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A LILY IN THE VALLEY

By

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Chair:



Myra Sklarew



Keith Leonard



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DEDICATIONS

This collection is dedicated to my parents, Cleo and Linda Tillman, and to my grandmothers, Ida Mae Diggs and Virginia Dare Tillman.

A LILY IN THE VALLEY

BY

Cedric Tillman

ABSTRACT

A LILY IN THE VALLEY is a collection of poetry. Its title is borrowed from a Negro spiritual. The phrase is a metaphor for individuality in general; it is also an acknowledgement of that remnant of poets and prospective readers who, in an increasingly secular American society, still consider religion to be a vital influence on their moral compass. The first two sections of the collection, entitled "This Little Light of Mine" and "Short Stories," are concerned with the individual's struggle with the demands of faith and the ways in which faith can affect one's view of the world. Several poems in these sections also address the process of writing. The collection concludes with "R&B Poetry," a grouping of love poems inspired by love songs and relationships.

PREFACE

Sometimes I wish I had gone along with that gang, but I guess I am too much a moralist at heart and really want to preach at people in some acceptable form rather than to entertain them. –F. Scott Fitzgerald

“Let the current flow freely when you feel that it is the true current that is flowing... And if you cannot release your personality, what you write, though it be engraved in letters an inch deep on stones weighing many tons, will lie like snow in the street to be melted away by the first rain.” – Carl Van Vechten, *Peter Whiffle*

For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings... it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility... – William Wordsworth

I thank the Lord that my voice was recordable. – Cee-lo of Goodie Mob, *Soul Food*

The stone that the builders refused is become the headstone of the corner. – Psalms 118:22

One thing I've learned... is that whatever shortcomings you have, people are going to notice them; and whatever strengths you have, you're going to need them. – President George W. Bush

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6).

I want to acknowledge my Father in heaven for his mercy on me and his many undeserved blessings. Lord, I pray that you put me in the places you want me to be, that your will be done in my life and not my own, and that there be nothing I want so bad that it can't be given up if it is not pleasing in your sight. Continue to mold me — I know you are not through with me yet.

I want to thank my Mom and Dad for more than words can possibly express. I thank God you all were strong enough to raise me the way you did, and I hope I can follow your example when I have children. Thanks for that first red Children's Bible with the gold lettering on the front. Thank you for giving me something to turn to and to refer to during these most trying years of my life, something with which I can put every trial into context. Because of you all I know nothing is coincidental and that all things happen for a reason. Daddy, thank you for the ass whippings, and for being a Black man that tried to raise his kids, and for working so hard to provide for us. And Ma, thank you for your example. You are so near-perfect in all the ways that really matter. Thanks for putting us before yourselves. I love you both with all my heart. Anything I do wrong is my fault— not ya'lls. You know I know better. Also, thanks to my big little brother (for what, I don't know). I love you and your immense cranium very much. I want you to be happy and I know God

will bless you if you let him. You know I think it's harder on church folk 'cause we know better. Ya'll know I'd do anything I could for you, and as God blesses me we all gone get blessed.

To my wife—I love you very much and I owe you so much that I fully intend to repay. Thank you for your patience, strength, faith, friendship, and forgiveness. I have needed it all, and will doubtless need them again. You have never stopped loving me, and never stopped believing in our destiny even when I did. I don't deserve you, but I hope to. I ain't never gone come to nothing 'til I do right by you. Thank you for taking care of me and providing for us while we've been up this road. Someday soon, somehow, I'm going to be able to take care of you. Thank you for going with me wherever God guides us. For now, I think it's 'bout time to go home, and I know you are ready. I will always love you no matter what.

To my grandmothers— Ma 'Gin and Ms. Ida— thank you for your toughness and your faith. I want to be just like ya'll when I grow up. I'm still trying to give ya'll something to be proud of. You all have no idea how much you motivate me and how much I think of you though I can't see you often, or anymore. Grandma Ida, I know you see me from up there and you must know I always have your expectations for me to live up to. We'll see about the preachin'.

To the boys in the 'hood— too many to name. Thank ya'll for beatin' and jackin' me up, cursing me out, calling me names, sticking me in the jaw, robbing me of self-esteem,

picking on me, buying me contraband, taking me to girls' houses, and so much more. Ya'll made me tougher.

Thanks especially to Antoine Mitchell, for being another brother to me and all the memories. I love you man. Also to Stukes Lemon, for the relationship advice, IT support, and most importantly, paying for club admission and lap dances. Thanks also to the Vaughn brothers, Dedrick Boyd, all ya'll. And thanks to my Me Phi Psi Brothers nationwide. Ya'll know who you are.

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Thanks to all my instructors at AU. Thanks to Profs. Myra Sklarew and Keith Leonard for agreeing to read my interminable thesis (and acknowledgements). Thanks especially to Myra for seeing so much in those of us in the program that sometimes don't see as much in ourselves. Thank you for your encouragement and your open-mindedness and your consistency and genuineness. This school and this program are blessed to have you

and your true reward awaits you. Thanks to Prof. Frank Turaj, one of the singular persons I have ever met, for his willingness to be unpopular and true to himself. I found it refreshing, and though I did not always agree with you, I think you are a wonderful example and the last of a dying breed. This institution is the worse for your departure. But you've pissed off enough people for one lifetime. Enjoy retirement—I'll never forget you. God bless (Yes, God.) Thanks also to Cornelius Eady for his honest, constructive criticism. Thanks to Henry Taylor for the stories and for being a cool ass white man. Thanks to Kermit Moyer for introducing me to Hemingway and Fitzgerald, two writers who have inspired and amazed me.

Thanks to David Pike for exposing me to Dante, a Christian heathen poet after mine own heart. And many many thanks to Nicki Miller, A.K.A Morn. Thanks for keeping all of us straight and for all the work you do. I know you don't get paid enough. Thanks for calling me on my cell phone in North Carolina talking to me like you knew me to tell me ya'll had a merit award after I'd decided not to go to go grad school. You are a special lady and everyone knows it—God bless you. Thanks to Ms. Nancy Payne and Cynthia Furr, my 11th and 12th grade English teachers, and to my 7th grade English teacher Ms. Wildman, for grabbing my face and telling me that my smile could light up a room. Thanks to Nations Ford Elementary School, Ms. Connell, Ms. Hastings, Ms. Carlton, and Ms. White (2nd, 3rd, 4th, 6th grades, respectively) for being “mean,” wonderful women and teachers.

A very big thank you goes to the people in the program who didn't let their feelings about some of the sentiments in my work affect their objective critiquing of that work. Thanks to Venus Thrash (love you so much girl) and Paulette Beete, Sandra Beasley, the former Patti Smith (don't know your married name, hope I got the old one right), Natalie Illum. Thanks also to Ebony Golden (so aptly named). Ya'll are high standards to live up to. Can't wait 'til ya'll get famous. Thanks to Derrick Brown (D. Breezy) for being from Charlotte and the days on the quad. Thanks for all the hugs— Gabrielle Belfiglio (love you Bella), Rachel Bork, Samantha Shanley, Lisa Schamess, Lisa Vanian, Lauren Fanelli, Kate McGann and all you other sweethearts.

Thanks to all the DJ's who play a good Quiet Storm. So much of me is its fault, because it made me a hopeless romantic. To all the girls I've liked, lusted and loved before— I know a lot of my poetry wouldn't be possible without you all. Most of all, thanks to that exclusive sorority that loved me back, even if only for a short time. Everyone happens for a reason. I have learned so much from you.

