when you  
watch it

I AM THE EVER EXANDING SPHERE  
KOLORED WITH SPLOTCHES  
STRIPES AND SPIRALS  
GALAXIES TO WORLDS  
BOYS TO GIRLs  
I am the kinky hair with the milky way swirl  
TO THE SONS OF MAN TO THE  
WOMBMEN WITH DAUGHTERS

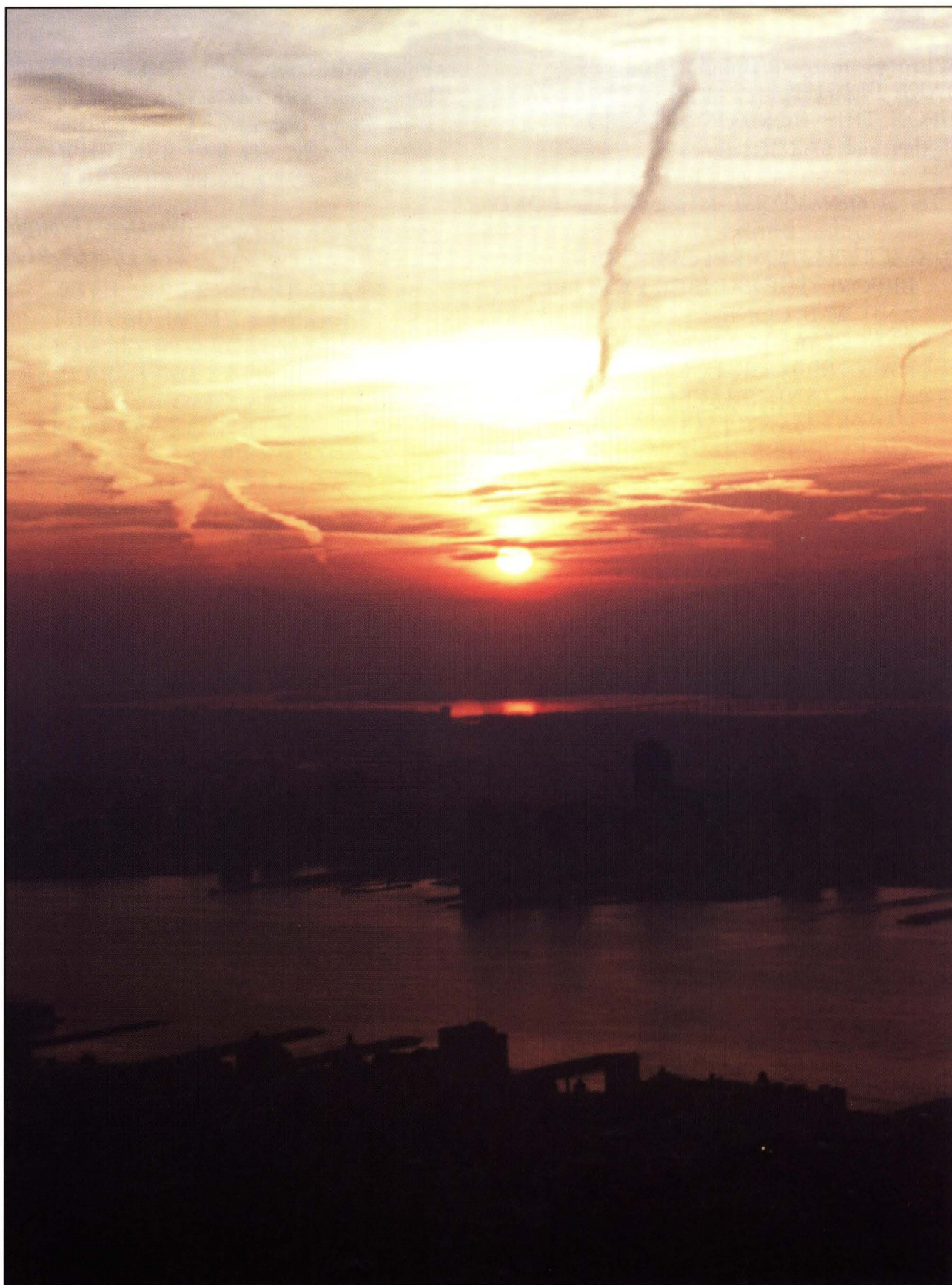
To the seers and knowers  
To the followers and watchers

I AM THE PURPLE SPHERE  
And I am ascending out of here  
My name is soul balloon

Filled with 2 waves of hydrogen  
harmonizing with one oxygen  
I am Rising higher and higher into...

Regions Most Magnificent.

--Written through  
Tera Ofori-Atta



*Sunset (2)*

*Color Photo*

*Choo Pin Ang*

## *Beelzebub's Bed*

Thoughts of you consume me  
Like death on the minds of the soon-to-die.  
You are the only cure for you—  
The wanted virus that has consumed my  
thought;  
The desire fantasy that has enveloped my  
dreams—  
A visible silhouette of you is carved  
Upon my eyelids.  
Every time they shut,  
You appear wearing blue and beauty  
As None have, None can and None  
Ever will.  
If in heaven  
Every memory of you and I will be erased  
And I cannot love you boundlessly in  
Paradise  
Make my bed with Beelzebub  
For there I would devilishly dwell.  
When I hold you at night,  
I want to steal  
All the clocks in the world  
In an attempt  
(though wary as it seems)  
To stop time  
To Breathe you—you are life –  
To devour your presence like  
A baby's first breath  
The one thing that is good about every day  
is  
You  
Knowing that you live  
Knowing that I live  
For You.

I've put a record of my love for you  
On tablets of paper  
Engraved meticulously by ink  
So that when we cease to be  
Forever can tell stories of  
Us.  
Love may come in all shapes, sizes and  
colors  
But for me love only comes in blue  
Blue is You.  
Created poetry, words that elicit feeling  
Because you touch me with your lips.  
My legs work  
Because if I walk  
I can end up next to you  
Sometime, Eventually...  
And I will walk for forever,  
Though knowing that I will die the day  
after,  
As long as at the end of my journey  
I can hold you  
Press you against my body  
One  
Last  
Time.

--*Alwin Jones*  
*Inspired by SP, KM & TG*





*Oware*

*Black and White Photo*

*Scheherazade Tillet*

## *Love Triangles*

Love triangles are unconditionally universal. They even exist between two people. The third point of the triangle can be found in time. Let us say a man looks in the direction of a woman. Through his eyes he sees the most captivating creature he's ever seen. This creature is sly and glides like a cat. Her arms swing softly as though they are in a dream. Her forearms stroke the sides of her hips, soothing and rounding them to perfection. As her hands stroke the shoulders of the man they move like a feather tickling the soft skin of a baby but their strength kneads the taut muscles into soft bread-dough. The creature's body flows like a slow, steady, meandering stream. When the woman speaks, warm golden honey falls from her mouth, smooth and thick. The warmth of her words hovers over his ear and embraces the inside of his soul. The honey seeps into places undiscovered and purposefully hidden from the outside. It lifts the lid of his Pandora's box and reveals his secrets. Without her intention, he pours his soul into the honey of her words. Her curves mesmerize the watcher, pressing them into sleepy sensuous daydreams for months on end. But this woman does not look back in the same way. This captivated man looks upon this woman but she will not look back. She only glances to the side catching his outline then gazes forward into time. All she sees are the promises of the future ahead of her. Only the temptation and adventure of time ahead receives her attention.

