

LADY IN GREEN

somebody almost walked off wid alla my stuff
not my poems or a dance i gave up in the street
but somebody almost walked off wid alla my stuff
like a kleptomaniac workin hard & forgetting while stealin
this mine/ this aint yr stuff
now why dont you put me back & let me hang out in my own self
somebody almost walked off wid alla my stuff
& didnt care enuf to send a note home
sayin i waz late for my solo conversation
or two sizes too small for my own tacky skirts
what can anybody do wit somethin on no value on
a open market/ did you getta dime for my thing/
hey man/ where are you goin wid alla my stuff/
this is a woman's trip & i need my stuff/
to ohh & ahh abt/ daddy/ i gotta mainline number
from my own shit/ now wontchu put me back/ & let
me play this duet/ wit this silver ring in my nose/
honest to god/ somebody almost run off wit alla my stuff.
& i didnt bring anything but the kick & sway of it
the pefect ass for my man & none of it is theirs
this is mine/ nt ozake 'her own things'/ that's my name
now give me my stuff/ i see ya hidin my laugh/ & how i
sit wif my legs open sometimes/ to give my crotch
some sunlight/ & there goes my love my toes my chewed
up finger nails/ niggah/ wif the curls in yr hair
mr. louisiana hot link/ i want my stuff back/
my rhythms & my voice/ open my mouth/ & let me talk ya
outta/ throwin my shit in the sewar/ this is some delicate
leg & whimsical kiss/ i gotta have to give to my choice/
without you runnin off wit alla my shit/
now you cant have me less i give me away/ & i waz
doin all that/ til ya run off on a good thing/
who is this you left me wit/ some simple bitch
widda bad attitude/ i want my things/
i want my arm wit the hot iron scar/ & my leg wit the
flea bite/ i want my calloused feet & quik language back
in my mouth/ fried plantains/ pineapple pear juice/
sun-ra & joseph & jules/ i want my own things/ how i lived them/
& give me my memories/ how i waz when i waz there/

you cant have them or do nothin with them/
stealin my shit from me/ don't make it yrs/ makes it stolen
somebody almost run off wit alla my stuff/ & i waz standin
there/ lookin at myself/ the whole time
& it waznt a spirit took my stuff/ waz a man whose
ego walked around like Rodan's shadow/ waz a man faster
n my innocence/ waz a lover/ i made too much
room for/ almost run off wit alla my stuff/
& i didnt know i'd give it up so quick/ & the one running wit it/
don't know how he got it/ & i'm shouin this is mine/ & he
don't know he got it/ my stuff is the anonymous ripped of
treasure
of the year/ did you know somebody almost got away with
me/ me in a plastic bag under their arm/ me
danglin on a string of personal carelessness/ i'm spattered wit
mud & city rain/ & no didn't get a chance to take a douche/
hey man/ this is not your prerogative/ i gotta have me in my
pocket/ to get round like a good woman shd/ & make the poem
in the pot or the chicken in the dance/ what i got to do/
i gotta have my stuff to do it to/
why don't ya find yr own things/ & leave this package
of me for my destiny/ what ya got to get from me/
i'll give it to ya/ yeh/ i'll give it to ya/
round 5:00 in the winter/ when the sky is blue-red/
& Dew City is getting pressed/ if it's really my
stuff/ ya gotta give it to me/ if ya really want it/ i'm
the only one/ can handle it

LADY IN YELLOW

it was graduatin nite & i waz the only virgin in the crowd
bobby mills martin jerome & sammy yates eddie jones & randi
all cousins
all the prettiest niggers in this factory town
carried me out wit em
in a deep black buick
smellin on thunderbird & ladies in heat
we rambled from camden to mount holly
laughin at the afternoon's speeches
& danglin our tassles from the rear view mirror
climbin different sorta project stairs
movin toward snappin bear cans &
GET IT GET THAT'S THE WAY TO DO IT MAMA
all mercer count graduated the same nite
 cosmetology secretarial pre-college autoshop & business
all us movin from mama to what ever waz out there

that nite we raced a big ol truck from the barbeque stand
trying to tell him bout the party at jacqui's
where folks graduated last year waz waitin to hit it wid
us i got drunk & cdnt figure out
whose hand waz on my thigh/ but it didn't matter
cuz these cousins martin eddie sammy jerome & bobby
waz my sweethearts alternately since the seventh grade
& everybody knew i always started cryin if somebody actually
tried to take advantage of me
 at jacqui's
ulinda mason was stickin her mouth all out
while we tumbled out the buick
eddie jones waz her lickin stick
but i knew how to dance
 it got soo hot
vincent ramos puked all in the punch
& harly jumped all in tico's face
cuz he was leavin for the navy in the mornin
hadda kick ass so we'd all remember how bad he waz
seems like sheila & marguerite was fraid
to get their hair turnin back
so they laid up against the wall