Last but not least— I want to thank you love for the ways you will make me a better man. I cannot wait to see you and I love you—

Cedric Tillman

October 12, 2004, 3:20 a.m.

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THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE

There's a Lily in the Valley (Ms. Tine's song)

I speak for the regular folk,
The jilted, forgotten ones
Who lie somewhere between
*the tattooed and barred up*¹
and the neo-continentals.
One is twisting a blunt.
The other is twisting his locks.

We all know that militant brother
who said we'd been
"conditioned,"
that brother
who grew dreads 'cause
when he had the low even cut
they said he had a Caesar,
the one who knows better than white man Webster
the true etymology of "picnic."

We all know the brother with the Avirex jacket
and the limp
ain't hurt.

Peace to all my niggas who don't like the n-word.

Shouts out to cats that wear American Eagle and Structure on top
but rock Timbs on the bottom.

(Continued; stanza break)

One time for the Muslim dude I argued with
 while I was eating a bag of pork rinds,
 who laughed good-naturedly
 when I called white people our "distant cousins,"
 who tried to answer my questions
 about believing in both the Qu'ran and the Bible
 if there is only one God
 and *no man cometh to the Father except by*
 a prophet?
 and peace to people who think the Bible is figurative,
 to the ones who say the white people doctored it up,
 to the ones who know Jesus was black
 when his momma was a Jew,
 to the ones who don't go to church
 'cause Jesus ain't brown enough
 and much love to dude I fought with over politics,
 who gasped when I said most niggas
 (gasp)
 are poor Democrats who
 find security in pink necks
 and asserted that there is a growing population
 of unaffiliated black voters
 who are closet Republicans.
 Thanks for hearing me out dog.

But this special shout out goes to my chasm dwellers.
 This is for us,

(Continued; no stanza break)

down in the Hybrid Valley,
who are looked down upon
from the two sheer, slippery heights
of American blackness:
Mounts Gold Teeth and Kinte Cloth.
I wish to fellowship more with my brothers
and I gaze longingly at my sisters,
Those pretty-toed quasi-Africans
Mournfully aware that they can never love me
I can never love her
Because she says
“peace”
at the slams and I do not say
“peace”
at the slams
enough.
I have not been conditioned properly,
I think.
I am lonely,
and my spirit is burdened with the realization
That I will never know some of my nearer cousins:
I believe they are spiked
with too many new spirits
and they believe I am just chaser.

1. From “Bling Bling,” performed by B.G. featuring Hot Boys.

Having a Form of Godliness

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves...unholy...despisers of those that are good... lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away... Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. - 2 Timothy 3:1-5, 7

Like men making eye contact,
The mood was unsettling-
Though the seats were soft
the yawns were audible.
We sat,
half-anticipating
and let the speaker
talk over our heads.

The veterans,
they nod their heads continuously in time
to the inflections of the preacher's voice
The amens become passive acquiescence.
Truth be told,
we all wanted to be elsewhere
Sitting in bonds
Obliged to that crucifix
Called to accountability
because we lacked the bliss
of ignorance,
all of us burdened by the blessing
of belief in salvation.

(Continued; stanza break)

And the choir can hymn
of the need for the knowing,
But we fidgeted nervously,
for to give up life's lusts
for eternal life
is like giving away everything you got
in the hope that someone
you've never seen
will give you more than you had.

So slowly
we press toward the meeting adjourned mark
Content to call ourselves Christian
and approved in our study.
But when we are asked to turn to Hebrews,
Half of us turn to the front of the Book,
thinking
Surely that part
must come at the beginning,
just by virtue of its name.

People I Hate

I hate disturbed demonic ass people,
 So talented and shit,
 weird long braid hair cornrowed fro
 earthy bangled old clothes wearing
 Rap Techno Ska-pumping
 (what the hell is ska) ass people,
 Cool as hell,
 flaming liberals-
 I guess ya'll were just damn lucky.

So Dad hit Mom a few times.
 They used to be hippies,
 used to smoke weed
 go clubbing together
 'til they had you
 And you fucked it up for 'em
 So they argue all the time over stuff like
 how much allowance you get and your curfew.
 Mom's "unfulfilled,"
 didn't think she'd be married to a high school guidance counselor
 or maybe a First Union assistant vice president
 (future bank division),
 Now that you've come along
 your existence plays no small part in their money problems
 So they had to let your karate class go.
 You sense that it's all your fault and
 "withdraw into yourself."
 Besides the issues with guilt,

(Continued; no stanza break)

you also have the ability to paint like Van Gogh
 or write like Alice Walker,
 and a propensity to cuss your parents in grocery stores
 and act like you got a job in shopping malls.
 They get a divorce and as a young adult
 you complain to a psychologist
 that yours was a loveless childhood.
 So God saw fit to bless you with that talent
 so you could at least make a name for yourself
 before you put your head in an oven,
 put a gun in your mouth,
 drink yourself to death,
 slit your wrists
 or die in some creative and sick fashion.

Or you were raised by your momma.
 Your dad left when you were three
 and works at a t-shirt graphics plant.
 You came up on public assistance all your life.
 Pops does ok for himself
 (as evidenced by the new crib)
 now that he's done with child support
 and he's now an usher at this 30-member church
 where they have no drum set
 and the preacher's illiterate.

(Continued; stanza break)

He saw you in the paper yesterday,
 you're an honorable mention All-America
 Now he wants to meet you again
 since you're projected for the 5th round of the draft
 You run a 4.45 forty
 and you're a 5'10, 195 pound corner
 and all muscle.

Your grammar is pathologically incorrect when I hear you talk on TV
 and God sees fit to bless you with a talent
 so you can make a name for yourself
 so can get ya family out the 'hood
 and be on MTV Cribs.

And you,
 you the one with the two happy parents
 that ain't disturbed enough
 or discontented enough
 to make you extraordinary.
 You went to church every Sunday
 and you believe in God
 and so you think doing certain things will get you where you want to go if you keep doing
 them but you're impatient as hell and all the sick ass one parent can't talk ass people either
 got money or got published before they were 26 and here it is your 27th birthday.
 Momma in there reading the Bible
 Daddy's been married to her 30 years
 All this damn stability, shit, you thinking
 maybe if he had a Thunderbird fetish
 and she was hitting a bong
 and you had an autistic sibling

(Continued; no stanza break)

You'd be screwed up enough to have had your name in the paper,
appear on Oprah,
and make Religioustolerance.org's
ten most notable scientologists under the age of 35 list.

But no.

You sitting at a computer struggling,
trying to write some crazy shit,
trying to sound witty and quirky,
But you sane as hell,
And everybody's telling you to be yourself
But normalcy don't sell!
Apparently,
all God deemed necessary to give you
was the arrogance to believe
everyone else is out they damn mind.

The Gold Chain

so much depends
upon

a thin gold chain
when

you got too many
god

damn charms
on that muhfucka.

Poem Written Upon the Occasion of Watching the Movie "Igby
Goes Down"

I

The author would have you believe he has talent.
In truth,
he completely lacks for anything resembling ability.
To disguise his inadequacies,
he generally resorts to shock value poetry.
He has the tact of the Egyptian hog farmer,
He is as brazen as the Episcopal bishop
He has all the clever inventiveness of a drunken baby,
and in these respects,
he is like most spoken word poets.