The sly kitten has vanished and the man is left to imagine her swaying hips, her feathery fingers and voice like honey. In a different place the woman waits for time's opportunities to present themselves but time presents the man. Only the man fills her temptation; only the man presents and keeps time's promise. How ironic that only the man creates the adventure. It is time for the woman to be mesmerized by the strength in his arms and the ripples in his stomach. Now the woman will be lulled into a sensual trance by the thick molasses in his voice. Now it is the woman's turn to be trapped by the memory of the man but when she turns to drink his image he is nowhere. Her only option is to look back in time to fill the holes of his person. She has to peer into the past and rummage through memories to find that his voice was filled with gentle caress. Her memory places strong arms and a warm smile, that spreads slow like her honey and wide like the wings of an eagle, on her incomplete portrait. The broad shoulders competently latch on to his long lithe arms and allow them to swing and display his strength. Her memory retrieves a glow in his smile and eyes that infect all of his face and character. All the pieces are one and now the woman dreams of her man with every breath she exhales. It feels like warm honey on her top lip, slow, heavy and intoxicating.

Her illustration is complete but only captures his likeness. His exact person refuses to emerge because his soul has been imprisoned by his memory of her. He is trapped by the honey she poured long ago. She cannot retrieve him from their past; he cannot hinder her past self from looking at the future. So that is how it ends. First he is caught by the woman in love with the future. Next, she is entranced by the man who lives in her past but in the present they can never find each other. Their souls are owned by their past memories of one another. No endless daydream can find the soul of the other in the expansive third point of the triangle called time.

*--Jennifer Turnbull*

## *Little Girls*

When I was asked to define reality  
as part of my urban therapy  
I only said what was real to me.

Reality is little black girls with lopsided ponytails  
fastened with gigantic pink elastic balls.

Reality is these little girls who smack their gum too loudly  
and speak too soon, who begin to trade in their white  
plastic ken dolls for chocolate ones of more life-sized proportions.

Reality is these little girls who think education ends in tenth grade,  
who memorize every song that epitomizes them as easy hoes,  
and who speak with dees and dems, instead of these and those.

Reality is these girls who get turned out, put out, or locked out of society.

Reality is these little girls who don't care where their baby's daddy be.  
And the saddest reality of all, is that this is the *only* reality these little girls see.

*--Jamila Moore*





*Sizzle*

*Ink, Pastels*

*Scheherazade Tillet*



## *Past Life*

I remember you from somewhere  
I think it was a past life  
I was a bachelor  
You was a rich man's wife

I was poor as hell  
Sleepin by the dock with all the fishes  
I worked in the café  
Busin tables and washin dishes  
You walked in holding his arm  
A beautiful buxom mistress  
You never turned my way  
But my eyes blew you kisses

He pulled out your chair  
You pulled back your hair  
And sat down seductively  
Flattening red napkin over pure silk  
That was whiter than milk  
I had an epiphany  
Are you the long lost daughter of Nefertiti  
Glowing golden molten skin  
You made my little brother swollen  
I was unable to move  
When you asked for the menu

You wanted Duck al Orange  
I forgot what he ordered  
I never met his eyes  
I was mad your love he had courted  
Love on first sight this bordered  
I would buy you the world, but I'm broke and can't afford it  
Caught between declaring everlasting love, Or begging for one night in your bed  
Shit, I must be losing my head  
I gave the order to the chef instead

I brought out the food, Piping hot, I was so nervous  
I fell, and on your silk, duck al orange was dropped  
You screamed in surprise  
Before I could apologize  
Your spouse jumped up took off his shirt and tie  
and blackened both my eyes  
I collapsed to the floor  
Trying not to cry, begging God asking why  
I ruined my chance, At heavenly romance

Before I had the ability to see  
The manager came upbraiding me  
Telling the "victims" that the meal was free, And saying I was fired  
I said man I can't be fired  
I can't be fired cause I retire  
Slowly I rose off the floor ran out the door  
Rain trickled down my jaw, I ran till I couldn't run no more

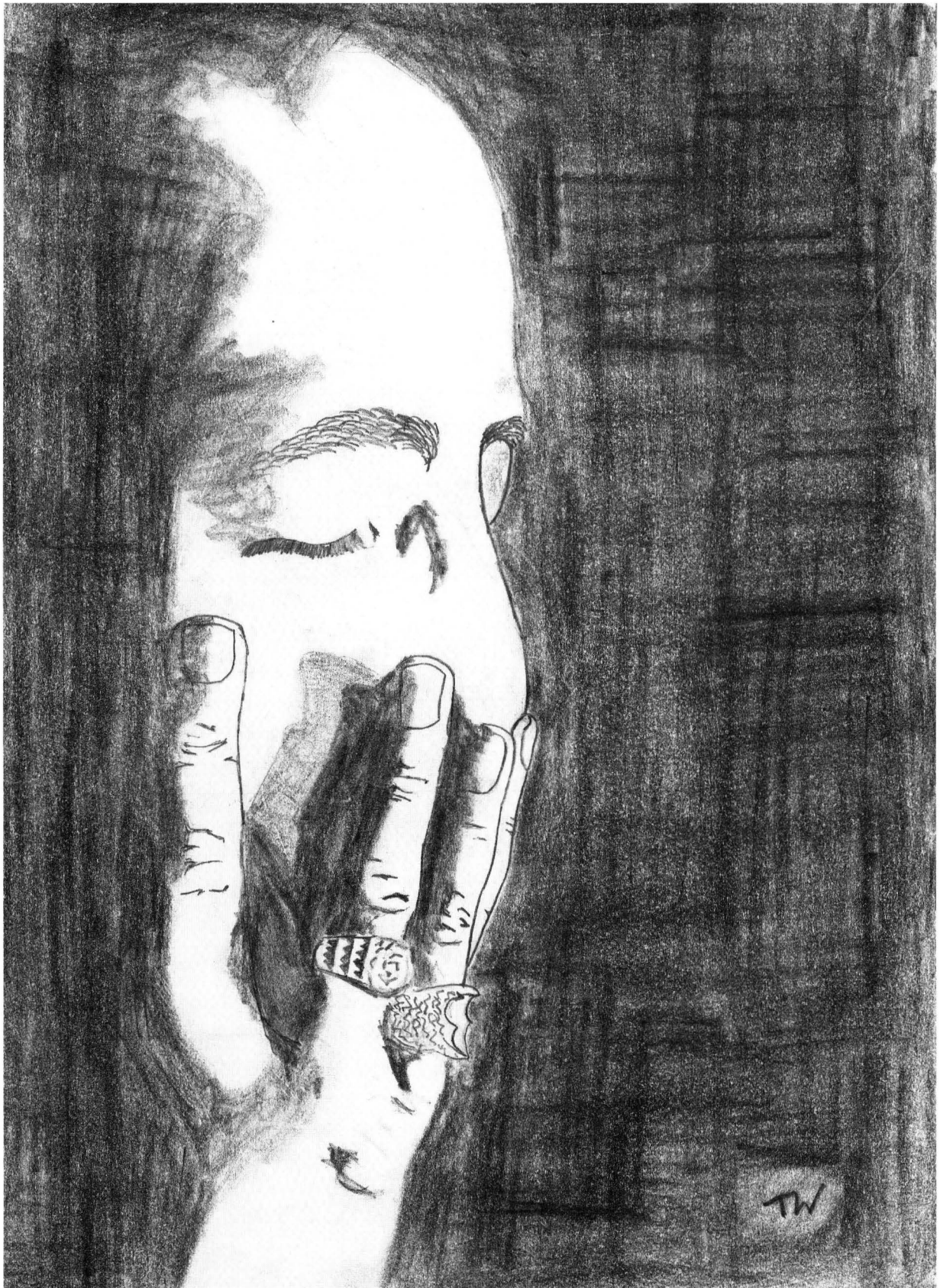
I stayed secluded  
For months, years, maybe even a decade  
Aight, more like three weeks  
I was dehydrated, malnourished, just hungry, I needed something to eat  
I walked down to the main street  
no shirt, no belt, no shoes on my feet,  
Craving for a piece of meat