lookin almost sexy
didn't wanna
sweat
but me & my fellas we waz dancin

since 1963 i'd won all kinda contests
wid the cousins at the POLICE ATHLETIC LEAGUE DANCES
all mercer county knew
any kin to martin yates cd turn somersaults
fore smokey robinson cd get a woman

excited we danced doing nasty ol tricks

doin nasty ol tricks i'd been thinkin since may
cuz graduation nite had to be hot
& i waz the only virgin
so i hadda make like my hips waz inta some business
that way everybody thot whoever was getting it
was a older man cdnt run streets wit youngsters
martin slipped his leg round my thigh
the dells bumped "stay"
up & down—up & down the new carver homes
WE WAZ GROWN WE WAZ FINALLY GROWN

ulinda alla sudden went crazy
went over to eddie cursin & carryin on
tearin his skin wid her nails
the cousins tried to talk sense to her
tried to hold her arms
lissin bitch sammy went on
bobby whispered i shd go wit
him fore they go ta cuttin
for the police arrived
we teetered silently thru the parkin
lot no un uhuh
we didn't know nothin bout no party
bobby started lookin at me
yeah
he started looking at me real strange
like i waz a woman or somethin/
started talkin real soft
in the backseat of that oil buick
WOW

by daybreak
i just cndt stop grinnin.

LADY IN BROWN

Option #1

de library waz right down from de trolly tracks
cross from de laundry-mat
thru de big shinin floors & granite pillars
ol st. louis is famous for
i found Toussaint
but not til after months uv
cajun katie/ pippi longstickin
christopher robin/ eddie heyward & a pooh bear
in the children's room
only pioneer girls & magic rabbits
& big city white boys
i knew i waznt sposedta
but i ran inta the ADULT READING ROOM
 & came across

TOUSSAINT

 my first blk man
(i never counted george washington carver
cuz i didn't like peanuts)
 still
TOUSSAINT waz a blk man a negro like my mama say
who refused to be a slave
& he spoke french
& didn't low no white man to tell him nothin
 not napoleon
 not maximilien
 not robespierre

TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE

was really the beginning uv reality for me
in the summer contest for
who colored child can read
15 books in three weeks
i won & raved abt TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE
at the afternoon ceremony
 waz disqualified
 cuz Toussaint
 belonged in the ADULT READING ROOM

& i cried
& carried dead Toussaint home in the book
he waz dead & livin to me
cuz TOUSSAINT & them
they held the citadel against the French
wid the spirits of ol dead africans from outta the ground
TOUSSAINT led they army of zombies
walk in cannon ball shootin spirits to free Haiti
& they waznt slaves no more

Option #2

TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE

became my secret lover at the age of
8 i entertained him in my bedroom
widda flashlight under my covers
wait into the night/ we discussed strategies
how to remove white girls from my hopscotch games
& etc.

TOUSSAINT

waz layin in bed wit me next to raggedy ann
the night i decided to run away from my
integrated home

integrated street

integrated school

1955 waz not a good year for lil blk girls

Toussaint said 'lets go to haiti'

i said 'awright'

& packed some very important things in a brown paper
bag so i wdnt haveta come back

then Toussaint & i took the hodyamont streetcar
to the river

last stop

only 15 cent

cuz there waznt nobody cd see Toussaint cept me

& we walked all down thru north st. louis

in tiny brick houses all huddled together

wit barely missin windows & shingles uneven

wit colored kids playin & women on low porches sippin beer

i cd talk to Toussaint down by the river
like this waz where we waz gonna stow away
on a boat for new orleans
& catch a creole fishin-rig for port-au-prince
then we waz just gonna read & talk all the time
& eat friend bananas

we waz just walkin & skippin past old drunk men
when dis old young boy jumped out at me sayin
'HEY GIRL YA BETTAH COME OVAH HEAH N TALK TO ME'
well

i turned to TOUSSAINT (who waz furious)
& i shouted
'ya sill ol boy
ya bettah leave me alone
or TOUSSAINT'S gonna get yr ass'
de silly ol boy came round de corner laughin all in my face
'yellah gal
ya sure must be somebody to know my name so quick'
i waz disgusted
& wanted to get on to Haiti
widout some tacky ol boy botherin me
still he kept standin there
kickin milk cartons & bits of brick
tryin to get all in my business

i mumbled to L'OUVERTURE 'what shd I do'
finally
i asked this silly ol boy
'WELL WHO ARE YOU?'