II

I wish I was black.
I would have higher blood pressure
I could curse more
Everyone would understand.

III

I'm glad ya boy knows Douglass and King were against affirmative action.
In his honor I have named my firstborn son
Clarence Narcissus.

(Continued; stanza break)

My mother was Cherokee.

She told me that if I decided to be black and ever got in trouble,
to get a white lawyer.

She told me if I decided to be white and ever got in trouble,
to get Johnny Cochran.

Why do the black people
laugh at all the wrong parts in "Monster's Ball?"
And why in the hell did I laugh
at the end of "Bamboozled?"

IV

One time in the mall,
I saw a cute little boy kick
and punch his mother.
He wanted to go to a store on the second level,
but she wouldn't go.
He screamed that he hated her.
He screamed that he would kill her.
He wasn't 3 feet tall.
It was then that I knew I would whoop my kids
Before they thought they could whoop me,
And that the nosey bastards that reported me
Would risk assault and battery.

(Continued; stanza break)

V

“Juggy,” she said to me, stroking my naps—
 “Baby,” she said to me, kissing my cheek—
 “We want to see something else,
 not these ranting,
 stream of consciousness joints
 all the time.
 You can say anything you want baby
 if it shows evidence of craft.
 And by all means, do apologize.
 Apologize for the Asian harlot
 being “Vietnam boom-boom.”
 Apologize for telling your audience to
 Kiss your black ass in that poem.
 You, and your ass,
 are black,
 and people will take you seriously love.”
 I wish they wouldn’t.
 I wish you would.

My mom wants me to write Oprah.
 I tell her I can’t.
 I may be famous one day,
 and won’t owe her so much
 that I can’t be critical.
 People that a lot of people like
 make me nervous.

(Continued; stanza break)

When I run for office,
 I won't bullshit the people.
 I'll pledge to be true to myself
 while serving the public.
 I'll tell them what I believe in.
 I plan to have enough money to make a race of it,
 And I will need it,
 because I plan to insist that you vote for the other guy
 if you don't agree with me.

If I offend anyone, I do apologize.
 I have three Eminem albums.
 When I was hungry, pissing you off
 fed me.

I was once beaten by a mob of poets.
 One,
 an albino with dreads wearing a tight t-shirt
 with the St. Something stenciling of a parochial school
 and a Che Guevara tattoo on his right bicep
 blugeoned me with a tasseled leather messenger bag
 decorated with buttons that read
 "God is great" and
 "what would Gandhi do".
 Out of the bag fell
 a copy of "The Art of War"
 and 3 or 4 big steno pads,

(Continued; no stanza break)

All I could think about
was how right Bush was about you people,
And I screamed as much
through bloodied mouth.
Before I passed out
the last things I remember:
A Borders receipt for a Qu'ran on the pavement,
the smell of urine,
My torn God Bless the USA shirt,
A Samaritan covering me
in a cloak of many colors,
and him leaving me there
to die.

The Poets for the War

It is good that war is terrible— else, I would come to love it so. — Robert E. Lee

1.

From here,
War is not poetic.
But who would know
better than Lee?

There are no redneck poets,
But if there were,
They'd support this war.
They are fiercely patriotic.
Redneck is not poetic,
But it's real.

Patriotism is Lee fighting for the Commonwealth
Because it's where he's from,
Not because they're right.
And perhaps it is just that personal,
And just that local.

2.

This is a war between the infidels and the heretics,
And I pray they all live to see other days,
But I wonder which of them deserve other days
more

(Continued; stanza break)

If you support war,
 you might, arrogantly
 Think of America as the best place to be,
 The best place people could ever disagree
 That perhaps this privilege was worth
 someone dying for,
 That we've had all we can stand,
 And we can't stand no more,

Besides, everyone gets their turn.
 The whiny 'flicted kid from high school
 Will live to be popular.
 We are all popular one day.
 True this,
 The hawks are having their turn
 The doves will have other chances.
 True this,
 The predecessors are built upon
 by the succeeding,
 Hang around,
 Something will be constant,
 Someone will always be here,
 Perhaps not what you 'customed to,
 or who,
 But this is the way.

(Continued; no stanza break)

Right now was not always,
 Do you think it so?
 Do you think we were always
 So tricolored and starred?
 They killed a lot of people,
 A few million for every star on the flag.
 Where were you, and why
 did you not stop it?
 What turned the tide,
 When did we ever reach
 the pacific?
 Is that the only reason it stopped?
 Who opened the counters
 The buses, the schools,
 And when were they unable
 To see colored legs beneath stall doors
 And not assume it was Him,
 the one black kid

What drops of water,
 rebellious and outspoken
 get out of line
 shortening the crest
 and breaking the wave?
 P.Y.P. means play your position.

3.

Eventually many things lie still,
 Knowing that some other thing thinks itself God.

(Continued; stanza break)

And yet they occupy until he comes,
 Still you live
 Like you haven't flipped to the back of the book
 And yes, you believe that--
 But you fight with all fervor;
 Or you go against grains,
 You sit-in,
 demand that things be renamed,
 stand loudly outside places,
 have dialogue bordering on diatribe
 with people you disagree with,
 write poems and letters,
 And when the days are done,
 you rest.

4.

There are no Christian poets.
 But if there were, what would they say?
 Would they want war?
 Do they really believe
 The peace of Jerusalem is to be prayed for,
 Or that a God would really bless those
 that bless Israel,
 and curse those that curse Israel?
 If they didn't, would they be Christian?
 How much of the Book do you have to buy?
 Do the poets against the war know
 how far inside the big man's head
 the Higher Father is?

(Continued; no stanza break)

Don't these Christians believe in the righteousness of unpopularity?

Don't all the wide roads lead to hell?

Ye are the salt of the earth

With what shall it be flavored

If you lose your savor?

God, if Christians wrote poems,

Maybe they'd all be in tercets, like

"If you've never come up against the Devil,

That's an good indication

You're walking with him."

5.

Has America been lucky, or blessed?

If lucky,

Maybe America is New Rome,

And if so,

maybe this is the end of our run

Like something Milan made years ago--

We are soon to be

passé'

as the French might say,

what with pride rotting us from within,

and being comparably nouveau riche

But the poets for the war

Who would be rednecks or Christians,

Or both,

would believe this is home

and/ or

(Continued; no stanza break)

we are blessed and that
life is more precious
than lives;
They'd believe the close attachment
To anything mortal causes myopia,
They'd claim clairvoyance,
These savage utilitarians,
and/or
They'd believe that the homeland's
Pants fit just fine, and that
When so inclined,
We can pull them sum a' bitches off
and show our thang
to the en-
tire world.

The All-American

My mind is made of American stuff and its thoughts are the product of my American
breeding.

I

I am an all-American boy.
And I'm proud to be an American.
I am of the finest American stock.
Pure breed of those that bred me.
My black hair, my brown eyes
The way I look through Chinese frames
into American mirrors and
Japanese watch faces, is beauty.
I became cocky because of my stock,
And so,
Because American and finest
are synonymic, I shall say finest,
And you may bubble outline now
Or free associate.