Famished, I collapsed on the pavement  
Please God save me was my last statement  
A holy hand touched mine  
Golden lips whispered it was not time  
I awoke rested nested next to beauty manifested  
This must be a sign

Helped up by an angel, My eyes saw beauty and jealousy  
I knew I was in a tangle  
Anger cracked his knuckles next to me  
My throat began to be strangled  
Beauty attempted to stop  
Masculine rage exploded, defacing holiness  
My angel dropped, white silk mixed, with black concrete  
His face, my hand meets, But I am too weak  
Drunken testosterone announces my defeat  
lifelessness falls to the ground  
I loved you religously from sun up to sun down  
Innocence, purity, and love  
Destroyed in the middle of town

I remember you from somewhere  
I gave to you my past life  
I was a bachelor  
You were a drunken man's wife

--*Ajahne Santa Anna*  
*aka Infiniti*



*Tupac*

*Pencil Sketch*

*Tijan White*

## Rain

It is funny to me  
Everybody waiting to see  
A deliverer appear in the sky  
And why  
When Son of man said he dwell inside  
A strong people don't need a strong leader  
Or a leader at all  
Yet time stalls  
We read that the civil rights era ended in the 70's  
And believe it  
Satanic plans, you have to perceive it  
Reveal it  
To yourselves  
Earth can be heaven or hell  
Your mind an unlimited expanse or a cell  
You're the one that chooses where you dwell  
*Masses are being conditioned like dogs hearing bells*  
Like Agent Smith said,  
Humanity is Starting to smell  
Falling Rain, the truth tells

What is ruling your heart?  
What is the underlying principles of your decisions?  
Do you believe me  
when I say we are ruled by value systems?  
So what values do you have son?  
Externals can be taken away  
Hoard knowledge and rich you will always stay  
We were the scholars of Timbuktu in ancient days  
I watch the world stage  
And interpret the play  
Earth is the game board, I say  
And it has no rules  
In the hands of fools that preach fairy tales  
While puppet masters balance the scales  
Of justice and truth to their own convenience  
Pay close attention  
to the words in this next sentence

The most important use of words  
is to navigate your own conscience  
So who created the languages we speak  
And what are the goals they seek?  
India and China Talk of  
Chi and Parna  
The internal divinity  
*Transcending all that is life and humanity*  
This concept is not found in English  
No word means no light switch  
To illuminate the thought  
And before birth  
We're already caught  
in a mental limitation  
They already censored  
our thoughts and conversations  
I shout liberation  
On all planes of being  
To perceive  
Beyond touching, hearing and seeing  
To experience the fullness of be-ing  
PEACE !!

--Michael Fraser



## *Walking a Timeline*

I've been walking along this timeline  
a little further each day,  
but always the same.  
Looking back,  
I see that there is a gaping hole.  
That must have been where you fell off,  
dropped right off  
I don't remember  
how I got over it.  
I'm not so sure I actually did,  
yet I keep going as if nothing has changed.

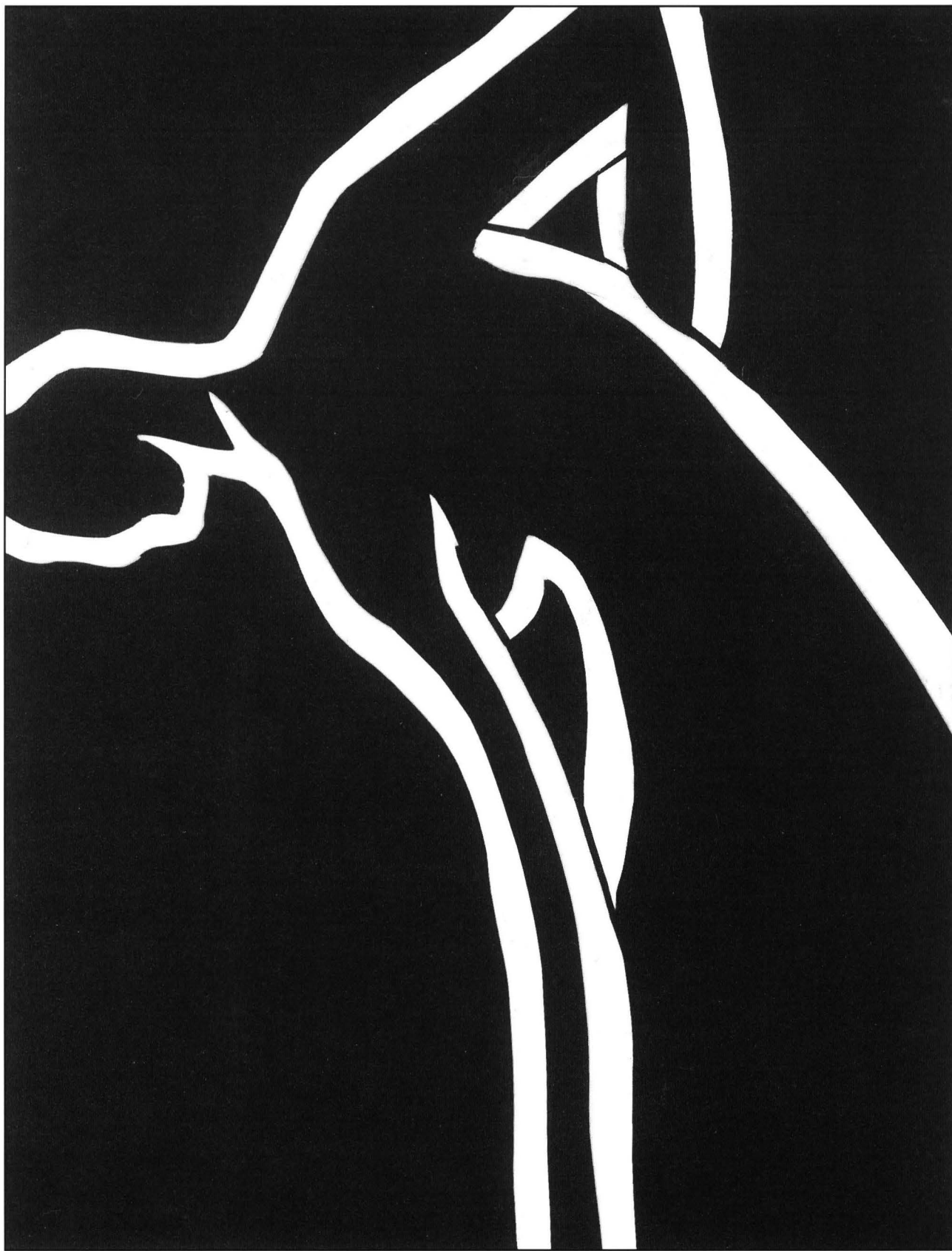
You simply dropped out of my life,  
and I keep going  
seemingly the same,  
but only I know  
that a part of me left me  
chasing you down that endless hollow.