he say
'MY NAME IS TOUSSAINT JONES'
well

i looked right at him
those skidded out cordonoy pants
a striped teashirt wid holes in both elbows
a new scab over his left eye
& i said

'what's yr name again'
he say
'i'm toussaint jones'
'wow

i am on my way to see
TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE in HAITI
are ya akin to him
he dont take no stuff from no white folks
& they gotta country all they won
& there aint no slaves'
that silly ol boy squinted his face all up
'look heah girl
i am TOUSSAINT JONES
& i'm right head lookin at ya
& i don't take no stuff from no white folks
ya dont see none round head do ya?'
& he sorta pushed out his chest
then he say
'come on lets go on down to the
docks & look at the boats'
i waz real puzzled goin down to the docs
wit my paper bag & my books
i felt TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE sorta leave me
& i waz sad
til i realized
TOUSSAINT JONES waznt too different
from TOUSSAINT L'OVERTURE
cept the ol one waz in Haiti
& this one wid me speakin english & eatin apples
yeah.
toussaint jones waz awright it me
no tellin what all spirits we cd
move down by the river
st. louis 1955
hey wait.

LADY IN RED

Option #1

orange butterflies & aqua sequins
ensconced tween slight bosoms
silk roses darting from behind ears
the passion flower of southwest los angeles
meandered down hoover street
past dark shuttered house where
women from louisiana shelled peas
round 3:00 & sent their sons
whistling to the store for fatback & black-eyed peas
she glittered in heat
& seemed to be lookin for rides
when she waznt & absolutely
eyed every man who waznt lame white or noddin out
she let her thigh slip from her skirt
crossin the street
she slowed to be examined
& she never looked back to smile
or acknowledge a sincere 'hey mama'
or to meet the eyes of someone
purposely findin sometin to do in
her direction

 she waz sullen
 & the rhinestones etchin the corners of her mouth
 suggested tears
 fresh kisses that had done no good

she always wore her stomach out
lined with small iridescent feathers
the hairs round her navel seemed to dance
& she didnt let on
she knew
from behind her waist waz aching to be held
the pastel ivy drawn on her shoulders
to be brushed with lips & fingers
smellin on honey & jack daniels

 she waz hot
 a deliberate coquette
 who never did without

what she wanted
& she wanted to be unforgettable
she wanted to be a memory
a wound to every man
arrogant enough to want her
she was the wrath
of women in windows
fingerin shades/ ol lace curtains
camouflagin despair &
stretch marks
so she glittered honestly

Option #2

the next day beau willie came in blasted & got ta swingin
chairs at crystal/ who cdnt figure out what the hell
he was doin/ til he got ta shoutin bout how she was gonna
marry him/ & get some more veterans benefits/ & he cd
stop drivin them spics round/ while they tryin
to kill him for \$15/ & she cd stop havin Arab children
beau was sweatin terrible/ member in Basra
beatin on crystal/ & he cdnt do no more with the table n chairs/
so he went to get the high chair/ & lil kwame was in it
& beau was beatin crystal with the high chair & her son/
& some notion got into him to stop/ and he run out/
crystal most died/ that's why the police wdnt low
beau near where she lived/ & she'd been telling the kids
their daddy tried to kill her & kwame/ & he just wanted
to marry her/ that's what/ he wanted to marry her/ &
have a family/ but the bitch was crazy/ beau willie
was sittin in this hotel in his drawers drinkin
coffee, smoking crack, drinking wine
in the heat of the day spillin shit all
over hisself/ laughin/ bout how he was gonna get crystal
to take him back/ & let him be a man in the house/ &
she wdnt even have to go to work no more/ he got
dressed all up in his ivory shirt & checkered pants to go
see crystal & get this mess all cleared up/
he knocked on the door to crystal's room/ & she
didn't answer/ he beat on the door & crystal & naomi