II

I am a fan of every all-American team.
I am a fan of pure all-American teams.
From first animation, I was
The Cowboy fan,
The Yankee fan,

(Continued; no stanza break)

The Carolina fan.
 Accident made me fans of other teams.
 Look and take note--
 I am a fan of nothing ignoble.
 I am a fan of the teams people like me
 should be fans of.
 I am a fan of the teams
 That a man would be a fan of
 If he has been where I've gone.
 If he is from where I am from.
 There are fans of other teams
 And I cannot understand them.
 I do not understand how you,
 other fan
 Cannot want the win I want for us.

III

I was born in a hamlet.
 In Rockingham
 That day, my American mother
 Her hair a science project mushroom cloud
 Bore me to an American father
 His hair a science project mushroom cloud.
 I remember the nurse,
 The baby blue of the thing she cleaned my nose with,
 Its rippled bulb like a seashell on its side.
 I remember my funny reflection
 in her silver ball earring.

(Continued; no stanza break)

She sat me, new and viscous, in his lap.
 He kissed me like I'd never grow.
 He hugged me,
 held me like I'd never grow.
 I shall never be so new in the coming tomorrows
 as I was that day.
 I am not perfect, and
 I will not be refurbished.

IV

The pure breeds love their country.
 They love especially how they bitch freely,
 They freely bitch because they can
 Because America lets them.
 They love their country.
 They love their country,
 those pure breeds who wish for the world
 the prerogative to bitch,
 Some die to make this so,
 And America
*Where at least I know I'm free*¹
 doesn't force them.
 It lets them.

V

The Americans who go to church
 go to church with me, for I go too.

(Continued; no stanza break)

I am Baptist.
 I am African Methodist Episcopalian Zion.
 I am probably African Methodist Episcopalian
 without the Zion.
 I am non-denominational.
 I have lived in closets
 I was prodded inside by the fallible,
 I listened to them,
 They forbade me wine,
 They forbade me women,
 They take in wine,
 They have women and men.
 I am a Christian in America,
 and I am very often tried
 And hardly ever by a jury of peers.
 It has been very hard for me
 to come back out.

VI

I am not an Atheist.
 I am not an
 Atheist.
 I am not an atheist.
 I am not, you know what I'm sayin',
 An Atheist.
 But you are, an American.
 I am not
 Good at line breaks.

(Continued; no stanza break)

But you are, an American.
 I am not Catholic.
 I am not Catholic
 but you are, an American.
 I am not a member of the Nation
 (they are Americans)
 I am in the top one percent of their 85 percent.
 Or in the top one percent of their 10 percent.
 But that in me which would be 5 percent
 Is ravaged by my pure breeding,
 My cocky Americanism,
 That wondrous and persuasive disease
 And our God is
 what I experience most
 and what I know best,
 Until all else is hearsay, and pagan.
 Don't tread on me.

VII

You who tell me of the poem we need
 are not All-American.
 The poem we need, you say
 is the poem we want.
 The poem I suggest for you is our poem,
 you say.
 Here are poem innards.
 Now, make it say this for us
 With the requisite affectation

(Continued; no stanza break)

And do not make us angry
 And we shall smile upon you.
 And I, the all-American,
 Pure breed of who bred me
 Arrogant and self-righteous,
 Inculcated with indignation
 As evidenced by the nascent fulmination
 So familiar to the eye on such occasion
 Say to you that--
 These poems are my churren!
 You don't tell nobody
 how to raise they shirren!

Now,
 if my poems need whippings,
 Then I shall consider it.
 But they have no need of you,
 and they will never have need of you
 as long as I am warm-blooded
 and phallic.
 And if they think otherwise
 Consider that they have
 come up in a single parent home
 and that they are not grown enough
 to know what's best.
 Here,
 I make the rules
And I won't forget²

(Continued; no stanza break)

the ones who died
who gave that right to me.

VIII

All Americans have a set of what sexed them.
 I would not be American
 if I were never sex.
 If I never sung sex,
 I should never sing songs.
 I will take notice of all nature
 and we should acknowledge sex.
 I am a poet, an All-American
 (I shall never be one on the field)
 And I love all Americans,
 And where there is dissonance,
 I take in that American,
 Notwithstanding.
 I say, notwithstanding.
 I say also, irregardless.
 What of it?

IX

And, so emboldened,
 I declare to you on this day,
 From this American earth,
 A pure-breed American male

(Continued; no stanza break)

With an all-American mouth,
 That we will love lesbians,
 That I shall love a lesbian
 To the music of a Meshell N'degochello tune
 Or some other blue rhythm;
 As sure as there are women
 Who taste women,
 A man shall most assuredly taste women
 Who taste women:
 Yea, let the pretty lesbians
 disrobe, revealing
 What else but a latent ambisexuality
 (mercifully)
 All the pretty lesbians
 Will orgy, so versatile
 (All but one who an all-American
 might pull aside
 to ask her hand in,
 at the least,
 A hetero-monogamy—
 May God forgive my shower with her,
 We take it in pious water, America's
 All that is there is
 America's, and damned)
 Let some foreign ones be green-carded,
If only for one night
 Let the ugly ones come
 The sexy ugly ones,

(Continued; no stanza break)

Make room in our moulting pot,
For truly we all will be beautiful there,
And there, in that place
Will be all-Americans,
Some *not mes*:
And I, ever repentant
So purebred, religious, curious, and thirsty,
In my all-American man's dream
will be there butt naked, singing
*Cause there ain't no doubt I love this land*³
God bless the US
A.

^{1, 2, 3} From "God Bless the USA," performed by Lee Greenwood.

SHORT STORIES

Or I Would Surely Die

I had to write something or I would die.

I can't read but so much.

I have to make something to read.

I am full of clever things, funny things

Sexy things, black things, white things

You should know about the secrets

The feelings, the urge,

The kick, the need,

The high, the flow,

The involuntary dispensation

of id.

Watch for the coming novel,

The pending newness,

The future.

Tell ya bizness.

How it all gets put down

Is random, and rabid.

How it all gets said is thirsty.

Poems are a sickness

When I am in pain

I type like the screen needs infilling

Margins are violable,

I never could color

This is a sickness,

No one would wish this on themselves

When there's work in the morning

and sex in the sheets....

(Continued; stanza break)

I had to write something or I would die.
 I read books when I have nothing to say--
 I have sinned every time I read
 when my soul was full
 I have passed classes I should have failed,
 I was thinking of what they'd think of me.
 I wasn't thinking of what I had been thinking--
 That is more,
 There is only so much I can read before
 I am full of what I can write,
 And I am here now, I am here now
 Fill me
 Until I am full of what to write
 and write it
 Fully inhabited by the proof of genius.
 Wholly possessed by a lyric unruliness.
 The whore for this conjuring,
 completely turned out.
 Saying nothing concrete,
 there are no things sometimes,
 There are no tangible things outside--

Tonight, at this late hour...

For a while, there were just...

For a while, there are just ideas,
 and concepts,
 Vapors you cannot hold on to,

(Continued; no stanza break)

But I breathe them, and they open me
Like eucalyptic air.

There is nothing less genuine than craft
Nothing lacks sudden spirit like what we concoct,
I worship my Muse,
I worship my God,
I serve two masters,
I shout into the listening space
that I have no choice
I have hellbound brethren to be singed for
and burnt with,
Save me,
or don't,
I smell of incense
and smoke
Carpet Fresh and cigarette
I am a straddler, pray for me,
I go with them there because I want to,
Because they sing how I sing,

I have angels alongside me
The fallen, the faithful,
All whispering,
even the eyes in their wings whisper
They know, they know,
hoarding it up,
The knowing,
They are all part of the plan
Heaven is conspiring
Yes, heaven is conspiring

I see it now
Heaven is conspiring with the thread cutter,
And I must finish it all soon,
There is a long way to go
and I am only starting.