And now I see you,  
a ghost.  
I do not know you.  
You do not even look the same.  
I do not see that life,  
love in your eyes  
because I killed it.  
I killed you  
because I had no choice.

I keep going because I have to,  
but I don't know why.  
Everyday and forever  
has become never again.  
I killed you  
and killed a part of me,  
and I keep walking through life  
like it's a straight line  
headed for a destination  
I know not where.

In cutting you out of me,  
I have become  
stronger  
and emptier.  
My hopes,  
dreams,  
and fantasies  
have left me  
barren,  
forsaken,  
with no future,  
no you. Stronger  
and much emptier.

*--Swati Mehta*



*Reclining...*

*Paper Collage*

*Catherine Headen*

*Your Plum*

I think you are too pale  
and because of that  
You think I am not beautiful  
because you can't see through my  
purple-blackness—  
You can't hold me in your palm  
and crush me between your teeth.  
You want to consume me in frantic gulps  
and swallows—  
quelling a hunger that won't be  
sated.

But, I don't live in a paper bag  
near your kitchen window,  
where it is too warm  
and I want to escape.

My brown skin is stretched tight and soft  
like crushed velvet, curling between your  
fingers

My breasts are plump and bruised from  
your constant  
pinches and bites

My hands are smudged smooth—  
waxy— like the charcoal tip of a candle  
wick

If you scratch me  
black juice will bleed under your nails.  
Be careful ... gentle.

My eyes are black oil pools—  
soot-sprinkled and swirling with infinite  
colors

My hair— an ornament amidst the stars—  
sprigs of ebony bark shredded into  
shards of night

It is not cold in the black holes of my  
pores,  
but warm, like cooling lava  
in the inky melanin creases.

Everyday,  
I ripen slowly.  
But, I am not your prisoner—  
your plum.

*--Natasha M. Marin*

*A poem to resist stone; in the name of the woman who raised me  
for my grandmother / por mi abuela*

It feels right to me, now, *ay pobrecita*  
I own you the way you own years  
You repeating lines of scriptures into my palms  
stinging verses of psalms into my soles

I walk with your voice in my feet  
and your notes in the grooves of my fingers  
making me reach forward and run when my eyes  
see brick and stone.

It feels right to me now, *ay bendita*,  
You own me the way I own poems  
Smiles creased with lessons when I give my heart  
twisting strands of the past into my hair for strength

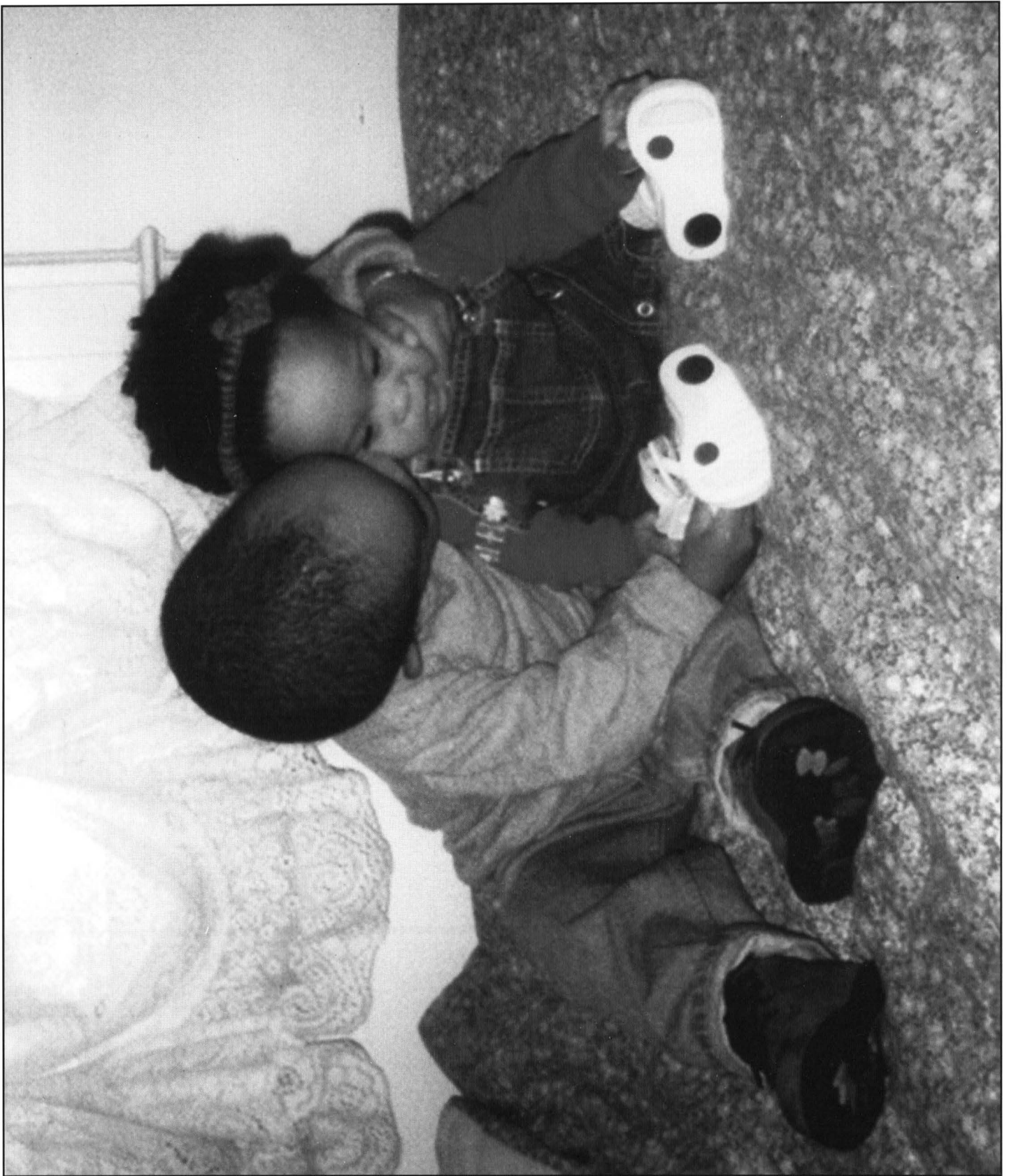
I love with your fingers on my scalp  
and your smile in the bone of my spine  
making me scream bravery! survival! when my eyes  
see me broken and stoned.

And it feels to me, *Abuelita*,  
that you build me again, heels first,  
when my spine turns dry and scatters  
I feel  
you are my faithful skin, my open door,  
the sign in my life that says  
we are from the clouds! and the coral!  
that we are Arawak queens and Carib warriors  
we are proud peasants who laugh our troubles to the air  
and let our tears sink into the ground for the storage of years  
and poetry

Your voice in my feet. Your smile in the bone of my spine.  
And I see no brick. I see no stone

*--Téphanie Yanique Galiber-Gundel*





*Innocent*

*Black and White Photo*

*Allana Torde*

## *The Molding Room*

Momma had a baby  
she wouldn't let out  
ballooned in front of her  
like an advertisement of  
afternoons spent  
stroking impatient kicks from inside  
as if to persuade  
honey in the tummy  
not to run

dripping face down dark  
I hang awaiting  
your labour decision  
swaying with the bees in the trees  
as petrified as me,  
stone baby  
stored safe

there are sounds outside  
your belly wall  
songs sweet melodies  
galaxies of color  
would run past  
my nose  
sniffing sneezing breathing  
in and  
out

out  
like gerber babies in exodus  
I'd carve an escape cesarian  
and lead my twins since deceased  
to fields and green  
and everything  
you'd run through  
if only  
born again

We'd summit mountains so high  
my stillborn siblings  
would send you postcards  
signed to momma with love  
and drink tea through nipped bottles  
on cruisline decks  
that don't allow pets

and just when the sea scared itself with  
our reflections in crests broken  
I would feel your tremble  
your call back home into  
the balloon vacuum  
Don't leave me here, child of mine,  
We'll keep each other company  
in moored umbilical eternity.

words can rattle my  
stiff frame  
pendulumed waiting  
for skies to befriend  
even if only to answer me  
in grey clouds that snycopate  
babies funeral march

upside down hanging,  
forever swaying  
as softly as my lullaby  
that sings momma to sleep  
in loops that play in me  
long after  
my nine months are up  
and the tenth counting.