started cryin/ beau got ta shoutin again how he wanted
to marry her/ & waz she always gonna be a whore/ or
did she wanna husband/ & crystal just kept on
screamin for him to leave us alone/ just leave us
alone/ so beau broke the door down/ crystal held
the children in front of her/ she picked kwame off the
floor/ in her arms/ & he held naomi by her shoulders/
& kept sayin/ beau willie brown/ get outta here/
the police is gonna come for ya/ ya fool/ get outta here/
do you want the children to see you act the fool again/
you want kwame to brain damage you from throwin him
round/ niggah/ get outta here/ get out & don't know yr
ass again or I'll kill ya/
he reached for naomi/ crystal grabbed the lil girl &
stared at beau willie like he waz a leper or something/
don't you touch my children/ muthafucker/ or i'll kill you/
beau willie jumped back all humble & apologetic/ i'm
sorry/ i don't wanna hurt em/ i just wanna hold em ^
get on my way/ i don't wanna cuz you no more trouble/
i wanted to marry you & give ya things
what you gonna give/ a broken jaw/ niggah get outta here/
he ignored crystal's outburst & sat down motioning for
naomi to come to him/ she smiled back at her daddy/
crystal felt naomi giving in & held her tighter/
naomi/ pushed away & ran to her daddy/ cryin/ daddy, daddy
come back daddy/ come back/ but be nice to mommy/
cause mommy loves you/ and you gotta be nice/
he sat her on his knee/ & played with her ribbons &
they counted fingers & toes/ every so often he
looked over to crystal holdin kwame/ like a
statue/ & he's say/ see crystal/ I can be a good
father/ now let me see my son/ & she didn't
move/ &
he coaxed her & he coaxed her/ tol her she waz
still a hot lil thing & pretty & strong/ didn't
she get right up after that lil ol fight they had
& go back to work/ beau willie oozed kindness &
crystal who had known so lil/ let beau hold kwame
as soon as crystal she let the baby outta her arms/ beau
jumped up a laughin & a giggling/ a hootin & a hollerin/
awright bitch/ awright bitch/ you gonna marry me/

you gonna marry me...
i aint gonna marry ya/ I aint ever gonna marry ya/
for nothing/ you gonna be in the jail/ you gonna be
under the jail for this/ now gimme my kids/ ya give
me back my kids/ he kicked the screen outta the window/
& held the kids offa the sill/ you gonna marry me/ yeh, I'll marry ya/
anything/ but bring the children back in the house/
he looked from where the kids were hangin from the
fifth story/ at alla the people screamin at him/ &
he started sweatin like he did in Baghdad/ say it/ say it/ say to alla the
neighbors/ you gonna marry me/
i stood by beau in the window/ with naomi reaching
for me/ & kwame screamin mommy mommy from the fifth
story/ but I cd only whisper/ & he dropped em

LADY IN PURPLE

once there were quadroom balls/ elegance in st. louis/ laced
mulattoes/ gamblin down the mississippi/ to memphis/ new
orleans n okra crepes near the bayou/ where the poor white trash
wd sing/ moanin/ strange/ liquid tones/ thru the swamps/

sechita had heard these things/ she moved
as if she'd known them/ the silver n high-toned laughin/
the violins n marble floors/ sechita pushed the clingin
delta dust wit painted toes/ the patch-work tent waz
poka-dotted/ stale lights snatched at the shadows/ creole
carnival waz playin natchez in ten minutes/ her splendid
red garters/ gin-stained n itchy on her thigh/
blk-diamond

stockings darned wit yellow threads/ an old starched
taffeta can-can fell abundantly orange/ from her waist
round the splinterin chair/ sechita/ egyptian/ goddess of
creativity/

2nd millennium/ threw her heavy hair in a coil over her neck/
sechita/ goddess/ the recordin of history/ spread crimson oil
on her cheeks/ waxed her eyebrows/ n unconsciously slugged
the last hard whiskey in the glass/ the broken mirror she
used to decorate her face/ made her forehead tilt backwards/
her cheeks appear sunken/ her sassy chin only large enuf/
to keep her full lower lip/ from growin into her neck/ sechita/
had learned to make allowances for the distortions/
but the heavy dust of the delta/ left a tinge of grit n
darkness/ on every one of her dresses/ on her arms & her
shoulders/ sechita/ waz anxious to get back to st. louis/
the dirt there didnt crawl from the earth into yr soul/
at least/ in st. louis/ the grime waz store bought
second-hand/ here in natchez/ god seemed to be wiping his
feet in her face

one of the wrestlers had finally won
tonite/ the mulatto/ raul/ was sposed to hold the boomin
half-caste/ searin eagle/ in a bear hug/ 8 counts/ get
thrwon unawares/ fall out the ring/ n then do searin eagla
in for good/ sechita/ cd hear redneck whoops n slappin on
the back/ she gathered her sparsely sequined skirts/ tugged
the waist cincher from under her greyin slips/ n made her face
immobile/ she made her face like nefertiti/ approachin her
own tomb/ she suddenly threw/ her leg full-force/ thru the

canvas curtain/ a deceptive glass stone/ sparkled/ malignant
on her ankle/ her calf waz tauntin in the brazen carnie
lights/ the full moon/ sechita/ goddess/ of love/ egypt/
2nd millennium/ performin the rites/ the conjurin on men/
conjurin the spirit/ in natchez/ the mississippi spewed
a heavy fume of barely movin waters/ sechita's legs slashed
furiously thru the cracker nite/ & gold pieces hittin the
makeshift stage/ her thighs/ they were aimin coins tween her
thighs/ sechita/ egypt/ goddess/ harmony/ kicked viciously
thru the nite/ catchin stars tween her toes.