Why Writing is Dying

As we speak,
the next Tennyson is eating honey graham Wheatables.
He is single, 50 pounds overweight,
and has a kaleidoscopic stack of aborted poem snippets
taller than a wine glass;
This is easy to discern,
as they are stacked on an end table
beside a crusty, days-old flute.
He yearns to
“attack the stack”, as he’s wont to say,
but he is currently enthralled by “From Hell,”
a movie which, he feels,
will augment a feeling of oneness with his late Victorian
collective unconscious.
Perhaps even inspire him, maybe.

The red light is lit up on his video game. He has had this track and field game on pause
now for an hour. He is playing, somehow, with a friend from overseas. He is
winning and at especially triumphant moments he mutters:

“vex not thou the poet’s mind, with thou shallow wit.”

His playing partner, the next Thoreau,
Has had a live-in fuck friend for 3 years now.
At this point she gets mad at him like a wife,
Though it’s actually been a few months

(Continued; no stanza break)

since he broke the engagement.
Across the pond in D.C.,
waiting for his colleague to call back,
He had grown rather bored,
And after writing in his journal for the day
He and his girl get drunk off Zima Citrus.
Utterly inebriated, they stumble to bed,
Where they go to suck marrow
from life.

¹ From Lord Alfred Tennyson's "The Poet's Mind" (1830).

what He really thought about Gethsemane

(Matt. 26, Mark 14, Luke 22)

Sometimes I thought
I should've left John and James on that fishing boat.
I guess in a short space details get left out,
Like how I had to flip that bread and fish
mainly because those two ate so much.
And don't get me started on Peter.
This fool.

First of all,
you know about the water incident.
Tell me,
if you're walking on water,
What makes you think a wind gust
could knock ya hustle?
Secondly,
how does cutting off one soldier's ear
Keep the others from arresting me?
Perhaps a better question would address
how to go about arresting a man
who just reattached an ear without stitches,
But it never should've come to that.
Jesus, Peter
I'm thinking.

So it shouldn't have surprised me
to see these knuckleheads fast asleep.

(Continued; stanza break)

Not that it's an important moment in history.
 Excuse me if I'm sweating blood drops
 But I'm only about to be crucified.
 Who, me?
 Just going to take on the sins of all humanity
 you know,
 So it's easy to see how the desire to sleep
 Could override the need to pray
 that maybe He
 just has a really bad sense of humor,
 that there is a less painful alternative for me
 that he's making us work to seek out.

I mean,
 You'd think I was some bullock or turtledove,
 That we hadn't been comrades for three years
 The way James was burping up last supper in his sleep
 when I came 'round the pomegranate bush.
 And here Peter is,
 "the rock on which I built my church,"
 snoozing on an earthen cot
 and a hunk of sandstone dimpled just enough
 to cuddle that hard head.
 They do this to me twice,
 So I come back earlier the third time.
 They're all nodding again.
 James starts in first,

(Continued; no stanza break)

He pleads emotional exhaustion.
I call Peter's name and he wakes up
fumbling about for his sword.
He tells me he loves me,
But I pray too long.
and
"I'm your right hand man Jesus.
Count on me Jesus.
If they come to get you I got you."
I tell 'em go ahead,
it's too late now.
No sooner had I said that
than here comes my friend Judas
and the soldiers.

As you know
they ended up ok,
They spread the good news,
Were predictably exiled or martyred,
Acquired the title of
"saint"
and all,
But I can't help but laugh
at how your "church fathers"
weren't worth a widow's mite
at the time.

Holes (for Paulette Beete)

Has anyone seen your father?
Your mother held post
until you untethered
and left her round
and open.
Now, she seems to know
only that she put you out,
and you try to remind her that
she is a place to stay.
He is fond of birds
and tends to air,
and she can never understand
when you write
to tell her what friends
see in you to embrace,
and exactly how
you caused lovers
to wind over the soft places,
and how you had become
so gourdied
it made a hollow, mournful sound.
You felt something was wrong,
You only wrote because
you thought she should know.

Once you told us
she picked at your scar tissue

(Continued; no stanza break)

because it loved you enough
to draw back the curtain.
Let it keep pulling on all sides
Let it close in on healing
until you are covered,
But be gradually comforted
so that the spaces in you
make us consider
the empty places
people could live in
if they would only fill us,
make me wonder
if I have ever been so needy
for reception,
and make me realize
how easy it is to redden,
how I am tender to the touch
in a different place
and how I can be pushed through
at some other emotion

Today, when I heard you
and hugged you
and kissed your hair
I wanted to tell you how
your longing reverberates in me
to this my shattering point,

(Continued; no stanza break)

And I wondered how
anyone could look at you like
you weren't saying a thing,
as if your lips were moving
but your notes were too high,
if they claim the better ear
of your blood.

Your David, My Saul

II Samuel, chapters 16, 18, 19

When you are troubled,
I will sit upon your floor,
and you will lie there on your bed,
And I will play you music
From the middle of the harp.

I am from the country
I tend to the flocks
You,
so city, and cavalier,
Surrounded by your subjects
in the city of our God
But I have learned your spirits,
Tried to negotiate them
I have learned to love your nuances
I know now when to go ahead
and when you would have me wait
I know now what to play,
and when you would have me
to leave.

I might have known a haint disturbed you
There is malice when you curse,
You scare me with your javelin
I fear for my life,
I know not what should cause the spear

(Continued; no stanza break)

To haste in my direction,
what in your life beyond me
propels it
But I am just fated to be there,
Preferring the Spirit's few idle moments
The days you hug me,
Or compliment my play
on the harp.

Many times when you were angry
I nearly fled
sometimes I hear people say you have forgotten
your anointing
they murmur about how the kingdom has changed you
and wish you were your younger self again
they know you have dealt roughly with me
and tell me to defend myself
yet I will not touch you
to do you harm.

I was sent to play for you.
Lately you are always nervous—
I play through your paranoia
After a day in the battle,
An ill-fated attack
on the fortified positions,
After pursuits that end in more chase,
You come in
and put your spear by the bed

(Continued; no stanza break)

Then I come in, to the floor
 at the foot,
 my accustomed place
 I dare not approach where you lie
 Even to better the earshot
 I play my psalm prepared for just such a moment
 Praying that you are moved by a gentler Spirit,
 By these strings that run lengthways,
 like your body over the bed
 And I seal the chamber so there is more solitude.
 I have thought of what might soothe you
 I play a quiet, mournful song
 Turn the sand upon its side
 to make it seem the time was static,
 searching you in my mind as I play,
 wondering what makes you tense with me,
 why you make me a favorite
 only to suddenly act the philistine,
 why you rage against our destinies
 I whisper a question about the fight
 asking about you
 hoping you will share until you are shriven
 as though I am a Levite.

When you call me closer,
 I always act as if
 I did not hear you the first time.
 You beckon with your left hand
 and though I am frightened,

(Continued; no stanza break)

I wonder what would happen
if you could hear my music clearer.
But I cannot trust you.
Your right hand wearily dangles
too close to the spear
So I watch you as I approach,
and even though your eyes are closed
I slide the spear away
so that I am between it
and you.