*--Thea Lavin*

## *Untitled*

Strong Black Woman.

Strong like steel, hard, cold, unfeeling, unneeding, self-sufficient, self-sustained, self-motivated, but alone.

Strong Proud Black Woman.

Head-up, walk that walk, switchin' (know they're watching me).

Know they stare but do I care? Do I feel? Does it hurt?

Strong Black Woman.

Black like the night with eyes so intense they burn.

Let me shade you from my light.

I might outshine you, black man, so you make me black like black and blue.

Pummeled down by you and the master's daughter.

But I'm a strong black woman, so I can take it, right?

Juggling kids, bills, and jobs alone, just cause you don't ever want to come home.

Don't treat me like Becky Jo, walking around her on tiptoe, scared she's gonna leave you.

Trying to impress, giving her the best, but not me.

I can take it, right?

Strong Black Woman gives you an excuse to give me the abuse which is so abuse.

In your words there's no truce, the juices from your lips, the words how they drip, and you know it's a lie.

I need you.

Strong Black Woman can't do it alone, without black man on his throne.

Complete the picture of family, read the scripture, it's meant to be.

My heart ain't ice and I'll love you good, twice as hard as any other woman would.

Hold me, caress me, all through the night. Stop me and tell me that I look all right.

Understand that you complete me and without you, what am I?

Just strong and proud and black and woman, proud and black and woman, black and woman, woman and alone.

*--Shayla Donald*



*Statue of Liberty*

*Color Photo*

*Choo Pin Ang*

*From "Mind Mimicking Madness"*

*Journal Entry # 1*

My mind sometimes mimics that of the insane; these bouts of "non-traditional insanity" (really that's BS, but...) are triggered by catalysts of minute proportions. You know the everyday shit.

But for me the first thing that causes that madness that I have come to love, the madness that is me, is race. (Don't stop reading now; hear me out). Though this issue consumes a lot of my time and my desire here in this cell, it also fuels me so I can continue. It pushes me through looks, stares, words of angst and ignorance, constant images of a docile me and encounters with a complacent me. I simply keep living for the path not yet found will be best when discovered.

Many days I sit and ask myself why am I what the world does not like and have tried, miserably I might add, to rid themselves of. The answer lies in the word "tried." I remember the ghastly horror of slave-holding stations and that did not kill me. I am here. I remember that ships, in which my people and I were stacked more tightly than matches, didn't do the trick. I am still here. I recall the rapes, murders and target practices, innocent whose sole reason for being a victim of death, sodomy and pain was that they existed. But I am still here. And when I hear the whips crack and see flesh tear (via my madness), I remember that I am still here. Hoses spitting out water, then an element of hate; dogs biting little children because of hate; police batons molesting muppy heads and tarnishing tepidly-toasted, beautiful skin, trying to tear asunder a perfection that they did not create—I AM STILL HERE. And then I see manacles, both the metal manacles and the mental manacles; and I see prisons of chrome steel bars and ideology surrounding and within me—I AM STILL HERE.

There must be a reason. I know that there must be one. I just don't know it, yet. All I know is that I survived and will survive. Everytime (yeah, that's one word. why? 'cause I said so) they kill me, ass-ass -sin-hate me with black death, which explodes instantaneously and take a life that they did not create, another one like me rises again. I am like a tree—when you cut me down to the stump, many little buds arise and grow above the "weeds" that are planted and despite the pesticide pissed on me.

I grow even more beautiful than before.

And because you cannot fathom why, you hate me again. I turn that hate into love and try to turn nigger into friend. (We'll talk more about that). And you sit and wonder.

And then you come over to me, clasp your hand on my shoulder and smile. But Grandma always told me that "laughy laughy gal easy for do-do." Do you know what that means? Figure it out. I can't tell because Grandma's secret is one of the reasons I'M STILL HERE.

When you look at me, tell me what you see, please. What do you see: person or black person? Ah, that doesn't matter anyway. You see you taught me what racism was and now you complain when I cling to my race. Why is it so bad when I congregate with those whose God-given cloak looks like mine (you remember BPP & Huey). Oh, you see me as black and when I congregate and therefore become a Black Sea you



are scared of a flood.

Well I'm honored that you are afraid that a cup of me can drown you. In my Black Sea, you do not exist. Actually, I really don't think of my "black sea-ness" either. I don't hate you. Trust me I don't. Actually that is hypocritical of me to ask you to trust me when I have a hard time trusting you. "Why?" Yeah, I know that you have "a black friend" and that you listen to hip-hop? Let me ask you this:

Can we trade our God-given cloaks?

Hey not that I want yours or anything like that but it's a start. I don't really need to know what it is like to be you. I already know. Feel ma drift? Would you wear mine for a year, no a month, no a week, actually a day and a night and then go to the housing projects in a predominantly black area (find one in NY preferably) among undercover cops who are taught to fear blackie or to suspect blackie. (*Pause*) Didn't think that you would?

Really, were you to become me would you trust you? Take your time and think about that. Let me help you. Let's examine his-story. That's not how you spell it. Oh! It's history. I tend to get confused as my mind mimics madness. But what did I tell you about interrupting me? Anyway, back to the topic at hand. You didn't stop reading yet. Thanks, normally you dismiss my feelings, concerns and thoughts with comments like "here's that stuff again." You remind me of Frankenstein:

Created a monster and cannot bear to look upon its hideous face. (You, not I, created this racism). But keep on reading, maybe you can write back to me. That is, if I didn't die already from diabetes, high blood pressure, a bullet from one of my peers, a cop's "stray" bullet, AIDS (African Immuno Deficiency Syndrome), suicide, cramped living space, depression from looking at abandoned buildings, the agony of watching a million brothers striving for three hundred spots on basketball courts, confusion from the mixed signals of the "ghetto," teachers telling me indirectly that I can't succeed, imprisonment, a massive heart attack from realizing the implications of White Jesus or that the democrats care as much as the republicans, severe acute homesickness (Africa! Africa! Africa!), parental abandonment (Africa does not want me?), the anguish caused by my ignorant desire to be president of a-(me)-rica.