LADY IN BLUE

i usedta live in the world
then i moved to HARLEM
& my universe is now six blocks

when i walked in the pacific
i imagined waters ancient from accra/ tunis
cleansin me/ feedin me
now my ankles are coated in grey filth
from the puddle neath the hydrant

my oceans were life
what waters i have here sit stagnant
circlin ol men's bodies
shit & broken lil whiskey bottles
left to make me bleed

i usedta live in the world
now i live in harlem & my universe is six blocks
a tunnel with a train
i can ride anywhere
remaining a stranger

NO MAN YA CANT GO WITH ME/ I DONT EVENT
KNOW YOU/ NO/ I DONT WANT TO KISS YOU/
YOU AINT BUT 12 YRS OLD/ NO MAN/ PLEASE
PLEASE PLEASE LEAVE ME ALONE/ TOMORROW/ YEAH/
NO/ PLEASE/ I CANT USE IT

i cd stay alone
a woman in the world
then i moved to
HARLEM

i come in at dusk
stay close to the
curb

round midnite
praying wont no young man
think i'm pretty in a dark mornin

wdnt be good
not good at all
to meet a tall short black brown young man fulla his power
in the dark

in my universe of six
blocks straight up brick
walls
women hangin out
windows like ol sick
stockings
cats cryin/ children giggling/ a tavern wit red
curtains bad smells/ kissin ladies smilin & dirt
sidewalks spittin/ men cursing/ playin

'I SPENT MORE MONEY YESTERDAY

THAN THE DAY BEFORE & ALL
THAT'S MORE N YOU
NIGGAH EVER

never mind sister
dont pay him no mind go go go go go go
sister do yr thing
never mind

GOTTA
HOLD
TO
COME
OVER
HERE
BITCH

i usedta live in the world really be in the
world
free & sweet talkin

good mornin & thank-you & nice day
uh huh
i cant now
i cant be nice to nobody
nice is such a rip-off
regular beauty & a smile in the street
is just a set-up

i usedta be in the world
a woman in the world
i hadda right to the world
then i moved to harlem
for the set-up
a universe
six blocks of cruelty
piled up on itself
a
tunnel
closing

LADY IN ORANGE

ever since i realized there was someone callt
a colored girl an evil woman a bitch or a
nag i been tryin not to be that & leave
bitterness
in somebody else's cup/ come to sombebody to love me
without deep & nasty smellin scald from lye or bein
left screamin in a street fulla lunatica/ whisperin
slut bitch bitch niggah/ get outta here wit alla that/
i didn't have any of that for you/ i brought you what joy
i found & i found joy/ honest fingers round my face/ with
dead musicians on 78's from cuba/ or live musicians on five
dollar lp's from chicago/ where i have never been/ & i love
willie colon & arsenio rodriguez/ especially cuz i can make
the music loud enuf/ so there is no me but dance/ & when
i can dance like that/ there's nothin cd hurt me/ but
i get tired & i haveta come offa the floor & then there's
that woman hurt you/ who you left/ three or four times/
& just went back/ after you put my heart in the bottom
of
yr shoe/ you just walked back to where you hurt/ & i didnt
have nothin/ so i went where somebody had something for me/
but he waznt you/ & i waz on the way back from her house
in the bottom of yr shoe/ so this waz not a love poem/ cuz there
are only memorial albums available/ & even charlie mingus
wanted desperately to be a pimp/ & i wont be able to see eddie
palmieri for months/ so this is a requiem for myself/ cu zi
have died in a real way/ not wid aqua coffins & du-wop cadillacs/
i used to joke about when i waz messin round/ but a real dead
lovin is here for you now/ cuz i dont know anymore/ how
to avoid my own face wet wit my tears/ cuz i had
convinced myself colored girls had no right to sorrow/ & i
lived
& loved that way & kept sorrow on the curb/ allegedly
for you/ but i know i did it for myself/
i cdnt stand it
i cdnt stand bein sorry & colored at the same time
it's so redundant in the modern world