R&B POETRY

*for people who love the quiet storm. for people like Babyface, groups like Ready for the World, all the
hundreds of others, and the part toward the end of "Charlene" where Anthony Hamilton repeats "baby I'll
be..."*

Findings

There is increasingly more and more evidence that the gene pool continues to grow in variance and diversity. We need look no further than the African-American for examples.

Today, there are Black serial killers, Black Republicans, even Black people who don't like Lenny Williams' classic song, "Because I Love You." Of these three phenomena, clearly this last is the most remarkable, and the least understood.

The Legend Nightclub, Temple Hills, Maryland

God damn that¹

God damn that

God damn that DJ made my day

God damn that

God damn that

God damn that DJ made my day

Ay, you gone ride out wit me or what—

Ay, I'mma tell you man

Ay man you gone barbecue or mildew

man bring yo pussass on and stop bullshittin'.

this nigga talkin' bout the hell he gone wear

nigga you ain't gone get no pussy

if the outfit old or new

I got you nigga, just come on

You get paid err week right?

hit a nigga back when you get paid

bring yo ass on nigga, shit...

Hell yeah it's gone be bumpin.'

Look man, on the way over here they played

that Sybil "Don't Make Me Over"—

Ok, den,

they hit you off with that Samuelle

"So You Like What You See"

yeah, that shit with the

"get with the program"

(Continued; no stanza break)

repeating through the song
 you remember that joint
 Ok, then my man gone blend that,
 and that Al B. Sure sped up,
 that

“Off On Your Own”

Ay, ay, ay, remember this shit
“what you think you dope on a rope?”
”nope. Oh I’m supposed to sweat you?”
 Ahhhh! nigga! bring yo ass!
 I’m trying to
 get to the club

you still talk like al b. too nigga,
 that’s what’s funny

then he gone hit ‘em with that Mary Jane Girls

“All Night Long”

you gotta do that shit,
 that’s like that Maze

“Before I Let Go”

at a black wedding
 gotta hit ‘em with that shit

fuck you nigga “droppin names.” I can’t help
 I know all the people that sing the songs
 hating ass muhfucka...

(Continued; no stanza break)

Where that Henn at cause I'm trying
To save mun-tey, true

ay let me use yo bathroom
you got a bath cloth dog
let a nigga wash his nuts
working and shit you know

shit ain't gone be brown nigga damn!

ay man you ready
I can't even lie we got to go
cause its 2 for one on the drinks to lehm uh clock
and iont get paid 'til Thursday
And you know this
and dem hoes gone be in there thick!

I'mma wear this, it's o.g.'s in there
these hoes thirty plus
probably figure I got a job
with this tie on unlike yo broke caszhal ass

yeah, I don't know who the dj is
But I ain't catch my breath from when I left work
to when I pulled up at yo crib
I'm at the light like damn, I forgot to breathe
this nigga rock it so tough.

¹ From "Peter Piper," performed by Run DMC.

This is not a love poem

(for a fly girl)

this is a flirt poem
not a love poem
because you don't like love poems
and we don't love each other but
I know I hug you

a little too long
my attraction to you
is a little too strong
how I wanna have you
on the right side of wrong
Oh!

when I look tired
it's cause I'm tired of you being out of reach
your eyes are the color of overcast skies
but hardly as ominous
(yes)
and you smell of incense like praise & worship
(amen)
and I like how the slacks and Seven jeans
hover just right over the stiletto boots
how the jeans hint at booty
and the hips are suggestive like deep poems,
or like you know you ain't
got enough to say to write a novel

(Continued; no stanza break)

so your jeans are soft covers
 for page-turning short stories I want to flip through
 (yes)

you know you can ride out right?
 and I ain't talking to the suburban creep cinema
 I'm talking AMC
 downtown 24 screen type shit,
 where I know I'mma see somebody I know
 and have to introduce,
 where I'm looking over my shoulder in line
 but hugging you from behind

*Fly girl, a fly girl*¹
 your whole style is risk
 and worth risk,
 you do it how you wanna
 and you make me wanna do it,

Let's make memories,
 Something to daydream
 when we never see each other again
 because I want to remember a time, say
 you wore pink thong
 flip flops that glowed in a dark room
 and in an honest moment
 we asked to make sure
 we did not love each other
 and while it was out in the open

(Continued; no stanza break)

I kissed your floral tattoo
and sucked a sunflower from your toe
until it came off in the mouth
you made a hot, needy oblivion
of libido
or something like that

¹ From "A Fly Girl," performed by the Boogie Boys.

Mistress Summer

I thought I heard you promise me more once,
but I know you'll go away soon.

These wifebeater nights
and Adidas flip-flops make me feel passionate
I like you so much in your dark mood.

You are so gentle
while I feel you in my hair and on my skin
I touch you more now as I press past 60—
Your pace will not change,
Such an invariable kiss, and I think
What am I rushing home to find
while I have you so close?

Well, you follow me home.
Oh, but you are a flirt,
and moody at that
You rage at me red-faced all day
to do this now
You don't love me, you just do what you do
Acting without thinking
of what your effect on me might be
Still, I can't help this coming to you at night,
lying by your stiller side.
Your breath seeps in and out of the holes in my house
all night,
even past when the crickets go quiet.
Sometimes when I'm in bed
You put your hands on me,

(Continued; no stanza break)

so I sleep without the sheets
to feel you better.

Maybe I should write in my diary
to get you off my chest
maybe spend a spell on the porch 'til I'm more tired
Then again,
It was the Marvin in the CD changer
that stoked this mood,
and unless my mind goes deaf
I will not sleep

But if by chance I do drift off
I'll keep the window open
just to keep you satisfied
in case you want to take a peep

Lust

My brother's friend,

 Your mother's child:

Your lover's end,

 Your father's smile,

A question mark,

 The black-blood ink;

A soft long falling;

 A long soft mink,

The driving with no headers on

 To show a country night;

Cascading through the two-tone hair

 And no mosquito bites.

in memory of a dark girl

I am missing you a bit.
More than I thought,
and more than I should.
But your spirit hovers over me.
Impish.
You must stop playing with my halo.
I should stop letting you.
Shoo, gone now.

You know me well.
It was the melanin, I'm afraid.
It was watery, it leaked all over you.
No mixing, no adulterating.
Grain alcohol blackness.
It saturated even the tangled,
sovereign curls
you twisted absentmindedly.
It simmered on your cheeks,
a veiled emotion.
It seeped onto your breasts,
where it burst at their conclusions.
It dove into your lips, where...
Those lips.
Your lips were grey.
They were like black after pink lost.
They were softly corrugated and nice.

(Continued; stanza break)

Your tongue was neon against night's background
It was easy to see between teeth.

You were better for shadow,
like poems for solitude
The bad lighting to finish good novels to
There were secrets in your stare
that made it worth the strain to see you,

A bump in the basement night
I went to explore
only to unscrew the bulb
and rip out the pull string
where I could see you glowing red
when it was dimly lit;
where you made me say
Go dark girl
do that shit
do that shit.

This is To Let You Know

This is to let you know
That as permanent as this love is
It is not invincible
I have seen many things
Stronger than the heart
Pierced with foreign arrows
And to let you know this love is
Immutable
But not infallible
so when you see me wit' ol' girl
years from now
Do not believe that I have never loved you.