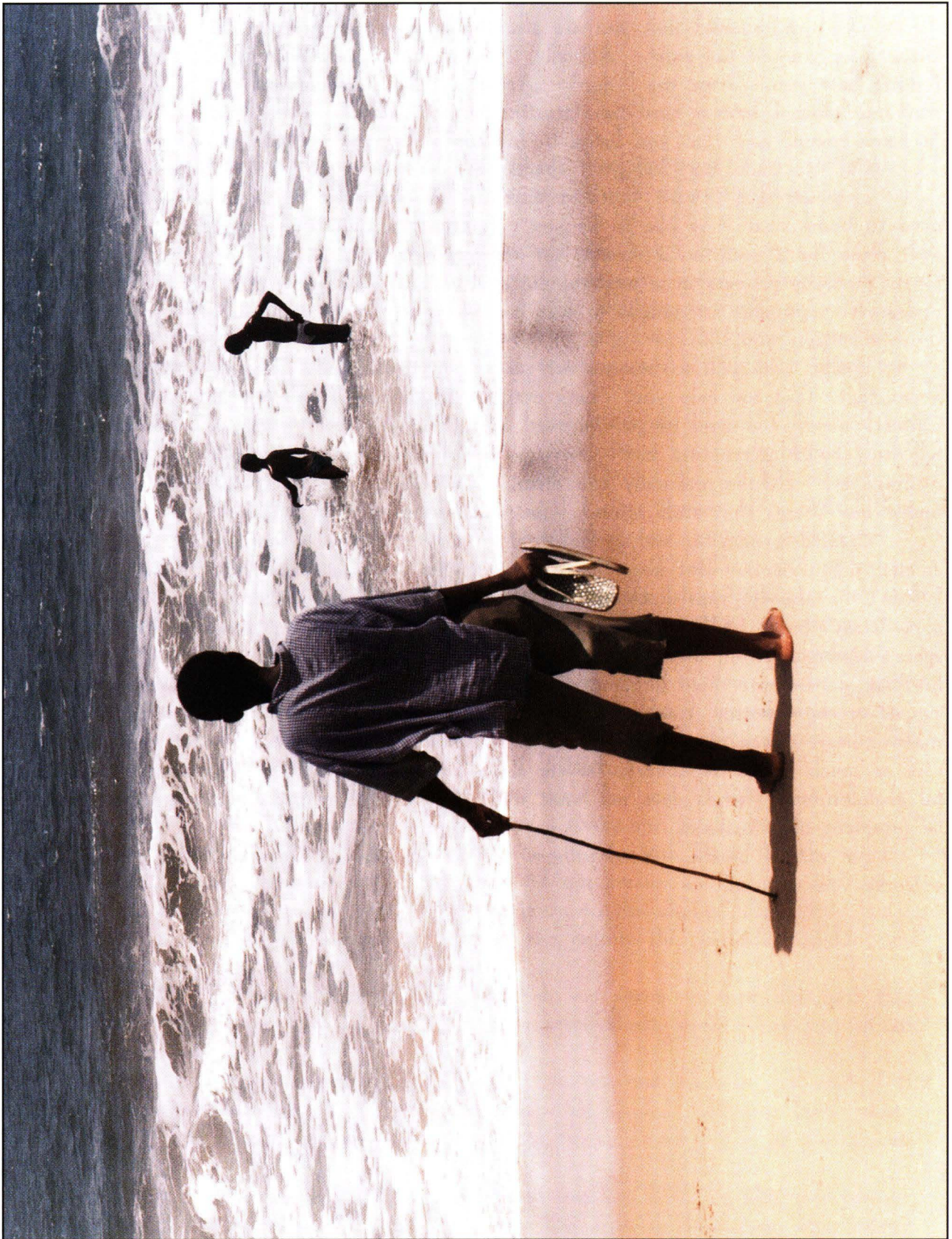
I'm out of breath. Need to rest. Will write more. Please feel free to respond. I welcome your conceits.

Sin-clearly,

*Free Prisoner # 310801666*

*--Alvin A. D. Jones*





*Denu Beach, Ghana*

*Color Photo*

*Scheberazade Tillet*



*You are a wonderful writer*

Subj: RE: (no subject)  
From: R22@hotmail.com  
To: F23rain@infoseek.com  
You are a wonderful writer.

——Original Message——  
From: F23rain@infoseek.com  
To: R22@HOTMAIL.COM  
Subject: (no subject)  
Wish

Wish my thoughts  
And feelings were transparent  
Through this cyber space  
Physic Connection  
Wondering how to show my affection  
In shards of black light on white  
Can a word hug you as I would  
squeezing briefly before my release  
Interrupt a sentence by stroking your cheek  
Kiss the corner of your lip as you attempted to speak

Day-dreams leave this journey man weak  
Time's seams seeming to be my defeat  
Light beams bend, so why can't the "rules"  
Fraser wish he was the one who controls  
From a distance observed the intertwining of souls  
Like DNA strands  
Or the interlocking fingers of a couple's hands  
Plans are often drawn in the sand  
To be edited by Time and Tide  
Which waits for no one  
Plus the wind whispered a storm 'za comin'

I want to leave my hand print in indelible ink  
Or carve initials on boulders in the semblance  
of the scratches on my shoulder  
Green shrieks and ice crystals  
Somewhere someone listens to the wind  
and learns to whistle

*--Michael Fraser*

## *Love Affair With the Sun*

### Rejection

Drowsy lady rise – he peeks through my window... orange...  
Searches my bed, I sleep while reddish haze creeps through curtains.  
He rubs the bridge of my nose with sleepy hands, but ... I ignore his call, avoid his caress  
More sheets.... and pillows

My darling wake – he whispers to my ear with lavender breath  
Now, stronger arms massage my legs against the feather barrier.  
Heat causes me to stir.

Please love – he mumbles, shakes me but on the other side of my eyes I'm engaged  
They hold me but still He presses my belly.  
I am cruel... I retract from continued requests, so close to darkness I am tempted

Still he strokes the valley between my neck and chin with heat-kisses my forehead but  
Insulting him I refuse to come  
Eyes closed open to black.

Where are you? – He smooths my belly to his rhythm, impatiently scorching the breast of  
the robin with that same finger... she sings... I moan.  
Spitefully I rise and slip from his grasp.. I will not answer him, broken from bliss.

Darling come back to me... I pout in a gray corner out of his reach, I daydream  
But his light fills me, swims over me through my eyelashes, lifts my eyelids and I see his  
sweetness, devotion... I see his light.

I am here – Cold I greet him today with a coat, scarf and hat. Yet unlike the moon and  
his companions... He is cleaver and unzips my black armor... looseness my scarf. His fingers  
slide down my neck and under my chest... touching me.  
He slips off my gloves and plays games with my fingertips on the horizon while he settles  
into twilight

I am alone in dimness... and coupled in light  
The inconstant moon starves me of that sugar... I cannot fill my craving  
He is full, sweet, constant  
releasing my hair and kissing my crown with a thousand butterfly wings

Sleep my princess – his hollow voice echoes in the dark breeze.  
I close my eyes.... I must dream of him this night.