This is to let you know
That as timeless as this love is
All becomes ashen with age
Hearts change sentiment like sediment
Hearts close up and lips become reticent;
I hope the same old love won't bore
But allow me, since this is to let you know
That it might, and as it might
When we are on distant and separate paths
Remember how I took your body
Before it was leavened
Like communion bread
And made love to you
as if not to brake it.
Do not believe that I have not loved you.

(Continued; stanza break)

I am letting you know this
Because it feels too good
to not speak of its end—
It is too right that summer should come
precisely on June 21,
And that this night
Should find me contented, in love
When so many others are not,
When so many who were
Are not,

This is just to let you know
That this is all that we make of it,
And that I know of the nuances
and the irregularity
of any given heartbeat,
That now is not then,
That no love is safe,
and that love is something we
could always have, if only
imprints on the soul
were indelible.

drowning

I am looking for air
in this room full of breath
I am too tired of loss
to sleep—
you,
always something to do
after all I can do
is done
an all day fearing that
I forgot something
and I know
no pet names,
too early
but
need you baby
need to hear
yes baby
by accident
wonder if there is a way
I could move inside you
to make you always remember
imprint itself
cerebral
a wall I could lean against
a dust outline just my size
that couldn't be washed away
by the moon

(Continued; stanza break)

last night
my deep breaths only came
in thoughts that
I may not remember forever, that
there is hope in the distance--
opiate and lotus,
but in the closeness
there is too much proximity
I am scared sweetheart
you are too close now to yell
I can never be well
so close to the source
and in case you recover
this is something
to flood me in
in case you keep it out
something you let
rub you red
absently
until you ache again
after the soreness was gone

I want you wet like me
in a revival of recall
Come share my chest
feel it tighten
do you know how it closes
over a heart in hiding
have you felt how it labors
when it yearns?

Like When I Spot A Rainbow ¹

and I don't know how/ to get over her smile/ wonder what she's doing now ²

hey, I was just calling to say
today there is the prettiest
rainbow outside

then with the change of month ³
there came october

the rainbow is out the drivers side window
never was on the right
shoulda known
wish I could go back
to when it was the prettiest rainbow
back to the feeling that makes us
call for no reason in particular
just to say you crossed my mind
just to say look out the window
let's see what I see
together

and now I wonder where that love ⁴
did go

I was just thinking about you
It made me think about you

(Continued; no stanza break)

And I don't know, anyway,
 call me later.
 bye.

*I think about it more than once in awhile*⁵

Today I saw a rainbow
 At the same stoplight
 I was just thinking about you too,
 baby
 Even before
 I saw you out my window,
 before this intersection
 I was thinking about you,
 being gone away from me
 And nowadays,
 I don't know either love—
 'cause I can't talk to you
 to find out

^{1, 2, 5} From "Diamond in Da Ruff," performed by Jaheim.

^{3, 4} From "Sweet November," performed by The DeeLe.

purging (for Anorexia)

I would've let it go
but warm days that weren't hot
make me think of gasping in the park
make me dream of balconies
overlooking the ocean
and the cold days
make me fantasize of morning hugs
her hair on my chest
warmth
I'da been let it go but
the radio works
and every love song is

yes baby
song and every heartbeat is forced
everything is forced
except fasting
my arms are so heavy without
yes baby

I look at the apparitions in my bed
the heart is raptured away
learn to live without
jesus will help you through lonely days
with soulmates and friends

I should want my innocence
But I'll trade it

(Continued; stanza break)

I should want my ignorance
 But I'll trade it
 don't want to spend life wanting
 tired of the right call,
 the percentage plays
 wanna run a reverse
 willing to crash and burn

yes baby

as long as I am on fire I will--

done lit this kindlin'
 and made me wonder
 made me not wanna go home no more

are so strong
 are so ready to give me up
 but you don't want to lose me all
 do you?
see I'm bur¹
ting baby
I'm not hap
py baby
 gotta stop singing
 turn it off

(Continued; stanza break)

what do I do for you
what do you want me for

you inspire me
love letters all over again
someone to think of
when the freaky songs come on
been so long
someone to share
everything beautiful with
you are my sleeping pill
in the mornings when I'm tormented
I can't sleep
until we've laid down in my mind
20 cups of coffee
adrenaline
make me see the righteousness
in a sinister touch
you are a painful rush
of blood all day
the taste of salted peanuts
in a bowl with pastel mints
a passion reminder
give it to me
yes baby
stinging and soothing
you are
that old movement in the extremities
until I gradually feel all over
someone to visit on short notice

(Continued; no stanza break)

to go broke for
to spend time with
something to yearn for,
to leave early and stay late for

to lie for,
something to cry over,
maybe are you

are you good enough to keep me honest?
are you like that?
is it
like that?
now tell me,
what did I do for you?

can't forget how
you kiss me where I kiss you
and cooled my feet with the
evaporation of crushed underwear

that's what you're made for

especially reserved,
just my size,
wanting to possess and hide away

what I prayed to feel,
can't afford you,
but I borrow to pay

(Continued; stanza break)

so wanting it to get better
not willing to keep it from getting worse
so good together

such a natural
disaster

I won't survive another

do you still

love

do you still

143

remember me

do you care

if I leave this gentle climate

for the tropics

and you tell me

you will let me in when I visit

but you will put me out,

you say

I cannot stay too long,

and I can never move in.

¹ From "Burn," performed by Usher.

Muffin

her breast is small,
the size of
three continental breakfast muffins
mashed into a soft pliable mound
and I am working on it
like I am too young to stop
like I was never sufficiently weaned.
On the other
I connect the dots with my finger—
she looks at me from above
like poor thing
and runs her fingers through my hair.

that last time I saw her,
she kissed my chest a little less
than she used to,
back when I used to look at her like
poor thing
but at the end she threw her leg up on me
like she wanted me again
right there
I pressed against the door
but I had to go
she said we were over time.

maybe she's just a woman,
a good actress,
they never move

(Continued; no stanza break)

unless they have a place to go,
 in love with what they have
 until they find that there's more
 they couldn't just leave you alone
 they ain't that strong
 still,
 maybe I'm crazy, but
 I believe in the want
 in that kiss.

In "Troy," Brad Pitt said
 he wanted what all men want:
 more.
 I mention this suddenly for no reason
 just its beauty
 and she asks if that is why
 I come to her
 but I cannot answer
 my mouth is full of poppyseed.

there is a time for everything--
 the course is run,
 their love is like hot sun.
 Gone and get brown while it's out;
 but when it passes behind that cloud
 try to forget
 it will come out again soon
 for someone

(Continued; no stanza break)

try to be comforted
by the nice tan you got
when you walk out the door.

Having a Mistress

I do not want what I haven't got. – Sinead O' Connor

You simply cannot go around
telling everyone you think is cute
that they're cute,
and this is especially the case
if one is married.

There is something about a man
that wouldn't want to prejudice
his ability to have an affair
with any one of the women
by being too generous to
any one of the women.

But, as my wife points out,
only the sorry men
have this problem.

I don't have a mistress
because they are hard to get,
and to get one
would mean I could get more,
or perhaps have to choose between
several I could dally with
plus the wife and
what if it's hard to decide?
And if she's worth my dallying with,

(Continued; no stanza break)

She deserves more than dalliance,
She deserves permanence.