I will come for you in the morning –  
I will be here – but then, swiftly, I drift to the cold starving face of the dark

--Jennifer Turnbull

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### *Untitled*

Thank you. I've said it I don't know how many times today. But I think I can say it again and again. Every time I think I've hit bottom, every time I feel like there is nothing more for me - you always find a way... always find something to keep the blood running through my veins. I love you for that Lord. I was feeling so depressed, so disappointed with myself and my performance and my school work and I just didn't feel like I had anything to look forward to and I knew that I had nothing left to give. But you gave me hope, Lord. Just like you always do. I WILL be in church on Sunday, Lord because today I owe you my life. Today I owe you my happiness. Today I owe you my love and the honor and the praise and I thank you Lord. I thank you for opening my eyes when I could have never made it to see the sun this morning. I thank you for picking up my feet and carrying me to class because I would have never gone without you. And I thank you for the way you've inspired me to be a better person. And I thank you for not letting me give up. Even when the work weighs down my shoulders, Lord, you are here. And when I feel ugly and unappreciated, you are here. And when I just can't do it anymore and the tears are streaming down my cheeks, Lord I feel you wipe them away. I hear your voice encouraging me to go on. And I feel how you lift my spirits and I know that it will be all right. Maybe not today, Lord, and maybe not tomorrow, But I know that it will be all right. I've never come so close to hopelessness. I was only minutes from the edge and without even asking you Lord you came and brought me back, giving me little rewards that I don't even deserve. I didn't expect you, but you came, right on time. You love me, when no one else here will and you change me like no one here can and I'm so grateful that I have you Lord. When I'm alone, those thoughts don't creep into my head because I have you. Everyday I look at those pills and I know what I could do but the thought doesn't carry through Lord because you protect me. You keep me alive every day. And I thank you. And I dedicate my life to you. Because I can't live without you. The stresses are just too much to bear without you. It's just too hard without you. Everyday and in every way I count my blessings. Lord, I love you. Thank you for today.

--Shayla Donald



## Blackman

You wake up Blackman  
angry as hell  
you only see two ways out  
Death or jail

So you think of your fucked up life  
and how the "white man holds you down"  
but you never truly take the time  
to change your situation around

You know you have the opportunity  
to be anything you want to be  
but all you pay attention to  
is what you see on T.V.

You see "niggas" with guns  
and "niggas" with mad ones  
"niggas" with basketballs in they hand  
and "niggas" with a lean in their stand

So you stop going to school  
and you begin to hate the world  
you start thinking it's cool  
to say bitch to every girl

You stop raising your son  
and start disrespecting your mother  
then you go buy a gun  
'cause it's time to rob a brother

You wake up Blackman  
starvin' to eat  
you put your Gun on your waist  
and you hit the streets

You run up on a bunch of guys  
with fear in their eyes  
They all scared to death  
'cause you start takin they lives  
and when it's all said and done  
you try to rationalize  
that it was worth one gold chain  
for six black lives

Now you tell the judge  
how you need to get cream  
and about how cloudy piss  
got you kicked off the basketball team  
you tell him why you were strapped  
and you try to explain  
the only life for the black man  
is entertainment or rap

You wake up Blackman  
angry as hell  
to find out you're one of the  
1 million black men in jail

You start reading a lot  
and come to an epiphany  
that our society is still racist  
even in this time of prosperity

You learn a whole lot  
and it ain't no joke  
that in most of the 50 states  
incarcerated felons cannot vote

So you realize  
during probation  
that there is only one way  
to change this station  
you pray that the youth  
get their education  
and use that knowledge  
to change the Black man's situation

You wake up Blackman  
knowing the truth  
praying that one day  
It'll be better for the Youth

--*Ajabne Santa Anna*  
*aka Infiniti*



*Man ... Transcends the Pain*

*Pastels*

*Tera Okanta Singh Ofori-Atta*

## *Unsung Psalm*

I woke up one morning singing, but whose song was in my mouth? I had not reached the point in my life where I could be happy, and accepting of exactly who I was. So I sat two days after Christ's birthday trying to have my own rebirth. I wanted to be honest with myself, so honest that it hurt. So honest that a stinging pain is produced. I wanted this so that the next time I woke up singing it would be my song in my mouth. I've been foolish in many things this I know. I've let my heart take me places my spirit didn't want to go, and I let confusion and longing be my heart's guides. Never again I promised myself would I let another man make me cry, and then I let John in. At least I was able to say his name this time. I found parts of my father in John, all the parts I looked to him to hear. What do you want from me I asked, "You," he said. Should've known, this drug pushing, gun carrying, just released, foster kid wanted me - and only me. But he lied, he wanted more - he wanted my soul. Why are you doing this he asked as we sat under the unromantic moonlit parking lot of McDonalds not touching but wanting to. "Because I'm supposed to," I told him. He didn't want to hear my, "God put me here to tell you he loves you" sonnet. He wanted me to say, "because I love you." But ha - I can't love you, not right now, not ever. He told me he was dangerous and I would end up hating him. Hate you I said, my first kiss, my man, my...how could I? So I told him superstition was played out, when really it was me. I believed in him when he didn't believe in himself. He was right, and I got played. When all was said and done I was left to squat in his memory like a pig in the filth I helped to create. The morning after our last goodbye - before the last kiss and after the first fight, I woke up singing, but it wasn't my song in my mouth - it was his, and it echoed anger and relief. Damn, I thought I was over that, I thought I had really moved on. On to what? The others awaiting my purity, the others who wanted virgin me, who kept urging me to go down. Who did I move on to? I thought that if I had a man of my own that nothing would bother me, or that I wouldn't have other issues. I thought a man was the magical cure for all my ordinary dysfunctional American life. Thank goodness I didn't bet money on that. Whole pages in my journal wasted on John Does who acted like hoes. I didn't know then that I was too good for them, or that they couldn't love me the way I needed to be. Or that when I looked at them I didn't see heaven and earth. I didn't understand that they weren't yet men. Not the men who would take risk, who would kneel down in front of me on their knees and cry tears unto God and ask to be made the type of man that I needed. No these were not the men in the spiritual sense, I know that now. Now I know that I don't have to flirt or play games because my man is being prepared for me and I for him. I know that the man I get will fulfill my spiritual and sensual needs.

I won't have to be like my sisters before me, suffering abortion - a distortion of their God given rights to reproduce. I will not be the one lying belly up and legs spread crying to just get this the hell out. But I do cry for my sister because she is a beautiful creature who does not understand her potential. The greatest thing she has in this hedoness world is her potential to do great things. She does not know how I cry and pray for her, but I do. She doesn't think I understand her, but one day I too woke up singing, my belly full with the sickness of her demise, and it came to pass that it was her song I was singing. A sad and pitiful ballad of a wasted life. I wanted to be honest with myself, but as I sit back and take a breath it hurts too much. It's intense, stop this feeling my head is reeling words are coming too fast. At last I can't breathe I was seventeen when I saw my life standing before me. I was down on my knees crying God please don't take my mama away from me. He hit her God, he hit her. Frantically searching for the words in my tongue but there were none, so I said save me Lord as best I could in my learned English language. Down on my knees, but not long enough. I'd seen the scenario over and over like a bad scene that just seemed to be on repeat. I exhausted myself to a tiny yelp, and when I awoke my mouth was dry and my voice was gone. I didn't wake up singing.



Hitting rock bottom I had a demented mind. Splinters of words pierced through my bones so as I struggled to make my knees bend and my fingertips for the cup of Christ I found resistance. Had I not been in pain for too long? How many lessons had I to be learned? I thought my fate was sealed that morning when I cursed his name. I had to lay blame to someone. I went through life like a zombie, each day decaying more and more until one day all that was left were two blank eyeballs staring into darkness thinking of crazy things. I was scared, and yet a combination of pride and fear wouldn't let me go to him. I could sing a song for everyone but myself, then one day those round blank eyes, the only things I had left in the world fell upon the notes that connected my nose to my mouth, my mouth to my face, my face to my head and so on until I was again a complete and vivid person. I blinked back a tear and my eyes were new. I saw my hands for the first time, and they were new and fresh. I saw that my feet had been washed, and my ears heard a new sound. It was powerful and beautiful and cranked with the spirit of ten thousand tomorrows. It was welcoming and rejuvenating. I wanted to hear it before, but I heard it just when I needed to. That day, I woke up singing, and he had given me a new song to put in my mouth, and it was all mine.