Unless she's happy with dalliance.

Which is a moot point, because
I have permanence and I am happy with it.

The problem with permanence
is that it never gets new—unless you count
how it becomes different as it ages.
Some get a big rewarding kick out of this.
Overall, you feel permanence is enough,
but everyday
you see someone that makes it, umm
maybe not so good.
But you really are happy, and
no one else would be with you
Permanently.

We are bound
to get into foreign entanglements.
I feel like a cheat when I do
and a punk when I don't.
But I remember the big picture.
I don't need the entanglements,
I need permanence.

(Continued; stanza break)

When I am famous,
 which would mean
 things were going well in a way,
 I imagine that she'll be interviewed
 And my wife will say
 I know he's very happy with me.
 I am also certain
 that he wants to cheat on me
 constantly. I am nearly as certain
 that he never has and never will.

Granted,
 this may not be her answer.
 Maybe this is my answer
 for her.

I have never been
 what I thought I should be.
 I should not be specific.
 She and I talk.
 Specificity here
 might eventually offset
 the therapeutic effect
 And thus,
 no specifics are provided.

Besides,
 my sweet little wife
 says I can have a mistress.

(Continued; stanza break)

She insists only that she

bednot

be white.

The Wife of Thy Youth

Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well...and rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love. And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger? For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the Lord... Proverbs 5:15, 18-21

Did we ever, baby?
Was it buzzing like this
During that first kiss
Did the air shimmer like heat in the distance?

Did I think you were so
there for the taking?
Has it been so long since my hand trembled,
desiring and scared to try you
We glimmered nervously, and I,
heavy laden with possibility,
having seen you anew,
like I hadn't met you
Wanted so much to touch against
the alternatives, and, smelling
what loneliness and sweat
and attraction and infatuation gives off,
I let myself out to the scent of just before,
when you were nothing more
than a pretty little dangerous thing.

(Continued; stanza break)

Tell me baby.
Remind me that you recall
Not minding the JVC and the Kenwoods
rapping at the 20 level or more,
Just wanting to be seen witch a man
in a loud car,
No headaches,
When my noise and my passenger seat
Were favorite places—
Remember the fortuitous tint of the windows,
how I reached over
to kiss you at stoplights,
in parking lots
Kissing in an unknown tongue
like nobody could see us,
Remember it baby,
or at least, you must
Imagine it possible,
Imagine always having a reason
to reach over at night,
Wanting to be cupped and pressed
against one another, anywhere,
until you shake together and run over

Did you feel like this?
Did you need like this?
Was I this nervous?

(Continued; no stanza break)

Were we ever movie material,
 Dream sequence intimates, and
 Could we make the folks in the flicks
 blush?

After our fateful meeting
 wouldn't we christen the couch after church
 were you ever a good member
 devotee, a faithful parishioner
 did you give me what the defense offered,
 did you do all you could for me
 when you couldn't give it all

where are our fig leaves,
 who knew there was more to know,
 was I supposed to know
 The bliss was the discovery—
 what they say
 I have no idea
 what they mean
 What do
 they mean
 when they say

Baby, I bet we were,
 I bet, if we go back
 there was a moment we knew
 there was a moment we were separated
 only by my audacity
 or a dining table

(Continued; no stanza break)

or a fear of transgression
 or a gearshift or gas money
 or room rates—
 there was a moment the air around us
 was too thick to breathe and we needed
 oxygen from each other and suffocated
 until later, until I knew for sure—
 Or did I just take you at my doorstep,
 Or kiss you into a car to your surprise,
 And give you stories to remember forever—
 Or were we so busy
 We forgot to take notes

Was there ever a time we fucked,
 A word I hate, and a thing I love,
 freaked in a back seat of a compact car
 Like we lived at home
 and had part-time jobs
 Or didn't work at all,
 Why didn't I get tint this time,
 And was I ever so gone
 off some you
 A younger you,
 that I thought if you gave it to me
 like this here
 you'd give it to others
 just as good?
 Did it have me thinking
 I'd never write another poem
 About anyone else,

(Continued; no stanza break)

where is your name charm now
and did your lips and breasts
smell of young sex like
green apple jolly ranchers
and candied lip gloss
Remember me being so weak,
making it so inevitable,
so certain a cascading
down a wet, slippery slope
toward a sinful sort of novelty that--

Was it you baby?

Remind me, you
musn't let me forget,
they say it get like
that sometimes but

Was it you?

That was you, right?

Or
was it somebody
else?

Fidelity

The pulpy concentrate
is near,
and touches,
and individual.
Is tart enough
to want to sip.

You are almost face down,
bare-chested
Dangling through a sieve
too small to get my hands through.
It starts with slow restraint
But then I pull on you
from beneath the partition,
Undisciplined, lascivious
Testing around for you.

I can have you no further.
These are the lengths we go to.
Variant definitions
of fidelity.

...better yet, newlyweds

I am waiting for her to come in.

I am half submerged in the tub, seething
daydreaming about childhood in the tub
remembering

how I used to be afraid that my melanin
was floating to the top in the dead skin
'cause the water seemed browner
the more I slumped.

I remember telling my momma
that baths were pointless,
'cause you really couldn't tell if I was dirty
or if all the brown cake stuff
was soap-bleached skin.

My brother had a habit of putting the rag in his mouth
no matter where it'd been.

When she comes in
I barely open my eyes,
I love when she's like this.

By now
she knows I think she's pretty with no clothes on;
you can see it in the nonchalance
with which she does anything
that requires bending or turning her back to me.
I notice for the millionth time
that everything beautiful about her

(Continued; no stanza break)

is bell curved or crescent shaped
I mention that she might think the water is a little bright.
(I only tolerate it this hot for her)
she says to me "what do you mean bright?"
and I say "hot girl."
she gets in behind me and snaps
"stop trying to be a poet for a minute
and let me wash your back."
anyway, i've known her for years,
but we've only been at this for days,
and while she gets down by my waistline
like its always been this easy
I find it gleefully difficult to pretend
that I'm used to it.

comfort woman (after Meshell N'degeocello)

baby grab a bag and
put it in that pitcher
fill it up and put in a chair
so the sun hit it

I put 2 cups of sugar in
too much for me
almost drowned out the tea

dinner is ready
homemade chicken soft tacos
and Trading Spouses

Could've done without
but I'll take it
she was sent here by the agency
she decided she was more perm than temp
the people here had no say
even HR is overseas

she is always on automatic pilot
can't lie sometimes I miss the turbulence

eight hundred dollars for two weeks of work.
our rent gets paid,
my whites still smell like Clorox,
and even the spot on the tee got spray and washed

(Continued; stanza break)

Man I can't wait
 watch when I'm able to take care of you
 ooh
 when I get money
 only the people we've blessed
 will recognize us

The Proverbs 31 woman,
 finally
 got around
 to my button

once you've given yourself so much to think about
 it's nice, in a way
 I guess
 not really having to think
 of all that much

you are always going to be this way,
 aren't you ?
 are you still waiting for me
 go outside,
 I'm coming

used to be brush script
 now it's new times roman
 but I can pull it up anywhere

(Continued; stanza break)

the helpmeet
meets all
the household's priest
ain't much help

so at least I can be
glad you're home
it's good to see you baby
at the very least
I could kiss you
like you all I got

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