--Jamila Moore

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### *JUST CAUSE*

FOR A MINUTE I WAS LOST WANDERING FUNNY I HAD LED MYSELF ASTRAY GUIDED BY EMOTION PULLING ME IN ALL DIRECTIONS IN THE MIDST OF MY CONFUSION AS I LOOKED FOR MYSELF THERE I WAS STANDING FIRM WITH YOU ON SOLID GROUND STILL HESITANT I GATHERED THE COURAGE THE COURAGE TO MOVE MAKE MOTIONS THAT WERE SURE TO SET MY SOUL AFIRE YOUR EYES BURNED WITH UN-NATURAL INTENSITY I GAVE YOU A PIECE OF ME A PECK PIERCING PLEASURE I MOVED AWAY ASHAMED OF WHAT I HAD DONE EMBARRASSED I APOLOGIZED FOR WHAT I HAD STOLEN STOLEN THAT MOMENT BUT FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A WHILE PROUDLY I STOOD AND WAITED FOR YOUR REPLY UNCOMFORTABLE SILENCE KILLING ME SOFTLY THROUGH MORE THAN MERE WORDS YOU ASSURED ME THAT MY AMBITION HAD NOT BEEN IN VAIN AND IN TURN GAVE ME A PIECE OF YOU AWE INSPIRING WHAT I KNEW THEN WAS THAT STARS ARE ALWAYS ADMIRER BUT ARE ONLY VISITED BY A FEW AND I HAD NOT BY CHANCE DRIFTED INTO YOUR LIGHT I WAS IN FACT DRAWN IN BY YOU AND YOU TO ME BY THE SAME LIGHT AND THERE WE STOOD HELD TOGETHER BY SOMETHING GREATER IN EACH OTHERS ORBIT LIKE SOME STARS DO BEAUTIFUL.

--Tijan White

*a poem for the last poets*

...and you shall ask me:  
"what ever happen to the rhythm?"

and i'll say one day that shit got played out  
it was a saturday  
we let it play  
day to night  
night to day

in a rock steady kinda way  
an early-morn-word-is-born-break-of-dawn  
serenade

then at dawn it broke  
the rhythm was dope  
maannn, so so dope  
so highly anticipated  
it was raided castrated & infiltrated  
by lack of hope

*what ever happen to the rhythm?*

we brought it out onto to streets  
until heartbeats bopped to a not so unique  
beat  
& it became shallow instead of deep  
exactly 6 feet  
& in my breakdance  
something snapped to break me out of my trance  
& at first glance  
i saw the rhythm rest innocently on a corner block  
a block patrolled by diallo type cops  
i saw the rhythm get murdered in a  
barrage of gun shots

the crowd dispersed!  
no longer immersed  
in the abstract coolness of a rebirth

*what ever happen to the rhythm?*

r.i.p ed apart in the line breaks of  
an accapella verse  
written instead of un-rehearsed  
which is kind of the worst  
cuz at first

on the planet mother earth  
we quenched our thirst off of  
Her FREEEEEE—STYLEEE!

I was a voodoo chile dancing in the Nile  
doing the running man  
escaping the confines created by Tha Man  
with grace i ran thru this rat race  
heart pumping blood at a pace  
in sync with the bass

the rhythm was our safest place

a life preserver  
that kept us a float in a boundless sea  
of griots poets emcees  
human beings we be  
ONE  
with the MOON, GOD, STARS & SUN  
if that's so then

*what ever happen to the rhythm?*

it became lifeless  
instead of priceless  
sold on a auction block at a high rate  
to an overpriced diced & sliced  
massa mind estate  
where ifs been slavin'  
whipped/flogged/hanged  
branches breakin'

& in this rhythm-less nation  
rhythm & meditation  
were separated due to the laws  
of segregation  
so now we're just sittin' in our arm chairs  
patiently waitin' for the emancipation  
of the rhythm

i heard it was shattered into pieces  
crucified like Jesus  
we surrounded it with scowls  
we mocked at it  
threw rotten tomatoes  
at its flows



spit mucus upon its toes  
cut our dreads, afros & all that was natural  
because his story told us we shouldn't have those

almost simultaneously we  
forgot how to clap our hands to  
negro spirituals  
that strengthened the souls  
warmed the parts of our body that were cold  
now we ain't even thinkin' bout its resurrection

*what ever happen to the rhythm?*

WHAT EVER HAPPEN TO THE RHYTHM?  
i can't bop my head no more

close my eyes to its hypnotic lullaby

i dance step to deafness  
trip over my feet in the darkness  
smother my breaths in restless awakenings  
please tell me, "What ever happen to the rhythm?"  
it stopped!

now we have become dysfunctional  
like the current state of  
dare i say....HIP HOP!  
it got mangled, tangled  
bitch slapped forearms strangled  
after the revolution  
now we all don't know what we are doin'  
groovin' to some shit that ain't producin' movement  
who sent  
the rhythm a way?  
who scratched it up & let it play  
in annoying skips on an unconscious tip  
raped & stripped  
placed on polar opposites  
I can no longer  
produce a phat beat with my upper & bottom lip?

*what ever happen to the rhythm?*

i will take my time  
rewrite my rhymes  
so i can lace it  
with everything nice

some rhythm & spice  
i envision my life  
soaring on its expanded wings  
I dream of such things

I AM and i know  
WE ARE rhythmic feens

ready to die by any means  
to rest in peace in:

A LOVE SUPREME  
A LOVE SUPREME  
A LOVE SUPREME  
A LOVE SUPREME

LOVE SUPREME  
A  
LOVE SUPREME  
a l O v ES up  
r e  
m E

what ever happen to OUR rhythm?

--Anansi

## *Lying*

The depths of his body deteriorate  
Deteriorate into the flame  
that will consume his existence  
Breath will fade like  
clouds on a sunny day drifting to the heavens  
Fade away leaving scars of the lie  
The lie that has brought him here  
Here, but not know why  
Here, not wanting to know why  
Denying his Fate  
Accepting his Lie

### *His breath fades*

Sitting on the coarse sand  
with the red sun on my back  
I persist in my scrutiny of the ravaged bench  
I stare at the lonely bench of sorrow  
With its feeble posts, its dismal, gray shadow  
Lying there and pondering  
why is it that way?  
Was the aging effect of the seasons like  
sandpaper on wood  
or was it its tears of loneliness

On the cruel world with my decrepit body.  
No one will sit on me, sleep on me, love  
me.  
Why is it this way?  
My exterior is appalling yet my interior  
is ravishing as a butterfly still in its cocoon.  
Eyes gaze at me like I am a mirror  
A mirror's reflection they choose to deny  
Remember, a mirror never lies  
What am I then, an object?  
Or am I the object of their self  
But, I stare at you knowing your Lie

*... Breath fades.*

What are your feelings...emotions  
Never will I inhabit  
such a world of pain, grief, denial  
You deny your appearance  
Accept what you are  
What you feel  
Accept Fate

*...fades*

He, along with his lie approaches me  
Fate forms in the sky  
like accumulated dew on a leaf

...

His deteriorated body lies on my post  
Remember, the mirror never lies  
What am I then, an object?  
Or am I the object of their self  
But, I stare at you know your Lie

Deny your Fate

Remember, I never lie.

*--Bobby Tugbiyele*



Tufts